The ABAA NEWSLETTER

VOLUME TWELVE, NUMBER 4 ANTIQUARIAN BOOKSELLERS' ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA SUMMER 2001

INSIDE: *There's Money in Books* ..... PAGE 5

ABAA Code of Ethics Revisited

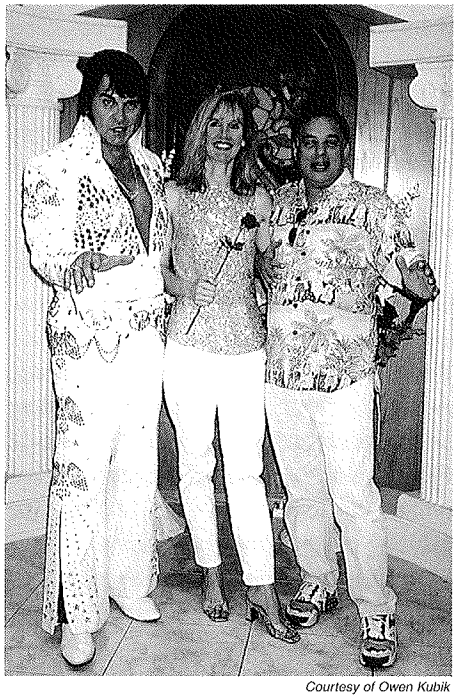
by Jennifer S. Larson

Sometime around the end of 1994, I suddenly resigned from my positions in the ABAA (I was Vice President and Ethics Chair at the time) and eventually gave up my membership as well. I explained my reasons as precisely as I felt I could at the time, without violating confidences entrusted to the Ethics Committee, in an article published in *AB Bookman's Weekly*, a copy of which I suppose is in a box somewhere in the attic of my house. I am now breaking a long public silence on this subject simply because a friend asked me to: my attitude has not changed; it is largely unwelcome, and I expect nothing will come of this airing of it. Nevertheless, here it is: the ABAA should drop its pretense to the enforcement of a code of ethics representing the highest standards in the antiquarian book trade.

There must be few ABAA members active at book fairs or with shops in large cities who are not aware of alleged gross violations of the ABAA Code of Ethics on the part of fellow members. I can think of half a dozen recent verifiable transgressions myself, and my contact with other booksellers these days is mainly as an observer on the periphery of the trade in modern first editions. If I had the Ethics Committee files in front of me, I believe I could demonstrate how few complaints come from fellow ABAA members. There are a handful of disgraceful episodes every year, and lots of talk about them at book fairs and hotel bars, none of which find their way to the ABAA Ethics and Standards Committee Complaint Form, for a variety of reasons.

I choose not to make these complaints myself because of my own experience in having made them in the past and, subsequently, of being in the position of unsuccessfully dealing with them. Years ago, along with several other irate members, I expended an enormous amount of energy attempting to prod the Ethics Committee to take action in the matter of the Texas forgery scandal, in which a past president of the ABAA was intimately involved. The excuse then made for more than a year of stonewalling was that no victim of the fraud

continued on page 16



Courtesy of Owen Kubik

Michael and Clare Hollander celebrated their twelfth wedding anniversary this summer by renewing their vows in Las Vegas. Elvis himself performed the ceremony.

The Messiah Factor in Bookselling

by Tom Congalton

My first real entry into the antiquarian book world was in the early 1970s, standing on line for library sales where treasures could be purchased for a quarter. It was during the tedious hours of waiting that I had my first encounter with the Messiah Factor in bookselling. Granted, gasoline was expensive and difficult to obtain, inflation was in full swing, and the country's mood was generally surly. Still, the booksellers, huddled in the cold outside of a small municipal library were pictures of optimism, and with good reason. The influx of oil money to the Middle East was going to transform the Arab nations into a hot bed of rare book collecting. What could be a more appropriate and suitably extravagant use of the petroleum bounty than the purchase of rare and exotic books? Rumors abounding that various Arab Sheiks and even the Sultan of Brunei, the world's richest man, were collecting books en masse warmed the cockles of our hearts—even of those who, like me, were only beginners. Surely this tectonic shift would enhance the value of my small stock.

We had heard the Good Word. The world might be going to hell, but we were all right. The Arabs were going to save us.

By the time I became a full-time bookseller, in the early 1980s, things had changed. Gasoline prices had stabilized, and a new Messiah had already arisen,

continued on page 12

Letters to the Editor

From: Jim Presgraves
Because this letter covers several points, subheads are used to permit skipping to points of interest.

Letters to the Editor
First, I hope to see the day when letters can deal with principles and be totally devoid of names: the ponderosity of third-person referral is worth the effort to reduce ego involvement. Second, I suggest that we adopt the procedure of addressing the editor with senders' names at end: putting names at the beginning could be interpreted as saying judge the writer, not the ideas. Third, could the mailing/email address of a publisher be provided when the book is reviewed? One should not have to seek this information elsewhere.

Customer Recruitment
Ever since I was elected to membership in ABAA I have heard people commenting on the drying up of the customer base. I also have heard about the tactile excitation, the visual satisfaction, the pleasant aroma, and the remembered rustle of books. Accordingly, I am on record some several years ago as asking that book fairs offer a half-price ticket to students with high school or college identification. Not only would this enhance customer recruitment, but it would also cost us nothing because these would be half admissions of people we'd not ever have paying full admission (at least the first time).

The answer returned was that dealers didn't want to face this audience… reasons being suggested included damage to books and decorum. Let those dealers who have never had a book dropped by a customer please plan to join me for lunch, at my expense, on Saturday at the Boston Book Fair. As for decorum, who has not had puking palpitations at the sight of a skinny behind dressed in revelatory stretch fabric scooting from booth to booth. Frankly, I don't think it's so much damage or decorum that bothers those who oppose this idea: I think they're afraid of a new idea.

Several years ago when I worked at a community college, a troubled freshman admitted that he had been to an adult bookstore, had been seen by a professor, and feared being ratted. I suggested that this would never happen, for the professor would convict himself. Imagine the relief! May I suggest to my colleagues that those who oppose the half-price concept would convict themselves of age-induced stodginess.

And there's nothing wrong with curtailing the window of opportunity for half price… say from ten to noon on Saturday. And we could even offer a class on "how to shop a book fair" or on how to handle a "rare" book; participants could wear a special ribbon identifying them as worthy to enter our booths.

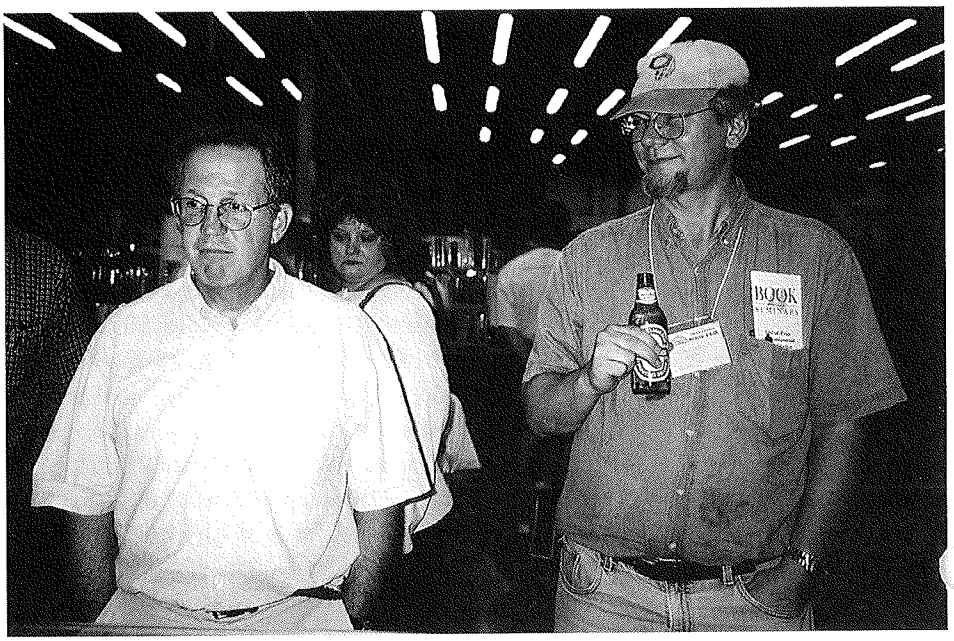
Book Fairs
A five-day fair is interesting. Would it be too much for the appropriate Book Fair Committee to report the results of a poll on this topic taken from those who exhibited at the New York Fair? On the other hand, with our average age at possibly sixty, one wonders how we'd like five days of standing; as a matter of fact, I'm not sure I could stand it.

"Downloading and the Mind…" My congratulations to the author. Seldom has an article demanded re-reading so much as this one.

Appraisal Days
If it works for antiques, why not for books? Let expenses come from public relations budget, let fees go to promote literacy, and let action commence immediately.

Minutes
Another idea on soon-delivery of minutes. A reason for delay was offered that not all board members had access to e-mail. Unless one of our members is floating sublimely on a polar ice pack, I bet all are within one hour of an email source… public libraries, for goodness sake. Durn, another reason demolished. May we soon see thirty-day turn around!

Finally, one will know these ideas have been considered if one sees them addressed in the minutes of the appropriate committee. Go to it. ■



Dan De Simone, Lessing J. Rosenwald Curator at the Library of Congress, and John Thomson, Bartleby's Books, at the Midwest Book Hunters' Fair in St. Paul, Minnesota, this July.

Armageddon Averted

by Ron Lieberman

Knowing that some friends and colleagues have a passing interest in happenings at the Old Mill in Kinzers, PA, home to The Family Album, I thought that we should relate a tale of a recent major event. It is probably also a cautionary tale for booksellers who move into mills, marinas, docks, and other waterside abodes.

On late Friday afternoon, June 22, it was raining hard. Winds were blowing. A tornado was reported in the neighborhood. We were fighting a few leaks around windows and doors, but actually much less water was coming in than had before. Our hard work tightening up the stone walls seemed to be paying off. Just as we relaxed for a minute or two around 6:00 PM, Gideon and Willie, two young Amish neighbors, came over. They were both quite intense: Did we realize how quickly the creek was rising?

Well—we hadn't. A cousin, Lisa, and a friend were coming for dinner and we were making ready for them. Indeed, they had just arrived. Once we looked at the creek, we knew we were in trouble.

There were about 500 banana boxes of books in the basement. In the last flood, during Hurricane Floyd, the waters stayed in the sub-basement and did not reach any books. Floyd developed slowly, and the waters rose over the course of a day. But now, the mill race and stream were rising every second. We started right away to bring books up from the basement to the first floor. Within fifteen minutes we were joined by about ten other Amish men and boys. We got a couple of hundred boxes up. They each weighed between fifty and eighty pounds. We left the bulk in the basement, on pallets that were six inches high.

When we first started working, we thought about the 1000-gallon propane tank outside. Just as we were going to turn it off and anchor it more securely... it broke loose and started floating downstream, blowing out a cloud of propane. It hung up on the fence by our busy road. We called the fire crew and, while we were carrying books, they roped in the tank, and a guy dove under the waters to turn it off. It's still sitting on higher ground now, as I write this. Still have no cooking or hot water.

The water came up higher than anybody in the territory remembers. Higher than Agnes. Much higher than Floyd. We were walking in about five inches of water in the basement, and the books on the pallets were an inch away from disastrous wet. Just then, the waters stopped rising. Almost as quickly as they had come up, they stopped and went down about ten inches. The Pequea creek was still a raging river... but the books seemed safe. Other neighbors (Amish and not) came to see the roaring river. Within the hour, we could see what was left in it's wake: mainly mud. Belle's carefully cultivated gardens and lawn were covered in thick, gooey, wet topsoil. Fences were gone. Trees uprooted. All sorts of minor damage. Our garden shed did not float away, but lawn mowers, paints, wood, and tools were all saturated.

And, even into the next morning, there were eight feet of water in our sub-basement. The night before, we had asked the fire crew whether we could have a heavy-duty pump if we needed it. Well, we needed it. By 8:00 AM we had the pump set up... and it was not until around 2:00 PM that we got enough water out to ease our concerns.

Though not hit as hard or spectacularly as we were, the whole neighborhood had leaks and floods. One farmer milked his cows in a foot of water. Another family had three inches of the gooey mud in their living room. Our closest neighbors were having church on Sunday. A very big deal. Yet their place looked like it had been hit by a... well, a flood.

Saturday morning while I was pumping, Belle was helping others clean up. And, though she had a mess of her own, an elderly neighbor walked down from her farm a half mile away, in bare feet, with a bucket and a broom, to help us clean up. We had decided to let our mess dry out a bit before getting it up, so Belle went back with our neighbor to help clean up.

After returning the pump, I went down to the sub-basement to see if we had removed most of the water. My boots were awfully muddy, and the stairs were muddy, slippery. Zing! Crash ! I fell all the way down the stairs. Banged myself up good. Sprained my knee.

Sunday morning as I write this, I can hardly move. I ache all over. But I'm smiling. It all could have been much worse. I hear carriages across the way. The sound of our neighbors' horses comforts us.

We have a lot to clean up here, but I'm sure we'll get some help. Monday is soon enough to start. ■

ABAA Flyer Available

The ABAA Public Relations Committee has just produced a tri-fold flyer that discusses the history of the association, our purpose, ABAA book fairs, our Code of Ethics, publications, the Benevolent Fund, the ABAA web site, and membership information. The flyer can be distributed at book fairs, put on display in open shops, tucked into packages that are sent in the mail, and conveniently mailed to interested parties.

The new flyer is a way that individual member dealers can explain what their membership in the ABAA actually means. It will show the general public that we are an active organization that adheres to a code of ethics and reaches out to the bookselling and book-buying community; it will perhaps encourage reputable dealers to pursue membership in the organization; and above all, it will instill in customers trust in our organization and make clear the difference between ABAA members and everyone else.

ABAA members are free to request as many flyers as they like from Greg Powers, Powers Rare Books, 244 Orange St., Manchester, NH 03104; phone and fax: 603-624-9707; email: powersrarebooks@mediaone.net ■

ILAB Book Fairs

2001

September 20–23
Barcelona, Spain (AILA)
Hotel Majestic

October 12–14
Sydney, Australia (ANZAAB)
Masonic Centre

October 12–14
Florence, Italy (ALAI)

October 25–18
Helsinki, Finland (SA)
Helsinki Fair Centre

November 9–11
Boston, MA (ABAA)
Hynes Convention Center

2002

January 18–20
Amsterdam, The Netherlands (NVvA)
RAI Congress Center

February 1–3
Los Angeles, CA (ABAA)
LA Airport Mariott Hotel

May 23–26
Paris, France (SLAM)
La Maison de la Mutualité

June 6–9
London, England (ABA)
Olympia Exhibition Centre

September 12–14
Copenhagen, Denmark (ILAB)
19th International Book Fair

2003

June 5–8
London, England (ABA)
Olympia Exhibition Centre

New England Chapter to Host ILAB Presidents' Meeting

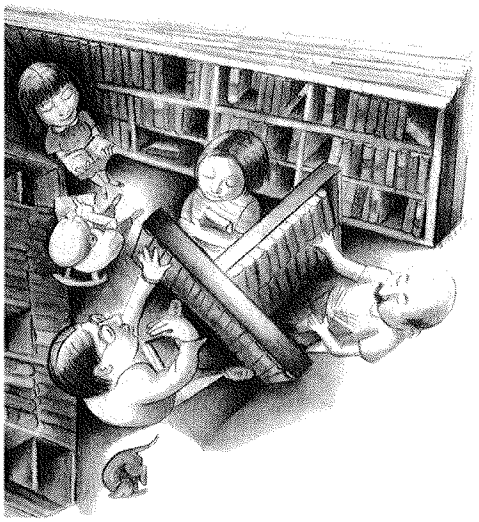
The ABAA's New England Chapter will play host to ILAB Committee Members and National Presidents in Boston for their annual meeting November 4-8, 2001. Michael Ginsberg and his local organizing committee have scheduled a variety of events that should keep the thirty-five to forty-five attendees and their travel companions happily educated, entertained, and fed.

Committee Members and National Presidents will reside and attend their rounds of meetings and workshops at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in the heart of Boston's historic Back Bay. When not engaged in ILAB business, attendees will be treated to tours of Kenneth Rendell's World War II Museum, the Kendall Whaling Museum, the John F. Kennedy Museum, and the Boston Public Library, and they will be lavishly wined and dined, all thanks to Ginsberg and his crack crew of organizers. For significant others accompanying ILABers to Boston, the NE Chapter is offering special guided tours of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum.

The bibliophilic smorgasbord that Boston offers each fall should entice ILABers to extend their stay at least through Sunday, November 11. The ABAA's Boston International Book Fair, open from November 9-11, provides a hearty main course of trading and collegiality. And, the New England Antiquarian Print Fair, running concurrently with the ABAA book fair, the Garage Book Fair on November 10 and 11, and auctions staged by Skinner and Van Blarcom on Saturday should offer plentiful piquant side dishes and scintillating desserts. ■

The 25th Annual Boston International

ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR



November 9–11, 2001

Hynes Convention Center
900 Boylston Street

Opening Night, Friday, 5 to 9 PM
Saturday NOON-7 PM
Sunday NOON-5 PM

Rare, collectible, & antiquarian books
Modern first editions
Maps & autographs

Sponsored by the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America

Housecalls

There's Money in Books

A few years out of college, after having worked in Boston at a new retail bookstore for a couple of years, I moved back to Houston and took a job in a secondhand bookstore called Half-Price Books. I was biding my time there, really, trying to decide what to do with my life and where to do it. Half-Price Books was at that time (about 1988) a place where a $10 book was an expensive one, and remainders had not become a large percentage of its stock. Each employee was authorized to buy books from the public, and each employee was capable of pricing them—a very efficient and profitable enterprise. This particular location (Half-Price had three stores in Houston alone) had amassed a roomful of older books (pre-1950) that everyone was afraid to price, because none of the employees felt they knew enough about old books to do it properly. When I arrived, I had some small experience with older, rarer material, so I was sent upstairs into this room to price all these "wonderful" treasures.

Stories about finding $100 bills in books were daily gossip (though not a daily occurrence) in the store, so naturally I flipped through every book I priced, hoping to hit the jackpot. I found quite a few interesting and uninteresting things, which I took home and kept in a Ziploc baggie: old bookmarks, prom photos, cocktail napkins from exotic places like Cincinnati, postcards, etc. Well, one day I thought the sun had finally risen on me: I found a wonderful cache of Civil War-related material, including some Confederate currency, a soldier's letter, a *carte de visite* photo, and a few other items. I thought for sure that the Confederate currency was worth its weight in gold, so during my lunch break I rushed over to the local numismatic shop (conveniently located two blocks away) and showed it to the resident expert. Alas, the Confederate $10 bill was worth about $20, and the smaller currency was worth as much as my lunch. Disappointed, I brought the whole group home and stuffed it in my Ziploc baggie.

Time passed. I moved back to Boston, worked in another book shop there for three years, met a great woman, quit my job and began traveling around the country with her for about seven months, and, before returning to Boston and begging for my job back, I proposed to her. We spent several months planning the small wedding, and since my fiancée was from somewhat humble means there was no question of her parents paying for our wedding, although her mother did buy her dress. It was really up to me to fund our romance, and I was a just poor bookseller (is this a redundancy?). Anyway, one rainy weekend afternoon, with nothing else to do, I started going through that Ziploc baggie, desperate to amuse myself somehow. The old prom photos were still there, as were the postcards and the bookmarks, and of course the Civil War stuff was there, too. I took another look at the *carte de visite* photo, and something about its subject struck me as familiar. "I know this guy," I thought. Then I realized it was Robert E. Lee. It was a realization that was initially hindered because he was in civilian clothes rather than his more familiar uniform. "Hmm, this is good," I thought. I turned it over, and lo and behold it appeared to be signed by him.

It didn't take me long to have it authenticated, and I immediately sold it to a dealer in Illinois. The money I got for that photo covered the significant difference between what we had saved for the wedding and what it was actually going to cost. So, thanks to Robert E. Lee and the manager of Half-Price Books, I'm happily married.

Greg Powers

A few years ago I bought a library from a well-known scholar, and in one of the books found a series of color photos from his proctoscope exam. I collate my books much more carefully these days as a result.

Kevin MacDonnell

I bought a bunch of books (about 300) on Native American Indians from an old, old gent who had been a customer of mine for years. While negotiating the deal, the old gent told me that years before, when his wife (since passed) was ill in the hospital for a month, he had hidden in one of the books $100 for each day she was in the hospital (thirty days—you do the math). But, said the old gent, he had searched each book dozens of times for the money over the years, and it was gone. He figured someone at one of the many large parties he had hosted had found the money and ripped him off. So, a fun but unfortunate story.

I bought the books very cheap (they weren't in the greatest condition). So, not being too pleased with them, I laid the 300 books on the table in the center of my shop and got busy on other projects. There they sat, literally for months. In the meantime I found out that the old gent had passed on, leaving no family. It then became obvious that he was selling stuff off because he knew his time was coming. At least that's how I had it figured.

Finally, after about three or four months, I needed my table space, so I decided to dive into pricing the books. Gawd, they were in poor condition, but at least they had those plastic dust jacket protectors so they looked better than they actually were. Do you know the end to this story? That's right, kids. I never found one dollar in a book in my entire career. But I did find thirty brand new $100 bills stuck between a dust jacket and a Brodart.

Bob Haines

continued on next page

(Left): Ed Glaser and Lorraine Vivian were married June 17, 2001, at their home in Napa, California. Congratulations! (Above, left to right): Among the guests in attendance were Bob Haines, Valerie Andrews and Stuart Bennett, Sherry Goodman and Jordan Luttrell, and, partially obscured in the second row, Evelyne Thomas and Barney Rosenthal. ***Photographs courtesy of Jeffrey Thomas.***

Money in Books

continued from previous page

I have found money in books on a number of occasions. When I was a teen-age book scout, I was once scouting the home of a couple of aged and not particularly prosperous antique dealers in Point Pleasant, New Jersey, who happened to have some books. Curiously, they were aged enough to report that they had formerly received regular visits from Dr. Rosenbach, who would buy antique furniture, but never books, from them on his visits to the Jersey shore.

While looking through a nicely bound set of Dickens on the landing of their staircase, I encountered several thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills secreted in the various volumes. Perhaps because of my innate honesty, or more likely because the postage-stamp house would allow for no subterfuge, I pointed this out to the owners, who were ecstatic. Apparently one of them had hidden the money there over a decade before and had promptly forgotten his hiding place. At any rate, my visit to them that day was far more profitable to them than the balance in my meager checkbook would have given them any reason to expect.

On another occasion I got to keep the money I found in a book, and in my opinion, it was only just. I was tramping around the Englishtown, New Jersey, flea market, fertile hunting grounds for an antique or book scout in the late 1970s, at dawn's early light. One of the junk vendors there had set up his wares, devoid of any books, and had settled back to drink his coffee and read a book he had brought along while he waited for commerce to come a-calling. I spotted the book and asked to see it—as it turned out, a first edition of Larry McMurtry's *Moving On* in what seemed like reasonably nice condition. At the time this was a desirable, if modestly priced book in the trade, perhaps worth thirty or forty dollars, but which, in that stage of my career, qualified as Big Game. The vendor said he'd take a dollar for it and received the same in due course, and the book was carefully placed into my bag with the rest of the day's pickings. The slight twinge of guilt I felt in relieving the fellow of his morning reading material dissipated quickly as the sun made its full appearance and I realized that the back panel of the jacket had been badly coffee-stained. I took off the jacket to examine the damage further, and a dollar bill fluttered out from where it had been hidden between the jacket and the book. It too had been stained, as had been the book itself. Despite the stain, I kept the dollar. I chucked the book.

Most recently, I was processing a large library of Western Americana, which I had bought en bloc, and which had not only passed through the hands of one dealer, but had sat for a couple of weeks in his shop, available to the public eye and touch. After hauling their volumes away, and while coding and pricing them in my own shop, I found, in a copy of Frank Dobie's *Apache Gold and Yacqui Silver*, an envelope containing ten two-dollar bills in as new condition. If my colleagues in the Western Americana field are to be believed, when I priced the books, I failed to pass the savings along to the consumer.

Tom Congalton ■

2001 ABA Olympia Book Fair

by Adrian Harrington

Olympia is now so well established in the world book fair calendar that the usual introductions are unnecessary. So we move straight on to the crux of the matter. Can we continue to expect growth in this market place? Elsewhere in this *Newsletter*, Alan Shelley, quite rightly, highlights the fact that the major American fairs *seem* to produce more private customers. The italics are mine.

One thing is for sure. The U.S. generates new young buyers. Book collecting there is in the same bracket as art and antiques in demonstrating that you have arrived and that you are not only successful financially, but also that you are intelligent, cultured, and well rounded. In short, it s cool to collect books in the States. You may disapprove of these sentiments, but that doesn t diminish their validity. In the U. K. new money demonstrates its wealth differently. And this may be a reflection of the crisis that we are currently suffering in education in this country. I have many young American collectors, but not so many young British ones.

Rare books often reflect the art and antiques market. Friends in those trades tell me that, at present, you can sell the very best or the under priced, but the middle ground, in terms of quality, is not coping so well. With books, I have to say that my experience is the same. Part of the reason may be that the Internet is now servicing the middle ground very well. In the States, the smaller provincial fairs are dropping like flies. Dealers find sitting in front of a computer for a day far more profitable than attending to a booth at a book fair, miles away from home, for the same period. The book fair is also generally poorly attended. This, together with the fact that dealers are continuously selling via the Net anything halfway decent or under priced, means that they have less stock to take to fairs. Buyers therefore find the smaller fairs even less attractive, and so attendance figures fall again. The downward spiral continues.

Against this background the Olympia and Chelsea Fairs are extraordinarily successful. With approximately one-third of sales going to exhibiting dealers, visiting dealers and the public have to fight it out over the remaining two-thirds, on what is at the time of opening a level playing field. The fact that these last two categories split the spoils roughly fifty-fifty seems reasonable. At the U.S. fairs, visiting dealers have less impact, as virtually all of the main dealer-buyers are exhibitors. This alone means that once the fair opens, it s the public who predominate.

This year the attendance figures at Olympia were down some fifteen percent, a figure reflected by the Art and Antiques Fair and by the country s hotel and tourist industry. It may be the Internet effect, but foot and mouth disease and the General Election probably also played a part. They certainly did not help our redoubtable PR officer, Vanessa Clewes Salmon, who managed, nevertheless, to get us wonderful coverage in the national press. It is worth noting that even with the attendance figures down, the gate was still three times that of our old fair at the Grosvenor.

With regard to Alan s legitimate observation that we need more members of the buying public attending the fair, there are a number of strategies that will be tried. In the end, it all comes down to increasing the public s awareness of rare and collectable books. That, and finding a cure for foot and mouth disease. ■

Olympian Heights

by Alan Shelley

Some among us have memories that go back to the days of the National Book League in Albemarle Street. Others recall the large room at the Europa, whilst many more remember the stairs and rabbit warren that was the ABA home at Park Lane before our brief sojourn amongst the so-called luxury of the Grosvenor House. One president stated categorically when locations were discussed that the ABA Book Fair *had* to be in Mayfair because that was where the wealth was and, by implication, the willing and able book-buyers. Battle ensued. Islington was fought and lost. Venues sank without trace. And then there was Olympia. At last, said some. Absurd, said others. Too far, cried many. High risk. Nirvana. Tawdry. Ideal. The badinage continued and eventually all was decided, but then not without both hope and fear.

Our fourth Olympia Fair has just finished. Ignore the Harringtonian statistics for a moment (bigger may not always be better). Where are we now? My words are the ramblings of a biased man: a proto Olympian who has tired of the pseudo splendor of Mayfair hotels with their cramped aisles, dirty carpets, and food smells. None of which would have mattered if the results had been phenomenal.

As a member of the Olympia committee since inception, I have to say that we have not cracked it yet. Those who were in San Francisco this year can confirm that visitors, indeed *buyers*, rolled through our spacious aisles and booths from Thursday to Sunday. Unlike us, the Californians do not believe that all of the best books will be sold by Friday morning. *Every* day is busy at the West Coast fairs. To meet customers who arrive with a budget and a three-day plan is not unusual. There are catalogue collectors there also, but not in such profusion, for of course, the level of disposable wealth on the West Coast is legendary. Yet London is by no means a poor city. Why is such a high proportion of our turnover at fairs due to our colleagues? (If I were religious, a grateful benediction would now be appropriate!) For although the statistics stack up well, this is still the

continued on next page

Over the Top in London: A Report from the Restaurant Trenches

by Peter L. Stern

A Short Preface

Our newsletter editor, left adrift by two no-show contributors, has asked me to provide something suitable at very short notice. He and I previously discussed enlisting various members and foreign colleagues to supply restaurant reviews. It's been a little difficult to get that going. While all of our colleagues can eat, not all of them can write, and those that can write quite understandably would prefer to eat. Anyway, at the time of this writing, on a Friday, he has magnanimously told me not to hurry, as "We don't need it until next week."

A Partial Cast of Characters (in random order)

Paul Rassam: A London dealer with very refined, literary sensibilities. A food and wine snob (like snobs of all types, he resents and denies this characterization), adventurous, generally of very good judgment, but easily swayed by food writers. In the British Museum, there resides the "Rassam Obelisk," named for his great-grandfather, the first Arab to attend Oxford, who assisted the Empire in looting his home country, Iraq, of antiquities. Paul was unaware that this family memento had been on display until we went there and reported back to him.

Nigel Williams: A London dealer of not very refined, literary sensibilities. Very serious about his food and wine, particularly wine, he maintains a cellar of several thousand bottles, with detailed plans for every single one of them. An Irish Protestant (in Boston, Irish Protestants are called "Englishmen") and a former opera singer, he has managed better than anyone I know in smoothing out the bumps of life. Working even less than most people do in London, he has plenty of competent shop help, enabling him to go home to Kent in mid-afternoon, open some wine, and expect his wonderful, indulgent wife Sophie (also trained in opera) to see to whatever needs he may have after an exhausting four-hour workday.

"The English Lads": Trenchermen all: various Harringtons by birth, adoption, osmosis, affiliation, marriage, and employment; Stephen Dick, mental age fourteen, who brilliantly scouts for Nigel with the finesse and grace of a sugar cane harvester (a yeoman to the core, he still savors victory over the French at Agincourt); and Paul Foster, mental age also fourteen, who looks like every photograph you've seen of a football hooligan (the U. K.'s number one visitor to Hooter's locations in the States, where he also bravely ventures into the diciest places to scout rap recordings).

John Bell: A London dealer (Bell, Book & Radmall), who, despite being as hale a lunch companion as one could hope for, has become hard to lure away from the shop. A stalwart of the ABA cricket team, and the only man I know with a funny story about his vasectomy.

James Tinley: John Bell's partner and a giant in the lunching world. One day, Nigel and I were on the way to lunch and poked our heads into the door. Even though James was manning the shop by himself, the temptation just proved too much, and he locked the place up. Nigel slyly concluded that he could bankrupt his competitors merely by taking them to lunch. James can absorb liquor in prodigious quantities without betraying its presence (until the next morning, anyway). With this sort of ability, he could have become a City lawyer.

Benjamin Spademan: Splits his time between London and Paris. More than a scout or a bookseller, he is a book arbitrageur. A dangerous man to underestimate, and still in his twenties, he will surely inherit the book trade. Even more of a food and wine snob than Paul Rassam, Benjamin has an antipathy for California wine that must be inherited from his French mother. In time, a potential rival to Nigel in smoothing out those bumps in life.

John Hellebrand, a.k.a. "The Big Boy": No one can hold a misguided opinion more fervently or longer; a great companion for those dinners where lively arguments are welcome.

Olympian Heights

continued from previous page

weakness of our British fairs: an absence of sufficient eager private buyers. Of course there will be some clients who would only ever do their shopping at Maggs or Quaritch, but will we ever be able to replicate the atmosphere of the best American fairs and have the constant hum of enthusiastic talk and business activity right through the weekend? We certainly now have a display of books and booksellers that could rival any on the other side of the Atlantic, so it is not the "product."

My subjective view, plus general comments, indicates satisfaction with Olympia as the right place for the foreseeable future. So what is missing? How do we get away from one day of frenzy and three of relieved calm? Economically it all looks good, and there are not many grousers. Some teething problems remain but can be easily resolved. Our useful links with the grand antiques fair next door will be even more dramatic in 2002. This should help, but it will not be the whole answer. As an exhibitor and as a committee man, I was delighted with Olympiathis June, but next year I would be even more pleased to be talking to visitors on Saturday and Sunday rather than to my (delightful) neighbors.

Articles by Harrington and Shelley are reprinted with permission from the ABA Newsletter *(June 2001, Number 300).* ■

John Wronoski, a.k.a. "The Duck": a serial check-grabber with a habit of inviting unwanted guests to large dinners. Involved in a long, monogamous relationship with Newcastle Brown Ale.

Rob Rulon-Miller: A recent, enthusiastic convert to fine wine; not particularly snobbish about it, but still retaining the neophyte's tendency to read the wine list in Hebrew (from right to left).

Lorraine Stern: Related to this chronicler by marriage; increasingly unsympathetic to the privations and sacrifices endured by him in his extensive research.

There was a time, and it wasn't long ago, that London was hardly considered a gourmet destination. In fact, like the early Boston Red Sox owner Harry Frazee (justifiably reviled for trading Babe Ruth to the Yankees), who, when asked what he thought was the best thing about Boston, replied, "The train to New York," the gourmet visitor to London could only take comfort in the proximity of London to Paris.

Over twenty years or so, I've traveled to London some seventy times or more and can report that the restaurant climate has improved as steadily as the quality of books on the shelves has declined. This is a phenomenon that has occurred virtually everywhere, even here in my historically restaurant-deprived hometown.

My first couple of dozen trips pretty much all began the same way, a routine carefully evolved to minimize jet lag. There was no direct daytime flight from Boston until a few years ago, so it was a groggy arrival time before 7:00 AM at Heathrow for me. Usually, the hotel would have a room ready early enough for me to check in and remove the airline grit from my person. Then, it was off to scout books in Cecil Court. More often than not, the buying was good enough to pay for the trip in a furious two-hour buying spree, inevitably followed by a long lunch at the **Café Pelican** on St. Martin's Lane with John Bell. Now defunct, the **Pelican** served an excellent fish soup, steak frites, and, while it may be hard for some of you to imagine, superb liver. Americans don't know from liver. The English and French, lacking this American contempt for innards, know what to do with a nice piece of this much-maligned meat. This meal was washed down with several large bottles of French beer, which had the desired effect of preparing me for a long nap. Waking up in late evening, I was ready to join the after-theater crowd for a late meal. The next morning, an English fry-up under my belt, I was on GMT, off to buy toys for the kids at Hamley's on Regent Street and then on to the business at hand.

The routine these days is more humane. The daytime flight from Boston gets into London in mid-evening, allowing an hour or so in a pub after settling in at the hotel and a normal start on the next day's activities.

Truth be told, I never disliked London's cuisine; if you were a lover of Indian food, you couldn't go wrong nearly anywhere. Our equivalent in the States is Chinese food, but walking at random into one of these establishments is a chancy proposition. I've never had a bad meal in any of the ubiquitous curry places; the quality of even the most modest of them is surprisingly good if you ignore the decor and the sometimes indifferent service.

A standout is **Chutney Mary** on the King's Road in Fulham, which advertises itself as the world's first "Anglo-Indian" restaurant. It features a lush, spacious, greenery-filled dining room, and the menu consists of dishes different than those found in more ordinary places, although I'm hard-pressed to describe what the Anglo aspect of the cooking is. We had a particularly memorable Christmas day dinner there: a set menu with dishes not found on their regular menu, a glass of good champagne, and a Christmas cracker. As to their wine list, I am ignorant. Invariably, I find that beer is the beverage of choice with Indian food.

Paul Rassam and I were pleased with **Café Spice Namaste**, which has locations in Clapham (South London) and in the City. The exotic menu is strong in fish dishes, many originating in Goa. We had a half dozen appetizers and entrees, all of which were excellent, and wished that we had been part of a larger party so that we could have enjoyed a broader sampling from the menu. The prices are very reasonable. Only its somewhat remote location has kept us from returning.

A better than average curry palace is **Khan's of Kensington**, very near the South Kensington tube stop. While the food is not especially memorable, a dinner there during one June fair was notable for its extended argument between Kevin Rita (Brick Walk Book Shop in West Hartford), James Jaffe, and Paul Rassam over a wine list that comprised some dozen or so selections printed on the back of the menu. I am not at all sophisticated or knowledgeable about wine, but I knew enough to recognize most of these as readily available at any grocer. That didn't stop these wine snobs from interminable wrangling over the most appropriate choice. My choice was easily resolved with a bottle of beer; John Wronoski's choice was resolved with many of them.

For those attending the June fair, the far reaches of Kensington offer little in dining pleasure. The **Olympia Tandoori**, directly across the street, is better than it looks and offers a welcome respite from the lunch choices available in the exhibition facility. This past fair, we joined Rob Rulon-Miller at lunch there. He was not wholly pleased with our arrival, as he had been avidly following the conversation of a nearby couple who were married, but not to each other.

Paul Rassam and I dined last year at **Zaika** on Fulham Road, a "new wave" Indian restaurant rumored to be in line for a Michelin star. A handsome, elegant restaurant with excellent service, the food was a trifle delicate. This is one of those places I can't quite make up my mind about, and will require a second visit.

John Hellebrand, a companion on an early trip, promised great Chinese food in London. His theory, shared by others, was to walk through Chinatown and look for the places where the Chinese went to eat, always a packed hole-in-the-wall with Formica tables and a menu on the wall with only some dishes (the ones with acceptable ingredients, I suspect) translated into English. We passed various nice-looking places with white tablecloths and attractive posted menus, all of which

continued on next page

Stern

continued from previous page

he scoffed at, and landed up in a closet where everyone was Chinese. I can recall being distinctly unimpressed. The fault in his theory is, of course, that the Chinese are like anyone else; they like restaurants that serve up plenty of food cheap.

In a tradition best abandoned, every trip requires a meal at **Poon's** at the Royal National Hotel in Bloomsbury. I meet up with the English lads after they've set up at the fair. We sit at a large table with a lazy Susan in the center, piled high with a couple of crispy ducks and their accompaniments. This device spins in a blur; the occasional cries for more pancakes, plum sauce, scallions, beer, "dietcokenoice" (Stephen) and water are met with admirably consistent surly service.

As to Thai food, **The Blue Elephant** at Fulham Broadway is an impressive establishment. You are led to your table across tiny bridges that pass over little streams running through miniature jungles. The food, while fairly standard, is excellent. Untried by me, but highly recommended by Gerry Stodolski and others, is **The Churchill Arms** on Kensington Church Street (handily located near Adrian Harrington), which is a pub with a Thai dining room.

London is severely deprived of good Italian food. **Zafferano** in Belgravia (very near Knightsbridge) is generally conceded to be the best London has to offer. I've eaten there twice, and while it is very good, I've been in half a dozen accidentally chosen places on New York's East Side that are as good or better. Most other Italian restaurants I've been to in London are twenty years or more behind the times.

I haven't been to all of the traditional fuddy-duddy spots, but intend to reach them all eventually. **Simpson's**, **Wilton's**, and particularly, **The Savoy Grill** are on my short list. I have enjoyed **Rule's** in Covent Garden, London's oldest restaurant. Vegetarians should best pass on this one; the menu is heavily game oriented. If it can be killed in the wild or on a preserve (they maintain their own), **Rule's** will have it on the menu eventually.

The **Connaught Grill** also features seasonal game. The first time we went there, the menu had both rabbit and hare (I had the hare). The oysters on the half shell were hauntingly good. The prices are punishing, and the service a little haughty. One June fair, we found ourselves there as part of a large group consisting of the Big Boy, the Duck, Jaffe, Kevin Rita, Rob Rulon-Miller, Paul Rassam, and others. With the attitude of a kid taken on the town by a generous parent ("You mean I can order *anything*?"), Rob ordered caviar, which he generously shared. The sommelier made excellent recommendations (all of which were vetted and discussed ad nauseam by Paul, James, and Kevin), and it was from this meal that Rob dates his rebirth as a wine lover.

We were probably a rowdier group than they would have liked. The Big Boy suggested a parlor game wherein each member of the table revealed what great book they should have read, but hadn't. *Ulysses, War and Peace, Finnegans Wake, Crime and Punishment, Remembrance of Things Past*, and others were mentioned. When the circle was completed with me, I had to admit that I hadn't read any of them. I plead no excuse: Had I read all those books, I probably wouldn't have wanted to sell them. At this past June fair, a customer of mine looked at an expensive copy of Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and asked me if I'd read it. Honest as ever, or at least as usual, I replied that I had not and turned to my booth mate, Paul Rassam, and asked him. He said no, so I asked him again with a mock pleading gesture. Not missing a beat, he said, "Oh yes, my first reading was a transforming experience. Hardly a year passes by that I don't re-read it."

A good, modest, but reliable, stand-by for British cooking is **Brown's**, which has various branches, one of which is next to Simon Finch off Bond Street, another a few doors away from Cecil Court on St. Martin's Lane. They're open on Sundays, when most decent restaurants are not, and you can usually get a table without a wait. The steak and Guinness pie is very nicely done; there are good daily specials, and the prices, while not cheap, are reasonable.

Just up the road on Long Acre is the very large **Palais du Jardin**. We've eaten there several times, and it has sometimes disappointed. It's not a bad bet for those times you can't get into anywhere better.

On the other side of Covent Garden is **Livebait**, a seafood chain with other locations near Waterloo and Notting Hill. They all share a stark, white-tiled décor, and tend to be loud when crowded. Apparently, they have recently been purchased by the bistro chain **Chez Gerard** (very good, reliable choices themselves), and while the quality is still top-notch, the variety of available fish appears to be abbreviated. Nevertheless, if you have a hankering for cockles and whelks (which require more effort than the reward warrants), you can get them there. One sees fish on the menu in Europe that we don't have, and those that we do have often carry a different name. At **Livebait**, I enjoyed a rarely available grilled whole John Dory, which is just about the ugliest thing with fins you can imagine, a cartoon of a fish.

The Ivy, in theatreland, may be London's most popular restaurant, and getting a table there represents an achievement. Famous for its celebrity clientele, I've had decent luck getting a table there on short notice when better people failed to make their appearances. Its reputation is well earned; my wife describes it as "expensive comfort food." The same management recently renovated **J. Sheekey**, a long-established fish restaurant on St. Martin's Court, just the other side of Cecil Court. I've been there twice since it reopened, and I found it greatly improved without having lost its soul (or sole, as you will).

Last year, a customer with whom we have become very friendly took me to a cricket match at Lord's. I spent some four hours in the hot sun and absorbed nothing about the game except for an appreciation of how to enjoy it. Simply enough, everyone brings a hamper of food and wine. A couple of hours or so and I was napping in the stands, but woke up in time for the tea break, which, to my delight, consisted of walking to the concession stands and buying a bottle of champagne. I wouldn't

exchange cricket for baseball any day, but dogs and suds have lost some of their simple charm for me. On a recent trip, on a Monday in which Lorraine and I intended to spend a quiet, early evening, this customer dropped by our Mayfair hotel for "a drink." Three hours and several drinks later, we found ourselves a bit peckish, and walked over to **Langan's Brasserie**, which was one of London's hot spots in the seventies. The founder was a famously rude drunk who came to a grisly end. I was a little surprised to find that not only was it still in business, it was also remarkably busy. We enjoyed a reasonably good meal off the modern British-Continental menu, along with two or three bottles of wine.

Nigel, Tinley, and I have developed a particular, perhaps even a peculiar, enthusiasm for a pair of restaurants operated by the same chef, **St. John** and **The French House Dining Room**. Each abides by the motto "Nose to Tail Cooking," so the squeamish among my readers may want to skip ahead a little. The latter is located in Soho above **The French House Bar**, a haven for the Free French during the war. The bar itself is a very pleasant watering hole. The tiny room (I doubt it seats more than twenty patrons) above is comfortably seedy. While the menu does have some items that could be served anywhere, or to anyone, the rest features parts of animals seldom seen anywhere else but in sausage (don't think about it) and dog food. I've had a nice bit of spleen (cow, pig, sheep or goat?), and eels. There was something on the menu that involved a pig's ear, but in deference to the sensibilities of readers who have ventured this far, I'll forgo describing the dish's less appetizing ingredients.

His other restaurant, **St. John**, at Smithfield, the wholesale meat market in the City, is much larger and airier and presents an even larger menu with more of the same. Quail was on the board in the dining room, but the bar featured a bowl of quail's necks, as well as various other apparently unusable bits. We went there for lunch with a large group, consisting of Nigel, Rick Gekoski, his employee Peter Grogan, Tinley, my wife Lorraine (who had arrived in London late the previous evening), and Tom Congalton (who had arrived early that morning, groggy, tired, worn, and showing every bit of it). The latter two did not really appreciate the menu, but managed to find something normal to order. Tom's complexion, in particular, turned various colors. I had rabbit, which was the best I've had anywhere. Usually served in small pieces covered in sauce and too often, as the old saw goes, tasting like chicken, this was a large, tender haunch with a distinct, not overly gamy, flavor.

A restaurant that has never disappointed is **Richard Corrigan at Lindsay House**, in Soho, just around the corner from **The French House**. Nigel likes it because the chef, an Irishman, knows the proper things to do with a potato. Its townhouse location features several dining rooms with restrained but warm decoration; the floors are bare and worn, and the tables are far enough apart for comfort. The food is excellent; the chef doesn't go wacky with inventiveness, the service is fine, and the prices, while expensive, are not unreasonable.

cheznico is a famously lavish modern continental restaurant located in The Grosvenor House on Park Lane. The eponymous chef has recently simplified it a bit, supposedly resigning his Michelin stars, but I haven't been there since this change took place. It has a large, elegant dining room, with tables spaced about as far apart as in any restaurant I can think of. Clearly, this is a place where they're not expecting to turn the table over again that evening. Each course is served with choreographed precision. A server will stand behind each of you (no matter how many are seated at the table) and serve the plates simultaneously, an act both impressive and giggle provoking at the same time. The food was always superb; the ten-course tasting menu was truly phenomenal, but more than a bit much. It is very expensive.

A favorite of ours is the **Capital Restaurant**, at the boutique hotel of the same name on Basil Street, just a few doors from Harrod's. Every dinner here has been faultless in every respect. They changed chefs in 1999, which caused unnecessary anxiety on our part; the transition appears to have been seamless. You are seated first in the adjoining bar, where you are shown the menus and wine list to browse and order from. At your leisure, you move into their bijoux version of a grand hotel dining room. With its tall, decorated ceilings and French décor, it is the epitome of elegance. The service has always been perfect: charming, with just the correct balance of friendliness and distance. They anticipate, but don't hover. The French cuisine is presented beautifully, but not preciously. We usually retire to an after-dinner drink in the bar, although when we last went there in Nigel's company, we found that we had enjoyed two bottles of a recommended Bordeaux so much that we ordered another one. The sommelier offered to reserve two bottles in the cellar in anticipation of our future visit. All this comes at a high price; we've always wanted to stay in the hotel, but that carries a somewhat stiffer rate than we're used to paying. Out of curiosity, I called last year and was offered a "special tariff" of £375—per night, that is.

All of which brings us back to square—in this case, quite literally. **The Square**, on Bruton Street between Bond Street and Berkeley Square, is Nigel and Benjamin's hands-down favorite. Benjamin uses it as his local diner and has managed to ingratiate himself with the staff, a talent for which he carries wherever he goes. In Paris, we noted that where Nigel proved himself impotent in attracting the attention of waiters, Benjamin's mere glance brought them running; before long, they're acting like lifelong friends, and the sommelier no longer recommends vinegar. **The Square** also never disappoints. Elegant, but very modern, the service is very much like that at **The Capital**, although a touch cooler without Spademan there to jolly them along. Its modern French cuisine is perfection; Nigel and Benjamin share the opinion that **The Square** would be considered in the top rank of Paris restaurants.

Last December, finding myself unexpectedly in London for an auction, they invited me along for a long-planned lunch.

continued on next page

Stern

continued from previous page

Actually, I think that they were just being polite and hoped that I'd be gracious enough to decline. They brought along some very expensive Bordeaux that they'd been hoarding, and a very nice vintage Chateau d'Yquem to boot. What made this even worse for them was that I had a bad cold, and any slight appreciation I might ordinarily be expected to have for these choices would be seriously impaired. With the unselfish consideration I have always shown to others, I soothed myself with a couple of martinis (**The Square** prepares a fine martini) so that I wouldn't have to dip too deeply into their stash. Unexpectedly, the Chateau d'Yquem was poured with our starter course of foie gras; it was a brilliant combination. The remainder went down quite nicely in its usual place after the meal, which ran slightly over five hours. I can recommend Chateau d'Yquem to anyone with a head cold; my own brief research hints at its hitherto unrecognized therapeutic properties. This was a lunch record for me, but it was quickly shattered by a small margin with our own first annual shop Christmas lunch a mere week later. However, it took ten of us to accomplish that.

London dining is expensive. As a general rule of thumb, the price in pounds is the same as we would expect to find in dollars stateside. That is to say, an entrée that would cost $20 would likely be found in London for £20. With the pound currently hovering around $1.40, those who maintain the fiction of a budget should take this premium into account. As to restaurant guides, *Zagat's* is as good in its London edition as it is everywhere else. I admire its spare edited comments; the reader will find it echoing their own conclusions.

I've left some very good places out of my exposition, and there are many others left to sample. I've also left out many good dining companions, but reviewing how I've portrayed those that were mentioned, I expect that they will thank me for their exclusion. If I'm not sued, I will endeavor to update this in the future, and welcome suggestions. I also welcome rebuttal from any of those mentioned above. I can see some disagreement regarding the restaurants. Such opinions are, after all, subjective. My characterizations of individuals are, of course, beyond reproach and completely objective. ■

Congalton

continued from front page

this time even farther east. As I idled away my time talking with other booksellers on the phone and awaiting orders from our catalogues, we were uniformly optimistic. We had all heard rumors of Japanese collectors and institutions snapping up Shakespeare folios, books of hours (whatever they were), and every available copy of Chagall's *Jerusalem Windows*. It didn't matter that virtually no booksellers of my acquaintance owned any Shakespeare folios, books of hours, or anything like them. And those who might turn up the occasional copy of the *Jerusalem Windows* had no direct contact with the Japanese market.

We had also all heard rumors of American dealers who had carefully and profitably cultivated the Japanese market and the Japanese trade. While few of us believed in the freshly posited trickle-down theory, we were all perfectly willing to benefit from it. We presumed that our colleagues, flush with profits from the Japanese trade, were going to convert the gains from their Shakespeare folios into the hyper-modern first editions I was offering for twenty or thirty dollars each in my first few catalogues. We had seen the light: the Japanese were going to save us.

It is perhaps only a bitter footnote to remark that in the 1980s my total dividend from the Japanese economic miracle was $680, which I received when I sold an inscribed photograph of the grumpy-looking Japanese author Junichiro Tanazaki to a Japanese dealer at the ABAA Boston Book Fair.

By the late 1980s we had found a new deity. Well, not exactly new, but one that was rapidly becoming pervasive: the book fair. As shop rents increased and urban centers changed, many booksellers found it convenient to close their shops and jump on the expanding book fair circuit. What could be better? Book fairs had previously been confined to the few run by the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, who had pioneered them in this country in the early 1960s, and a few other small regional events. Now, in the mid-to-late 1980s, a bookseller had his or her pick of regional fairs. On the East Coast, at least, one could have one's choice of as many as three fairs on a single weekend.

Freed from the shop, dealers could meet new collectors—and vice versa—as well as benefit from the efficiencies of scale that a book fair might provide. Scouting a fair with a hundred dealers was like going to a hundred bookstores. The conventional wisdom among dealers on the book fair circuit was that if you couldn't sell your way out of a book fair, you could buy your way out. One wise man in the book trade once remarked to me, and it has always struck me as true, that the way to judge the success of a book fair was not by one's sales, but by adding one's sales to one's purchases.

And at least one had easy proximity to one's colleagues: in the event of a total meltdown, colleagues could get together afterwards and commiserate over cocktails. On one such occasion fifteen years ago, a couple of my colleagues and I, with the collective courage born of several post-book-fair libations determined to buy a book from another colleague for $18,000. I'm chagrinned to admit that we still own it.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I became a freshly minted member of the ABAA—and a new Savior arose. Hollywood and the Entertainment Community were going to save us.

Unlike our previous Messiahs, there was actually some visible evidence that this might be so. The tedium between sales at West Coast book fairs was leavened by occasional celebrity sightings:

Brad Pitt, Lana Turner, Johnny Depp, Whoopi Goldberg, Jay Leno, and many others were not only in attendance, but were actively purchasing books, and sometimes expensive ones. We had all heard the legends that the Heritage Book Shop and other strategically placed West Coast dealers had successfully cultivated the Hollywood carriage trade, but now we too, while not perhaps having had our brush with fame, had at least had our brush with the famous. Booksellers could casually mention in the company of their fellows that they were going out for a drink with Johnny, had Jay's home phone number, or had spent an amusing half-hour trading quips with Whoopi. Probably some of it was true.

Perhaps a single anecdote will help to elucidate those heady days. One afternoon I received a call from a woman obviously filled with misgivings. She identified herself as the accountant for a Major Hollywood Star, someone who everyone has heard of. After some preliminary pleasantries, she stated the purpose for her call. Her client had a $14,000 credit card charge with our firm, apparently filed under "research." Was this correct?

"Yes, it is."

"Could I ask you a personal question?" she replied, apparently more than a little afraid of the answer.

"Yes."

"What do you sell at Between the Covers?"

"Rare books," I replied.

"Oh, thank God," she said.

While these interludes made for amusing cocktail chatter and what income that came of it was certainly welcome, when subjected to any sort of objective scrutiny, it had become clear that for the vast majority of booksellers, Hollywood had not saved us.

No matter, because by the mid-1990s we had put all false Gods behind us and had accepted the one and true Messiah: the Internet.

As everyone here knows by now, books are the perfect commodity to sell on the Internet: alike enough that they could be entered and stored in a well-ordered database, but different enough that their individual characteristics would be easily distinguished and searchable.

At first the fledgling Internet search services were a boon to savvy dealers and collectors. Collectors who had spent decades looking for a specific title might, with a few keystrokes, have a choice of copies in a variety of price ranges. Dealers who received multiple orders for a book from their catalogues could often provide equivalent copies on short notice. Most of the online services provided some sort of capacity for maintaining want lists, with automatic notification when a copy of a desired item was put into the system. Dealers learned to be wary when they received a half-dozen or more orders for a book the day after they had listed it. Such an onslaught could only mean that they had dramatically under priced any books that elicited multiple orders.

This phenomenon requires adaptable bookseller behavior. For example, one New Year's morning I stopped into the shop to feed our shop cats. Checking my email, I saw that one of my wants had come up: a nice copy of *Hike and the Aeroplane* by Tom Graham offered for thirty-five dollars. Experience dictated that I wasn't the only person looking for this book, and ordering it outright was bound to result in disappointment. In my machinations to acquire the book, I opted for a new and ingenious book-buying technique: telling the truth. I immediately both emailed and called, leaving a message on the seller's answering machine: He or she was offering Sinclair Lewis' pseudonymous and very scarce first book for a fraction of its retail value. I would pay something in the mid-four figures for the book, depending on further details of condition. The bookseller was happy to oblige, sending me the book on approval and receiving a check back in short order for the eventual agreed upon price. After we had completed the transaction he told me: "You know, I got over forty orders for that book, and no one else offered me a penny more than thirty-five dollars."

Let me stress that my behavior in this incident was in no way altruistic or motivated by my love for either fair play or my fellow bookseller, rather it was a new strategy to cope with a changing environment. I had left myself plenty of room for profit, and unlike the forty other prospective buyers, I had the book.

Like all good Messiahs, the Internet has had its Apostles: some of the high-tech millionaires—even some billionaires—looking to acquire the trappings of wealth and taste saw rare books as part and parcel of the cultured and sophisticated life they could now afford. Bill Gates bought the Codex Hammer in a much celebrated auction, and rumors that Gates, Paul Allen, and other high-tech moguls were amassing huge libraries were rife in the trade. Dealers flocked to the new Seattle book fair, expecting to exchange their stock for trunks full of money from new collectors flush with dotcom wealth. On opening night at one ABAA New York fair I overheard one dealer telling another that not only had he had two billionaires in his booth, but that he had had two billionaires in his booth AT THE SAME TIME! Apparently they traveled in packs.

For my part, I was woefully unfamiliar with the more important identifying characteristics of billionaires. I have recently taken up bird watching, hoping that the lessons inherent are transferable to this more lucrative pastime.

Talk at book fairs had ceased to be of rare books, and now was almost exclusively devoted to the Internet. Increasing numbers of dealers listed their stock on the net, and collectors were eager to embrace this new method for finding books.

However, it rapidly turned out that for dealers in very modern first editions, the new Messiah showed signs of being a wrathful Old Testament-style deity, unforgiving and quick to disperse our traditional marketing base: those collectors who bought almost exclusively from our catalogues.

Moderately uncommon books from the 1970s through 1990s, for which there existed regional disparities of supply but copies of which an active dealer could usually find in his or her daily rounds, were now listed in profusion on the search services. Where before one might reasonably expect to make continuous and repeated sales of specific titles in the $50 to $500 range, now one could only be

continued on next page

Congalton

continued from previous page

confident of selling them if one had the cheapest copy for its condition on the net.

If the ABAA's proprietary Internet discussion group was any indication, a few dealers in antiquarian or "brown" books found this fitting revenge for the brisk commerce they had been forced to observe at modern first edition booths in the past decades of book fairs, as well as for the assumed inferiority of the product that modern dealers were purveying. Even if the market for their more esoteric antiquarian books remained relatively small, at least they were confident in the knowledge that because of the limited supply, there would be only modest price competition on the net.

The feeling among at least some of these dealers was that the Internet had finally revealed the egregious depredations and practices of the modern first edition dealer. One listed example of these outrageous practices was that some first editions of recent vintage, such as John Grisham's *A Time to Kill*, were then selling for $2000.

In one exchange about this topic on the ABAA discussion group, the most vocal of this small group of dealers had in his own most recent catalogue a single book that was identical in price to *A Time to Kill.* It was, as I now recall, a second edition of an eighteenth-century Swedish book on meat carving. While one might have been hard pressed to defend John Grisham novels as the pinnacle of Western culture, I was pretty sure they were in no way exceeded by an eighteenth-century how-to volume devoted to slicing up the Swedish rump roast.

Another unforgiving factor of the Internet was that we were selling TOO MANY BOOKS. Books that we had previously devoted little or no time to selling, as they were not worth including in a printed catalogue, were, once ensconced in one's database, now available for sale to a large and not necessarily discriminating audience. Many dealers, including me, reported spending the greater part of our time processing orders for relatively inexpensive books. At Between the Covers it became increasingly apparent that if we continued to experience this large volume of Internet sales of cheap books, we would be unable to devote our time to the more expensive books that had become responsible for the largest part of our income. We would rapidly go bankrupt. Again, we had to develop a new strategy to address this.

In our case, we sought out another local bookseller who had a different problem, but one resulting from the same cause. The walk-in traffic in his shop had dissipated, apparently because his regular customers were spending their book-buying budgets on the Internet.

We formed a company, bought a large but inexpensive building, contributed our less expensive stock to the venture, and hired relatively low-wage employees to list large quantities of books on the net. The resulting company, named alottabooks, now has well over 100,000 books listed online for sale, and mercifully, I can go about buying and selling the more expensive, and what are to me, the more interesting nineteenth- and twentieth-century first editions.

Of course, every self-respecting new Messiah wants to destroy or discourage the vestiges and symbols of its predecessors. What former icons of the rare world has the Internet displaced or weakened?

The few remaining open shops for one, as booksellers increasingly discover the benefits of selling books in their underwear and in the comfort of their own homes, unencumbered by the expense entailed in running a shop and undistracted by the occasional idiosyncrasies of those likely to be found haunting rare bookstores or, as they are known in the trade, the collectors.

The book fair is another. Two of the best regional book fairs, the Florida Antiquarian Book Fair in St. Petersburg and the Long Island Book Fair, both of which have had longtime waiting lists of over a hundred dealers each, reportedly now have little or no waiting lists at all. Other fairs have folded completely.

Many lower-level dealers who did these fairs, and who had previously hoarded books to bring to them, are now selling their better ones through the search services or online auction sites and see no reason to go to the trouble and expense of exhibiting at these events.

Another casualty is likely to be price guides. Obviously price guides have always been something of a hit or miss affair, often obsolete as soon as they are published. When the first edition of Allen and Pat Ahearn's general price guide, *Collected Books: A Guide to Values*, was published, the date of publication was timed to coincide with opening day of the 1991 New York Antiquarian Book Fair, then held at the Sheraton Hotel. A few minutes before the fair opened, another first edition dealer, Jeffrey Marks, and I encountered Allen Ahearn in the elevator carrying a beautiful copy of *The Sound and the Fury*. Jeff and I expressed our interest in the book. Allen allowed that it was priced at $17,500, and that we could of course avail ourselves of the reciprocal twenty-percent discount, making the final net price $14,000. Our efforts to convince him that the book was worth $7500, according to his new price guide issued on that very day, fell on deaf ears. Allen was smart enough to write and publish his price guide, but not dumb enough to follow it when his instincts told him otherwise. I now forget whether it was Jeff and I who bought the book, but I do remember that Allen sold the book before the fair was over.

I expect some price guides, including the Ahearn, will survive, but many more seem destined for oblivion, most of the information inside them outdated instantly, with more current and more reliable information easily available for free on the internet.

Perhaps another casualty of the Internet might be bibliography. In the past, the mark of a serious collector or dealer would be a reference library numbering well into thousands of volumes. Bibliography was the foundation on which most booksellers built their careers, and most collectors built their collections. According to California bookseller Mark Hime, attempting to challenge accepted bibliographical knowledge was akin to dating outside one's own species: rarely satisfying and mortally embarrassing if caught.

Now with millions of books listed on the search services, each accompanied by a more or less competent description, booksellers without any reference library at all can appropriate the research and descriptions of their more, or occasionally less, competent fellows. On the ABAA Internet discussion group much time seems devoted to the proper form of "cease and desist" letters aimed at those who have lifted painstakingly crafted and researched book descriptions from member dealers for use with their own books listed online.

At one recent book fair I was sharing a booth with Boston dealer Peter Stern. During the first night of the fair, Peter and I were forced to leave our booth in the care of one of his employees. We had to decide where he should leave the key to the glass case, which contained perhaps a half million dollars worth of books, for us to retrieve the next day. The choice was clear: beneath the massive Gibson and Greene bibliography of Arthur Conan Doyle, which Peter had recently had reprinted, prominently displayed on a table for all to examine. There was obviously no safer place to hide the key, especially in a crowd of a hundred or so booksellers.

On another occasion, one of the young cataloguers at our shop misinterpreted some penciled notes in a book and listed a common title as being in the "scarce first state dustjacket." Now, as far as I know this book had no second state dustjacket. Over the course of the next few weeks, we were bombarded with emails from booksellers not of our acquaintance, demanding to be enlightened as to the point of issue on the jacket. Motivated equally by science and malicious curiosity we declined to change the description or to respond to any of these emails. No matter—within months, dozens of copies of this title could be found online, confidently described as being in the "scarce first state dustjacket." Most of these dealers were probably right; they just didn't know why they were right.

This reliance on the Net as the final arbiter of all bibliographical knowledge has led to a couple of my favorite new bits of bookseller jargon: "Not on the Net" and "Not on Ebay"

And what about Ebay and the other online auction sites? These sites, used judiciously by the experienced, can be beneficial to one's collection or stock. But nothing is by turns so disconcerting or amusing as an experienced dealer or collector browsing amongst the offerings of an online auction site. Buried beneath the mass of misdescribed books and inferior copies of desirable titles there might lie the occasional gem, or modest bargain; to me, it hardly seems worth the effort. In applying myself with a certain degree of attention to the online auctions, I have found that I buy on average about one book a month.

Another phenomenon is the bookseller or collector who deals exclusively, or almost so, online. I was recently treated to the first book fair appearance by a dealer who had bought most of his stock through the online auction sites. Let's call him dealer X. About half of the more expensive books X was offering for sale as authentic were sporting photocopied or otherwise reproduced dustjackets. The jacket on one F. Scott Fitzgerald first edition that he offered me for $24,000 turned out, on closer inspection, to be a color copy of a First Edition Library facsimile jacket, the original of which had had the facsimile notice sanded off.

Dealer X had bought this jacket for $7000 on a popular online auction site from dealer Y, who also dealt almost exclusively online. Eventually I became involved in X's effort to return the jacket to Y, who told me that he had bought the jacket from dealer Z for $4000 on the same auction site. This is an example of what is known in the rare book trade as PROVENANCE.

The names have been changed to protect the ignorant.

My observation, and one that I've heard from others as well, is that collectors have already reaped the benefits of a one-time windfall. Most of the professional dealers that will list their stock on the net have done so. Although increasingly larger numbers of books will be listed online, and surprises are bound to be among them, the vast majority of these books will be of the used, not rare variety. Already I've noticed that the relatively uncommon books that were for a time available in profusion have started to be absorbed into the market, restoring some equilibrium between dealers and collectors.

The Internet seems, in my opinion, to have greatly broadened the market for rare books, but not necessarily to have deepened it. Through its window, a large group of people has been exposed to the rare book world, and some of them, happily, have been attracted to it. I think that this is most immediately evident in the two fields that seem to function as the entry level genres for book collectors: modern literary first editions and children's books. Not surprisingly, it seems that very few new collectors begin by collecting incunables.

Many of these new collectors are affluent members of the baby-boom generation at the peak of their earning capacity. And like many affluent collectors, they want to start at the top. Thus, the past few years have seen a remarkable rise in the prices of prime condition high spots in the two fields I've just mentioned. This great increase in demand has caused the prices of available copies to rise dramatically. At the recent Christie's East auction of the collection of Henrik Falktoft, a Danish collector of both modern first editions and children's books who had paid close attention to condition, the prices realized where generally adjudged stunning: *The Sound and the Fury* brought $58,750, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Catcher in the Rye* brought $32,900 each, and *The Lord of the Rings* brought $56,400. On the children's side, *The Wizard of Oz* brought $64,625, *Where the Wild Things Are* nearly $20,000, and *The Cat in the Hat* over $10,000. But what is really remarkable is that most, and maybe all, of these books were bought by dealers. The Christie's sale was strategically held the day before the opening of the New York Antiquarian Book Fair, where two of these books were exhibited by the successful bidders. As is the quaint old custom in the trade, the prices were duly raised—and both sold at the fair.

How have these prices affected collectors? They have set a discouragingly high

continued on next page

Congalton

continued from previous page

bar for new collectors who want to accumulate recognized high spots. Conversely, this has worked to the advantage of veteran collectors who assembled their collections in a more forgiving era and have seen the value of their collections grow exponentially.

It has affected dealers of high spots by making them compete with collectors for the best available copies of the best books. And It has also encouraged dealers to do what dealers have always done: when the available supply of high spots has dwindled or disappeared, we have looked for new candidates to be promoted to that status. The collector who once accused me of being criminally avaricious when I catalogued a nice first edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for $275 a dozen years ago is probably still waiting accusatorily in the wings to denounce me for the price of the next future high spot that will appear in my catalogues.

So then, maybe the Internet isn't the new Messiah, just a very large and unexpected bump on the rare bookselling landscape.

The theory that I cling to now in my apostasy is that the new Messiah is really the old Messiah; he or she who will save us has been there all along: the determined and resourceful collector. The smartest one percent of rare book collectors set the agenda for all of the others in the trade. They determine the subject and scope of their collections and set out with all their tenacity and a good portion of their resources to construct them. Following close on the footsteps of this charmed one percent of collectors are the smartest one percent of booksellers, who take their cues from the collectors, faithfully and industriously fulfill their wants, and by use of their wiles and imagination, attempt to, and often succeed in, forcing the boundaries of these collections ever outward.

The Internet is neither the new Messiah nor the ultimate bookselling weapon; it is just another arrow in the quiver of the working bookseller and collector. While some can survive exclusively on Internet sales, in my observation the booksellers most serious about their trade, and the collectors most serious about their collections, will continue to use the Internet to their advantage but will also continue to scan catalogues, attend book fairs and auctions, and do pretty much everything else they can think of to advance their agendas.

The contract between collector and bookseller is still very much in force. We can frustrate or enlighten one another, delight or infuriate one another, but one thing we surely can't do is survive or thrive without each other.

In other words, the collectors are going to save us. ■

Ethics Revisited

continued from front page

had made a formal complaint (this loophole has since been closed). I don't believe the Ethics Committee ever did anything at all in that case, other than to informally ask John Jenkins to disclose his source for each of the many forgeries he had sold.

Eventually, perhaps largely as a result of my persistent complaining, I came to serve on the Ethics Committee myself. I now regret voting with the majority in two cases that came up during those years: we should have taken action, and we didn't. Most cases are quietly arbitrated—which amounts, in effect, to assuring the public that if caught red-handed, an ABAA member can be compelled to do the right thing—a far cry from an assurance that in dealing with an ABAA member you can be sure of honest and fair treatment in the first place. I also had the experience during those years of making a complaint against an applicant for membership (for failing to pay a bill in full and on time) only to witness that applicant admitted to membership and, before my service on the Board of Governors was out, expelled (for failing to pay bills on time). (I bring up this incident not as a failure of the ABAA to enforce its code of ethics—this is one of the few successes—but in the context of the reasons for my disinclination to make formal complaints.) It is unpleasant enough to be making a legitimate complaint without adding to it the likelihood of its being completely disregarded.

It is particularly disagreeable to lodge a complaint as an uninjured party rather than as a victim. It puts one in the role of... policeman... rat... tattle-tale. An outsider to the book trade might reasonably suppose that business competitors would relish the opportunity to curtail one another's shadier dealings, but in our business such is not the case. We prosper when we cluster our shops together, act in partnerships, and refer customers and libraries to one another. It is more important in our business, probably, to have good relationships with other dealers than with collectors and librarians. You can't expect effective law enforcement when the policemen derive their paychecks from the criminals.

The fact that most violations of the ABAA Code of Ethics never become the subjects of formal complaints does not entirely discredit the effort, but the failure to take action once a legitimate complaint is formally made and not resolved by the usual quiet arm-twisting does. I don't propose to reiterate the statements I published in AB seven years ago, but they are easily summarized: the Ethics Committee recommended action on two complaints, which the Board approved at one meeting and did not approve at the next, after a personal appearance by one of the members complained against (at which no new pertinent facts were presented) and a letter from the lawyer of the other. Extreme measures, such as expulsion or suspension of either member, were not proposed or even contemplated by the Ethics Committee: the aim in one case was to correct an unsatisfactory transaction by undoing it, for credit rather than cash; in the other, since that remedy was not possible, to fine the offending member a sum equivalent to the amount of the failed transaction (three figures), to be paid to the ABAA Benevolent Fund, which was a resolution that was satisfactory to the complainant.

To my knowledge, since the early 1980s the ABAA has expelled three members and suspended one, and two members have resigned in the face of a pending matter. From a review of these incidents one might learn that there will be trouble if you are unwilling or unable to pay book-related bills that become the subject of a complaint (three cases); if you steal books from a fellow member and resell them (one case); if you fail to return promptly an item sent on approval and pack it poorly, resulting in damage, when you finally do (one case); or if you violate the ABAA book fair rules by packing up your display and departing before the show is over (one case). What about all the other complaints that are made and disposed of sub rosa? Wouldn't you, as a potential consignor of valuable material, like to know that the ABAA member you are considering has been the subject of more than one quietly resolved complaint for failing to pay consignors on time in the past? Or been through a bankruptcy? I don't mean to suggest that being the subject of a complaint is in itself a disgrace, nor is it even necessarily disgraceful to have had the Ethics Committee decide against you (I can think of at least one instance in which I was morally entirely on the side of the bookseller, even though the Ethics Committee unanimously agreed that the complainant was within his rights and should be satisfied). If it is necessary, though, for a complaint to be made, or even the threat of a complaint to be made, in order to induce any ABAA member to settle a legitimate debt, for instance, then the ABAA cannot lay claim to be maintaining "the highest standards in the antiquarian book trade."

The ABAA is not a hotbed of untrammeled unethical activity. The incidents of which I write represent a tiny percentage of the vast number of mutually rewarding transactions between ABAA members and their customers that take place every year. Still, the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. One might argue that since the aim is lofty, duty requires that it be doggedly pursued despite past failures and present imperfections (such as the near universal disinclination to lodge a formal complaint). I used to think so, and I do not any more. I only have to remember my own capitulations to expediency in the past: those occasions when I voted with the majority against my better judgment, and my own inability to convince at least two thirds of my fellow Board members (for a second time) that the Ethics Committee had arrived at appropriate solutions in the two cases that resulted in my resignation. The job is just too hard. I hope I am making it clear, therefore, that in revisiting this business I am not attacking any particular Ethics Committee or Board of Governors; the problem is widespread and, I have come to believe, insurmountable.

The ABAA Code of Ethics should be dropped. Its only value beyond mere boosterism is as a cudgel to bring recalcitrant members back into line from time to time without any negative repercussions to themselves other than being required to do what they ought to have done in the first place. While this is not an inconsiderable benefit, it can be achieved without an elaborate code pretending to the highest standards in the antiquarian book trade. What the ABAA really requires of its members is that they pay their bills. Perhaps most ABAA members do not see the harm in a little unmerited self-promotion. To me, it's like forgery: it's a fraud perpetrated on a believing public, and it destroys trust.

The reputation of the ABAA as a group is only as good as that of the least ethical member it knowingly permits to function in its midst. Let me address just one unenforced element of the Code: the ABAA has never thrown out any member for selling forgeries or for selling items purchased from known forgers without disclosing the source, or for failing to contact purchasers of items later discovered to have come from forgers, or for lying about provenance. There have been numerous examples of this, including those alluded to in the recently published book by the Goldstones, *Warmly Inscribed: The New England Forger and Other Book Tales,* wherein the ABAA figures prominently and mostly in a positive light; the mess in Texas; the sale of some forgeries by Mark Hofmann by an ABAA firm despite prior warning, exposed in these pages by this writer several years ago; and the ongoing activities of the Sinclair Lewis forger, to name a few. I am aware that I am considered exceptionally zealous in these matters, but even my perhaps unusually strong resolve has been defeated through experience. Either these distasteful episodes should be formally examined, with results known beyond the confines of Board confidentiality, or the inability to do so should be acknowledged. I strongly recommend the latter course, and I respectfully request that any apologists for the ABAA Code of Ethics who care to respond to my views include in their response an answer to this point.

I recently met a man who had been researching some books he had inherited on the Internet and happened upon the ABAA website with its prominently posted Code of Ethics. His reaction, as a complete outsider to the book trade, was that there must be a lot going on for the ABAA so loudly to proclaim its superiority. It is an interesting and unanticipated supposition. I'm not sure now whether he meant that the ABAA seemed to him to have a lot to hide, or that there is so much dreadful activity in the trade outside the ABAA that the ABAA is compelled to hold itself above the nest of snakes. I cringe either way. The ABAA does not have a lot to hide; but there are more bad things going on in it than there ought to be and there is no effective way to curtail them. And the absence of an ABAA logo on a bookseller's letterhead means no more, in regard to ethics, than its presence: ethical behavior comes from within. It has not been successfully imposed by the ABAA Code of Ethics.

by Rob Rulon-Miller

In the late 1980s, with the Texas forgery affair fresh in our collective minds, I had written in the November 1989 issue of the ABAA *Newsletter* that above all, "ABAA must promote and enforce a code of ethics and integrity within its membership ... We should create, write, distribute, and enforce guidelines of ethical and

continued on next page

Ethics Revisited

continued from previous page

professional behavior. We should squeak with cleanliness, and offenders should be swiftly and effectively punished. A legal contingency fund, legal insurance, and sage counsel should be at hand, as should the courage to use them if needed."

As an association, the ABAA might have seemed desperate at the time; much of the Board's efforts were focused on repairing the image of inefficiency and on creating new procedures for handling complaints. So in May of the following year, after much discussion with many members of the ABAA, Jennifer Larson and I sat down to write the ABAA Code of Ethics. Jennifer had come to St. Paul for The Ampersand Club's annual dinner, at which she was featured speaker. Her talk that night, as it had been on many nights back then, was on forgeries, particularly the Texas forgeries—and her nemesis, the late ABAA dealer, Johnny Jenkins—and the nefarious forger, Mark Hofmann. Her speech was largely drawn from an earlier one she had given at the Texas Conference on Forged Documents, November 2-4, 1989, on the obligations of the dealer in forgery detection and handling. On the Saturday afternoon following her talk we sat down at the computer in the brightest corner of my dark book room. We had rough notes that we had been given by our predecessors on the Ethics Committee, Lou Weinstein and Ed Glaser, sages both, and of course, both past ABAA presidents.

Jennifer and I didn't start from scratch, but the existing Code, imprecise and gentlemanly, was so bloodied that it needed an emergency transfusion. During the months and weeks that lead up to Jennifer coming to St. Paul, she and I were in constant touch, by phone and by fax and of course, at the Board meetings during the New York Fair week in the April just past, where we had plenty of input from other Board members. So it was no wonder that when we actually came down to writing the Code, it flowed freely and perfectly. I think we were essentially done with it in under two hours.

On July 5, 1990, the Code of Ethics was unanimously approved by the Board, replacing that which it had previously adopted in 1982, during the presidency, ironically enough, of Johnny Jenkins. I think its success was almost immediate. It was largely adopted, with permission, by the Canadian Association and, without permission, by ILAB. And so the Code lives on today in its various guises around the world and is generally credited, I think, as being a successful document.

It will be interesting now for readers to see Jennifer's assessment nearly a dozen years out. I'm not entirely sure she's wrong. All of the history is true, at least as I remember it (which isn't saying much any more). I could give a different slant and spin, offer different memories of the events she speaks of, but it's of no consequence now, except as history. I also agree, wholeheartedly, with her statement that one's "ethics come from within." What matters ultimately is *not* the ABAA Code of Ethics, but the code—small "c"—of conduct we carry inside ourselves. I speak now, as I know Jennifer does as well, of personal character and integrity, something within that makes us who we are. At its deepest, it is chemical, buried in the genetic code. Closer to the surface, environment and upbringing play a significant role. But by all counts this code with a small "c" is a far different and infinitely more complex notion than ABAA's Code of Ethics. The ABAA Code is an advertisement; to be vulgar about it, a marketing scheme with intent and purpose. Nonetheless, it exists as something for us to adopt—a template, perhaps, for one's business manners, and in this light it serves a wonderful purpose to those who would so use it. The irony we suffer is that any clever bookseller can abide by the ABAA Code (or any system of customs and usages), to the very last letter, and still be a scoundrel and prevaricator. Some booksellers, no matter how many books they may write, how many wonderfully illustrated catalogues they may produce, or how brilliantly they may hold themselves up as paragons of good behavior in the trade, have left their fetid scent in all its corners. They unctuously claim the trade as their own and preside deferentially over it, to the chagrin, detriment, and, ultimately, the humor of others. The ABAA Code will never help these booksellers, whether big or small, prosperous or teetering.

Jennifer and I (and all those who helped us along the way) wrote the ABAA Code of Ethics largely in response to the turmoil that surrounded us in the aftermath of Johnny Jenkins. At the time, ABAA was seen as weak and was the ridicule of many in the trade, domestically and internationally. The Code (and the subsequent rewriting of the By-Laws that was passed the following year) were major steps in ABAA reinventing itself. I think by most accounts ABAA was successful on this score.

Recently, I have noticed that stories of long-outstanding invoices are on the increase, as are stories of misleading cataloguing entries and undisclosed sophistications in books. And I notice also that the names of the offending parties, once held back, are now being mentioned openly, often with scorn. A past ABAA president told me recently that he has, in his stronger moments, been inclined to take his overdue trade receivables public on the ABAA discussion list rather than lodge a formal complaint to be adjudicated upon by the Ethics Committee. Is this public justice a good idea? Will the ABAA discussion list be our modern-day Ethics Committee? Our trial and jury? On this, the verdict is still out. But there will still be the need of an ethical code as a point of reference, and I humbly suggest that the ABAA Code of Ethics remains as good a point of reference as any. ■

The deadline for submissions to the next *Newsletter* is

October 1, 2001

Send your contributions to:
ABAA Newsletter
400 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102
FAX: 651-290-0646
EMAIL: rulon@rulon.com

In Memoriam

Richard S. Barnes, Evanston, IL

Richard S. Barnes, 87, a member of ABAA, was a Chicago-area bookseller for more than fifty years and found a special niche created by his integrity, scholarship, and sense of what a good book is.

Mr. Barnes, a thirty-year resident of Evanston, IL, died April 29 in the Presbyterian Homes in that city.

In a 1976 speech to the Caxton Club in Chicago, he stated his belief that "A good book is about something. And the less it is about and the less there is about it in other books, the better." He inherited his love of books from his great-grandfather, A. S. Barnes, a publisher who traveled the country selling books and whose name lives on in the bookstore firm of Barnes & Noble, Inc.

Mr. Barnes earned a bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1935; a master's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1941; and started his first bookstore in Chicago while completing his doctorate at Yale University in 1953.

"He was a totally crusty character," his wife, Pat, said with affection. "He was more interested in books than anything else. He was not only a gnarled oak with a rough bark, but also a private and sensitive person. Until the day he died, he was a unique presence and people responded to him."

His regular dress included immaculately polished shoes, knickers, vest, Brooks Brothers shirt, and bow tie.

Citing his "capacious mind," Frank Lambert, a friend and history professor at Purdue and Northwestern universities, added: "His mind was a library."

From the 1950s through the 1970s, his bookstore was located at 1628 North Wells Street in the Old Town section of Chicago, a neighborhood that he fought to protect from being razed. He subsequently moved to a location in Evanston, where he also worked in his shop as a bookbinder and restorer.

Among long-time Chicago area book dealers, his memory lives on perhaps best for his unique approach to bookselling.

"Because of his incredible integrity, he filled a special niche in the book world," internationally known Chicago bookman Kenneth Nebenzahl said. "Dick wanted the books to get to the people who would make best use of them. For him, it was libraries over collectors and people with relatively little money over those with a lot. His stock was extensive and exceptional, but he called his books 'second-hand' rather than 'rare' or 'fine.'"

Survivors, beside his wife, include a son, Roderic; two stepdaughters, Dorothy Sherer and Sandra Brown; two stepsons, Nick Bothfield and Hank Bothfield; thirteen grandchildren; and three sisters.

Contributions can be made to the Richard S. Barnes Memorial Fund for Book Lectures. Please send donation to The Special Collections Department at Northwestern University Library, c/o The Library Development Office, 1935 Sheridan Rd., Evanston, IL 60208-2300.

Kenan Heise

John Socia

Sainthood for a bookman? Of all the book dealers and second-hand bookshop owners I've encountered in four decades of browsing and questing, the only one who qualified was John Socia. John died at age 87 last October 26 and would have been acutely embarrassed by so presumptuous a claim, even in a secular context. Those who knew and appreciated John and his shop, The Old York, will know what I mean. John more than met the first qualification for bookseller sainthood: a pure love for books, not as commodities but as printed nourishment to be sought for, discovered, and administered to the right or deserving readers. In his prime, John could elbow his way through the pack of dealers at a sale with the best of them, but in contrast to the negative stereotype of "those people who push everyone aside and grab all the good stuff," John's passion related less to profit than to his pleasure in finding long-sought volumes for particular customers. Ask anyone who ever accompanied him on buying expeditions, and they'll tell you that as often than not John would charge such a customer no more, and sometimes less, than he paid for the book.

I first experienced John's bookshop, a block from the Rutgers campus in New Brunswick, in the fall of 1968. I still have the first book I bought there, the 1924 Jonathan Cape edition of *Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man*. Because Joyce was a hero of John's, we connected immediately. John's wonderfully browsable shop with its rich, ever-changing, underpriced stock, its down-to-earth New Jerseyness (dogs and dog bones, the aroma of John's pipe, a repertory company of local characters, none more colorful than John's wife, Mae) inspired the quality of "sweet disorder" I gave to the fanciful bookshop Second Comings in my novel *Rosamund's Vision*, which appeared in 1983, around the time John decided to sell the Old York. I like to believe John came to regard my book as a testament to the spirit of his store and thus a memorial to it and to him. I only wish I could have given the character modeled on John a history as fascinating as his. I also wish I had the information or the space to do justice to it here; perhaps someday someone will write a piece for the *Newsletter* about John and his three brothers, all in the book business, all but one of them the owners of secondhand bookshops.

Stuart Mitchner

Robert Tollett, New York, NY

Long-time ABAA member and revered autograph dealer Bob Tollett died here in New York City on July 29, 2001, only days after reaching his seventy-fifth birthday. Crippled by Parkinson's disease and fighting cancer in his last years, he valiantly attempted to keep active, finding renewing strength and pleasure in talking, mostly by telephone, about autographs and rare books with his many friends and colleagues.

Although my friendship with Bob goes back to the early 1960s, I have special memories of Sunday afternoons spent at his apartment in recent times, sitting at the kitchen table with him and one of the won-

continued on next page

In Memoriam

continued from previous page

derful women who cared for him, musing about what was or should have been. He frequently would have autographs or signed books for me to look over and discuss, and sometimes authentication problems for me to help with. There was always lots of business gossip to plow through and, occasionally, outside matters with which he needed assistance. Without exception, we could never get away from discussing our old alma mater and the famous people we knew there. Although Bob had attended Northwestern University ten years earlier than I, we had many of the same notable professors and always seemed to find time to talk about their impact on our lives.

Born in Tennessee, the unusual and tragic events of Bob's childhood sometimes paralleled tales spun by such Southern writers as Carson McCullers and Truman Capote. After college, Bob settled in New York City and for a while pursued a career in the theater. Forced to enter the business world to pay the rent, he took a job at the prestigious Fifth Avenue store, B. Altman and Co., and remained there for twenty years. He was befriended there by department head Rosejeanne Slifer, who introduced him to the "commercial world" of autographs and rare books. In 1966, in tandem with Miss Slifer, he developed at Altman's new concepts in the marketing of historic autographs, antique maps, and rare books. Banking on Altman's enormous advertising clout with the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal,* he convinced management of the financial feasibility of running extremely expensive full or half-page ads in the two major newspapers, bringing for the first time the idea of buying autographs, maps, and rare books to a massive nationwide audience yet untapped. The concept proved highly successful and lucrative for the store, and opened an important new avenue in the marketing of historic and rare collectibles that would benefit the entire field.

With virtually unlimited cash flow, Bob, through Altman's, became one of the major buyers in the rare book, map, and autograph markets, even when times were lean. This allowed him, now the head of the department, the opportunity to travel throughout Europe and the United States, acquiring the best that money could buy.

In 1984, at age fifty-eight, Bob decided he wanted to be in control of his own destiny and founded the firm of Tollett and Harman with Donald Harman. The two long-time friends had been avid collectors for many years and were able to start their new business with an enviable inventory of choice letters, manuscripts, and rare books. The firm issued twenty-three catalogues, the last of which my partner and I assisted Bob in writing. Don Harman died in 1997 after a long illness.

More than any dealer I ever met, Bob showed a special compassion for young people entering the field, both collectors and dealers, frequently cutting prices for them and extending overly generous credit terms. Highly respected by his peers, he will be remembered fondly by a wide circle of friends.

James Lowe ■

Membership Updates

Argus Books and Graphics has a new address and phone number: PO Box 277697, Sacramento, CA 95827-7697; phone: 916-568-3991.

Beasley Books has a new email address: Beasley@beasleybooks.co

A Book Buyers Shop has a new email address: bkbuyers@swbell.net

G. Davis Rare Books has a new address, phone, and fax: 12075 Wesford Overlook, Roswell, GA 30075; phone: 770-650-9562; fax: 770-650-9563

First Folio has a new email address: firstfol@bellsouth.net

Franklin Gilliam :: Rare Books has a new area code and email address: phone: 434-979-2512; fax: 434-979-2689; email: fgrare@fgrarebooks.com

Charles A. Goldsmid-Books has a new email address: goldsmid@mindspring.com

Hamill and Barker has a new email address: handb1@ameritech.net

Lorson's Books and Prints has a new address, phone number, and email: 141 West Wilshire Avenue, Fullerton, CA 92832; phone: 714-526-2523; lorson@earthlink.net

Olde Port Book Shop has a new name, address, and phones: **The Reynolds-ABAA**, 185 Main Avenue, South Hampton, NH 03827-3526; phone: 603-394-0200; fax: 603-394-0055.

Jett W. Whitehead Rare Books has a new area code: phone: 989-892-0719 ■

The ABAA Newsletter

(ISSN 1070-7000X)
is published quarterly under the auspices of the Publications Committee of
The Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America
20 West 44th Street, Fourth Floor
New York, NY 10036-6604.
PHONE: 212-944-8291
FAX: 212-944-8293
EMAIL: abaa@panix.com
www.abaa.org

EDITOR: Robert Rulon-Miller
ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Greg Gibson, Tracy E. Smith & Liane Wade

Annual postpaid subscriptions are $20.00 domestic; $25.00 Canada and Mexico; and $32.00 overseas.

COPYRIGHT 2001 by The Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America

Send submissions and letters to:
ABAA *Newsletter*
400 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102-2662 USA
PHONE: (651) 290-0700
FAX: (651) 290-0646
EMAIL: rulon@rulon.com