

A Few Ghostly Reflections

I don't believe in ghosts. Never have. Yet when I enter the enclosure of the room containing most of the Mosher Collection, it's as though I hear the murmurs of the authors; the muted discussions of the those who made up the provenance of each book; the binders deliberations over the forwarding and finishing of each binding accomplished, or the illuminator's joy at adding something special of his or her own to a book. With eyes canvassing the shelves, I see and "hear" the replay of the books' stories and what I went through to acquire them. I'm taken back to the memories of bookstores once frequented; the sometimes charming and sometimes curmudgeonly booksellers encountered; the forged relationships that endured over time until some type of separation disunited us; and the times of turmoil over whether or not a "deal" would go through. I faintly hear the remarks of scholars who have visited, and some of the folks who came here to show me some precious object that's been in the family for generations, or better yet, to turn over such precious object after seeing that they have found a fitting home for it. I'm reminded and still feel the parting emotional pangs of those who finally decided to sell their own collection to be absorbed into the Bishop Collection. Sometimes upon entering what seems like the collection's embracing arms of peace and contentment, I pull a volume from the collection and reexamine a book that I haven't scrutinized for some time and find myself reliving the excitement I first experienced when I held it and surmised its worth, not the dollar value nor the scarcity, but rather its beauty or the story it helps to unfold.

There are several framed portrait photos of ol' Moshwig himself looking out into or down upon the collection. I wonder what he'd see if he was able, and what he would appreciate, or how he would remind me such was only one tiny part of his entire story. Do I hear him speak? No. As I said, I don't believe in ghosts, but that doesn't stop me from wondering, from imagining. What would he tell me about the manuscript copies of some of his book layouts? What further stories might he relate about his seafaring days with his father and the rest of the family? What comments would he make about his diaries, or about the correspondence between himself and another passionate collector well represented in the collection? Would he be amazed at all those finely tooled leather bindings placed upon his publications? After all, he never had the opportunity to see so many bindings assembled in one place. He only heard about which binders or binderies were putting fancy dress upon his wares which were distributed to the far corners of the earth. Or how would he respond to seeing the artist rendering of his favored Emilié Grigsby? What would he say if there in front of him were all those highly personal manuscripts he told his gal Friday, Flora Macdonald Lamb, to dispose of upon his death, especially mindful that they should not fall into the hands of his second wife? I don't know. I don't believe in ghosts, but that doesn't stop me from wondering.

There was a time when I thought I might have to revise my view of a nether world creeping into the presence of the library. Late at night or in the wee hours of the morning I'd visit the collection and see one or two books on the floor. Mind you, they were precisely picked from the shelves and put down on the floor. All the other books remained just where they were lined up along the shelf, but only one or two were "selected" leaving a hole where they once were and now newly positioned on the floor below. If this had happened only once or maybe even twice, I wouldn't have been concerned, but it happened a total of seven times over a year. They'd come off a shelf maybe four feet above floor level. Then off another shelf in an adjacent case three weeks later. Several months would go by, and then again different books would be found in the same manner. Once I even found one of the books opened to a particular page. OK, what was its significance? Was this open to some sort of interpretation? Did I need a weegie board? Would I have to admit that maybe ghosts do indeed exist? The answer would have to wait until a

year after I first began noticing this phenomenon.

What I found out was a discovery which both pleased me and worried me. The last "incident" provided a detail I hadn't noticed in any of the others. One of the "Old World" books once owned by Elizabeth Shippen Green, the American illustrator of children's books, was on the floor and one of its fore-edge corners was nibbled upon. Oh my gawd, could it be a mouse? Worse? No, not worse, but deduced after I saw something that I hadn't seen before. As soon as I mention it, the cat will be out of the bag. Yes, THE CAT! Not just any ol' cat. No, it was this one newer cat which we call Flopsy. I noticed that Flopsy was always particularly teased and enticed by shadows. We've seen her in the dining room, or the living room staring at the shadows on the wall, and sometimes she'd take a swipe at them. Then in the library I saw what became an epiphany. There before the three bookcases where I'd occasionally find one or two books on the floor, there sat Flopsy staring up at the shelves and shadows caused by the trees blowing outside interrupting the streaks of dim light from the streetlights. There sat she calculating her next move, and then stretched up and with one paw extended, rested it atop one of the books and down it came. Ah hah! No ghost. No return of Elizabeth Shippen Green trying to take her book back to the netherworld. No mouse. Just Flopsy who first must have accidentally removed a book when shadows moved across the shelf, but who later might have found this to be particularly fun. Of course the situation has been remedied with barriers across the shelves thwarting any repeat performance. She doesn't touch any of the other shelves. No need to. It's only the shelves where the shadows race across. No shadows. No fun. No access to the volumes. No fun. To date, no repeats performance, and...
NO GHOSTS.

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