

1991

# At the Pass with Carl Hertzog

Al Loman

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/carl\\_hertzog](http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/carl_hertzog)

Comments:

Number 3

---

## Recommended Citation

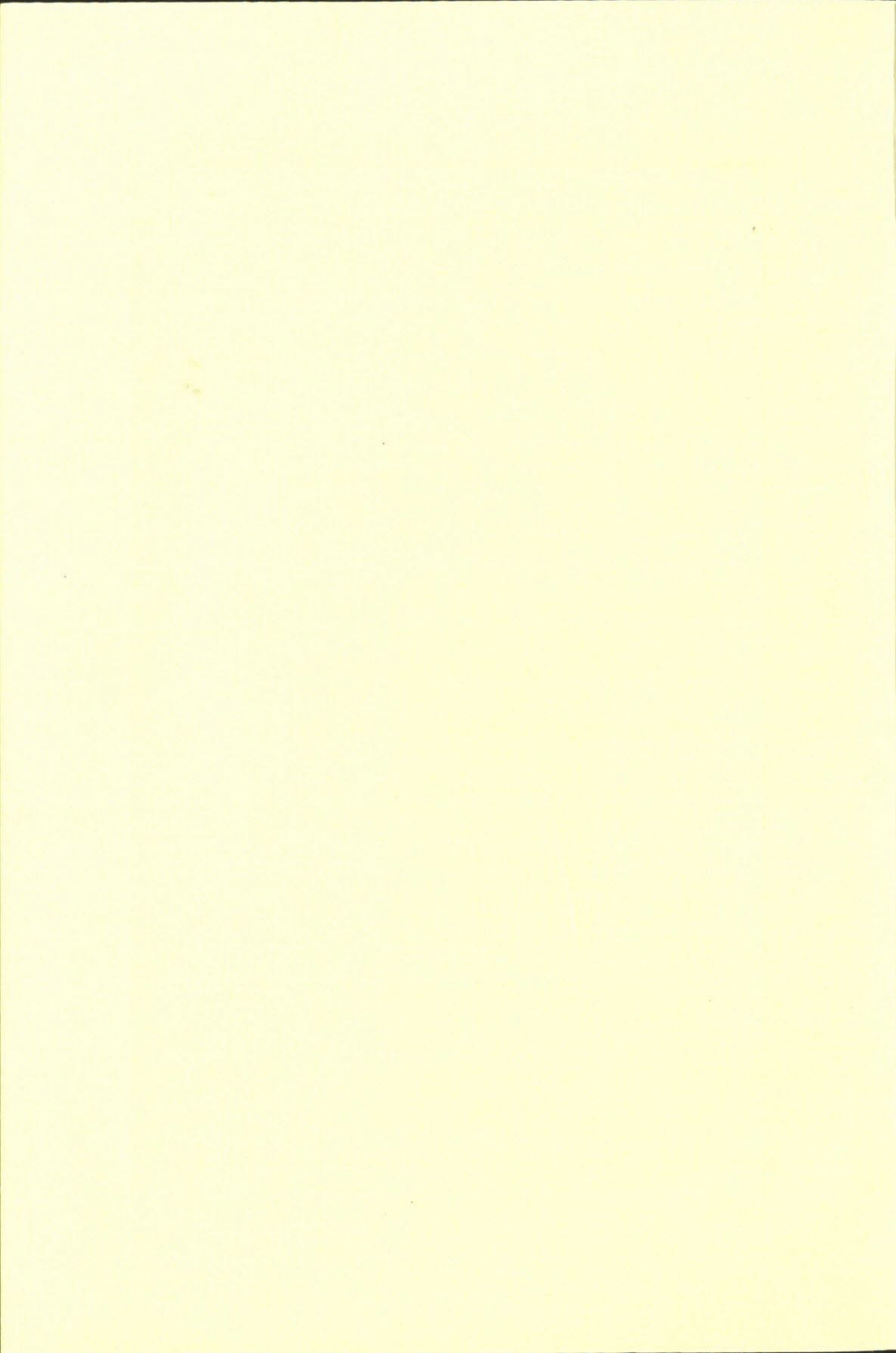
Loman, Al, "At the Pass with Carl Hertzog" (1991). *Carl Hertzog Lecture Series*. 4.  
[http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/carl\\_hertzog/4](http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/carl_hertzog/4)

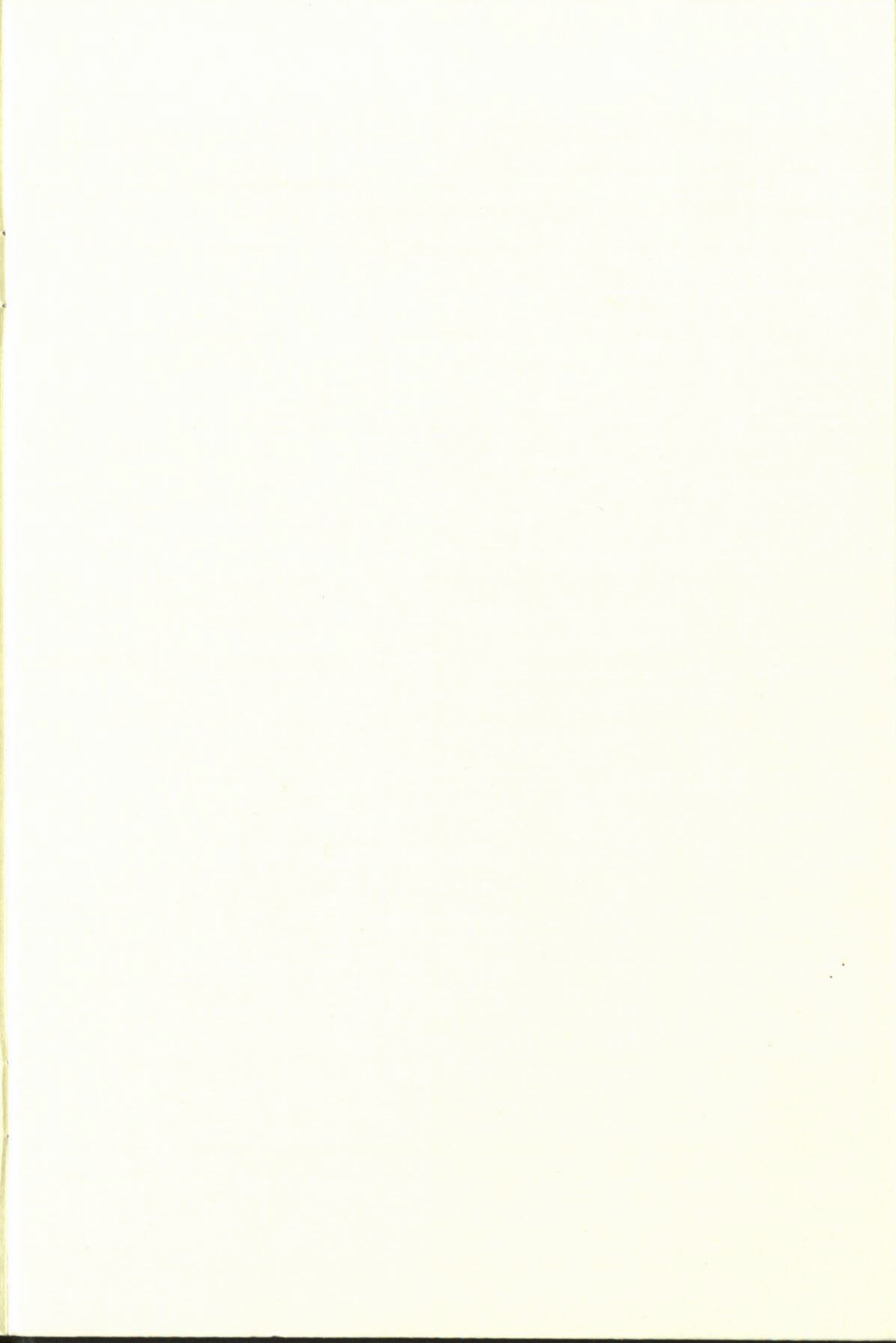
This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Texas at El Paso Library at DigitalCommons@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Carl Hertzog Lecture Series by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UTEP. For more information, please contact [lweber@utep.edu](mailto:lweber@utep.edu).

Carl  
Hertzog  
Lecture Series



At the Pass with Carl Hertzog  
by  
Al Lowman







Carl  
Hertzog  
Lecture Series



The University of Texas at El Paso

Copyright © 1991  
Texas Western Press  
The University of Texas at El Paso  
El Paso, Texas 79968-0633



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements  
of American National Standard for Information Sciences.  
—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-  
1984.

*Published in September, 1991, in a printing limited to 500 copies.*

## *The Carl Hertzog Lecture Series*

The Hertzog Lectures, inaugurated on February 5, 1989, and presented annually in the month of his birth, honor the memory and life work of the "Printer at the Pass," J. Carl Hertzog (1902-1984).

A premiere typographer and book designer long before his association with the University of Texas at El Paso, Mr. Hertzog brought his international renown to the then Texas Western College in 1948 and launched Texas Western Press in 1952, serving as its director until his retirement in 1972.

Books bearing the distinctive Carl Hertzog colophon reached a standard of excellence that is unexcelled to this day.

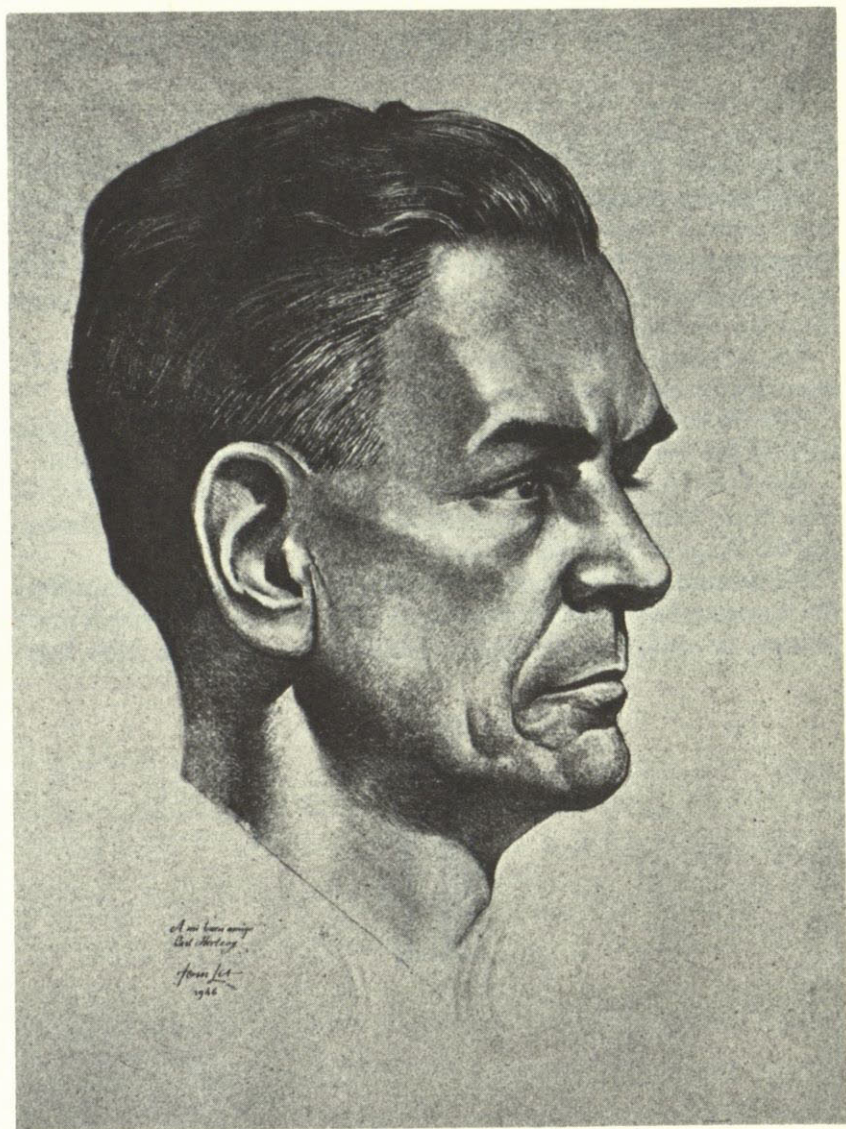
The University Library's Special Collections section is the repository of the extensive Hertzog Collection of books and papers.

The Carl Hertzog Lectures and the annual Carl Hertzog Prize for Fine Book Design, are sponsored by the Associates of The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

Publication of these Lectures is made possible through a grant from the Associates to Texas Western Press; the Carl Hertzog Prize is made possible by a gift from Mr. Joseph Goodell, Jr., of Buffalo, New York.







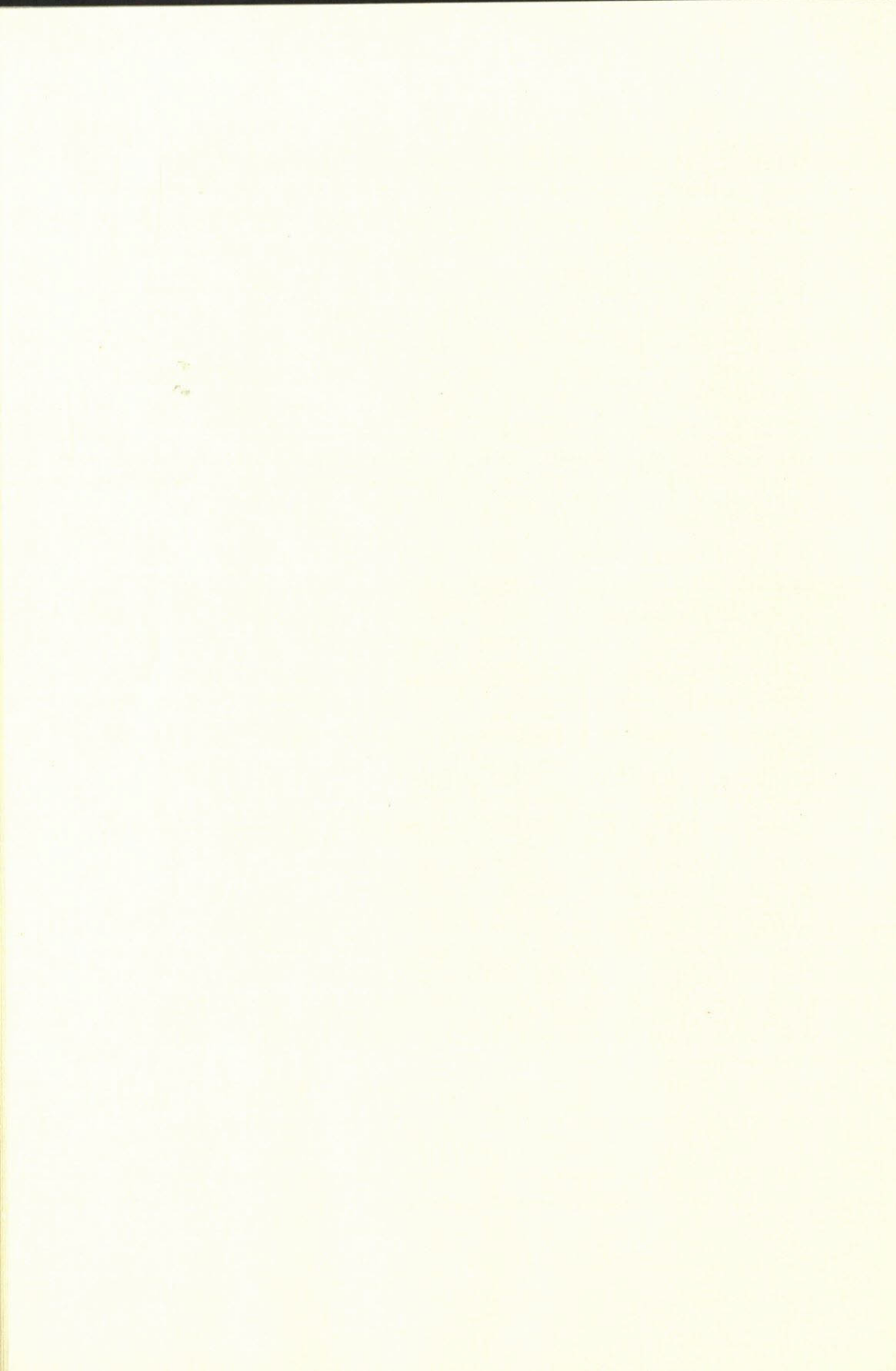
(Drawing by Tom Lea, 1946)

J. Carl Hertzog  
1902 — 1984

# **At the Pass with Carl Hertzog**

by Al Lowman

February 10, 1991



For years I have held the opinion that Carl Hertzog would have made a great subject for a biography even if he had not been the Southwest's premier book designer/printer and the close associate of so many noted literary figures of his era.

Especially appealing to me, aside from my interest in his chosen field of printing arts and western history, was Hertzog's gift as a consummate storyteller. Frankly he was better at telling stories than listening to them. Just a few weeks before his death from the complications of emphysema, he was honored at a small reception held in President Haskell Monroe's office here at the University. The event was tape recorded by a mutual friend, Jess Marquez. Listening to the tape, one can sense Carl waiting impatiently as the first two speakers made appropriate remarks. When it dawned on him that a third speaker was about to be introduced, Carl is clearly heard asking plaintively, "When do I get to talk?"

The next speaker tarried only briefly before Carl was invited to respond. The ailing man rose from his wheelchair and, trailing his oxygen-breathing paraphernalia behind him, made his way slowly to the lectern. One could feel the sunshine being restored to his voice as he jested about his inability to resist a captive audience. For the next few minutes he charmed everyone as he reminisced about his career and friendships in the El Paso Southwest and his long association with the university. It was spontaneous, unrehearsed, articulate, and unfaltering — an amazing performance for one in his condition.

Carl had this incredible ability to convey to an audience that they — individually and collectively — were the most important thing in the world to him. They were. And this ability swept away all shortcomings of organization and delivery. On a Sunday afternoon in the fall of '49, Carl made a talk here on campus. When it was over, he went up to Myrtle Ball of the speech department and said, in that basso profundo drawl of his, "Well, Myrtle, how'd I do?" She said, "Carl, you broke every rule in the book, but you got away with it!"

The highlight of Carl Hertzog's boyhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was the gift of a toy printing press from his stepfather, Chester B. Story. Ten-year-old Carl was hooked in a hurry. For years there

has been a persistent belief that, as a young man, he studied printing under Porter Garnett whose Laboratory Press had opened at Carnegie Tech in 1922. Not true. Carl sent Garnett a sample of his work. Garnett liked what he saw, invited Carl to visit and bring additional samples. Garnett gave him what any young person needs most: advice and encouragement.

The relationship had little time to blossom before Carl was on his way to his first job at the Owl Press in Wheeling, West Virginia. Garnett was mentor more than teacher. If Carl was self-taught as a public speaker, he was also self-taught as a printer. But he was self-conscious about his self-education, fearing that others might have difficulty taking him seriously. Carl's reaction was understandable; the world often dismisses its geniuses in this fashion.

When he was twenty-one Carl Hertzog came West to be not a cowboy, but a printer. As a ten-year-old he had wanted to be a printer when he grew up. As a grown-up he wanted to be a cowboy — or so he claimed. In 1923 he went to work for the W.S. McMath Company; there he designed his first books. Just last weekend I stumbled across the very letter from McMath that brought Carl to El Paso. Dated May 18th, it reads in part:

Dear Sir:

Your letter was received several days ago and I have been waiting for your samples to come before answering. They have not yet arrived. Your letter would indicate, however, that you possess the qualifications we are looking for. . . .

We have the largest and best plant in this section of the country. In comparison with northern plants, however, it does not seem very much — a Miehle, a Premier, six jobbers . . ., No. 14 Linotype, Ludlow, and other equipment necessary to make a well balanced plant.

The writer was born and grew to manhood on the banks of the Ohio river — the same beautiful stream upon which Wheeling is located, but, after living in the large, open West for the past twenty-five years, that section of the country has no attraction for me other than a pleasant memory.

If you are looking for a permanent place to locate, where health conditions are ideal and climate is as good as can be found anywhere, and where work, if you are a real typographer,

will be pleasant and congenial, I don't think you could find a better place than El Paso — and us.

If you want to come with us, we can pay you what you are now getting, and let the future take care of itself. . . .

Very truly yours,  
The McMath Company, Inc.  
/signed/ W.S. McMath  
President

The future did take care of itself — and Carl. The samples appeared, and McMath sent a telegram: "Come soon as possible."

On his arrival, Carl quickly saw that books in this part of the world showed no taste in typography, no knowledge of spacing and proportion, and were printed poorly on cheap paper. The sheets were then clapped haphazardly into bindings of whatever material happened to be at hand. Harmony between subject matter and design was seldom considered. Carl was soon to devote the balance of his long life to changing the way people felt about printing in general and books in particular.

He believed that printing should be both subtle and imaginative to convey the author's thoughts to the reader. This, after all, is the purpose of printing. It has no other. Effective printing, he held, should help the reader focus on the content; it should never call attention to itself. Thus he carefully selected such things as the size and shape of the book, paper color and texture, style of type, binding, and other elements to create a harmonious package suited to the subject matter.

Then he would spend countless hours working over the type to avoid bad spacing between letters and bad breaks at the end of lines and pages. Finally he would check the press run with a critical eye for variations in inking. He was seldom satisfied.

Carl once compared his work to that of an architect. It was necessary, he said, for a designer not only to lay out the specifications, but to "follow through and engineer the project to completion." And when it was over and done, he could say, "I have come to the conclusion that some people like my work because I had the right attitude. By getting close to the work, a book can be infused with an

aura which attracts people who have no knowledge of the technical defects, but who are sensitive enough to feel the sincerity of purpose.”

However precise Carl may have been with his printing, it is regrettable that his authors were not always as careful with their facts. Never one to over-rate consistency, Carl could be testy when reviewers called attention to these discrepancies. To the university librarian at Norman, Oklahoma, in 1965, he wrote, “I have always been picayunish and exacting about spacing and other typographic matters, but I get disgusted with pedantic critics who go in for nit-picking.”

Carl left the McMath Company in 1926, worked for the El Paso Sash and Door Company until 1930, left to learn offset lithography at the Rocky Mountain Bank Note Company, returned to McMath in 1932, then opened his own shop in 1934.

He had to be judicious in the selection of his equipment because of limited financial resources. In a letter to J. Frank Dobie in 1942, Carl complained that “Printers have no sense of design. They get a hodgepodge of type for catalogs and commercial work that is not suitable for good book work, whereas any good book type is also usable on commercial work.”

In 1944 Carl began a large-scale commercial printing venture with Dale Resler, one of El Paso’s most astute businessmen. Hertzog hoped to make enough money to quit in a few years, then “retire to seclusion and a little private bookmaking.” Even while engaged in commercial work, he continued his quest for excellence. To a doctor friend at the Mayo Clinic, Carl wrote in January, 1946, “Although I would like to be a perfectionist, it is often impractical. However, it is always possible to do a few little things that do not add to cost by selecting type, paper, and colors that are appropriate.”

The firm of Hertzog and Resler was sold in 1947, and for a year, Carl created books by subcontracting his production requirements. From 1948 until 1971 he was associated with this university. He established a campus print shop, and in 1952, became founding director of the Texas Western Press. For many years he taught a popular course in book design and typography. He once claimed that his most important accomplishment was the reorganization of the college catalog so that the Ph.D.s who had written it could understand it.

Even after his formal retirement in 1971, Carl remained interested in the latest technological advances in his field. In his mid-seventies,

he learned the intricacies of digital typesetting. To the very end he remained concerned that taste be preserved regardless of technology. Carl's recurring theme — with infinite variations — was that there is no such thing as good taste or bad taste in printing or elsewhere. The word *taste* needs no modifier; you either have taste or you don't. Therefore, good taste is redundant and bad taste is a contradiction in terms.

As many of you in the audience are aware, Carl was never one to sit idly when he felt the need to improve a printed product, especially when that product misrepresented the institution behind it. For example, in 1944 he became dissatisfied with the bulletin at the First Presbyterian Church, which he and Vivian attended. To his friend H. Bailey Carroll in Austin, he complained, "Why should church printing be so cheap and inappropriate?" So he redesigned that bulletin, setting the titles and major headings in Gothic type because, as he explained, "its sharp points resemble Gothic architecture — pointing to Heaven. Gothic text," he continued, "was first used . . . by Gutenberg in the printing of his famous 42-line Bible. He naturally designed his type from the only lettering he had seen — handwritten copies of the Bible laboriously copied by the scribes of the 15th century. . . . The paper used [for this bulletin] is 'Arak Book,' which has the texture and color of old religious books printed in the 16th century."

In the fall of 1945, he wrote Marcelle Hamer of the Texas Folklore Society: "Who orders the stationery? Would like to contribute the new lot with new officers' names. The attached is not only a poor combination of types, but also quite remote from an appearance of folklore. This type is usually used for bank checks or book-keeping forms. Let me know how much stationery is needed and I (will) supply it with more appropriate type." And he did!

In June 1950 Carl corresponded with the Rev. William G. Wright at St. Clements Church. Carl, Jr. was graduating from high school at that time. Carl's letter reads as follows:

Dear Bill:

Your baccalaureate address to the Austin High School class was the best I have heard in years. Thank you for your thoughts and the way you presented them.



While following the service, I could not keep from studying the printing on your front page. The type at the top does not fit in with your stained glass windows, and does not harmonize with the sketch, which would be passable if it was squared with the page. The ragged handling of the type at bottom is not in keeping with the careful precision of your services.

If you will excuse me for butting in, I will be glad to prepare the lettering for your front cover (at no cost to you) the next time you order a supply.

Sincerely,  
/signed/ Carl

And so Carl fixed it. In 1952 he complained to an official of the El Paso Natural Gas Company that the typeface used on the company's letterhead looked just right — for a millinery shop. He fixed that, too.

But then there was a memorable occasion, about 1955, when the Hertzogs and the Phil Segalls enjoyed a fine dinner at a fancy restaurant in Taos, New Mexico. At the conclusion of the meal they were handed a card which told the story of La Dona Luz, for whom the restaurant was named. It was so crudely printed that it almost ruined the meal for Carl. He volunteered to create a new one that would match the quality of the cuisine. The owner acquiesced with no sign of enthusiasm. Hertzog engaged José Cisneros to do a special drawing. Carl was proud of his work and forwarded it confident that his effort would be wildly applauded. The proprietor was underwhelmed.

“Dear Mr. Hertzog, I am embarrassed! You went through so much trouble and expense, but I don't like it. This, of course, is my personal taste and has nothing to do with the quality of your work, etc. . .” Needless to say, Carl was chagrined, but Tom Lea offered consolation: “That ought to teach you to mind your own business!” It didn't.

Many years later, Carl would say in a letter to David Holman, “When I see something well-written and promoting excellence, but printed horribly, I get so angry. I feel *defeated*. I worked hard all my life, burned the midnight oil, reset and respaced over and over for *quality*. Good printing ain't easy.”

When he wrote this, Carl must have forgotten something W.H. Hutchinson had told him back in 1947: "If people like you were appreciated, they wouldn't do half the things that will be their monument after they're gone. Maybe the idea of monuments appalls you . . . it does me too . . . but, the simple knowledge that you have made most substantial contributions to your country's heritage . . . culturally and spiritually . . . is something no one can take from you."

But Carl never gave up. At seventy-seven he undertook his first miniature book, a reprint for Stanley Marcus of an 1820's Indian captive narrative called *Little Manuel: the Captive Boy*. Carl had been in fragile health for at least a decade, but he felt a debt of gratitude to Marcus for support in years gone by. He agreed to something he had never before attempted; he might grow old, but not outdated.

The binding of this miniature was left to his friends, the Gerhardt Schermers. It was a first experience for them, too. At one point I asked them which Hertzog project had caused them the most grief. Instantly Mrs. Schermer shot back, "Oh Gott! It was that little red Indian book." Indeed the book was bound in red leather and the binder's most noticeable problem was maintaining the French groove that separates the spine from the covers. Gerhardt continued the story. "We would always make a trial binding — maybe three or four. Then Carl would come to have a look. He would line them up. He would pick up one, then another. He would handle them oh so gently, look at the front, then turn it over. He would rub it with his fingers and give it a little pat. Finally he would say, 'Oh Gerhardt, this is bee-you-tee-ful.'" Now those of you in this audience who knew Carl remember very well that he pronounced it as two words: beauty-full. "Then he would go home. The next morning at nine o'clock the phone would ring. It would be Carl. Now we would get the true story."

Part I of my Hertzog project is a biography. Part II is a bibliography that will considerably expand my 1971 exhibit catalogue. As examples, I remember Harriet Brown returning from a back room bearing a fragile cookbook and asking if it might have been Hertzog's. Never having seen it before, I knew from ten paces that it was. It had been produced for the Presbyterian Church ladies about 1939, I would guess.

In 1945 came a pamphlet entitled *Paricutin; or, The Old God's Demand* by Bernice I. Goodspeed. The author was living in Mexico when the volcano blew up. She wrote a dramatic account of it and wanted a handful printed state-side for copyright purposes. She sent the manuscript to her friend Hari Kidd, who turned it over to Carl. None of these examples add to, or take from, Hertzog's reputation. They were merely bread-and-butter.

Often, hard choices must be made about what to include or exclude from a printer's bibliography. In general I have included any item that is eight pages or longer and was produced in an edition of five copies or more. Otherwise class it as ephemera, from which the bibliographer may select outstanding examples for listing in a special section at the end of his compilation. I've already decided to include every piece of ephemera that contains artwork by José Cisneros and Tom Lea.

It all sounds so simple. But it isn't. Hertzog was the university printer. You all know the volume of printed matter that such a bureaucracy generates — catalogues, forms of every description, programs and tickets for every event. The range is mind-boggling. Catalogues and sometimes programs will exceed the eight-page, five-copy rule. Then what? Well, the catalogues can become a group entry with points of interest about individual catalogues set forth in the annotations.

The programs are another matter. Sometimes a department chairman — art, drama, or music, for example — might go directly to Ed Davis, the print shop foreman, and request that a program be gotten out on short notice. Maybe Carl was out-of-town. Ed could whip out something acceptable, and a sixth sense would tell you that "this ain't Hertzog's." But suppose Carl sauntered through the shop and spotted Ed pulling a proof. He walks over to the press, looks at the proof and says, "Ed, if you'll set this line in Bulmer, move that line 3 ems to the left, and give the bottom line 2 extra points of leading, you'll have a nice-looking program." Does that make it a Hertzog item? Perhaps.

We must bear in mind that Carl always worked within a reasonably well-defined set of rules. But the rules are being challenged by new computer technologies. Of particular concern to us purists is the use of so-called "outline fonts," which enable the operator to

create his or her own typefaces. I have Nancy Hamilton to thank for sending me this ad from one of Ralph's computer magazines.

- The most powerful PC graphics toolkit now has the most powerful font editing system! FontWINDOW makes it simple for you to create, edit & customize your own fonts.
- More than 200 high quality fonts, icons, and foreign language styles—over 2 megabytes of fonts with NO royalties!
- Quickly merge characters from multiple fonts to create totally new custom designs.
- ZoomFont function makes it easy to scale fonts to virtually any size. . .

Nancy goes on to observe that “this makes it possible for people to do the kind of mixing that would drive Carl crazy, I'm sure. How can anybody establish tasteful design when we have the whole cafeteria at our fingertips? And we can change the recipes ourselves?” Good point. What we have here is the ultimate democratization of a once revered art form.

I'm going to wrap this up with a couple of stories of recent experiences you might find far-fetched, but not Carl. If he held one unwavering belief, it was that his world was dominated by unseen forces that accounted for the incredible coincidences that dogged his life. To him, they were too much to be attributed to mere happenstance. Something was out there. By Jove, he may have been right.

In November '88 a sales list from Colleen's Books in Houston sat on my desk for a week before I noticed an innocuous listing of two stationery samples, with envelopes, from the old Gateway Hotel in El Paso. I remembered Carl telling me that he had once done a little printing for Charlie Bassett, who had owned some hotels, including the Gateway. When I phoned Colleen, she had sold the items, but volunteered to contact her customer, who might be willing to send a xerox by which I might determine if this were, by chance, Hertzog's work.

Two weeks later I opened correspondence with a New Orleans postmark. Out fell a letter. Inside was a pristine copy of the hotel stationery with envelope. The flap of the envelope had writing on it, which I ignored for the moment. The hotel letterhead was clearly Hertzog's. The typeface was right out of the 'twenties and, in

El Paso, who but Hertzog letterspaced his typesetting anyway? My New Orleans correspondent was curious about the handwriting on the envelope flap. Hertzog's perhaps? I looked again. Sure enough it *was* Hertzog's. Suddenly, I had the strangest feeling that this was no coincidence.

Ninety days ago, I had yet another strange experience. But this story began in the summer of 1989 while I was researching the Hertzog correspondence files. I discovered letters to a retired Army colonel in San Antonio which indicated that Carl had sent him the project files pertaining to the design and printing of *The Unspoken Speech of John F. Kennedy*. This was a 1964 project for Stanley Marcus of Dallas. I wondered why Marcus didn't have this file. Nevertheless, I made mental a note to contact Col. Gordon George when I returned to San Antonio. Time passed and I eventually got around to phoning Col. George, but the lady who answered explained that he was on his way out of town and would I please call back later. I did. Several times over a period of weeks, but with no luck. I retired from my job in San Antonio last June still not having contacted Col. George.

In mid-November I went back to my old office to tidy up some loose ends. Through sheer happenstance I encountered one particular staff member. As our brief chat was about to end, she casually mentioned that she had been to an estate sale the day before, where a large Texana collection was being offered. In addition to the usual habitués of such sales, she had observed the usual coterie of book dealers. Nothing to get excited about I told myself; the good stuff was probably gone already. As an afterthought I asked whose estate it was. "Somebody named Gordon, I think. George Gordon, maybe." "Wait a minute. Was it, by any chance, Col. Gordon George?" "Yes. I think that's it."

Now I got excited. I found out that the sale was still underway and that the person overseeing the book end was someone I knew quite well — Camille Rosengren, a former owner-manager of the now defunct bookstore that became a San Antonio legend.

I called Camille, who was astonished that I had not received an announcement of the sale. She said she was certain that the Hertzog material had not surfaced. She suggested that I meet her at the home at 2:00 PM. When I arrived, she had looked in every case and

all the cabinets but one that was wedged behind a lamp stand and an armchair.

I had no trouble moving the lamp stand and armchair while Cam dug out first one pile of junk, then another. When the second pile emerged, it looked as if we might be getting warm. There were odds and ends of Kennedy memorabilia in it. Here came the third pile, and right on top were three large brown envelopes addressed in a familiar handwriting. Bonanza!

Now what on earth impelled me to be in San Antonio while that sale was in progress, to have visited that morning with the one person who happened to have knowledge of it, and why had that particular cabinet remained unopened during the time the sale was being organized? If that material had been on view, it would certainly have been snapped up prior to my arrival.

Just another combination of coincidences perhaps? Maybe so. I doubt it.

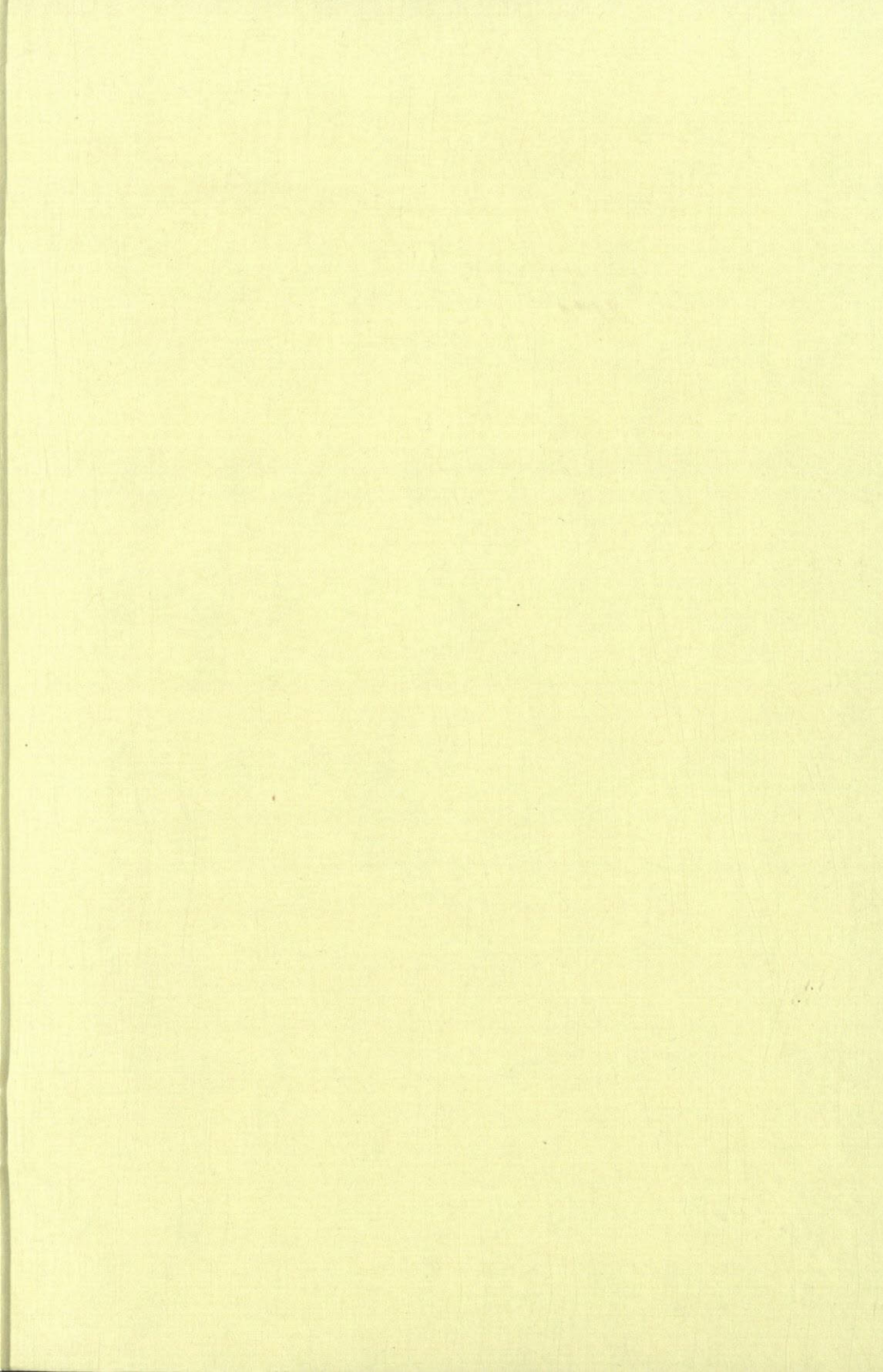


### Al Lowman

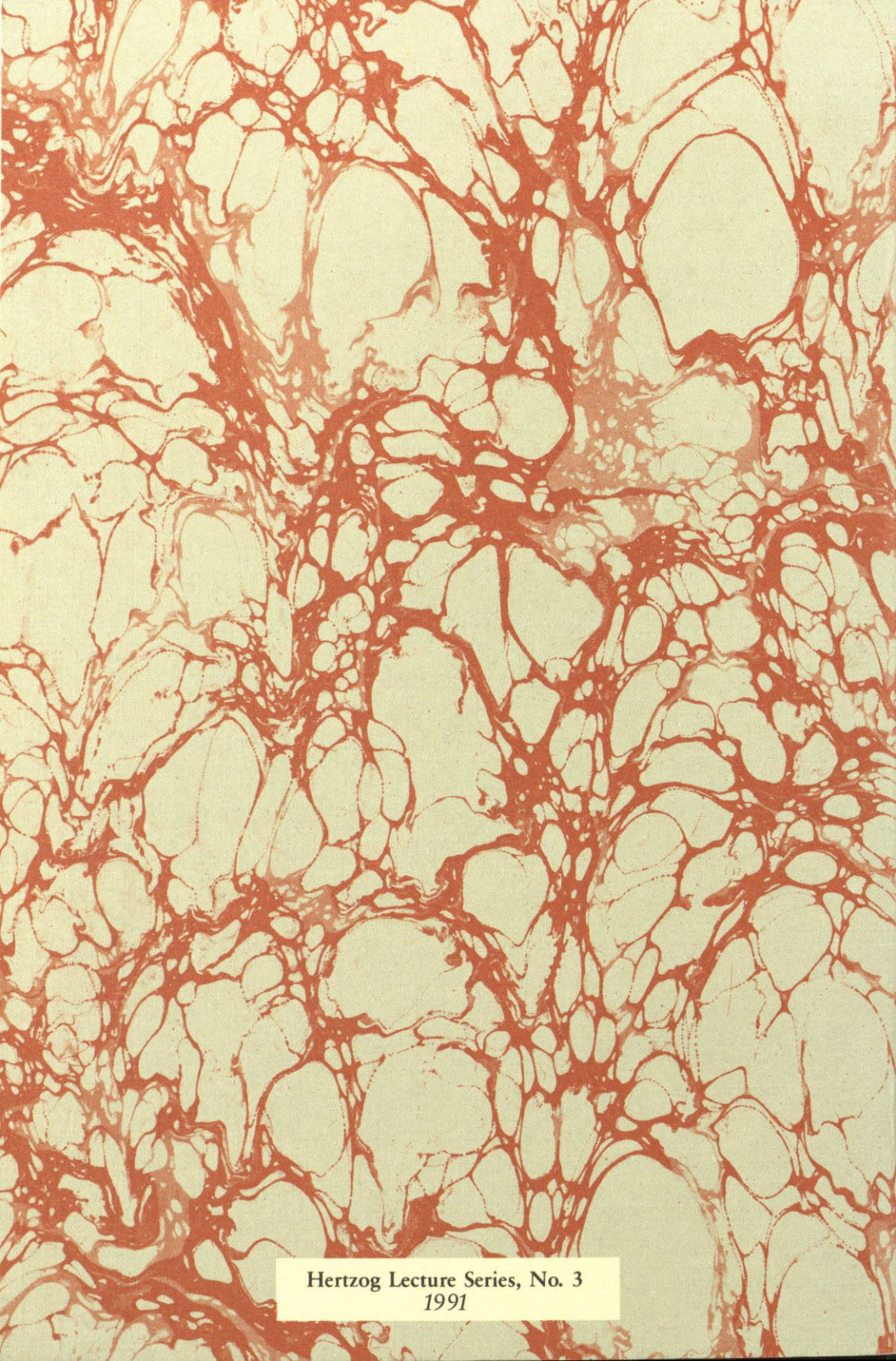
Al Lowman is a historian, bibliophile, book reviewer, and author of *This Bitterly Beautiful Land* (1972), *Printing Arts in Texas* (1975), *Remembering Carl Hertzog: A Texas Printer and His Books* (1986), and the forthcoming anthology, *A Grand Place to View the Stars: Texas Commonplace Book II*.

His bio-bibliography of the late book designer-printer Carl Hertzog of El Paso is in progress.

Lowman is retired from the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, where he served as a senior research assistant.







Hertzog Lecture Series, No. 3  
1991