

Book Reviews: A Worthy Sequel and a First of Its Kind

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GRAFFAGNINO, J. Kevin, AUSTIN, Terese M., and QUASHNIE, Sara (editors). *Americana is a Creed: Notable Twentieth-Century Collectors, Dealers, and Curators*. Ann Arbor: William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, 2019. 4to. Hardbound. xiv, 405pp. Frontispiece, numerous illustrations. **\$100-on-up library donation.**

JOHNSON, Kevin R. *The Celluloid Paper Trail: Identification and Description of Twentieth Century Film Scripts*. New Castle: Oak Knoll Press, 2019. 4to. Hardbound. 232pp. Frontispiece, numerous illustrations. **\$65.00.**

It seems that the wish I expressed in my review of *The Pioneer Americanists: Early Collectors, Dealers, and Bibliographers* in the Summer 2018 issue (“Fingers crossed that Graffagnino is paving the way for a sequel volume down the road”) has come true: *Americana is a Creed: Notable Twentieth-Century Collectors, Dealers, and Curators* is a big, beefy book as sprawling and exciting as its subject and a cracker jack follow-up to its big, beefy precursor.

In typically forward-thinking fashion, the editors “want to make clear that we do not regard either of these books as definitive studies.” They continue,

Our goal with both projects has been to make a worthwhile contribution to the history of Americana and to provide an evocative introduction to the outstanding men and women in the Clements Library’s area of specialization. We hope that readers who find something of interest in these two volumes will visit the Clements and our peer institutions around the country for additional research, since our individual and collective holdings are rich in primary source material on all aspects of Americana as vocation and evocation alike.

Nothing like a shout out for this outstanding library and its compadres such as the Lilly Library, Newberry Library and others. I’m pleased that they anticipate “the next volume in this series” – necessarily a century down the road!

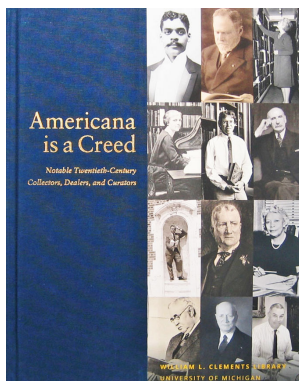
As in *The Pioneer Americanists*, Clements Library director Kevin Graffagnino (now enjoying well-earned retirement) provides a meaty, enjoyable introduction that ably carries the reader through the dramatic changes the 20th century brought to the field of Americana. The major collectors and their interests changed with the new century, new collecting fields such as African American history were established, great institutional collections came into their own, a new breed of dealers came about – and then again after World War Two major shifts came about and the process repeated itself.

But rather than rephrase the accolades of my earlier review let me just sum up that *Americana is a Creed* does for the 20th century what *The Pioneer Americanists* did for the 19th century. The individuals profiled in this book (32 in number versus 16 in *The Pioneer Americanists*) consist largely of excerpts from autobiographical writings and occasionally biographical essays,

each preceded by brief introductions – and since this book covers twice as many figures as its predecessor it’s almost double the length. They are presented chronologically by year of birth, starting with Edward Everett Ayer (1841-1927) and closing with the late great William Reese (1955-2018).

Keeping in mind that almost all of these 32 figures wore different Americana hats at different times in their lives or even concurrently — David Randall was a bookseller before becoming a librarian and Wright Howes a bookseller and bibliographer – I’m surprised to note that dealers somewhat dominate here (14 in number), followed by collectors (9), librarians (5) and bibliographers (4). Some actually participated in all four of these areas, so my category count is fairly vague.

Every reader immersed in Americana will have an opinion as to who should and shouldn’t be included in this “Who’s Who.” I’m sure the editors’ selection process got lively and arduous at times. Just to throw in my two bits, I’m tickled that Margaret Bingham Stillwell made the cut – one of only five women represented (though Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine Stern are treated as a single unit). Her delightfully titled *Librarians Are Human* is a fine account of a woman making her way in what had usually been a male profession. I’m equally happy that the dynamic bookselling duo of Rostenberg and Stern are found here – no one cranked out more books-about-books together or individually than “the ladies” and no author’s titles have been reviewed more often in this column than theirs. On the other hand, would that autograph dealer Mary Benjamin were here (although she’s mentioned), or Chicago’s renowned Hamill and Barker (Frances Hamill and Margery Barker) – not to mention their protégé, the much-missed Terence Tanner. I’m sure that legendary Los Angeles collector Estelle Doheny (prime character in *The Lost*



Gutenberg, reviewed in the Fall 2019 issue) was considered, though she's remembered for fields outside Americana and was mainly a reclusive collector without broad influence.

The subject whose presence may raise eyebrows, though, is Texas dealer John Jenkins. His many and varied misdeeds are too well known to deserve discussion here. Suffice it to say that the just-released biography by dealer Michael Vinson, *Bluffing Texas Style*, reveals the extent of those misdeeds in greater horrific detail than ever before reported. Calvin Trillin's 1989 *New Yorker* profile included in *Americana is a Creed*, published shortly after Jenkins' death and before many of his crimes had been proven, seems gentle by comparison. But the wide influence of his salesmanship and usefulness of reference works such as *Basic Texas Books* cannot be denied and was surely a factor in their editorial decision.

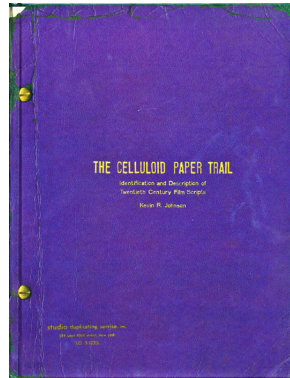
And lastly the subjects whose *absence* may raise eyebrows should be noted: dealer A.S.W. Rosenbach ("Dr. R") and collector A. Edward Newton. I must confess to surprise at not seeing their names among these 32. Rosenbach's gangplank comings and goings and auction record-setting were reported as avidly as celebrity gossip today, and he cranked out more than a few books about books – some of them ghostwritten by E. Millicent Sowerby, subject of chapter sixteen. The volume of literature by and about Rosenbach and Newton is sizeable, however, so perhaps it was felt both were well-known enough that others ought to be given the spotlight for a change – plus both are Anglophiles and general antiquarians more so than diehard Americanists, which I'm sure was a factor. It's a bold decision to omit them, still, one which some will welcome and others regret.

Other names come to mind who may have been suggested – Abraham Lincoln Book Shop founder Ralph G. Newman, for instance, who was quite a marketer and popularizer who helped fuel the fire for Civil War and Lincolniana from the 1940s through the Civil War centennial. It's challenging with more recent figures still fresh in many dealer and collector minds, especially when issues

may have tarnished careers later in life – same is true of autograph dealer Charles Hamilton, although he made the list of 32. Enough second-guessing of the editors’ selection process, though.

Americana is a Creed is a page-turner as Americana goes. Its title, by the way, is a brilliantly apropos sentiment that originates with one of my all-time favorite booksellers, the incredible Charles F. Heartman of Hattiesburg, Mississippi via Braunschweig, Germany: “American is not a hobby, it is a creed.” *Americana is a Creed* will resonate with anyone who appreciates its religious-like fervor, and for those who don’t – well, this may just make a believer out of you.

A first-of-its-kind always excites and fuels speculation. Whenever a collecting field about which little is written becomes the subject of a bibliography or collector’s guide, expectation rise: Will a stampede of new collectors enter the fold and drive up prices? If written by a collector, will the book cause a price spike and the author be priced out of his or her own field? If written by a dealer, will



it prove a boon to business? Or will the book be appreciated by devotees and ignored by all others, causing little effect on the market? Most likely something in the middle will occur: The niche field will become better understood, some dealers may pay closer attention to it, more collectors will pursue it and more examples may enter the market perhaps at more robust prices.

Kevin Johnson’s *The Celluloid Paper Trail: Identification and Description of Twentieth Century Film Scripts* is just such a case. Neither bibliography nor collector’s guide, it is a well-illustrated description of the many forms a film script may take and “a means

for catalogers in my shop to be able to write a description properly, and with a well-defined style....” Because digital technology has pretty much made the film script obsolete, “this volume focuses exclusively on the 20th century, and more specifically the 1920s to the late 1980s...” This Baltimore dealer, founder of Royal Books and “cinophile to the core,” shows some serious cinematic chops here in taking a collecting field only vaguely understood by most and presenting its intricacies in this clear, well-written guide.

Filmmaking is a dauntingly complex process, one quickly learns, the paper trail it creates no less so. Johnson’s grasp of its inner workings helps untangle the mass of product to the dabbler or the complete novice, whether dealer or collector. Luckily I happen to fall into all categories of his prime intended audience: “the experienced bookseller, collector, or cataloger of 20th century rare books and manuscripts. It is written in the 20th century bookseller’s vernacular, and assumes a fair amount of resident knowledge common to that framework.” But I wouldn’t discourage anyone who doesn’t fall into any of these categories but just likes film scripts from diving into *The Celluloid Paper Trail*.

The learning curve in any new or developing field is necessarily steep. Every collecting field has its own vocabulary and specialized terminology to befuddle newcomers, and film scripts are no exception. One quickly learns that to describe a film script as simply “film script” can be incredibly quite imprecise and unsatisfactory. Even those among us who have been handling film scripts for many years will gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of film scripts, along with scores of other useful tidbits, from *The Celluloid Paper Trail*.

“No one script draft stand alone when it comes to understanding the film it is associated with,” writes Johnson. “A script is made not just to be read, but to be *used and modified*.... The lengthy and often complex process a script may go through before it becomes a film eventually involves producers, studio executives, and often altogether new writers....” He describes and explains the story

script, treatment script, draft script, final draft script, composite script, estimating script, shooting script, revised shooting script, revised shooting script, partial script, setup script, post-production script, souvenir script, for your consideration script and others – each of these created for specific purposes and many of them with subcategories. Clearly “film script” is a far more elaborate beast than many have imagined.

Invaluable nuts-and-bolts data fills my single favorite chapter, “Physical Components of the Script, Printing Processes, and Types of Annotations.” Johnson methodically lays out “The major physical elements of a script” such as binding elements, wrappers, added elements and rubber stamping. One enlightening illustration depicts every way in which scripts are all bound up, fasteners shown side by side: “metal brads, metal screw brads, interior binding with metal brads, flat metal brads, side stapled, prong binding, plastic Velo binding, and perfect binding.” Film script buffs will find this demonstration instructive and fascinating. The large sampling of full-page images of different wrapper styles and materials is likewise outstanding. Printing processes employed can be challenging for the novice to differentiate – can you tell a mimeographed page from an offset-printed page? – but others are straightforward. Most have little difficulty distinguishing between a carbon copy on onion skin paper and a xerox copy.

Dealers in particular will enjoy Johnson’s chapters “A Method of Analysis” and “Writing a Description.” This kind of insider info is often shared among colleagues. It’s always refreshing to follow another dealer’s reasoning as he untangles the mysteries inherent in any script, studies its history and makes deductions regarding its creation. The template he presents for the cataloguing of film scripts is clean and efficient, though dealers would likely use this for inspiration, retaining what they like and modifying it to suit their taste and purpose.

The Celluloid Paper Trail is handsomely produced and attractively designed by this country’s premiere publisher of books

about books. Hardbound in a faux film script binding resembling worn heavy wrappers (typical edge chip at upper left corner) with two metal screw brads near the spine, it is also heavily illustrated with superb color images throughout, many full page. It's not without its quirks, though. The table of contents page numbers the chapters and their titles, but gives no page numbers – funky intentional design decision or unfortunate oversight? If looking for, say, Chapter 7, “Standard Wrapper Styles During the Studio System Era (1922-1985),” and you don't know on which page it starts, you could at least count on a book's *running heads* above or below the text block to tell which chapter you're in – but *The Celluloid Paper Trail* also doesn't have running heads. So you have to flip page by page until you find the opening of Chapter 7 – page 158 if you're curious.

But these are minor glitches in a wonderful must-have reference that anyone interested in these provocative by-products of films. *The Celluloid Paper Trail* is sure to be considered a cornerstone in the film scripts field and essential reading if one wants to buy or sell in this field.

Autograph folk too will want to take note, whether or not they're into film scripts or are even bookish, for a good many film scripts are found signed or annotated by actors, directors and others of interest associated with a particular film. *The Celluloid Paper Trail* shows “Orson Welles' working script for *Touch of Evil* (1959), with annotations, deletions, corrections, and various additions affixed with staples, glue, and Scotch tape.... John Wayne's working script from *The Searchers* (1956)” as well as scripts signed by Van Heflin, Charles Bickford, Darryl Zanuck. Opportunities to collect abound among film scripts, but the more knowledge you bring to the equation the better off you are.