

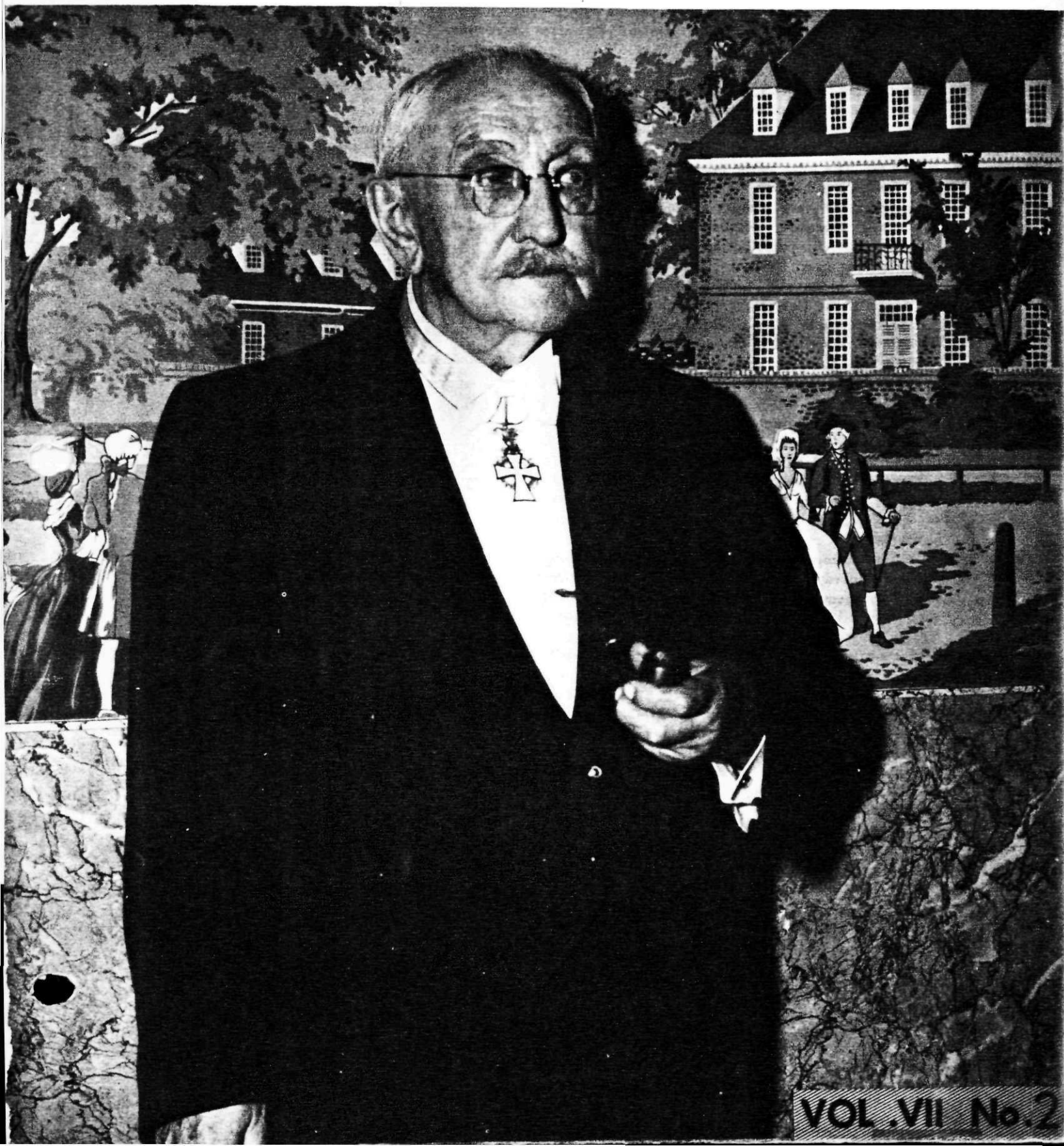
This document came from a binder of notable Elmhurst, IL citizens that was kept by librarians for many years. No further information is available about where the information came from. 2010



Bay, Jens Christian

*Elmhurst - 1929  
Biographies*

# The American BOOK COLLECTOR



VOL. VII No. 2

## The Editor's Say So!

Dr. J. Christian Bay is 85. His name is known by every librarian and rare book dealer in the land, and by a great many abroad. Many bibliophiles and everyday collectors have read his popular bibliophilic and scholarly books; a few are lucky to possess them.

His *Handful of Western Books* I, II and III, have been the guide to U.S.-iana collectors for twenty years. The first volume appeared at Christmas, 1935 "Privately Printed for the Friends of Walter M. Hill," in an edition of 350 copies (Torch Press). Below the title page is the proverb: "'Tis youth in man that makes history."

Dr. Bay has made history since he was born in Rudkøbing, Denmark, October 12, 1871. This may be exaggerating a point but his school years began when he was four. He took "Realeksamen" at 15; studied assiduously under Professor Rasmus Pedersen at the University of Copenhagen until he left in 1892 for St. Louis. His first bibliographical contribution appeared in *Botanisk Tidsskrift*, 1890.

Since his first position as an assistant at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis (under the direction of Dr. William Trelease), Dr. Bay has been a productive giant with his pen. Not only has he made his imprint in literature: the sciences, belles lettres, biography and bibliography; but he has served the Library of Congress well (from 1901 to 1905), and the John Crerar Library (from 1905 to 1947) where he has been Librarian Emeritus since 1947.

In his bibliography *J. Christian Bay at Seventy* (1941), Kanardy L. Taylor lists 160 items. Walter M. Hill remembered the occasion too for in that year he published *The Fortune of Books: Essays, Memories and Prophecies of a Librarian*, by J. Christian Bay (pp. xi, 442). This magnificent book, with many portraits and facsimiles, contains thirty pieces of Dr. Bay's work under the subheads: "Bookmen and Scientists," "Library Life," "Books and Literary Events," "Time and Chance" and "Americana." This book has also become a scarce item. Since then, the honored Librarian Emeritus has continued writing his memorable Christmas books, printed by the Torch Press and Simon Gullander at Skjern, for his many loyal friends. Sandwiched in between he has written such essays and bibliographical papers as "Some Vital Books in Science: 1848-1947," which appeared in *Science*, Vol. 107, and which we reprint in this number through the courtesy of the author and the publisher.

The cover picture of Dr. Bay was taken on his eighty-fifth birthday in the banquet hall of the famous Aksel Nielsen Restaurant in Chicago, by Kenneth Smith of the Engstrom Studio. It is published without the knowledge of Dr. Bay, who resents publicity like a bibliophile resents *Anobium birtum*. We trust Dr. Bay will forgive us this time, we promise not to run his picture again until he reaches the century mark.

\*\*\*\*

We are planning another special issue for February. Some important Lincoln material has come our way, and we are prepared to bring some fabulous Lincoln pictures in this number. We are open for suggestions and welcome contributions.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Drawing by Frank Ross

Dear Mr. Thorsen:

Columbia University is preparing for publication a new and complete edition of the papers of Alexander Hamilton.

The editors wish to locate any letters to or from Hamilton and any other Hamilton documents that are in private hands. If any one possesses such documents, the editors would appreciate any information on their whereabouts and availability.

Very truly yours,  
Harold C. Syrett  
The Papers of Alexander Hamilton  
Box 9 Butler Library  
Columbia University  
New York 27, New York

Elmhurst - Biography -

J. C. Bay

No. 58

Bibliographical reminiscences

And

Prophecies

---

J. Christian Bay

---

It is an act of gracious consideration that you wish to give heed to the somewhat superannuated ideas that blend in my mind as a mixture of reminiscence and prophesy. It is the order of the day to prophesy upon existential principles rather than on past experiences. Men of the year '71 - I name with deep respect Koch, Bishop, Raden and Windsor - have been inspired (as I, a lesser relic of '71, confess to be) rather by the cumulated experience and tradition of ages. Many of you close the doors of the past and begin a new era. New systems develop everywhere about us, innocently engineered by such as know intimately the mechanics of libraries but perforce are denied the pleasure of opening the books.

My first thought was to wish upon you a fourth handful of Western books. These, however, now are figuring in High Finance, which is beyond the realm of bibliographers, so I shall approach the bibliographic gospel in a round about way, and introduce an old friend, Sir James M. Barrie, one of the last of our secular Fathers, inspired and prophetic. I demonstrate to you his last book named for mystic Miss Julie Logan, whose ethereal existence makes us aware of history quite as forcefully as Peter Pan, winging upward, draws us beyond it. Of bibliographic interest is that Miss Julie Logan was the first book of pure fiction ever honored by



special publication (London having been paved with books for centuries) as a supplement to the Times (December 21, 1931). One hundred copies of this original issue were numbered and signed by Sir James and bound, - but I warn you that copies exist, ingeniously manufactured and signed in that bibliopegic laboratory impromptu: was it at the Isle of Wight? where Dickens also was said to have been given attention. Less exposed to counterfitting was the issue in 1930 of fifty privately printed copies of Barrie's early essays collected under the title The Greenwood Hat and printed for the Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, K.C., - the copy I now show to you having served for the edification of Ada and John Galsworthy, to whom it forever is "affectionately" inscribed. My point in producing it is to show that even a rag of newspaper in a gutter, its message forgotten, - such an object, as immortalized in one of these essays, may serve the ultimate purpose of bibliography, which I understand to be definitive characterization of form and contents.

I admire Barrie as one provincialist admires another. My own provincialism began with my father, who came from an island in Denmark, as remote as Thrums, to California in 1851, a seafaring man, a vigilante and a member of the San Francisco Keystone Lodge of Scottish Masons. He was up in the Sierra Nevada about the time (Christmas eve, 185 ) when Professor Lindley in London gave to our big trees the name

Wellingtonia, which in a late hour was changed to Sequoiadendron and Washingtonia, respective of two genera, his Grace the Duke being ruled out.

Those were the years when our army engineers sturdily surveyed our Western country and left a rich dossier of description and adventure, giving also to a wondering ho. de of pioneers a treasure of authentic pictures of our national landscape. The lithographs we find in the Pacific Railroad reports and other, similar, publications, never have been equalled. One of the surveyors, Baldwin Hollhausen, wrote two excellent works about his journeys and later nearly a hundred tales of American types and forms of life. His Wanderings in the Prairies and Resorts of North America was the first book on the West that I read.

My father returned to Denmark in 1866 journeying overland. The prairies scattered over the Middle Border impressed him deeply. So when I, twenty-seven years later, came to Iowa, a young and naive botanist, in my twenty second year, I expected to find prairies everywhere. To my amazement, not even the name prairie was found in the then most voluminous handbook of geology, even though a score of scientists by that time had debated the problem of the origin of this form of landscape. In 1893 Prof. L. H. Pammel hunted in vain for a piece of native prairie in Iowa. So did a stalwart,

The result of my extra-official efforts now are in evidence in the Library of the State Historical Society of

Western Virginia.

to the Western field I had met Helen-Travelled Bonds and literary movement headed by Hamilton Garland. At my entry in- however, was turning reasonably liberal - witness the with decent funds for their own use. The rest of the world, economically, for librarians of that era were not trusted region. This at that time, it happily was possible to do for forty years to collect literary material on our prairie but constructive view of life. So I then began and continued struggles for an earthly paradise, and it provides a critical significance, does two things to you: It shows man in his spirit. The ensemble of it, in its historical and moral its historical development and the pertinent human action and fruitful to collate the explorations of the plains region, over the origin of our prairies. It seemed, however, more analyzed the Great controversy continued for several decades, Before joining the Library of Congress staff I had of this, our midwestern empire.

outs. That opened my eyes to the natural and human ecology progress bloomed among people living in sod-houses and dug- saw traces while, visiting remote places where comfort and few patches of virgin prairie in the Northwest, and I myself. Not until years later did B. Shinnick analyze the handsome student of mine, George Washington Carver, and

Missouri. After 1905, when I went to Crerar, Chicago for many years offered fine opportunities for specialized personal collecting efforts, even in most narrow fields. But my domain also widened. While concentrating on Iowa or Nebraska one is tempted to cross Lake Michigan and the Ohio River, to look beyond Detroit or into Kentucky, or peep beyond the Rocky Mountains. Overland journeys lead us into remote places where any hill or road crossing is significant. And how may one avoid the Leatherstocking Tales when they stare you in the face? In my case, The Last of the Mohicans, uncut and in blue boards, literally fell into my lap in Chicago, and I had a nice half-binding put on the two volumes! But that happened long before Herschel V. Jones appeared on the scene and preached about leaving books as far as possible in their original state.

In my "handfuls" I have mentioned numerous fine Western books easy to obtain in Chicago during the first quarter of our century but now never seen. Let us agree, however, that currently, year by year, new jewels turn up to be garnered by those who possess the needed instinct for permanency of interest. This perennial comfort brightened my days, as they otherwise were directed to promote the welfare of a rapidly growing scientific-technical and medical reference library, the healthy growth of which involved an instinct for, and knowledge



of anatomic illustration; his collection was willed to the University of Chicago. Mr. Charles Rubens acquired source-material on Dickens, and the Manierre and Wentworth accumulations became scattered by auction. Dr. Irving S. Cutter very deliberately brought together the Western books now housed in the Chicago Tribune tower. The choice little Americana collection donated by Senator Wm. Mason to the Urbana Public Library, came upon the auction table. Those were the years when genial William Smith Mason, of Evanston, brought together his famous Frankliniana, surrounded by an extraordinary apparatus of sources on our War of Independence; this enormous treasure, carefully selected, now ornaments Yale. Mr. D. Renne gave attention to English poetic classics. Partly through Chicago connections Mr. W. T. H. Howe, of Cincinnati, built up a towering mass of literary armaments, English, American, books and manuscripts, which at his death was purchased by Dr. Berg and donated to the New York Public Library.

Earlier Dr. Nicholas Senn had assembled by purchase several large European medical collections, which were donated to the Netter Library, whence they came by transfer to the Crerar.

In those years I unofficially gave advice to Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick and at times stood between him and Mr. H. V. Jones in their contentions for rarissima. Jones was a keen, spectacular plunger, first for early examples of

of, books of a vastly different order, but not of less importance.

To get away from myself, let me sketch briefly the book-collecting scene as it looked then. We had here, in our early days, formidable magnates, such as John A. Spoor and the Valentines, specializing in English literature. Mr. Spoor assembled his unique Charles Lamb collection, which the Livingstones catalogued. Mr. Hubbard came over from Michigan in search of colonial Americana, as did Mr. Clements. Mrs. Harold McCormick wished for a few unique incunabula and classical philosophy, while her brother-in-law, Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick, favored colonial Americana, especially Virginica. Gentle Mr. Edward Everett Ayer sought historical American and material on our Indians. Mr. Otto L. Schmidt filled his house with valuable rarities of all kinds, somewhat like Mr. Ayer, - and, like him, proved wholesome philanthropic motives. Private collections numbering from 5000 to 50,000 volumes, were not scarce in Chicago and suburbs early in the century. Mr. Ellsworth's treasury counted better than Dr. R. reported then in later years, and Mr. Charles Gunther assembled vast collections, notably Lincolniana, incunabula and manuscripts. Genial Dr. Mortimer Frank brought together early illustrated medical works and used them in preparing an expanded edition of Choulant's work on the history

printings, then of English literature, later of Americana, and finally of first editions of famous authors' first books. Auctions followed each advent of a new field, except the last.

It may seem idle for a librarian in active service to pay attention to such private activities. Nevertheless to scan each book in the small hundred composing the Ambrose collection, which formed the nucleus of Jones's Americana, each book a monument to its author and in perfect condition, was educational and enlightening; the outstanding gem being the Account of the Inoculation of Small-Pox in Boston, 1722, an uncut copy, - incidentally an anonymous book then recently identified by Professor Kittredge as a Cotton Mather.

The most pictures we and inspired of all our local collectors of books was, however, Chester Hjordur H. Thordarson, a native of Iceland, known in his day as the Nicola Tesla of America. He as a child had walked from Dane Co., Wisconsin, to North Dakota, and later he had carried a dinner-pail along Chicago's western suburbs. His inventions in industrial electricity gradually permitted him to cultivate - literally reap - books on a large scale, not only his beloved Islandica but even more extensively the great works of the ages that would reveal the forces and forms in Nature and man's interpretation of them. He was an autodidact gifted with extraordinary powers of

observation, active fancies, and a tenacious, truly poetic  
landmark memory. Among all the bookmen I ever knew he  
possessed the surest instinct for sound enlightenment of  
lasting, permanent value; and he not only, as we might  
come to him, discovered truth for himself but readily  
verified his finds by his books, so that in time his  
library became to him an organism. Historical science,  
pure and applied, was his constant concern, to which he  
brought an inborn instinct. For nearly forty years he  
stayed on deck, an inspired stargazer - a source  
of insight and enthusiasm to any mere librarian or even a  
bibliologist, because he invariably would interpose his  
threads of thought, his reading and his discoveries with  
modern ideas and views. His collection has four corner-  
stones: Chaucer, Shakespeare's Poems of 1640, Milton's  
Poems of 1645, and the Coverdale Bible, 1538. Richardson  
go hand in hand. He made even a nationalized industry join  
the chorus and induced good cheer far and wide. In 1930 I  
briefly described his library, having seen it grow book by  
book, and in 1950 Mr. Ralph Hodgson gave a much more in-  
telligent analysis, after it had been absorbed by the  
University of Wisconsin, the natural place for it; the  
collection bears witness to the fertilization of scholar-  
ship by the genius of unlettered tradition. The old mas-  
ter's only schooling had been imparted by Miss Alice Wheeler