



Newsletter
Number 167
Summer 2008

Susan Otis Thompson

SUSAN THOMPSON, teacher, scholar, author, editor, and friend, died on March 5th, 2008 after a long struggle with breast cancer. Her many companions in the Typophiles, the American Printing History Association, the William Morris Society, and the Grolier Club will miss her greatly.

Susan was first of all a teacher. The course she taught on the history of the book at Columbia University's School of Library Service from 1966 until the school was closed influenced the lives and careers of hundreds of students. Beyond this, Susan was well known in the world of research for her contributions to William Morris scholarship, especially for her book *American Book Design and William Morris*, first published in 1977 by Bowker and then reprinted in 1996 by Oak Knoll Press and the British Library. She was the author of the section that deals with the book in *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1876-1916*, edited by Robert Judson Clark (Princeton, 1972).*

As a Typophile, Susan attended that organization's luncheon meetings when her teaching schedule allowed. She was also a member of our intrepid Typophile group of world travelers, dubbed the "Junketeers," who visited printing shrines in many countries. Her husband Jack, a literary scholar and SUNY professor, came along whenever it was possible.

Susan attended many of the Heritage of the Graphic Arts Lectures, presented to a largely Typophile audience, from the late '60s to the '80s. These stimulating talks, under the direction of Robert Leslie, brought graphic arts notables from around the world to speak to us. Susan herself spoke twice for the Heritage Lectures: in 1973 on "The Arts and Crafts Movement"; and again, in 1978, on "The Private Press Movement," in the series dedicated to Giovanni Mardersteig. Some years later, when John Dreyfus needed



Photo: Terry Belanger

help in compiling a complete list of the Heritage of the Graphic Arts Lectures and the many speakers from 1965 to 1982, Susan came to his aid. This research resulted in Typophile Monograph New Series Number 11, *The Heritage of the Graphic Arts Lecture Series: A Complete Listing*, published in 1994.

The Caxton Congress, held in London in 1976, marked the 500th anniversary of the introduction of printing into England, and many Typophiles attended. Out of this celebration came Typophile Chapbook 52, *William Caxton: An American Contribution to the Quincentenary Celebration* (1976), expertly edited by Susan, with contributions by Joseph Dunlap, James Lawton, and Richard Griffith, and an introduction by Joe Blumenthal. Two hundred and fifty copies of this publication were set aside for those attending the occasion in London, and the chapbook itself constituted a major event in the Typophiles' revived program under Abe Lerner.

Susan was born on August 9th, 1931, in Nashville, Tennessee, and retained a bit of that delightful southern accent all her life. She was a "Sweet Briar Girl," attending that Virginia college for her undergraduate work in French, and

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Reflections on the Closing of the Stinehour Press

haec olim meminisse juvabit—Virgil, *The Aeneid*
(in time to come you will enjoy recalling these things)

I FIRST READ THIS QUOTATION at the Stinehour Press in 1975, when David Godine took me to Lunenburg for a visit that proved to be one of the pivotal moments of my career. On that day, surrounded by the noises and smells and bustle of an active printing plant, I did not imagine a time when I would refer to the Stinehour Press in the past tense.

The closing of the plant is much larger than the release of several dozen highly experienced and sensitive employees into the depressed economy of the North Country, larger than the loss to the book community of one of its best printers: It marks the end of a way of life that had its beginnings at the birth of printing and found its modern renewal over a century ago, an unbroken continuum that has flowed through the proofrooms and pressrooms of Merrymount, Anthoensen, Meriden Gravure, and Stinehour.

Throughout Rocky Stinehour's distinguished career, he and his co-workers lived the ideas and standards developed by Bruce Rogers, D.B. Updike, W.A. Dwiggins, Fred Anthoensen, Carl P. Rollins, Ray Nash, and others. In upholding the tradition of New England scholar-printers, they fulfilled their responsibilities quietly and without fanfare, dedicated to accuracy, beauty, appropriateness, timeliness, and practicality in what they produced. To this tradition Rocky also added his particular qualities of integrity, gentleness and respect.

The spirit that inhabited this place for the past 55 years was not that of one person alone. Here was a small band of like-minded neighbors who worked together to do common things uncommonly well, functioning in the manner of a well-rehearsed orchestra. Rocky may have held the baton, but it was everyone together who made the music. Rocky cared deeply about the business side of printing and not just the art, understanding that this enabled the employees and their families to eat every week, and that without this stability the Press could not carry out its important work.

The unity of spirit of the Stinehour Press is our greatest loss: Stinehour lived the principle that a closely knit group could create an entire book from design through binding. Co-workers gathered at the picnic table, or up in the library, weighing subtle differences, planning improvements, exper-

imenting to find exactly the right touch, engaged in the crafting of a book whose physical properties would best serve its content. As I view the closing of Stinehour through the lens of the current moment, with its extreme specialization and the flinging of digital files around the planet, I feel the loss of something essentially human . . . a spirit that acted as thoughtful shepherd of the merely technical.

In addition to making books for its distinguished list of publishers, museums, and other clients, the Press published the journal *Printing and Graphic Arts* from 1953 to 1965, edited by Nash, Stinehour, and Rollo Silver. Beyond this, Stinehour served as an incubator for many who went on to do important work elsewhere: Chris Burkett, Stephen Harvard, Lance Hidy, Sinclair Hitchings, Katy Homans, Darrell Hyder, Jerry Kelly, and Mark McCorison, to name only a few.

In 1977, when the Meriden Gravure company in Connecticut was unable to continue on its own, Rocky undertook extraordinary measures to preserve it by merging the souls and hardware of the two organizations. This was an heroic act of preservation, and a deed I wish had been repeated by someone else in 2008.

Ownership of the Press went out of the Stinehour family in 1998, to an Irish conglomerate that claimed it would modernize the plant, and then back into the hands of a group of local investors in 2001. For the past few years the new owners have dedicated themselves to extending the life of the Press, but they do not possess resources of the magnitude needed to keep the company's prices competitive. As head investor Warren Bingham observed recently, "These are not good times for American manufacturers. I hope we know the full cost of what we're buying as a society. When lowest cost is always the determining factor, it might be higher than we think."

New England tradition holds that the Abenaki had one tribe member whose job was to preserve fire when the band was traveling. In the morning, as camp broke up, he would select one perfect coal from the fire and bed it in a quahog shell filled with ash. Its edges sealed with mud, that shell—and the tribe member—would keep the ember safe all day on the long walk through the forest. In the evening, the fire keeper would carefully unpack the coal, set it into a pile of tinder and squaw-wood, and blow the fire back to life.

For those of us who feel the impact of this event, who understand the meaning of Stinehour and its antecedents, this is the moment for us to become fire keepers. Not just in our own work, but perhaps even more importantly, as the teachers of newcomers—helping them to appreciate the

Sue Allen Delivers 2007 J. Ben Lieberman Memorial Lecture

SUE ALLEN GAVE the 2007 Lieberman Lecture on April 17, 2008 at the Grolier Club in New York City. The APHA and Grolier Club members in attendance were treated to an evening of magic as she spun the tale of “A Doubly Fascinating Book: Hawthorne’s *Wonder Book* Illustrated by Walter Crane”; Sue brought her boundless passion and intelligence to bear on her account of two fathers, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Walter Crane, who each in his own way gave a gift to his children and to all future generations.

With style and panache, Sue first told the story of Nathaniel Hawthorne and his relationship with his children, and with his publishers, Ticknor and Fields. Hawthorne wrote his anthology of classical myths for children, *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls* (1852), at his home, the Red House, in Tanglewood, Massachusetts, and soon followed this very successful book with another collection of stories entitled *Tanglewood Tales* (1853). Through our speaker, Hawthorne’s youthful narrator Eustace Bright and his captive audience of bright, mop-topped, flower-named children came alive.

Nearly forty years later, another devoted father, Walter Crane, created a series of illustrations for Hawthorne’s tales, published together with these first by Osgood McIlvaine in London (1892), and then in America by Houghton Mifflin (1893). Sue revealed how Crane’s sixty images evoke the spirit of Hawthorne’s retelling of the tales at the fireside, porch, playroom, and Bald-Summit at Tan-



*Sue Allen with Charles Rheault, a longtime employee of the Riverside Press.
Photo: Paul Romaine.*

glewood. She showed us many of Crane’s full-page illustrations, including Perseus and the Graiae from “The Gorgon’s Head,” and *The Strangers in the Village* and *The Strangers Entertained*, two scenes from the myth of Baucis and Philemon in “The Miraculous Pitcher.”

Sue wove a tapestry intricately involving the classical myths with historical facts of the author’s and artist’s lives. She punctuated her narrative with a heartwarming recitation of Hawthorne’s inspirational prose, and with colorful slides of Crane’s beautiful images. She also showed us pictures of the remarkable brasses used to stamp Crane’s designs into the illustrated book covers and end sheets. Her presentation was accompanied by an exhibition of the book brasses chosen from her own collection, and by copies of the books themselves selected from those of Charles Rheault, her close friend and a member of Boston’s Society of Printers, who came down to New York for the lecture.

Virginia Bartow

quiet and sensible traditions of the scholar-printer, the importance of craft, of thoughtfulness and patience. Of not settling for what is expedient and cheap.

. . . *haec olim meminisse juvabit*. In Virgil’s story, Aeneas is giving encouragement to his men as they prepare for the difficult voyage to Italy. To all of you who read this, I would ask that you do more than contemplate pleasant memories of Stinehour. This is the moment for us to invest the spirit of Stinehour within ourselves, and to pass it on with conscious effort, so that it may remain alive in future generations.

Bruce Kennett

Note: Bruce Kennett is a book designer and photographer, and former managing director of the Anthoensen Press in Portland, Maine.

APHA 2008 Annual Conference

APHA’S 33RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE, “Saving the History of Printing,” will be held in New York City, hosted by Columbia University’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and the Grolier Club, on October 10–12, 2008. For further information and updates, see the APHA website.

Gerald Cloud and Jane Rodgers Siegel

Chapter News & Upcoming Events

NEW ENGLAND

APHA NEW ENGLAND'S first meeting of the spring, "Tiny State + Tiny Books: Miniature Books in Rhode Island," took place on Saturday, April 26, 2008, from 2 to 4 p.m., at the Barnard Room of the Providence Public Library (3rd Floor), 150 Empire Street, Providence, Rhode Island. Anne Bromer, author, and owner of Bromer Booksellers, Boston, Massachusetts, gave an illustrated lecture on the history and design of Miniature Books: 4,000 Years of Tiny Treasures. A reception and book signing followed the event.

Bob Soorian, David Wall, and Alice Beckwith

CHESAPEAKE

THE CHESAPEAKE CHAPTER is growing in its membership (50 members to date). It has produced a handsome letterpress broadside-roster of members, designed and printed by Roland Hoover with help from Will Lockwood. In March, chapter officers held a planning session and shipped out a package to each chapter member containing the roster, a complete directory of our members with all contact information, and a first-ever proposed set of bylaws.

The APHA Newsletter
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We have reached a tentative agreement with Paul Shaw to speak to the chapter in September on the subject of W.A. Dwiggins. We hope to join with the Washington Rare Book Group for this illustrated talk, and to have a "tea" afterwards to get acquainted. At our officers' meeting we discussed ways to raise more cash to pay for a couple of special speakers each year.

In other news, Mike Anderson donated the type and form of his 1733 *Poor Richard's Almanack* page to the newly opened Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC; and Daniel De Simone was mentioned in the April 11, 2008 issue of the Washington Post as having traveled to France to purchase some of the volumes needed to complete Thomas Jefferson's Library of Congress collection.

Mike Denker

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

OUR SUMMER PICNIC is to be held in August, at the San Jose studio of Tom Goglio, who will demonstrate stone lithography. Tom recently retired as teacher at Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo).

In my last report I should have referred to one of the disappeared printers of Berkeley as "Lederer, Street & Zeus," a firm which has no relation to the late Wolfgang Lederer, beloved graphic arts professor and master book designer. I wish to thank both Alastair Johnston and Eric Holub, who called my attention to this error.

John McBride

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

OUR JANUARY MEETING to view the Helvetica movie led to a particularly lively conversation, so we plan to discuss sans serif typefaces further at our first Salon of the year in July. On March 27 we initiated our new Book Club by starting to read *The Evolution of the Book*, by Frederic Kilgour. Our present focus upon the beginnings of writing on clay, papyrus and other substrates has us anticipating a workshop in the next few months on making papyrus. We visited the cuneiform tablet collection at USC in May, and USC student Hannah Marcuson brought out a dozen three-to-four-thousand-year-old examples, along with ownership rolls. In June we held our second Book Club meeting to discuss the rise of parchment and the codex as outlined in Kilgour. We have planned to visit UCLA Special Collections' Coptic and Islamic holdings in September to accom-

pany our third Book Club event, which will focus upon Kilgour's chapter on Islamic books. (In August, we will hold a reception for members and participants at the California Rare Book School at UCLA.) Members will be also be encouraged to attend the Frederic W. Goudy Lecture given in September by Susan Share at Scripps College, together with the opening of the exhibit "Performing the

Book" at the Williamson Gallery (an occasion when Susan will also give a performance with her books).

At the close of October, E.M. Ginger from Oakland will present a lecture about her fascinating work on digitizing rare and important works at her company, 42-Line.

Kitty Maryatt

"Susan Otis Thompson," continued from page 1

gaining membership in Phi Beta Kappa. She went on from Sweet Briar to the University of Paris for graduate work in modern French literature. (On one of our fabled Typophile junkets to Paris in the 1970s, Susan invited me to accompany her on a tour of her old Paris haunts and to visit friends who still lived there.)

In another interesting chapter of her life, in 1952 Susan returned to the U.S. to work for a time at the C.I.A. in Washington as a secretary, and then returned to Paris for continued study at the Sorbonne, and to serve as an administrative assistant and translator for the U.S. forces in France. She came back to New York in 1960 to work briefly at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

Then began a new phase of endeavor for Susan, with the career choice that shaped the rest of her life. She enrolled in Columbia's School of Library Service, obtaining her M.S. in 1963, then going on to earn her doctorate there. She was a reference librarian at Columbia for a time, and then a teaching assistant. She began teaching the course on the History of the Book at Columbia in 1966. The eventual closing of the School was a sad time for Susan, for she loved teaching and the exhilaration of working with students.

Susan was an avid book collector, not of "high points," but of books she could use in her research. Hers was a scholar's library, and her books were "reading copies" in less than pristine condition, that many collectors would disdain. She was an early member of the British Private Libraries Association, and introduced others to that fine organization. She was one of the first women to be allowed to join the Grolier Club in 1977.

Susan's contributions to the American Printing History Association were enormous. She was one of its founding members in 1974. Her vision brought forth APHA's semi-annual journal *Printing History*, with the first number appearing in 1979. Only those of us present at the time can appreciate the immense dedication and persistent effort this ambitious project required. Susan was the journal's meticulous editor from its inception until 1983—for five years and ten issues of the highest quality, when the common fear was that there would never be enough good material available for publication. In 1983 Susan stepped down in order to concentrate on her own research in book design and production of the Art Deco period.

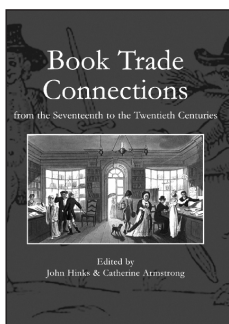
Sadly, she was never able to finish that project, because of numerous personal obstacles. Susan was devoted to her husband Jack. His long illness and death were terrible blows from which she never recovered. Other physical problems debilitated her. In her last couple of years, hanging on to life was difficult and painful. At the very end, she was utterly beautiful, I'm told.

Susan will be remembered for her warm good humor, extraordinary kindness, and generosity. Her decades of teaching influenced hundreds of future librarians through her love of books and broad knowledge. Her publications broke new ground. Her high standards contributed to all of our organizations.

Cathy Brody

*Note: Susan Otis Thompson's article "American Arts & Crafts Typefaces," is included in APHA Special Publication *American Proprietary Typefaces* (1998).

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New Membership Dues

IN 2009 several categories of the annual membership dues will increase: Individual, \$50; Institutional, \$75; and Contributing, \$100. Rates remaining at previous levels are: Sustaining, \$200; and Benefactor, \$500. Membership includes subscriptions to APHA's semi-annual scholarly journal, *Printing History*, and to the quarterly *APHA Newsletter*.

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Websites, Blogs and Listservs Mentioned in this Issue of the Newsletter

American Printing History Association: printinghistory.org
Grolier Club: grolierclub.org