

# Row, Row, Row Your... *Book*

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**GROSSMAN, Carol Porter.** *The History of the Limited Editions Club.* New Castle: Oak Knoll Press, 2017. 4to. Hardbound. xi, 268pp. Illustrations. **\$125.00.**

**KAGAN, Neil, HYSLOP, Stephen G.** *Atlas of World War II: History's Greatest Conflict Revealed Through Rare Wartime Maps and New Cartography.* Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2018. Foreword by Kenneth W. Rendell. Folio. Hardbound, dust jacket. 256pp. Extensive color illustrations and maps. **\$45.00.**

Imagine conducting an orchestra consisting of, say, twenty-four vocal quartettes each singing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. Each quartette sings in a different language, each has a distinctive sound, each starts at a different time and sings to a different beat. And oh yes, quartettes drop out regularly and other quartettes take their place.

Sound like any maestro's nightmare? But this is the repertoire that George Macy performed as founder and publisher of the Limited Editions Club for a quarter century. Think of each quartette as the creation of one book from concept through finished product – the endless delays, conflicts, budget crises and other setbacks, plus the string of paper suppliers, designers, typesetters, printers, illustrators, binders and others with which one works to create a

fine press book. And remember that Macy arranged a *different* press, illustrator, designer, paper supplier and so on to fit every title. Why twenty-four quartettes? Because once Macy survived those tough first couple years with no backlog to fall back on when emergencies arose and titles had to be juggled, he preferred to have at least two years' worth of titles "in the pipeline." Hence the cacophony of twenty-four quartettes singing that unnerving but catchy musical round.

I'm reminded of the accomplishments of this remarkable and little-known man every winter when I reread my copy of the LEC edition of John Greenleaf Whittier's *Snow-Bound*, usually in front of a blazing fire on a day when we are indeed snowed in. It pleases me to learn from Carol Porter Grossman, author of *The History of the Limited Editions Club*, that "*Snow-Bound* was always a favorite of George's" (although sadly "apparently only a few typographically astute Club members seemed to really appreciate the book" – plus my non-typographically-astute self).

*The History of the Limited Editions Club* represents, shockingly, the first full-length account of this important American fine press. As Grossman notes in her introduction, "The Limited Editions Club is probably the only major fine press/publishing house that has not been the subject of an extensive historical study." Having been involved in the publication of Ralph Newman's *Great and Good Books: A Bibliographical Catalogue of The Limited Editions Club, 1929-1985* in 1989 while employed by the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop founder, I've been admiring and handling LECs for three decades. This bibliography is little more than a glorified checklist with an introduction by Mortimer J. Adler, LECish in appearance and in that it's limited to 500 numbered copies (LECs were usually 1500) signed by Adler. The LEC itself published two bibliographies of its titles (in 1959 and 1985), but other than journal articles and chapters in books about fine presses LEC scholarship is largely a gaping void – until now.



For those not familiar with the Limited Editions Club, it began in the unfortunate year 1929 and after changing hands in the past few decades finally ceased not too many years ago. To my mind, the LEC brought fine press publishing into the 20<sup>th</sup> century by applying modern business, scheduling and marketing techniques to an ethereal, highly-specialized publishing niche too often governed by whim, fancy and other nontraditional business methods. A one-year subscription got you one slipcased book per month (one “Series,” as Macy called it) at a cost of about \$10 per book. That may sound cheap today but for a typical book in 1929 was mighty spendy -- adjusted for inflation that’s about \$144 per book. Each book was limited to 1500 numbered copies signed usually by the artist, designer or author (or some combination) and each book differed substantially from every other offering – these weren’t cookie-cutter productions. Some are slim affairs; others are thick and consist of more than one volume. Many of the most renowned illustrators, printers and designers of the day were employed at one time or another by the LEC.

“So,” continues Grossman, “why isn’t the Club better known and recognized for its fine work? And why is it sometimes even scorned as a publisher?” Aye – there’s the rub! She does offer up some theories for this. “. . . many bibliophiles mocked fine press books as old hacks dressed up in shiny new harness. . . Many booksellers and collectors myopically viewed the LEC as just another book club.” I don’t think she quite puts her finger on it. It’s truly unfortunate that the name bore the word “Club.” For some this represents membership in an exclusive group, but at this time the Book of the Month Club was in its infancy, so the word bore negative associations to poor quality low-brow mainstream fare – anathema to the elitism and downright snobbery that sometimes pervades the world of fine press printing. The very notion that inspired fine press books could be issued like clockwork on a monthly schedule, not as the Muse struck—well, it *offended*. Picture Groucho Marx’s 1930s film foil, society grand dame Margaret Dumont, whispering “Well! I never!” Don’t target fine wine enthusiasts by naming your vineyard Bill’s Bubbly.

The lion’s share of *The History of the Limited Editions Club* consists of Grossman taking the reader on a long journey, title by title and series by series (that is, year by year), through the LEC’s transformation from audacious newcomer in the fine press publishing world to respected mover-and-shaker, with ups and downs and bumps galore every step of the way. Her style is engaging and straightforward, as the multi-faceted subject matter demands. I can only imagine the amount of research and legwork involved in producing such an interesting, instructive narrative when faced with George Macy’s frenetic publishing schedule and the other endeavors the Club branched out into.

Grossman chronicles the birth of the LEC’s first title, Swift’s *Travels of Lemuel Gulliver*, in particular detail – and a long, painful delivery it was. This “torturous series of misunderstandings” ended with a handsome volume delivered in the nick of time, though fraught with delays, cost overruns and sundry snafus such as colophon leaves signed by the book’s illustrator (Alexander

King) that couldn't be used and a Baltimore printer who refused to ever work with Macy again. Their second title, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, while outwardly handsome, utilized a delicate design that clashed with the poet's manly prose, and Macy foolishly used the slim text of the 1855 first edition, not the greatly-enlarged later editions that the public knows and loves. By the third title you might say that Macy and the Club were getting into the groove. "George recognized that the pressure of not having a backup book to slip into a faltering schedule was intolerable," writes Grossman. "Once the Club was well launched, he always strove to have at last two to three years' worth of books at some stage of development." By the two-year mark – and remember that the first title rolled out as the stock market crashed – Macy had accomplished what few thought possible: "He was producing fine books, and even more important, in the early years of the Depression he was paying promptly for all the services he needed... He was fulfilling his dream: producing beautiful editions of classics at reasonable prices... The negative critics were mostly stilled... The constant stream of well-known illustrators, fine printers, and exceptional designers from both continents set the Limited Editions Club on course."

One pleasure of press histories for this reviewer are the many mysteries, the unanswered questions that can finally be put to rest. I had often wondered, for instance, about the contribution to the LEC of a designer whose work is often associated with it – the great Frederic Warde. Grossman sings his praise loudly, for his crucial role in the First and Second Series has been overlooked. Macy wanted a European focus to his Second Series, and without Warde's many contacts in the world of European printers, illustrators and designers most of these titles would never have come together.

George appreciated how important Warde's work was to the foundation of the LEC, but this critical project has been largely unknown. In three months, Warde accomplished an amazing amount of work, diplomatically negotiating with the best printers and artists of Europe. While some were

enormously cooperative... several were prima donnas... Warde's insight on personalities was extremely useful to George. This colossal effort on behalf of the LEC must be considered among the most impressive achievements in Warde's unfortunately short career...

Grossman also solves the question of *Notre Dame de Paris* being published in *softbound* form. It was simply "the French manner" and Macy mistakenly thought that "enclosing the book in both a sturdy wrap-around chemise and a slipcase to protect it" would appease his subscribers. Not so – us Americans prefer our books hardbound. When subscribers received this paperback pair "the howls of protest could be heard in George's office." He promptly offered hardbound binding options for a fee. Only 150 took him up on this offer, but Macy mistakenly said in print "that most of the copies were rebound" – and thus began the long-held belief that hardbound sets (of which there were only 150) were common and softbound sets (of which there were 1,350) were scarce! *The History of the Limited Editions Club* solves many such issues.

Autograph enthusiasts with a bookish bent as well as bibliophiles fond of autographs have long found the Limited Editions Club titles with their signed, numbered colophon leaves a secure source for signatures of often-forged artists such as Picasso and Matisse. (Beware, though, signatures placed in *Heritage Press* versions of LEC titles. This was the low-end mass-market edition begun by Macy, neither signed nor numbered – they're the "poor man's LEC," smaller and far cheaper and definitely *not* fine press productions.) Another eagerly-collected rarity of which LECs are a good source is their edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1932) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1935) signed by Lewis Carroll's inspiration, Alice Hargreaves. Her signed material is quite scarce, and it's nice to learn for the first time how this signed edition came about:

As it happened, 1932 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lewis Carroll's birth, and a worldwide conference on Carroll was to be held at Columbia University. The guest of honor was to be Alice Hargreaves... In advance of her arrival in New York, George negotiated with her son for her to sign copies of his forthcoming *Alice* for all members who were willing to pay an extra \$1.50. About 1,000 members mailed in their payments. This was the first time that Alice Hargreaves allowed her name to be used for a commercial venture.

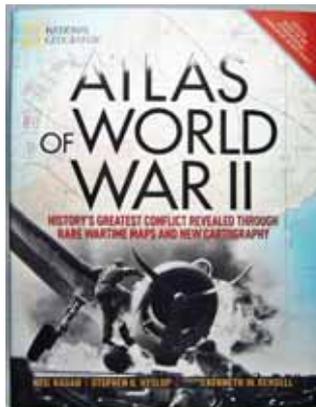
Another autographic rarity about which James Joyce collectors gnaw their knuckles is the LECs Matisse-signed edition of *Ulysses*. For an additional \$2.00 – that's right, *TWO BUCKS* – members could receive one of 250 copies that Joyce himself had also signed. Today one of these Joyce and Matisse signed copies is the most expensive and sought after of all LEC titles, with fine examples usually selling in the \$20,000-\$30,000 range. Later she did the same for *Through the Looking-Glass*, though "the copies would be somewhat limited because of her health. She did complete the signings, but passed away before the book was published." Only 500 copies of this title are signed by her.

One bizarr-o typesetting glitch I feel compelled to point out: Dozens of times throughout this elegant production book titles include an unnecessary apostrophe. *The Marble' Faun*, *The Narrative' of Arthur Gordon Pym*, *A Tale' of Two Cities*, *The Little' Flowers of St. Francis*, *Printing on Three' Continents*, *Notre' Dame' de' Paris* (!) and many others – whether simple typo or some weird affectation I don't know. It only occurs on book titles and isn't consistent. It's the only visual annoyance that catches the eye of this former English teacher in an otherwise lovely, lovely volume.

Grossman's *History of the Limited Editions Club* impresses me with its ability to unravel the convoluted tale of more than five hundred unique volumes published over eight decades without tying

itself into knots. Anyone who's worked in publishing knows what a tough nut George Macy attempted to crack and how remarkable is his (and his successors) success. Why a person with delicate health and lifelong digestive issues would subject himself to such an ulcer-inducing schedule is beyond me – but book lovers everywhere are grateful he did. He died in 1956 at age 56, having miraculously kept his brainchild afloat for more than twenty-five years, and his wife Helen valiantly stepped in and kept it going. Eventually it changed hands a couple more times and morphed into a publisher of *livres d'artistes* art volumes featuring the work of Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Jacob Lawrence and others with tiny limitations and stiff price tags. Grossman chronicles this eighty-year roller coaster ride superbly in this handsome and authoritative account.

Some years ago a local lady asked if I'd like to see some World War Two maps that her elderly father, who'd been a flight navigator, had kept as war souvenirs. The tight roll she brought contained dozens of near-pristine USAF maps of England and various locales on the Continent, all stamped "Secret" and most bearing neatly penciled flight paths and navigational markings. She was relieved we purchased them – had grown tired of using them as gift-wrapping paper, she confided – and they now reside happily in an Ivy League university's map collection.



So the latest use to which Kenneth Rendell has put some jaw-dropping artifacts from his International Museum of World War II outside Boston resonates particularly well. Few better appreciate World War Two artifacts than Rendell, whose half-century collection is “the world’s largest and most comprehensive collection of World War II artifacts, including 7,500 on exhibit and more than 500,000 artifacts and documents in its archives.” Starting with his memorable *World War II: Saving the Reality* in 2009, Rendell and others have published several titles using his extraordinary collection as a jumping-off point. Neil Kagan and Stephen Hyslop’s new *Atlas of World War II: History’s Greatest Conflict Revealed Through Rare Wartime Maps and New Cartography*, introduced by Rendell, is the second title this pair have authored that showcase items from what’s undoubtedly the preeminent WW2 collection in this country and possibly the world (their first title being *The Secret History of World War II: Spies, Codes & Covert Operations*, 2016).

When Rendell writes in his foreword that “This National Geographic *Atlas of World War II* may contain more military intelligence than ever gathered in one book,” I sense no hyperbole. “This is the only atlas that combines authoritative new maps and rare wartime maps to give readers a comprehensive view of World War II.” A new sub-genre indeed, and might effective it is.

In about 250 large pages densely packed with new maps, old maps, artifacts and historical photographs reminiscent of *National Geographic Magazine*, Kagan and Hyslop move swiftly but thoroughly through the war. They begin with Germany’s many-tentacled opening gambits in the east and west from Britain to the Balkans and Russia. Focus then switches to Japan and the Pacific (1941-43) before returning to Europe’s various fronts (the Atlantic, North Africa, Italy, the skies over Europe and finally Russia) from 1942 to 1944. Meaty closing chapters address “Victory Over Germany” (1944-45) and “Defeating Japan” (1943-45). Each of these five sections opens with a useful and detailed timeline well worth studying. Theirs is a sensible approach that surveys the

war's worldwide sprawl in an orderly fashion that gives the reader (especially newbies to this daunting field) a clearer understanding of a war so far-reaching it can be challenging to grasp.

Few organizations make better maps than National Geographic, and an abundance of their unbeatable color maps ranging from specific engagements to huge theatres of war are the star of *Atlas of World War II*. Clearly labeled and featuring helpful keys, with troop positions and movements well marked, they are easy to interpret and a pleasure to peruse. There's even a fitting nod to the role that their magazine insert maps played in the war. Kagan and Hyslop note one instance of a National Geographic map saving the day in 1942 near Guadalcanal, and quote Admiral Nimitz stating that "your maps proved invaluable to the forces in the Pacific. Your charts were in wide service in planning work, particularly for areas which were not adequately covered by the official maps available." The large Pacific Ocean map pictured and other National Geographic maps of WW2 vintage are still readily available and inexpensive today.

But the old maps – *ah, the historic maps!* – are the heart and soul that draw us paper people to this book. Their immediacy to the terrain depicted feels downright palpable. Ken describes them:

Their handwritten notations, tracing developments day by day, place readers alongside those commanders and planners, who could not be sure how their maps would change as the action unfolded. . . . Some of the most important maps in the collection – those with handwritten notes and markings – were acquired from aides who received them as souvenirs from top commanders or held on to the maps when the action moved forward and they were no longer needed.

Facing Ken's foreword is one of the most provocative maps of the book, a seven foot by eight foot Royal Air Force table map with

varnished wooden border of southwest England (“literally saved from the wrecking ball by a worker”) – we see these in World War Two films, usually in large darkened war rooms with officers huddled about them and female juniors in smart uniforms moving about tiny model ships and planes with long poles that resemble pool cues, appropriate as the map is larger than a billiard table. This poignant survivor is clearly whitened near its center from heavy rubbing.

Dozens of cartographic rarities pepper these pages. Among them, to note a few favorites: Classified German 1941 military atlases featuring not-so-accurate foldout maps of major Russian cities in readiness for their not-so-secret Operation Barbarossa invasion; an exceptionally soiled and sullied, truly war-torn crudely printed Marine-issued map of Guadalcanal with a hand-drawn closeup on the verso with stylized palm trees representing vast jungles; the yellowed 1943 journal of a USAAF pilot in which he draws the Solomon Islands and his flight path for the successful mission to shoot down the plan carrying Pearl Harbor mastermind Admiral Yamamoto; a German-issued 1944 propaganda leaflet captioned “Death’s Head!” showing a leering skull atop a simplified map of the Italian coast south of Rome, eye holes positioned over Anzio and Nettuno (R.I.P. my mother’s older brother Richard, one of three siblings who fought and the only who died, felled there by machine gun fire at age 19); two stacks of “bomb-damage assessment maps,” dramatic map-like before-and-after aerial reconnaissance photographs depicting numerous German cities with most-destroyed areas outlined in red and black and less-destroyed residential areas outlined in green – chilling.

As expected, a fine array of superb non-map artifacts, not just paper but also three-dimensional, also populate these pages. Once more, here are a few favorites out of many: A forged identity card for a French resistance fighter of amazingly deceptive quality; an extraordinarily rare “navigational slide computer... used to determine a U-boat’s position based on the stars” and bearing no

resemblance to what we think of as a computer; one of Rendell's most famous showpieces, one of only a few surviving Enigma cipher machines, the "breaking" of which so crippled Doenitz's North Atlantic U-boat fleet he withdrew them; a quaint little arrangement of mini-compasses hidden inside badges, buttons, even pipe stems and tiny magnetized steel strips that when balanced on a belt buckle pointed true north; a fascinating assortment of map-making tools (proportional divider, ten-point divider, rolling disc planimeter, dashed-line instrument, pantograph and so on) used by the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) cartography department; and some lethal spy gear of the French Resistance such as a nonsense garrote in nifty carrying case, a knife whose handle concealed a suicide capsule and the scariest-looking brass knuckles you'll ever see. A clear favorite of Rendell are some P.O.W. escape maps, sometimes printed maps on tissue or silk from the Allies smuggled in and other times primitive hand-drawn affairs made by the prisoners themselves, handed down and improved upon by subsequent escapees.

Reasonably priced and well made as you'd expect of any National Geographic production, Kagan and Hyslop's *Atlas of World War II* will delight any diehard WW2 buff, educate those less militarily inclined and thrill both parties with the formidable wealth of Ken Rendell's poignant artifacts.