

# THE FOSSIL

Official Publication of *The Fossils, Inc., Historians of Amateur Journalism*  
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## WHO'S ON FIRST? PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Guy Miller

“First things first” is a great rule to live by, provided one can figure out the order of priorities. In such a quandary we go by a second rule which is that people are more important than things; so, it is our pleasure to inform the membership that we have found our replacement for Secretary-treasurer Stan Oliner who has moved onto the Board of Trustees, replacing the late Jerry Killie. Tom Parson, also of Denver CO, has agreed to step in to finish Stan's unexpired term. We hope that Tom will enjoy the job because we will try to twist his arm (both, if necessary) to get him to offer his services for 2006-08. Tom begins his duties as soon as Stan hands over the checkbook.

Two other officers deserve to be singled out for their dedication. Our Official Editor has informed us that Webmaster Dave Tribby has already posted the January issue of *The Fossil* on our website. Considering his various activities in AAPA, including his handset and letterpressed *Tribby Tribune*, this is an amazing accomplishment. If you haven't already done so, you must see what Dave has created for us on our website:

<http://www.thefossils.org/>

Also, we express our deep appreciation to Vice-president Lee Hawes for his past performance as Chairman of the Russell L. Paxton Memorial Award for Service to Amateur Journalism, himself a recipient of this award as well as holder of the coveted Gold Composing Stick Award. We have asked him to repeat the task again for the 2005-6 award despite our awareness of the other daily demands on his time and energies.

A former Fossils President (1963-65) as well as Vice-president and active participant in LAJ negotiations, Lee is best-known for his contributions to AAPA during his sixty-four years' affiliation. At present he is serving as its President (how many times around is it?); and this August 10-13 he will be presiding at AAPA's 70th anniversary celebration in Cleveland.

Moving on from individual to entity, we want

to announce that, effective August 15, 2006, we will officially shed ourselves of our corporate identity under which we have operated for 79 years. It was in 1927 that President Leonard Tilden proposed that the Fossils incorporate so that it could legally accept bequests and protect the growing value of the Fossil Library (later, the Library of Amateur Journalism), plus a growing collection of books, pictures and other memorabilia. As a result, on September 1, 1927, the officers and 25 directors, one of whom was Thomas Alva Edison, filed papers for incorporation in the State of New York. Incidentally, no doubt because of the prominence of the men who made up our organization in 1927, news of the incorporation was widely circulated via the AP and UP wires and subsequently appeared in many large city newspapers such as *The New York Herald Tribune*.

Later, in 1985, without any public fanfare but, following much internal controversy, the charter of The Fossils, Inc., was transferred to Oregon. And there the matter has rested until the present hour. Now that our most prized possession, the Library of Amateur Journalism, has been transferred to the care of the University of Wisconsin in Madison and we are not likely to be bothered with a bequest of any size, your officers have elected that an incorporated status is an unnecessary expense.

This brings us to the matter of elections which will soon be upon us. Please be advised that those officials charged with the task of nominations will be seeking candidates for all offices. We hope that we will get ready volunteers for the offices of President, Vice-president, Secretary-treasurer, and Official Editor. We ask you to submit your name now or by June 30 at the latest to Secretary-treasurer Tom Parson, 157 S. Logan, Denver CO 80209. You can e-mail Tom at [typetom@aol.com](mailto:typetom@aol.com).

Besides election of officers this year members will be asked to cast an up or down vote for a number of changes to our By-laws. These changes, which are enumerated below, will be presented on the ballot as one amendment because the proposed changes are interdependent. In order to help you wade through all the verbiage, let us explain the intent of the revisions:

First, note that beginning with the fiscal year

2006 all officers will serve for two years (at present only our Secretary-treasurer has a two-year term).

Second, in recognition of our dwindling officer pool, beginning with 2008 only the Board of Trustees will stand for election. All other officers will be appointed by the Board of Trustees; and, if no qualified officers can be found, the Board of Trustees may assume these posts. Also, any appointive officer may become a Trustee without giving up the appointive office.

Note, also, that in 2008 the office of Vice-president will be eliminated and that the Webmaster, now a committee appointment, will be considered an appointive officer.

That's about it. Of course, the Articles and sections will be renumbered when the proposal, if adopted by the membership, is integrated with our present By-laws. The present By-laws may be consulted in *The Fossil* for October 2005, pp. 13-16.

## PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE BY-LAWS

Article I—Delete Section 1. Add new Section 1: “The name of this organization is THE FOSSILS.”

Section 2. No change.

Article II—Eliminate the designation “Inc.” from the organization's name wherever it occurs.

Article III—Delete Section 2. (*Re: Dues in arrears: Moved to Article IV, new Section 2.*)

Article IV—Delete Sections 2 and 3.

Add new Section 2: The Secretary-Treasurer shall drop from the roll all whose dues which become due on his or her renewal date are still not paid at the end of 45 days after that date.

Article V—Officers.

Delete the present wording and substitute the following passages:

Section 1. Effective upon the adoption of this amendment, elections will be held in even-numbered years, commencing with the election in 2006. Officers shall serve for a two-year term.

Section 2. Beginning with the election in 2008, the

elective officers of this organization shall consist of three members, operating within the structure of a Board of Trustees. All other officers shall be appointed by the Board of Trustees.

a. The newly formed Board of Trustees shall select one of its members as President, at least two members concurring to the selection. Beginning with the election in 2010, elections shall be held for two of the three members of the Board of Trustees, the incumbent President being the carry-over member. The newly formed Board shall select one of its number as President, at least two members concurring.

b. In the case of confusion in selecting a President, the incumbent President shall appoint a committee of at least three members at large to determine which elected Trustee will be designated as President for the ensuing term of office.

c. In the case of a vacation by a Trustee, the remaining Trustees shall select a replacement who will serve until the next election. If the Trustee member replaced was the President, the Board shall select a new President, following the procedure outlined in Sec. 2 a. and b. of this article.

Section 3. Duties of the Officers:

(a) Board of Trustees: Responsibility for the conduct of the affairs of the organization shall rest with the Board of Trustees except in those areas in which the duties of other officers must necessarily take precedence in order that the mandates of their offices can be properly executed.

(b) President: As chief executive, the President may appoint special committees, enter into agreements with outside parties, approve expenditures apart from the regularly established expenses of the organization, and propose policies deemed beneficial to the well-being of the organization. Effective with the election of 2008, the President, with at least one other member of the Board of Trustees concurring, shall select appointive officers consisting of a Secretary-Treasurer, Official Editor, Historian, Librarian, and Webmaster who will serve in their respective offices until the position is declared vacated by reason of one of the conditions detailed in Article V, Section 4.

(c) Secretary-Treasurer: As Secretary, this officer, or a designate, shall (1) pass upon the qualifications of

applicants for membership, (2) conduct official correspondence, (3) be responsible for the printing of ballots, and fulfill the customary duties of secretary. As Treasurer, this officer shall (1) have charge of the funds of the organization, (2) make disbursements as authorized by the President, and (3) furnish the Board of Trustees with a financial report when requested.

(d) Official Editor: The Official Editor shall have full responsibility for publishing *The Fossil*.

(e) Historian: The Historian shall compile a record of events and people of historic significance in the founding and development of The Fossils for publication in *The Fossil*.

(f) Librarian: The Librarian shall convey to the membership through *The Fossil* any pertinent communications from the Special Collections Department of the University of Wisconsin Library, Madison, pertaining to The Library of Amateur Journalism.

(g) Webmaster: The Webmaster shall strive to maintain and enhance the organization's web page.

Section 3. In the event no member can be found to perform in one or another of these appointive offices, members of the Board of Trustees may assume any of these duties in addition to their assignments as members of the Board of Trustees, and may continue with these additional duties until a replacement can be found. In like manner, appointive officers may be elected to the post of Trustee and still continue to serve in their appointive positions.

Section 4. Vacating of an Office: An office shall be considered vacant in the event of (a) the submission of a written resignation by the office holder to the President; (b) the death of the office holder; (c) release of an appointive officer from his duties by the Board of Trustees; or (d) the office holder's ceasing to be a member of The Fossils.

Article VI—*Delete*.

Article VII—*Delete*.

Article VIII—Nominating Procedures.

Delete the present wording and substitute the following passages:

Section 1. It shall be the duty of the President to notify the membership of the date and procedure for filing for election to the Board of Trustees. This notice should either be published in the April issue of *The Fossil* or be mailed first class to all members in time for them to submit their names to the Secretary-Treasurer or designate.

Section 2. Names of those filing for office should be submitted to the Secretary-Treasurer or designate no later than June 30.

Article IX—Elections.

Delete the present wording and substitute the following passages:

Section 1. Elections of officers and amendments to the By-laws shall be determined by ballots mailed by the Secretary-Treasurer or a designate to all qualified voting members by July 10.

Section 2. Ballots shall be returned to the Secretary-Treasurer or a designate no later than July 31. The Secretary-Treasurer or a designate shall tally the votes and convey the results to the incumbent President and the Official Editor for publication in *The Fossil*.

Section 3. A majority of the votes cast shall be required for amending the By-laws. The two Board candidates receiving the first and second largest numbers of votes shall be elected. Any tie votes will be decided by giving preference to the candidate with the longest period of continuous membership in The Fossils according to the records maintained by the Secretary-Treasurer.

Section 4. Elected officers shall assume office on August 15.

Section 5. Amendments to the By-laws shall become effective on August 15.

Article X—Meetings—*Delete*.

Article XI—Method of Amending the By-laws.

Delete the present wording and substitute the following description:

Section 1. Majority vote of the members of The Fossils shall be required to amend the By-laws as part of the

election process, and such amendments shall be described on the ballot with appropriate “Yes” “No” boxes. In the event that at least two members of the Board of Trustees determine that the approved amendment is of an emergency nature, a special election may be ordered at a time to be determined by the Board.

Section 2. Amendments may be proposed by the Board of Trustees, at least two members concurring; appointive officers, at least two officers concurring; or individual members, at least five members concurring. Proposed amendments should be submitted to the President no later than June 10 for review by the Board of Trustees. If the amendment is not determined to be of an emergency nature, the Board of Trustees shall submit them to the Secretary-Treasurer no later than June 30.

Article XII—Resident Agent—*Delete*. Substitute new Article XII: Distribution of Assets: In the event of final dissolution of The Fossils, any residual funds in the treasury shall be conveyed to the Special Collections Department of the University of Wisconsin Library in Madison for use for the Library of Amateur Journalism Collection.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR MEMBERS

Guy Miller

Lately we have been in communication with several of you about the possibility of your telling us something about yourselves. As a result, we have been favored with articles, with more promised.

We are pleased that long-time Fossil Kent Clair Chamberlain is a recent respondent. Kent tells us that he was born on January 22, 1943 in Abilene KS. When he was six months old, his family moved to Medford OR, and, later to Ashland where he still resides. Asked for his occupation after graduation from Southern Oregon College he responds only with “Retired dishpuncher!” However, he does allow that his first poem, “Prayer for the Modern Age,” was written January 1961, “When President Kennedy took office. `Forgive us the assassins,/For we lack thy mercy,’ proved strangely appropriate.”

“As to my ajay accomplishments, by 1967 I joined UAP and UAPAA. Wonder if Mrs. Willametta Turnepseed Keffer and Mr. Martin introduced me to the Fossils during President Mrs. Eunice Fontenot's term of office [1974-77].

“Served as late Mrs. Patricia Saunders' UAPAA

Vice-President, When I ran, written-in President Saunders got re-elected by a landslide she passed on to me. 1980-1981.” We take those dates as the two terms which Kent served under Mrs. Saunders. From what we can understand, sometime during that period UAPAA scheduled its convention at the Mark Anthony Hotel in Ashland OR. “Two local women attended—no members.”

“When 49 years old [1992], chain-smoking beloved cigars gave me chronic bronchitis, vertigo—and sleepiness was caused by a very low thyroid! Won, unopposed, UAP Presidency. When I realized medical condition could be serious, promptly resigned so the Order could thrive no matter what happened to me.

“Have been publishing my hasty ramblings in bundle [UAPAA]; so my thoughts on Creation should outlast mine years.”

As we thank Kent for this brief insight, we also are grateful to Dee Burnlees (*Intimate Journey*, AAPA) for an update on Fossil Marion Fields Wyllie. An e-mail from Dee back in February refers to the copy of *100 Years of the Fossils* which Dee had purchased for Marion as a present on her 99th birthday: “I visited Marion Wyllie a couple of weeks ago in her new residence. She had just received the Fossils book we sent to her. It arrived in good shape, and she was thrilled with it. Marion is very comfortably settled into this retirement residence and enjoys having her meals in the dining room. Her son also resides there; so they drop in on one another for daily visits. At 99 she has now finally bought a computer, and is busy cracking the codes. What a marvel.” In a later letter, Dee mentions that Marion “appreciated the crisp clear print and all the photos” which appeared along with her memoir in the Oct. 2005 issue of *The Fossil*. “She and Martha [Shivvers] go way back in another poetry group; so she was delighted to find her photo included” [Martha had also submitted a memoir in that issue].

We appreciate information like this about or from our members; so a couple of letters from Fossil Ted Conover, at present residing in Gardnerville NV, were most welcome. In one letter Ted tells us that “My adventure in amateur journalism started in 1937 when Burton Crane (then with the *New York Times* financial department) invited me to an AAPA meeting on Long Island. I was 14 at the time.”

This introduction prompted us to turn to *The Fossil* for Jan. 1983, in which new Fossil member Ted reveals that “My parents gave me a toy printing press, and this plus my association with amateur journalism led to a professional career that included ownership of five community newspapers” all located in Ohio. His letters

tell us that when publishing these weeklies he and his wife Edna (whom me met at Ohio University) “worked all night on Wednesday and the job was all work and nothing else.”

When he and Edna decided that teaching was their first love, Ted attended journalism classes at Ohio State University, and it was there that the dean of the journalism school helped him get a job at the University of Nevada. Says Ted, “Both of us were a little leery of going way out to Nevada. But it all turned out well and we ended up pleased with life out there.” What Ted doesn't tell us is that, in addition to his ajay publishing ventures (*Scribbles*), Ted published a textbook *Graphic Communications* which has gone through several editions and, last we heard, was still in use. Ted concludes, “It is interesting how life works out, isn't it?”

Ted's reminiscences suddenly brought to mind a 1995 communication from Fossil Miriam Campbell, now residing in Lexington KY. In a letter dated Aug. 21, 1995, we had inquired about her activities in the United press associations. Her reply: “Yes, I was secretary-treasurer of UAP for a while back [ca. 1967]. I had been secretary-treasurer of UAPAA for 22 years. I have never been in UAPA, which is now out of existence. I have been in UAPAA longer than anyone I know. I have seen it change. I am no longer interested and will not renew. For years I have been planning on writing about these Uniteds. I have notes and papers filed away.”

We immediately answered: “If I can help you in any way either in publishing or helping you to organize your papers regarding the Uniteds, please call on me.” Alas, Miriam did not respond. Nevertheless, we feel honored that we can still count on Miriam as a member of The Fossils.

#### FOSSIL NOTES

*The Fossil* notes with pride that our Vice President Lee Hawes received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from the University of South Florida on December 17, 2005. Please refer to member Fred Liddle's *Flimsie Excuse 811* for further details.

Fossil Trustee Stan Oliner has donated the nineteenth-century journals in his collection to the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Bill Boys's *NAPA E-Mail News* reports that NAPA President Troy McQueen and Stan have agreed to release to the Antiquarian Society a prior donation of \$2,000 which Stan had made to benefit NAPA's official organ to enable the Antiquarian Society to purchase acid-free jackets and other archival supplies

for Stan's donation of amateur journals. The Oliner donations, both of journals and of funds, should help the Antiquarian Society maintain its pre-eminent position as a collector of nineteenth-century amateur journals.

A kind note from Martha Shivvers thanked the editor's wife for her review of her *Collected Works* (refer to *The Fossil* for January 2006) and mentioned her pleasure in reading Karenna Gore Schiff's account of “nine women who changed modern America” in her book *Lighting the Way*. Mrs. Schiff is the daughter of Al and Tipper Gore. Martha also sent the seasonal poem that immediately follows this column. We also have a summertime poem by Martha for our July issue and invite our other Fossil poets to submit their works as well.

*The Fossil* can also report new addresses for two of our long-time members:

Merry Harris, 543 South Third Street,  
Brawley, CA 92227;

Marion Fields Wyllie, 875 Sixth Street East  
#237, Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada, N4K 5W5.

#### A CADENCE OF SPRING

Martha E. Shivvers

Furry squirrels scamper among tall oaks  
with bushy tails swinging, a chattering scold,  
teasing and tormenting small animal folks.

Conceited redbreasts become quite bold  
flicking seeds by the window pane  
and peck at the images they behold.

South breezes swinging weather vane  
say goodbye to winter, hello to spring  
and welcome to warm gentle rain.

In timbers tree frogs peep and cling  
to mossy grasses with a greening hue  
and watch meadowlarks preen and sing.

Tulips and jonquils nod spritely on lawns  
as spring mornings whisper their  
bright new dawns.

#### ERNEST A. EDKINS: A MEMOIR

(Reprinted from the brochure of the same title originally published by Edward H. Cole at The Oakwood Press in April 1947.)

There may be, salvaged from this heap of dust,  
Some quenchless energy that stands apart,  
Ready and eager for another start—  
Contemptuous of Death, for live it must!  
Of what avail the bright Promethean spark  
If born to perish in eternal dark?

I know not—only that I have to leave  
Familiar roads to tread an upland trail.  
Here is the parting, here I cannot fail,  
For something urgent plucks me by the sleeve;  
Over the vasty rondure of the sphere  
Some new emprise. I must not linger here.

E.A.E.

## ERNEST A. EDKINS: AN APPRECIATION

Rheinhart Kleiner

Ernest A. Edkins was in many ways a phenomenon. His birth in London, his picturesque vagabondage before his marriage, his long career with an American business house—so long, in fact, as to bring retirement with a pension—are all parts of his story. But that phase of his life and activity which is more immediately important to amateur journalism is his record in the history of the hobby.

To one viewing just the latter phase of his activity—his literary energy, versatility, and productiveness—it seems wonderful that such a man should have escaped the professional literary career which seemed so obviously open to him. Not that there is the slightest inclination to cavil here at Edkins' choice of the National Amateur Press Association as a suitable field for his efforts! That choice was all to our advantage. It was for us that he wrote his stories, criticisms, articles, letters, light verse, and poetry.

We may well ask whether any period in amateur history ever saw so much ability in all kinds of literary effort exercised solely for the pleasure of its possessor, and, as an indispensable part of that pleasure, for the good and welfare of organized amateur journalism.

Edkins' prowess in the short story was not frequently manifested during the final decade of his activity. He had been represented in Spencer's *Cyclopedia of the Literature of Amateur Journalism* in 1891, and a few of his later tales appeared in Bradofsky's *Californian* in the mid 1930's. It was in his first period, when he frequently appeared in the amateur press as an incomparable story teller, that his laurels in this field were won. H. P. Lovecraft, in a letter to the

present writer dated July 17, 1917, said: "After reading Ernest A. Edkins' 'Phantasmus,' in a collection of amateur stories lent me by Paul Campbell, I realize how indifferent I am in this province...Edkins was a phenomenal writer—something of real, stark terror swept through certain passages of his prose and verse."

Anyone who questions that verdict should read "The Affairs of the Centaurs," in *The Californian* for Winter, 1936. This writer, in a critical report at the time, called it "a blaze of wit from beginning to end." It is all that, and much more besides. Scrymgeour, who has just seen Challoner's recent painting, a scene from "The Marriage Feast of Pirithous and Hippodamia," tells of what happened when the centaurs in the painting became alive and galloped past him in thunder and fury. That description, read only once, has haunted the memory to this day.

It is only because the Edkins short stories did not form any considerable part of his later activity that they are not considered at greater length here.

## II

Edkins' first period of amateur literary effort seems to have occurred in the late 1880's. His contemporaries were men like Edwin B. Hill—happily still active among us—Truman J. Spencer, Frank D. Woollen, John J. Mack, James J. O'Connell, J. Roosevelt Gleason, and others as notable, to whom appreciation has been tendered even in these later days. Edkins himself, in his article "Writ in Remembrance," has given us an unforgettable picture of those old days and those young men and their various meetings in Cincinnati, Chicago, and New York.

And because he was a student, even though an informal one, he was in touch with the literary movements of his time. The Yellow Nineties were just beginning then, and Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, and John Davidson could hardly have escaped being part of his reading. Nor could William Morris, Swinburne, Walter Pater, and John Ruskin have been overlooked. Occasionally Edkins, in his own articles, dropped oblique references to these men or their works, and, more rarely, he might make a specific reference, as in the case of George Moore and his "Memoirs of My Dead Life."

These are the authors who influenced his style. Who would not guess as much, even without indirect admission from Edkins, merely from the prose in which his own delightful articles was written? There is a *fin de siècle* freshness and vigor about it—almost an air of improvisation. There is that fondness for the occasional

French word or phrase. (In this connection the reader may recall “oubliettes of oblivion” as among the adornments of the Edkins rhetoric.) Undoubtedly, in the best sense of the word, it was a “dated” style.

How he used to encourage worthy effort, to spur on the lazy and the slothful, and to distribute generous praise when he thought it due!

The list of amateur publications containing his articles is a long one. It includes not only *The Californian*, *The National Amateur*, *The Dragon Fly*, *The Phoenix*, *The Scarlet Cockerel*, *Cubicle*, *Bavardage*, *Bellette*, and *The Ghost*, but also many others which cannot be recalled at the moment. It has been a steady stream of highly informative, and royally entertaining, comment and gossip from his pen.

Edkins' own publication, *Causerie*, of which all too few numbers were issued, represented a high-water mark among personal journals. Since he wrote it all himself, the labor must have been considerable, but there was never any sign of flagging energy. Every issue was a model of vigorous and sound expression from beginning to end.

When, later on, he became one of the editors of *The Aonian*, the flood of inspired comment continued. It was the same old Edkins, but this time with a regular medium of communication with the amateur world—one which was gladly received everywhere and gladly read by everyone.

### III

In 1888, Edkins won an honorable mention with a poem entitled “At Twenty,” the winner being Brainerd Prescott Emery with “Pan, Pan Is Dead.” Emery was still winning honors for poetry almost ten years later, but Edkins appears just once on the list with this honorable mention, and his name is henceforth found no more.

Frank Dempster Sherman was the judge of poetry that year. Some readers may recall when his fame as a writer of polished light verses stood high. A handsome collected edition of his poetry, edited by Clinton Scollard, appeared in 1917. Mr. Sherman was so doubtful as to the soundness of his own judgment in the bestowal of the laureateship that, in a postscript to his letter, he adds the corroborative opinion of a young, unnamed poet of his acquaintance, thus thinking to settle the matter.

One of the objections to Edkins' poem had to do with “licensed profanity when unnecessarily introduced, as in the second stanza—“ah, God!”” The

likelihood is that anyone reading the poem today would find it quite inoffensive. This is the stanza:

And he who battled nobly in the strife  
Is loved, and he who bravely fell is mourned,  
But one, ah God! I know, whose empty life  
Is justly scorned  
E'en by himself, with myriad sad reflections  
rife.

The stanza has an added interest for us as containing one of the poet's earliest printed allusions to his “empty” life. He was twenty at the time he wrote this, but the refrain of futility recurs in the poetry he wrote even in his latest years.

In fact, some of Edkins' serious work seems to have been done out of the conviction of the starkness, bareness, and general uselessness of life. Yet he was frequently aware of beauty and ecstasy, and gave expression to such perceptions, too.

In 1939 Edwin B. Hill printed a brochure of Edkins' poetry entitled, characteristically enough, *Brief Splendor and Other Futilities*. Here are six lines from the poem “Quick Passage” in this collection:

Short years of pomp and circumstance,  
Long years of things undone—  
And now, with what a wistful glance  
We view the westering sun!  
Then here's a toast by candle-light,  
Drink to obliterating night!

There is another moving bit in “Heimwehfluh”:

Gone is the Spring, and gone the swallow,  
And all the gold of youth fore-spent,  
The dreams that flee, and fears that follow  
As I follow I my stubborn bent  
Through darkling woods to overtake  
The breast of Beauty in the brake.

As a sonneteer, he stood unequalled for charm and distinction. “Alter Ego” is an excellent, but by no means rare, example of his skill. In this quotation of the concluding six lines, the reader will notice the continued accent of hopelessness, almost despair, in the poet's contemplation of what he might have achieved.

Sometimes at night, when I have sought to win  
Surcease from bitter memories, he is near,  
Reminding me of all my wasted days;  
He feels no pity, only deep amaze,

His voice is silent, but I seem to hear,  
“I am the ghost of what you might have been.”

Then, in 1944, Tim Thrift, published an edition of the poems in a volume called *Leave Taking*. Many of the items in Mr. Hill's collection are reprinted here, but one or two appear for the first time in book form. “Flight of Psyche,” from the later book, speaks of

Something we seek and cannot find, beyond  
The needs of mere existence, something lost  
In earlier Avatars, a moment's flash  
Of dazzling vision, yet not wholly lost  
Beyond recall.

This poem is in blank verse, a form not usually employed with success by amateur bards.

And, just for one example of a mood that has strayed for awhile from graver thoughts, these lines from “Pastoral” may be sufficient:

In a leafy mold the first arbutus gleams;  
Over the brook a trailing willow bough  
Bends like Narcissus; now  
The time has come for reveries and dreams;  
Untended are the flocks, the idle plough,  
While Young Love lingers by enchanted  
streams.

#### IV

Edkins, as a light versifier, certainly deserves more than casual mention. From 1920 to 1928—before the amateur world had reclaimed him—he was a frequent contributor to the late Bert Leston Taylor's column, “A Line-O'-Type or Two,” in the *Chicago Tribune*. This column was then as popular in the Midwest as F.P.A.'s as in New York, and its editorial exactions were almost as difficult to meet.

Edkins was later capable of giving high praise to amateur journalists whose efforts in this direction did not equal his own. He was a true master of the light whimsy, the satirical jape, and the broadly humorous sally. Not many of these efforts were seen in the amateur press, where he preferred to display the graver and statelier measures at his command.

But in 1928 he published a little collection of his verses in a slender volume called *The Scarlet Cockatoo* (Lincoln Printing Co., Chicago). This writer has often browsed in it, and has been charmed by the grace and wit of our most versatile literary man.

It is fairly obvious that he did not take these

efforts too seriously. At times he could rhyme “warning” with “yawning” and “school” with “cruel,” but not often, and if any amateur bard takes the example as license to do the same, let him remember that Edkins wrote many a lyric which was technically perfect. In fact, these little divergences from strict technical observance would not even be mentioned here had not Tim Thrift warned the writer that Edkins—perched now in some serener sphere—probably would not like a job of complete whitewashing.

Here is “The Scarlet Cockatoo” himself:

A prisoner in a little house  
He seldom tries to sing,  
But bravely plucks a lurking louse  
From underneath his wing...

If anyone wonders at the lack of indentation in alternate lines, let it be explained that this is the prevailing practice throughout the book.

And then there is the damsel who inspires an apostrophe to this effect:

Darling, a vague suspicion rankles  
That it must cost like sin  
To dress you from your slender ankles  
Up to your pretty chin.  
But you at least have swell contours  
On which to drape your things;  
I fear I'd not be truly yours  
If you had only wings.

In “Bygone Drinks” we are reminded that the Dry Era still prevailed when the lines were written, but many have since become thirsty again for another reason. Here is the first stanza of one of his best light pieces:

Where are the drinks of yester-year—  
Where the liqueurs that once sufficed?  
*Lachrimae Christi*—tears of Christ!  
Arrack from Java, English beer?  
Old Johnny Walker, full of cheer,  
Fragrant juleps, deliciously iced,  
Puncheons for which the pirates diced—  
Where are the flagons of yester-year?

“The Fire Goes Out” is a longer piece in blank verse; it is really too good for inclusion in a fairly light collection. The very medium employed would rule it out as light verse. It would seem to the present writer as worthy of reprinting in one of our amateur magazines,



even at this late date. Here is just a bit of the conversation between two old friends, James and Gerald, grown somewhat mellow over the Scotch. Gerald speaks:

Do you recall  
The singing silence of our ancient room  
That winter night when we, immersed in books  
Or musing by the fitful, dying fire,  
First felt in our young hearts the deep content  
Of silent fellowship? The wavering walls  
Dissolved in fragrant smoke; a phantom host  
Of lurking shadows vanished and resurged  
Around the beleaguered fire, while the voice  
Of some lost spirit in the chimney grieved...

And here, finally, we have "The Egotist Contemplates the Incredible." Let the verses speak for themselves:

"It seems absurd, were I to die today  
Never again to pace our leafy lane,  
Or watch the eager children at their play,  
Or savor April's rain,—"  
Well, what if you *did* die? Would traffic stop  
Or children cease to shout, or robins sing?  
Tomorrow Tommy still would spin his top  
And it would still be Spring!

Edkins was somewhat freer in the vocabulary of several of his unquoted poems than strait-laced readers might relish. Frank Dempster Sherman would not have approved of them at all. Edkins reveals himself as quite cynical and disillusioned, but aware that if life has played a joke upon him, it has done the same to most others. This has enabled him to retain a proper perspective, and, at the same time, saved him from bitterness. It seems to have been enough for Edkins to indulge in a few innocent ribaldries now and then!

## V

But the story of Ernest A. Edkins is finished now. The golden decade which saw him at the height of his activities has closed.

Those whose mail, until fairly recently, was enlivened with his inimitable letters, whether of sympathy in illness or personal loss, congratulations upon some amateur achievement, or merely in quest of copy, will miss him.

He has written his last article. Our publishers, editors, story writers, and versifiers will no longer have

his genial reproof or generous praise to meditate upon.

The incomparable teller of tales and inspired poet has become mute, and it will be long before we shall find another like him.

The man who was an elder brother to all amateur journalists, the sympathizer in every scheme for furthering the usefulness and appeal of the hobby has "fallen on sleep."

Well done, thou good and faithful servant! We shall not soon forget you.

## REFLECTIONS AT SUNSET (To be published posthumously)

Ernest A. Edkins

It is an embarrassing experience to meet one of your dead selves. To be sure, you knew that they once lived and strutted their brief hour, but now their apparitions seem those of a stranger,—bogus and incredible. Perhaps you take the offensive:

What may this mean,  
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel,  
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon?

Or you may bow and pass by, saying, "Sorry, but I don't seem to remember you." The spiral of existence eventually brings us around to things known and things unknown and things forgotten; it probably accounts for that curious feeling of familiarity which occasionally overtakes us in a strange room, or baffles us in some alien landscape. Long after certain periods and experiences of your life have vanished from memory, you come across an old portrait or a bundle of mouldering letters, and out pops that Jack-in-a-box, your former self, to cover you with confusion!

Recently an ancient copy of *The Stylus* came my way. It was published over a half century ago, when I was a youngster, but even then in the spirit of a weary and disillusioned old man, I was bidding adieu to amateur journalism in these pompous phrases:

As the end of my inconsequential and fruitless idling in this little company of diletanti draws near, I have no heart for the fray, but only muse on "the days that are no more." The disease of authorship is analysed in a fantastic poem by Jules Laforgue ("Watteau de cafe-concert," as George Moore calls him) with sardonic candor:

*Alors, j'ai fait de la litterature  
Mais le demon de la verite  
Sifflotait tout le temps a mes cotes:  
"Pauvre, as-tu fini tes ecritures?"*

The demon's mocking query cannot be evaded much longer, and before another year is born I shall have contributed my last line to the amateur press.

This humorless and egregious farewell reveals

the sort of solemn ass that I was when it was written. I quote it in a spirit of self-flagellation and as a reminder, in the sunset days of my life, to cultivate humility, to take nothing seriously, and to make no promises. Our goings and comings, our convictions and our predilections, are seldom of the slightest interest or importance to others—and only momentarily to ourselves. My predicted “last line” turned out to be most ridiculous hooley, for in point of fact I have contributed many thousands of lines to the amateur press since that snooty announcement was made, and here I am, *still* slugging away! Scribblers who have really been bitten by the writing bug *never* quit writing. In 1892 I took a somewhat gloomy view of amateur journalism, for which there was an excellent reason: amateur journalism took a gloomy view of me. Today, although the institutional view has not completely changed, my own outlook is much cheerier. There has been a marked improvement in publications and contributions during the past half century, and I hope that I have outgrown some of my early intolerance and solemnity. At least I can now laugh at what I was and smile at what I am—a congeries of conceits and contradictions, of antiquated tastes and obsolete literary ideas, of modern tastes and ancient prejudices. Am I at the end of my disguises and metamorphoses, or shall some final clarity be vouchsafed me before I turn up my toes? Probably “no” to both questions. We change greatly as the years slip away, but where is there a scale so fine as to measure our improvement? Still, of all the reproachful dead selves that occasionally return to haunt me, I like best that posturing fathead who, in his lush twenties, really enjoyed his counterfeit melancholy and was really having one hell of a good time. You see, he didn't *know* he was a ham; he was play-acting; he actually thought that he was good!

## EDKINS THE UNFORGETTABLE

Edward H. Cole

At approximately the moment that Ernie Edkins died Frank Batchelder (now too gone to join his boyhood friend) and I were talking of him. On my way to the National's convention at Newark I spent the night of July 3 in Riverside. Almost the first question Frank asked was of Ernie, and I related how Edkins had recently written Tim Thrift that he was feeling better than for months and that “the doctor had given him permission to live until Christmas.” I hope that somehow Ernie knew as he left this world of mortals that he was on the tongues and in the hearts of two of

his friends.

That he was beloved of those who knew him was unmistakable the following evening when it was my sad duty to break the unhappy news of his sudden death. Some of the members of the National had been holding a caucus. The session had been hilarious; laughter was on our lips. But at the announcement there fell that quiet, pervasive silence that bespeaks deep emotion. For Ernie Edkins had made his place anew in amateur journalism in the past decade, even as he had written his name vividly on the pages of its history in the eighties. Then, perhaps, he had aroused opposition and passion, for he had been supercilious and arrogant, as only youth can be. In his later years he came among us with humility, eager to renew old friendships and to form new, yet still vigorously seeking to stir amateur journalism to better things.

He was the litterateur, the accomplished poet and essayist and critic as of yore, but he was generous and tolerant. Lured anew into our activities by the intellectual Howard Lovecraft, he was again hopeful of developing in amateur journalism a literature worthy of the name. When Lovecraft died Edkins carried on the cause. His editorials and reviews belabored the banal and strove to give young writers a concept of literary values. Finally he found the fulfillment of the dreams of years when Tim Thrift made him literary editor of *The Aonian*. How he poured forth the richness of his mind in essay, review, and editorial, and how discriminatingly he chose the work of others for republication! Yet as he searched the files for writings that met *The Aonian's* literary standards, sadly the conviction was forced upon him that he had pursued an *ignis fatuus*: amateur journalism is not a literary institution, much less a school for writers, and it never has been. As we know, almost literally with blood, sweat, and tears he wrote his final judgment for the last *Aonian*, yet he conceded that, within its scope, the institution had its indefinable appeal. He found, as many of us do, that the community of interest that amateur journalism affords engenders friendships that outlast the spirit to participate in its activities.

Those of us who met or who corresponded with Ernie Edkins these past dozen years know what opulence he brought to friendship. He was indeed a rare companion—hearty and forthright, ready with quip and laughter and appreciation, sturdy and sincere and eager to enjoy every minutes of the hours together. He was a memorable correspondent who gave liberally of himself. You had only to be an amateur journalist to awaken his interest, and many a youthful newcomer received from him letters of advice and suggestion and genuine interest

in his work that made him know a great deal of the “indefinable something” that binds amateur journalists. Those who were older can cherish missives that were of the very spirit of the man himself—full of vigorous exchange of views, priceless quips, and occasional racy tales.

He became the dean of amateur journalism. No one approached him in talents, and he had few compeers in years of experience in the institution. He gave freely of his time and talents. Even when illness was heavy upon him, he sacrificed himself in the service of the National. He felt glad, he said, to serve the association whenever he could be of help. Such was his noble spirit.

A man does not truly die so long as he lives in the minds and hearts of men. Not soon will Ernie Edkins perish from our thoughts. He has given to all who knew him imperishable recollections of a man among men. And so long as there is an amateur journalism, those who know its history will ever turn to the work of Ernest A. Edkins as evidence of the best that our institution has produced.

## THE GRAND ILLUSION

Ernest A. Edkins

(Reprinted from *Tim Thrift's The Aonian* [vol. III no. 4] for Winter 1945.)

“Be not alarmed, the goblins cry,  
We are but *ignes fatui*.”  
—Beddoes' *Apocrypha*.

As the ambitious if not somewhat foolhardy adventure of *The Aonian* travels to its predestined close, I feel that it is fitting to review the grandiose ideas of those who projected this magazine. For reasons now immaterial, the enterprise was spaciouly conceived on the basis of a Five Year Plan—one that, as it turned out, was a trifle optimistic. By dint of considerable effort we have completed three of the five volumes, though not without making some concessions to our original lofty aims. Other literature worthy of preservation—in our narrow view—is either non-existent or inaccessible; and as for the selection of more recent work, we prefer to leave that task to amateur writers and critics whose sympathy with and understanding of modern trends are more dependable than ours. After the turn of the century, in fact, there was a considerable period in amateur letters of which this magazine's editors know little or nothing, nor have we found others much better

informed than ourselves. It may have been an epoch of some consequence, but it seems to have passed from sight and memory without much criticism or comment.

We rest, however, on our oars, content to leave the remainder of these explorations—if indeed they are worthy of further attention—in the hands of younger and abler historians. As Literary Editor, my eclectic methods and critical tastes are bound to come in perhaps for some well-deserved pooh-poohing—the universal fate of the demodé anthologist—but I *do* point with pride to my colleague's typographical work, which has won the praise of professionals. We have given to our hobby three volumes of a magazine wherein prose and verse of exceptional merit (within their narrow confines) are preserved in press-work of distinction. I permit myself the privilege of bestowing this accolade upon Mr. Thrift in the confidence that it will not be misunderstood as staff braggadocio; his work is essentially creative, a reflection of his craftsmanship and discriminating taste; mine has been mostly selective, and often unduly favorable to forms and patterns that, in the Keatsean phrase, were “writ in water.” Another Literary Editor would have made other and probably better selections,—but another Literary Editor, as my associate will assure you, was not at the moment available, and so the readers of *The Aonian* have been confined to “Hobson's Choice.” It only remains to be said that both Mr. Thrift and myself have thoroughly enjoyed our antiquarian researches and sincerely regret the several untoward circumstances of personal health and other preoccupations that now compel us to suspend publication.

In bidding farewell to an avocation that has enlivened many years of my life, I feel an urge to examine once more the peculiarities of amateur journalism in light of matured experience. Have I been wrong in my premises? And if so, is there not still time to admit my error? For practically a lifetime I have cherished certain convictions regarding our beguiling hobby that, until recently, I felt were well-founded and irrefutable. Now, I am obliged to confess that they were largely the product of wishful thinking rather than of sound reasoning. Their relationship and sequence seemed so inevitable that even now I find it difficult to think of them as separate entities. Fundamentally, the error springs from a loose association of ideas. Pen, ink, paper, typewriters and books are all more or less evocative of the writing art, but in reality have merely a suggestive connection with literature. They are helpful but not indispensable, as our earliest cave-dweller artists and modern symbolists have discovered and re-discovered with Balboan amazement.

Approaching the subject from another angle, we find it closely associated with the incidence of the toy printing press, circa 1850-60. Out of a clear sky the jaded youth of that period were suddenly offered a new game, a fascinating diversion that promised both amusement and emolument in place of the deadly tedium of rainy afternoons. The symbols of this game were the amateur hand-operated printing press, a few fonts of body and display type and a list of father's business acquaintances. In these modest circumstances the avocation now loosely and inaccurately defined as "amateur journalism" had its accouchement, somewhat over-shadowed by the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Here, on July 4, 1876, a small group of youngsters assembled to organize the National Amateur Press Association (please note the significant absence of any reference to "writing" or to "literature" in this title), and the affluvia clinging to these earnest organizers was of that delectable species which we always associate with type cases and printing paraphernalia. In the beginning, at least, these juveniles were not writers by intent or cultivation; they had acquired a job printing outfit by gift or for a few dollars and they aspired to be printers, which involved a certain amount of writing. Thus the toy press actually antedated and inspired the editorial urge, since a paper and editorializing were only short steps from the printing of announcements and business cards.

There were a few scribblers in attendance at the first Philadelphia meeting who had a tepid interest in writing and very little in printing, but most of them were what you might call "innocent bystanders." Of course they were interested in the *idea* of amateur journalism, though perhaps not as keen about it as the "teenagers" of this generation who have been fascinated by amateur photography. That is an important fact and must be kept clearly in mind: practically *all* juvenile hobbies and avocations had a stronger appeal, initially, than that of amateur journalism, which only equalled or exceeded them in its social contacts.

I shall not take the time or space required to elaborate this argument, but careful consideration of the various factors involved will soon establish their superior attractions and validity. To those who may be inclined to scoff at this pronunciamento I merely say, examine the rituals of any sport, the trappings and accoutrements of any dilettante obsession—water color painting, dry point etching, book binding and marbling, high speed photography, boogie-woogie music, wood carving or what not—and you will begin to realize how small is our circle, how limited our appeal. It has taken us about seventy years to build an organized

membership of less than 300 amateurs. How many "fans," do you suppose, are interested in amateur photography? My guess would be somewhere in the thousands, though of course I may be wrong. But, off hand, I can think of no hobby that commands such a half-hearted and meager following as that of amateur journalism. There is undoubtedly a certain glamour about the atmosphere of a small print-shop, but it is generally a lonely and unsocial glamour. As a rule its devotees can only practice their skill at odd moments—evenings, Sundays or holidays—and although the printers have their occasional "bull sessions," the actual *work* of type setting and printing is not social or convivial, in the sense that these terms apply to billiards, bowling, tennis or other diversions. Their practice does not necessarily call for the aid of an assistant or the presence of an audience. Like the writers, their compensation is usually implicit in the silent approval of discriminating readers.

But the *crux* of the matter still remains to be analysed, and we shall find it, I think, in an all too easy acceptance of literary assumptions that have never actually been tested to see if they have any foundation in fact. I have lately made a few tests and comparisons which convince me that amateur journalism's pretense of being a literary institution is distinctly bogus. The existence of a smattering of clever scribblers has no bearing on the matter. Amateur journalism has *never* had a predominant literary membership; it has nothing like ten percent of its members at the present time who could honestly be termed devotees to the art of writing, or able to write anything comparable, say, with the prose and verse printed in leading college magazines. If you have ten per cent membership in a bowling league who only sit around drinking beer and consuming hot dog sandwiches, that does not make them bowlers.

The point involved is really very simple. The genuine literatus who aspires to attain anything like professional skill in writing always shows that aspiration in the individuality of his approach, his style, his painstaking craftsmanship. He strives for originality, but also for stylistic distinction. You read his work, and you immediately feel the impact of these qualities,—no loose construction, faulty diction, second- or third-rate thinking, *but an unremitting pursuit of the right word, the choice turn of expression, the arresting characterization.* That's it. You will have no trouble recognizing that sort of writing when you see it. Do you see any of it in amateur journalism? Of the several hundred so-called "ajays" (detestable locution!) who print their efforts in amateur papers, can you name a dozen whose work shows real writing ability? No, you

cannot, for they do not exist. If we could list even fifty per cent of our writers as amateurs who show definite promise and real ability, we might justify our pretensions as a writing organization, but we haven't ten per cent in the whole clamjamphry.

If I were not too old and tired I could prove these assertions up to the hilt, but you can easily do it yourself if you are interested. I have written this "last will and testament" because it may partly atone for my past stupidities. For years I have tried to boost amateur journalism as a "literary" institution, when as a matter of fact it is something vastly more valuable and important—an organization which promotes skill in the printing craft, and also offers its members many delightful social advantages, both at its conventions and at other gatherings. There is also the privilege of writing our fancies for reproduction in the amateur press,—a privilege from the exercise of which we can derive much pleasure, but for Heaven's sake let us not kid ourselves that we have ever produced a line of real literature.

I have been told from time to time that I am a writer of excellent prose and verse. I don't believe it, because I *do* know good writing when I see it; but even if the statement were true, what of it? I might be another Hemingway or another Mencken, but that would not indicate the literary quality of our hobby—it would only indicate its lack of literary quality. If we were preponderantly or even to some reasonable degree "literary," we would not have to cite such a dubious example as Edkins to prove our point.

It seems rather odd that few if any of us have ever speculated editorially over the baffling question of authorial incubation. Where do the new authors come from; where do they get the preliminary training and writing experience that enable them eventually to crash the publisher's gate with a first novel? Certainly not in the merry-go-round known as amateur journalism. We did not help to cultivate the pinfeathers of Saroyan, or preen the wings of the contemporary fledglings whose first flights are chronicled every week in the *Herald-Tribune's Weekly Book Review*. Some of them, perhaps, were lucky enough to get a little experience on college papers, or in the hospitable columns of *The New Yorker* and kindred publications, but for reasons which I will not attempt to go into, they seem to have weathered their adolescent years without ever hearing of our institution,—a hobby, one might say, with more wooden horses than riders.

It may be salutary, but it is also humiliating, to have to admit that amateur journalism has never made a successful appeal to embryo writers who actually have

the makings of genuine writing ability, amateur or otherwise. That I regard as an incontestable *fact*, and no citation of the baker's dozen who, during the past forty years or so, have gone on to achieve distinction in the professional field of journalism and of literature can be seriously considered. I have been connected more or less intimately with amateur journalism for over sixty years, and in all that long period I do not recall the name of one amateur journalist whose work has been acclaimed in professional publications. We have had a good time with our scribblings, but the best of us have never produced anything that could seriously be considered as literature.

Are there actually any amateur journalists? There are, but you will find mighty few of them displaying their activities under the aegis of the N.A.P.A. A few function in other groups, and they well deserve the accolade, because they are, almost without exception, better writers than the N.A.P.A. has ever spawned. Some are good enough—like Laney [Francis T. Laney—ed.] and his phantasy associates—to be professionals, and some are really "half-and-half," but all of them outclass our best average accomplishments in prose and verse. Have you ever read the top-notch stuff printed in *Poetry* magazine? All over this country there are groups of amateur writers whose subscriptions and gratuitous contributions support the publication of magazines that, save for typographical perfection, can give *The Aonian* unbeatable competition,—and I make no bones about declaring (what, in fact, every member knows) that *The Aonian* is, all things considered, the finest magazine now (perhaps ever) produced in what *we* are pleased to term "amateur journalism."

To the host of good, kind friends in the N.A.P.A., who have overwhelmed me with their affectionate attentions during the last few months of my illness, and who seem to have forgiven me all my sins of omission and commission, let me say this much more, while I still have the energy to push a pencil whose uncertain script may even defy Mr. Thrift's powers of interpretation: amateur journalism is an institution which I have loved all of my long life, but *it is not and probably never will be a "literary" adventure*. The man with a congenial talent for writing will never waste his time over our piddling amusements. He will, by hook or crook, break into the "big time" circuit, if he has to write and destroy a thousand articles before he can crash the gates of professional editors and publishers. And that is as it should be. Amateur journalism will continue to produce worthy printers; it does not need to concern itself with "literature" *except*

as a minor diversion, absolutely restricted and conditioned not alone by the lack of real talent but also by the fatal lack of *space*. Even *The Aonian* has had to forgo reproduction of some fairly good fiction because we couldn't find room for it.

Our hobby, without conscious effort and over a period exceeding half a century has “jelled” into its proper form and content,—a most fascinating game with a lasting appeal to hobbyists of all ages, and with “something else added” (I don't know just what it is) that “holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner.” It is hard for me to confess that I have been egregiously wrong all these years, while my fellow members have been right in their practical, common sense evaluation of the proper function of amateur journalism; it is harder still to have to say “farewell” to my many beloved friends, and to realize that at last I have reached “journey's end.” Still, it has been a pleasant voyage, and although my departure must be attuned to a note of apology, I take comfort in the thought that however much I have blundered, I shall be forgiven by those who have honored me with their esteem. As one of Bret Harte's characters remarked, “I done my damndest, angels could do no more!”

December 15, 1945

*In an appended note, editor Tim Thrift quoted from Edkins' correspondence: “Literally with `blood, sweat and tears' I have written this `last will and testament,' piecemeal, a paragraph one day, another the next, and son on...you can put it in the files as the last article written by Ernie Edkins. It represents my final convictions regarding amateur journalism and I have recorded them crudely but honestly, with a hand that has much trouble in guiding the pencil.”*

## ABOUT ERNEST A. EDKINS

Ken Faig, Jr.

Ernest Arthur Edkins was surely one of the most gifted and controversial figures to play a role in the amateur journalism hobby. Born in Coventry, Warwickshire, England on October 4, 1867, Edkins journeyed with his parents to Canada, and shortly afterwards the United States, in 1869. His schoolmate Frank S. C. Wicks of Worcester, Massachusetts introduced him to the amateur journalism hobby in 1883. His first amateur writing appeared in *The Pearl*.

Edkins edited *The Gauntlet* from Syracuse, New York and was later associated with Edwin B. Hill in publication of *The Stylus*. He became a protege of the

famous James J. O'Connell of New York City. In 1886 he was elected President of the Eastern Amateur Press Association and Official Editor of the National Amateur Press Association. In the same year, he was instrumental in the foundation of the Literary Lyceum of America. Edwin B. Hill of Detroit, Michigan published Edkins' collection *Amenophra and Other Poems* in 1889. A small sample of Edkins' early amateur writing appeared in Truman J. Spencer's *Literary Cyclopaedia of Amateur Journalism* (1891), pp. 507-512. Edkins joined *The Fossils* in 1906 and became associate editor for Tim Thrift's *The Lucky Dog* in 1909.

After ten years of extensive travel, Edkins settled down to a business career in Chicago in 1892 and spent the next forty-two years with Commonwealth Edison Company, rising to the position of manager of the retail stores department. He married Lucie Maude Howell in Hanover, Ontario, Canada in 1903 and had by her one daughter, Phyllis Louise, who married Donald M. Macomber of Winnetka, Illinois, and had four children of her own.

After his retirement from Commonwealth Edison in 1934, Edkins divided his time between his home in Highland Park, Illinois and a winter home in Coral Gables, Florida. He was encouraged to return to activity in the amateur journalism hobby by his friend H. P. Lovecraft, and published several numbers of *Causerie* and contributed to other amateur journals. As Literary Editor of Tim Thrift's *The Aonian* (1942-45), Edkins reprinted some of the finest amateur writing. He died at his home in Coral Gables, Florida on July 3, 1946, and his obituary appeared in *The Fossil* for October 1946 (p. 60).

This issue of *The Fossil* reprints the entire contents of Edward H. Cole's *Ernest A. Edkins: A Memoir* (1947) as well as Edkins' valedictory editorial from the final number of *The Aonian* (winter 1945). In the last analysis, Edkins did not believe that amateur journalism was an effective training ground for professional writers. However, he was richly appreciative of the friends he made during his sixty years of participation in the amateur journalism hobby, and he never ceased urging his fellow hobbyists to improve their writing and their publications.

In retrospect, the posthumous literary reputation of his own friend Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) serves as a counterexample to Edkins' claim that the hobby never produced a writer of world renown. The Francis Towner Laney (1914-1958) mentioned as a notable writer in Edkins' valedictory editorial was the publisher of the famous amateur magazine *The Acolyte* (1942-46), which was primarily

devoted to H. P. Lovecraft and his circle. For a full account of Laney and his activities, see Harry Warner Jr.'s *All Our Yesterdays* (Chicago, Illinois: Advent Publishers, 1969), pp. 131-139. Laney was indeed a fine writer but he scandalized science fiction fandom with his exposés of homosexuals in Los Angeles fandom in his account *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* (1948). Our own Helen Wesson published Laney's very readable account of his participation in L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetics in the fifth issue of her magazine *The Unspeakable Thing* for April 1952.

## A STORY TO BE WHISPERED

Lee Hertzberg

(Reprinted from O.A.P.C. Review [vol. 3 no. 8] for December 1937.)

With the election coming soon for the officials of the Oakland Amateur Press Club, and with the name of C. Hamilton Bloomer, Jr. nominated on a White Ballot for the presidency, it is only fitting and proper that the members should have some inkling of the type of genus homo and Man of the Hour that they are choosing to guide their destinies.

Our Pal, "The Man of Destiny," first saw the light of this world somewhere in the vicinity of Jersey City, New Jersey, on the fateful morning of March 27, 1915. Being the only member of the family at that time (besides his parents, of course!) he was greeted with the customary exclamations of joy and stuff, and invited to stay awhile.

He accepted the invitation of the Bloomers, Papa and Mama, and even went so far as to appropriate Papa's name, putting the accent on the middle, however, instead of at the beginning, as all normal, sane people would do. Undoubtedly, this charming, rosy-cheeked bud, which was to unfold into the full glory of staunch American manhood, was already showing that independence of spirit which so endeared (Editors: ? Author: ??) to his colleagues in later years.

After his arrival and subsequent acceptance into the family circle, he was left to his own devices, and later formed part of the welcoming committee for two girls, waving his rattle with gusto, and bouncing his bottle off the craniums of both interlopers, just to gauge their reactions. (This gauging business appears later.) Much to his horror, these two lovely girls turned out to be his sisters, and he has never fully recovered from the shock. However he soon grew accustomed to their presence and could "Goo" and "Da" with either of them

in the very best of form.

Whether it was due to the far-famed New Jersey mosquitoes and their various attempts to abduct the Bloomer children, the family after various meanderings came to rest in Denver, Colorado. There the little group grew up with the years and the rest of the inhabitants and C. Hamilton attended the various schools in order. While not a precocious child, he nevertheless managed to worm his way thru the various grades and secure good grades in the passage.

Then, when he was in High School, the itching feet hit the family again, and they followed Horace Greeley's advice, winding up in San Diego. There, "The Friend of the People" attended Hoover High School, and made quite a name for himself. He graduated as a Major in R.O.T.C. and with his diploma he was handed a fountain pen and pencil set (Scholastic magazine's International News Contest award). Besides these very necessary items, he received one handshake, one pat on the back, a few pointers on signing dotted lines, and then was sent forth into the world.

Again, the family felt the urge to seek greener pastures, and in 1933 they moved to San Francisco, where by diligent reading of want-ads, pushing of doorbells, and trampling of streets, Chuck secured employment with J. M. Curtis and Son, Gaugers and Wine Chemists. There Charles H. learned to be a wine chemist and developed his early talent as a gauger. (See I told you this gauging would come in again.) As a representative of the company he was sent to various places in the state such as Fresno, Lodi and all points north.

He stayed with Curtis for over three years, and then after a brief but enlightening experience with Willie Hearst and the San Francisco *Examiner*, he joined the staff of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company as a collector, and has managed to calm his nomadic urges to the extent that he has stayed with them ever since. At the present writing he is expecting a promotion any year now.

His writing experience dates back to the period soon after he arrived in San Francisco. Having an intense interest in science-fiction and fantasy, he determined to work zealously for the betterment of this branch of literature, and forthwith published, edited, and wrote his own periodical, titled *Tesseract*. This was continued more or less regularly for two years, and then because of the pressure of other work he was forced to suspend publication. However, his initiative was not to be downed, and noting a need for an authoritative magazine in the wine industry, he began the *Wine Digest*. This, his first commercial venture of large scale

dimensions, lasted about six months, with “CHB” as editor, reporter and staff. It was a very high type, technical journal printed on glossy paper, with profuse illustrations. Due to lack of support, it lapsed.

Meanwhile, our hero has turned his attention more and more to the O.A.P.C. and its varied activities, and under his guidance, instigation, and support, the club has taken on a new life, and is making an active fight for the 1939 convention. He has worked hard and well, and undoubtedly deserves the full support of the membership and the honor of its leadership.

#### ABOUT C. HAMILTON BLOOMER, JR.

Ken Faig, Jr.

I don't know if C. [Charles] Hamilton Bloomer, Jr. was successful in his campaign for the presidency of the Oakland Amateur Press Club (O.A.P.C.). Maybe some further research in the Groveman Collection will reveal the answer. I do know that the club did land NAPA's 1939 convention, which was held in Berkeley, California in July 1939. I don't know whether Bloomer was still participating in O.A.P.C. affairs by that time or not.

So why reprint an article about an obscure ajay from nearly seventy years ago? The reason is that while Bloomer may not be particularly well-known in amateur journalism circles, he is an almost legendary figure in science fiction fandom. For Bloomer's era of activity, the reader must refer to Sam Moskowitz's book *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom* (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1974). This work was first published in book form in a mimeographed edition by The Atlanta Science Fiction Organization in 1954, but the Hyperion Press edition is far more accessible. Moskowitz's account of science fiction fandom was originally serialized in A. Langley Searles' *Fantasy Commentator* between 1945 and 1952.

Bloomer and Claire P. Beck (1919-1999), who had launched *The Science Fiction Critic* in 1935, became close friends in San Francisco. Moskowitz writes (p. 63): “There is little information on Bloomer the man, but he was a chemist by occupation and would appear from the mature cast of his writings to have been older than the average fan of his times. Through association with Beck, he was encouraged to strike out on his own; the result was a national organization called the Science Fiction Advancement Association [SFAA]. It was introduced to the fan world through several advertisements in Beck's *Critic*.” Moskowitz provides a rather full account of SFAA and its journal *Tesseract*.

Among the notable early members of SFAA were fans like Bloomer, Beck, Roy Test, James Blish, Raymond Van Houten, William H. Miller, Jr., Nils H. Frome, Willis Conover, Jr. and Robert A. Madle. Bloomer produced four consecutive monthly numbers of *Tesseract*, using an office duplicating machine called the multigraph. He sold his multigraph machine to Nils H. Frome (1918-1962) of Fraser Mills, British Columbia (who would later use it to produce two issues of *Supramundane Stories*) when a merger of *Tesseract* with Beck's *Critic* was announced in 1936. However, Beck ultimately decided against the merger. Bloomer tried to arrange with James Blish to continue SFAA columns in Blish's *The Planeteer*, but when that plan fell through, Bloomer acquired a mimeograph and produced new issues of *Tesseract* beginning in November 1936. The April 1937 issue was dedicated to the memory of H. P. Lovecraft and contained the first publication of his revision “The Crawling Chaos.”

Bloomer urged SFAA members to join NAPA and a number did. Fred Pohl and Donald Wollheim attended NAPA's July 1937 convention in Boston; there is a notable photograph of them posed with Harold Segal and Jack Bond. By 1937, however, Bloomer's energies were focused on OAPC and NAPA. He appointed Roy A. Squires (1920-1988) as his successor at SFAA. Eventually, Raymond Van Houten (1915-1993) succeeded Squires, and in 1938 Van Houten handed over the remnants of Bloomer's organization to Moskowitz and his *New Fandom*. These developments are all narrated in great detail in *The Immortal Storm*. Modelling many of its features on NAPA, Donald A. Wollheim and others launched the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA) in 1937.

In later years, Claire Beck and other members of First Fandom made determined efforts to trace SFAA's founder, C. Hamilton Bloomer, Jr., without success. At least, the *O.A.P.C. Review* for December 1937 provides a somewhat fuller picture of the “mystery man” who founded SFAA. I thought that Bloomer's date of birth (March 27, 1915) might enable me to trace him through the Social Security Death Index, but I had no success. I did find a Charles Bloomer, born October 26, 1892, who died in San Francisco, California in October 1985. Perhaps he was the father of C. Hamilton Bloomer, Jr. Whether C. Hamilton Bloomer, Jr. died early, changed his name, or went abroad I do not know. Perhaps someone in amateur journalism can provide something more about his history after 1937. Bloomer did produce at least four issues of a small amateur magazine, *The Bloodstone*, for NAPA, OAPC and PCAEA between March and



November 1937; the November 1937 issue (vol. 1 no. 4) is reproduced in this issue of *The Fossil*.

Bloomer was not alone among science fiction fans in being interested in mainstream amateur journalism. Lovecraft's friends Robert H. Barlow (1918-1951) and Duane W. Rimel (1915-1996) both joined NAPA, and Barlow published two issues of *The Dragon Fly*. Another science fiction fan, Wilson H. Shepherd (1917-1985) of Oakman, Alabama, who founded the International Science Fiction Guild (later the Terrestrial Fantascience League) in 1934, joined both NAPA and AAPA. In 1937, he ran a vigorous campaign for the AAPA presidency against incumbent Robert H. Price, but lost. Shepherd published four numbers of *The American Free Press* and three numbers of *The Rebel* for AAPA (the former was a straight apazine while the latter was a science fiction fanzine) and also circulated H. P. Lovecraft's *A History of the Necronomicon* as a brochure in AAPA's November 1937 bundle. He was partner with Donald Wollheim in a semi-professional magazine *Fanciful Tales*, of which only one issue, dated Fall 1936, appeared. His later life, apart from his death in Montevallo, Alabama in November 1985, seems as much a mystery as the subsequent career of C. Hamilton Bloomer, Jr.

Connections between mainstream amateur journalism and science fiction fandom have occurred occasionally over the years. Bloomer and Shepherd are early examples from the 1930s. Helen (Vivarttas) Wesson has always maintained a lively interest in science fiction and fantasy and remains a member of both NAPA and FAPA. Among current Fossils, Mike Horvat and Robert Lichtman are both longstanding science fiction fans. Readers of *The Fossil* will recall that Mike's collection of science fiction fanzines was donated to University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa at the same time LAJ was donated to UW-Madison. Yours truly, while not so much involved in science fiction fandom, has been a Lovecraft fan for many years and was one of the founding members of the EOD (Esoteric Order of Dagon) Amateur Press Association in 1973. Hopefully, cross-fertilization between mainstream amateur journalism and science fiction fandom will continue into the future. C. Hamilton Bloomer, Jr. is a notable—if somewhat mysterious—early example of a crossover fan/ajay.

## OUR BANQUETS

Nita Gerner Smith

(Reprinted from George W. Trainer's *The Empire* [vol.

2 no. 7] for February 1942.)

Among the interesting relics in the Library of Amateur Journalism are the menus of dinners amateur journalists have eaten. The earliest menu is dated 1870. Enormous meals were served to our members in the eighteen-nineties, seven courses were common, the menus written in French, and often included oysters on the half shell, several meat courses but no salad, and many desserts, including plum pudding and fresh fruits. Game was easily procurable in those days and more varied fish courses. What was served most often through the years was tenderloin of beef or turkey; at some of the old banquets, both. The longest menu noted was in January 1873, a banquet of the Eastern Amateur Press Association: six courses [at that dinner no oysters and no salads] but meats were served cold, boiled, and roasted, and there were twelve desserts. In 1878 the Chicago Daily News gave what was called a banquet to the N.A.P.A. at the Palmer House, but as griddle cakes and eggs were served, it seemed to have been a breakfast.

The amateurs have been fond of interlarding the menus with quotations, such as “Let good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both.” One Fossil dinner menu contained Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem, “The Boys.” [Look it up—it just fits the Fossils.] The Fossil dinner menus are elaborate, but among the most attractive are those of the St. Louis A. J. Club of other days. The menu of the Golden State A. P. Association, San Francisco, 1900, reproduced many headings of a.j. papers on the cover. E. M. Lind, in Oakland 1897, turned his paper, “The Amateur Bohemian,” into the menu for the banquet. A N.A.P.A. dinner menu in 1901 listed a pun for each course. Richard Gerner's well-known poem, “Terrible Snow,” was used for the potatoes—“Gerner's pommes de terre[ble].”

Hadley Smith attended a dinner given by British amateurs in 1895 in Manchester, England, and one of the courses was “stewed steak.” Would that have had anything to do with his becoming a vegetarian? Later on, the records disclose that he gave vegetarian meals to the N.A.P.A. delegates, New York in 1902 and Cleveland in 1905. At the latter he imported all the food from the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

Many of the menus are autographed, according to our good old custom, and Messrs. Mellinger, Edkins, Hayes, Adams, Boechat, and Kempner are among those who survived those enormous banquets are still with us, to do justice to many more, I hope. The first a.j. dinner I was privileged to attend was to one given to Mrs. John Nixon and her sister, at the Broadway Central Hotel,

New York, in 1912. That is where I first found out about the amateur fellowship—I want to be a part of it always.

## LAJ PROGRESS REPORT

Robin E. Rider  
Curator, Special Collections  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
26 December 2005

I wanted to offer an update on the Library of Amateur Journalism in its new home here in Madison. Now that the project to install compact movable shelving in some of our vaults is more or less complete—a full year later, much later than the schedule had predicted—we have our work room back and usable for processing projects. We've thus begun to prepare inventories of the LAJ boxes (starting with the brown EHS boxes), to clean and rebox the contents in appropriate archival boxes, and to list specific preservation issues box by box. As that work goes forward, we will have a better idea of what additional archival supplies and preservation measure will be appropriate for LAJ.

We are also happy to be receiving issues of *The Fossil* and packets from the United Amateur Press Association of America to add to the collection. Thanks, too, for the copy of *The Connecticut Amateur, 1:4* (1902) enclosed with one of the issues of *The Fossil*.

As in 2004, we are most grateful to you for your generosity and for everything you've done to assure the safe arrival of LAJ at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

*This progress report on LAJ from UW-Madison Special Collections was received just a little too late for inclusion in our January 2006 issue. The Fossil will print further updates as they become available.*

## FOSSIL OFFICERS: 2005-2006

President: Guy Miller, 2951 Archer Lane, Springfield, OH 45503-1209, (937) 390-3499

Vice President, Leland M. Hawes, Jr., 5009 Dickens Ave., Tampa, FL 33629-7514, (813) 837-1314, <lmhawesjr@earthlink.net>

Secretary-treasurer, Tom Parson, 157 South Logan, Denver, CO 80209, (303) 777-8951, <typetom@aol.com>

Librarian, Martin M. (Mike) Horvat, P.O. Box 741, Stayton, OR 93783, (503) 769-6088, <W7ASF@arrl.net>

Historian, Sean Donnelly, 9037 Tree Valley Drive, Tampa, FL 33615, (813) 889-7323, <sdonnelly@ut.edu>

Webmaster, David M. Tribby, 1529 Fantail Court, Sunnyvale, CA 94087, (408) 737-2193, <dtribby@stanfordalumni.org>

Membership Chair, Martha E. Shivers, 1526 165th Avenue, Knoxville, IA 50138, (641) 842-3212

Official Editor, Ken Faig, Jr., 2311 Swainwood Dr., Glenview, IL 60025-2741, (847) 657-7409, <moshasuk@interaccess.com>

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This journal is the Official Organ of The Fossils, a non-profit organization whose purposes are to stimulate interest in and preserve the history of independent publishing, either separate from or organized in the hobby known as “Amateur Journalism” and to foster the practices of amateur journalism. To this end, The Fossils preserved the Library of Amateur Journalism, a repository of amateur papers and memorabilia dating from the 1850s, acquired in 1916 and donated in 2004 to the Special Collections Department of the University of Wisconsin Library, Room 976, Memorial Library, 728 State Street, Madison, WI 53706. Individuals or institutions allied with our goals are invited to join The Fossils. Dues are \$15 annually—\$20 for joint membership of husband and wife. Annual subscription to *The Fossil* without privileges of membership is \$10. Make remittances payable to The Fossils, and mail to the Secretary-treasurer.