

Chronicling the “Lava Wave”

My Adventure Unearthing the Amateur Press

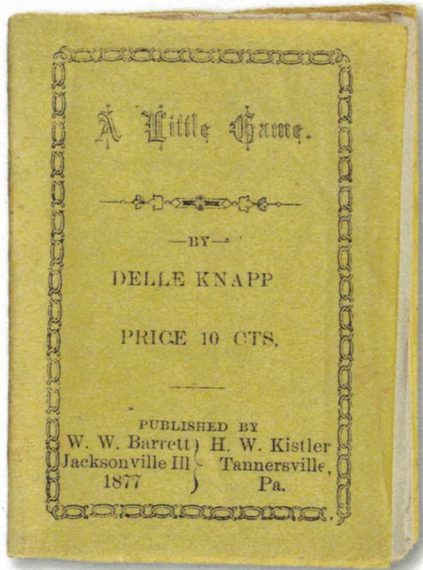
Laura Wasowicz

Although I am a recently minted member of the Caxton Club, my bibliographic roots in Chicago are deep. I studied the history of the book with Michael Hackenberg and advanced cataloguing with Arlene Taylor while enrolled in the University of Chicago’s Graduate Library School. I graduated from GLS in 1986, shortly after it was announced that the school was going to close. I am grateful for the superb training that I received during my time in Chicago. It served me well when I embarked on what was to become my life’s career – being the curator of and cataloguing the comprehensive collection of pre-1900 American children’s literature held at the American Antiquarian Society (AAS), an independent research library in Worcester, Massachusetts. Founded by patriot printer Isaiah Thomas and his friends in 1812, the AAS collects the printed texts and images produced in British North America between 1640 and 1899. We award about fifty fellowships per year, and our deep collections attract worldwide readership among researchers interested in historical America print culture. AAS has one of the largest institutional collections of amateur newspapers produced by young people in the United States between 1805 and 1900; we hold about four thousand such titles.

I joined the AAS staff in 1987 and am still learning from and about the thousands of lesser-known authors, illustrators, and printers whose work can be found in the AAS collection of children’s literature. Most of the researchers who I help are not children’s literature specialists but Americanists taking a deep dive into evidence of their topic across print media – from finely bound novels to tattered children’s chapbooks. Such research is possible because of the detailed cataloguing of this collection with attention to subject/genre analysis, estimated publication date ranges (so important for the thousands of items in

the collection lacking an imprint date), and biographical details of the authors, illustrators, and publishers behind the books.

Over the past year I have created detailed cataloguing for the Historic Children’s Voices Project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This funding provides me with the time needed to make accessible some 150 amateur books held at the AAS, most of which were written and printed between 1860 and 1899



A Little Game

by teenaged boys and girls. Scanned images of these amateur books, along with the in-depth cataloguing describing them can be found on the project website (americanantiquarian.org/historic-childrens-voices-primary-sources).

Amateur newspaper production exploded in the United States, particularly after the invention of the tabletop Lowe Portable Printing and Letter-Copying Press in 1856, and the Novelty Press in 1867. Amateur books are offshoots of these amateur papers. The books are generally between sixteen and thirty-two pages long and contain a wealth of infor-

mation about what young people, especially teenaged boys, found worth printing as well as the names and locations of various journalists, many of whom lived in small towns like Rockport, Indiana; Tannersville, Pennsylvania; and Jacksonville, Illinois.

The title of this article is drawn from a quotation written by eighteen-year-old amateur journalist John Winslow Snyder of Troy, New York (1855-1910) in his amateur book *Essays and Sketches* (Rutherford Park, NJ, 1873). He writes, “The Adams and Novelty presses kindly furnished the crater, and through it poured the burning lava.” The amateur printing craze was about five years old at the time. The flooding of the market by inexpensive hand presses affordable by middle-class youth ignited the amateur printing craze in the U.S. and Canada. The Improved Lowe Press (1868) with a 3 × 4-inch bed sold for eight dollars (current value: \$168); the Woods Novelty Press with a similarly sized bed sold for as little as nine dollars in 1884 (\$274).

As well as the amateur newspapers, AAS has several hundred amateur books, most of which are dated between the 1870s and 1890s. We did not buy these books from dealers. Most came to us from individual donors. The genesis of the AAS collection was established when then AAS director Clarence Brigham (1877-1963) appealed for donations from Worcester, Massachusetts amateur printer Frank Roe Batchelder (1869-1947) and Boston area amateur journalist Edward Harold Cole (1892-1966) in the 1910s. It was through these relationships that we received the donation of amateur papers and books either published by or reviewed by Truman J. Spencer (1864-1944) who wrote the seminal *History of Amateur Journalism*, published posthumously in 1947. About one quarter of our amateur book holdings were donated by AAS collector member Ruth Adomeit (1910-1996). Presently better known for her collection of miniature books

Awards

Michael Gorman



Tammy L. Clemons

The Rare Book School (RBS) at the University of Virginia has announced the winner of this year's T. Kimball Brooker/Caxton Club scholarship award. The recipient of the 2024 scholarship is Dr. Tammy L. Clemons, an

independent scholar who received her PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of Kentucky in 2021. She is a media artist whose particular interests lie in making, researching, and preserving self-publishing practices and media. She is particularly interested in DIY publishing (zines, etc.) and connections between artistic practice and social change, especially in Appalachia. She intends to use her time at the RBS to develop her knowledge about self-publications and equipment further and to expand her potential as a scholar, teaching artist, zine-maker, and cultural organizer. The scholarship will support her immersive professional development activities focusing on the history of artists' books and twentieth-century duplication processes with hand zine-making/production opportunities. Dr. Clemons intends to share the bibliographical knowledge she gains with students and colleagues through educational offerings and public presentations.



Kadin Henningsen

The American Printing History Association (APHA) awards committee has announced the recipients of its 2023/2024 awards. Unanimously approved by the APHA board, the 2024 honorees are Kadin Henningsen (Individual laureate)

and Self Help Graphics & Art (Institutional award).

Kadin Henningsen is a PhD Candidate in the Department of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where

he is writing a trans history of the book in nineteenth-century America. His scholarship has appeared in *Library Trends*, *Medieval Feminist Forum*, and *Criticism*. He is also an award winning printer and book artist, and the owner of *Meanwhile...Letterpress*. His work is included in several collections including the Bainbridge Museum of Art, Houghton Library, King Library at the University of Kentucky, and the Library of Congress.

Kadin is a Caxtonian and the 2019 winner of the T. Kimball Brooker scholarship award.

Self Help Graphics & Art in Los Angeles offers artists a space where they can develop artistically in a peer-to-peer setting. Their workshops attract all levels of artists to work in a variety of mediums such as intaglio, relief, screen printing, ceramics, aerosol art, and many other forms. They foster the creation and advancement of new art works by Chicana, Chicano, and Latinx artists through experimental and innovative printmaking techniques and other visual art forms. Since 1973, they have worked at the intersection of arts and social justice, providing a home that fosters the creativity and development of local artists. They seek to establish international collaborations and partnerships nationwide, and create worldwide cultural exchanges.

Both awardees were recognized at APHA's annual meeting on Saturday, January 27, 2024. Held as part of New York City's Bibliography Week festivities, the APHA annual meeting, which was free and open to the public, featured remarks by the honorees. The 2024 meeting was held at the Center for Book Arts, 28 W. 27th Street, 3rd Floor, Manhattan.



Michael Johnston

The Bibliographical Society of America has awarded a grant, funded by the Caxton Club, to Dr. Michael Johnston, associate professor of English at Purdue, to do research in the U.K. on manuscripts of the Middle English poem *The Prick of Con-*

science (written ca. 1325), which, though it survives in more manuscripts than *Piers Plowman*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and others of the period, is less studied. *The Prick of*

Conscience was a guide for the moral and theological instruction of the laity and was widely distributed and used for a long period of time. Dr. Johnston and his colleague Dr. David Gura (University of Notre Dame) are working to complete two publications – a comprehensive catalogue of the surviving 128 manuscripts of the poem, and an accompanying volume of co-written essays. Dr. Johnston will study manuscripts in, among others, the British Library, the Bodleian Library, and Cambridge University Libraries.

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Honor for Caxtonian Sandra Hindman



Sandra Hindman

Les Enluminures has announced that Dr. Sandra Hindman, its CEO and Founder, has been named *Chevalière de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) by the Minister of Culture of

the French Republic. The award recognizes those who "have contributed significantly to furthering the arts and culture in France and throughout the world." For nearly five decades, Dr. Hindman has been active in the field of the history of medieval art as a professor, a scholar, and an art dealer. An internationally recognized scholar, she has published numerous articles and well over a dozen scholarly books on medieval manuscripts, early printing, the history of collecting, and historic jewelry. Among her many noteworthy publications, some of them in French, are books on the illuminated manuscripts of celebrated French authors, Christine de Pizan and Chrétien de Troyes. She is a contributor to the catalogue of illuminated manuscripts of the Musée du Louvre and a co-author of the catalogue of manuscript leaves in the Robert Lehman Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She lectures frequently on medieval manuscripts in North America, Europe, and Asia in English, French, and Italian.