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Robert Grabhorn

FINE PRINTING AND THE GRABHORN PRESS

An Interview Conducted by

Ruth Teiser

Berkeley
1968

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Ruth Teiser interviewing Robert Grabhorn.
January 1967 - Photograph by Ted Streshinsky.

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

Interviews Completed by October, 1968

Brother Antoninus *Brother Antoninus: Poet, Printer, and Religious*

Edwin Grabhorn *Recollections of the Grabhorn Press*

Jane Grabhorn *The Colt Press*

Robert Grabhorn *Fine Printing and the Grabhorn Press*

Warren R. Howell *Two San Francisco Bookmen*

Haywood Hunt *Recollections of San Francisco Printers*

Lawton Kennedy *A Life In Printing*

Oscar Lewis *Literary San Francisco*

Bernhard Schmidt, Herman Diedrichs, Max Schmidt, Jr. *The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Vol. I*

Albert Sperisen *San Francisco Printers 1925-1965*

Edward DeWitt Taylor, supplement to interview with Francis Farquhar

Adrian Wilson *Printing and Book Designing*

INTRODUCTION

Robert Grabhorn was for nearly forty-six years an integral part of the famed Grabhorn Press of San Francisco. Born in 1900 in Indianapolis, he was the *fourth of seven children* in his family, eleven years younger than the eldest, Edwin Grabhorn. By the time Robert was fourteen, Edwin had established the Studio Press in Indianapolis and invited his younger brother to work with during school vacations. There, as he related in this interview, Robert Grabhorn learned "the case," the first step in learning, as he did over the ensuing years, the refinements of typography.

Late in 1919 the two brothers came to San Francisco, and early in 1920 The Press of Edwin and Robert Grabhorn was established. About five years later the name was changed to The Grabhorn Press, a more manageable designation, the firm continuing however to be the shared responsibility of the two brothers. When at the end of 1965 The Grabhorn Press was closed, many people who had known it well over the years were surprised to learn that Edwin Grabhorn had been the sole owner, while Robert was, as he stated in this interview, "a favored employee."

The history of the Grabhorn Press has been the subject of many articles and fully chronicled bibliographically to 1956

in two notable volumes which it printed: *The Heller and Magee Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1915-1940* (it also includes *The Studio Press*) and the *Magee Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1940-1956*. The press has also been discussed by most of the others interviewed in the Regional Oral History Office series on books and fine printing in the San Francisco Bay Area. That series includes interviews with Edwin Grabhorn and Jane (Mrs. Robert) Grabhorn.

The interview with Robert Grabhorn was held in three sessions, on January 3, February 8, and March 3, 1967. All took place in the Grabhorn-Hoyem press at 566 Commercial Street, San Francisco, which Robert Grabhorn and Andrew Hoyem established in 1966. Following the final session, Jane Grabhorn added interpretive comments on the collaboration between the two brothers.

Mr. Grabhorn spoke thoughtfully, with some hesitations, clearly making an effort to be accurate in his statements and assessments even while making amusing comments and recounting anecdotes. Mrs. Grabhorn spoke with similar thoughtfulness. Few changes were made in the transcript.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer

25 September 1968
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University of California
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INTERVIEW I

January 3, 1967

Family and Early Years

Teiser: When were you born?

R. Grabhorn: May 17, 1900.

Teiser: And where?

R. Grabhorn: Indianapolis, Indiana.

Teiser: Who were your parents?

R. Grabhorn: My father was of a German family. His name was Henry Grabhorn. He worked always in furniture factories. My mother was of British ancestry--mixed up as usual: Welsh and British.

Teiser: Was your father born in Germany?

R. Grabhorn: No. His father came to this country in, I think, 1848, when so many came to avoid military service. He ended up by becoming a veteran of the Civil War.

Teiser: You had some family tradition of craftsmanship?

Grabhorn: Oh, yes. I had artisans, craftsmen. My mother's family were tailors mostly.

Teiser: What sort of man was your father?

R. Grabhorn: Well, I was always proud that he did Sunday afternoon painting. Not very good, but he did.

Teiser: Do you have any of his paintings?

R. Grabhorn: I have one at the old Grabhorn shop. I used to

R. Grabhorn: have another but it was lost. Only valued it because he did it. He went around doing barns and things like that; gardens.

Teiser: Did you live in Indianapolis?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, but then my father was a traveler, too. You see, Ed was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. My father was always going to change his condition by changing his geographical location. So I lived in two small towns in Indiana. When I was six or seven we lived in a quaint little place called Orleans, Indiana. I was reading about it in a guidebook, and they said that nine-tenths of the inhabitants were descendants of the original inhabitants. My father went there to work in the furniture factory. Then he went to Logansport, Indiana. Then back to Indianapolis, where I spent the rest of my life until I came here with my brother in the winter of 1919.

Teiser: Who were your brothers and sisters?

R. Grabhorn: Edwin, Walter, Lewis that survived; one that died in infancy; and two sisters; and a younger brother, Kenneth.

Teiser: What has happened to your brothers and sisters?

R. Grabhorn: My brother Walter died early; that is, what I call early: 44. My brother Lewie is older than I am; he was a plumber, a successful plumber.

Teiser: What has your younger brother done?

R. Grabhorn: Not much besides being a nice human and raising two nice sons and a daughter. He is still in Indianapolis.

Teiser: Are your sisters alive?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. One sister is retarded mentally. She's had to be taken care of. My other sister worked all her life, from graduation from high school until she retired, at the Eli Lilly plant in Indianapolis.

Teiser: Did you have a happy childhood?

R. Grabhorn: I had miseries.

Teiser: What were you interested in as a child?

R. Grabhorn: Various things. I went through all the normal ambitions: being a detective, policeman, cowboy. But early, when I was 14, I was working for my brother Edwin. He had been away to Seattle. He wasn't home very much in my youth.

Teiser: How much older than you is he?

R. Grabhorn: Eleven years older.

Teiser: How did he happen to choose you to work with him?

R. Grabhorn: That I don't know.

Teiser: He had a lot of other kids to choose from.

R. Grabhorn: But they were too close to him. There was a necessary gap there. He worked in my uncle's--my father's brother's--printing office in Indianapolis.

Teiser: Oh, there was a printing office in the family!
What was your uncle's name?

R. Grabhorn: Harry Grabhorn. His specialty was music printing. That's how Ed journeyed to Seattle, because he learned what is known as the music case, which is a complicated thing. It has four hundred characters in it. Now they don't print music that way any more. By lithography.

Teiser: He had gone into your uncle's shop early then?

R. Grabhorn: Fairly early. It wasn't his first printing job though. He worked around printing offices, then graduated to my uncle's, then left for Seattle, where he realized there was a music publisher. He wrote and asked for a job. When he got there--this is the story, how much is legend I don't know--he found that this man had all of this expensive music type, but no one in Seattle knew how to handle it. Then he graduated from music to just general printing.

Teiser: You had gone, then, to grammar school where?

Grabhorn: Indianapolis. Oh, I went to grammar school in Logansport. I was too young to go to school in Orleans. Or, if I did, I've forgotten about it.

Teiser: Did you like school?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. Yes, I liked it.

Teiser: You must have liked reading.

R. Grabhorn: Yes, very much, and that was the connection with Ed and me, because he became interested in books and would take me with him on his book hunting expeditions.

Teiser: Even as a youngster he was interested in collecting books?

R. Grabhorn: Well, he must have been--say I was ten--he would be 21.

Teiser: Did your parents read much?

R. Grabhorn: No. I have a story that I always like to tell about my mother reading, picking up the sporting page of the newspaper. The ball team in Indianapolis was known as the Indians, and the St. Paul team was known as the Saints. And she saw the headline one day, and it said, "Saints Massacre the Indians." She said, "Isn't that awful!"

Teiser: Was she quite a serious person?

R. Grabhorn: Anyone that had that many children, I think would have to be serious.

Teiser: Was your father quite a serious man?

R. Grabhorn: He seemed to be. I went on fishing trips and painting expeditions with him.

Teiser: Was he a good companion?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, quite so.

Teiser: How far did your formal education go before you started working?

Grabhorn: I still lived in Indianapolis, graduated from high school. Then during the war, in 1918, when I was eighteen, I went to Butler College for a few months. Because everyone that passed the physical

R. Grabhorn: examination was inducted into the Army, I belonged to that thing--not many people remember it--called the SATC, waggishly known as the Saturday Afternoon Tea Club. It was really the Student Army Training Camp. I think we were members of the Army. We had uniforms. I have a discharge from the Army. I'm always embarrassed where it says, "Battles, Engagements, Wounds;" it says, "None."

Teiser: Did you then serve in the Army at all?

R. Grabhorn: After that, no. The war ended after I was in college two months, sixty-six days. We all were discharged, that is if we were healthy.

Teiser: You had been working for your brother while you were going to school, then?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. In summer vacations I worked in his shop, from 1914 on.

Teiser: But during the school year you devoted yourself to school?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

The Studio Press

Teiser: What shop did he have then?

R. Grabhorn: It wasn't music. He had switched back. He had a little shop in Indianapolis called The Studio Press. Fascinating to me because of the people that came around.

- Teiser: I don't think of Indianapolis as a great cultural center, but I suppose there were many interesting people.
- R. Grabhorn: There were small groups. He was usually associated with musicians and advertising men. At that time they had a standing that they're losing now.
- Teiser: He did general commercial printing, would you say?
- R. Grabhorn: Of a superior kind. He was always interested in superior work. I imagine he was the first printer that ever used handmade paper in those parts to any extent. When he was young, he was in communication with the big American printers. He wrote to Goudy regularly. Goudy wrote to him. Updike wrote to him. He would send his work to be criticized.
- Teiser: Isn't that wonderful that people could do that then.
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. I imagine they still do it. Any ambitious youngster who commences to play with type usually tries to do something good, or what he thinks is good. It usually takes the place of setting up a business card.
- Teiser: I guess you encouraged Andy Hoyem similarly, didn't you?
- R. Grabhorn: Andy had quite a bit of experience before I knew him. I never saw him when he went through the beginning.
- Teiser: What were your first jobs in the shop?

- R. Grabhorn: You proceed to learn the case and distribute type. Then in a place like that you would set up what we call straight matter; that is, just follow your copy under instructions. No attempt to create, as we call it.
- Teiser: What were you doing then, brochures and things of that sort?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes, and my brother was very early in what we call advertisement composition, from advertising agencies, where you set up ads that are plated and sent to newspapers and magazines.
- Teiser: Then I supposed you must have become interested in the kind of typographic design that he was.
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. Books. All printers want to get into books. I think all printers do. If they can.
- Teiser: Were any books done by the Studio Press?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. One of the local dilettantes [George C. Calvert] wrote an essay called *A Defense of the Dilettante* [published in 1919]. It is one of the first books that we printed. Of course, he paid for its publication. And we did a series of poems for a man who was secretary to one of the Indiana senators. He had invented a form of poetry he called the "linnet," which is thirteen lines instead of fourteen for a sonnet. One of our books-- it wouldn't be called a book, it was a pamphlet--

R. Grabhorn: was called *The Laugh of Christ and Other Original Linnets*.

Teiser: Is it linnet like the bird?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.*

Teiser: Did you have much of a part in printing it?

R. Grabhorn: Oh no. I was too young. I just followed instructions.

Teiser: How long did the Studio Press last?

R. Grabhorn: I don't remember the dates. You could find that in the first bibliography.** It was sold by my brother to an advertising man, and we came to San Francisco together in the winter of 1919. I would say the Studio Press lasted from about 1914 to '19. I'm speaking from memory.

Teiser: When you got out of the army training service, then, did you go in the business with your brother full time?

R. Grabhorn: I worked elsewhere for a while. Some member of the family got me a job in an electrical supply house. I lasted about two or three months there, then I went with my brother.

Teiser: Doesn't sound like your kind of work.

*The *author's name* on the title page of the book, published in 1917, is St. Claire Jones.

**Heller, Elinor and Magee, David. *Bibliography of The Grabhorn Press, 1915-1940*. San Francisco: [David Magee], 1940. The Studio Press was owned by Edwin Grabhorn from 1915 to 1919.

R. Grabhorn: No, it wasn't. I was pretty good when I started as a receiving clerk, but I got pretty bad when they promoted me. They had me checking invoices. I didn't know what I was doing.

Teiser: So almost all of your working life has been with your brother?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. Shortly before I went into the Army, I worked for the Burroughs Adding Machine Company as a student, so I could be taught to repair adding machines. [Laughter] I went to school for three months to learn all about adding machines. I've forgotten everything now.

Presswork, Typography, and
Typographic Design

Teiser: There's no relationship between any of that and the mechanics of a press, is there?

R. Grabhorn: No. I knew less than nothing about presswork. My brother somehow didn't want me to work with the presses. Oh, I did what you call feeding a press. That means after the press is set up, you put the sheets in and take them out. I know the theory behind the presswork, but I'm no pressman.

Teiser: I thought any printer who didn't have to be a pressman felt he was lucky.

R. Grabhorn: Oh no, that seems to be the big thrill, actually

R. Grabhorn: printing something that you've worked on. Take Lew Allen. He's a devoted pressman, a very superior one. I imagine the composition for him is painful compared to printing. I imagine, now.

Teiser: That's a point of view.....

R. Grabhorn: Oh, and especially if you have a hand press. Just as a child wants to set up his name and print it on the little proof press. If you don't let him turn the crank, he's disappointed. It's magic to see this stuff that he can't read, really, and then he can.

Teiser: It always seemed to me that setting type and designing was so much more demanding and creative.

R. Grabhorn: Well, I think this word "designing" is over-emphasized. I think if you work with copy, many times it sets itself. Printers generally have an advantage over "designers" who just sit down with a paper and pencil. They can try something, and right there reject it.

Teiser: You mean set and run it off on a proof press, and discard it?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. Where the minute you try to "design" something, especially if you haven't had a world of experience, you're going to be too obviously "designing;" you're going to try tricks that you shouldn't. If you just do it straightforwardly, you have a better result

R. Grabhorn: than if you try to play with it.

Teiser: It seems to me there's a kind of inspiration that is in effective printing, that must come from the typesetter.

R. Grabhorn: Well, . . . I was content to be a typesetter, and nothing else. But I know that many of these young fellows are not.

Teiser: You liked what you were doing, and I presume your brother liked what he was doing?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, I think so.

Teiser: Did he do any typesetting?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, of course, of course! He taught me. He also taught me to approach it right; in other words, learn something about the history of what you are doing. This kind of thing had been going on since the fifteenth century, and there are various ways of solving a problem, by the evidence.

Teiser: Did you then read much about the history of printing?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes.

Teiser: You still do, I presume.

R. Grabhorn: Well, not so much. But I did. I collected that bunch of books because I was interested in that.

Teiser: This is the one that went to the San Francisco Public Library?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

- Teiser: Haywood Hunt, in his interview in this series, indicated that he prized his acquaintance with you and your brother.
- R. Grabhorn: I worked for Haywood once for three months. I became dissatisfied with the lack of varied experiences in printing in what you might call a specialty shop. I thought I wanted more experience in other kinds of work. So Haywood offered me a job there [at the Kennedy-ten Bosch Company], which was a much more commercial enterprise. It had all kinds of work. So I worked three months. I evidently learned enough. [laughter] Haywood was always a little too finicky for me. He would labor over correcting, even putting in tissue paper spaces. I was too impatient.
- Teiser: Someone told me that at one time it was thought that Haywood would inherit Nash's mantle. Did you ever hear this?
- R. Grabhorn: No. He was a friend of Nash's, but I don't think he had a chance. He didn't have a broad enough outlook, I don't think. He liked to fiddle. I remember...Brother Antoninus was speaking of press-work rather than typesetting, but it can apply. He once said he was trying to avoid the overprecision of the Bremer Press. That's a fine excuse for bad work. Not that I.....he's another superlative

- R. Grabhorn: pressman. He does really good work, in the tradition of the best paper, the best ink.
- Teiser: I think he said, or wrote, that he learned a good deal from the Grabhorn Press.*
- R. Grabhorn: He admired our work, our best work, quite a bit.
- Teiser: You speak of your best work.
- R. Grabhorn: We did a tremendous amount of inferior work, compared to our standards.
- Teiser: Under what circumstances did you do that? For advertising typography?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh no, advertising typography is easy. I don't know why these advertising men thought they had to have better than average printers, because usually they were pretty sure exactly what they wanted. No, it was a matter of money. If you have to, in order to keep the place going, you will accept a job and do it more economically than you would otherwise. That's the economic outlook.
- Teiser: People mention Chickering Piano work. Did you do some of the actual designing of the Chickering ads in the Grabhorn Press?
- R. Grabhorn: We worked very closely sometimes with the art directors, and experimented with them, and offered

* Antoninus, Brother, *Poet, Printer, and Religious*, a 1966 interview in this series.

- R. Grabhorn: suggestions. But that was just a few times when they asked us to.
- Teiser: Why do people keep mentioning these Chickering Piano ads?
- R. Grabhorn: Because this man that supervised them was interested in typography, and he was sort of an innovator in a sense. He would come to the office and work right with us, try something. He was the arbiter. He had a scheme of full-page newspaper ads. Lots of copy. You shaped them like a bowl. Sometimes it got pretty wearisome, because he was saying, "Move this a brass." (A brass means 1/72 of an inch.) Ten o'clock at night, you could get pretty weary. Sometimes you could just pull out a letter and put it back in the same place, take another proof. You know the old story of throwing dust in their eyes. "Now, isn't that better?" you'd say.
- Teiser: Many of the things that I've seen that I've thought were so wonderful were things that you've done for fun.
- R. Grabhorn: For instance?
- Teiser: That little type specimen sheet....I guess Jane did that, though. The one that's now in the Gleason Library.
- R. Grabhorn: That's entirely Jane's. Jane was the fun printer. We were a bit more serious.

Teiser: I'm trying to grope around in my mind for examples of what I mean. It seems that so much of your work had a lightness and an inspirational quality that no one else's had.

R. Grabhorn: I agree, but I can't remember instances.

Teiser: Can you account for it?

R. Grabhorn: All I can account for is that we enjoyed our work. If we could be funny and not be solemn about it, we enjoyed it.

Teiser: Originality, I suppose, is the word I want. In the best of your work, there has been so much of it. How was the work divided in the shop? Was there any formal division of duties between you and your brother?

R. Grabhorn: In the main, I did typesetting. Of course, my brother did typesetting too. When I got more experience, we would work together on details. Actually, many things determine the page look: what type is available; how long you want the book to be; what type you have in your shop that you can use, and how best to use it. To a printer the fun [is the title page], and most of the printers I know save the title page to the last. First of all, the general look of the book will condition the title page quite a bit. And within the limitations of the type used in the rest of the book,

R. Grabhorn: that imposes some limitations on the title page. But in general, the title page is truly an advertisement for the book. You've got to take it out of just doing it. You love to play with it and put a little fun into it if you can. Now that doesn't always work. Sometimes it's inappropriate. Then you do it the simplest way. The rules are hard to enunciate. I've seen us work together.....anybody's contribution is welcome if you're stymied. You just ask them what they think. Someone might come up with something. So, in that case, there is no "designing." I've seen us take a hundred proofs of a title page, and still be dissatisfied; we didn't make it. That's when time was no object.

Teiser: It wasn't because there were other things that you thought were more important?

R. Grabhorn: We liked to be successful. And sometimes you start out with the idea that you have it, that this is going to be an easy title page; it'll be effective without much effort. Then you get to working on it, and it doesn't come out that way, and you have to alter and alter. Sometimes you get so despondent because nothing looks good. Then you go back to the beginning again.

Robert Grabhorn at a Book Club of California reception, 1957. Reproduction rights reserved by Ruth Teiser.



Robert Grabhorn setting type at the Grabhorn Press, 1959. Reproduction rights reserved by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun.

Outstanding Books and Types

Teiser: It seems to me that Oscar Lewis mentioned that you'd sometimes start a book and then just junk it because it wasn't right, and start over again.*

R. Grabhorn: This happened two or three times. We had a terrible time on the *Leaves of Grass*. We had an artist working with us [Valenti Angelo]. He didn't mind dashing off an initial letter, or anything that was required for an illustration. We bought especially for it a type called Lutetia. This was a big folio book, and Lutetia was too weak. We had bought quite a bit of type when we had decided that Lutetia would be the type for it. We printed about twenty-five pages and junked them, and started over with another type.

Teiser: The book itself was a great success, was it not?

R. Grabhorn: It's a success in terms of accomplishment. It came out at a bad time as far as the sale of it was concerned. They had rather a rough time selling four hundred copies at \$100 a copy. Well, it was in 1930 that it was finished. There weren't 400 people.....

Teiser: It was a very notable book in those years.

R. Grabhorn: Oh yes. Among American books, I think it is.

* Lewis, Oscar, *Literary San Francisco*, a 1965 interview in this series.

R. Grabhorn: I just told you about two types on that. We set up a few sample pages in three or four types before we decided on this Goudy type. I can't imagine anything we took more pains with than that. We knew we were printing a book and the sale price was going to be \$100.

Teiser: How did you happen to undertake that book?

R. Grabhorn: Random House. We had already had a book practically printed, and Bennett Cerf came out here and bought the whole edition from us. Then he decided that we ought to do a monument together. And he decided that we should work on an American classic. It was a mutual decision that we print the *Leaves of Grass*.

Teiser: It took some financing, didn't it?

R. Grabhorn: It did, and they financed it.

Teiser: What was the other book that Cerf had bought?

R. Grabhorn: The travels of Sir John Mandeville.* That was sort of an archaic exercise, and I'm still proud of it, but it's still in the incunabula tradition. Blackletter type. Valenti Angelo really made the book with his initials. You see, every initial in it was hand illuminated in the old illuminator's tradition, with three colors. It was done with

*Maundeville, Sir John, *The Voiage and Travaile of*.
.....1928.

- R. Grabhorn: tremendous labor on his part. But he was enthusiastic.
- Teiser: Was a project like that inspired by your interest in seeing if it could be done?
- R. Grabhorn: That happened, in my recollection, because we got hold of this interesting type. Not simply a copy of an existing type, but an interesting form of black letter [Koch Bibel Gotisch]. It had just been brought out by the Klingspor Foundry. At that time, a young boy, the nephew of the founder of the Klingspor Foundry, was working, getting his international experience at our shop*. He called our attention to this type, and we liked it. That's the case of finding a subject to fit the type. This was in the rude days of the English language. This was a rude, very interesting letter. I like it. It's not for every book.
- Teiser: What was the type that was designed for your press?
- R. Grabhorn: Franciscan, designed by Fred Goudy. Now, we did not say, "Mr. Goudy, you design this type," and "we want this kind of type." We said, "We like that type," and if we could afford it, we'd like to have it. And he said he had this type in design for another printer. Something happened that the printer didn't accept it. The details are very weak in my mind.

* He was Karl Klingspor, nephew of the elder Karl Klingspor.

R. Grabhorn: But at any rate, he offered it to us for what we considered a low price. He changed a few of the letters, had the matrices made. We liked it. There again, type not for general use, probably inspired by Ashendene Press Subiaco type. Subiaco is the monastery near Rome where the first Italian printing was supposed to be done.

Teiser: Did others use this Franciscan type then?

R. Grabhorn: I really don't know whether this man in upper New York. . . I've never seen it.

Teiser: Did the Grabhorn Press use it much?

R. Grabhorn: We used it on our bibliographies, both of them.*
The first book that we used it on was one in the Americana series. We only used it in two or three lines at each chapter beginning. We've done a lot of small things in it, memorials. The bibliographies are the most important books it has been used in. Probably some others, but I can't name them.

Teiser: How did you happen to name it Franciscan?

R. Grabhorn: San Francisco.

Teiser: Not that you thought that it had any period California feeling, or did you?

R. Grabhorn: No. Naming a type is a tricky thing. Franciscan: well, it's a special type for San Francisco printers, and it's a romantic sounding name. It has nothing

* See footnote, page 9, for the first bibliography. The second was: Magee, Dorothy and David. *Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1940-1956*. San Francisco: [David Magee], 1957.

R. Grabhorn: to do with its design, except that it looks old, like black letter. I don't think I'm competent to give you much information here, unless I go home and bone up. [laughter] You see, I rarely look at a book we've done after it's been done. I don't think my brother does either.

Teiser: Have you been pleased by the bibliographies, though? Did you enjoy doing those?

Grabhorn: Very much.

Teiser: I should think it would be a unique experience for anyone to sum up in his own medium the work he's done in that medium.

R. Grabhorn: We had nothing to do with the text.

Teiser: No, but I mean the production of it.

R. Grabhorn: Probably the first one was a little more interesting textually because we could remember details, little stories connected with each item. There's not so much of that in the second one.*

Printing Books in the 1920's and 1930's

Teiser: Did you have much to do with John Henry Nash?

R. Grabhorn: No. We knew him, of course, and attended a few formal lunches he organized, things like that. As a matter of fact, we had very little sympathy for

* See also chapter, "Grabhorn Press Bibliographies."

R. Grabhorn: his work. We knew it was amazingly well done, but it wasn't our style, that's all.

Teiser: Did the fact that he and a few others had created a kind of interest in fine printing in San Francisco have any influence on your decision to come to San Francisco?

R. Grabhorn: Well, I didn't have too much to do with that. That was up to my brother. I think he liked the idea of coming to San Francisco. He was still a very young man then, in the thirties. He had never been to San Francisco. He had been to Seattle. It was a romantic place, and he knew Nash was here and there was some support for that kind of printing, because Nash was getting it. And it might be well to muscle in on it. [laughter]

Teiser: Although I don't suppose it would have been easy for Nash to have felt threatened by a couple of young men, I should think he still might have been a little annoyed.

R. Grabhorn: Printers are a little bit akin to actors. They're prima donnas. They have the same jealousies, belittling of competition.

Teiser: It seems to me that there was some kind of funny story about Nash and a man named Ray.

- R. Grabhorn: Oh. That story. Let's see if I can get it. This man came into our office with a book of poems that he had illustrated with photographs of the Farallon Islands. We had printed a few books of poetry. I always say we printed the worst poetry in the world, but we never made much money out of them, and I was a little sick of dealing with poets. The story goes that my brother sent him down to Nash with his book, and the imaginary interview with Nash and Ray was: Nash looked at it, and his way of discouraging was to say, "Such a book would cost you \$10,000." And Ray countered with, "Fine. Do you want a deposit?" [laughter] Well, who was there?
- Teiser: How was the financing of most of the books that you've done arranged?
- R. Grabhorn: When we first started to print books, we financed them ourselves. We made our bread and butter from the advertising agencies, and in fallow periods we'd work on a book.
- Teiser: What was the first book that you printed out here under that circumstance, do you remember?
- R. Grabhorn: I think the Mandeville was done under that. And we did a little tiny book of Hawthorne's called, *The Golden Touch*. Then the big things took financing and Random House did that. We were always dissatis-

R. Grabhorn: fied, of course, because there's a vast difference between what you get and what the customer has to pay in our modern distribution system. I remember we got \$16,000 for printing 400 copies of the *Leaves of Grass*. That's \$40 a copy. It's usually three times that. Then they did give us \$1000 extra when the book was finally finished. Of course, we'd used up most of the \$16,000 doing it. With the Book Club, especially in later days, they finance a book as they go along. Of course, that wasn't always so. We financed the Book Club in a fallow period. We printed books that they only paid us for as they sold them. The great book that we printed for the Book Club--it's got the Book Club's imprint on it--*The Santa Fe Trail to California*, was done that way.

Teiser: So in effect, you financed it, and they paid you back?

R. Grabhorn: We financed it.

Teiser: That was during the Depression, wasn't it?

R. Grabhorn: It came out in the Depression, '30, I think.* That came from my brother's interest in collecting. He had bought the manuscript. That book was entirely our creation. We furnished the material, and we

* Watson, Douglas S., Editor, *The Santa Fe Trail to California*. San Francisco, 1931.

R. Grabhorn: set up and printed the book.

Teiser: Were there others?

R. Grabhorn: Oh yes. There were quite a few. Then we would sell them to the Book Club, because we didn't want to be bothered with the collection and bookkeeping and all that stuff; keeping a mailing list.

Teiser: You and Oscar Lewis had the Westgate Press, didn't you?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. A funny little thing. That's the time when the signed limited editions were very popular. I can remember Oscar--we were interested in publishing. We thought we'd like to be big publishers. We started out by Oscar selecting magazine articles by what we thought were collected authors. We obviously offered these people too much money. We sent off letters that said we would give them \$250 for the right to print their article or short story as a book. All they had to do was give us permission and sign 500 sheets. And they jumped at it. I can remember we got a telegram from Sherwood Anderson. We printed some little article of his. He sent us a telegram after he accepted our proposition. He said, "When you know me better, you will know that I always need money. Please send me \$100." [laughter]

Teiser: How did you come out of that on that basis?

R. Grabhorn: We never knew how we came out, because our printer was the Grabhorn Press, you see. And the Grabhorn Press, being Edwin Grabhorn, would never give us a price as to how much this book cost. He would say to us, "Has the Westgate got any money in its treasury?" Then we'd turn it over.

Teiser: Has your brother always been formally the owner of the Grabhorn Press?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

Teiser: And your position has been.....?

R. Grabhorn: An employee. A favored employee, let's say.

Teiser: Was this always satisfactory to you?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. I was considered a partner in a loose sort of way. This had nothing to do with business, in a sense, but it was assumed that I was a paid partner.

Teiser: I presume the recent dissolution of the Grabhorn Press also had nothing to do with business, but a variety of other factors.

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

Teiser: Do you want to talk about that, or not?

R. Grabhorn: No, I don't.....well, it had sort of outgrown its usefulness. My brother is a very old man now, and he's still working. He's interested in printing his Japanese print catalogues. And I had to make money,

R. Grabhorn: frankly, and the books we were printing were solely for my benefit. It was retarding his progress on the Japanese print books. So he's printing his catalogue, and I'm trying to make money. That's about it.

Teiser: Let me go back to your enterprise with Oscar Lewis, the Westgate Press. How long did it last?

R. Grabhorn: It lasted quite a few years, but then it became just an imprint that we'd use for certain things, the last two or three books. But it lasted five or six years.

Teiser: You didn't lose a lot?

R. Grabhorn: No, we didn't lose a lot. We lost our time.

Teiser: Then the name of the press was taken over with your permission, was it?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. By Lawton and Alfred Kennedy. That's the first Alfred, Lawton's brother, who worked at our shop at various times. He was a very good printer. He was accurate and efficient. His contributions, intellectually, weren't the greatest, but they were adequate. He was above average, and he was certainly interested in his craft. His idea of a holiday was to come over to our shop and help us distribute type, even after he had left us.

Some Grabhorn Press Employees

Teiser: I do want to ask you about the young men of talent who worked with you.

R. Grabhorn: There was always some anxious and ambitious young man who loved books and wanted to get closer to them, always bothering us. We couldn't possibly accept all that we were offered. Some of them would say, "You don't have to pay me a cent." But we never liked to do that, completely that way. We didn't pay them enough. But they really, actually just wanted to learn and then go on. They were students. They had no intention of staying with us a lifetime.

Teiser: They went out and did many things, didn't they?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. Some of them forgot it altogether.

Teiser: There must have been a point in the history of the Grabhorn Press at which you discovered that you were famous.

R. Grabhorn: Yes. When that was, I don't know. But I think sometimes that people were overemphasizing the contribution. It's a nice thing to have done, and to be doing, but it isn't that important. We were proud of our books, naturally. We had a young apprentice named Jack Gannon. He died early. He worked for money, and he was making printing his career. He was hired as an apprentice.

R. Grabhorn: Helen Gentry, the same way. Those were the first. And this young man from Germany, Klingspor. Well, he'd heard of us, I suppose.

Teiser: How did you happen to hire a woman?

R. Grabhorn: She was the protegee--or her husband was associated with--Porter Garnett. I think he introduced us to her. But she was hired as a printer. Of course, women take lower salaries. We were interested in that. After all, the way this kind of business is operated, you can't pay top salaries.

Teiser: You never paid union scale, did you?

R. Grabhorn: No. Except in the things we had done outside the shop. Among our employees, no. But they were, strictly speaking, apprentices.

Teiser: You probably never got union wages.

R. Grabhorn: Ourselves, no. I don't think either my brother or I ever got union wages.

Teiser: Are you members of the union now?

R. Grabhorn: No.

Teiser: Neither of you?

R. Grabhorn: Neither of us. My brother was, in Indianapolis at various times. When I worked for Haywood Hunt, I had an apprentice's card in the union. I had to have one to work in that kind of a place. Short duration.

Teiser: Who were your longest employees?

R. Grabhorn: Sherwood Grover and Katharine, his wife. She worked

R. Grabhorn: for us before he did.

Teiser: Was she a printer?

R. Grabhorn: She was taught in our shop. Everybody in our shop was expected to do everything that was needed, folding paper, setting type, proofreading, anything they can do.

Teiser: I guess Jane was a long-time employee too. She gave a good account of how she started working with you.* How did Sherwood Grover come to you?

R. Grabhorn: From his wife. He worked as a sort of apprentice at a commercial shop in Oakland, called the Goodhue Printing Company. And after his wife got a job from us, she kept trying to get us to give him a job, which we finally did.

Teiser: How long was he with you?

R. Grabhorn: Twenty-six or seven years. This was a living to him. He wasn't one of the rich boys who wanted to smell printers ink. He was a faithful typesetter and pressman. And he always did things himself, on his own. He used to do things as a youngster with John Dos Pasos. He'd take parts of John Dos Pasos and make a Christmas book out of them. Then he decided that Dos Pasos had sold out to the Establishment and he was through with him. Now he

* Grabhorn, Jane, *The Colt Press*, a 1966 interview in this series.

R. Grabhorn: is printing his commonplace books, quotations he likes. He likes to do them in all sorts of type. He's got a printing office at home. Now he is a successful book salesman. But he's just bought a press and installed it in his house. He's doing printing in odd hours.*

* For further discussion of people who worked at the Grabhorn Press, see chapter, "Present Printers and Past Employees."

INTERVIEW II

February 8, 1967

Printing Fine Books and
Printing For Profit

- Teiser: When we were talking the other day (not on tape), you told a story about some rare books and an automobile.
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. Well, you see, we were interested, when we first commenced to get in the printing of fine books, in other fine books that had been done and were still current, like the Kelmscott Chaucer and the Ashendene--any book of the Ashendene Press--and the Doves Bible. And we bought those books, mainly from John Howell. We traded printing for them, actually. That's the way I've got a great many books, by trading printing for them to book dealers. The amusing thing about this was we suddenly decided we must have an automobile and we sold the books and bought a \$1200 automobile.
[laughter]
- Teiser: What kind of car was it?
- R. Grabhorn: A Stutz Bearcat, of all things. Secondhand of course. [laughter] That was in 1922. We sold three books.
- Teiser: Just three?
- R. Grabhorn: Just three. The Kelmscott Chaucer, the Ashendene

- R. Grabhorn: *Morte D'Arthur* (that's not the most expensive of the Ashendenes, but it's up there) and the Doves Bible. Twelve hundred dollars wouldn't buy them today.
- Teiser: Had you got all three of those from John Howell?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes.
- Teiser: Do you remember at all how much you paid for them in printing?
- R. Grabhorn: I would say it was pretty close to the same price.
- Teiser: What books were you doing for him then?
- R. Grabhorn: Well, let's see if I can remember. I think we did something of Robert Louis Stevenson's, not his *Baby Book*. . .
- Teiser: *The Best Thing in Edinburgh*, or something of that sort?
- R. Grabhorn: No, that wasn't it. That came along later. This was a fragment of an unpublished manuscript. I think it was called *Diogenes at the Savile Club*; either that or *Diogenes in London*.. Later on a man in Chicago had a part of the same manuscript and we printed it the same way. One or the other--one was *Diogenes at the Savile*, and the other was *Diogenes in London*. Now that wouldn't be the only thing [for Howell]. We did a number you know; it was just commercial printing. No longer can I remember. . . oh yes. We did a book about Abraham Lincoln.

- Teiser: Did you enjoy working with John Howell?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes, yes. Pretty much. Very little cash ever exchanged hands. [laughter]
- Teiser: Was he pretty close fisted?
- R. Grabhorn: No, no. I don't think so. He was fair.
- Teiser: I guess everybody had so little money . . .
- R. Grabhorn: That's right. [laughter] However, that wasn't exactly the Depression. The early 'twenties that was, when we first came to San Francisco. I forget who was the author of this life of Lincoln, but it was more or less of a commercial type book.* It was not a press book in our sense.
- Teiser: I see. I think Nash had done, previously, some printing for Howell.
- R. Grabhorn: Yes, he did a Stevenson's *Baby Book*, or something like that. I think John Nash was a little too expensive for Howell.**
- Teiser: How did the Grabhorn Press do its pricing? How did it do its estimating?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, God! [laughter] That is tough. We made several attempts to be business-like and have what they call an hour cost and keep time on the time

* Bissett, Clark Prescott, *Abraham Lincoln, A Universal Man*. 1923.

** See Howell, Warren, *Two San Francisco Bookmen*, a 1966 interview in this series.

R. Grabhorn: expended, but we couldn't keep it up. We'd guess as to how much time we'd spent. Lots of times it was how much money we needed. [laughter] There was nothing efficient about the pricing, except with the advertising agencies. That was the best pay, of course--not the book pay--just doing composition for the advertising agencies.

Teiser: That you could keep track of your cost for?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, and charge a legitimate price per hour.

Teiser: What kind of charges were the legitimate prices per hour in the twenties?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I have an idea that \$7.50 an hour was about as high as you could get. I endorse Eric Gill's statement, you know, that the decline of the crafts commenced with the invention of double entry bookkeeping.

Teiser: You certainly never had any intention of keeping track of the time that you and your brother put in, did you?

R. Grabhorn: On a book, no; on commercial work, yes. A book generally ended up with what it would sell for. That was the difficulty of trying to do a book for the big publishers, for instance Random House. Because the price the printer gets is so much less than a book sells for, because they [the publishers] have so many expenses of salesmen, salesmen's

R. Grabhorn: commissions, and discounts to book dealers that often you find yourself printing a thirty-dollar book for ten dollars, and it must look like a thirty-dollar book, not ten dollars.

Teiser: Did you do much publishing under your own imprint?

R. Grabhorn: Uh, yes, we started little trifles, like the--oh, let me think--*The Golden Touch* of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and then the biggest thing was Oscar Wilde's *Salome* about that time. Then we started a really big book--I think we covered this before--the travels of Sir John Mandeville, which Random House took over. Then we did three or four books for Random House.

Teiser: And you didn't really come out on those?

R. Grabhorn: We came out all right.

Teiser: Your approach to the whole printing world has never allowed you to do little Christmas books of your own or many things of that sort, has it?

R. Grabhorn: No. I only reluctantly print Christmas cards. About once every ten years I do it, because after you have the pressure of doing Christmas cards so many years for people who are hurrying you up, you don't feel too enthusiastic about it.

Teiser: Maybe I wasn't making my point. Your printing for pleasure was of a professional kind?

R. Grabhorn: That's right. Create a book, even if we had to dig up the material, which my brother's collecting helped out enormously.

Teiser: But it was always a book to sell?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

The Americana Series

Teiser: What of the Americana series?

R. Grabhorn: Well, now, that came in the Depression. That came after we decided we didn't want to work with these publishers that had to mark up a book so high. And that came through my brother's collection of Californiana, rare things that he decided would make small-priced books. It was the reprinting of rare books. There were no original works in it. They were just books that were scarce and in demand by the collectors. Californiana--we tried to make it include other things besides Californiana, but there weren't very many. You know, like an early history of Kentucky, something like that.

Teiser: Did they sell well?

R. Grabhorn: The Americana series sold very well, after it got started. It had difficulty getting started. I think the story's been told so many times, or some version of it. The first book in the first series was the life of Joaquin Murieta, which got a big,

R. Grabhorn: enthusiastic review from Joseph Jackson.* And that sold. Of course, it was seriously underpriced. We said there were 500 printed and there were less than 500 printed, so it became a rare book in no time. And the price went up. And since we announced a series of ten books, that helped sell the rest of the ten. That appeared successful, so we went into a second and third series, price going up slightly all the time.

Teiser: How were you pricing them?

R. Grabhorn: As I remember, the Joaquin Murieta sold for \$3.75. Then on the last series, I think the usual price was \$7.50 for a book.

Teiser: Was Douglas Watson involved in that series?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, yes. He was sort of the editor and proof-reader. He wrote introductions to them, and kept books at the shop. He was a great help to us.

Teiser: What position did he occupy in your arrangement?

R. Grabhorn: I don't know whether he got any salary or not. I doubt it very much. I don't remember. But of course he always got books. And he was looking for something to do; he was occupied.

Teiser: Had he been a journalist?

* Joseph Henry Jackson, book editor for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The book was *Joaquin Murieta, The Brigand Chief of California*, edited by Francis P. Farquhar and published in 1932.

R. Grabhorn: No, not to my knowledge. He had been a real estate dealer at one time in his life. He was an enthusiastic Californian who knew his subject. Of course, his prose style was a little rococo at times. He could say, "Gold! Gold! Gold!" in an introduction.
[laughter]

Teiser: Had he retired?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, he'd retired from any sort of business.

Teiser: When did you first know him?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I can only date it by where we were. I think it's shortly after we moved to Commercial Street, about 1933. Then he was around for three or four years.

Teiser: What did he look like?

R. Grabhorn: I'm poor at that, "What did he look like?" He looked like an American business man. [laughter]
Nothing else.

Teiser: Was he an enthusiastic sort?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, but of course he was elderly then. He was probably seventy at that time. He wasn't any young enthusiast.

Teiser: I see.

R. Grabhorn: His wife took lessons in bookbinding from Belle [McMurtrie] Young, who was well-known at that time. She [Mrs. Watson] was one of the old San Francisco

R. Grabhorn: families, the Moodys, I think. It wasn't necessary for him to work, even though he had been up and down in the real estate business. He used to regale us with stories. I was always amused at his statement about what a promoter was: a promoter is a man that says, "You furnish the ships, I'll furnish the ocean." [laughter]

Teiser: Oscar Lewis wasn't involved in that Americana series, then?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes! Oscar wrote our letters and kept the books, and he was there even before that time. Oscar we first came in contact with when he was the secretary for the Book Club. He was the house clerk. He did all of our letter writing. A great deal of that--introductions. That was before Watson's time. We didn't see so much of him after Watson's time. However, we were always close.

Teiser: I guess he got busy with his own writing.

R. Grabhorn: Well, he was always busy with his own writing, but his income did not depend on his writing at that time, or anywhere near it. He was secretary of the Book Club. Of course, I had gone into a little partnership with him earlier in the Westgate Press, as I mentioned.

Teiser: So you had a little knowledge of publishing by the time of the Americana series?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. But we were never--you know we didn't ever even keep an efficient mailing list. [laughter] Surprisingly enough, book shops took a lot of the Americana series. And of course we always had access to the Book Club list because we were so close to it.

Commissioned Books and Ephemera

Teiser: When did you start printing for the Book Club?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I think our first book might have been 1921, '22.

Teiser: How did that come about, do you remember?

R. Grabhorn: I think Albert Bender, who, of course, no matter who was secretary, was the mainspring of the Book Club, gave us a book to print. Oh, what was that book? I think the first book we did for them was *The Gracious Visitation*, a book of short stories by a California writer, Emma Frances Dawson. I think that was the first book. But whether Albert was responsible for us getting that or not, I don't remember. But he was responsible for other books, the kind we liked to do, the more press book types, not California, beginning with the parts of the Bible, new translations, Song of Songs, the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Teiser: You did those for the Book Club?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

Teiser: Under Albert Bender's influence?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. Of course, Oscar belonged in there all the time. I think at that time he was secretary of the Book Club, also sort of a ghost writer for Bender . . . not exactly that. . . took care of his correspondence, any official writing he had to do.

Teiser: We interviewed Oscar Lewis* and he indicated something of that sort. When did you first meet Bender? Just shortly after you came here?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. We put out little things to give away, little pamphlets. Gave them to book dealers and advertising agencies. Bender got wind of us and looked us up. He gave us commissions lots of times.

Teiser: What was he like?

R. Grabhorn: Well, ebullient, short, enthusiastic. He used to give us Chinese brocade neckties and our wives jewelry.

Teiser: I guess he was responsible for a good deal of tradition here.

R. Grabhorn: He certainly was. I sometimes--everybody, I think--got annoyed at him. [laughter]

* Lewis, Oscar, *Literary San Francisco*, a 1965 interview in this series.

Teiser: Did he have good taste?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, that's hard to say. He certainly didn't have bad taste.

Teiser: The things he was interested in, in general you liked doing well enough?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes.

Teiser: So to that extent his taste corresponded with yours?

R. Grabhorn: There was no doubt about it, he was of great benefit to us. And to lots of artists in San Francisco.

Teiser: Weren't there other wealthy people in San Francisco who were interested enough in fine printing to occasionally have you do something?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. They usually might have come through book dealers. I remember very early we printed a book for Mrs. Tobin Clark, a tribute to her sister or someone.

Teiser: Was that one that John Howell published?

R. Grabhorn: He might have been the ostensible publisher. It was hardly a book that could be published; it was a family thing.

Teiser: Sometimes, I suppose, Howell or Magee or others act as publishers when it's just a nominal function?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, that's right, just a nominal function. That's always been true. Someone would ask them where they could get such a book, and they would refer it to whoever they thought could make it. Of course,

R. Grabhorn: Nash got the rich commissions. [laughter] We got the leftovers. [laughter]

Teiser: Did you ever do anything for Templeton Crocker?

R. Grabhorn: No. We did several little things of Bender's again. We did a George Sterling--slight poem. You could hardly call it a book, except that it had hard covers on it. About sixteen pages. A poem called, "To A Girl Dancing." Now, most of those Bender took, those copies that the author didn't take.

Teiser: As I remember, later you did a good deal for Tom Norris, little keepsakes.

R. Grabhorn: Yes, those were Christmas things. Well, naturally, as my brother got interested in collecting Californiana, other people who were interested in Californiana too became habitués of the shop, you see. Some of them we printed things for, especially at Christmas time--mostly trifles.

Teiser: Was there a W. P. Fuller book?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. That was later. We printed two books for the Fuller Company. Sort of anniversary books, you know.

Teiser: Did you do many books like that?

R. Grabhorn: No. Those were rather long books. We did lots of memorials for people that died. Some would be just a couple of pages, but printed on vellum and bound. Those were usually resolutions by a board

R. Grabhorn: of directors, you know.

Teiser: To present to the family?

R. Grabhorn: Well, usually there'd be one or two copies presented to the widow. I always said in the hope that the widow wouldn't dump her stock on the market. [laughter]

Teiser: Were they set in type, or were they calligraphic?

R. Grabhorn: They were set in type. When Valenti Angelo was around, or even later Mallette Dean, they would hand illuminate and hand initial them. My brother has lots of stories about those things. When he was talking to a vice-president of Standard Oil Company, he said he always imagined how his name would look in type. I think he called himself a mortician among printers. [laughter] We did quite a few of them.

Teiser: Did you charge for those on a commercial rate?

R. Grabhorn: No, that was higher, usually. I think my brother said he had two prices--of course he was joking--\$500 for a president and \$300 for a vice-president. Many years ago we printed a book that always amused me. It was when one of the young--at that time young--Fleishhackers (he's probably a grandfather now, if he's still alive) was a hero in a Stanford-California football game. A friend of the family had us print the newspaper account of his last-

* ~~Mortimer~~ Mortimer Fleishhacker Jr.
Herbert

- R. Grabhorn: minute saving the game as a book. [laughter]
It's difficult to make a book out of a column of newspaper material, but we could do it.
- Teiser: I think Oscar Lewis said that he used to occasionally bulk things out for you so they'd look like a book [laughter].
- R. Grabhorn: Sometimes the introduction was longer than the book.
- Teiser: Then a fair amount of your work was thorough luxury printing, wasn't it?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. Vanity printing was more like it.
- Teiser: Did you do much of the kind of vanity printing where somebody wrote a little thing and wanted to have it published as a literary effort?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. We rarely undertook the sale of those things. We printed some of the worst poetry in the world. It's usually poetesses want their little book. But they're difficult. They think that if they could get a book of poetry for \$2.50 from a book shop they should be able to get twenty-five copies of their book for \$2.50 each. They didn't realize the matter of quantity.
- Teiser: Were they difficult to do as books?
- R. Grabhorn: No. We've done some very funny ones. I'll never forget one book. It was called *Poems and Philosophical Thoughts*, by Maude Something. I don't

R. Grabhorn: think she'll ever hear about this. But one of her thoughts was: "Sickness is like a window, some have one big pane and others many little ones." We didn't have much pride. [laughter]

Teiser: This would have been all hand-set?

R. Grabhorn: Usually, yes.

Teiser: On the whole, though, you continued doing a regular stream of books that were commercially reasonable, didn't you?

R. Grabhorn: Like the Americana series?

Teiser: Yes.

R. Grabhorn: We used to do sort of gift volumes for a local attorney named Herbert Rothschild, who was also the owner of some of the movie palaces in San Francisco: the Granada and the California--if you remember them. He was a book lover, you see. And he would have us print books at Christmas time to give to his friends. Those were usually small editions. Fifty copies, something like that. Then, of course, we got in the habit of doing for Ransohoff's a Christmas book for them to sell. The first one was King Edward's (I suppose VIII) abdication speech, with an introduction by William Saroyan, who was a friend of ours. I think we gave him a hundred dollars.

- Teiser: Did you then do the editorial suggesting for these Christmas volumes sometimes?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. Then we printed two or three--two I think-- that are very hard to get hold of and are collected--Churchill's wartime speeches.
- Teiser: Were they for Ransohoff's?
- R. Grabhorn: Those were for Ransohoff's. They sold them for, I think, about \$10 apiece, usually.
- Teiser: What relationship did that bear to the actual cost?
- R. Grabhorn: Well, we never got rich out of the printing business, so it wasn't enough.
- Teiser: They took a profit?
- R. Grabhorn: Profit? Not much. Less than a book dealer would. Most of the poetry and vanity volumes were an adjunct to our main business, which was doing the work for advertising agencies. As I say, the serious books we tried to do were usually our own efforts.
- Teiser: About how much of your time went into the advertising work?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, that was sporadic. There would be periods when we did nothing else for three or four months. Or maybe on Saturdays and Sundays do other things.
- Teiser: Did you work most Saturdays and Sundays anyway?

R. Grabhorn: Well, at that time everybody worked Saturday morning. But we would often work nights and Sundays, lots of times.

Advertising Typography,
Wine Labels and Commercial Printing

Teiser: Some one told me that those ads for Chickering and others were really the first distinguished printing for advertising in San Francisco.

R. Grabhorn: Yes, I think so, because they were out of the ordinary and they were usually full-page newspaper ads and exclusively typographical. Little or no illustration. For instance (I think I told you this) the Chickering Piano ads were usually in the shape of a bowl; it was fairly difficult to do. The Zenith Radio ads: a bolt of lightning. They were for the same advertising agent. For a man named M. E. Harlan, who was original in that way. We also did, through him, work for Schilling Coffee Company.

There's a long story; it's been told before. I don't remember whether it was through Harlan or Douglas Watson, who was close to the Schilling business, [that] we got the contract to print two or three copies of a book celebrating Schilling's birthday; maybe seventieth, seventy-fifth, or

R. Grabhorn: something like that. But he was so enamored of it, he had us print a reproduction of the gift volume in three or four, maybe five hundred copies. And he sent those out. Naturally he got letters of acknowledgment. Then he had us print a book reproducing all the letters. [laughter] Craziest book. And then that thing was going on from there, but I think his family stopped him.

Teiser: [laughter] This was August Schilling?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. But I think he was in his dotage. That was how come they had to stop him.

Teiser: They were very particular about their printing in that company always, weren't they?

R. Grabhorn: They were particular about their labels. I knew a man that used to slave over the labels. But I can't say that we'd be too proud of these reproductions of letters of acknowledgment.

Teiser: Were there any other notable ads that you did?

R. Grabhorn: We did lots of ads through McCann-Erickson for the Standard Oil Company. We did those for years. But then we stopped doing ads for them. Then they came back to us, oh, perhaps around 1930, and we did a little more than just follow instructions there. We worked right with the art director, Charles Stafford Duncan. He was a local artist of some repute at the time. I think actually he was

- R. Grabhorn: one of the executors of Bender's estate. But we did the Standard Oil ads announcing Standard Ethyl gasoline.
- Teiser: This is interesting because although your name always appears in your books, these ads are anonymous.
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. Who would know?
- Teiser: Except maybe people would recognize your style.
- R. Grabhorn: That's right. But, of course, we can't assume any credit for the design of the Chickering ads. Those were conceived by Harlan; we just followed his lead.
- Teiser: But in the Standard Oil ads you had a little more free reign?
- R. Grabhorn: In that last group, we did. Of course, we weren't commissioned to do a series of ads and do anything we wanted. We always had to work with the art director.
- Teiser: You yourself recently did some wine labels for the New Almaden Winery?
- R. Grabhorn: We refurbished the Almaden labels, but those are not creations. We just sort of snapped them up a little bit, changed colors. But we always have done a few wine labels for friends that were wine makers. There we created the labels actually. We created the ones you see around now on Ficklin Port.

- R. Grabhorn: And then the Hallcrest Winery--that's a small winery. It's sort of a large plaything for an attorney here in town, Chaffee Hall. Then before Chaffee was in the commercial business, we did some private wine labels for him that I liked very much. I haven't seen one in years. I worked for some months on the Almaden wines. Did a couple of original labels. I remember one for a brandy that I haven't seen around. I don't know whether they're making a brandy or not.
- Teiser: That was you alone, wasn't it, working on the Almaden labels?
- R. Grabhorn: Well, my brother helped in taking proofs, and the color business.
- Teiser: Were there any other kinds of fugitive work that you created?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, we've done many business announcements. Of course for years, when Jim Ransohoff was alive (I suppose there's a younger Jim Ransohoff now) we did the Ransohoff announcements each year of their fashion openings. We did those in quantities which were huge for us: 30,000.
- Teiser: Could you handle that many of one thing in your shop?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes, but that's about as many as we ever did.

R. Grabhorn: We very rarely had anything printed by other printers. Now and then. Lawton Kennedy printed one of the Fuller histories for us. And then we did some pamphlets, large pamphlets, for Stanford University in which the presswork was done by somebody else. We did the design. That was very seldom. We'd rather do it ourselves.

Illustrations

Teiser: What about illustrations? Didn't you use lithographed illustrations in certain books?

R. Grabhorn: No, not until later. We were printing books before offset printing was common, you see. So we would have to depend on woodcuts and zinc etchings of line drawings.

Teiser: Did you use many halftones?

R. Grabhorn: No, no halftones. We could never print a halftone properly. We tried but we never could, because we didn't have the ideal kind of presses for halftones, for one reason; and besides that, we weren't good enough. [laughter] We always avoided them. And so we always had halftones lithographed when we got to the point of using them. Up until offset became usual, why we were limited to line drawings, woodcuts. When we had a good, hard workman like Valenti Angelo, a lot of small editions were hand

R. Grabhorn: decorated--several of them. I mean things of forty or fifty copies.

Teiser: You mean the color was applied by hand?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

Teiser: When you did later have illustrations lithographed, who did them?

R. Grabhorn: I think the first time we used an offset lithographer was when we printed those facsimilies of the letters written to Schilling. You see, we'd just take the whole letter, with the letterhead and everything, and that was reproduced by offset. I forget even the man's name. We've used A. Carlisle for offset. And the local man here, Waters.

We prefer collotype. We've had lots of our collotype done at the Meriden Gravure Company. That to us is better than offset.

Andrew Hoyem: They have finally stopped. I got word of that. [who had just entered] One of the men died, and the other three retired.

R. Grabhorn: Is that right? They've stopped. I know they threatened to stop doing collotype.

Hoyem: This is a recent development.

Teiser: You can't get collotype then anywhere now?

Hoyem: In the United States, no.

R. Grabhorn: You can get it in Europe.

Hoyem: Japan also.

- R. Grabhorn: I think Jaffe, who used to operate in Europe, operates in New York. I think he might still be in business.
- Hoyem: I think that man that was out here from Meriden said they were the only ones [left].
- Teiser: Did you ever use gravure?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes, when we got it in Oakland [from Oakland National Gravure]. I think the last book we used any gravure on was . . .
- Hoyem: Photographs.
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. Photographs of the Grabhorn Press in that catalogue of Magee's--Grabhorn books he had for sale. About six, seven years ago.
- Teiser: Oakland National was the only place that did gravure in this area,was'nt it?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. The most elaborate book was a book we printed for the Americana collector, Holliday. I think his son is over at the Bancroft Library now.
- Teiser: He was--Jim Holliday. He's at San Francisco State now.
- R. Grabhorn: Well, his father was a very important Americana collector, and he had us print a book about a man that had made elaborate illustrations--I forgot the name of the book. The ostensible publisher was the Arizona Historical Society. Those were gravure illustrations.

- Teiser: There's a book that I have that you did that was edited by Eleanor Bancroft and Edith Coulter.
- R. Grabhorn: *California Towns*?
- Teiser: Yes.
- R. Grabhorn: That was probably offset. That was some local [offset lithography] company. That wasn't collotype, I'm fairly sure.
- Teiser: It looks like very good offset. Were you fussy about it?
- R. Grabhorn: Well, not too. Not the way some men are.
- Teiser: How about the maps . . .
- R. Grabhorn: The Diseños^{*}, you mean?
- Teiser: Yes. Who did those reproductions?
- R. Grabhorn: Well, the groundwork I think was done by Waters, the black. We added the colors, you see, with linoleum blocks, which we've done. The Japanese print books, you see, the background was done by collotype. We added the colors with linoleum blocks.
- Teiser: That sounds harder to print than halftones.
- R. Grabhorn: It isn't nearly as hard as you think, thank goodness. You see, we had nothing to do with the groundwork. That's where the shading is.
- Teiser: I'm just thinking of the registration.
- R. Grabhorn: The registration is tough, especially on collotypes. Because on the Japanese print books, you

*Becker, Robert H. *Diseños of California Ranchos*. San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1964.

R. Grabhorn: see, we would have to slice, with a razor blade, the sheets with the illustrations in order to get registration. There were guide marks printed; [but] if we just used their press guides, the color would wander all over the illustration.

Teiser: What of the San Francisco Bay Area map book?

R. Grabhorn: *Maps of San Francisco Bay?**

Teiser: Yes.

R. Grabhorn: I think those illustrations were collotype.

Teiser: I see.

R. Grabhorn: I think. We've used quite a bit of collotype.

That has its drawbacks. It's a matter of getting the paper there, and back. Especially if you want to use the same kind of paper the rest of the book is on.

Teiser: I saw some gravure work of Charles Wood's the other day.

R. Grabhorn: Wood did the illustrations by offset for the first volume of Carl Wheat's *Mapping the Trans-Mississippi West*. It's a six-volume thing. We printed the first volume. The rest of them were printed--several by Taylor and Taylor--and somebody else. We had nothing to do with them, only the first volume.

* Harlow, Neal. *The Maps of San Francisco Bay*.
San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1950.

Printing Equipment

- Teiser: This brings up the presses you used. Let me go 'way back. When you first came to San Francisco, did you bring any equipment with you?
- R. Grabhorn: Type. That's all. No presses.
- Teiser: Did you have much type?
- R. Grabhorn: No, no. We had some English Caslon and Kennerly. But we only had a couple of cases of English Caslon, which we traded to Taylor and Taylor for some type that we wanted. I forget what it was. But we bought type regularly.
- Teiser: Then how did you set about getting the rest of your equipment?
- R. Grabhorn: We bought it here. Bought the press. I forget our first press. It was a Colt's Armory. We've always been partial to Colt's Armory presses.
- Teiser: Is that what you had in Indianapolis?
- R. Grabhorn: I do not remember the press . . . I don't. . . yes, we did. We had a form of a Colt's Armory press. And also an old Chandler and Price.
- Teiser: Why have you always been partial to the Colt's Armory?
- R. Grabhorn: Because of the heavy, the nice impression you get. You get a heavier impression, usually, and better ink distribution, than you could on a Chandler and Price, at least. We never liked the idea of

R. Grabhorn: cylinder presses. Of course, they're ideal for halftones. If you work with dampened handmade paper, it's a little more troublesome on a cylinder press.

Teiser: Has much of your work been done on dampened paper?

R. Grabhorn: Quite a bit. The whole *Leaves of Grass* was done on dampened paper, which was a tremendous job. I mean just dampening it.

Teiser: I think I asked Albert Sperisen, whom I interviewed,* about why the Colt's Armory press was held in such high esteem in general, and he said, "Oh, because the Grabhorns use it," or something to that effect. But I think he was indicating that it was a difficult press to use.

R. Grabhorn: Well, it's not a fast press. But you see, when we were starting, the automatic feeders had just been invented, and they were usually attached to an inferior press. But we never did tremendous quantities. We didn't need a fast press.

Teiser: There is no automatic feeder possible with the Colt's Armory?

R. Grabhorn: Now there is on a form of Colt's Armory called the Victoria. We have one upstairs [in the Grabhorn-Hoyem press] that isn't as efficient as the modern

*Sperisen, Albert. *San Francisco Area Printers, 1925-1965*, a 1966 interview in this series.

R. Grabhorn: presses like the Heidelbergs. But those are cylinder presses. These are platen presses. The Victoria's just another name for a Colt's Armory. It has the same type of action.

Teiser: Where is it made?

R. Grabhorn: It was made in Germany. Now I think it's made in Switzerland, if it's made at all anymore. Sherwood Grover bought one recently for his home printing office, in England. Rebuilt.

Teiser: Do you remember how much you paid for your first press when you came here?

R. Grabhorn: No. I think about the second one, we paid \$450 for.

Teiser: Did you get first just one?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes.

Teiser: When did you get your second?

R. Grabhorn: About 1924, I would say. One press in 1920 when we started.

Teiser: What else?

R. Grabhorn: Just one press. One press and type.

Teiser: I see.

R. Grabhorn: Well, we did lots of curious work there. We did it in quantities. And one of our richest jobs was a political thing. After the fire in Berkeley, when there was an attempt to pass a law that you couldn't

R. Grabhorn: use redwood shingles for roofing, we did a lot of work for the Redwood Association, or its publicity man, who was an amusing old character. He started us printing postal cards, or things like a postal card, about the size. Then he ordered a thousand and we printed them one at a time, naturally. Then he ordered 20,000. Then we would print them four at a time. And he never asked for a reduction in price. [Laughter] So it became very rich. I think we must have printed 100,000 of those. As a matter of fact, he tried to give us work we couldn't handle. They spent a lot of money defeating that [law].

Teiser: And were successful?

R. Grabhorn: That's right. I think after about six months of doing work for the Redwood Association, I took a trip to Europe.

Teiser: How long were you gone?

Grabhorn: A year.

Bookbinding

Teiser: Were you just traveling?

R. Grabhorn: No. I spent most of my time in Paris. I was supposed to be studying bookbinding, but I took some lessons in bookbinding from a woman in Paris, a Danish woman. I shouldn't have any pride about it, but I wrote a book on bookbinding, with my teacher.

R. Grabhorn: We wrote it in English, and it was never published in English. But it was later published in France, in a French translation. My French is not good enough. "*Lessons in Binding for the Amateur*, by Madame Ingeborg Borgeson and Her Pupil." I was her pupil, R. Grabhorn. [laughter] I doubt if it's in print. She later had a Danish edition put out. I don't think my name was on the Danish edition.

Teiser: Did you continue bookbinding when you came back?

R. Grabhorn: No. No. Everybody laughed at my attempts. As a matter of fact, it was just fun. I did a few bookbindings, but with my teacher looking over my shoulder.

Teiser: Did you study typography at all? Did you go around. . . ?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I always hated to go around to printing offices. I have gone to a few. Later on, in France, I went to a few--years later. But not then.

Teiser: Did you buy any books that trip?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. I always bought books.

Teiser: Did you buy some books on printing at that time?

R. Grabhorn: Not at that time. I bought books to rebind, or I thought I was going to rebind, and books with illustrations. But on my second trip to Paris in 1936, I bought books on printing. I bought quite a few. I always remember when the ship landed at

R. Grabhorn: Los Angeles, because of a dock strike here, I had a couple of suitcases full of books and went through the customs down there. And the man said, "What are those books?" I said, "Books on printing." He said, "Let's see." I had to go through all those. He was bitterly disappointed, because they were.

Teiser: [laughter] Was your studying in Europe an attempt to beat the bookbinding problem in San Francisco?

R. Grabhorn: No, no. This was an attempt to find out something about it. We were self-taught--there were some crude bindings we put out at that time, that we concocted ourselves, just from reading books on it.

Teiser: You were actually doing binding, though, yourselves?

R. Grabhorn: In a way.

Teiser: What then did you do about having your books bound?

R. Grabhorn: Well, unless the edition was pretty large, and if it was a pretentious book, we nearly always sewed them ourselves, folded them, and--you can't trust a good book to a commercial folder, you see.

Teiser: Did you have folding equipment?

R. Grabhorn: We folded them by hand, gathered them, and sewed them by hand--on small editions. Now, of course, most of the books are sewn by machine. But if it's possible we like to fold them and gather them on the premises.

Teiser: Did you do the folding yourselves?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, my wife, or whoever wasn't employed at something else. That isn't so bad, especially if it's a 200-copy thing. Sewing is much harder!

Teiser: Who sewed?

R. Grabhorn: Why, usually Jane, or Ed's wife. She'd even take them home. She'd have a sewing bench at home. She'd sew as many as possible; Jane would sew as many as possible. Now, you understand, this would be a comparatively expensive book, and then a small number of copies. When it got up to be 500 and over 100 pages, then we would have them sewn. We bound our own books. Up until a few years ago, even, we bound them. Unless it got up, like the Bohemian Club play, to 2,000 copies. That's too much, you see, and we'd send them to Cardoza.

Teiser: Well, for a time did you employ a bookbinder?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. We had a very good bookbinder, Bill Wheeler, who actually was self-taught--almost. But he got better and better. He was a very neat workman. And especially got better when we hired a young man from England, who was a fairly good bookbinder. Bill tried to emulate him--became very successful at it. Now this fellow was hired by Hazel Dreis. And then she couldn't keep him busy, so we hired him.

Teiser: Do you remember his name?

R. Grabhorn: He had a hyphenated name. . . Sanders-White, or some such name. I can't remember. No. He went to Los Angeles, never heard of him afterwards. He's a younger man than I am, so I presume he's still-- it's peculiar you never hear from him. Maybe he went back to England.

Teiser: What was Wheeler's period with you?

R. Grabhorn: Well, we used to give him things to do in his little loft, or room, or wherever he worked. But that wasn't too successful. And then I think about 1925 or '26 he came to work with us. And he lasted all through the printing of the *Leaves of Grass*--which Hazel Dreis did a lot of work on. It was too big, you see. And, I think it was around '33, no, possibly '35 or '36, that he left us. He lasted a long time.

Teiser: Jane [Grabhorn] had studied bookbinding, had she?

R. Grabhorn: No, she just graduated into it by being around the shop, folding and proofreading, and then graduated. When Wheeler left, she took over. But we've had several bookbinders.

Teiser: Who were the others?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, there was an old Englishman. He was pretty sloppy. I forget his name. And a young man that joined the Army. He was taken prisoner in the Philippines. He lasted a couple of years, but

R. Grabhorn: nothing especial. They're not bookbinders. I mean, they're case-makers. A bookbinder, in the strict parlance, is someone that does individual volumes, and laces them in, laces the cords into the sides, and usually works in leather, something like that--in the Peter Fahey tradition. She's bound a few books for us.

Teiser: Has she?

R. Grabhorn: Well, I mean, odd volumes--or I mean five or six, maybe at a time, I remember.

Teiser: Who bound those presentation pieces that you did?

R. Grabhorn: Wheeler, usually. Very good at it. Because they're very thin. It's very difficult to bind a very thin book, and those were usually bound in full Morocco.

Teiser: The economics of the binding part of the book business. . .

R. Grabhorn: That's the ruination of . . . or was for a long time . . . general publishing in San Francisco. I would say that's why there haven't been more commercial publishers, because it cost more to bind a book locally for many years than the whole production in New York, or Chicago, or wherever the book factories are. And that was because, of course, they were not mechanized. They didn't have a case-making machine. Now they have. Recently, I hear, a place like Cardoza, that is a modern bindery,

R. Grabhorn: isn't interested in doing binding for people like us. Because they're too busy binding schoolbooks. We asked them for a price, I think on a 2200 edition, and they didn't want it.

Type

Teiser: I wanted to ask about the amount of type that you acquired over the years.

R. Grabhorn: Oh, tremendous, I would say, for this kind of printing. We bought type in old-fashioned quantities. We bought that early American type called Oxford. We bought over 1200 pounds of it, which is a huge quantity in this day. We could set by hand, in ordinary six by nine size, ninety-six pages-- something like that--if we had to. Now, the first book we used any quantity of that on--that we needed that quantity for, was *Two Years Before The Mast*, that we did for Random House. See, that's hand set. It's a nice book, too. I don't know whether we bought that type deliberately for that book or just wanted to buy 1200 pounds [laughter]. Well, it's a great relief to be able to get 'way into a book without having to stop and distribute. Because often you don't know what problems you're going to get into, so the more pages you can have up the better it is. Our first huge quantity was

- R. Grabhorn: when we thought we were going to use a type called Lutetia on *Leaves of Grass*, and we bought a thousand pounds of that--and a European type too, and that was quite expensive. And, we decided it wouldn't do for . . .
- Teiser: This is it? [broadside on wall: *Lutetia Type, A Specimen, designed by the Grabhorn Press, 1948*].
- R. Grabhorn: That's it. Well, we had the eighteen-point size, you see.
- Teiser: Did you set this?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. We set that for a paper company that issued some years ago a series of broadsides they gave to different printers, showing types. I thought it was a very interesting series. They must have had about thirty in the series. That one [broadside] up there of Cheltenham is designed by Dwiggins. That one over there is about the lost Goudy types. And that's the one we printed--Lutetia.
- Teiser: What paper company was it?
- R. Grabhorn: The Eastern Paper Corporation, Bangor, Maine.
- Teiser: That's a beautiful broadside.
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. Now, we didn't print it, you see. It was printed in the East. We set the type, and had the plates made. They wanted a huge quantity--thirty thousand.
- Teiser: Didn't you do something similar for Mackenzie and Harris?

R. Grabhorn: No. That was a series of ads they called "From Gutenberg to Grabhorn."

Teiser: Oh, that's it.

R. Grabhorn: They had Mallette Dean illustrations. But they set the type. We did print about nine of the advertisements, to be put out in a folder. But those were all set in the same kind of type. I concocted and printed a type specimen book that Magee published, strictly on Victorian types. I've always wanted to do a type specimen, and I thought I wanted to do one different from any one else's. This was a sort of a feeler, to see what I could do. And so we had some Victorian types in the shop, and I played with them and concocted--it was just about nineteen different types, you know. I wish there was a copy here. I thought it was amusing: I was facetious about the beauty of these types. You know, it doesn't exist. For instance, I called one type--the type had a name, but the heading of the specimen was "Barnyard Elegance." [laughter]

Teiser: This was an idea you generated?

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

Teiser: And Magee went along?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. It was printed a little more elaborately

R. Grabhorn: than I wanted it to be, because the idea wasn't such luxurious elegance. My brother did the press-work; he used very good hand-made paper. That I thought was gilding the lilly.

Teiser: Did you have any other major type holdings?

R. Grabhorn: Well, then we had a lot of the type we called Franciscan that we owned the design for. That Goudy made. You see, we could get that made locally, and we'd get it made as we needed it, you see.

Teiser: Who made it?

R. Grabhorn: Mackenzie and Harris. And we must have made five or six hundred pounds of that--it's still at the Grabhorn Press. And we had quite a large font of Goudy New Style, that we did print the *Leaves of Grass* in. I forget exactly how many pounds we had. We lent a large quantity of that to Brother Antoninus when he was printing his Psalter, which he never finished. I think Dawson issued it, when he abandoned it, as much as he had printed.

Teiser: We interviewed him. He thought that was very generous of you to lend the type to him.

R. Grabhorn: Inasmuch as he never gave me a copy of the book.
[laughter]

Teiser: I think they gave him one. [laughter]

R. Grabhorn: Well, let's see. We had quite a bit of what we'd call Bible Gothic, that's now called Jessenschrift.

R. Grabhorn: We bought it when it was known as Bible Gothic because it had been used to print in Germany an edition of the New Testament. Well, the German name was Bibel Gotisch. But as I told you, that young Klingspor worked for us. He got the type for us when it was virtually a private type. But later they made it in all sizes, and they renamed it Jessenschrift after a German calligrapher.

I don't know whether I told you or not about the time we ordered extra characters. I typed out the order to this foundry: so many pounds of this letter, so many pounds of that letter. And my typing was pretty crude, and I got a little hyphen over the top of the n. And when we got the type, there was a little line above the n. We had to take a file and file it off. [laughter] This was a German type company, the Klingspor Foundry.

Teiser: Were there other types, then, that you held in major quantities?

R. Grabhorn. When Nash dissolved his printing office up in Portland, we bought types from Nash. We never got exactly what we ordered. [laughter] We got a huge quantity of this Italian type called Incunabula, possibly five or six hundred pounds.

Teiser: Did you use it much?

R. Grabhorn: We never used that too much. We printed a Shakespeare, one of the Shakespeare volumes, in it, *The Tempest*. But that didn't take near all of it. We experimented on several books with it, which we never used. Of course, there are tons of type at the Grabhorn Press that nobody can afford to hire printers to set up any more. I don't know what's going to happen to all those big fonts. This is the day of the machine. Nobody can afford to hand set, really. Unless it's something so short. Lew Allen manages to do it.

Teiser: Well, he doesn't do it on a very strict economic basis, does he?

R. Grabhorn: No, no. No, he does it himself. I don't think he has any very large fonts. I think he has to distribute and reprint all the time, as everybody does.

Teiser: I'm going to stop now and come back again.

R. Grabhorn: Well, I think we might've repeated ourselves.

Teiser: You've discussed some of the same things, but in a little different way, and you've added something to what you said before.

R. Grabhorn: I'm apt to be garrulous, I guess.

Teiser: No, you're telling just the sort of things that I think are important. So much has been written about you, of course, but a lot of what you're saying, I think, is not a matter of record. What

Teiser: I'm trying to do is supplement what's been written.

R. Grabhorn: Well, I know that a lot of my anecdotes are the same as my brother's, but they'll probably be in a little different form. [laughter]

Teiser: Yes, everybody remembers things differently.

R. Grabhorn: Well, I've been credited with things that I know I never said.

Teiser: I hope they were good things.

R. Grabhorn: Sometimes too good. [laughter]

INTERVIEW III

March 3, 1967

The Grabhorn Press Characterized

R. Grabhorn: I was trying to think about our position as craftsmen at the Grabhorn Press. It's sort of ambivalent, you know. Sometimes we're good, but we're not always thorough craftsmen in the sense of Brother Antoninus, as far as presswork is concerned. What I mean is, many of our books could be faulted on the grounds of meticulous detail, you see. I do think we did superb presswork in several books, but not always. Our presswork is of variable quality, according to the nature of the work. We were never what you could call finicky, you know like--I think I mentioned Haywood Hunt using tissue paper, and Porter Garnett also used tissue spaces between the letters of the same word. That, we think, is over-meticulous. Always did. I think our reputation depends more on the content of a book. You see, we printed for collectors. Not collectors necessarily of just fine books, but collectors of subjects too. Californiana. In other words, that probably saved our lives as printers, printing for collectors. Now our books, I think, are more widely collected than much finer presses, that is, consistently finer presses,

- R. Grabhorn: because our books have increased in value greatly. And that is because collectors wanted them. I mean collectors of subject, not printing.
- Teiser: Oh, but aren't you collected by collectors of printing, too?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And many times it gets to be like the stock and bond business. Our books have gone up in price, many of them, so tremendously that people think it's a good investment that are not true collectors. And it's not true of all books. They'll collect something and pay a high price just because not many people have it. Something privately printed for twenty-five people, never designed for the general public--but if somebody can get ahold of one, because he's making a collection, he will pay a high price. But on the other hand, some of these Californiana books have increased tremendously, like *Santa Fe Trail to California*, which is a pretty good book typographically, and presswork and everything about it is pretty good--not superlative--pretty good. But it's a new subject, an important book in its field. That book was issued for \$30 and you have to pay \$300 for it now. A great printer like Bruce Rogers, who has a tremendous influence--none of his books have increased that much in price.

- Teiser: Does the size of the edition have any bearing on this? Did he produce books in larger editions than you?
- R. Grabhorn: No. Not while he was at the Riverside Press, when I think he had the greatest influence he ever had. In fact, he's influenced lots of designers, influenced us. I think we were probably one of his best students, you see. We didn't ever copy some one thing he did, but we approached the problem of printing many books the way he did. I think we were pretty good at it. [Chuckle]
- Teiser: How would you characterize that approach?
- R. Grabhorn: Well, it's generally--lots of people called it allusive printing. Not necessarily just period printing because period printing would be this: if you have an Elizabethan book to print, you do it in the Elizabethan style, you see; typography. That's obviously period work and it's a good recipe. But also, if the nature of a book is feminine, you can give it a feminine touch, you see, a delicate piece of typography. Now, we printed a book that I like very much in the Americana series, called *The Spanish Occupation of California*. We printed that in our Franciscan type, which is a half black letter, half Roman kind of type. But it had the Spanish look to it,

R. Grabhorn: Spanish California look, if there is such a thing. It's got a great title page.

Teiser: You said allusive printing?

R. Grabhorn: Allusive either to the nature of the subject or the period of the subject. Rogers did that in a whole series of books when he worked at the Riverside Press, oh, from around 1900 to 1911-12, before he went to England. For instance, one of his famous books is the *Song of Roland*, and it's set in a French *Lettre Batarde*, or, you know, a sort of current Gothic type. It was made in France to reprint old texts. And he did this in a nice tall folio, double columns, with hand-painted illustrations like stained glass. Now that's allusive to the period and the nature of the book, you know, a French romance. That's what I call allusive printing.

Teiser: I think this perhaps was what Albert Sperisen was alluding to when he said that you invented ways to create effects that earlier printers had created, but didn't use the same methods.

R. Grabhorn: Modern methods. We used old type sometimes. Lots of printers are contemptuous of that, but then it's a matter of period. I know Updike liked many of our books, but he was very contemptuous of a thing like the *Mandeville's Travels*, which was printed in the

R. Grabhorn: 15th Century manner. But he was an allusive printer, too. But his period, his favorite period, was a bit different.

Teiser: What was your favorite period?

R. Grabhorn: All periods. But the older were the better to us. Old John Johnck said, "Those fellows are not printers, they just produce old books." [laughter]

Teiser: Who was he saying that about?

R. Grabhorn: Us! [laughter]

Now a man like Rogers could print in almost any period, even in a bad period typographically, and make a fine book out of it. He would refine it so. He made almost a creation. If he made an Elizabethan book, it'd be better than any Elizabethan book.

Teiser: What were the main influences on your work?

R. Grabhorn: I would say, well, all the private presses. We printed our bibliography; that was certainly influenced by the Ashendene bibliography, which was a private press. Because we have inserts of old sample sheets, just as the Ashendene did, and used an attractive type, our private type, which is appropriate. He had a private type too.

Teiser: Was Rogers your main general influence?

R. Grabhorn: He certainly was mine, and I'm certain that my brother was aware of it, but one time he sold his

R. Grabhorn: whole Rogers collection because he said he got tired, when he was confronted with a problem, of going to one of Rogers' books. Which he actually didn't do. That was just a reason for getting rid of it. [laughter] But Rogers rarely used a text that was new and collectable, you see. That is, if you bought his book you did it because you admired his printing style. Subject, I think, still has a tremendous influence on what a book's going to cost the collector eventually.

Teiser: How did you choose subjects, then?

R. Grabhorn: We started out by choosing classics of literature. You know, the English are always printing literary masterpieces, and that's more or less correct, because if people pay a high price for a book they want something, sort of a monument to their favorite author. They usually took the *Canterbury Tales*, or Dante or Boccaccio, or big names.

Teiser: The Mandeville was a fugitive piece wasn't it?

R. Grabhorn: The Mandeville was--that's a one-book thing. That's an early book of travels, you see. And we wanted to use this new type we had on hand, that Koch Bible Gothic. We were the first ones in this country to have it and wanted an appropriate subject for the type.

Teiser: That sort of consideration, though, could not have

Teiser: often influenced your choice of books to print?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, no, not often, not often. Now, *The Santa Fe Trail*, for instance is a journal of crossing the plains. That is not period typography. That's in Centaur type, which isn't anything like the type that would have been used in 1850. It's anything but.

Teiser: How did you happen to choose that type for it?

R. Grabhorn: Well, it was available in a size large enough. It is not what I call period typography in any sense.

Teiser: Nor even allusive?

R. Grabhorn: Nor even allusive, no. It was an old journal that had never been published. The nice thing about it; it had nice drawings of the missions, you see. I think one of them was a drawing of a mission that is gone. It's probably more Italian in feeling than any other but not so. It's just a good book.

Teiser: I'm still trying to find out how you were smart enough, lucky enough, or what, to choose things which were collectable, as you say, and significant.

R. Grabhorn: Well, I think they stemmed out of the fact that my brother was a collector of Californiana himself. And he knew that he had some tremendously rare books that lots of collectors would want a reprint of. And whereas these people wouldn't have bought the

R. Grabhorn: book if it was one of the classics of literature, they would buy it because they wanted that particular text. When we first started to print books we printed Mandeville; we printed as experimental typography Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and *The Golden Touch* of Hawthorne's. Then we got the idea, since we are American printers, we'd better use American classics. And while we were on that kick we printed the Whitman, and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. And that's not period typography. None of these were. Maybe closer to period typography would have been the *Two Years Before the Mast*, but not exclusively. But then we're aware of the period, you see, when we're doing this. That's why I say if there was any influence besides all old books-- certainly old books influenced Rogers, for a long time. Then he tried to be contemporary, and was successful in a few books. But never, never did he try to be freakish, to be "modern." We used to all be concerned with modernity in the days of the Bauhaus, you know. We used to have tremendous arguments about what's modern typography. And some people would say to use a sans serif type throughout the book. Well that didn't work. Some would say, "Change the margins." That worried me for a long time. Instead of having the big margin on the outside

R. Grabhorn: of the page, some few experimentally printed a big margin on the inside, just to change it. I asked Jo Sinel, an industrial designer, about this once. I said, "Now why is it, it's never successful to fool with the margins of a book?" "Well," he said, "don't you see, the book is functional the way it is, without improving on it."

Teiser: Still, much of your design is what one would call contemporary.

R. Grabhorn: Yes, with a background of the knowledge of other typographic style. I can see a man like, oh, William Morris, loved the medieval. And his books were his concept of the medieval. He had two or three heavy types, heavy incunabula type of decoration, and the books were all the same. Then you have a man like Cobden-Sanderson who says, "That's nonsense. The sole function of a book is to be read." So he printed all his books the same way. Very austere. But then, those presses all had a personal style, strictly personal. They didn't go to all the periods of typography, use all the types. You find us using types that were popular in 1850 as well as 1940 or 1490.

Teiser: Still, I think that anyone who is acquainted with your books can almost always tell them from any other printer's books.

Grabhorn: Yes.

Teiser: You have some imitators, but they don't, of course . . .

R. Grabhorn: I wasn't aware of any imitator.

Teiser: You have a style . . .

R. Grabhorn: Well, our title pages are usually strong, but we print delicate books. I'm just trying to arrive at why we did things the way we did. We did have a devotion to good paper. But we also had to buy paper cheaply. Sometimes we used paper we shouldn't have because it was something we had and it was good, but not suitable for a particular book. Of course, any printer can, after a book is finished, fault what he did. Afterward. If somebody else doesn't do it for you. [laughter]

Teiser: Some of the other people you were speaking of, such as Garnett, perhaps, Rogers--were they in the same position that you were, of having to make a living by printing?

R. Grabhorn: Well, no. Rogers, for instance, did his great work when he was hired by the Riverside Press. That was owned by Houghton Mifflin, I think, the publisher. He was on salary. They supported him. My brother was even offered a job to take his place when he left. He had quite a free hand. They indulged him. These Riverside Press books

R. Grabhorn: that he did, the good ones, took a lot of indulgence. They bought types for him, and went to a lot of expense. And they were not money makers. You could buy them, years after he left the Riverside Press, for the published price. They weren't printed in large numbers, either.

Teiser: If you did not print each book to be what you felt perfect, it was not as if you had all circumstances within your complete control.

R. Grabhorn: Well, that's true. You have to calculate the market for a book and what you can possibly charge. We did our best on quite a few books. I mean money was no object, you see.

Teiser: Yes, I realize that.

R. Grabhorn: But with quite a few, it was. [Chuckle]

Teiser: I'm trying to figure out another word for "design."

R. Grabhorn: Well, design's a hard thing. [laughter] I'm not much in favor of the word "design." You take a modern publisher. I think the word "design" is more than anything being a bookkeeper. You have to realize what the book's going to sell for and how much you can afford to spend on its manufacture, and work within those limits.

Teiser: I'm thinking of it, as you know, in terms of simply how the type is selected and how the book is put together.

- R. Grabhorn: Well, in the commercial books it's what the company you're dealing with has available.
- Teiser: But so far as your work has been concerned, it's come from your sense of rightness, has it not?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. We often bought types deliberately for a book, you see. Of course, we used them again.
- Teiser: Did you get tired of them and sell them?
- R. Grabhorn: No, no. Very seldom. We traded. We sold some Caslon to Henry Taylor of Taylor and Taylor once. He needed some. I think he sold us some of his Oxford. I can't remember accurately.
- Teiser: Of the books that you have been speaking of, or have in mind, which do you feel came closest to satisfying you?
- R. Grabhorn: Ah, that's very difficult. Well, I liked *The Santa Fe Trail* because it was a decent book as far as materials and the effort that went into it, the paper, presswork, and the subject. I like the *Leaves of Grass* because it is one of our best productions as craftsmen. I like the book we printed one time called, *Cabeza de Vaca*, around 1930*I think. The presswork in that was exceptional for us, I think.
- Teiser: Haywood Hunt said that when your brother was in Seattle, he came to know Henry Anger, "art printer"

*1929 was the publication date.

Teiser: or whatever they called him, and that perhaps your brother got something from Anger. Did he?

R. Grabhorn: I doubt it. I knew Anger. I doubt whether you could. [laughter] They all liked Anger. But I think they liked him because of his character. He was aware of better things, but I don't think he had much influence. My brother told me they used to call him "The Rule Man of the Rockies." [laughter] It always amused me.

Teiser: I guess that was before Nash?

R. Grabhorn: Well, Nash used rules, but Anger used them in a different way, in the old-fashioned way.

Teiser: You mentioned John Johnck. I never knew him, but I gather he was a man who inspired many printers.

R. Grabhorn: Not so many. I think [Harold] Seeger quite a bit. He was a good printer of no particular style, I think he first printed a very impressive book of Colonel [C.E.S.] Wood's, a book of poetry, up at Portland, before he came to San Francisco. I forget the title.

Teiser: *Maia*?

R. Grabhorn: That's it. Which was a deluxe book of the period.

Teiser: I have heard him spoken of as if he had at least a cultured outlook on the world?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, I think he did, more than many printers. More

R. Grabhorn: than a Henry Anger or a Haywood Hunt.

Teiser: And of course, Harold Seeger was a very accomplished man.

R. Grabhorn: Yes he was. Never any definite style, I don't think. He worked in the shadow of Johnck for so many years. But he was a very careful typesetter.

Teiser: There was really, in effect, no one here who influenced you, was there?

R. Grabhorn: No. Not that I'm aware of.

Book Collecting and Printers
of the Past

Teiser: Let us then go on to your collection of books on printing.

R. Grabhorn: That's just something that grew out of buying other printers' works. And then buying books on the history of printing. And being influenced by the books you read. I think it's a combination of things. The books themselves, then books about them, about the books, bibliographies, specimen books. It was based mainly on Updike--kind of extra-illustrating Updike.

Teiser: Do you recall about what year you started this?

R. Grabhorn: Really concentrating and spending what money I could afford?

Teiser: Yes.

R. Grabhorn: All the money I could afford. Why that would be. . . Well, I had a little collection of principally press books like Golden Cockerell, a few Doves, and maybe a couple of Kelmscotts, things like that, that I sold in 1932--the year I got married. [laughter] And after that I naturally started another collection. And I would say I was hooked by 1936, when I made a trip to Europe and bought--concentrated on--books that I had learned about from reading the history of printing. I made lots of nice buys on that trip.

Teiser: Where?

R. Grabhorn: Mainly Paris. And London. Then, of course, from the local book dealers I bought lots of books, by then. Magee and Howell. I bought the book that is the most expensive in my collection from Howell.

Teiser: What one is that?

R. Grabhorn: That's a first edition of Euclid. Because Howell had a lot of them I bought quite a few Euclids. then. And I see the [San Francisco Public] Library is more or less trying to keep it up--buying more.* I had the first edition and several very early editions, like the first Arabic edition. And so

* Robert Grabhorn's collection of books on printing was acquired by the San Francisco Public Library in 1965.

- R. Grabhorn: people might get the idea that I'm a mathematician, but I'm not. They are intriguing books by virtue of the diagrams all through.
- Teiser: Was there anything else that you bought heavily?
- R. Grabhorn: No, no one author. But if there was a book existed that several printers had printed, the same book-- I tried to get different printers handling the same subject. I wasn't too successful at that. But that was the main idea. I stuck to the Euclid after I'd seen how the different printers approached the problem.
- Teiser: This went in directly with your own approach to the problem of a book, didn't it?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. It's well to know how other people approach the same thing.
- Teiser: When you printed, for instance, the *Leaves of Grass*, did you study earlier editions?
- R. Grabhorn: No. Except that Whitman himself was the printer of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. And it isn't what you'd call a private press book, but it's a nice, straightforward book. Of course, he was a Victorian printer, and some of his stuff, his typography in some things, was strictly of its day, and over-ornate. But this first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is very simple, very direct, a very nice book. And all we wanted to do was the same thing.

R. Grabhorn: We wanted a strong book; that's why we changed the type. We bought Lutetia for it and then changed to Goudy New Style because Lutetia was too weak for this massive folio, you see, and not strong enough for Whitman.

Teiser: Had it ever been done by a fine press?

R. Grabhorn: Not that I'm aware of. That's strange; there were a couple of American fine presses--not many. It's strange Rogers never touched any of the American subjects. He might've, but I'm not aware of it. For instance, he was printing *Song of Roland* and *The Centaur*. I think several presses have printed *The Centaur*. That's strictly 1890. I had a collection from a little press that I liked very much. It's probably collected now more, but it wasn't collected when I formed my collection--the Eragmⁿ Press. The printer was the son of Pissaro, the painter. He had gone to London, got mixed up with the Vale Press crowd and made woodblocks and printed a whole series of little, very thin books, fragile books. He was interesting. And he tried varieties of treatment with illustrations--the matter of illustrations in colors that printers had not tried. He used other colors than the straight red and black. He printed woodblock in colors, you see, in books there. They're very nice little books. The chief

R. Grabhorn: attraction to me was they didn't cost very much. I think the highest price I ever paid for one of his must have been about. . .oh, well! No! Finally I got into it. But on the paper copies the highest price I ever paid was \$25. But I bought a couple printed on vellum I had to pay more for. Albert Sperisen gave me two or three very rare ones that he came by. He knew that I liked Eragmyⁿ. And if he'd see one, on a birthday or Christmas he would try to find one I didn't have. He gave me a couple of the rarest. I ended up--stopped--having all the Eragmyⁿ books that are credited to him but three. One, of course I'd never get. It was sort of printed in about twenty-seven copies.

Teiser: When you say that he used color in an unusual fashion, did that suggest any technique to you that you ever used?

R. Grabhorn: I don't think so, I don't think so. Of course, we used plenty of color in--well, now the illustrations in the *Scarlet Letter* were colored woodblocks that Valenti Angelo had made us. Square. But very nice little things. Of course, we labored over that book. Our original conception was to use as a chapter head a large initial A--not too decorative--in each chapter head, but starting out in a very light pastel color and increasing in intensity 'till

R. Grabhorn: we got to the big scarlet A. [laughter] But we gave it up. Well, the same with the *Leaves of Grass*. Valenti worked terrifically hard on that. We were going to use huge initials. We printed a lot of the book, and the spaces were there, and we decided it would look like an alphabet book. [laughter] And then we had the spaces there and we had to fill them up. We gave up the initial idea. Valenti made those decorative things, woodcuts.

Teiser: Did you collect actively until the time you actually turned over your books to the San Francisco Public Library?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. I sort of eased off when I knew I was going to sell them. I bought a few after that, two or three. When you're finished, you're finished.

Teiser: As I recall, you sold them to the library, but there was also a gift aspect to it, was there not?

R. Grabhorn: Well, that's usual. Everybody knows about income taxes. I got the price I demanded, you see. They had them appraised. And it was a fair appraisal. As a matter of fact, it was too fair, I imagine, now. And the price I demanded was quite a bit lower than their appraisal, so they said I gave them the difference.

Teiser: Who appraises collections like that?

R. Grabhorn: Warren Howell did this. Magee does a lot of appraising.

Teiser: I forget that we have these experts.

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I'm an expert myself. I knew what I was doing when I asked \$50,000 [laughter] Actually, I don't like to be credited as a benefactor. I'd made up my mind that that was what I wanted for the books. That's all. I'm still getting it, of course. They didn't pay right at once.,

Teiser: Are you still collecting?

R. Grabhorn: You can't say that, no. If I see something that I know is underpriced, and is appealing, I'll buy it. But prices are generally too high now.

Teiser: I imagine your collection had gone up in value considerably since you purchased it, hadn't it?

R. Grabhorn: Oh yes, every day.

Teiser: Did you buy much through catalogues?

R. Grabhorn: Quite a bit.

Teiser: Just every way, then. You used every resource.

R. Grabhorn: Every way. I didn't make big purchases, except through the local book dealers, who gave me unlimited credit. [laughter]

Teiser: How many volumes all together in the collection?

R. Grabhorn: I've never counted them, actually--I imagine there are about 1,500. A lot of them were strictly

R. Grabhorn: ordinary books in the field.

Teiser: Did you ever trade some and get others, better copies?

R. Grabhorn: In two or three cases. Not many like that. Not many.

Teiser: What you originally bought, you kept?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. I was always more interested in getting another book. I wasn't too meticulous about condition.

Teiser: Were there any kinds of books you didn't collect just because you didn't like them?

R. Grabhorn: No. I wanted an example of as many different printers as I could get. I even had Elbert Hubbard, that most people wouldn't touch, one or two that I came by.

There was a much better printer, in fact--one that could hold his head up and you don't hear much about--in America of about that period, called the Elston Press. It printed more or less like the Vale Press. I never had a single book of theirs for some reason. Then. . .let's see. I like a lot of the trifling things that were printed in America in the 'nineties, like the Stone and Kimball for instance. They were primarily publishers, but they printed some very interesting books typographically, even popular novels. I often think that the

- R. Grabhorn: American Institute of Graphic Arts hasn't done much to raise the quality of the ordinary book, when you look at some of those printed around 1910, 1912. They had some concern about the quality of their books.
- Of course Updike printed many books for publishers. They usually were gift volumes, a thin essay of Stevenson's or something. For Scribners.
- Teiser: What would collectors do without Stevenson?
- R. Grabhorn: Why that's right. [laughter] We printed a couple. We printed them for people that owned the original manuscripts.
- Teiser: Two of them were for Howell, weren't they?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. One that I thought was an interesting book, one of our late books, was the *Silverado Journal*, where we tried to indicate his corrections in the manuscript by taking rule and putting it around the word that was transposed, you know, and place it in the place it was.
- Teiser: It must have been a terrible job.
- R. Grabhorn: It was. There were lines spaced very widely apart so we could do that.
- Teiser: One thing I should ask is about the size of books. It seems to me that back in 1910 books weren't so big.



Left to Right: Glenn Todd, Robert Grabhorn, Jane Grabhorn,
Andrew Hoyem, at Grabhorn-Hoyem Press, January 1967.
Photograph by Ted Streshinsky.

R. Grabhorn: That's right. People have often objected to the size of our books. Well, I don't know why. Except that people might say they like little books. But they won't pay for little books. [laughter] That is, not what they're worth. You see they take just as much effort as a big book. They'd rather buy an eight-page folio than a forty-page duodecimo.

Teiser: Don't you think it must mean they don't read them?

R. Grabhorn: I'm sure they don't. [laughter] That never interested me as a printer, whether they read them or not. I always think, "Of course you're not going to read *Leaves of Grass*. You can buy a pocket book. But if Whitman's your favorite author, you like a monument to him." That's the same for many books. I think the most elaborate book that Rogers printed at the Riverside Press was Montaigne's *Essays*, hand set folio, in three volumes. Of course, they used such heavy paper, they were almost like decks of playing cards.

Present Printers and Past Employees

Teiser: I think I've asked you a good deal about printers who preceded you or were contemporaries of yours. But what about the young printers who are coming next?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I really don't know. They've all been at it so long, like Lew Allen, whose work I like very much. Brother Antoninus I always did [like]. Both those men are superb craftsmen. They're not considered young printers coming up.

Teiser: Are they also good typographers? Does their typography match their presswork do you think?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. There's no attempt with Antoninus other than just straightforward typography. And good type, well printed, and good paper. Lew tries things. I think he's very successful sometimes. Sometimes I don't think he's so successful. But this is not a criticism at all. It's just a personal thing. I think he prints type in these pastel shades lots of times. But it makes an interesting book. And interest in a book is far more important to me whether the printer is successful or not. If he tries. Lew has quite a following.

Teiser: He's a remarkable man, isn't he, to have devoted so much. . .

R. Grabhorn: To have done it, given his life to it actually. He retired at an early age in order to be a printer.

Teiser: Of the younger men--your associate Andrew Hoyem worked with the Grabhorn Press for a time, didn't he?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. When Sherwood Grover left us we had to have

R. Grabhorn: a pressman and he was at the Auerhahn Press. And someone suggested he might welcome a job part time in addition to working at Auerhahn. We tried him and he helped us out.

Teiser: He is a pressman and a typographer too?

R. Grabhorn: He's a very good typographer and a very good pressman. I like to work with him because we really work together very nicely. If I don't like something he does, I say it; if I do something he doesn't like [he says so] and then sometimes we're both stubborn. But it's never offensively so. No one getting mad. And it's very difficult to work with someone in a matter of design, I think. That's why we let a thing grow, rather than design it.

Teiser: Did he work at the Grabhorn Press for a long time?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I would say a year, maybe a year and a half. Then he bought out his partner, Dave Haselwood, at the Auerhahn Press, and he was by himself. Then he moved down here.* And he was here about a year when I joined him. I took some of the equipment from the Grabhorn Press.

Teiser: What have you brought here?

Grabhorn: Oh, some of the type and one press. And some other equipment, like a stone and things like that. My

*566 Commercial Street, San Francisco.

R. Grabhorn: brother doesn't need it. He's only printing his own catalogue of Japanese prints now. If I need a type every now and then, I go down and get some that he's got.

Teiser: Are there any other young men coming up?

R. Grabhorn: Well, no. I like the work of the--of course it's more commercial, more like the Grabhorn Press--the Plantain Press of Los Angeles. If you want my opinion, I think Ritchie used to be a very good printer, but he's a big business man now. It's like a factory, and it's a factory product. But they're not young.

Teiser: No, they're not. And even Adrian Wilson is not a boy.

R. Grabhorn: Not any more. No. Adrian is a designer principally now. He's probably very good as those things go, because he has usually, I think, a lot more personal contact than most designers have with the [publishers]. For that matter, people level their criticism at Bruce Rogers, and he was never a printer. But that's sort of ridiculous because he knew types and could print. He can letter a line of type accurately, making a layout. You see, a printer ought to know more than just type. He ought to know paper, the ideal paper for a book. That's very important.

- Teiser: And he's got to know what a Linotype machine can do, even if he doesn't operate one?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes, yes. Well, he very seldom went to Linotype. He might've when he did some work for Harvard University Press.
- Teiser: But, for instance, you have to know what Monotype could do, even if you never operated a Monotype machine?
- R. Grabhorn: Yes. Sometimes you have to know--a trick we learned from Rogers--how you could work with a Monotype and change the face, for instance. Like Rogers created something called Riverside Caslon. What he did was take the body type of a Caslon and, for capitals, use another size of the same type, you see. We've experimented even more than that. In one of the Shakespeares we printed we used what's called Goudy 30, but we used capitals from two other Goudy types.
- Teiser: Oh, I'd forgotten the Shakespeares. We haven't discussed those.
- R. Grabhorn: Those were principally issued, I don't know--it's a combination of using my niece's drawings and [being] sort of bored with Californiana.
- Teiser: Have they too been successful in that their value has increased?

R. Grabhorn: I don't think so, no. There again, the private press concentrated on an idealistic approach to the ideal type, the ideal paper, and so forth. That's sort of past. The last great exploiter of that was--his books do command probably a higher price than any of the presses, including the Kelmscott--the Ashendene. A few of his books were completely successful. I like them all because they're in the old hand tradition. But usually his illustrations did not come up to the quality of the Kelmscott illustrations. I'm thinking now principally of Burne-Jones and the Chaucer.

Teiser: Back to Adrian Wilson. I would say he had been influenced by the Grabhorn Press, wouldn't you?

R. Grabhorn: Possibly, but not noticeably so.

Teiser: You don't see it?

R. Grabhorn: I don't see it.

Teiser: A number of the young men who worked with the Grabhorn Press have gone on to become well known in their own right, haven't they?

R. Grabhorn: Bill Roth, who was an apprentice at the Grabhorn Press. He hasn't gone on [in printing] but he was influenced enough to go into partnership with Jane. Jane wanted to be a printer and he wanted to be a

R. Grabhorn: publisher.* But he was one of our less serious apprentices. He used to practice on the flute on the noon hour. [laughter]

But they [the young men who worked for the Grabhorn Press] were interested in books rather than printing. They wanted to be associated with someone--that goes for my brother-in-law [William Bissell]. That's how I met my wife. He was an apprentice. He only worked about a year, and he didn't do much except wash presses, run errands.

Teiser: Well, you got some work out of him.

R. Grabhorn: I got a wife out of it. Well, the printers, let's see; I'm trying to remember. Of course, Gregg Anderson was closely associated with Ward Ritchie. He was an apprentice, or worked for us. He was a little more than an apprentice.

Teiser: He wrote of that, didn't he?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. It was published in Connecticut, where he was working at the Meriden Gravure Company. They had a club. They put out a little book called *Reminiscences of the Grabhorn Press*. And he also wrote an article for one of the printing magazines. Then there was Helen Gentry.

* See Grabhorn, Jane, *The Colt Press*, a 1965 interview in this series.

Teiser: Did she just come to work as an apprentice?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. She had had some experience. She was a friend of Porter Garnett's and had done some printing. Very little. She was an apprentice. And later she was a printer here in town for Goldberg Bowen, who had a printing press. That was very funny, in fact. Then she went in business for herself, right here on Commercial Street. Then she went to New York. There she's principally--I don't know what she's doing now. She was a partner--I don't know whether it still exists--in the Holiday House, which concentrated on children's books. I can't even remember all of the apprentices. Lots of them didn't last very long. Lots of them, they just had summer vacation jobs.*

Teiser: Did Wilder Bentley ever work with you?

R. Grabhorn: No. We were close friends. Wilder is a peculiar chap. He gave up printing suddenly. I don't know why.

Teiser: Apparently he was an accomplished printer?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I would say so. I don't think he was terrifically so, but he knew his subject. He was more of a poet than a printer, a writer. He was very much disgusted--he did very good work and none of his books

* See also chapter, "Some Grabhorn Press Employees"

- R. Grabhorn: were ever included in the Fifty Books Show. I think that disappointed him. I don't know whether it did, but I always had a hunch it did. That's the terrific thing about those shows. They discourage people as much as they encourage them when they're not included.
- Teiser: That's a nasty one, too, isn't it, because of the capital it takes to enter your book?
- R. Grabhorn: Oh, that's getting terrific. We thought we might send this book. . . .
- Teiser: The Letter Sheets?*
- R. Grabhorn: Letter Sheets. Well if the book is accepted, they want six copies, you see. Now it doesn't mean anything for an ordinary five dollar trade book. But you get a book that costs \$60 a copy. . . of course, it wouldn't cost us \$60 a copy, but nevertheless, I don't think the show is that important anymore.
- Teiser: Valenti Angelo was only an illustrator with you? Or did he do some printing?
- R. Grabhorn: He never did any actual printing. I think our business with Angelo was: he got a salary of \$25 a week, and he was to do anything we had to do, and

* Baird, Joseph Armstrong, Jr., *California Pictorial Letter Sheets, 1849-1869*. San Francisco: David Magee, 1967.

R. Grabhorn: he was to do as a free lance artist anything he could get, you see. And Valenti was not lazy. He was tremendously industrious and he didn't mind redoing things. That was a lovely thing about him. We'd stand over him and make him redo them. Of course, he was facile. A tremendous worker. When you think of the labor of putting in all those initials in the Mandeville by hand, that was tremendous. But he would fold and do other tasks about the shop. I don't think he ever learned how to set type. But he does now. He has a little press at home in New York.

Teiser: Did he leave the Grabhorn Press after a row or something?

R. Grabhorn: Not a row with us. I think he was a little put out at the direction the Grabhorn Press was taking when Douglas Watson was around. There might have been differences between him and Douglas. I can't say for certain. But I think he wanted to get away, go to new fields. Of course, I think Valenti needed us to stand over him; I really do. He needed a firm hand. But, as I say, he was willing. He would try, and he would arrive at something finally.

Teiser: Mallette Dean, I suppose, is one of your prize past associates, is he not?

R. Grabhorn: Mallette Dean did some wonderful work for us, but typographically he isn't in the league with Allen and Brother Antoninus. There, again, he must earn a living. He does a lot of things for the wineries. A prize apprentice? No, I don't think so. Because he's primarily an artist. He learned to set type. I don't mean he doesn't do good work, by any means.

Teiser: It is a practical combination for him, isn't it, being an artist and a printer?

R. Grabhorn: Yes it is. He's developed some things. He can make his wine labels and print them. It would be a good idea for lots of printers to be artists or artists to be printers, perhaps.

Teiser: Did he come to you first as quite a young man?

R. Grabhorn: Not quite young. Around in the late Depression era. I think he did a lot of work for the Federal Art Project. I think the first book he illustrated [for the Grabhorn Press] was one of the Americana Series called *Wah-To-Yah*. It's a very famous book. I think it was originally published about 1837, about this man's experience in the Indian country.

Teiser: Was Arlen Philpott working with you?

R. Grabhorn: Arlen was what you might truly call an apprentice. He was about 18 years old when he came to work with us.

Teiser: Did he work with you long?

R. Grabhorn: Let's see. He must have worked two or three years. That's quite a while. Then he went into the Coast Guard, traveled around, and . . . I always think of Arlen as 18 years old. [laughter] Now he has a lot of children.

Teiser: Is he not doing some Book Club work now?

R. Grabhorn: Yes, he does the Book Club *Quarterly* [*News Letter*]. He hasn't done a book. I'm amazed that Arlen has never done a book.

Teiser: Who has among the younger men?

R. Grabhorn: Printing's a hobby with most of them. You ask about young men. I don't know any. I really don't. Andy's the youngest, and Andy's thirty-one.

Teiser: To go back to other people--did Jo Sinel work with you?

R. Grabhorn: Well, he spent an awful lot of time at our shop. He was not on salary. He offered to be at one time, but we decided he would cost us too much because he was so meticulous. I remember we printed some trifle where he was mixing the ink. There were some colors on it. My God! There were more pieces of cardboard around the shop! Trials of ink mixing. I think no matter how cheap he would work, he would cost a lot of money. But he was amusing. I had a lot of fun with him. He did things. . .he made

R. Grabhorn: a font of initials for us that we use to this day. You see, at that day he was an artist at the advertising agency that's now McCann-Erickson. It was H. K. McCann. But he was not very happy there. He had all sorts of theories. Then he became interested in industrial design. He was one of the first in the field. He went to New York, and he had quite a success. But he's an eccentric. Well, a lot of those artists used to come and play around our shop. The commercial artists, like Don Schmidt and Maynard Dixon, even. We printed some books of Maynard Dixon's. He belonged to this group of artists called Advertising Illustrators. I don't think Maynard ever did much advertising work. We printed a book of Maynard's poems once with some of his drawings in it. Those were characters.

Teiser: There was an artist named McKay?

R. Grabhorn: Donald McKay was another of the same group.

Teiser: Did he work with you?

R. Grabhorn: Well, he did some initials, a couple of decorations, not a lot.

Teiser: Was that in the same period that Saroyan was around?

R. Grabhorn: No. Saroyan was much later. These were in the 'twenties. All these men were around in the 'twenties, when we were on Kearny Street. Before 1926.

Grabhorn Press Locations

- Teiser: I'd like to go back to your early days in San Francisco. What was your first impression of San Francisco, when you first arrived here?
- R. Grabhorn: I don't know. I can't remember. The only man we knew was Haywood Hunt. Ed knew him in Seattle. He found us an apartment at some foul place where he lived, right near the tunnel on Stockton Street [laughter]. My brother took a job at a commercial printing office. This is an anecdote. We had rented a couple of rooms in a little building on Kearny Street. There was a candy store on the bottom floor, a tall, thin building. There's a barroom on the bottom now and nothing above. I wonder why. I'd like to have that. And I set up the shop while Ed was working. You see, he used to come around noon, and we'd work nights. He had sent samples to a trade magazine, a local trade magazine called *Pacific Printer*, and they had been reproduced and written up in this magazine. So Ed went to work one day after this article on his work had appeared and his fellow workmen said, "I see we have an artist working for us." And he just left at noon that day and never went back. [laughter]
- Teiser: What was the shop where he was working?

R. Grabhorn: It'll come back to me. I can't remember it.

Chris Beran, later associated with John Johnck, was one of the partners of this place.

Teiser: So you went first into the Kearny Street location?

R. Grabhorn: Kearny Street. That was 1920. While I was in Europe in 1923 to '24, Ed moved to Powell Street. A new building, sort of an arty building. There was an architect there. 526 Powell. It's right up the side of the hill. I remember while we were there they were tearing down the old temple before they put up--what is it?--450 Sutter. And the noise was tremendous. We were only there about two or three years. Then we moved from there to Pine Street.

Teiser: Did you have more space than you did on Powell?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. We had a whole floor there. I don't know whether that's the reason we moved or not. That was about 1926, I think. 510 Pine, that's where Peter Fahey is now. We had one floor in that building, the same place she's got.

Teiser: The rent had gone up on Powell?

R. Grabhorn: I think so. Or something like that. That's where we printed *Leaves of Grass* [510 Pine].

Then, I think, my brother had some money, or his father-in-law financed it. At any rate we decided we might buy a building. And we bought this place

R. Grabhorn: on Commercial Street, where we were until the war, 1942. You see, we bought this building from A. Lietz (this amused me) who made the navigation instruments. And they had built this building we were in for their war contracts in World War I. In 1942 they had another war contract, so they wanted that building back!

Teiser: So you sold it back to them?

R. Grabhorn: We said, "You find us another building, or we'll find a building." In other words, they paid for the other building. That's the one out on Sutter Street. Now there is some insurance company, all prettied up, you know, in the place we had on Commercial, in the next block up on Commercial [from 566 Commercial]. We had two tremendous floors and a tremendous basement. And the top was very efficient. It was also uncomfortable in hot weather because it was almost all skylight.

Teiser: And every time you moved did everybody go through terrible agonies?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes, yes. Well, the last move was sort of costly: we lost the matrices for our private type.

Teiser: You did? Franciscan!

R. Grabhorn: Yes.

Teiser: How'd it happen?

R. Grabhorn: The moving men were a bunch of winos, I think, and they got everything mixed up.

Teiser: And they really lost them?

R. Grabhorn: Really lost them, yes. They were packed away in a garbage can with lots of things, and then they never got out.

Teiser: Did you have insurance?

R. Grabhorn: No.

Grabhorn Press Bibliographies

Teiser: I wanted to ask a little about the details of the publication of the two bibliographies.*

R. Grabhorn: David Magee had sold lots of our books to a collector, Mrs. Heller. And he and she compiled this bibliography. She financed the printing of it. David handled the sale. And then when we printed the second one, it was David's own project. Mrs. Heller had nothing to do with it.

Teiser: He financed it?

R. Grabhorn: He financed it.

Teiser: Well, they were both done with considerable cooperation from you, were they not? You and your brother?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes.

* see also pages 21 and 22.

Teiser: This amounted to a considerable investment of time and effort?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. Both--on all of our parts.

Teiser: Did you feel they came out as they should have?

R. Grabhorn: Yes. I like them. I like them.

Teiser: Did you have control over the printing of them?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, yes. Yes. We were left strictly alone.

Teiser: I suppose there haven't been so many occasions on which you've been able to exert so much control over anything that you printed?

R. Grabhorn: Oh, I don't know. I think we really usually had full control, except, well, work for advertising agencies and things like that.

Teiser: But in the bibliographies you could change the text if you wanted, couldn't you? [laughter]

R. Grabhorn: Yes! Yes, we certainly could. And did. [laughter]

Jane (Mrs. Robert) Grabhorn was asked to comment upon the relationship between Edwin and Robert Grabhorn as a factor in the character of the Grabhorn Press.

Jane Grabhorn

March 3, 1967

Comments by Jane Grabhorn on the Grabhorn Brothers

J. Grabhorn: Ed would remember perhaps the look of a page that he'd seen, in the early years, when Bruce Rogers was starting out, and so forth. Bob is a little slower study and is more the studious type, I think, and a lot more interested in the intellectual aspect. You have somebody else's judgment or opinion, and you're circumscribed by the quality of your own intelligence, your own knowledge. I think that if I had to--oh, one of those Henry Luce words, what is it?--encapsulate or encapsulize it, [I'd say that] I've always felt that Ed was a good deal more aggressive, a good deal more experimental, a good deal more. . .whatever inspirational means. Whereas Bob has, I would say, definitely contributed to the Grabhorn books, from all points of view, the things that I think Ed lacks--and I could be wrong--taste and restraint, and intelligence, which Ed

J. Grabhorn: has never felt were important especially. Ed would be more likely to take a chance on something or to take the plunge. More the female type--the seeming quick, spontaneous. I know a lot of people think, probably Ed himself, that Bob for many years, although he was the younger, acted as more of a restraint than anything else. But then of course as you get older, that age gap gets lesser and lesser. Whereas when somebody's ten and somebody else is twenty-two there's a big difference; when you get up in the thirties, forties and fifties, then it becomes less and less of a difference. But I think Bob has always felt himself more or less an arbiter, a restraining influence, an organizer, the intellectual member of the team. As far as I can see, that's the way his mind works and that's the kind of character he has.

Teiser: Their relationship was, of course, to some extent inherited.

J. Grabhorn: Ed was twelve years old when Bob was born. He remembers wheeling Bob around in a baby carriage. He had charge of him. Their mother was too busy. And so that relationship persisted along. They were apart for many years on and off. Bob spoke to me about that the other day. He didn't know Ed at all, as an adult. And, as I say, the person who

J. Grabhorn: is the more aggressive tends, whether rightly or wrongly, to take the authority. Like the parent, he has the authority. But I think that Bob feels that Ed was genuinely interested in printing, both as a craft and as a trade. He always had the greatest respect and regard for him professionally. Bob Grabhorn is one of those rare people. . . he is no different with me at home alone than if you were there or anyone else--he is polite if he feels like it; if he doesn't, he isn't. There is absolutely none of the four-flusher about him, no pretenses whatever.

Whether or not there are any resentments I don't know. It seems to me he's one of those rare people that is an adult; he is mature. I don't mean by that the weak word "tolerant," or anything like that. But he's understanding, and he is interested. But always in a detached sort of way. And Ed has some of that. That seems to run through that whole family. At least in the ones I've met--they have that trait. Very rare. In my family, for instance, we're all so close, so emotionally involved. Building up that business--I think it's something that grew. I don't think either one was more dedicated than the other. It was just that each one had his own department. But I think in the

J. Grabhorn: beginning probably they worked together a good deal more closely because they had to. There were only the two of them. They were poor, they were unknown. But Ed would be the one always to get the ideas. Not always, but by and large. Always the one to go out and get the business.

Teiser: I was surprised to hear Bob say he regretted not operating a press. I always thought it was the more mechanical aspect of printing. . . .

J. Grabhorn: Of course it is more mechanical. Well, let's put it this way: unless you're printing on the hand press--if you're printing with a machine then you've got to be able to fix that machine if something goes wrong. You have to have a feeling for machinery. Whereas a compositor, who is technically known as a printer, can rectify his mistakes. He can make changes. He has time, but if you've got a machine going. . . .
Designing, well. . . .I think there again they always worked closely. I can't imagine either one of them doing anything, like putting out a book, that met with the specific and outspoken disapproval of the other one. This would be impossible you see. But in their work they're quite different people than they are otherwise. They're infinitely, I would say, painstaking and patient. I have seen them

J. Grabhorn: discuss something without raising their voices, without ever quarreling, without ever getting angry or emotionally involved. "Well, let's try this," or "Let's try that." And then of course there was that endless--which is so important--that endless trial and error and the patience, and above all a certain mutual respect. Sometimes I think that's good, and sometimes it isn't.

I think in their case, their books improved as they got older, which might not have been the case with that kind of a relationship. But it seemed to me that each one grew along with the other one. As I say, they became closer and closer as far as their ages went. I can't remember ever having heard a harsh word or any really serious disagreement. Because if there were, each one would begin to reassess, revalue his own judgment. Bob is no hero worshipper, none of that at all. But he might say, "Well, I think that cap's a little big, there," or "Let's try this." "Let's try that." Or Bob would set a page, and Ed would look at it, seriously, and he would say, "Well, I'll tell you what I don't like, Bob, I don't like the such-and-such position of the cut. Why don't you switch it around a bit. Why don't we try that as a chapter beginning?" And that's the way it always was. So then Bob goes

J. Grabhorn: back to work and says, "What do you think of this?" [Ed says,] "Well, yes, I think that's it; I think that's it." Or, "I don't know. Maybe I was wrong. Let's see the first one again."

Teiser: This is why, I presume, Bob and others object to using the word "design," which sounds as if you conceive of the whole thing full-blown.

J. Grabhorn: I think that's very pretentious, yes. They don't like it. It's essentially still in the mind and heart of a true printer, especially one with a little background, forty or fifty years. In Ed's case and Bob's case their uncle was a printer. A job printer. He was a tradesman. He might as well have been a plumber or a plasterer. All that business about "design." I can't ever remember Ed using that word.

You've got a challenge. You have a sheet of paper with something written on it. You've got to translate that into type. Because type in itself, you know, is a very rigid form. That's, I think, one of the reasons a lot of printers don't like the word "design." Because there is a limit to what you can do with these hard little pieces of metal. You can't end up drawing something. I think Bob's contributed far more, however, in the artistic line to the Grabhorn Press than he realizes. But this

J. Grabhorn: is true sometimes of just the fact of being a restraining influence. It may be a negative thing, which may lead him to believe that he wasn't actually creating something. But after all, somebody has to make the first move. And you're still part of that if you say--I've heard him say to Ed many times--"Oh, no, don't do that." I think Ed would have been capable of a great many vulgarities and a great many errors on the side of sensationalism if it had not been for Bob. All I do is observe. Of course I actually stayed out of it, you know. I was always appalled because right from the start--Ed is the sort of person that will ask anybody, "What do you think of this? What do you think of that?" And far from my respecting that, it irritated me. Bob does not give a damn what you think of it unless you're a professional and somebody he respects. Whether Ed really does or not, I don't know. But I think Ed does. I think what people think to Ed--it's true of a great many people of that sort--the reality is what people think you are: you are what people think you are. That page isn't good unless everybody thinks it is. That's a difference in temperament.

J. Grabhorn: One person, one man, seems so much more outgoing, so much the extrovert, so much the driver, the more dynamic, the more--well, the louder, noisier, more ambitious personality. But I suspect that Bob has been the stronger, the steadier influence in that relationship. But there again, you see, I'm biased. There is no limit to the strength of a limitlessly ambitious person. Bob is not. Bob will say, "So what?"

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Gesner: The Admiration of Mountains

Gesner: The Admiration of Mountains

God
referred
Cheucerdank
rom
alling to
is Scath





God
preserves
Cheucerdank
from
falling to
his Scath

far as the crest due to the doubling back of the rays upon themselves. But why do they not liquefy by reason of that inborn fire, which acts most mightily upon the summit? The force of the fire ends a little below the highest point (otherwise it would come forth as in the case of the mountains which blaze up), and it has earth and exceeding thick rocks as though for a cover for itself; a cover which the apex of the fire does not pierce, being now, as it were, at its extreme point too

thin and feeble, while the heavier and denser earth overpowers it. Thus it comes to an end before the summit is reached. The snows moreover are nourished, as it were, by the cold air and by the moist and icy vapors and they endure.

Whence comes it that mountainous regions are rich in forests? Because they have an abundance of nourishment, that is to say a bubbling source of waters, a copious supply of rain, and a great quantity of snow. The snow indeed is of great advantage, since in gradually dissolving it sinks into the soil and all the moisture is not lost by rushing down in one single flow. For thus also can the earth best be broken up, since the heat is hemmed in and enclosed on every side. In fact by the outside packing and by confinement of the cold the interior heat is increased (a fact which is evident in wells warmer during the winter); this heat drawn in by the roots is distributed throughout the entire shoot. Add to this that for the most part they are barren, or at least are not so luxuriant in fruit-bearing as the cultivated sort, a fact which contributes much to their shortness of life. Nor, on the evidence of Theophrastus, are they like the others attacked by disease. Whence do the mountains furnish so great a supply of water? The indwelling fire stirs up many vapors, conceived in the hollow caves; when these seek an outlet, they are seized upon by the cold and are condensed. This is a thing we experience also in our own bodies, which when heated by exercise give off vapor which presently by the comparatively cool air is changed into drops of sweat. Likewise it happens in the case of those alembics contrived by the chemists, in which through the action of fire, fluids are evaporated and drawn off. There are full many other things on account of which I am captivated beyond measure by scenes afforded by the mountains. And since in your home land they are most lofty, and above all, as I hear, most fruitful in plant life, the desire has come over me to go to visit them, whereto your friendship at the same time entices me. In order,

however, that I might not without some gift approach so dear a friend, it has been my wish to gather together in some sort for your pleasure whatever on the spur of the moment should present itself to me, handed down from the ancients, on the subject of milk and of the products thereof. For this theme seemed not unsuitable to your nation, a large part of whom are preparers of milk-food, adapting milk to various victuals. Of this number that well-known smooth cheese is deemed famous, which being seasoned with fragrant herbs wins great favor with all foreigners among whom it is wont to be brought. Moreover, you will pardon me if much has been brought together without regard to order, bearing in mind that such an assortment is commonly read without weariness.

Farewell.



At Zürich, the month of June, in the year of
the salvation of mankind 1541.

DESCRIPTION OF
THE RIVEN MOUNTAIN, OR MOUNT PILATUS
AS THEY COMMONLY CALL IT,
NEAR LUCERNE, IN SWITZERLAND,
BY CONRAD GESNER.

CONRAD GESNER,

PHYSICIAN, SENDS GREETINGS TO J. CHRYSOSTOME
HUBER, THE DISTINGUISHED
PHYSICIAN:



SINCE it is my habit, in accordance with an old custom of mine, both for mental recreation and for my health, to undertake a journey, preferably in the mountains, either annually or every other year, it was recently my desire, my dear Huber, to visit you at Lucerne, together with our friends, Peter Hafner, the stone engraver, Peter Boutinus of Avignon, the pharmacist, and John Thomas, the painter and a relative of mine by marriage, all young men skilled each in his own art. In that place you bestowed upon us all the kind offices of courtesy; and there also we were entertained right honorably, both privately by several citizens, and even publicly besides, wine being poured in abundance to do us honor. On the following day, having procured from the governor, the eminent Nicolas von Meggen, a most valorous knight, the privilege (as is customary) of ascending Mount Pilatus, we departed. Moreover whatever we noted upon that journey I have determined to describe in the following brief account and to dedicate to you; so that by that means I may both present to you an evidence, such as it is, of our gratitude, and at the same time request of you that whatever error or omission has been made by me in this description you will correct and supply. It may well be that you can do both, since in the very famous city of

Lucerne, close by the mountain which I am describing, you follow the calling of a physician, rejoice in the friendships of numerous powerful men of that place, excel in learning and judgment, and also have recently ascended the mountain yourself. But if not only concerning this mountain but others also, especially of our Switzerland (in which feature this country abounds beyond almost all regions), you either see personally anything noteworthy in certain instances or get it from men worthy of trust, you will at some time write me in full of it. I myself (if I live) will also add my own observations, so that an entire little book may be composed at last on mountains and their wonders. But for the present, though in former times I have traversed a great many and much higher mountains in various sections of Switzerland, it has seemed good on account of my fresh memory of it to write separately of yours only, which is called

The Broken Mountain.

Farewell.



Zurich, August the twenty-eighth,
in the year 1555.

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OF THEUERDANK & THE EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN

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The editions of *Theuerdank* are as follows: the first and second appeared in 1517 and 1519; the third in 1537, the letter-press being converted into modern type. In the fourth edition, 1553, with text alterations by Burchhardt Waldis, there are new engravings in imitation of the old. This was reprinted in 1563, 1569 and 1596, these editions containing minor variations. The eighth edition, by Schultes, was brought out in 1679 (the writer's copy of this edition once belonged to Longfellow), and the ninth edition, 1693, differs but little from it. There are about forty known copies of the first edition printed on vellum. The Alpine plates are by the following artists: Beck-15, 37, 53, 55, 59, 62, 66; Burgkmair-22, 66, 71; Schäußelin-69; Unknown (B)-20.

Owing to the death of Maximilian I in 1519, and other vicissitudes, the first printing of *Weiss Kunig* did not take place until 1775, the original engraved blocks still being preserved in the Vienna Hofbibliothek. Plate 71 of *Theuerdank* should be compared with plate 75 of *Weiss Kunig*.

The discussion of "Ancient Crampons" is from *American Alpine Journal*, ii, 266.

J. M. T.

C THE ILLUSTRATIONS

page 7

Theurdank's climbing-irons become wedged in the rocks, and he would have perished had not assistance arrived.

page 10

Theurdank, on the Martinswand, spears chamois before the assembled court.

page 13

Theurdank slips when snow clogs his climbing-irons, and would have fallen to his death had not God preserved him.

page 22

Three avalanches shoot down from the mountain, but Theurdank, hearing the roar, saves himself by reining in his horse.

page 25

Theurdank is endangered by a gale which lifts him into the air, but he is able to catch himself in the rocks.

page 27

Theurdank slips on a mossy slope, and his life is saved by a single prong of the climbing-irons which holds although much bent.

page 31

Theurdank, taken up a lofty mountain to cross a snow slope, sends over a huntsman, who falls, and Theurdank continues by another route.

page 34

How a chamois, after being shot, would have thrown Theurdank from a precipice had it not caught on a projecting rock.

These illustrations are from plates 15, 20, 22, 36, 56, 62, 66, and 71 in the early editions of *Theurdanckh*.

Ruth Teiser

Grew up in Portland, Oregon; came to the Bay Area in 1932 and has lived here ever since.

Stanford, B. A., M. A. in English, further graduate work in Western history.

Newspaper and magazine writer in San Francisco since 1943, writing on local history and economic and business life of the Bay Area.

Book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle since 1943.

As correspondent for national and western graphic arts magazines for more than a decade, came to know the printing community.

