The World of James Yeatman: A Vision of Art, Culture, Commerce and Politics in Early St. Louis Highlights Mercantile Collections

James Yeatman was not the founder of a new and growing city, but his ideas and enthusiasm, his talent for leadership and consensus building, and his taste and generosity were the tools he used to found or establish many of the key institutions by which St. Louis was allowed to grow and develop from a struggling boomtown into one of the largest metropolitan areas of the United States, with a heritage that has remained in the deep memory of the general American consciousness. This exhibition explores his influence both locally and nationally in the areas of art, culture, commerce and politics as well as his role in the Civil War. The exhibition opened October 19th and will be on view through January 2014.

The Mercantile Library is proud to present this comprehensive examination of life in St. Louis as it was both experienced and impacted by our founder, James Yeatman. The exhibition examines a period of time in which one American city expanded tremendously in response to the economic, geographical and political forces of the day, but also through the attentive and dedicated leadership of many individuals who were proud of its heritage and optimistic about its future.

Of all these citizens over the course of the nineteenth century one name occurs, almost extraordinarily, at every juncture of change, planning and improvement. James Yeatman’s influence is found in all aspects of nineteenth century St. Louis life; in cultural and educational endeavors including art museums, schools and libraries; in the omnipresent political issues of civil war, divided loyalties, abolition, local corruption and national elections; and in the economics of mercantile and banking pursuits and the commerce of a city expanding through the coming of the iron horse, river trade and bridging an untamed river. All of these issues developed a fur-trading frontier city into a central states urban hub of entrepreneurship, land development, and manufacturing.
The Art of the Printed Book Through the Centuries

The St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in collaboration with the Missouri Center for the Book and the National Endowment for the Arts presents this traveling exhibition of printed books, the book arts and printing history for readers throughout our state. The collection of printing history present in Missouri’s oldest library, the St. Louis Mercantile Library Association founded in 1846, is deep and has grown into a superb research collection that illustrates the development of fine printing and the history of the printed book through the past five centuries. The Center for the Book is grateful to the Mercantile, held in the public’s trust at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, was willing to loan examples from its collection for programs in St. Louis, Columbia and Springfield. The exhibition documents the origins of fine printing, how it developed to a very high level in England in the nineteenth century and then in America in the twentieth century, becoming now a worldwide art form in the traditional format of binding with the familiar medium of paper in the twenty-first century. These are the main strands of a triumphant and inspiring story of the art of the printed book which this small traveling program merely touches upon; a tale of even greater depth which can include the book arts of other times and cultures in future programs.

As a complement to the exhibition, the Mercantile Library hosted two special programs to celebrate the Art of the Printed Book. On Sunday, October 21 participants enjoyed brunch and a lively panel discussion on the world of fine printing in St. Louis collections at the Library’s free first Branch & Lecture program. The panelists included Gregory Pass, Director of the St. Louis University Special Collections and Vatican Film Library, Erin Davis from Washington University Special Collections, and John Hoover, organizer of the exhibition and panel, for the Mercantile Library. On October 26 thirteen students from St. Michael School of Clayton attended a bookmaking workshop at the Library. The students learned about the bookmaking process from Joanne Kushi of Paper Birds Studio and printing/illustration techniques from Eric Woods of St. Louis’ Firecracker Press. The students took inspiration from excerpts and illustrations from Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn to create their own unique version of that American classic.

The process of electing a president is an enormously complex and intricately nuanced equation involving personalities, party platforms, public sentiment and contemporary issues. Presidents & Politics looks at two of these elements, personalities and issues, and the impact each had on particular presidential elections. This focused exhibition explores concepts of imperialism and the gold standard in the McKinley vs. Bryan election of 1896; the impact of Theodore Roosevelt’s dynamic personality and his return to the presidential race in 1912; the issues of economic recovery, the repeal of prohibition, the new deal, and World War II; the controversy over the third term during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s four campaigns between 1932 and 1944; concluding with the many issues, including the Vietnam War, that made the 1960s elections so controversial.

A Family Gallery Guide is available for Presidents & Politics to help families and educators explore these important examples of American history with young visitors. The exhibition will be on view in the Mercantile Library Atrium through January 27, 2013. To arrange a tour for your group, please phone 314-516-7248, or stop by for our unreserved public tours every Saturday at 11 am and Sunday at 2 pm.

Spotlight on the Donor

Helen Shopmaker grew up around politics. Her father was a lawyer and was active in the Democratic Party, but in her words “always behind the scenes.” Helen remembers not only the frequent dinnertime conversations about political issues, but also her father’s attendance at national conventions held in St. Louis in 1900 and 1912. The entire family attended the convention in Chicago in 1944, and Helen remembers the excitement that permeated the hall. When her husband Allen suggested that she start collecting something, her lifelong familiarity with politics made it an easy choice as Helen’s new hobby. The Shopmakers enjoyed this shared past time for many years, from the thrill of finding a rare button to the stimulating research that continually enriched their knowledge. In the spirit of that research, the collection remains available to scholars, students and casual visitors as a source of inspiration and enjoyment.

The Art of the Printed Book Through the Centuries

Ellis Library at the University of Missouri-Columbia
February – March, 2013
Springfield-Greene County Library District Library Center
February 16, 2013, 2:00 p.m.
Curator’s Talk: John N. Hoover on the History of Fine Printing, Springfield-Greene County Library District Library Center

The Mercantile Library Celebrates the Election Year with the Opening of the Dr. Allen B. and Helen S. Shopmaker Political Collection

In 1975 Allen and Helen Shopmaker were in an antique store in Michigan when they came across two old buttons printed with the words Follette and Wheeler. Helen, whose family had always been interested in politics, recognized them as presidential campaign buttons from the 1924 Progressive Party and purchased them for one dollar apiece. This was the beginning of a shared passion for the Shopmakers, resulting in an expansive collection that now contains several thousand items ranging from a George Washington token dated 1798 to buttons and stickers endorsing candidates for the current election. The variety of objects contained in the Shopmaker Collection reflects the changing tastes of the American public and the technologies available to produce these objects, from 19th century brass jewelry and clothing buttons embossed with candidate’s names and party symbols to today’s modern, mass-produced buttons, and from porcelain plates embellished with a portrait of First Lady Helen Taft to Nancy Reagan paper dolls. With artifacts representing nearly every American election, the Shopmaker Collection provides the viewer with a broad look at how candidates have used images, slogans and symbols to woo the public, and how the public has expressed its own, often outspoken, opinions on both individuals and issues.

In 2008 Mrs. Shopmaker donated the collection to the Mercantile Library in honor of her late husband. Since that time the collection has been featured in two special exhibitions and has continued to grow with the Shopmakers’ knowledgeable and generous financial support. The Mercantile Library has also restructured its existing political materials under the umbrella of the Shopmaker Political Collection, thus uniting these resources into a comprehensive source for research and study of this pivotal historical issue.

The current election year was chosen as the appropriate time to launch the new and permanent Shopmaker Political Gallery. This named space in the Mercantile Library is now dedicated to an ongoing presentation of selected objects from this exciting collection as well as rotating installations of related materials including campaign and presidential photographs from the Globe-Democrat archives, political cartoons both in print and original drawings, historical newspapers, and electoral ephemera from 1824 to the present day. The Mercantile Library was pleased to inaugurate the Shopmaker Political Gallery with a lecture by noted Pulitzer Prize winning historian Mark Neely who presented a lively paper entitled “The Democratic Party in the Civil War and the Election of 1864.” The opening event included Prof. Neely’s talk, tours of the exhibition and gallery, a ribbon cutting ceremony and champagne toast.

From the Kelmscott edition (1896) of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, reproduced in facsimile, from the traveling exhibition.

Eric Woods, from the Firecracker Press, teaches students from St. Michael School how to make a print
Through the Maine Woods: Saving the Records of the Bangor and Aroostook

Summer 2012 was a significantly productive time for the John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library. Pursuing its research and preservation mission to secure and interpret America's railroad history, the Library acquired archival records from the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad that had previously been held by the NAERD, Maine, and Atlantic Railroad.

The two companies were linked by the impact of the B&N bankruptcy in 2003 when it was restructured into the MMK&A. Barriger curator Nick Fry met with MMK&A officials in July to assess the archives and initially shipped three boxes of significant business records back to St. Louis. Logistical details were coordinated over the summer, and in September Nick Fry and Sean Visintainer, the Mercantile's Pott Waterways curator, spent four days in Hermon and Derby, Maine packing and shipping the archival history of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad. Among the materials preserved are those of the Public Relations Department, traffic and regulatory records from the 1960s to the 1980s, and more recent records from Iron Road, Inc.

Their efforts resulted in scores of boxes containing records from the 1930s to the early 2000s becoming part of the Barriger Library archives. The collection has significant documentation relating to the railroad development and operations in New England during the Penn Central bankruptcy and the formation of Connal. The collection will be a significant resource for scholars of this era and of American railroad history in general, and will complement comparable existing records in the Barriger Library for other geographic regions and periods. Through acquisitions such as this the Barriger Library retains its leadership position as one of North America's largest and finest railroad history collections.

The Mercantile is grateful on behalf of its Barriger Library advisory board, to Bob Grindrod, the President of the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railroad (MMK&A) for effecting the transfer to the Library of this fine collection focusing on the transportation history of New England.

Brief notes from the Barriger:

In June of 2012, the Barriger Library held its annual board meeting in Galesburg, Illinois. The meeting was held in conjunction with the induction ceremony of John W. Barriger III into the National Railroad Hall of Fame. Jack Barriger accepted the honor for his late father.

In celebration of this honor, the Barriger Library and The Center for Railroad Photography and Art organized an exhibition of photographs taken by John W. Barriger III during his railroad career; the exhibition was on view at Knox College in Galesburg, IL during the weekend of the induction ceremony.

In September of 2012, Simmons Boardman Publishing Company donated six boxes of 8 x 10 photographs from the office of Railway Age Magazine. These photos cover various topics and multiple railroads from the 1940s to the 1970s. They are currently being processed into the Library's collection for the use of researchers.

In October of 2012, the Barriger Library curator, Nick Fry, was introduced at the annual meeting of The Lexington Group in Transportation and gave a talk on current Library projects and activities.

The Barriger Library has received the following grants:

$10,000 from Union Pacific to participate in their Train Town USA program this year in celebration of their 150th birthday.

$10,000 from Norfolk Southern in support of Barriger collection digitization projects

$5,000 from the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation for Library support

The Herman T. Pott National Inland Waterways Library Celebrates

The Donald T. Wright and James V. Swift Awards

On December 1st the Pott Library held its 26th Donald T. Wright and James V. Swift Awards. The Captain Donald T. Wright Award for Maritime Literature and Journalism was given to Earl Swift. Mr. Swift is a graduate of the University of Missouri-St. Louis political science program and has written for the St. Louis Globe-Democrat in addition to newspapers in Anchorage, Norfolk, and St. Louis. He has been a Fullbright Fellow, PEN finalist, and five-time Pulitzer Prize nominee. Mr. Swift received the Wright Award for his book, ”Journey on the James: Three Weeks through the Heart of Virginia,” a riveting story combining his 435-mile journey by canoe with the river’s interesting and lively history.

The James V. Swift Medal for excellence in contribution to maritime literature was awarded to Gregory Thorp, one of the great photographers of the life, workers and industry of the inland waterways of the United States. Mr. Thorp’s work has appeared in The Waterways Journal and can be seen at the Seamen’s Church Institute. His book of photography, Rivers Run Past, is a fascinating visual look at life and labor aboard the mv O. Nelson Jones.

In addition to the awards ceremony, the award recipients each gave a series of remarks about their work. Music was provided by the Buckhannon Brothers, players of tradition mandolin and fiddle music indigenous to Missouri and the Midwest. A fully catered dinner was provided to guests, and the event was hosted by journalists and political cartoonist Dan Martin, also known as the St. Louis Post-Dispatch weatherbird artist and 1990 Wright Award winner.

The awards event also served as an opening of a new exhibition at the Mercantile Library that focuses on the Pott Library’s special collections; “Rolling on the River: Images of Work and Industry on America’s Rivers.”

The Wright Award was established in 1965, with the first award given in 1972. Until then, there had been no recognition to encourage excellence in the field of maritime journalism, literature, or a service that has contributed significantly to a better understanding of the American inland and intracoastal waterways. Captain Wright was the editor and publisher of The Waterways Journal from 1922 - 1965, and a unique and respected spokesman in the field of inland river transportation. The Wright Award has been presented to many distinguished individuals including H.N. Spencer, Jr. publisher of The Waterways Journal, folk musician and pilot John Hartford, artist James Godwin Scott, the New Orleans Times-Picayune photojournalist David Grunfeld, and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Ron Powers.

The Swift Award was established in 2006 through a generous donation from the estate of James V. Swift. Mr. Swift was the business manager of The Waterways Journal, with which he was associated for forty-five years. He also had a hand in many other aspects of river industry and culture, including tenures with the St. Louis Propeller Club, Inland Rivers Ports and Terminals, Inc., the Golden Eagle Club, Midwest Riverboat Buffs, and the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council. The Swift Award has been given out three times, to authors Dean Gabbert and Captain Charles F. Lehman, in addition to this year’s recipient, Gregory Thorp.

Brief notes from the Pott Library

Three new collections have been brought into the library in the past year. The Bob Goodwin, Jr. Collection consists of working papers, slides and memorabilia from Mr. Goodwin, a former maritime administrator from St. Louis. St. Louis artist Marilyn Bradley has donated a large collection of her river-related watercolors. The Library has also acquired some working papers between the NAERD and former Public Relations employee.

The Captain Thomas Kenny Collection has been processed. The collection consists of many photographs ranging from the 1880s to the mid-1900s of river vessels. The collection also contains Captain Kenny’s scrapbooks and manuscripts. The James V. Swift Collection is currently being processed. About 17 linear feet have been processed out of what will be a massive collection of images, clippings, working papers, and memorabilia from the noted Waterways Journal employee.

The photographs of the Dorothy Heckmann Shrader Collection have been digitized. The photos of the Captain William F. and Betty Stroekhoe Carril Collection are undergoing digitization. Curator Sean Visintainer has been working with a university system-wide committee to bring about a new Digital Library that will span the collections of the four state campuses. When the Digital Library is launched, perhaps as soon as February, the Shrader and Carril Collection photographs will be uploaded and available to patrons online.

The Pott Library received in the spring a major grant from the Herman T. and Phoebe R. Pott Foundation of $85,000 for the continuing support of its operations and collections.
Anne Leners has been an avid supporter of the Mercantile Library since she first became a member in the 1980s. She brought her enthusiasm to the Library’s new home in 2002, when she joined the newly formed Advisory Board for the St. Louis Mercantile Library Art Museum where she chairs the Collections Development Committee, as well as agreeing to take on as co-chair of the Library’s Print Fair Committee. The Print Fair, now in its seventh year, has been chaired with great success by Ruth Bryant, former Mercantile Board president, who chose to pass the baton and recommended Anne for the position based on her love of art, her solid network in the St. Louis community, and her personal interest in collecting art. Anne enthusiastically took on this leadership role, stating “Although I am an avid collector myself, I am very happy to also bring wonderful books and artwork to the St. Louis audience that can find homes in private and public collections here!”

In the past two years Anne has joined the newly formed Advisory Board for the St. Louis Mercantile Library Art Museum where she chairs the Collections Development Committee, as well as agreeing to take over as chair of the Library’s Print Fair Committee. The Print Fair, now in its seventh year, has been chaired with great success by Ruth Bryant, former Mercantile Board president, who chose to pass the baton and recommended Anne for the position based on her love of art, her solid network in the St. Louis community, and her personal interest in collecting art. Anne enthusiastically took on this leadership role, stating “Although I am an avid collector myself, I am very happy to also bring wonderful books and artwork to the St. Louis audience that can find homes in private and public collections here!”

The Library is fortunate to have such a long-standing supporter who has given generously of her time, talents and her collections. Anne’s feelings on the Library say it all, “The Mercantile Library is a fabulous treasure that should be familiar to every St. Louisan!”

Spotlight on Members: Anne Leners

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Spotlight on Staff: Valenda Curtis, Assistant Curator

Valenda Curtis, Assistant Curator, joined the Mercantile Library staff in November, 2011. She brings to the Library a BA in Art History from Indiana University, Bloomington and an MA in History with a certificate in Museum Studies from the University of Missouri – St. Louis. As a graduate student assistant she gained experience in Past Perfect, the collections management software used by the Mercantile Library and the University. At Historic Annapolis she served as a Museum Intern developing educational programs, providing tours, assisting with docent training and conducting collections inventories at the William Paca House and Garden. This position led to her promotion to Historic Annapolis Museum Education and Collections Management Fellow, where she had a significant role in collections management, provenance research and exhibit installation. As Assistant Curator for the Mercantile Library Valenda provides research and collections project support to the Library curators and also works with exhibition research and installation, membership, Reading Room assistance and Mercantile programming. We are happy to have Valenda on the Mercantile Library team!

In Memoriam

Lee J. Niederhuis III member of the St. Louis Mercantile Library Board of Directors passed away suddenly on October 7, 2012. A native of St. Louis, Lee had travelled the world with his work in international banking. Lee retired to St. Louis and pursued his many interests, including art and history. He became known for his research on the Old West, specifically documenting his family’s historic N-N Ranch in Montana and lecturing on the history of the greenhouse industry produced by his family’s company – after which Greenhouse Glass was named – in the 19th century. He published a detailed monograph on the ranch as well as several other articles and won the SPUR Western Writers of America Award in 2011. The Mercantile Library is among the many institutions that benefited from Lee’s generous spirit. Our sympathies are extended to all his family and friends.

The Mercantile’s Audubon Collection – Continuing to Grow after 150 Years

The Mercantile Library’s copy of John James Audubon’s Birds of America has been lovingly preserved by the Mercantile for generations and is a very proud emblem of the fine American and natural history collections which have grown at the Library. It is the Mercantile Library’s single most significant illustrated book. It was inscribed by the artist, a remarkable legacy. The 435 plates which comprise the double elephant folio here are just part of the story which includes other rare books and separate prints, such as the Library’s complete set of the imperially sized folio of The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America, the very rare original volumes of Audubon’s fine memoir, his Ornithological Biography, a set of rare edited composite Havell plates from the first edition of the Birds of America, and a number of what are called pattern proofs, or color proofs of several of Audubon’s designs saved by the printer and preserved here at the Library. The Library even has an extra title page for the double elephant edition of the Birds of America as well as rare notices from contemporary newspapers on Audubon’s exploits.

Recently the Library was able to conduct further conservation treatments to its copy of the Birds of America thanks to the generosity of the Bland Family Foundation, which allowed the Library not only to preserve new versions of damaged plates in the rare volumes, ones which had been severely trimmed and unlike the others, but also to add to its Audubon collection with variant plates, as well as to create special portfolios for rare but loose and ephemeral separate items. This work will greatly enhance the Audubon resources here for study, programs and exhibition and the Mercantile Library is grateful to this very welcome support.

If any members would like to “adopt” an Audubon bird by adding to the Library’s fund for the preservation of it and acquisition of other related Audubon items please call Dr Julie Dunis-Morton at 314-516-6740 and she will be glad to discuss options and needs which will help keep the collection chirping merrily well into the future.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

January 12 Director’s Colloquium: Newspapers at the Mercantile Library. 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

February 9 Director’s Colloquium: Pacific Railroad Surveys, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

March 9 Director’s Colloquium: The First Books of St. Louis and Missouri, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

May 5 – 5 St. Louis Fine Print, Rare Book and Paper Arts Fair

July 12 Mercantile Library Annual Meeting, 2:00 p.m.

A lively crowd enjoys the St. Louis Fine Print, Rare Book and Paper Arts Fair, May 5, 2012.

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Some Other Programs at the Library This Fall:

UMSL's Department of History holds two graduate student colloquia at the Mercantile Library each fall and spring semester. The colloquium gives graduate students the opportunity to present an outline of their proposed thesis projects to their peers and faculty of the history department. Pictured: Students and faculty discuss Ashley Ray's project on Italian Futurism.

The new exhibition Rolling on the River: Images of Work and Industry on America's Rivers featuring artifacts and images of work from the Herman T. Poit National Inland Waterways Library will be on view in the Lobby through June 30, 2013.

Addenda: In late news please note addition to Page 7, second column, second box: the Mercantile Library is also very pleased to welcome Spencer Burke for his return to the St. Louis Mercantile Library Association with other 2013 nominees who have accepted service on the advisory board and to Dave Jump who will be joining the board for the first time. A Warm Mercantile Welcome to them both!
The Steamer *Admiral* and Streckfus Steamers
A Personal View

By Annie Amantea Blum

A new memoir and authoritative history of the great river icon and excursion vessel

144 pages, with 62 photographs from the Captain William F. and Betty Streckfus Carroll Collection at the Herman T. Pott National Inland Waterways Library

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