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Among the Gently Mad

Nicholas A. Basbanes

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**Carl
Hertzog**
Lecture Series



Among the Gently Mad

Nicholas A. Basbanes
Professional writer, former book editor of
The Worcester Telegram and Gazette,
and Author of *A Gentle Madness -
Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the
Eternal Passion for Books*

Carl Hertzog Lecture Series



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The Carl Hertzog Lecture Series

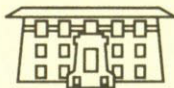
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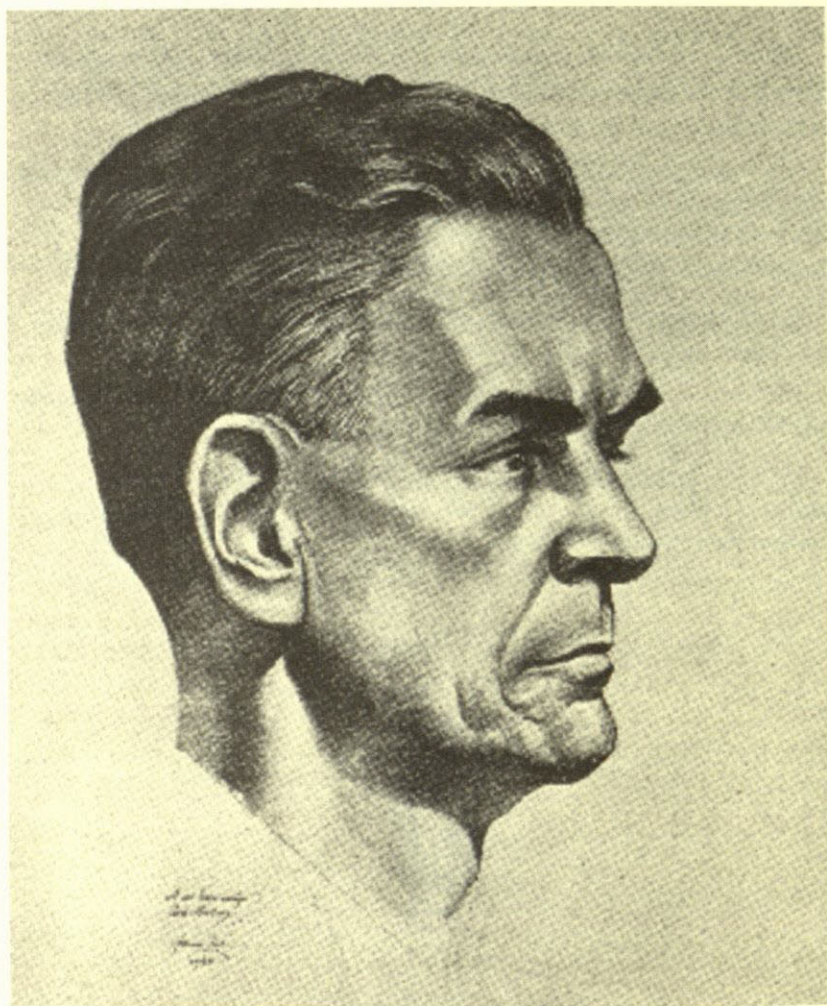
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(Drawing by Tom Lea, 1946)

J. Carl Hertzog
1902 - 1984

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February 6, 2000

Carl Hertzog lecture series, no. 9

Carl Hertzog Lecture
University of Texas at El Paso
February 6, 2000

Among the Gently Mad

By Nicholas A. Basbanes

I want to thank you for inviting me to The University of Texas at El Paso to participate in this admirable event and for introducing me to what is undeniably Shangri-la on the Border. Let me note that a feature I find particularly gratifying about the Carl Hertzog lecture series is that while you celebrate books as beautiful artifacts, you also recognize their continuing relevance as containers of wisdom in the computer age. It is a spirit that recalls the words of the fourteenth-century collector Richard du Bury, who in his *Philobiblon* called books “the heavenly food of the mind.” Also, I have to say how reassuring it is to see my dust jacket projected so impressively on the screen behind me up here on the stage. If any image makes me feel that I am “among the gently mad,” it is Albrecht Dürer’s *Book-Foole* from 1494.

Because this is a book arts gathering and since we all appreciate the niceties of “printings” and “editions,” I probably should begin by giving you a capsule publishing history of my book, as it is pertinent to the discussion at hand. *A Gentle Madness* was published five years ago in a first printing of six thousand volumes, and in the four and a half years that have elapsed since then, seven editions have appeared all together, each with identifiable “points,” or changes, to distinguish them from one another. It might surprise some of you to learn that I am a person who believes that a nonfiction work like mine remains a work-in-progress to some degree, even though it already has made seven passes through the printing press. I will briefly explain what I mean.

One of the central premises I posed in *A Gentle Madness* was that there is a timeless cycle of books and book people, each responsible in different ways for preserving extraordinary artifacts and passing them on to the next generation. In the Owl paperback of *A Gentle Madness* just released last year, I included a new introduction with the specific intention of bringing readers up to date on a number of major stories that I had profiled in the earlier hardcover versions. Several of these “updates” involved what might delicately be called “transitions.” More specifically, they pertained to the deaths of three collectors I wrote about at some length in the book: Carter Burden of New York

City, Chef Louis Szathmary of Chicago, and Dr. Haskell Norman of San Francisco.

Carter Burden, the preeminent collector of modern first editions in the United States, was the first to go. He died unexpectedly in January of 1996, leaving the decision of dispersal to others. After careful consideration, his heirs announced that the heart of the collection should go to the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City, and that major segments of what was left should go back into the trade to nourish the general stock. When the Chicago restaurateur Chef Louis Szathmary passed away nine months later, everything he had gathered over forty years of eventful collecting—two hundred and fifty thousand books and perhaps a million culinary artifacts—had already been installed in a number of institutions. Then, in December of that year, Dr. Haskell Norman—a retired psychoanalyst who was regarded as the greatest collector of science books and medical books of his generation—died in California. In his conversations with me, Dr. Norman had made unequivocally clear that none of his beloved books—including the dedication copy of Andreas Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica*—would be given to any institution. Instead, at his specific direction, they all went on the auction block at Sotheby's in New York, setting all kinds of records for the sale of science books in the process, accounting for \$18.6 million altogether. Unlike Chef Louis, who felt his library should serve scholarship, Dr. Norman believed, as perhaps the greatest American collector of all time, a gentleman named Robert Hoe, also believed, that "if the great collections of the past had not been sold, where would I have found my books?"

So what we had here, in something akin to a triple conjunction of the major planets, was three strikingly different collectors from three widely separated sections of the United States passing away in the same calendar year, with each one, in decidedly distinctive ways, contributing to the unending cycle of renewal and custodianship. Even more remarkable, from my standpoint, was the fact that I had presented this very notion as a guiding theme of the book and had cited the examples of three nineteenth-century French bibliophiles to illustrate it. I had opened *Gentle Madness* with a profile of Silvestre de Sacy, an unapologetic collector who coveted his books to the very end—a pattern that would be replicated by Carter Burden. Next, I introduced Xavier Marmier, a man who, like Chef Louis, arranged every last detail in advance of his departure, including provisions for a gala banquet in honor of the Left

Bank booksellers who had sold him his books. Finally, there was Edmund de Goncourt, a prominent man of letters who pointedly sent his books off to auction with the same rationale propounded by Dr. Norman one hundred years later. For me, these three Parisians from the nineteenth century, and the three Americans who died in 1996, were case studies in what I regard as a continuing saga, and they comprise one reason why I consider my book to be a work-in-progress. Indeed, since the publication of the paperback, a number of other similar curiosities have developed, and it is my intention to report on them from time to time as well.

So who *are* the gently mad, and how is it I chose to spend the better part of eight years in their company? The answer to the first part of that question, in my view, is that anyone who has a deep passion for books has a touch of the gentle madness. As to what forces motivated me to chronicle its various manifestations—it emerged from the thirteen years I had spent as a book review editor and literary columnist in Worcester, Massachusetts, from 1978 to 1991, working every day with books and authors followed by the nine years I have devoted since then to pursuing a career as an independent writer and a historian of books and book culture. My excursions into the world of the gently mad began in earnest in 1988 when I did an essay for *Bostonia* magazine that documented what I contended were twelve hundred years of library formation in Boston, as told by the stories of the people who built them.

You might wonder how I could seriously suggest such a preposterous thesis, given the fact that the Pilgrims did not arrive in Plymouth until 1620. But if you look closely at the great collections in the Boston area, you come up with three hundred and fifty years at Harvard College, two hundred years at the Massachusetts Historical Society, one hundred and seventy-five years at the American Antiquarian Society, one hundred and fifty years at the Boston Public Library, and if you keep going around the region, you come up with something like twelve hundred years of impassioned book collecting. What I did was write a kind of narrative history of all of these institutions, focusing not just on the collecting and the gathering of the books, but on the passion and the obsession that drove certain people to gather and assemble them. Then, in one of these wondrous moments of epiphany we all have at certain crucial moments in our lives, it dawned on me that so much of what we know of our shared heritage, so much of what we treasure of our culture and our history, would be lost forever if not for the dedication of these quirky, eccentric people.

Prior to submitting this piece to *Bostonia* for publication, I read the final draft to my wife, a custom I follow with everything of importance that I write. She has a good ear for the nuances and rhythms of language, and she is an excellent critic, and I will forever remember her response to the opening paragraph of that essay. I had started out my first paragraph by describing the Amy Lowell Room on the second floor of the Houghton Library at Harvard University, gazing in wonder at a life mask of John Keats, and then I quickly cut across the Charles River to the Boston Athenæum on Beacon Hill. From there I wandered over to the Massachusetts Historical Society, then on to Copley Square and the remarkable Colonial library of Thomas Prince at the Boston Public Library, all the while trying to do a little travelogue, pointing out a few high spots here and there. Suddenly, Connie said, "You know, if you expand this concept a bit, if you go all over the country, you just may have the makings of the book that you were born to write." We have all seen the amusing cartoons where a light of insight flashes over a character's head. That is what happened to me there, and so began my quixotic attempt to document as much as I could of the creation of some great libraries and to describe the efforts and the contributions put forward by all of these extraordinary collectors. For a model, I tried to emulate *God, Graves and Scholars*, hoping to do for bibliomania what C. W. Ceram had done in 1951 with archaeology, to take a seemingly arcane subject and make it accessible and interesting to the general reader through the power of story-telling.

For the first six months or so of my research, I sought out exactly the kinds of stories I had said I would. I spent hours on end in the Widener Library at Harvard University and the Boston Athenæum tracking down every interesting book-collecting story I could find, and the wealth of information I turned up was enormous. But there came a point where my journalistic instincts kicked in, and it occurred to me that as fascinating as these old tales were—and believe me, I had no intentions of abandoning them—no writer had ever examined the great living collectors. Nobody, so far as I could determine, had written a book that placed the most important bibliophiles of today within the framework of a historical continuum. And it was at that point that what had started out as a diverting exercise in scholarly research developed into a form of investigative reporting and that I began to spend increasing amounts of time among the gently mad.

Thankfully, I had sold the idea for *A Gentle Madness* early on to a

publisher, so I was not pursuing an idle dream. Put less delicately, I was not writing a book on speculation; I had a signed contract and a modest advance on royalties that allowed me to broaden my focus and expand my horizons. The word “horizon” is an apt metaphor in this regard, since I decided that the only way to do a project like this was to box the compass, not only geographically, but in terms of activity and sophistication. I was not, in other words, interested in just the affluent collectors: I wanted to profile people from all levels of participation, since book collecting is an activity that anyone can play with great satisfaction. I was fortunate in that some of the most important book auctions in decades coincided with my research and that my home in central Massachusetts is only a three-hour drive from New York City, where most of them were mounted.

The title for the book, *A Gentle Madness*, came to me as another kind of revelation. As I mentioned, I had worked in Worcester for a number of years, and it happens that this old industrial city forty miles west of Boston is home to the American Antiquarian Society, which was established in 1812 by a gentleman named Isaiah Thomas. Isaiah Thomas was a patriot during the American Revolution, a printer who fought at the battles of Lexington and Concord and published the first news reports of the hostilities in his fiery journal, the *Massachusetts Spy*. After the war, he became an enormously successful printer and publisher based in Worcester, the most enterprising in the young republic. Devoted to his craft, he also wrote the first history of printing in North America. Yet for all these accomplishments as an entrepreneur, we remember him today largely for an extraordinary gathering of primary materials he used to form the core collection of the American Antiquarian Society. The AAS became the first research library to be founded by a book collector, one that operates with its own endowment, its own staff, its own librarians, and exists to serve scholarship. Other examples of this distinctively American innovation are the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., the William Clements Library on the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island, and the William Andrews Clark Library in Los Angeles.

When Isaiah Thomas died at the age of eighty-two in 1831, his grandson, Benjamin Franklin Thomas, said in tribute that his grandfather had been “touched early by the gentlest of infirmities, bibliomania.” I remember

reading that characterization of the man, and recognizing immediately that I had my title. For context, I decided to use a lengthy subtitle: “Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books.” In the first chapter, I offer a definition from a German bibliographer by the name of Hanns Bohatta, who said, “the bibliophile is the master of his books, the bibliomaniac their slave.” Bohatta also had the good sense to acknowledge that you never really know when you have crossed the line.

I am often asked if I am a bibliomaniac. One local reviewer in Massachusetts who knows me wrote, “Well, Nick Basbanes may not be a bibliomaniac, but he certainly is at risk,” although personally, I enjoy thinking of myself as being on the cusp. Recently I moderated a forum at the American Antiquarian Society and was introduced as a person who doesn’t collect books so much as he collects collectors. I like that assessment even better, since I do regard these people I have spent so much time with as my own. Not only have they allowed me to enter their lives and to handle their collections, we have in some cases become friends, and as I have followed their fortunes along, they have become a part of my life as well.

I don’t deny that there is even a bit of vicarious pleasure involved in the exercise. I know that I will never own a First Folio of Shakespeare, and I know that I will never own a Gutenberg Bible, but I have handled these objects in the libraries of people who do own them. There is a gentleman in Illinois, Abel Berland, who will be featured in my new book, *Patience and Fortitude: A Roving Chronicle of Book People, Book Places, and Book Culture*, in a chapter I call “Madness Redux.” I spent an afternoon in Abel’s home, and what he did essentially was stage a performance for me. He sat me down at his desk and brought forth, one treasure after the other, selections from his library, which can be described generally as landmarks of Western Culture. It was a brilliant presentation—a *tour de force*, really—and it culminated with what he regards as the crown jewels of the collection, the Four Folios of Shakespeare: the First Folio of 1623, the Second Folio of 1632, the Third Folio of 1664, and the Fourth Folio of 1685. His First Folio is arguably the finest in private hands. It is complete, meaning that there are no pages missing, and in its original binding, and if that were not enough, it bears the prior ownership signature of John Dryden. His Third Folio has a provenance of comparable importance; it was the book that Samuel Johnson used when he was preparing his own edition of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century.

There was a very nice review of my book in the local newspaper here in El Paso, published under the catchy headline, “Book Crooks.” Although one of the longest chapters in *A Gentle Madness* profiles the adventures of the most accomplished bibliokleptomaniac of the twentieth century, let me stress that the book is by no means simply about the theft of books. This notable example aside—and I will address myself to it presently—it is essential that I must stress my belief that bibliomania, for the most part, is a productive exercise, and I think that the many libraries I write about are proof positive of that conviction. Indeed, a good many of the collections that you have here at The University of Texas at El Paso, as I have seen during my visit this weekend, came to you with the compliments of many benefactors. There is a chapter in my book dealing with the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin that recounts how the world’s preeminent collection of twentieth-century literary manuscripts was put together in a relatively brief period of time by one towering personality, Harry Hunt Ransom. That is my chapter on institutional bibliomania, and I call it “Instant Ivy.”

By far the most frequent question I hear from readers is something that goes like this: “Well, if your thesis is the productive aspects of bibliomania, why does Stephen Blumberg occupy one of the longest chapters in the book?” For those of you who have not read my book, let me note that Chapter 13 deals with a man named Stephen Carrie Blumberg who was arrested in 1990 in Ottumwa, Iowa, by a squadron of seventeen FBI agents. When the agents went inside the old Victorian home Blumberg owned near the center of town, they seized 23,600 books which they later determined had come from 268 libraries in forty-five states, two Canadian provinces, and the District of Columbia. These books were initially given an estimated value of \$20 million, but later, more conservatively determined to be worth \$7.3 million on the open market. My guess is that it was something in between. Either way, one feature every title had in common is that every one was stolen.

Stephen had spent twenty years traveling the United States assembling this library. Among his prize possessions was a copy of Hartmann Schedel’s 1493 book commonly known as the Nuremberg Chronicle, the last great history of the world published before the discovery of America was announced in Europe. Stephen got “his” pristine copy in its original pigskin binding at the Claremont College Library in Claremont, California. From the other side of the continent, he had acquired the State of Connecticut’s own copy of *A Confession of Faith* of 1710, the first

book printed in Connecticut, and he removed that from a library that is not open to the public. How he got inside the building—and how he penetrated the steel vault where it was stored—is anybody's guess. He also had books from the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota; he had books from Harvard University, the Library of Congress, Duke University, Dartmouth College, Cornell University, Stanford University, Oberlin College, Amherst College, Smith College, Vassar College, Emory University, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the University of New Mexico—and yes, I regret to say, Southern Methodist University, Baylor, Rice, Texas A & M, University of North Texas, and the Amarillo Public Library. The good news is that I could find no evidence of his having visited this area of the Lone Star State.

I call that chapter “The Blumberg Collection,” a cute title I readily admit, but I coined it to illustrate the difference between a *collection* and an *accumulation*. There are people like the Collyer Brothers who in the 1930s and '40s filled their house in Upper Manhattan with thousands and thousands of items, and quite literally died under the weight of all their books. When rescuers finally reached them, they were buried under tons of material, a classic story of accumulation without purpose. A collection, by contrast, is a telling expression of a personality. It reflects your interests in life, your work, your hobbies, whatever, but there is always a definite shape and direction. A true bibliomaniac often gathers material in excess, but there generally is a purpose, what we call a focus, a scheme at work, and in the case of Stephen Blumberg, the intention was to create one of history's greatest collections of Americana. Beyond the fact that he is a great story in and of himself—let's face it, there is no way I could keep him out of the book—he does serve as an instructive example of bibliomania that is out of control, a cautionary tale, if you will, of collecting run amok.

Stephen's driving passion was the Victorian Era in America, particularly in the area of architecture, furniture, design, antiques. Did I mention that he owned fifty thousand antique doorknobs? Or that he had 120,000 old 78 r.p.m. records? He also had ten thousand American stained-glass windows. I was thinking at dinner last night in the Camino Real Hotel, in that lovely room with the dazzling Tiffany dome, that if Stephen had ever been here, the temptation for him would have been overwhelming. More often than not, however, his routine was pretty straightforward. As he traveled about the country, he would find the condemned buildings in

town, principally those built in the 1800s. He would go in, he would strip the building of the stained glass windows, the door knobs, the fixtures, the fireplace decorations, whatever was interesting to him.

If you were to meet Stephen on the street—and he very definitely is a person of decided eccentricity, the people he identified with most were what we euphemistically call “street people”—you would think he lived in a homeless shelter. In truth, he is from an affluent family, one of the largest owners of real estate in the city of St. Paul, and Stephen is the beneficiary of a generous trust. The point to be made here is that if this man wanted books, it was well within his grasp to acquire them legitimately, but that was not the way he decided to work. He chose instead to “go and select,” as he told me, and this he did in his own bizarre way.

When Stephen’s career on the road came to an abrupt end, fully ninety-five percent of the books that were discovered in his old house in Ottumwa were never known to be missing until the day they were recovered. As I pointed out, he victimized some of the most prestigious libraries in America, places with the most sophisticated security systems. He really was a brilliant master thief. Sometimes he would assume the demeanor and persona of a college professor. He had obtained some documents that identified him as a visiting scholar, and he traveled around with a briefcase. He would go into various libraries, he would make his way into book storage areas, he would identify the books that interested him, and he would make plans to come back later. How would he get inside? I do not know the specifics, but he often located the desk of a person in charge and managed somehow to get hold of keys, make copies, and then come back at night when the facility was closed. This was one of his favored methods, and several rings with keys to dozens of American libraries were entered into evidence at his trial. The FBI agent in charge of the investigation told me that he regarded Stephen Blumberg as a master burglar adept not only at breaking locks, but in circumventing and defeating the most sophisticated security systems. In some instances, he would back up a pickup truck to a building in the middle of the night and load his latest acquisitions on board. He did this for twenty years, and he was never really caught through any fault of his own. He had a “good friend” by the name of Kenny Rhodes who got into some trouble of his own with the law and made a deal with federal authorities that enabled him to go free if he informed on Stephen.

When I first found out about Stephen Blumberg, I already had a contract to write my book. I had a theme; I knew where I was going with the material. But then one morning I read an Associated Press dispatch about this man who had devoted his life to stealing precious and rare books, and that changed the calculus entirely for me. What made his story uncommonly appealing was the contention that even though these books were worth millions of dollars, money was not the driving motive. Had this been a simple case of grand larceny—and there have been numerous cases of book theft for profit—then I really would not have been terribly interested in writing about this curious episode.

What drew me to this story most of all was the irresistible subtext—that these crimes were driven by an uncontrolled passion for books. In a phrase, it could be argued that Stephen Blumberg stole rare and beautiful books because he loved them, and this has never been in dispute. When I learned that his lawyers would argue a defense that claimed “not guilty by reason of insanity”—and it was the only time in the history of American jurisprudence where such an argument has ever been used to rationalize what in effect was a case of criminal bibliomania—then it was clear that this was something that I had to write about, especially when you consider that I already had the title for my book, and that title was *A Gentle Madness*.

In January of 1991, I went out to Des Moines, Iowa, to attend the trial in U.S. District Court. During the two weeks I was there, I got to know Stephen fairly well; he was out on bail, and he was curious about this person from the East Coast there ostensibly to learn more about his activities. Outside of two local reporters, I was the only journalist to cover the story from start to finish, and it intrigued him that my specialty was books and not crime. We walked the hallways during recesses, and he was quite taken by the idea that I was there to write about his activities as a “collector.”

One freezing Saturday morning when court was not in session, I got a call in my hotel room, and it was Stephen inviting me to spend a day in his life. Fifteen minutes later he picked me up at the front door in his 1976 Cadillac. I took along my tape recorder, my camera, lots of tape and lots of film, and we were off for Ottumwa, the city where he had kept the books in an old Victorian house that he had not seen since his arrest the previous year.

While we were there, he showed me the warehouse he had leased in town, one of nine, I later learned, that he has kept at various times around the country, and where he has stashed his various collections. He pointed out a corner of the long room stacked high with plastic milk cartons, each filled with antique doorknobs, fifty thousand of them by his estimate, as I mentioned, and I had no reason to consider the figure inflated. He had a warehouse down here in Texas, by the way, a state he loved to visit for the flea markets you are justly celebrated for hosting.

The Ottumwa “library,” he told me, began as a reference collection. One reason he chose Iowa as a base of operations, incidentally, was its location in the geographic center of the country. He wanted to know more about his antiques, about American cities in the Victorian age, exploration, and discovery. That prompted me to ask him why he had something like one hundred incunabula in the collection, which are books published in the fifteenth century during the earliest years of printing with movable metal type. None of these titles, obviously, have anything to do with Americana or antiques; they are all more than five hundred years old, and this occasioned one of his more memorable quotations: “Well, you know collectors, once we got started, we can’t control ourselves.”

What proved to be part of Stephen’s undoing was his fondness for what we might call trophies. When he stole the books from all of these libraries, he took them back to Ottumwa and removed all traces of identification from them. He did not hurt the books; in fact he took excellent care of them, but he did excise the bookplates, and he very carefully mounted twelve hundred of them inside three scrapbooks. These scrapbooks were seized by the authorities and entered into evidence at his trial as Prosecution Exhibit Number 12. Not only did they give detail of his foraging activities, they gave investigators and bibliographers the means by which they could begin to determine where he had done a good deal of his hunting.

While Stephen was out on bail awaiting trial, incidentally, he was ordered by the court to stay away from all libraries, bookstores, museums, and condemned houses. He should have followed that advice. Not long after his release from prison in 1996, he was arrested in Des Moines in a vacant house and accused of taking mantels off the fireplaces, knobs off the doors, and old lights off the ceilings. He was convicted in state court and is scheduled to begin serving five more years in prison next month.

My extensive archive of material pertaining to this case includes seven hours of conversation I had with Stephen. At one point toward the end of the final tape, as we were driving back to Des Moines from Ottumwa, you can hear him say, “Shut off the recorder.” So I turned the machine off, and because he was at that time holding out as a bargaining chip his knowledge of where every book came from, he did not want to tip his hand. He had hoped that by agreeing to help the government determine the “provenance” of the books, he might get a lighter sentence. Anyway, the tape recorder was off, and then he said to me, “You know the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* they think I got from Harvard?” He paused momentarily, smiled, shook his head, and said, “USC,” meaning the University of Southern California.

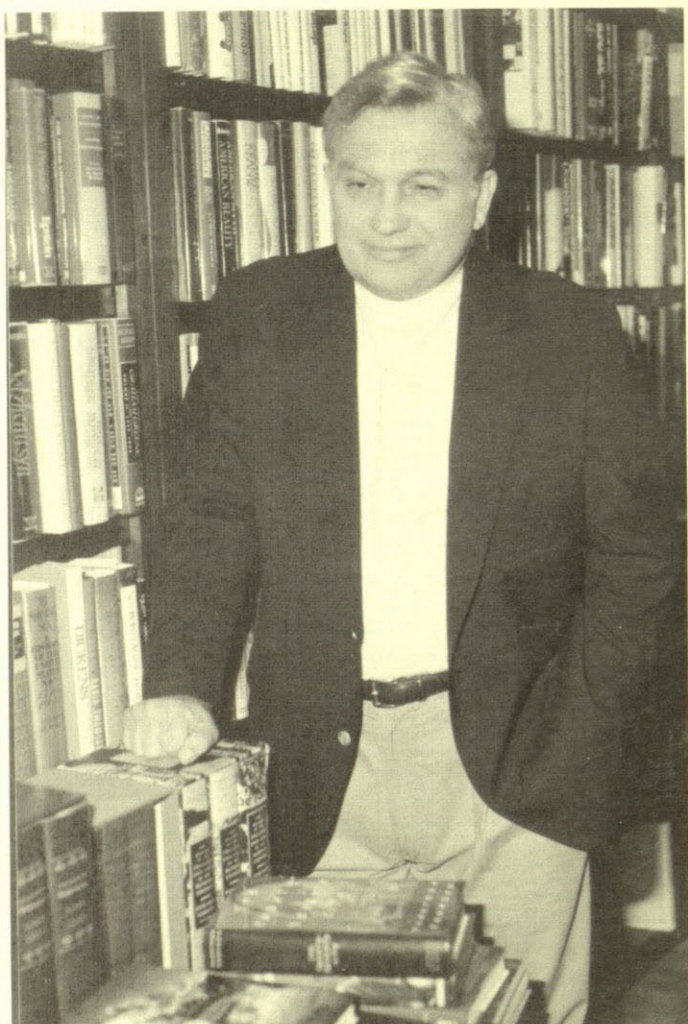
After he was convicted—and before he was told that he would serve just under six years in a succession of federal penitentiaries—Stephen spent a number of days in Omaha, Nebraska, in the secret warehouse the government had set up to identify the books. I was the only writer allowed inside this facility before the materials were returned, incidentally, and that happy circumstance came about after I promised not to disclose its location. I met the FBI agent-in-charge at a fast food restaurant, right under a flagpole as he had directed, and he drove me to the building. I will never forget the agent saying to me, “I can’t imagine why you want to come out here; all it looks like is a library with a lot of old books in it.”

That exactly was the point of my visit, of course, and I went out to Omaha from Boston, even though I was told I would be allowed no more than fifteen minutes inside the warehouse. But it was worth it, not only because of the books I saw, but the atmosphere I was able to absorb and describe for my readers. In fact, I chose to begin the Blumberg chapter by sharing my impressions of the building, and I did it with the one detail that struck me the most powerfully. It was not the sight of so many old books, but the stenciled signs on the metal shelves—“Library of Congress,” “University of Michigan,” “Wisconsin Historical Society,” and so on. That scene, more than any other, captured for me what this chapter was all about, because in the end it was not collecting at all, it was about a cultural felony, and these names brought the offense home in an unusually dramatic way. For those who wonder why some nonfiction writers—and I very definitely include myself among this group—insist on getting their material in the field, of wanting to see things in situ, as it were, I

submit this as my primary exhibit. The only way to do this book, I felt, was to go and be “among the gently mad.”

You know, we New Englanders tend sometimes to be pretty smug. We take pride in the fact that the first printing press in what we now know as the United States was established in 1638 in Cambridge and that it was there that the little book we know as *The Whole Book of Psalms*, or the Bay Psalm Book, was published. Well, you come down to West Texas and you quickly realize that the first press in North America was not in Massachusetts at all, but in Mexico, set up just across the border in 1536, and that the first book printed in this hemisphere was produced by John Cromberger a hundred years earlier. As the great Fats Waller was fond of saying, “One never knows, do one.”

Carl Hertzog, whose memory we honor today, recalled coming to El Paso as a “tenderfoot Yankee,” and he took enormous pride in being known as the “printer at the pass.” The fact that you honor his accomplishments so elegantly and that you sponsor this wonderful competition on behalf of the book arts, is a great tribute to him. I tip my hat to you, and I thank you very much for allowing me to share in the festivities. Let me conclude by saying that I quite happily find myself once again in the agreeable company of the gently mad.



Nicolas A. Basbanes

Professional writer, former book editor of
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Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the
Eternal Passion for Books*

NICHOLAS A. BASBANES

Nicholas A. Basbanes, the author of *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books* (Henry Holt, 1995), has been a professional writer for more than 30 years, and has written articles, essays and reviews for numerous newspapers, journals and periodicals.

A Gentle Madness was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in nonfiction in 1996, was a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, and was named by the New York Public Library as one of 25 "books to remember" for 1995. Now in its sixth printing, the book was an alternate selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, the Quality Paperback Book Club, and Readers Subscription Book Club. An Owl Paperback edition, updated and including a new preface by the author, was published by Holt in 1999.

In a full-page review of the book, Michael Dirda, the Pulitzer Prize-winning critic of *The Washington Post*, described *A Gentle Madness* as "a wonderful gallery" of appealing characters, "each more appealing than the last." Robert Taylor of *The Boston Globe* called it a "magnum opus" that mingles "the best of historical research and investigative reporting"; *The New York Times Book Review* declared it to be "compulsory reading for anyone seriously interested in books."

An excerpt of Brian Lamb's one-hour interview with Basbanes, televised nationally on C-SPAN in October 1995, has been included in *Booknotes*, published by Random House in 1997. (A complete text of the interview is posted at www.booknotes.org on the World Wide Web.)

A native of Lowell, Mass., Basbanes is a 1965 graduate of Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, with a bachelor's degree in English. He was a Graduate Fellow at the Washington Journalism Center in Washington, D.C., in 1966-67, and in 1969 he received a master of arts degree in journalism from Pennsylvania State University.

From June 1968 to March 1971, Basbanes served as Public Affairs Officer aboard the aircraft carrier USS Oriskany, made two combat cruises to Vietnam, and received a Navy Achievement Medal for the superior performance of his duties.

Following his release from military service, Basbanes worked as a reporter for *The Evening Gazette* in Worcester, Mass., for seven years. In 1974, he won a first prize in the "best news story" category from the New England Associated Press News Executives Association for his work on an investigative series that exposed irregularities in the Worcester County Treasurer's office.

From 1978 to 1991, Basbanes served as book editor and literary columnist for the Sunday Telegram in Worcester, Mass. In 1994, Basbanes formed Literary Features Syndicate with his wife, Constance V. Basbanes, and began offering his columns to other newspapers around the country, concentrating largely on university cities where there is a demonstrated interest in serious literature. Together, they also write a monthly review of children's books, which appears in the *Orlando Sentinel*, *San Antonio Express-News*, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, *Eugene Register Guard*, and other newspapers.

Basbanes has contributed to numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian*, *Civilization*, *The Washington Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Milwaukee Journal*, *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Publishers Weekly*, *The Gazette of the Grolier Club*, *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship*, and *New England Quarterly*. His work appeared in all 31 issues of *Biblio* magazine, which was published from June 1996 to March 1999. A companion volume to *A Gentle Madness, Patience & Fortitude: A Roving Chronicle of Book People, Book Places, and Book Culture*, was scheduled for publication in October 2001 by HarperCollins. A third volume in this cycle, *Life Beyond Life: The Permanence of Books in an Impermanent World*, is scheduled for publication in 2003. For Holt, Basbanes is completing a twenty-first century commentary on book collecting, like this lecture, to be titled, *Among the Gently Mad*.

Basbanes is a member of the American Antiquarian Society, the National Book Critics Circle, PEN, the Society of Professional Journalists, the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, the Grolier Club, and the Boston Athenaeum, and he is a past president of the Friends of the Goddard Library at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., which has established a Nicholas A. Basbanes Prize for student book collectors.

He and his wife live in North Grafton, Mass. They have two daughters, Barbara and Nicole.

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studio blue

(Shown above: Kathy Frederickson and Cheryl Towler Weese)

Chicago, IL

**1999-2000 Recipient of the Carl Hertzog Award
for Excellence in Book Design**

Title: The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler

Author: Harriet K. Stratis and Martha Tedeschi, general editors.

Publisher: The Art Institute of Chicago, May, 1998

Printer: Meridian Printing

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(From remarks given during the award ceremony February 6, 2000)

Kathy Frederickson:

I want to thank you all for honoring us with this award and for the wonderful kindness and hospitality that you've shown to us in our visit here. I especially want to thank Pat Phillips, Sam Moore, and the Friends of the [University] Library. It's our first time in El Paso and it really is a very remarkable and special place. I am delighted to be here.

I just want to say a few words to you about the process that we use when we create books and a little bit about our partnership. I first met Cheryl in 1992, when I was working at the Art Institute of Chicago. I had been working for three years with the editors and the curators there on this catalogue raisonné of Whistler's lithographs and we had decided to hire a graphic designer to design this enormous project.

Most of the designers that we worked with at the Art Institute were from the east coast based in New York. We wanted to look for someone who was local. I remembered this young woman who had come in a few weeks earlier and had shown me her portfolio. I had been really impressed with the quality of her work although she was right out of graphic school and with her enthusiasm for books. I proposed that we consider her for this project, realizing that it was a daunting task. At that time, we had hundreds of manuscript pages and there were literally hundreds of illustrations. I think the finished two-volume set is over a thousand printed pages.

We offered her the project and then we waited to see what would happen. Cheryl spent weeks researching material, looking at the prints, learning all about Whistler's work and then she presented us with her preliminary designs, which are pretty similar to the finished book that you see here. For me it was a real breakthrough in my career because, through her use of design, she'd been able to capture some of the essence of this artist's work. The way that she designed the book, the way the type looked, and the layouts worked, just somehow encapsulated, for me, the sort of slightly fussy, but luscious quality that existed in these lithographs. She also created a book that was very contemporary and fresh. That was the beginning of our relationship. We are now business partners and eight years have passed, but I still take a lot of pleasure in the process of discovery that we use when we create. Whether it's a book or an exhibition or a Website, we're traders. Like Nicholas [Basbanes] with his project, this book was a ten-year process for me. What's really rewarding is that we've done something that you responded to so wonderfully. We do this because we love it. We thank you for recognizing that and for having us here.

Cheryl Towler Weese:

Just a couple of thoughts to add to what Kathy said. I want to re-double the thanks to Pat, Sam, and everyone at the dinner last night. This has been a really wonderful introduction to El Paso. I think Kathy and I have been particularly touched by the graciousness and generosity of all of the Friends of the University Library, and really moved by the civic pride that is shown here. Designing books is a wonderful occupation. I think it allows you to be a perennial student and each book really forces you to delve into some new field of study. The combination of learning and reading about a subject and trying to make it a tangible, visual form that encapsulates that subject in some way that moves your audiences is really one of the hardest, but most rewarding challenges we found.

Carl Hertzog himself said it best when he said that, "A book with shortcomings whether they are typographic errors or faulty binding is still superior to one that is mechanically perfect, because something intangible in that flawed book would testify that the designer cared." When reading the material about Hertzog, I was also struck by his passion. He was not from the west, but in his passion for learning about the west, he became a square dance caller. He learned to ride [horses]; he would sit with cowboys wearing boots and he affected a southern accent. All these things he took on as an immersion and I think that's the exact same process that we take on. When we take any project, you really have to delve in an appropriate way to be able to create something. I also want to mention a little bit about the collaborative nature of studio blue. Kathy is very generous in talking about my contributions, but each book that we work with, including this one, is the product really of five minds in the office coming together. Each of us plays several roles from book to book, which range from researcher to storyteller, an author to information organizer, albeit skillful product manager or to fierce negotiator. The very roles we play are really parallel to the shifting roles of graphic design. Sometimes designers function as authors and sometimes as form viewers. What I really do feel sure of is that the book is far from a drying artifact and instead is a viable and an evolving form. I really applaud UTEP's support of the book arts as an important contribution to the evolution.

Thank you for having me.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Katherine Frederickson

EDUCATION

School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Master of Arts Administration
December 1997

Middlebury College
Bachelor of Arts in English Literature
and Studio Art, June 1982.

EMPLOYMENT

studio blue
Partner
March 1995-present

Develop books, installations, and other projects in collaboration with museums; institutions, and businesses.

Supervise all aspects of design, project management, production, and fabrication of each of the studio's projects.

Responsible for financial planning, budget maintenance, scheduling, and marketing.

The Art Institute of Chicago
Associate Director,
Publications Department
July 1993-March 1995

Production Manager
December 1987-July 1993

Supervised all aspects of design and production of the museum's scholarly publications, popular books, and special exhibition catalogues.

Developed books on the museum's permanent collection in collaboration with the editorial and curatorial staff.

Responsible for quarterly financial planning, budget maintenance, and scheduling on all museum publications.

Coordinated translations and publishing of foreign language editions.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York
Production Manager,
Special Publications Department
April 1986-December 1987

Aperture, Inc. New York
Production Manager
February 1985-April 1986

The Meriden Gravure Company,
Meriden, Connecticut
Account Executive
November 1982-February 1985

SELECTED PROJECTS

Studio of the South: Van Gogh and Gauguin
The Art Institute of Chicago
spring 2001
Currently designing this 400-page book.

Northwestern University Sesquicentennial Tribute
Northwestern University
spring 2000
Currently designing and producing this 256-page book.

Chicago Postal Museum
spring 2000
Currently conceiving, researching, writing, and providing the graphic design for this museum in Chicago's postal headquarters, in collaboration with Harry Weese Associates.

Taking Stock
The University of Chicago Graduate School of Business
Designed, photo-researched, and produced this 96-page centennial tribute.

Photography's Multiple Roles: Art, Document, Market, Science
The Museum of Contemporary Photography and DAP
fall 1998
Designed and produced this 252-page book, printed in 10 colors using color separations scanned directly from the original photographs.

Space/Sight/Self

The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art and University of Chicago Press, fall 1998
Designed, managed, and produced the identity for an exhibition, including street banners, templates for exhibit signage and wall labels, and an 80-page book, in collaboration with museum staff.

An Explorer's Guide to the Field Museum
The Field Museum of Art
spring 1998
Conceived, designed, and produced this pocket guide to the Field Museum of Natural History.

The Des Moines Art Center: An Uncommon Vision
The Des Moines Art Center,
spring 1998
Designed, art-directed photography, and produced this 300-page book.

Within the Fairy Castle: Colleen Moore's Dollhouse at the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago
The Museum of Science and Industry and Bulfinch Press
fall 1997
Conceived, edited, designed and managed this 144-page book.

Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, Chicago, Illinois
Worked with client and architect Booth/Hansen to conceptualize, design and produce an installation on this non-profit organization.

Wilson Library, University of Laverne, Laverne, California
Working with architects Weese Langley Weese, provided environmental graphic design and design consulting for a business and economics library.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Cheryl Towler Weese

EDUCATION

Yale University
Master of Fine Arts,
Graphic Design, June 1991

Received fellowship for graphic design work; student work published in *Emigré* magazine.

Wesleyan University
Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art and Art History, June 1987

National merit scholar,
graduated with honors.

EMPLOYMENT

studio blue
Partner
March 1993-present

Serve as primary designer and art director for the majority of the studio's projects, and help coordinate each project's management, production, and fabrication.

Develop installations, books, and other projects in collaboration with museums, institutions, outside publishers, and businesses.

Assist in financial planning, budget maintenance, scheduling, and marketing.

University of Illinois at Chicago
Adjunct Assistant Professor, 1993
Visiting critic, 1998-99

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Visiting critic and professor, 1996-99

Washington University School of Art
Visiting lecturer and critic, 1997-2000

Previous work experience includes four years of employment in graphic design firms in Connecticut and Chicago, with a wide range of clients and design responsibilities, and three years of experience in newspaper design and production.

SELECTED PROJECTS

The Chicago Music and Dance Theater, Chicago Illinois
In collaboration with architects Hammond Beeby & Babka, currently providing all environmental graphic design for this 1500-seat performing arts center.

Regarding Beauty
The Hirshhorn Museum and Distributed Art Publishers, fall 1999
Designed and produced this 232-page book.

Marcel Duchamp: The Arts of Making Art in the Mechanical Age
Ludion Publishers, Ghent, Belgium
fall 1999
Designed and provided project management for this 280-page book.

Graduate and Undergraduate Viewbooks
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, fall 1998
Conceptualized, designed, and art-directed photography for these 72-page viewbooks.

Julia Margaret Cameron's Women
The Art Institute of Chicago and Yale University Press, fall 1998
Designed and assisted in the management of this 200-page book.

Whistler's Lithographs
The Art Institute of Chicago, spring 1998
designed and project managed this two-volume, 1000-page book, in collaboration with museum staff.

Still More Distant Journeys
The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art and University of Chicago Press, fall 1997
designed, managed and produced the identity for an exhibition, including street banners, templates for exhibit signage and wall labels, and a 284-page book, in collaboration with museum staff.

The International Pantry Cookbook
Chronicle Books
fall 1997
Art directed illustrator and designed this 264-page cookbook.

Literary Objects: Flaubert
The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago
fall 1996
designed, managed, and produced this 64-page book, in collaboration with museum staff.

Art in Chicago, 1945-1995
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
fall 1996
Designed, managed, and produced this 312-page book, in collaboration with museum staff.

Metalwork in Early America
Winterthur Museum
Winterthur, Delaware, fall 1996
Designed, managed, and produced This 450-page book, in collaboration with museum staff.

Grant Wood:
An American Master Revealed
The Davenport Museum of Art
Davenport, Iowa
served as exhibit and graphic designer for a Grant Wood retrospective.

Wartburg Chapel, Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa
Working with Weese Langley Weese, provided environmental graphic design consisting of a history wall, inscriptions, and varied signage.

Jane Addams Memorial Sculpture Garden, Chicago, Illinois
Working with the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Park District, conceptualized, designed, and produced a public memorial honoring Jane Addams, in tandem with the work of artist Louise Bourgeois.

Selected Client List

studio blue

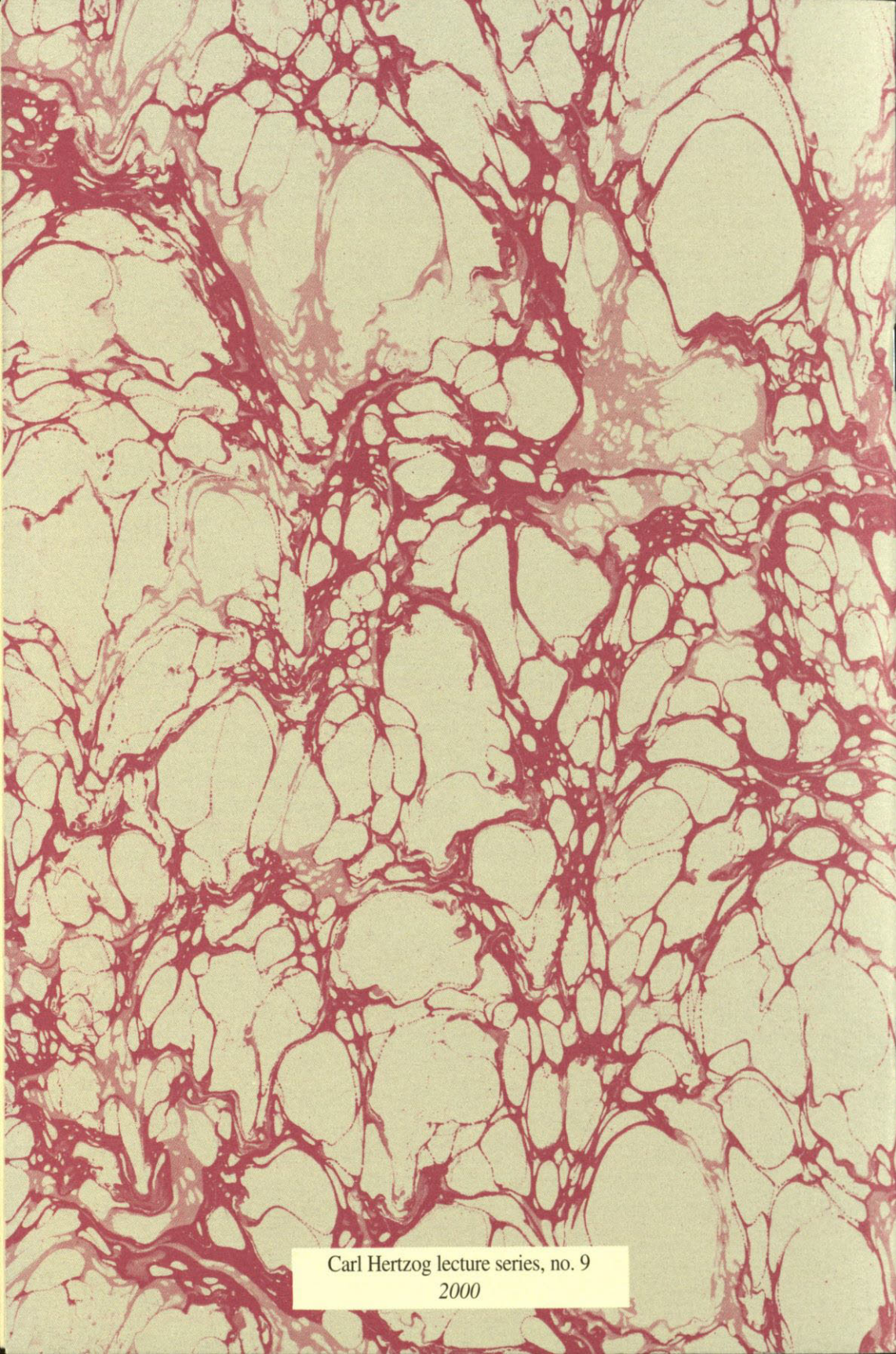
The American Institute of Architects
The American Library Association
The American Medical Association
The Art Institute of Chicago
Booth/Hansen Architects
Chicago Botanic Garden
Chicago Park District
Chronicle Books
Distributed Art Publishers
Des Moines Art Center
Grinnell College
Hammond Beeby Rupert Ainge
Architects
Harry Weese Associates
Lake Forest College
Ludion Publishers
The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Chicago
The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Photography, Chicago
The Museum of Science and Industry,
Chicago
Northwestern University
The School of the Art Institute of
Chicago
The David and Alfred Smart Museum
of Art
Smithsonian Institution
University of Chicago
Village of Oak Park
Weese Langley Weese, Architects
Winterthur Museum

SELECTED AWARDS

American Association of
University Presses
American Center for Design
American Institute of Graphic Arts
The Art Library Association of the
American Library Association
American Association of Museums
Carl Hertzog Award for Excellence
in Book Design
Chicago Book Clinic
Museum Publishing Association
Print Magazine
Stiftung Buchkunst Exhibition

SELECTED LECTURES

American Center for Design
Student Conference, Chicago,
Illinois, 1996
Center for Creative Studies, Detroit,
Michigan, 1998
Northwestern Michigan University,
Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1999
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois, 1998
University of Illinois at Chicago,
Chicago, Illinois, 1998-99
Washington University, Saint Louis,
Missouri, 1997-2000



Carl Hertzog lecture series, no. 9
2000