



*The Aldus Society*  
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## Members of New Club Are on Same Page: They Love Books

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**By Bill Eichenberger, Dispatch Book Critic**

Columbus' new ***Aldus Society*** has an immodest goal — to save The Book from impending extinction.

President Geoff Smith, head of rare books and manuscripts for Ohio State University's libraries, said books are, not for the first time, in jeopardy.

"At the end of the 19th century, bibliophilic clubs were formed because books were being made very cheaply," he said. "Now we're being told that the book is dead, that technology has supplanted books. The existence of the book itself is in question. So I'd say we're coming along just in time."

Just in time, Smith said, to celebrate and commemorate the book, not only for its content, but for its beauty.

The society was named after 15th-century Italian printer Aldus Manutius (1450-1515), who is credited with developing italic type and with publishing well-crafted but affordable books.

"If you have an appreciation of beauty, well, to me, the book is a very beautiful thing," said Marcia Preston, the group's program director. "I don't think a computer screen is at all beautiful."

According to its "statement of purpose," the ***Aldus Society*** hopes to foster "interest in the historical, aesthetic, physical and cultural aspects of books, manuscripts and other original textual and graphic materials."

The 19th-century decline of the book arts was a catalyst for the formation of several book clubs, including the Grolier Club of New York, the Caxton Club of Chicago and the Rowfant Club of Cleveland.

More than a century after their formation, in 1999, these clubs and many others established the Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies, which recently welcomed the ***Aldus Society***.

Eric Holzenberg — director and librarian of the Grolier Club, which was established in 1884 — said new clubs play an important role promoting a love of books.

"Clubs like the ***Aldus Society*** are absolutely essential to the larger movement appreciating the book as object, the book as history. The more of these clubs that develop, the more robust is the movement as a whole," Holzenberg said.

"In the 19th century, there was a perceived threat to the book arts. Now as then, the threat is galvanizing a lot of interest, a lot of discussion. The fact that there's enough interest in the Midwest to found another book club is a very interesting and encouraging development."

At a recent gathering, Smith, Preston, treasurer Jay Hoster and secretary Genie Hoster described the possibilities for programming as "infinite."

Robert H. Jackson, one of America's foremost collectors of Victorian literature and beat-generation literature, spoke at the Aldus Society's inaugural meeting last month.

More than 40 of the 70 members attended.

"I think there is a hunger in us (book lovers)," Preston said. "For so long, I've had almost no one to talk to about books."

Topics under consideration for programs include: calligraphy and the history of scripts before the printing press; a history of illustrated books; collecting children's books; collecting Mark Twain or James Thurber; how the Internet has affected book collecting; the history of women's roles in printing; and early printing in Ohio.

Book lovers can learn much from one another, Jay Hoster said; the Hosters own Books on High.

"Remember those books from the late 19th century we were talking about? We see a lot of those books. People bring them in and, well, they're old, so they must be valuable," he said, smiling.

"And we'll open up the book and pages will fall out. And they're brittle, a thick version of newsprint. It was a cheap book when it was made, and now it's an old, dilapidated cheap book."

Books printed on computers don't interest the **Aldus Society** for the same reason -- inferior quality.

"You can see the ink bleeding through from one side of the page to the other," Genie Hoster said. "These are not books made for the ages."

The eBook -- or electronic book -- and similar products also leave the bibliophile unimpressed. Holzenberg said traditional books have at least one advantage.

"If you put a paperback on the floor and jump up and down on it or heave it as hard as you can against a wall, you still have a book. Do that with an electronic book, you have a mess."

Holzenberg also expressed the bibliophile's concern about the "integrity of the text."

"You expect the text of a book to be the same week after week, year after year. But if a book is centrally located, in a computer, it would be relatively easy to hack into it and make unauthorized changes," Holzenberg said.

Said Smith: "Membership in the **Aldus Society** can lead to security of mind and of soul."