

Celebrating Robert Reid's Books

The six-decade career of typographer, designer and private press printer Robert R. Reid will be the focus of two major events this fall.

As a fitting introduction to the next day's awaygoose printing fair, on November 16 the annual Yosef Wosk-Simon Fraser University-Alcuin Society Lecture will celebrate Robert Reid's work and influence with an evening of reminiscences by friends, colleagues and students. And in October a new Web site chronicling his career, with details and photographs of his many books, was launched at www.robertreidprinting.ca.

The featured speaker at the November 16 evening will be West Coast artist Takao Tanabe, who was introduced to Reid, and printing, in the early 1950s by the painter Joe Plaskett. Other speakers will be Charlie Mayrs, one of Reid's students at the Vancouver Art School in the late '50s; librarian Peter McNally, who will speak about Reid's work as designer for McGill University Press; and Heavenly Monkey publisher Rollin Milroy, who will start the evening with an illustrated overview and highlights of Reid's publishing work.

Born in Alberta in 1927, Reid moved to Vancouver at the age of nine. It was shortly thereafter he received his first printing set—a toy made from tin, with rubber type—and a lifelong obsession was sparked. He played at printing newspapers, and worked at printing cards, through his teenage years. During his first year at the University of British Columbia (studying commerce, as befits any solid young man of Scottish stock), the sight of a rubricated volume on display in the library sparked his desire to print a book.

Looking for guidance from UBC librarian Kaye Lamb, Reid was directed towards Alfred Waddington's *Fraser Mines Vindicated*, the second book printed in B.C. (edged out, by a few weeks, by *Cameron's Rules*). Though only about 70 years old at the time, the book had

already become exceedingly scarce, with only a handful of copies known to exist. Satisfied that the book deserved his attention, Reid embarked on a two-year project of copying out the text from the UBC copy; setting the 90 pages of type by hand; and printing them in two colours on his treadle-operated platen press. The edition of 110 copies was published in 1949, bound in quarter leather with paper marbled by Reid on the boards, and a grey flannel "slipcase" made by his mother. It sold out (at \$10 a copy) and was even accepted

into the prestigious Rounce & Coffin Club's annual Best Books of the Year show.

The success of *Fraser Mines* convinced Reid to pursue his passion for printing, and he established his own shop in downtown Vancouver. Through the 1950s he did a wide range of commercial printing, including the *B.C. Quarterly* magazine, and came into contact with many of the artists emerging from the West Coast at the time, including Bill Reid.

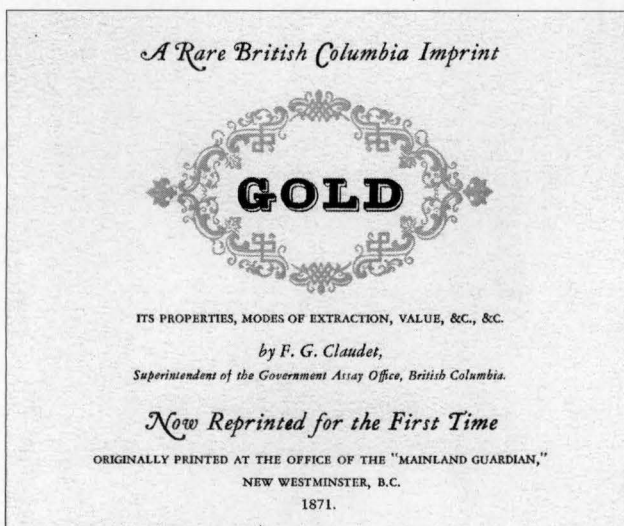
It was during this time that Tanabe met and worked with Robert Reid, collaborating on a range of commercial work and Reid's second limited edition book, the historical

reprint *Gold*. Tanabe went on to establish a reputation for creative use of type and printing with his own Periwinkle Press during the early 1960s, before abandoning printing to focus on painting. A major career retrospective was published in 2005, in conjunction with a show of his paintings at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Both Tanabe and Reid taught at the Vancouver School of Art, where they encountered Charlie Mayrs, one of four brothers who attended the school during the 1950s. A dedicated painter, Charlie went on to a career in advertising, establishing his own agency. Re-



One of the portrait sketches of Robert Andrea Taylor did in 2006, as a basis for the frontis linocut she created for his book A Young Printer in San Francisco, 1949.



Detail from one of two prospectuses issued for Gold, published by Robert Reid and Takao Tanabe.

cently retired (see page 14), he has turned to developing his paintings into limited edition books. Throughout his career in advertising, and now with his book projects, Mayrs has sustained an appreciation for Reid's work and influence.

"Bob greatly influenced my appreciation of the joys of fine design, quality paper selection, hand-crafted books and letterpress printing. In his quiet way Bob was a wonderful mentor and practitioner who guided all his students into the world of graphic arts. It only took me 50 years to get back to the world of books!" Mayrs says.

Reid published three more limited editions—*The Journal of Norman Lee* (1959), *Kuthan's Menagerie* (1960) and *Grave Sins*: (1962)—before departing for Montreal and a job as in-house designer for McGill University Press. It was there that he led production of what remains his magnum opus, the Lande bibliography of Canadiana. The book remains one of the most ambitious and beautifully crafted limited editions in Canada's publishing history.

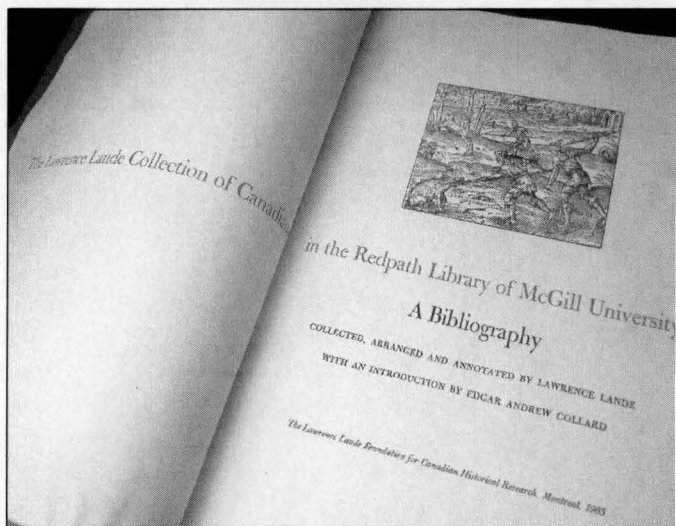
In the early 1970s Reid decamped for the centre of the publishing universe, New York, where he spent the next 25 years packaging over a million books for major publishers. He also assembled his own printing shop at his home in New Haven, Connecticut, but had too many distractions to ever tackle a major publishing project. (His capacity for just having fun in a print shop knows no bounds.) He and his partner Terry Berger did print on commission a limited edition comic book titled

Pixie Meat, featuring the work of Gary Panter, Charles Burns, and Tom De Haven—all major artists in the field of alternative comics (i.e., comix). He also printed five broadsides, including poems by Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg (who insisted that Bob's initial design, with the text set centred, be reset in a "traditional" ragged right format), but none of these travelled farther than his friends and acquaintances. The fun was in the doing.

In 1998 Reid returned to Vancouver. Though retired, his passion for books and everything related to their creation had not diminished. He collaborated on a bibliography of his five Vancouver limited edition books, titled *Reid's Leaves* (Heavenly Monkey, 2001),

featuring actual sample pages from three of the books. He's published two more projects with Heavenly Monkey, both limited editions printed letterpress. And he's produced a number of elegant digitally printed limited editions, including his own six-volume memoirs.

The November 16 evening celebrating Reid's work promises to capture an important part of Canada's artistic history. A number of Reid's friends and past collaborators will be



Title spread from Robert's magnum opus, the Lande bibliography of Canadiana.

in attendance, and no doubt offer stories and appreciations from the floor. The evening will be held at Simon Fraser University's downtown campus. See the Alcuin Society Web site or www.robertreidprinting.ca for details and updates.