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2002

Friends of the Connecticut College Library Summer Newsletter

VENTURE SMITH'S Story on the Web

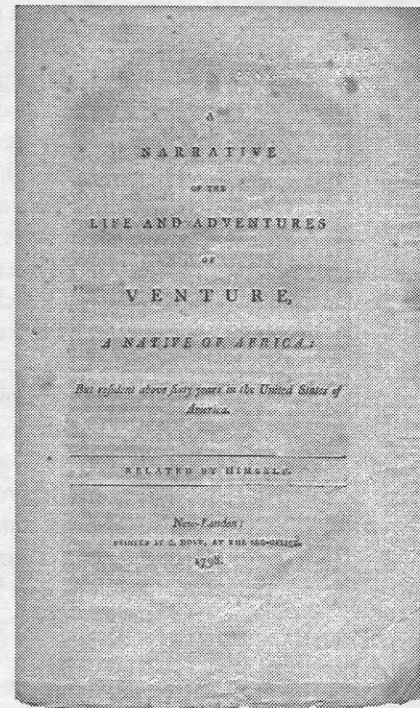
The story of Venture Smith is one of the most compelling of the many slave narratives that were published in the United States during the 18th and 19th centuries. Smith, then in his 69th year and living in Connecticut, told it to an anonymous narrator. This true story was then published in New London under the title *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa, But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America* in 1798 by Charles Holt.

Connecticut College owns a precious complete copy of the scarce first edition of Venture's narrative, a photocopy of which was given to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for the *North American Slave Narratives, Beginnings to 1920*, part of *Documenting the American South*, a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities that digitized and encoded 230 slave narratives and published them on the Internet for the educational use of students, teachers and the general public.

According to his account, Venture was born about 1739 at Dukandarra, in Guinea, and was captured and sold into slavery when he was 8 years old. The first chapter recounts his life in Africa and the circumstances of his capture by slavers. While still aboard a Rhode Island ship bound from Africa to Barbados, Venture was purchased by Robertson Mumford of Fisher's Island, the first of his three masters. The narrative is sprinkled with references to his subsequent life in New London, Stonington and Long Island. By dint of his extraordinary physical strength, hard work and self-denial, Venture was able to buy his own freedom when he was 36 years old and eventually the freedom of his children and his wife. By the time he died in 1805 at the age of 77, Venture Smith had acquired property and land in East Haddam where he is buried in the cemetery near the First Congregational Church and had become a respected member of the community. His story may have influenced the growing movement to abolish slavery in Connecticut.

In addition to its interest as an insight on slavery as it existed in southeastern Connecticut in the 18th century, Venture Smith's narrative is important in the context of the history of printing in the region. The late Hazel Johnson, College Librarian from 1943 until her retirement in 1968, published the definitive bibliography of printing in New London, *A Checklist of New London, Connecticut, Imprints, 1709-1800*, in 1978. Special Collections owns over 300 items printed in New London or Norwich during this period. The first printer in the colony of Connecticut was Thomas Short originally of Boston who printed the first documents in 1709. In 1712, Timothy Green, who was the first of many members of the Green family to operate a printing press in New London through the 19th century, succeeded him.

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*A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of
Venture (1798)*



ARTISTS' BOOKS at Connecticut College

THE SYMPOSIUM

On Friday afternoon, March 29, the Charles Chu Asian Art Reading Room provided the perfect setting for the Artists' Books Symposium. Chairs were set up lecture style and the shades were drawn to keep out the afternoon sun so that the audience of more than one hundred people, drawn from Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, could see the slides projected on the pull-down screen. On large tables elsewhere in the room, the book artists set up informal displays of their work that the members of the audience were allowed to examine before and after the symposium and during the break. The audience included many art students and faculty members from Connecticut College. The program concluded with a reception and light supper in the Haines Room for as many speakers and members of the audience as were able to stay.

Over the course of the afternoon there were seven presenters including several from Connecticut. After a brief welcome by Lee Hisle, Vice President for Information Services and Librarian of the College, and an introduction by Laurie Deredita, Special Collections Librarian, Jim Lee was the first speaker. Lee is a professor at the Hartford Art School of the University of Hartford who teaches printmaking, drawing and the book arts. Lee showed many slide examples of his prints and the books that he creates at the Blue Moon Press. He was followed by Maureen Cummins, an artist in Brooklyn, New York, who creates books with a strong feminist and political message. Esther K. Smith and Dikko Faust of Purgatory Pie Press in New York City gave an amusing joint presentation of their collaborative work.

After a short break the program continued with a lecture by Suzy Taraba, University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at Wesleyan University, about interesting ways that she has found to use artists' books in academic classes and examples of how college students have used the collection at Wesleyan. She was followed by Marlene MacCallum, a faculty member in the Division of Fine Arts of Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, who creates interior architectural spaces in her books. Robin Price, publisher and printer of Middletown, Connecticut, talked about her recent work in blind collaboration with other artists, with particular reference to her artist's book *Slurring at Bottom*. The program ended with the presentation of Scott McCarney of Rochester, New York, who showed examples of his work in which the book functions

as a physical site for the collection, organization, and dissemination of information. Brian Valzania of PABA Gallery in New Haven filmed the event on videotape.

THE KEEPSAKE

Robin Press designed and printed a keepsake as a souvenir of the symposium. The artists who spoke at the symposium sent her samples of their work from which Robin created a collage on each of the letterpress printed pages so that the keepsakes are all slightly different. The keepsakes were printed on the handmade paper of John Koller of Woodstock Valley, Connecticut. Copies of the keepsake are still available to readers of this newsletter.

THE EXHIBITION

Artists' books are a quintessentially 20th century art form. Although it has precedents in the first part of the last century and perhaps earlier in the work of William Blake and William Morris, the artist's book as a medium of artistic expression took off in the last four decades, an international phenomenon undoubtedly abetted by the widespread availability of inexpensive electronic technology such as personal computers, digital cameras, photocopiers, scanners, printers, and so forth. There are even online artists' books. By all signs, the genre will continue to flourish in the current century.

The book in the familiar codex shape goes back about two thousand years, an ingenious design of leaves of paper, or vellum, folded and sewn, or later glued, through the fold. The book was a great technological advance over early formats for inscribing text because pages in a book could be written on both sides, the text was linear and sequential, and it was portable. The book artist takes the venerable book form as a medium of expression or point of departure for communicating an idea that can be artistic, philosophical, metaphysical, political, literary or personal. In artists' books form and content reflect each other. According to Joanna Drucker, writer, scholar and maker of book art, "an artist's book should be a work by an artist self-conscious about book form, rather than merely a highly artistic book." At any rate, it would be a mistake to worry too much about how to define the artist's book. Suffice it to say that there is a great deal of variety among the objects that call themselves artists' books.

In their physical appearance, artists' books run the gamut from very "booky" to very "arty," which

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June 2002

RECENT GIFTS to the Library

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

Special Collections has been given 17 first editions of works by Wilbur Daniel Steele (1886-1970), a writer who was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, educated at the University of Denver but who lived most of his life in Provincetown, Massachusetts and in Old Lyme, Connecticut. During a career that spanned forty years, Steele was especially noted for his short stories and won a number of literary prizes including several O. Henry Awards. He also wrote plays, some of which appeared on Broadway.

Steele's association with the Provincetown Players makes these books especially interesting to Special Collections at Connecticut College. One of his plays, *Not Smart, a Farce*, is included in *The Provincetown Plays*, a collection published by George Cram Cook in 1921 that also includes Eugene O'Neill's early one-act play *Bound East for Cardiff*. This was the first play by O'Neill that was ever produced, by the Provincetown Players at the Wharf Theatre in Provincetown, with John Reed, Wilbur Daniel Steele and O'Neill himself playing minor roles in 1916. Steele and his artist wife Marguerite were part of O'Neill's artistic and literary social set in Provincetown. Steele was

interviewed by Louis Sheaffer forty years later when he researched his biography of Eugene O'Neill. The books, many inscribed by the author, are the gift of Steele's great-nephew, David Jenness, who lives in New Mexico.

THE ITALIANS OF NEW LONDON

Jerry Fischer, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut, has given a videotape copy of the film *The Italians of New London* to Special Collections. Mr. Fischer made the film in 1998, with the assistance of Ada Filippetti and Elisa Giommi, under the auspices of Mitchell College and with the financial support of several community foundations. The gift also includes 34 uncut video tapes of interviews conducted with local residents of Italian American descent. In addition, the Leonard Rocco family presented the library with a copy of the film *Italian Treasures Exhibit of the New London, Connecticut Community*, which was made of the 1998 exhibit at the Umbrella House at Mitchell College.

The videotapes will become part of the growing oral history collection in Special Collections and will be available to researchers, students at the college



Miniature Nazi propaganda books.

and members of the community of southeastern Connecticut. The films offer an insightful look into the history and culture of the various Italian American communities that flourished in New London in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

THIRD REICH PROPAGANDA MINIATURES

The Gildersleeve Collection of Children's Literature contains many miniature books but nothing quite like the 13 tiny Third Reich propaganda books given to Special Collections by Hal and Phyllis Soloff of Norwich, Connecticut. Each of the miniatures measures 35 x 50 mm and has 35 pages with text in German and many black and white photographs and maps. The photographs were taken by Heinrich Hoffmann (1885-1957), Hitler's personal photographer, who is not to be confused with the 19th century Heinrich Hoffmann, the author of many delightful books for children. Several of the books have a hole and a string attached, presumably for the purpose of hanging from a coat button or as a Christmas tree ornament. The books were given to people who contributed to the Nazi Party Winter Relief charity, or to the War Relief of the German Red Cross.

ARTISTS' BOOKS at Connecticut college

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is why they are of interest to librarians as well as to art departments. The Shain Library exhibition displays all of the relatively modest collection of artists' books in Special Collections, ranging from the beautiful, finely crafted, letterpress creations of Robin Press and Jim Lee, which are clearly related to the traditional fine press book, to the inexpensive "zines" whose apparent casualness belies the artists' serious intentions. Some of the artists' books in the exhibition have the form of a book but have no text or only sequences of dots or holes in paper. Others bear scant resemblance to a traditional book. Some are highly or complete-

ly illustrated while others have no pictures at all. Artists' books can be unique objects, or are produced in very limited or even large trade editions. Some are hand crafted and others are made with a Xerox machine. There are examples of each type in the exhibition.

Each of the artists who spoke at the symposium is represented by at least one work in the exhibition. There are also books by artists such as Mindy Belloff, Joan Gardner, Sol LeWitt, Joanna Drucker, Paulette Rosen, and many others. The exhibition originally ran from March 25 to May 17 but will be carried over through August 12.

SHINBACH DELFTWARE Exhibition

The Shinbach Delftware Collection is now on display in the Palmer Room. This beautiful and valuable collection is the gift of the late Rose Lazarus Shinbach, a member of the class of 1939. The Dutch city of Delft is well known as the birthplace of the painter Vermeer but it also achieved great renown as the center for the production of the hand-painted, tin-glazed pottery known as Delftware. In the 17th century there were 32 factories in Delft producing objects both ornamental and practical in this distinctive style, but by the 19th century the great period of Delftware was over. Mrs. Shinbach's collection contains nearly forty pieces illustrative of the history of Delftware from its golden age through the end of the 19th century.

Anyone who only associates Delft pottery with blue decorations of wind-

mills on a white background will be very surprised by the vivid and colorful images and shapes of the objects in the collection and by the strong influence of Oriental flower and bird motifs. Many of the pieces are signed with potter's marks on the bottom, which help to identify and date them. Highlights from the collection include an outstanding pair of polychrome parrots about twelve

inches high which was shown in color in *Art and Antiques Magazine* and exhibited at the Columbus Museum of Art in the 1980s. The splendid "Rooster" was made about 1764. A pair of matching male and female figures wearing wooden shoes is typical of the Delft "peasant" style. There are also several examples of Delft style pottery made in England and Germany.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

New York artist Robert de Michiell, whose witty caricatures of celebrities and bright, bold illustrations of pop culture have graced the cover of *The New Yorker* and other well-known magazines, will speak about his own work and the mass media and celebrity culture in the 20th century at the fifth annual Sound Lab Foundation Lecture on September 19, at 7:30 p.m. in the Charles Chu Asian Arts Reading Room in Shain Library. De Michiell grew up in Waterford, went to Waterford High School and participated in local art shows during his teenage years. He is also a BFA graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design.

The third annual Eugene O'Neill Celebration will take place on the weekend of October 18-20, with various events, lectures and workshops held at the O'Neill Center in Waterford and at other places in New London. This year Connecticut College will participate in the celebration with an O'Neill exhibition in Shain Library and by sponsoring a lecture by O'Neillian Harley Hammerman, M.D., who is also a radiologist in private practice in the St. Louis, Missouri area. In a field dominated by academics, Dr. Hammerman is a non-academic scholar of the life and work of O'Neill who has amassed an excellent personal collection of O'Neill photographs, documents, and first editions. Dr. Hammerman's dedication to the study of O'Neill led him in 1999 to create www.eOneill.com, a Web site which serves as the clearing house for

scholars and amateurs alike looking for information about O'Neill or needing to know where to find it, and as a place to exchange ideas about the study of his life and work. The title of Dr. Hammerman's lecture and the time, date and place will be announced later.

VENTURE SMITH

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It is in Miss Johnson's book that we learn that the publisher of Venture Smith's narrative was Charles Holt, a printer and bookseller in New London from 1797 to 1806. Holt was born in New London in 1772, and in 1797 he began to publish *The Bee*, a weekly newspaper which continued until 1802 with a brief suspension in 1798 because of an outbreak of yellow fever in the city. According to *New London Imprints*, Holt was a staunch supporter of Jeffersonian principles and his newspaper reflected these views. During the administration of John Adams, he was arrested for libel under the provisions of the sedition law. He was tried in New Haven and sentenced to a fine of \$200 and six months in prison. Holt later moved to New York where he presumably found a more favorable climate to continue to publish newspapers. The narrative of Venture Smith was one of Holt's first publications and it was published at the "Bee-Office."

MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Membership, new or renewed, in the Friends of the Library is welcomed at any time of year. The dues from the Friends support the purchase of books, to sponsor receptions and lectures, to print the *Newsletter*, and to fund the library scholarship.

If you wish to join at this time, or know of someone who is interested, a check payable to Connecticut College may be mailed to the Friends of the Library, Charles E. Shain Library, Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London, CT 06320. Membership has the following categories: contributing (\$30), associate (\$50), patron (\$100), benefactor (\$300 or more). Dues in the associate, patron and benefactor categories include library-borrowing privileges.