

Publications of the Alcuin Society

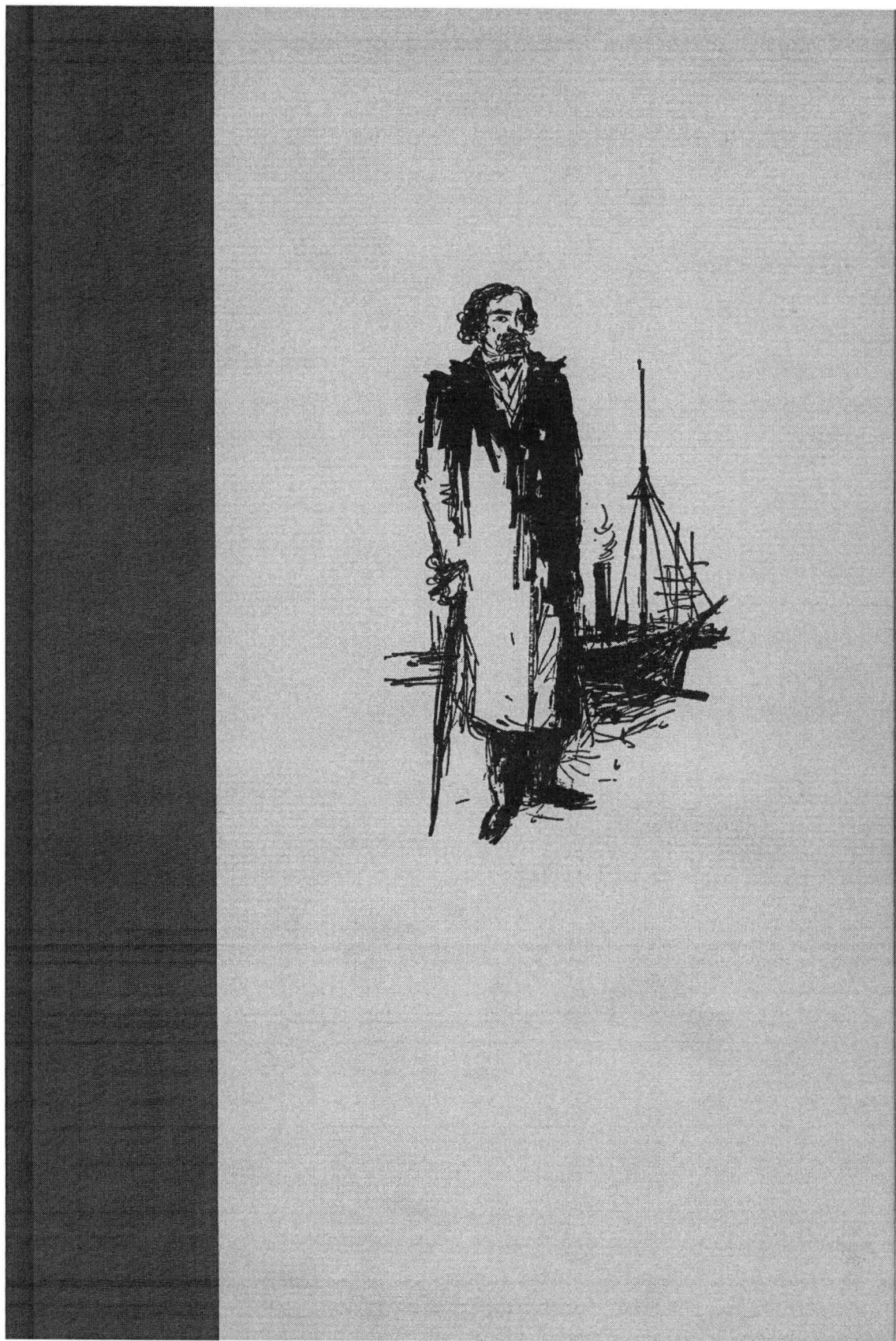
The Alcuin Society was founded with the noble purpose of promoting the art and craft of fine bookmaking. Certainly, this has been accomplished in *Amphora*, the Society's quarterly publication, with many inspiring articles on the subject over the years.

But talking about making fine books is one thing; actually making them is another, and the Society tried its hand at this from almost its very beginning. From 1966 to 1996 it published eleven substantial books, all except one produced in Vancouver.

One of the Society's mainstays in the early days was designer and printer Wil Hudson, an American who had come up to Vancouver and established a letterpress printing shop on Cambie Street near Hastings. Luckily for the Society, he had an interest in fine printing, and he worked with a Nick Schwabe, also a designer and printer, in producing some fine publications. Although he produced only two of the eleven Alcuin Society books, he also did chapbooks, pamphlets, keepsakes and broadsides, and was an obvious focal point for fine printing in Vancouver for a time.

The Alcuin Society's first book, published in 1966, was a Canadian historical item, *A Theatrical Trip for a Wager*. This book got the Society off to a great start—it was a substantial book of 282 pages printed in an edition of 500 copies. Printed by Wil in Frederic Goudy's Kennerley typeface (available on Monotype at Shilvock-Parkes, a local type composition house), it had a three-colour title page and a second colour for large initials on the chapter opening pages. Handsomely bound and contained in a slipcase, it caught the attention of bibliophiles and proved that the Society was serious in its stated purpose of promoting fine bookmaking.

A year later came an edition of Ethel Wilson's *Hetty Dorval* that was designed, printed, illustrated and bound by Morriss Printing in Victoria. The illustrations were done as linocuts by Gus Rueter, a talented printer from Toronto who had worked in Vancouver for a time before settling in at Charlie Morriss's printing shop. He was the father of Will Rueter, proprietor of the well-known Aliquando Press, where he has produced almost one hundred limited editions.



Binding in red cloth and buff paper sides of A Theatrical Trip for a Wager.

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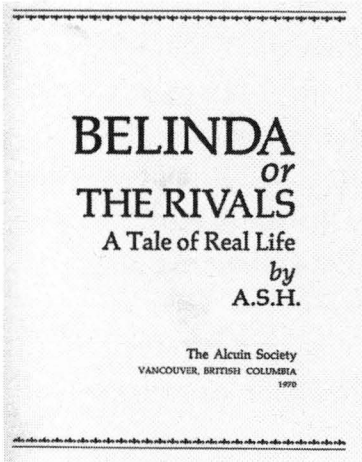
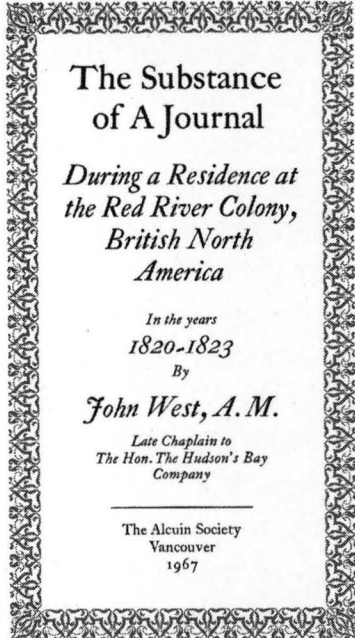
The third book, also published in 1967, was another Canadian historical item. Entitled *The Substance of a Journal during a Residence at the Red River Colony, British North America, in the Years 1820-1823*, this book was originally published in 1824 by John West, late Chaplain to the Hon. Hudson's Bay Company. This project was another triumph of Hudson, with Schwabe as the designer. The book had a beautiful title page and was again printed in a Monotype face from Shilvock-Parkes, this time Caslon Old Style. It was a journal relating to the Red River Colony in the 1820s.

There was a hiatus of a few years until 1970, when an ambitious project was undertaken to reprint one of the first Canadian novels, *Belinda, or The Rivals*, along with the reproduction of sixteen watercolours of the Chatham,

Ontario, area in which the story was set. Set on the Linotype in Hermann Zapf's Palatino type, it was printed by letterpress, and bound and slipcased by Evergreen Press. Additionally, twenty copies were bound in quarter Morocco leather.

Next we jump to 1973, when James Alexander enters the picture. His father was a printer operating as Seymour Press, on Seymour Street, of course, and Jim, involved in graphic arts his whole life, became a printer too. For a time he taught printing at the

Vancouver Vocational Institute, and had his students design and print for the Alcuin Society. The fifth book, an account of a journey across the Rocky Mountains in 1862 entitled *The Diary and Narrative of Richard Henry Alexander in a Journey across the Rocky Mountains*, was done by them.



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The institute had a Heidelberg cylinder press, perfect for printing books, and the typeface this time was Times New Roman. The binding was done by Hans Strohhacker, an excellent German binder who had settled in Vancouver, and who bound at least six of the other editions as well.

A bit of a mystery surrounds the next book, which appeared in 1974: *A Short Account of a Northwest Voyage*. Someone went all the way to Toronto to get the book set in Monotype Plantin by Cooper & Beatty, the leading type composition house there, had the type shipped to Vancouver, and some Society members themselves printed the book on an Albion hand press. Whose press was it? Whose printing shop was used? Who designed it? There is talk of a local printer who bowed out halfway through printing a book for the Society. Could this be it?

The next book, *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, by Catharine Parr Traill, originally published in 1853, was published by the Alcuin Society in two volumes in 1974–75. This book is significant because it was the first not printed by letterpress. Volume 1 was hand set by Wil Hudson in Monotype Van Dijk, undoubtedly obtained from McKenzie & Harris in San Francisco. Volume 2 was set by Cooper & Beatty in Monotype Janson, but the metal did not have to be shipped west; only reproduction proofs were necessary because both volumes were printed at Benwell Atkins by lithography. *The Canadian Settler's Guide* continued the string of historical items for which the Alcuin Society was becoming well-known.

In Praise of Scribes was the first non-Canadiana publication. It was first published in 1494 by a book collector who feared that the new technique of "printing" was going to kill the art of manuscript books done in calligraphy. How right he was, but the Alcuin Society edition is at least hand set, rather than machine set, in Caslon type. It was the second book printed by Alcuin Society members—perhaps on the same Albion press as *A Short Account of a Northwest Voyage*.

In 1977, the jewel of the Society's publishing ventures arrived. *Flowers in Heraldry* is the work of Vera Ibbett, a British artist skilled at both calligraphy and botanical painting. Printed in Belgium by lithography in glorious colour throughout, it has to be seen to be believed.

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Flowers in Heraldry essentially ended the book publishing program, and the Society turned to publishing chapbooks and pamphlets until 1992, when the second-to-last book was published. Entitled *In Praise of the Book*, it was a collection of articles and illustrations from the Society's quarterly journal, *Amphora*.

The last book, *Festina Lente*, was printed by lithography, although the Barbarian Press printed the cover by letterpress. It was a celebration of the fabulous Aldine Collection donated to Special Collections at Simon Fraser University by the Wosk family. Crispin Elsted designed the book, and had it set in digitized versions of Monotype Poliphilus roman and Blado italic.

CHAPBOOKS & PAMPHLETS

These publications have been produced occasionally by the Society from 1976 up to the present and number about fourteen. They range from *A Typographic Bestiary* to *I Believe: A Portfolio of Calligraphy* to *A Letter by Admiral Lord Nelson* to *A Typographic Frolic*. Of the early ones, some were printed letterpress by Wil Hudson and some by Jim Alexander's students at the Vancouver Vocational Institute. *Ear Reach: Poems*, by George Bowering, was printed by Peter Quartermain on his 8x12" platen press, and another poem, by Robert Bringhurst, was printed in Toronto by Glenn Goluska at his private press.

More recently, the chapbook program has been revived, with Jim Rainer overseeing the production, in 2004, of an edition of Roderick Haig-Brown's *On Making a Library*. This was printed letterpress by David Clifford at his Blackstone Press on Granville Island. In 2005, Richard Hopkins managed the production of Terry Stillman's *Thoreau MacDonald: Canada's Foremost Book Illustrator*; again printed letterpress by David Clifford. Copies are still available from the Society.





An Alcuin Society Keepsake

*Printed on an Albion press by Bill Taylor at the Palliser Press
in Harrogate, Yorkshire, on paper handmade at the press.*

KEEPSAKES & BROADSIDES

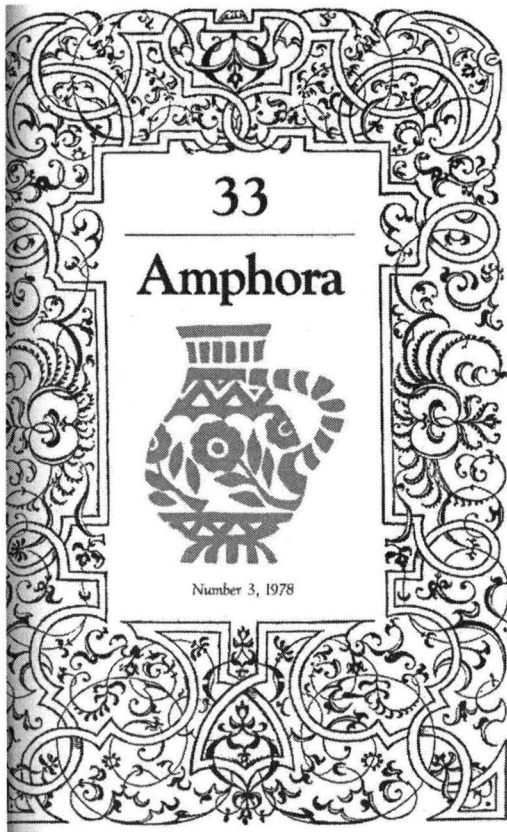
More than fifty keepsakes and broadsides have been produced continually by the Society from 1966 to the present. Some are ephemeral in nature, consisting of Christmas cards, invitations, announcements and book prospectuses. Some were printed letterpress by Wil Hudson and Jim Alexander, and some by lithography by Don Atkins at Benwell Atkins.

Quite a number of keepsakes were produced for inclusion in *Amphora*, and here we have a cornucopia of letterpress printers operating under a number of exotic press names:

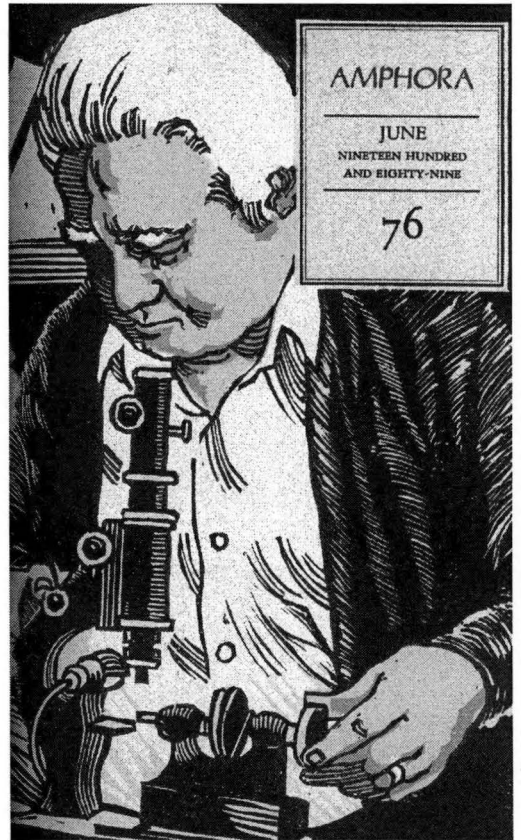
TARRYDIDDLE PRESS
STANBROOK ABBEY PRESS
CRABGRASS PRESS
SLUG PRESS
BRANSTEAD PRESS
BLACKSTONE PRESS
BARBARIAN PRESS
GREGYNOG PRESS
SHERWOOD PRESS
BASEMENT CAGE PRESS
FIREWEED PRESS

AMPHORA THE SOCIETY'S QUARTERLY JOURNAL

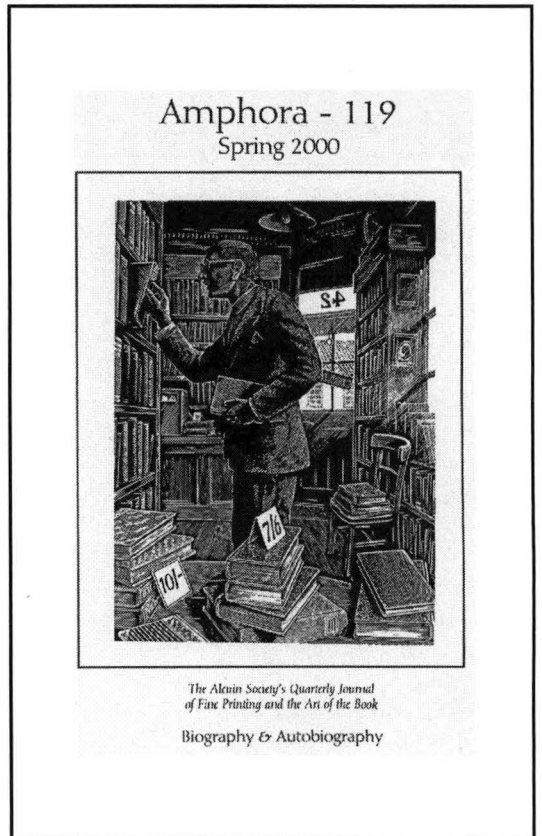
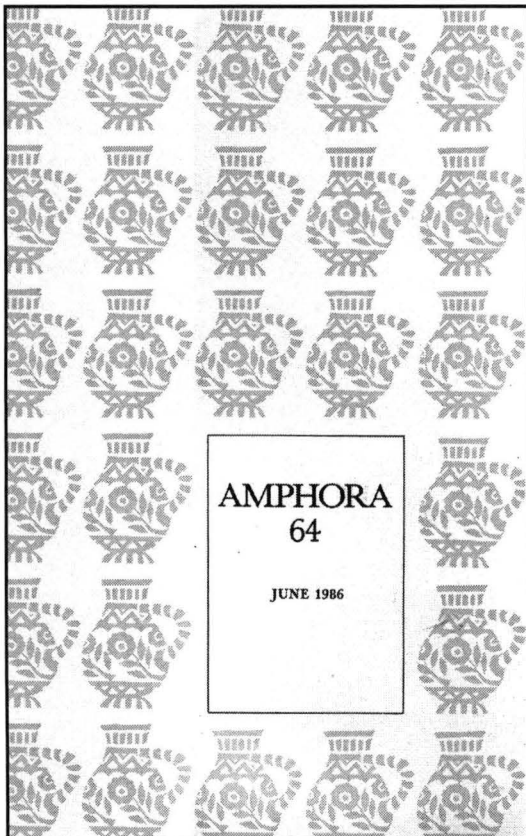
The first issues of *Amphora* were essentially a newsletter of four or eight pages, but it soon blossomed into a full-blown quarterly journal that has been produced continuously ever since. Typographically, the best issues were printed letterpress by Jim Alexander's students at the Vancouver Vocational Institute. The type was hot metal, set on the Linotype, and a second colour was used here and there to bring the pages to life. Altogether, these issues had a printerly look about them that is always a pleasure to see.



The vase is a linocut by George Kuthan.



Drawing of Frederic W. Goudy by Jim Rimmer.



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Jim gave up teaching, however, to start his own graphic arts business, and subsequent issues were all produced by lithography at Benwell Atkins, until more recently when they obtained the latest in printing presses—a digital laser printer. Developed by Xerox, this laser printer prints even better than lithography because the blacks are denser, hence blacker.

In addition to being printed on Benwell Atkins' digital laser printer, *Amphora* has undergone a recent redesign. The last few years' issues have used a real typeface (Bulmer) and have a printerly look about them that recalls the earlier issues printed by letterpress.

