

BOOKSELLING

ALTHOUGH JIM LORSON recently (and proudly) established a Web site for his Southern California shop, he remains an old-school proponent of California's long tradition of bookselling and collecting. Business communications received from Jim by post are often accompanied by brief, and usually wry, notes written on a typewriter. This year being the 30th anniversary of his first shop opening, *Amphora* invited Jim to talk about selling and collecting books.

How did you get into bookselling?

Books have been my main interest from as early as I can remember. I was an early reader, encouraged by my mother and the books of the Carnegie Library in Canton, Ohio. I worked as a pageboy at our local library at age 12 and gradually was allowed to man (boy) the reference department in the evening. The reading of books was my main interest and I read continuously.

After moving to California and working as a manager in electronics and getting married, I spent my weekends browsing bookstores and building up a collection of sorts, telling my wife I would open a bookstore after retirement. Retirement occurred earlier than I thought, as I was laid off with an early retirement option that covered insurance and a small amount of monthly income.

Prior to this I had opened a small shop in downtown Fullerton run by my wife (and joint partner to this day) in April of 1977. It was successful from the beginning and my wife began offering new children's books, which allowed me to play the antiquarian game.

California has a long and rich history of book collecting and a passion for the book arts. How does your business fit into this tradition?

California had two major collectors in Henry H. Huntington and William Andrews Clark, and their libraries remain in the Los Angeles area. There were outstanding booksellers: the Dawsons, Jake Zeitlin, Maxwell Hunley and a host of others, augmented today by the Heritage Book Shop, with stock comparable to the best in the world. The Huntington Library with its incredible collections is an outstanding research facility, as is the Williams

Andrews Clark Memorial Library, which recently celebrated the addition of its eight-millionth book.

Today—and the end is in sight—I have a small group of regular customers with varied interests: Californiana; fine press; and miniature books. My wife sells principally to teachers and school librarians. We recently started a Web site as an alternative to commercial programs like AbeBooks and eBay, because it allows us to be totally independent and still participate in the incredible invention that is the Internet. It has been a success, notably in the area of miniature books.

How has book collecting changed since you started?

When I began collecting there was still interest in the children's books listed in *Peter Parley to Penrod*; and customers still used Merle Johnson's *High Spots of American Literature*, both of which bring blank

stares when mentioned to most modern book hunters (many of whom just seek things on the Internet).

Perhaps because of the active collecting and fine printing community, California booksellers also have a long tradition of publishing books. This is something you have carried on, specializing in miniature books.

We began miniatures as an uncommon sideline. Our first publication was the miniature *Nothing to Wear*, printed by Vance Gerry and Patrick Reagh. We began to issue catalogues and expanded our coverage of miniatures over the years, with

pleasurable participation by the Whittington Press, Carmen & Erik Voss, Joe D'Ambrosio, Vance Gerry and others. Any success we have had in private press publishing has been in our choice of printers and binders. It has not been a money-maker, but somehow we have probably broken even over the years.

Looking back at your career, what have been some of the highlights?

Perhaps a crowning achievement has been our relationship with John and Rose Randle of the Whittington Press, which began early on at an ABA book fair. We were privileged to be the first sellers of *Matrix* in the Southern California area and were able to sell a core collection of their books to UCLA. Simon Lawrence of the Fleece Press has been another close friend.

Lorson's Books & Prints (www.lorsonbooksandprints.com) is based in Fullerton, CA.

