

Ever More the Association Copy

Elsewhere I mentioned that I received an author copy of the newly released *Other People's Books: Association Copies and the Stories They Tell*. Introduction by G. Thomas Tanselle. Chicago, IL: The Caxton Club, 2011. A number of present and past Delaware Bibliophiles Delaware Bibliophiles hold an honored place in its pages and my congratulations go out to all of them. I also saw a number of other names of folks with whom I have had either professional or some personal experience, including: Earle Havens, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Sheridan Libraries, The Johns Hopkins University; Stephen Parks, Elizabethan Club, Yale University; Samuel B. Ellenport, Club of Odd Volumes in Boston and formerly the head of the Harcourt Bindery; Stanley Ellis Cushing, Curator of Rare Books at the Boston Athenaeum; Mark G. Dimunation, Chief of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division, The Library of Congress; and Molly Schwartzburg, Cline Curator of Literature, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. I also came across the posting of a few remarks by Jerry Morris. In one of his blogspots he mentions that his contribution to the new Caxton Club book is the "Hither-unpublished Obiter Dicta," an essay about Augustine Birrell's copy of Lord Acton's book, *Lectures on the French Revolution*, which is "...essay No. 31. I'm between two well-established writers in the book world: Philip R. Bishop and Mark Samuels Lasner" (well Mark, I think we've got him sandwiched in, *in perpetuity*). Anyway, the book is delightful, the illustrations quite nice, and the essays are captivating. I very much appreciated Mark Samuel Lasner's "My 'Incomparable Max' Beerbohm Book" in which he presents the scenario: which is the first book would I seize if someone yelled "Fire!" which provides the springboard for his tale to tell.

There were a number of people who went to the Book-Launch Party on March 18th, but as I mentioned elsewhere, all I could say was *estaré contigo en espíritu*. Several of the authors reported getting signatures from fellow authors thereby creating their own association copy of the new book. I took a completely different tact to provide a supplemental association with the new Caxton Club book.

Having first read the Preface and Acknowledgments, I found myself captivated by the cover and content reproductions of the first Caxton Club catalogue on association copies issued in 1896. It was only the Caxton Club's third exhibition, and it took place during February 1896. First there was a thirty-seven page catalogue issued, "An Exhibition of Ex Libris Books, interesting through their associations..." bound in charcoal blue wraps, but this evidently unsatisfactory version was to be superseded by an much expanded book of fifty-four pages, with a larger trim size, an addition of several books not included in the first issuance, the dropping of "Ex Libris"

from the front cover and title page, and now replete with facsimiles of some of the inscriptions. This expanded and improved large paper version was entitled "Catalogue of an Exhibit of Books Interesting through their Associations" and carried with it a much sturdier binding of quarter vellum over light blue boards. One hundred and twenty-four regular copies were printed (plus three on Japan vellum) by R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company at the Lakeside Press in Chicago (who else, of course), and I set out to find the very best copy I could secure to accompany the newly issued Caxton Club book on association copies. Perhaps I might even find an association copy of this first expanded appearance!

There is always one bookseller to whom I turn to find anything related to Chicago or to the Caxton Club: Thomas J. Joyce and Company. I got on the horn and asked if he had any of these early catalogues, preferably one with some association to the Club. He didn't let me down. He had but one association copy of this "incunabular piece by it [The Caxton Club] on this subject," that bearing the ex libris of J. T. Lee (designed and engraved by SLS, i.e., Sidney L. Smith, in 1921). One added benefit is that the cover of this copy is many times nicer—in fact quite fresh looking-- than the one pictured on p. 6 of *Other People's Books*. I'm always mystified why people choose to picture a copy in far lesser condition to illustrate a book on books.

After receiving the book I wrote to Tom Joyce that this was

Indeed, an association copy of the Caxton Club's own "incunabular" on the topic, accompanying the newest Caxton Club publication on the same topic (albeit 115 years later), both now married together and as such forming a splendid joint "association copy" in that it's in the possession of one of the latter publication's authors. Associations abound!!!!!! A "lovely package" as we say in the trade. I just don't know why you weren't mobbed by a host of the other authors. I mean, don't they get the connection? In my opinion, this is not the same world of collectors and their delightful experiences we inherited from the golden age of book collecting. My gawd... take me back to the 19th or early 20th centuries.

A little further research on the previous owner brought to light the following information on its owner. J. T. Lee is John Thomas Lee (d. 1953), a Chicago collector and bibliophile, and is listed in the Caxton Club's "Roll of Members" (he also appears as a member of the Chicago Literary Club). The centennial history of *The Caxton Club of Chicago, 1895-1995—Celebrating a Century of the Book in Chicago* notes that Lee was a collector of Western Americana and published several scholarly articles on the travels of Jonathan Carver, an early American soldier and explorer. He joined the Caxton Club in 1919, served on the Council (1920-41) and the Publications Committee (1920-35; chairing the committee from 1926-27 and 1930-35). He also delivered a paper, "Bibliomania and Kindred Afflictions," to the Club on May 2, 1921. He was elected president of The Caxton Club in

1923 and remained a member until his death in 1953. Theodore Wesley Koch, translator of Charles Nodier's *Francesco Colonna: a fanciful tale of the writing of the Hypnerotomachia* (Chicago: Privately printed at R. R. Donnelley & Sons, 1929), inscribed a copy of his translation to Mr. Lee, designating him as the inspiration for this book and also for his other book, *Tales for Bibliophiles* (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1929). Many of John Thomas Lee's letters from the 1888-1916 period are at the Newberry Library, where his papers from 1907-1932 are also kept. So although I could not make the celebratory proceedings inaugurating the new publication of the Caxton Club, I nevertheless now have an equally fitting memento which celebrates the association copies, unites the two publications by the Caxton Club on the subject, and which ties into the very place where the celebration was held, The Newberry Library. And all this with the added significance that here is a copy once owned by one of the Caxton Club's early members—a man whose letters and papers are preserved in the Special Collections at the Newberry while the festivities ensued.

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