

Charming and Complex

RICHARD HOPKINS remembers William Evan Fredeman,
the man who brought Norman Colbeck to UBC.

I FIRST MET William Evan Fredeman (1928–1999) in the fall of 1975. I had enrolled in a graduate course he was teaching in the UBC English department concerning the editing of literary letters. I had taken all four of the bibliography courses Professor Roy Stokes offered in the School of Librarianship (today the iSchool@UBC) and wanted to add to my knowledge base in that area of study. As good fortune would have it, after the course concluded Professor Fredeman hired me as his research assistant for his newly initiated project concerning the letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

I remember the early days of the project as I got to know more about my new boss. A telling memory is the way he handled my question on why he was called “Dick” when his Christian names were “William” and “Evan.” “Oh, that is just what some of my colleagues and former students think I am,” he replied, puckishly. He seemed reluctant to revisit his past to reveal the real truth: that he was born Richard Singleton Merrill, but his mother was killed in a car accident and he spent several years in an orphanage until adopted by a couple named Lucille and Frank Fredeman.

Fredeman was more forthcoming about the major decision in his life that ultimately brought him into mine and Norman Colbeck’s. He had served during World War II in the U.S. Navy and later as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve handling criminal investigations. His trajectory brought him to a major turning point in his life, and he had to decide between a career in military intelligence and a career as an academic. Dick never did explain why he opted for one path over the other, but thank goodness for literary studies that he decided to become a scholar rather than a spy!

SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN

A close friend of Dick noted in an obituary, “He was not universally popular, either with his

colleagues or with students.” I cannot comment on his dealings with other students, but he was always very cordial and generous to me. Whenever he was out searching for books for his own collection, for example, he always kept my own Dickens collecting in mind and several times picked up small items such as pamphlets, badges and medallions, which he then generously gifted to me. I think his academic enemies arose from the fact that he was a solid, ex-Southern conservative who had ended up in a department of what he considered to be “hippy-dippy,” left-leaning liberals due to the scarcity of academic jobs in the States. I know also that other scholars at times became enemies, especially those who disliked what they took to be his arrogance. I particularly remember one scathing and caustic review he wrote of a scholarly article written by what he called two “fem-lib.”

This is all just to say that Dick Fredeman was a complex man. He could throw his weight around and alienate some people, or he could just as easily turn on the Southern charm and ingratiate himself with other people. Certainly he charmed English bookseller Norman Colbeck. He convinced him to not only sell his enormous collection of 19th-century and Edwardian literature to UBC, but also to move to Canada, where he would be employed as a bibliographical consultant to catalogue his own collection. Dick was also instrumental in acquiring a large Rossetti manuscript archive, the Angeli-Dennis Collection, and other significant collections of Victorian books and manuscripts for the library.

CUT AND PASTE

Alienating to some and ingratiating to others, though, there is no disputing his considerable achievements as a literary scholar. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment is the mammoth, multi-volume work *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Two volumes appeared in 2002, and the final eight volumes in 2015.

This is a project that started on a pool table in the Fredeman basement. Since this was before the widespread use of computers in literary scholarship, the initial task was to cut up the only compilation of Rossetti letters to that time, the Doughty-Wahl edition. Dick knew that Doughty-Wahl was deficient in many ways—missing letters, incomplete letters, editorial errors, and so on—but it seemed to be the best place to start. So before computer scholarship, “cut” and “paste” meant literally that—cutting letters out of DW and pasting them onto sheets of paper. While I was carrying out that task, Dick was away scouring the world for new letters to include in the edition. Computers eventually made great advances, greatly easing the labour of literary scholarship, and the material we accumulated could much more easily be handled and edited in digital mode.

Even before undertaking this major scholarly project, Dick gathered many encomiums for his academic work: several well-received books and scores of scholarly articles and reviews. He

had an international reputation and was dubbed “the foremost scholar of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.” He was called “one of Canada’s pre-eminent Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite scholars” and earned the sobriquet “the Father of North American Pre-Raphaelite Studies.” He was said to be the most internationally distinguished scholar in UBC’s English department.

Without a doubt, however, *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* was the capstone of his scholarly career. Just one fact alone will indicate the scope and importance of this new edition: it added 2,000 letters to the Doughty-Wahl edition that had never before been published. As one scholar described Fredeman’s magnum opus, this impressive work of scholarship stands as “a monumental testament to his outstanding scholarship.”

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Surprising and Delightful Connections

UBC graduate student JUSTIN O’HEARN makes an unexpected discovery in the Colbeck collection.

NORMAN COLBECK was known for his affinity for collecting the finest editions as well as those inscribed by the original authors. Examining Colbeck’s extensive editions of poet G.K. (Gilbert Keith) Chesterton (1874–1936), I found a number of works inscribed to one Anne Kidd, sometimes accompanied by original drawings done by the author. Looking through the extended collection, we found more volumes inscribed to Kidd and other members of her family by not only Chesterton, but also his brother Cecil and the extended Chesterton family.

Colbeck himself noted that a copy of G.K.

Chesterton’s *Greybeards at Play* (1900) in the collection was “an intimate presentation copy to Mrs. Robert Kidd, who, as Annie Firmin, was the playmate of [Chesterton’s] boyhood days in Sheffield Terrace.” Looking into the matter further, I discovered that this particular Mrs. Robert Kidd, *née* Firmin, moved from London to Vancouver with her husband and founded Overwitea Foods in New Westminster in 1915. In the years after Anne’s move to Vancouver, she remained a friend of Chesterton’s as well as his younger brother Cecil, their respective spouses and their mother, whom Anne referred to as “Aunt Marie.” Anne would