

Legacy of a One-Man Book Maker

Randy Silverman & Cathleen Baker

Late in 1983, Dr. Gregory Thompson, newly appointed head of Special Collections at the University of Utah's Marriott Library received a call from a local gentleman interested in selling off some books. In what would become a commonplace occurrence for Thompson over the next 27 years, he and Margaret Landesman (head of Collection Development) made the short trek off campus to the owner's home to appraise the collection's significance for the library.

The books in question were in the owner's basement and, while nice – copies of Limited Edition Club publications that paired prints by contemporary fine artists like Matisse and Picasso with important authors such as Joyce and Aristophanes – they were not very useful for building the Special Collection. However, wandering into a back room Landesman came out holding three fine press books by Dard Hunter that caused quite a stir among the browsers. Thompson had not yet encountered Dard Hunter's work but it was plain from the quality of the handmade materials these were works of distinction. The binding for *Old Papermaking* (1923) had paste paper sides, the text was printed in a very elegant black ink, and above all, the paper was reminiscent of the Renaissance.

The owner said he had inherited the Hunter books from Lionel Anderson, a close friend who had lived in the rural town of Stockton, Utah during the 1930s when he collected these fine volumes. He produced correspondence between Hunter and Anderson indicating the transactions had been quite formal but personal and Thompson noted the alignment of the subject with the object. Like spirit made flesh, these books on hand papermaking were printed on the most luxurious paper, and from the prospectuses it was clear these limited editions were created by hand despite the original asking price of \$27.50 to \$37.50. The books commanded great respect and raised for Thompson a question he began turning over and over with relish – how did these novel publications correspond with his vision of collection development and more to the point, what criteria

made a collection special? As a trained historian, he began to recognize this inquiry might shadow him for the rest of his career.

With a sense that Dard Hunter's books represented the special character he sought for the library, Thompson approached the Friends of the Library to seek support to acquire what turned out to be a total of four volumes for what at the time seemed like a tremendous amount of money -- but that in retrospect represented one of the bargains of the decade. Members of the Friends were pleased with his analysis of the books' significance and came forward to fund their purchase. It seemed that everyone who saw these books was enticed to begin scrutinizing their execution and their exquisite simplicity, which in turn, inspired even closer examination. It was difficult to explain, but the process of visual interrogation inevitably prompted imitation.

This convergence of appreciation with the urge to replicate the craft experience for oneself overlapped with the library's contacting Bay Area fine press printers Dorothy and Lewis Allen who were contemplating retirement and looking for a home for the equipment and accompanying ephemera that represented their life's work -- the Allen Press. Acquisition of the Allen Press's type and working 1846 Columbian hand press complemented Special Collections' growing aggregation of fine press books and, in 1984, the founding of its own Red Butte Press. Over the years, the Red Butte Press has brought forth eleven elegantly crafted limited edition books plus a number of unbound works. In turn, the library embraced a comprehensive book arts program that today reaches hundreds of people each year and occupies a 6,050 square foot studio and classroom space on the library's dedicated Special Collections floor.

The passage of years has made clear that Dard Hunter's influence on the library through the acquisition of those four original volumes was the seed that offered new meaning to the question, "What is a Special Collection in Utah?" The subsequent outpouring of book arts creativity has resulted in thousands of students and community members embracing their personal impulse to make books in the manner of the masters. And at the center of that cyclone, Dard Hunter's books continue to provide tangible evidence about what fine

book making is and to infect successive groups year after year with a zeal to reinvigorate the tradition. “Good enough” is rejected as the watchword of little men in grey suits – these students aspire to achieve timeless dreams of perfection most didn’t know they possessed.

From such a humble beginning these accomplishments beg the question, “Who was Dard Hunter, that dormant force waiting to be rediscovered in our virtual age?” Briefly, he remains recognized worldwide as a seminal paper historian of particular significance to the field of hand papermaking. One of his unique attributes was that he was both a practicing papermaker and a hand printer. Following a short but successful career as an Arts and Crafts graphic designer with the Roycrofters (1904–1910), Hunter’s lifelong interest in papermaking began in 1912 when he established a hand papermaking mill in Marlborough-on-Hudson, New York, some five years after the last company in the United States closed its handmade paper department. Hunter’s goal was to provide discriminating artists with domestic handmade paper, but unfortunately his enterprise was unsuccessful, not due to lack of customers, but to the fact that he was working alone and could not fill the orders.

While at Marlborough, Hunter also produced two so-called “one-man books” for the Chicago Society of Etchers, for which he made the paper, designed the typeface, cut the punches and cast the font by hand, as well as printed the books on a Washington-style handpress; he did not do the binding. These books were the first of many that Hunter produced by hand over the next thirty-five years (1915–1950) on the history of hand papermaking as practiced around the world. By 1923 Hunter had established a press named after his home, Mountain House located in Chillicothe, Ohio. (His grandson, Dard III still lives in the house, and visits can be made by appointment.)

In 1925 Hunter visited the South Sea Islands to observe the making of bark “paper.” This was the first of several trips abroad he made to study non-western papermaking. Not only did Hunter faithfully record the techniques he directly observed, but he also collected paper specimens, tools, equipment, and plant materials. Over the next fifteen years,

Hunter visited Japan, Korea, China, Indochina, Siam, and India where he met with Mohandas Gandhi in 1937. By 1939, he had amassed a large collection of papermaking materials and that year, the Dard Hunter Paper Museum opened at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1954 this collection was relocated to the Institute of Paper Chemistry (IPC), Appleton, Wisconsin. Today his collection forms the research component of the Robert C. Williams American Museum of Papermaking at IPC's renamed Institute of Paper Science and Technology, Georgia Tech University in Atlanta. Hunter considered this collection to be his most significant contribution to the history of world papermaking.

In a second effort to provide America with domestic handmade paper, the Dard Hunter and Associates papermill was established in 1930 in Lime Rock, Connecticut. Thwarted by chronic financial and technical problems, but again not due to a lack of orders or interest in this enterprise, the mill ceased production after three years. The bulk of the paper made in the mill over those few years was used by Hunter in the production of his limited edition books on papermaking published by the Mountain House Press from 1932 through 1950.

In addition to his lovely hand-printed books on papermaking, Hunter published trade edition books, the most significant being *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (2nd edition, Knopf, 1947; Dover reprint, 1978), considered by many to be *the* reference book on the topic. In 1958 Knopf also published Hunter's autobiography, *My Life with Paper*, a highly entertaining retelling of his trips to foreign lands between the two world wars.

Throughout Hunter's life, hundreds of articles about paper and his passion for it appeared in trade journals, popular magazines, and newspapers, written by him and by others about him. Countless Americans gained an appreciation for handmade paper and papermaking through these articles published from the mid-1920s until his death in 1966.

Over the past 30 years, due largely to Hunter's example as a practitioner and his scholarly publications, the craft of hand papermaking has enjoyed a renaissance. Today there are a number of papermaking workshops available at institutions such as Dieu Donn  Papermill (New York City), Penland School of Craft (North Carolina), Paper & Book Intensive (various venues), and Hollander's School of Book and Paper Arts (Ann Arbor, Michigan), as well as part of academic book arts programs at University of Iowa (Iowa City); Columbia College (Chicago), University of the Arts (Philadelphia), University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa), Scripps College (Claremont, California), and Oregon College of Art and Craft (Portland), to name a few. Children are especially captivated by the process, and the Robert C. Williams American Museum of Papermaking has developed a popular program that introduces children to papermaking. Once one has made paper, it becomes a more easily understood and appreciated product of modern life. No one looks in the same way at common paper products once he or she has formed a sheet of paper by hand.

In the area of preservation and conservation of the world's cultural heritage, most of which was drawn, written, and printed on paper, Hunter's work has been indispensable in identifying papers from different eras and countries. Understanding how paper was made and the nature of its components yields vital clues for determining how it may or may not deteriorate -- information critical for the preservation of billions of paper-based artifacts in the world's museums, archival collections and libraries.

Although Hunter's focus was on hand papermaking, a few, inspired by his work, have expanded their interest to include machine-made paper. Fortunately, the availability of tours at modern papermills has increased over the past few decades, which has only whetted our appetites for more information about the processes. The popularity of papermaking—both hand- and machine-made—and an ever-increasing interest in the industry's history can largely be attributed to the work of Dard Hunter and to the many he continues to inspire. As scholarship in the history of papermaking increases, we acknowledge that Hunter's work necessarily revealed only a portion of what he knew and

what can be known. While the enquiry is ongoing, his legacy is assured at the University of Utah and numerous places worldwide.

KEY PUBLICATIONS BY DARD HUNTER

Books

Handmade Paper and its Watermarks: A Bibliography. 1916. Reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1967.

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My Life with Paper: An Autobiography. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.

Selected Articles

“Ancient Paper-Making.” *The Miscellany* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1915).

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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Captions for Illustrations:

Left: The 1922 Bull's Head and Branch watermark for *Old Papermaking* (1923). This wire watermark, probably made by Hunter, was sewn to the antique-laid hand papermaking mould made for him in England. The paper used in the 1923 book and two subsequent books was also handmade in England. Right: The printer's mark on the title page of *Old Papermaking*. The number of leaves found in this printer's mark (3) and in ones on later title pages refer to the number of books printed using Hunter's handcast type. *Old Papermaking* was the third book; the first two were printed for Chicago Society of Etchers's books (1915-1916).