
Interview with Amelia Hugill-Fontanel

David Walden



Amelia Hugill-Fontanel is the Associate Curator of the Cary Graphic Arts Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Many T_EX people first “met” her through her TUG 2020 conference video presentation on the evolution of type specimen books (youtu.be/7Cm2AcQiUuk).

The interview took place via Zoom between Walden in his home in East Sandwich, Massachusetts, and Hugill-Fontanel in her home in Victor, New York.

David Walden, interviewer: Please tell me about your youth.

Amelia Hugill-Fontanel, interviewee: I am from Trenton, New Jersey. I was born in 1975, and I grew up around Trenton. My parents divorced when I was quite young. So, I’m very close to my mom, who raised me and we lived in Trenton until about 1990. She got remarried and her husband was from the Rochester, New York, area. So we moved up to a suburb of Rochester. I always thought I would go back to the downstate area to be nearer to my mom’s side of the family, but I always found a wonderful place in Rochester, including in college. So I have now lived the bulk of my life in the Rochester area.

D: Was art always a part of your life as a child or did that come to you later, say in high school?

A: There are these great Dr. Seuss books. One was called *My Book About Me* and it was a book that you were actually encouraged to fill in. It asked you questions. It had pictures like “Tell us who are the people in your neighborhood?” and you’d go around and interview people and write their names in the blanks. There was one page that was “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, and then there were pictures of all these different professions like nurse and doctor and mailman and secretary, teacher, all

these things, and then there was a write-in and you were supposed to circle who you wanted to be and I wrote—I came across this book not too long ago—and I wrote in “artist”. So I was about eight years old.

I never realized that it went that deep, but I’ve always been drawing pictures ever since I was a kid, and my mom was very encouraging—she took me to a few extracurricular art classes. And then I think when I got to high school, I realized that even though I was academically strong in different fields, I always gravitated towards art—different kinds of clubs, like doing different kinds of set design for the theater. I wasn’t interested in being on stage. I wanted to draw the backdrops or design the T-shirt for the environmental club.

So, I guess I always gravitated towards art. I remember when I went to college—I went to SUNY New Paltz, which is a state university in New York—and the registration person asked me “What do you want to major in?”, and I had never thought of it before. Nowadays I think students are really keyed in to what they want to major, but I just said “Art”, and they put me down for studio art.

D: Did you have a good, or encouraging art teacher in high school?

A: Yes. I went to a suburban high school in Rochester, Fairport High School, and they had great art programs. One of my favorites was an artist-in-residence program. So, it wasn’t just the art teacher who was monitoring, but she brought in several working artists from the community who made their livings from doing different kinds of art. One was an airbrush artist. Another was a jeweler, another a cartoonist. And so, there were different blocks of classroom assignments where you would work with these artists to create work in different media that the high school teachers themselves didn’t have experience with. This was great exposure to seeing how people negotiated a career in different media. It was very good.

D: Did you have other high school activities, music, sports? You mentioned drama.

A: Well, like the kids in the back, like the stagehands and stuff like that. I did not enjoy dancing and singing. They were usually musicals.

The other big formative experience in high school was that I was good at the French language, and so I did an exchange program. We had an exchange student come and stay with us, my family. I was able to go to France in my junior year in high school. Ever since freshman year, I have always loved French, and I’m still fluent in French. I took it all through college and I’ve traveled there extensively.

D: Where did you go for your exchange program in France?

A: We went to Normandy. It was a small town on the seaboard near Caen, which is one of the cities that's up north in France. subsequently, I married a Frenchman.

D: Let's move on to your postsecondary education. You mentioned SUNY New Paltz. From looking at your CV you weren't there very long.

A: I went for a semester to SUNY New Paltz and discovered it wasn't quite for me at that time in my life. It was downstate. I should have—hindsight is 20/20—and I should have given it a better chance but my 18-year old self went back home after one semester and I went to a community college, Monroe Community College, in Rochester and I thought that was going to be just one semester until I figured things out. As it turned out, I stayed there and got my associate's degree. It was a really good place, an excellent community college. They had great studio art classes, good instructors. After that, I transferred into Nazareth College.

I work in academia now, where the places where you got your degrees or fellowships become important, but I can't say better things about my community college experience. If I hadn't gone there, I wouldn't have been exposed to a slice of our population in Rochester that I probably would have never experienced at Nazareth College, which is a small liberal arts college. I got to meet mothers who were trying to go part time and get their degree. I got to meet people who served in the military and were working at college as part of their GI Bill benefits, all different people, immigrants—there was a woman from China who had married an American man and she was trying to get better at English. It was a great experience for me.

D: I can empathize. I went to UC Berkeley for one term, tried to study architecture, discovered I wasn't going to be good at that. Like you, I went back home and went to junior college for another year and a half so that I could get qualified to go to the four-year college.

A: Perfect. You kind of grow up just a little bit in that spot.

D: Yes.

A: I worked hard. I worked a lot of different jobs. I had a job as a cashier at a hardware store. I worked in the bookstore. I worked in the counseling office at the community college. So, I did a lot of work—work in addition to trying to go to school.

D: Your CV says you got a BA from Nazareth College. While you were there, were you already interning at Eastman House?

A: Yes. I had originally gone into . . . I can't remember now what the degree was, the associate degree, but it was mostly studio art classes. But as part of that, we had an art history class at the community college and I fell in love with art history. For everybody else in the entire auditorium: the lights go off, the slide projector goes up, and everybody is sleeping. But I was rapt, learning about ancient Greece and different kinds of cathedrals. I was completely in love with art history and the professor was great too. So, even though I still did a few studio classes at Nazareth College, I focused more on art history.

I came out with an art history degree, with a minor in studio art, because art history was just transformative for me. It was a very small college and there were only a few professors who were teaching art history, but I took every single one of them because I liked it so much. I realized that I got more enjoyment from studying the history of art and the causes, like the cultural causes, and writing about art than I did from studio art. I couldn't see myself making a living from making things, making art; having to support myself on that would be stressful for me.

D: How did that lead to Eastman House?

A: One of the classes I took was something like contemporary art criticism, and the woman who was the professor—her name was Judy Natal—was a photographer. She was a really interesting photographer in her own personal practice, where she did photography and a special process called photogravure, which is a wonderful printing process. She would transfer photographs to marble and sculpture. She was a collected artist at Eastman Museum, and knew the curator there. She recommended me for an internship. I wound up staying there more than a semester and, wonderfully, got hired part-time right after my bachelor's degree to work on a cataloguing project in their photography collection.

I was still working other jobs at the same time as Eastman House because I couldn't support myself working only in the museum. I remember that at one of those part-time jobs somebody asked me if I wanted to go full-time; and I said “No, I need to stick with Eastman as long as I can and see what I can do to get in there.” Eventually, the curator of photography hired me as her full-time assistant curator.

D: Nice . . . some excellent training for the future.

A: Yes.

D: How did you end up going to RIT, and were you already doing printing and that sort of thing, or just art and cataloging?

A: Those transformative moments like the time at Monroe Community College when I took the art history class and knew I loved that . . . well, another one of those times was at Nazareth in my senior year. It was spring, and I was to be out of there in a couple months. I took a digital art class. This was in 1997. I think we were running a bunch of different software, Photoshop 1.0, QuarkXPress 2, vector-based Adobe Illustrator, and others. It was a class to learn those software elements and learn just a little bit about graphic design.

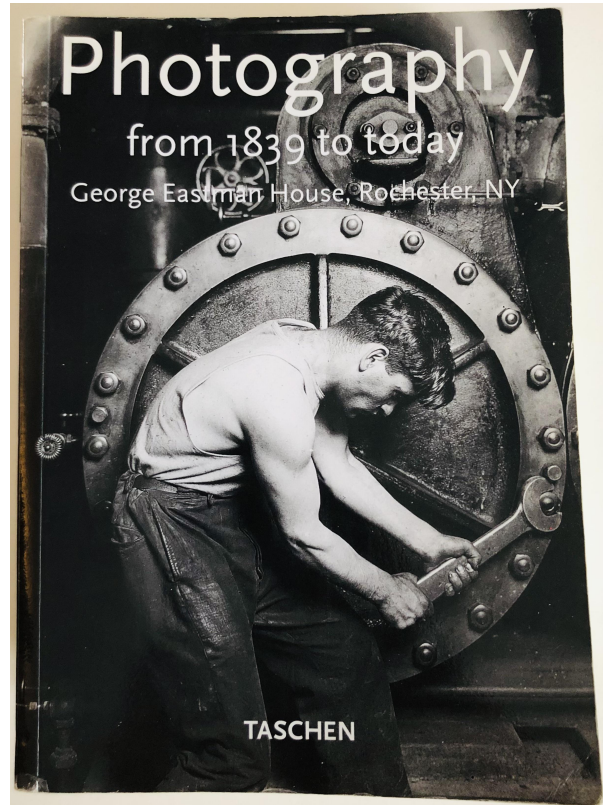
I used those skills at Eastman Museum to prepare exhibitions. Hardly anyone else, just a very few people, knew how to use QuarkXPress or knew how to use Photoshop; and one of those people was the graphic designer at the museum and the publication staff. Because I had those skills, I could be a sort of liaison between the graphic designers who were designing books and the curatorial staff who were doing the writing and actually selecting photos. I began to see that it was going to be a long time and a lot more education if I wanted to be a curator at a museum, and I didn't think that was for me at that time.

So, I kind of threw in my cards: "I'd like to do some graphic design or I'd like to study about art book publication," because at Eastman Museum, it seemed like most of our work was focused on "Let's get the photographs ready for the exhibition and write the labels and create the narrative of an exhibition." But along with that, you have to do all the marketing of it. You have to photograph those images and make sure they print correctly on the poster and the book and the invitation. It seemed like we were putting as much mental energy into the reproduction of these museum artifacts, and I thought that was really interesting.

Luckily RIT had a program called Graphic Arts Publishing. In it you would learn not only the different software page layout programs but also the reproduction processes and the typographic history about graphic design and layout, and it was perfect for me. So, that's how I got into that.

D: At Eastman, did you also do catalogues for the exhibits?

A: Yes, sometimes. I think the tipping point was when we worked with the art book publisher Taschen. It was the 50th anniversary of the museum. This is the book, and I was the lowest on the totem pole. Just about every single page has images upon images.



It was my job to get the physical photographs out of the archive and take them to the photographer to make four by five-inch transparencies, color transparencies, and then when we got the proofs back from the actual printer, we would compare the proofs with the transparencies. It was this amazing on-the-job learning. That whole process was formalized in my studies at RIT — that kind of art book reproduction. It wasn't just "Oh, we're just going to do this one-off." I wanted to be part of more productions like this.

D: Wonderful. You got an MS at Rochester. How did you go from being a student to an employee?

A: All these happy accidents, I think. Hold on. I'm just checking for my dog.

D: Are you, in fact, at RIT or are you at your house?

A: I'm at my house. We're working two days on campus, three days remote.

So, the question was, how did I stay at RIT? Well, great opportunities, being the right person at the right time, I guess. As a graduate student, I applied for a position as a graduate assistant at the Cary Collection because I had been there on a tour before I matriculated as a graduate student and I thought then, "I would love to work here," and I think I presented myself as someone who had



Henry Noel Humphreys, *The Origin and Progress of the Art of Writing . . .*, London: Day and Son, 1855. An example of a fragile 19th century papier-mâché binding from the Bernard Middleton Collection of books on the History and Practice of Bookbinding.

museum experience, which would be useful to the Cary Collection.

The curator then, David Pankow, hired me. I have been an employee of the Cary since 1999, when I finally matriculated as a grad student. David had planned two big conferences. I don't know why he planned two conferences in a single year, the year 2000. I was the graduate assistant, and worked hard on those conferences to help pull them off. One was called Bookbinding 2000, and it was to mark the acquisition of Bernard Middleton's book binding collection which we still have. It's a real jewel in the collection. A lot of people came from all over the world for that conference. The second was the American Printing History Association's conference called Printing on the Digital Brink. David saw how hard I worked, I think.

In the middle of this, David had always expressed that he had wanted to start a university press at RIT because, looking at the programs, there's a wonderful program in photography; there was a wonderful one in printing; there was another one in graphic design. There really shouldn't be any reason why with all these resources and talents that the university shouldn't have a publishing program, a

formal one. So, he was able to do a proof of concept. He was given permission by the Vice President of Finance for two years to publish a few books. I was hired as the production editor right out of grad school to be the person to put those books into production and to publish them. So, what is now called RIT Press has been around since 2001, when I was first hired. It was originally called RIT Cary Graphic Arts Press because we focused on graphic arts publications that directly related to the Cary Collection subject matter.

D: As the production editor, did you help with the direction of the press or was it more you were doing the mechanics and operations of the press?

A: It was such a small endeavor that it was a Jane-of-all-trades situation. It was David Pankow, who was the Director, who would choose most of the content, but in terms of liaising with the authors and the designers, getting print quotes and even shipping, that's what I did. Luckily, I had student assistants to help.

In those early days, up until about 2004, we only had one and a half full-time employees to run this endeavor, and my director was the half time because he was still running the Cary Collection too. I learned so much—about how to do everything related to the publication production, in terms of filing for ISBNs and cataloguing data, how to work with copy editors and authors and negotiate printing costs.

It was also an exciting time, because a lot of the new developments in digital printing of books were coming along in those early 2000s. We were able to do some innovative production that was on the edge of how print-on-demand took off—trying to push the envelope and see if we could get truly good quality in terms of color digital images, printing compared with traditional offset lithography.

D: Were you also helping with the marketing?

A: Yes. Sure. We would do like a prospectus sheet. We would do mailings. I think I wrote most of the original website.

D: Were you using some kind of website generation program or did you write HTML in a plain text editor?

A: Part of the allure of this university press is that some of the services could be provided by the library. So, we did have a web designer who was a library web designer, but then he taught me how to load new products on to the site and so, I was doing plain text editing of HTML to get those images and items up and uploading new PDFs every time the order

form changed. We didn't have any kind of online ordering at that time. You had to call and give me your credit card or send in a check by mail.

D: You were the production editor for how long?

A: Until 2008.

I had my first son in 2004 and I had my second son in 2008 and I realized that it was too much. It was too much to be a mom and to work full time. It's a credit to my former boss, David Pankow, that when I said "I can't continue on this way with this new baby on the way. I need to quit," and he said "Hold it. Hold it. Let's find another solution." He very kindly did a search for my replacement as production editor, which really needed to be a full-time position, and I became more of just a financial manager, business manager, which was a part-time position. So, while my second son was a baby, for about a year, I continued in that way, which was wonderful. It was great that he made that happen.

D: When your son got older, did you become even more part-time or less part-time?

A: More full-time. In 2009 the library gave David a new part-time assistant curator position; and he asked me to be in that position.

D: When did you start being on the adjunct faculty and teaching courses?

A: Let's see . . . I think that was about 2003.

D: While you were still with the press?

A: Yes. That was great—a way to apply what I had learned in terms of production and design and software. I was teaching photography students essentially how to learn these software tools and present their work. I remember a lot of arguments. They're photo students. They love Photoshop, and I'd say "Okay, I need your resume," and I'd show them how to use Adobe InDesign, and they'd argue with me: "Why use this? We know Photoshop. Photoshop can handle text. We're going to submit it in this," and I'd say "Okay, you do that."

D: That's not good. Photoshop doesn't handle text well.

A: Right.

I'd get them and I'd mark them up because of course, if you're a 19-year old student, there are probably going to be a couple edits that need to happen in your resume and they'd say "Now, I have to go back in Photoshop and change everything," and I'd say "Do it in InDesign," and they would. So, that kind of nice conversion, this convincing them it's okay to use the right tool for the project at hand. You

need to use vector-based software for some things and you need to use bitmap-based software for others.

D: You were an adjunct professor and then you had a curatorial position and that's basically what you're doing today.

A: Yes. Over the course of time, now it's associate curator. You know how these academic things work. But what's very nice is that I'm still a teaching adjunct, except for this year in the pandemic. Now I teach a letterpress printing class in the School of Art. It's just fantastic. I get not only art students—it's open enrollment with no prerequisites. I've had engineers and software programming students take my class.

D: Is your experience "drifting"—I don't mean that in a pejorative way—from starting college to incrementally building this career useful experience in guiding students in what they might do? Do they come to you for such guidance?

A: I do write a lot of recommendations for students. Usually they are students who are interested in museum-based jobs or librarian-based jobs, going for library school or library science positions.

I do think that the drift or the kind of haphazard—the not-straight line—path is a good model. There are very few people who can be absolutely assured that what they start on when they're eighteen years old is going to be where they're going to end up when they're forty-five. We have a lot of undergraduate students who finish and then are kind of in a quandary about what to do next, and I say, "You need to just work for a year before you go right into grad school." That's what I did. I worked for about two and a half years, and it gave me a really better viewpoint of what adult life is and where I want to put myself in that adult life. I think it's okay that I moved around.

D: My view is that it's never too late to figure out what you should be doing. New things will come up.

A: Yes. I love working on book production projects. I really like graphic design, and I like to write, and I like the process of putting a book together. And I still do it all the time in my job as a curator, even though I don't do it for the ultimate goal of selling a book. I prepare articles or I contribute to books. I even print things as part of our programming at RIT and the Cary Collection. So it never got away from me. But I think that intense view of printing something that is a thousand copies offset really helps to plan even a small job that's on a letterpress machine.

D: Do you teach offset or roto?

A: At the School of Printing Management and Sciences, where I got my master’s degree, they did teach that. However, that school has undergone a lot of change over the last twenty years. Part of it is that it’s hard to convince people to spend a lot of money on a private school education to become a printer. Printing kind of suffers from being perceived as a blue collar field. I don’t think it is. I think it’s fascinating to be a printer.

The School of Printing was very well-attended for many, many years, but when a lot of printing went offshore because it became too expensive to produce many books and various printed articles in America, the students went away. So the School of Printing has become a lot smaller at RIT, but it’s also transformed. They are now aligned with the Packaging Science Department, because we all know that packaging is the most ubiquitous printing. We see it all the time in the grocery store. And there are fewer students, but they all do well in the marketplace because they’re cross-trained in actual production and in programming in terms of web media and different kinds of graphic reproduction processes. So there’s a lot more concentration on digital scanning and analysis of digital imaging.

You asked me did they still teach offset and roto. They teach offset. We used to have a gravure press at RIT, but they don’t teach rotogravure anymore. We have a flexographic press. They teach offset lithography, screen printing, and a huge gamut of digital printing.

D: You mentioned food packaging. I want to digress a moment.

A: Sure.

D: I worked my way through college, four summers, in a big printing plant which had a seventy-six-inch (I think) Miehle four-color offset press. I was a helper. I re-piled paper to go into the feeder and re-piled printed sheets coming out and took them to a place in the warehouse for the ink to dry. Another summer I worked in the cutting shop next door where they stamped a big sheet into, for instance, eight different food-package boxes. I had a pneumatic chisel for peeling apart the individual six-pack-of-beer cartons which could then be glued next door in the gluing plant. It was very interesting.

A: Amazing. I love that.

D: I loved it, and I thought, “If this college stuff doesn’t work out, I’m going to spend my twenty years here and become the lead pressman. It’s a fascinating craft.”

A: That’s so interesting. In the past, the students at the RIT School of Printing got jobs as plant managers and scanning managers. RIT’s School of Printing is an interesting story. It’s been around for almost a hundred years, and it originally started as a trade school, so it wasn’t always a degree-granting program. Around the fifties and sixties, they started doing degrees. There was always work for those School of Printing grads, because part of the program was funded by the Gannett Corporation. Gannett’s headquarters are here in Rochester, so an RIT School of Printing grad was assured that they could get a job at any Gannett newspaper around the country.

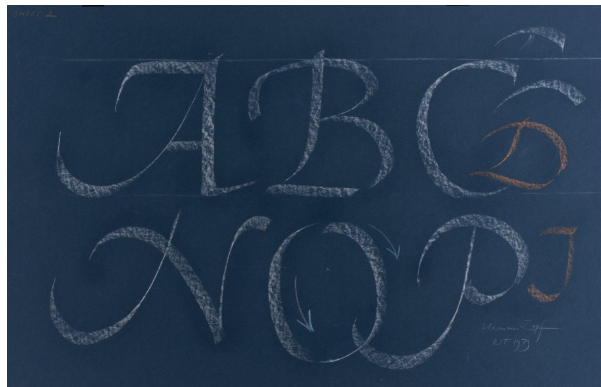
It’s very much changed now to be software-based, multimedia-based. And that’s okay. A lot of people have hard feelings about that, but I embrace that change because I think still they’re teaching some great things there, even if they no longer get to do all the physical printing. I got to, as a student, be on a web press and take the web press class where you’d watch the splice, and it was terrifying but exhilarating and fascinating. I love that.

D: Since this is an interview for the T_EX Users Group (tug.org), let me ask you a little bit about T_EX at this point. Did you know about T_EX and L^AT_EX before you participated in TUG 2020?

A: Not really. I had heard of it from our mutual friends, Chuck Bigelow and Kris Holmes of Lucida fame (lucidafonts.com). But when we were preparing for the TUG conference that didn’t happen in summer 2020 in Rochester, I had reached out to colleagues who were in the Program of Imaging Science and found out that they teach their students — there’s undergrad, grad, and doctoral students — everything is run in L^AT_EX. They focus on that. I think it’s a quiet thing that is not accentuated, but when you start probing deep into a program you find out, “Oh, it really is used widely,” especially in their program.

D: Kris and Chuck have been well-known in the T_EX world ever since they were out there helping Knuth start T_EX back in, I guess, the late seventies. What connection do you have with them at RIT?

A: I don’t remember what year it was. But Professor Bigelow, Chuck Bigelow, was hired as the Melbert B. Cary Professor at the School of Printing at RIT. He and Kris moved to the Rochester area, and that was our first introduction. That professorship has always worked very closely with the Cary Collection, the Cary professorship — we both get our endowments from the same estate of Melbert B. Cary, Jr., and his wife, Mary Flagler Cary. And we’re both dedicated to printing history and typography, etc.



Hermann Zapf, Calligraphic teaching sheet from his summer classes at RIT, 1979. Demonstration of stroke sequence, stress angles, and forms of calligraphic letters. Chalk on blue paper. One of many Zapf items in the Cary Collection.

So Professor Bigelow would bring his classes to Cary and be such a wonderful collaborative partner. Kris Holmes was also teaching calligraphy at RIT. We have an extensive calligraphy collection at the Cary, so she would bring her students for different kinds of guest visits so that they could see original calligraphy, especially from Hermann Zapf who, of course, was the instructor of both Chuck and Kris at RIT in the 1970s. They took Professor Zapf's class in calligraphy.

So that's how I got to know them and know them well. Then, in 2010, the Cary Collection, Professor Bigelow, and a couple other departments on campus put on The Future of Reading conference. Kris was a speaker and Chuck was part of the planning committee. Ever since then we've been such lovely colleagues and good friends.

D: Zapf, of course, was another person who helped Knuth create \TeX . He helped Knuth get his type designs right.

More generally, what do you see as the value to RIT or to Cary or yourself of having the sequence of Alexander Lawson, Zapf, Frank Romano, Bigelow and the other Cary Professors?

A: It's always been this opportunity for a renowned practitioner in publishing or typography or graphic arts to be a professor at RIT and influence the students.

The way we operate in terms of acquisitions and programming—in my position at the Cary Collection, if a book comes up for possible acquisition, the first question we ask is, “How are we going to teach with it? How are the students going to learn from it?” It's a very student-centered way of acquiring

materials for educational purposes. I think having the Cary Professor in that position at RIT is in the same spirit. How can students benefit from having such a prolific or successful practitioner be a leader and a model for them in their classes? That's how I would view the Cary Professorship.

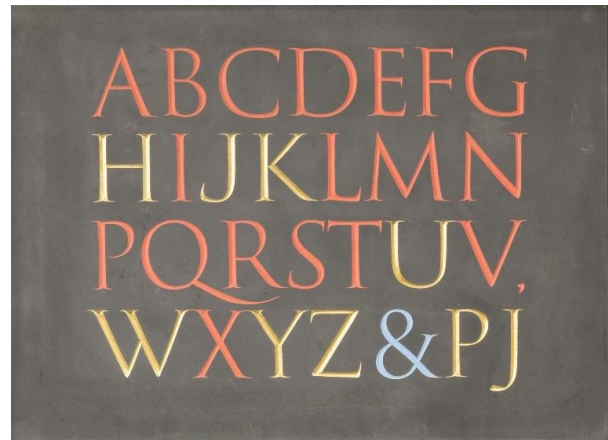
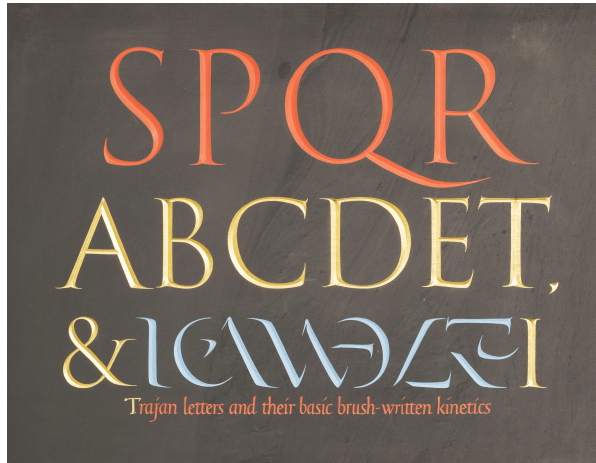
D: I want to cover a bit more about the Cary Collection (tug.org/TUGboat/tb39-3/tb123walden-cary.pdf) and this may be a good time. Might you recount the story of Lawson's involvement in the creation of the Cary?

A: Oh, sure. It's a great story.

The Cary Collection just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2019. So 1969 is when the collection was officially deposited at RIT. But the great story is that, a few years previous to that, the estate of Mary Flagler Cary was announced that there was going to be fifty million dollars available for New York State educational purposes. One of the RIT School of Printing alums, Herbert Johnson, who later became one of the Cary Professors—he was a book designer for Alfred Knopf—saw that announcement in the *New York Times*, that this Cary Estate was going to come up and interested parties should apply for grants from this foundation. Johnson sent that notice to Alexander Lawson, who was his former professor in typography at the RIT School of Printing.

Johnson wrote to Lawson because RIT, in the early sixties, had acquired a collection related to Frederic Goudy called the Coggeshall Memorial Workshop. Coggeshall was a friend of Frederic Goudy who had acquired a lot of his type and was planning to write a biography, which unfortunately never got done. So this Coggeshall/Goudy Collection was already at RIT, and using that collection, Professor Lawson taught many students, including Herbert Johnson. Goudy also had an association with Melbert Cary, who was the husband of Mary Flagler Cary. So, an RIT alum from the School of Printing gets notice of this foundation, sends it to his former professor, and then Lawson jumps on this. He talks to one of the development vice presidents at RIT and says, “Maybe we should make a proposal for some of this foundation's money, because we do have a Cary association in the School of Printing.”

I have talked to some of the former trustees of the Cary Foundation. One of them said that they did a site visit to RIT and they were very impressed with how the students who worked at the library were so courteous and kind to them and directed them appropriately. So that gives me pride, as a library employee, that the library was looked upon favorably for what would be a really substantial



Left: Trajan letters and their basic brush written kinetics. Right: Trajan alphabet. Both by Father Edward Catich.

gift from this foundation of funds to establish the Cary Graphic Arts Collection. The library acquired Melbert B. Cary’s book collection, which is about 2,500 books, but then also an endowment for the Cary Professorship, and then another small endowment for the Goudy Award, which is the annual award on typography (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic_W._Goudy_Award).

That’s the long meandering way the collection came to RIT. I like how it involves an alum, a current professor, and this association that Melbert Cary had with one of our substantial holdings, namely materials about Frederic W. Goudy, the type designer. One thing I always mention about this in tours with visitors is that I wish I could say that Melbert B. Cary had made his millions and millions of dollars from type founding; he was an importer of metal type from Europe to the United States. He died in 1941, and he did a lot to incorporate novel and interesting avant-garde typefaces in the American market from different foundries in Europe. But Cary didn’t make his money there; he was married to an heiress. Her last name was Flagler.

D: Flagler . . . like the places in Florida.

A: Yes, exactly. Her family was involved with oil, real estate, and railroads. If you go to St. Augustine, there’s a Flagler College. There’s a Flagler County in Florida. Mrs. Cary was a Flagler, and that’s where that foundation’s money came from. It was a very interesting foundation. It was interested in the Cary Collections which collected things about printing; that came to RIT. They also collected medieval playing cards that went to Yale University’s Beinecke Library. And they also collected musical scores by famous composers, like a score written by Mozart, and that went to the Morgan Library in New York

City. The Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust also gave a lot to music composition and philharmonia and nature conservancy. So a lot of the different wetlands preservations have some kind of Cary grants associated with them.

D: Another question about acquisitions of the Cary. You have a set of Father Edward Catich’s alphabet stones at the Cary. How did those come to be at the Cary and what is their significance to the Cary or the college?

A: Father Catich was a priest from Iowa. He taught calligraphy there and was a scholar of the Latin alphabet. In 1976 he was invited, as the Goudy Award winner, to come to RIT to give the Goudy award lecture, and also to do classes with students. Because of that association—I’d have to look up whether he donated or if RIT bought them—he provided several significant things, including three slate-carved alphabet stones. Two of them are based on the kinetics of the Trajan Column in Rome, which is the first century inscription.

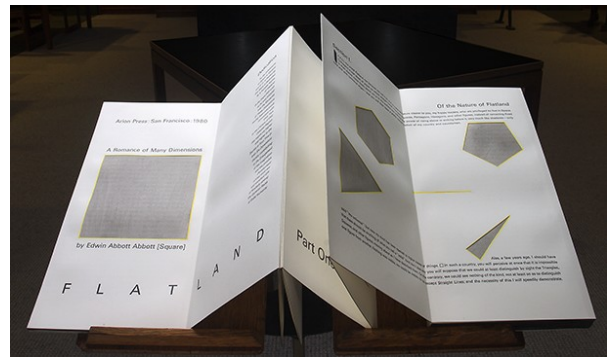
D: What do you mean by “kinetics” of the column?

A: Catich studied the ductus, or sequence, of the strokes made by hand, and then chisel, to carve the Trajan inscription. So the kinetics I believe refers to the human movements needed to make the letters.

The Trajan Column is considered to be one of the most beautiful inscriptional alphabets that was ever made, from the Roman Empire. Father Catich carved two stones that were based on the Trajan Column. There’s also a third stone, of his own alphabet, which he designed, called Petrarch, which is also a Roman inscriptional style alphabet (all can be viewed at digitalcollections.rit.edu/luna/servlet/s/b430q1).



Left: a book from the Vincent FitzGerald / Rumi exhibition.



Right: *Flatland* by Edwin Abbott, from the Landmarks of Printing History exhibition, in collaboration with the RIT photography department.

Another marvelous artifact that we acquired from Father Catich was an original rubbing of the Trajan Column. Father Catich, because he was a priest, was able to get permissions in Rome that other people wouldn't be able to leverage. He was able to make several rubbings of the Trajan Column, on scaffoldings up there, and they're in different collections around the country.

RIT has one of them, and I teach with it every month, it seems. In a typical year, we see all the sections of students who are studying typography, and it is an essential resource that I gesture to on the wall and ask students to deeply analyze the letter forms that are evident in that rubbing. It's so essential to us, how we teach. It's so much better than a slide of it.

D: You have a long list of exhibitions you have been involved with. *TUGboat* production editor Karl Berry especially noted your exhibition called "The Light of the Sublime: The Works of Rumi". Will you please speak a little about how that exhibit came about, perhaps, as an example of how exhibits come about more generally.

A: Sure. We like to frame our exhibitions in ways that would be educational for our students, and I think the idea of that one came about because we had been collecting at the Cary—David Pankow initiated it— all the works of a publisher in New York City called Vincent FitzGerald & Company. It was kind of a *livre d'artiste* publications production where you would invite an artist to respond to a classic text in some way, create artworks for a book, and then other artisans would work on the typography and the illustration and the design and the bookbinding. So every single book is very different in a limited edition. They're works of art, every single

one. Vincent FitzGerald was the orchestrator and publisher of this.

So we have all these wonderful books. When I started to think about this exhibition, I knew I wanted to highlight the Vincent FitzGerald books, because we had this great collection that we had already been showing students. But I wanted to respond to and physically focus on the works that he published that were translations, or sometimes bilingual publications, of the twelfth century mystic, Rumi, who was Persian. Vincent FitzGerald is dedicated to the works of Rumi, and he had a collaborator in an Iranian woman named Zahra Partovi, who was the translator of the Rumi works. So it was nice that when we started to think about this exhibition to not only show off the publisher and the visual works, but also focus in on an author that was a little bit more diverse than a typical European author—perhaps appealing in ways that the Cary Collection hadn't reached out before to the community, to offer something that wasn't so mainstream. That's how that exhibition came about.

I was proud of that exhibition because Vincent FitzGerald and Zahra Partovi are still practicing artists, and I got to visit them in New York City. They even debuted one of their final works at the Cary Collection during the exhibition opening (rit.edu/carycollection/light-sublime).

By the time I had started working with the material, they were more or less done with the book projects, and Zahra had turned now to music composition, so we were able to have a visual light installation and we also had a harpist who performed Zahra's original composition that was based on another quote by Rumi.

I found it exciting and a little bit terrifying, because for most of our previous exhibitions, the

makers and the authors were all passed away. To work with current artists is a whole other dimension of collaboration, trying to make sure that the exhibition was appropriate for what they would like.

D: If that exhibition is representative, it seems that creating an exhibition is a dynamic process and you go wherever the materials and situation take you.

What do you see as the benefit of exhibitions either to scholarship or the university or yourself? You certainly seem to be involved in a lot of them.

A: We're such a small staff in the Cary Collection, that even if I'm not the primary curator for an exhibition, I usually act as the preparator for my colleagues who do the intellectual work and the arrangement. I have the hand skills to do a lot of matting and framing. I learned a lot of that at Eastman Museum, in fact.

I always feel that exhibitions are a springboard for a whole bunch of different creative things that could happen. You create an exhibition and you give a tour to students about it and get them excited about the things that are in the collection. Or you create an exhibition and then you can invite a lecture series about the different themes. When we commit to an exhibition, it's not just putting the things on display for a short period of time. It brings into being a place where we could talk about these concepts and include in other programming. It could also be publications that result in exhibitions.

Right now, I just had an exhibition meeting with Steve Galbraith, who's my supervisor now. We were talking about how even in this time where there are not a lot of people in our library because of the pandemic restrictions of quarantine and social distancing, we're still moving forward with exhibitions. We're going to shift in the next year and have them be more online exhibitions. That's a blessing and a curse because I'd love to have people actually look at the objects. On the other hand, the online exhibitions are usually evergreen. So, I can turn to them again and again in the future; for instance, point a class to them, or build upon them in other ways. Say I curate an exhibition about Goudy and then in two years I do an interview with somebody about Goudy; I can add that interview to that exhibition. It could grow in a way that those ephemeral or timely exhibitions can't. So, I view them as part of our outreach and part of our educational program.

D: Online exhibits are terrific for those of us who can't visit the Cary.

A: Yes. I'm a bit sad because the next exhibition that I was supposed to work on heavily was one of our graphic design archive designers. His name was

George Giusti. He was a graphic artist who did a lot of editorial design, covers for magazines for example, but he also was a sculptor. We have about 50 of his sculptures, and I was envisioning this fantastic exhibit, where we're usually putting up pictures or books and prints and things, very flat things, this was going to be a sculptural exhibition. After talking with Steve just now, I think it's going to be online, at least for this next year and then hopefully in 2022 we can have a physical exhibition.

D: I hope in 2022 I can travel to the Cary again. I was looking forward to going to the Cary this past summer for the TUG conference.

A: Yes. I planned another conference in the interim here for the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum in Wisconsin, and it was a joint conference with the American Printing History Association, and we had it just this last weekend, November 5th through the 8th, and even though it was online, we had more participation than we ever could have in the physical space. So, there's a little bit of a silver lining and, again, everything was recorded.¹

D: I'll look forward to it. In a message you said you were embedded in the American Printing History Association and the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum. What do you mean by embedded?

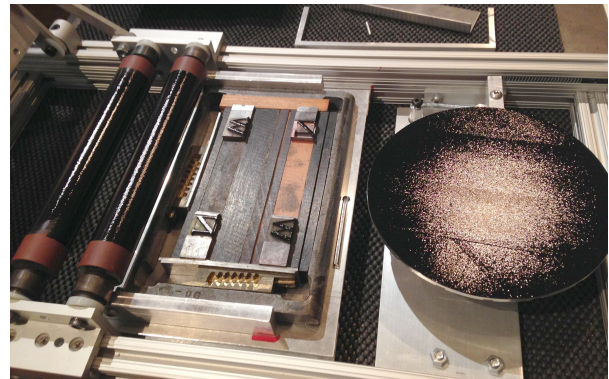
A: It seems like all my volunteering time goes there. And that's okay because I think both organizations serve the Cary Collection well too. We're all good collaborators, all interested in preserving, printing artifacts and graphic design.

D: What kind of volunteering do you do for them?

A: I'm the Vice President of Programs for the American Printing History Association (APHA); their web site is printinghistory.org. I organize the conferences and also a lecture series that we have every year called the Lieberman Lecture. I'm also on the board of the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum (woodtype.org).

As a board member, we have a chance to choose what best suits us in terms of our talents, how to serve on that board, serve the museum, and so. A year ago or a year and a half ago, I said, "I want to be completely selfish and put all the people that I really care about and I find interesting in printing history in the same room. So, we should have a joint conference." So, that's how that association between the two organizations got started and we had hoped that it would be in-person, but that didn't happen, but still, I think it was a strong alliance between the two places.

¹ Videos are online at woodtype.org/pages/wayzgoose.



Left: 18th century-style “common press”. Right: Inked type on the small aluminum press.
Both built by RIT students.

D: Earlier you also mentioned “Hands-on letterpress teaching and learning across curricula”. What do you mean by “learning across curricula”?

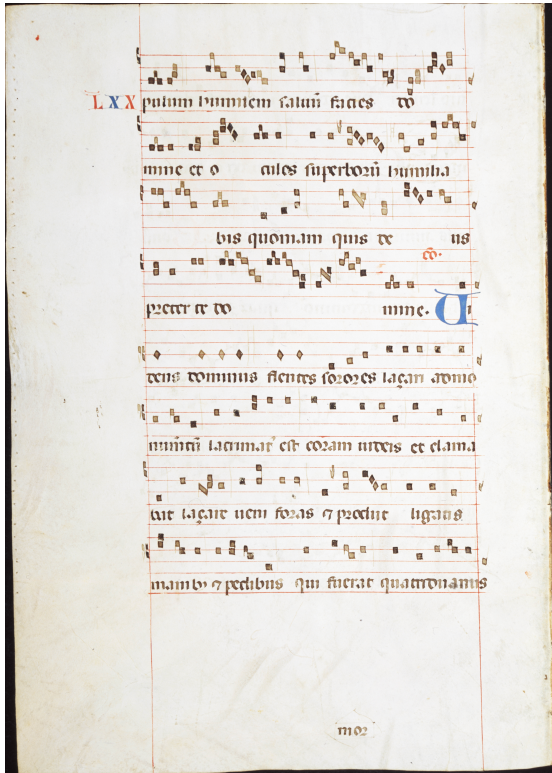
A: A good friend of mine, who was previously on the APHA board, said that book arts education is really like a foundation of liberal arts; there is something to be acquired in almost every field, from learning about how to make a book, how to write a book, how to edit a book, and by extrapolation I think you can move that on to the earliest productions of books and that’s the process of letterpress printing, the oldest commercial printing process in our culture. Today, a lot of contemporary letterpress work is very art-centered, but from Gutenberg’s time up through the 20th century, letterpress was used to print in every discipline. If you were looking at a math book, it was letterpress printed.

The impact that this printing process had had on every discipline of human intellectual thought is, I think, rather astounding; when I couch it that way, we see a lot of different classes in the Cary. It’s not just the graphic designers who are studying typography. We see mechanical engineers who want to know how the printing presses work. They’re completely invested in how the compound lever structures work in a hand press. Steve, my colleague, regularly sees the History of Math students in his teaching because we have such great books with mathematical tenets

in them from the Renaissance era. We see a lot of students from the History of Music class because we have musical scores and calligraphic things. In one of the videos that I recently produced to teach this on-line, I make a statement that printing history is our shared history. It can be integrated in all curricula in all disciplines (youtu.be/05RUA1ScXH0).

D: I first heard your name in 2018 when I visited the Cary, and Steve or Kris said, “Here’s our press that Amelia renovated, and out here in the hall is a wooden Gutenberg-like press that our students built, and here’s this little aluminum press that you can make for something like \$30.” How did you learn the mechanics of all of this, restoring presses, guiding students building new presses and so on?

A: The foundation was laid with my former boss David Pankow; he’s such a polymath. He’s a great librarian and curator and editor and teacher; but when he was hired to be the librarian for the Cary Collection in the 1970s, he applied himself immediately as an employee of RIT and took printing classes. He learned printing while on the job, and then as presses were donated or discarded by the School of Printing because they weren’t high-tech enough, David would often take those technology items into our collection — he began acquiring printing presses for the Cary Collection. So in the same way as our collection has grown since 1969 from 2,500 books



Antiphonarium fragment, ca. 1430.

to 45,000 in many different disciplines, the printing technology collection has also grown.

Learning how to take care of the press, the correct way to print with some of our irreplaceable type, that foundation was laid with David. I also learned so much from him about restoration. While I was an employee, he restored several presses, and then I learned from other people in our field, and the field has grown and especially through all the online forums we can gain access to people all over the place; that has really helped. If I have a question about the mechanics of something, I can cast wide to people who will have known or have experience with that kind of object.

D: In the *Fine Books* interview that you gave,² I read that you have a personal printmaking practice that uses vintage printing presses. Do you still have that, and what kind of presses do you have?

A: Yes, I do. I have enough presses for it to be annoying when we have to move them. It's like my vocation has become my avocation; even when we're on vacation, we seek out printing presses and things like that or printing places. At any rate, I personally have a Chandler & Price old style printing press,

² finebooksmagazine.com/blog/bright-young-librarians-amelia-hugill-fontanel

which is a foot treadle platen press from the late 1800s, and I also have a Vandercook 99, which is a little proof press. And then a stand of wood type and a stand of metal type—not too much. But my current partner, my life partner Richard Kegler, the head of P22 Type Foundry (p22.com), has a much more substantial letterpress studio. So, I'm able to go in his area and use his automatic presses and type too.

D: The interview reported this was a business. Is it art printing or commercial printing?

A: It's more artistic, and I don't sell things very often at all. If I do make something available, often I donate it because I have such a good livelihood at RIT. I'd rather donate time or energy to other associations. I have sold a couple. For one I did sell recently, I donated the proceeds to GirlTrek, a non-profit that cultivates healthy lifestyles for Black women (girltrek.org).

D: You mentioned that you had a couple of children. Are they old enough to help you in this printing business or do they have any interest in printing?

A: My older son just turned 17. They are old enough, and they'll do something if I cajole them enough. One son I have trained since he was about eight years old to do wood type restoration; he knows how to clean wood type and just this last year through the pandemic, we did some printing of it and he seemed to be semi-interested in it, but not with a full heart like me.

D: You mentioned that you look up printing presses while on vacation. What printing museums do you particularly recommend that someone should go to?

A: One big one is the Museum of Printing in Haverhill, Massachusetts, that's run by Frank Romano. It is an excellent place to go, especially if you want to learn about like that unsung period of phototypesetting that people forget about.

Oh, hi. Here's my dog.

D: What's the dog's name?

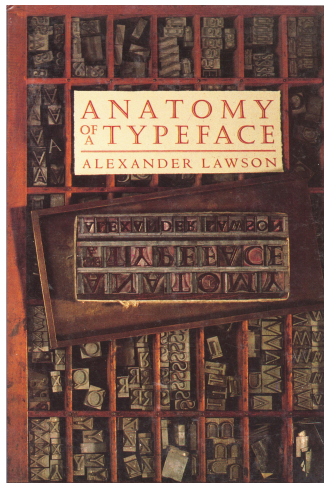
A: The dog's name is Phin, which is short for Phineas Gordon. George Phineas Gordon was the inventor of the platen press.

Another museum is in LA—the International Printing Museum—and that one is run by Mark Barbour, again, a huge, comprehensive, really amazing place. There's another in Toronto that is a sales floor and museum called the Howard Iron Works. And then, of course, the place that I really love is Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum, in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. If you're a Green Bay fan, it's about 45 minutes south of Green Bay. It has the largest collection of wood type in North America.

D: For a person who gets interested in typography or printing but wants to learn more about it, not become an expert like you are, just know a bit more, are there books or short courses or online courses or videos? How would you recommend somebody go about learning more about printing and printing history and typography?

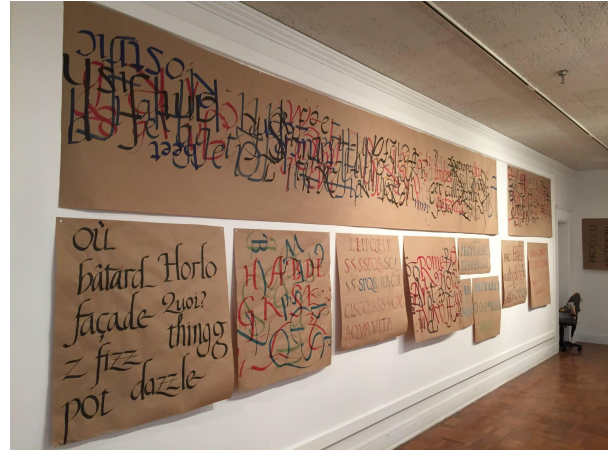
A: Perhaps the easiest and probably the most accessible way right now, if you don't want to purchase books, is to get on the mailing lists of a few places around the country that are doing some very nice online lectures that relate to graphic arts and typography. For instance, the Hoffmitz Milken Center, which is at Cal Arts in California. They have a center dedicated to typography and some of the lectures coming out of there are top notch. The Type-at-Cooper Program, which is at Cooper Union in New York City, has also been having some great lectures. And now that we've been through a suite of online conferences, I expect a lot of YouTube-like channels to open up with content from the conferences. There was recently the ATypI Conference that was online, so that probably will be coming up. That's one way to dip your toe without making a big commitment in terms of expanding your library.

Of course there are great books out there on those topics. One of the books that a new student of typography might read—it might feel a little outdated, but I still like it—is Alexander Lawson's *Anatomy of a Typeface*.



I like it because, of course, Professor Lawson did most of his research at RIT, and he was an important faculty member in our history. The book also contains nice concise chapters about the classic typefaces that we see revived on our computers. There's a chapter about Garamond and there's one about Bodoni. If you want just a little snippet about those, I think Lawson's book is a good place to start. There's

David Walden



Wells Book Arts Summer Institute, July 14, 2014, Kris Holmes' class "Calligraphy and Digital Type Design".

plenty more current scholarship on any one of those type designers, but I think that he definitely covers a lot of the bases in terms of classical typography through history.

D: Have you done type design yourself?

A: No. I was so happy in 2015 to be able to take a class with Kris Holmes at Wells College Book Arts Summer Institute. It was a great class because we learned calligraphy in the morning from Kris and then it was type design in the afternoon from her. I knew going into that class that I was there to soak it up because although I teach students of calligraphy, I had never done any calligraphy and similarly I teach students who are studying type design and typography, but hadn't done it myself. So, I needed to put my toe in that water in order to have a little bit more understanding about what I was teaching and it was fantastic. It was such a treat to absorb Kris' amazing knowledge and her skill in both fields. I'm sure if I practice the way she does, I would have a chance, but I'm not great.

D: The digital humanities you mentioned, what are those?

A: It's an evolving field. It has a deference to classic fields like history and sociology and English, I think, and different kinds of social sciences, but wants to enmesh the power of digital technologies so that they can do kinds of new visualizations or new kinds of publication that were not possible before without this kind of tech coming into it. That's not the official definition, just my perspective on it. We've been privileged to be able to think about it at RIT because a couple years ago, the university started a digital humanities program and we've had some great professors come in. I think the Cary is one of the

places that is fodder for digital humanities students to do their projects on. So, that's a really nice thing, to see our collections viewed in a different way.

D: The next time someone can visit the Cary, are there particular parts to the collection you think that they should seek out? Do you have favorite parts yourself?

A: Each time somebody walks in, we do a little reference interview, like “What do you like? What can I show you?” and it's different for every single person. But one place we lead people to because it has such great visual impact is our press room — it happens that I'm the manager of that collection — to talk about letterpress printing technologies because it's so impressive. These are big machines that are often also decorative. So, people get impressed by that.

At the same time, I can fall in love with a tiny little miniature book too. It just depends on what somebody wants to look at. Often we get a visit from a student who walks in, an undergraduate student, who doesn't necessarily know what they want to look at. They're just beginning their education. They're just beginning to formulate the questions for the things that they want to study. Often they say, “Oh, I just want to look around.” Well, they don't necessarily know what they're looking for, right? So, depending on what's on the table at any given moment, I'll try to engage them and say “Oh, my gosh. We just got this collection of posters from this collective that solicited posters from artists from all over the country. Would you like to look at that?” So, that's a nice, nonconfrontational way to get students engaged with our collections. On any given day, there might be something new on the table that somebody could look at.

D: What is the point of view of the Cary or RIT about digitizing things and then putting it online? You have a massive website. Some places historically don't want to put their stuff on the web. They want to somehow charge for access. What is the philosophy at your place?

A: Open access as much as we can. I'm so thankful to work with such a talented team in our library, library-wide. I'm part of this digital initiatives team, and over the last two years we've formulated a workflow to efficiently digitize stuff. This has served us so well in terms of education in the pandemic. If our students couldn't get in to see the original things, at least we could point them to a digital surrogate. So, that has worked well and it's a way that we can engage with people that can't come to the Cary Collection, even if we weren't in this limited patron model right now during quarantine. For instance, I

could send a link off to somebody who's in England and engage with them in a conversation about our items from afar.

D: Do you have plans for coming scholarly or graphical projects you want to tell us about in advance?

A: Just today my supervisor, Steve Galbraith, who is the head curator, and I, decided to start planning an online exhibition with a lot of digital humanities kind of integration about the Kelmscott-Goudy printing press. That's the printing press that was first owned by William Morris and printed “The Kelmscott Chaucer”. It was used for that book. Next year is the 125th anniversary of the book. As a result of this anniversary and some collaborative work with the American William Morris Society, we're hopefully going to have a very robust digital exhibition about the Kelmscott. Steve and I were saying today that the moss doesn't grow under our feet ever. Even with fewer students on campus, there's a lot going on.

I'm also going to contribute to a book. There was a conference called Post-Digital Letterpress Printing that was hosted in Portugal in January 2020 (pdlp.fba.up.pt), and I was able to participate in that conference³ and they're doing a proceedings. So, I'm excited to contribute to the proceedings for that conference. It was a nice small conference where you were able to talk to every single person there. Sometimes big conferences are overwhelming, but this was a good one. It was before we could not travel anymore; we just squeaked it in.

D: Maybe next year or the year after that, the T_EX Users Group Conference can plan again to come to RIT, and we can see each other in person.

A: That would be lovely. And in the meantime, please feel free to reach out if you have a question about anything in the Cary. We'd love to hear from *TUGboat* readers (rit.edu/carycollection/contact-and-visit).

D: For now let me say thank you so very, very much for taking the time to do this interview — for being willing to talk to the T_EX users' world.

◇ David Walden
tug.org/interviews

[Editor's note: Images in this interview are courtesy of the RIT Cary Graphics Arts Collection or Amelia Hugill-Fontanel. Some images have been cropped for presentation.]

³ Amelia's talk is online now at youtu.be/S11dj5LMv8Y.