

The Bancroft Library

University of California · Berkeley

University of California Bancroft Library/Berkeley
Regional Oral History Office

David Magee

BOOKSELLING AND CREATING BOOKS

An Interview Conducted by
Ruth Teiser



David Magee - 1969

Photo by Ruth Teiser

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between the Regents of the University of California and David Magee, dated September 10, 1969. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user. The legal agreement with David Magee requires that he be notified of the request and allowed thirty days in which to respond.

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

Interviews Completed by December, 1969

Lewis and Dorothy Allen, Book Printing with The Handpress

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

Mallette Dean, Artist and Printer

Edwin Grabhorn, Recollections of the Grabhorn Press

Jane Grabhorn, The Colt Press

Robert Grabhorn, Fine Printing and the Grabhorn Press

James D. Hart, Fine Printers of the San Francisco Bay Area

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

David Magee, Bookselling and Creating Books

Walter Mann, Photoengraving

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

Lorenz Schmidt, Ernest Wuthman, Steward Norris, The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Vol. II

Albert Sperisen, San Francisco Printers, 1925-1965

Jack W. Stauffacher, A Printed Word Has Its Own Measure

Edward DeWitt Taylor, supplement to interview with Francis Farquhar

Adrian Wilson, Printing and Book Designing

INTRODUCTION

David Bickersteth Magee was born in Yorkshire in 1905, the son of a vicar, John Arthur Victor Magee, and Gwendolyn Georgina Frances Mary Wilson Magee. David Magee grew up in London and, after his graduation from public school and following his father's death, came to America when he was nineteen.

As he recounts in this interview, he had been a book collector since the age of eight and had begun his editorial career at nine. In San Francisco he secured a position in the book shop of John Howell and almost immediately prepared a catalogue, thus laying the foundation for much of his future work as an antiquarian bookman, cataloguer, bibliographer, publisher, editor and author.

In 1928 he opened the first of his book shops, at 480 Post Street, San Francisco, moving to 470 Post in 1936 and 442 Post in 1948. In 1964 he moved once more, to 3108 B Fillmore Street.

Over the years Mr. Magee has travelled frequently to Europe to buy books, created collections that have enriched the shelves of both private collectors and libraries, and taken a central part in many aspects of the

world of books in San Francisco. As publisher and bibliographer he has had a close association with the Grabhorn Press, which he discusses here. He has also been associated with most of the other notable printers of the San Francisco Bay Area, through individual publications, and through publications of the Book Club of California and the Roxburghe Club. The catalogues he has created as a bookseller have been notable. He has also made notable editorial contributions to books and journals concerned with books. In addition, he has written nationally published fiction and essays on matters beyond the immediate world of books.

In 1931 Mr. Magee married Dorothy Wilder, who has collaborated with him in some of his bibliographic work and has worked with him in the Fillmore Street enterprise known simply as "David Magee/Antiquarian Books."

Mr. Magee is a man of humor and good humor, as is evident in this interview. It was held in two sessions on April 8 and April 9, 1969, in the comfortable high-ceilinged, book-lined main room of the shop. The text was edited carefully, Mr. Magee making some additions and clarifying some wordings. At the request of the interviewer, he added information on his experience in printing and on

his non-bibliographic writings, but no rearrangement of material or other major changes were made.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer

10 November 1969
Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

CONTENTS

	Interview, April 8, 1969	
Background of a Bibliophile		1
First Publications		7
The First Grabhorn Bibliography		10
Albert Bender		16
The Second Grabhorn Bibliography and Other Publications		19
Bookselling and Book Buying		24
The Grabhorn Press		29
	Interview, April 9, 1969	41
The Fine Printing Tradition in San Francisco		43
The Post-Grabhorn Printers		53
The Economics of Fine Printing		63
Writing and Editing		67

Interview, April 8, 1969

Background of a Bibliophile

Teiser: Shall we begin with the day of your birth?

Magee: Well, I was born June the 18th, 1905, in the village of Gargrave, which is in the West Riding of Yorkshire, very close to the border of Lancashire. My father was the vicar of the church, and my mother was one of the daughters of the squire. And I was the fifth child. My mother's family had been living in Yorkshire in the same house from the seventeenth century. They were a lot of three-bottle squires and their unpretentious ladies, you know, with one exception, which is interesting from my point of view, I think. My great-great-aunt was Mary Frances Richardson Currer, who was England's greatest woman book collector. In fact, she had such a marvelous library that Heber*, who was the greatest man collector of his time, tried to marry her in order to get one single book that he wanted. [Laughter]

So maybe there's something in heredity, because

*Richard Heber (1773-1833).

Magee: I believe it was from her that I got my love of old books. Also my first cousin, who bears exactly the same relationship to her as I do, is chairman of Sotheby's, Peter Wilson. But it was a marvelous library. She had every Bible in English from the very beginning up to the King James Bible of 1611. All in perfect condition. And my grandfather sold this library to pay for his election expenses, about 1850. What would it bring today? Gosh!

Teiser: Did it go as a whole?

Magee: No, no. He sold it piecemeal at auction. In fact I have a book right here from it, which is rather fun. That's the bookplate.

Now, on my father's side, I come of a long line of divines, Irish divines. My great-great grandfather was archbishop of Dublin, and my grandfather was archbishop of York. But my grandfather came to England [from Ireland] to be bishop of Peterborough in about 1860, I think, around there.

Well, thereafter, being born and raised for about a year in Yorkshire, my father had [got] a parish in London--it was in St. John's Wood--so I was brought up really in the northwest of London, until I was about 18, and then my father died very suddenly. Being one of eight children, I had to

Magee: leave school because suddenly from being fairly affluent, there was no money at all. You know, a parson's family sort of thing.

So I went to work in London, but I just couldn't let my mother support my three younger sisters and me too, see. I couldn't live on what I earned. So I came to America. I had a strange idea of being a farmer, and this is very odd because I don't know an apple from a pear in its natural state. So I came to San Francisco.

Teiser: How did you happen to chose San Francisco?

Magee: Because I didn't like New York and I didn't like Chicago.

Teiser: You went there and didn't like them?

Magee: Yes, but I didn't stay very long. But my aunt was a great friend of the wife of the Brazilian ambassador to France. And her son was John Stern of the Levi Straus family in San Francisco. Do you know the Sterns, Mrs. Sigmund Stern? And, so she said to my aunt, why not have David go to San Francisco and my son will look after him? You know, when you're nineteen, nothing matters. You can't fail. Well, I was making no money when I arrived. Of course, I realized I was no farmer at all. I didn't even try.

So I got a job as a bookseller with John Howell,

Magee: and I worked for Howell for two and a half years, and in 1928--it was 1925 when I came over--in 1928 I opened up a shop of my own.

Teiser: You had clearly had an interest in books but what did you present to Howell as your qualifications?

Magee: I had none at all. I just had an English public school education.

Teiser: Where did you go to school?

Magee: I went to Lancing College. It's in Sussex.

Well, of course, I've always been a book collector. When I was eight years old I began to collect books. It was a rather weird sort of collection. I had pocket money of six pence a week, and I went about all the churches in London, and I bought religious pamphlets. They sold them in boxes in the porch, you know for a penny. I hadn't any idea of what these books were about. They had titles like, "What Is Transubstantiation?" and that sort of thing. But they were done in a series. They were like collecting stamps or cigarette cards; they were numbered. And I went all over trying to get complete sets of these things. I think my mother threw them away one time years later. I honestly had, oh, a couple of hundred. That was my first essay into book collecting.

Teiser: What was John Howell like when you first knew him?
He was in about his prime then, wasn't he?

Magee: Yes, I suppose John Howell was. I hate to think he was younger than I am now. But I thought he was a very old man, I being twenty. But I was very interested in Bacon, and I think that's why I got the job, because he was an expert in this Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, which I couldn't see, but still.... He asked me who my favorite authors were, and I mentioned Bacon, and that apparently did the trick.

So I went to work for him for \$75 a month, which wasn't bad in those days. I couldn't live on it, but I did. The first job I did for Howell was to compile an Elizabethan catalogue. How I did this I will never know, with the little knowledge I had. I had only been working there six months when I started this catalogue. I'm not patting myself on the back or anything, but it is just the fact that when you're young, you know, you just do these things. I wouldn't dare do it now. I wouldn't have the courage. [Laughter]

So I opened up a shop on Post Street, 480 Post Street, which was part of the Children's Bookshop. Do you remember the Children's Bookshop? A Miss Moore

Magee: and a Mrs. Powell, I think. They ran it, and they had a long narrow room like a shooting gallery at the side. I rented this and stayed there for six or seven years.

Teiser: What led you to believe that you could make a living as an independent bookseller? [Laughter]

Magee: When you're that age you don't know the word "fail."

Teiser: And it wasn't the Depression yet, was it?

Magee: No. It was 1928, and things were good. I had a little capital that I borrowed from two friends and I went to England with \$1,500, and I bought books, came back, and they sold, much to my astonishment.

Teiser: You were in, I suppose, by then, a good position to know how to buy.

Magee: Yes. I had had two and a half years experience at Howell's.

Teiser: I mean too in England, having lived there, you knew your way around.

Magee: Yes, that's true, and I knew some of the bookshops. When I was fifteen I used to haunt Charing Cross Road and buy cheap books, you know, for sixpence and a shilling, that sort of thing. Just to read.

First Publications

Magee: So I came back, and then by 1935 I published my first book, which was--no, no. What am I talking about. In 1929 I published my first book.

Teiser: What was it?

Magee: I didn't write it, I published it. This was an edition of King Lear, with illustrations by my brother-in-law, whose name is Yunge-Bateman.* I thought they were just great. And I got Chesterton to write an introduction to it, G.K. Chesterton. He was a great friend of my family's, and when I was young we used to go to Beaconsfield, where he lived, and play with his nephews and nieces, the Oldershaws; I remember them very well. For some strange reason I insisted that this book--this edition of Lear--be printed on handmade paper. It cost me the earth. It cost \$9 a copy, I remember. I could have it on ordinary paper for \$2 a copy. But oh, no, I had to have the best.

Teiser: Who printed it?

Magee: It was printed by the Curwen Press in London. I took it to Ed Grabhorn first. It was the first time I had ever met Ed. And for some reason or other he

*Jack Yunge-Bateman.

Magee: didn't want to do it. I don't know why. I think he thought I didn't have enough money to pay for it, which might well have been true. But I did actually. [Laughter] That was the first time I met Ed. He was then in the Ray Coyle Building--what do they call it now--where the University Extension used to be on Powell Street, just above Sutter.

And so my meeting with Ed was not very fruitful, and so the Curwen Press, which was run by a man called Oliver Simon, who just died about a year ago as a matter of fact [printed the book]. He was a wonderful typographer. And the book was very handsome, but it didn't sell because the Depression came along about then. It was a \$15 book--I had to charge \$15 for it. And now it's worth about \$75. You can't find a copy.

Teiser: Do you have a copy?

Magee: I have my own copy at home, yes.

Teiser: Was it a big book? Was it a large format?

Magee: Yes. Large quarto, bound in buckram with twelve illustrations, which were rather Blakean. I always remember Chesterton saying to me, "Do you want me to write about the very ordinary play or the extraordinary illustrations?" [Laughter] I said, "You write about anything you like." He was a wonderful man, G.K.

Magee: The next time I saw the Grabhorns was after a trip to England where I bought a very poor copy, a very incomplete copy, of the book called The Ship of Fools. This is a very famous book of the sixteenth century and a very rare one. This was the first English edition, printed by England's third printer, Pynson, in 1509, and it has lovely woodcuts. I made a little "leaf" book, and Grabhorn printed it.* And who did I get to write the introduction?--James D. Hart. This was his first book. That was in 1935 or 1936. It was a great success.

Teiser: By then had you got to know the Grabhorns?

Magee: Not very well, no.

Teiser: What did Ed look like when you first saw him?

Magee: Oh, Ed was sort of, you know, untidy hair and he always had a pipe, one of these meerschaum pipes. And he was cheerful. They all were. I can't remember the pressman--I guess it was Tom Hewitt. You know about Tom Hewitt, don't you?

Teiser: Some, not a lot.

Magee: Tom Hewitt, like most itinerant printers, would suddenly decide that everything was too much and he'd go on a magnificent bender, and would be gone sometimes, oh, six weeks. I think I've written him up, you know, in that little thing I wrote about the

*Brant, Sebastian. An Original Leaf from the First Edition of Alexander Barclay's Translation of ... Ship of Fools. San Francisco: David Magee, 1938.

Magee: Grabhorn Press, "Two Gentlemen From Indiana." I think I gave you a copy.*

Teiser: That was the piece of chalk story?

Magee: Yes. [Laughter]

Teiser: We got Ed Grabhorn to tell it on tape.

Magee: You did? Oh, good.

Teiser: I think he told your version of it.**

Magee: [Laughter] I've heard it was not Ed who said this but Douglas Watson, the historian. Tom Hewitt had a loathing, you know, of all historians. He said that anyone with a good memory could be an historian but it took genius to clear a press. [Laughter]

The First Grabhorn Bibliography

But then, to back track a little bit, talking about the Grabhorns. In 1933 I think--I may be wrong about the date--Valenti Angelo decided to go to New York and leave the Grabhorns, and he wanted to sell his library. The best offer he could get for this library, which was a marvelous one, was \$400. I was a great friend of Ellie Heller's*** and

*It first appeared in the California Librarian and was reprinted in the Catalogue of Some Five Hundred Examples of the Printing of Edwin and Robert Grabhorn, 1917-1960, issued by the Book Shop of David Magee in 1961.

**See Grabhorn, Edwin. Recollections of the Grabhorn Press, a 1968 interview in this series.

***Mrs. Edward Heller (Elinor Raas Heller).

Magee: she had the beginnings of a very nice Grabhorn collection, which she had acquired sort of bit by bit from either me or Albert Bender. And I said, "Look, Valenti Angelo wants to sell his library. He's got all the Grabhorns, all the early ones you don't have. Do you want to buy them?" And she said yes. "Well," I said, "let's offer him \$800." Which we did, and Val has always been very grateful to us because that got him to New York and he could live for about three months, while he looked for a job, on \$800. There were lots of other books besides the Grabhorns. Boy, I wish I had that collection now. All these early Indianapolis things, you see, which he had collected. They are very, very rare indeed.

So then having got this nucleus, Ellie Heller and I decided that since few people knew anything about these Grabhorn books we ought to do a bibliography. And so for three years we labored. The Grabhorns, of course, never keep anything, and their memory is appalling. You'd ask them about something and they'd say, "Oh, we didn't print it." I'd say, "Well, here it is, right on the colophon, Grabhorn." "Oh well, perhaps we did." Then we'd finally dredge it out, you know. And so that was

Magee: the birth of the first volume of the bibliography.*

Teiser: It seems to me that Bob said the first one was fun particularly because they still remembered--this contraverts what you say to some extent--they still remembered a good deal about some of the things. And yet this doesn't contravert it...

Magee: But it's true. But there were lots of things they didn't want to remember. I think that was the point. They just didn't like some of the things they had done. They just refused to remember them.

Teiser: Are there any imperfections in it?

Magee: In the bibliography? Yes, but there's no error of omission that I have found yet, except for one broadside. No one has ever turned up anything that isn't recorded in it. But there were a couple of errors of commission. We couldn't date one thing. Later we found we had dated it one year too late. And there was one ludicrous error. It was a broadside, which is about nine inches tall and about five inches wide, and by mistake it was written nine feet tall, [laughter] which would make it rather ludicrous. It would look like a piece of toilet paper. So that was an error. I can't think of any others, although I'm sure there are some.

It was an awful job reading proof on that thing.

*Heller, Elinor and Magee, David. Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1915-1940. San Francisco: [David Magee], 1940.

Magee: You know that Franciscan type, which they had got from Goudy, and had exclusive use of, is not an easy type to read. And many people complained to me, why did they use that type? Because it wasn't easy to read. And I said, "Well, I'll tell you, you don't sit down and read a bibliography from cover to cover. You refer to it. And surely for five minutes you can endure it." And it's a very handsome type, I think. Very handsome indeed.

Teiser: And it was appropriate since it was theirs.

Magee: Well, of course. Absolutely. Goudy wrote a very nice introduction to it. In fear and trembling--I was still pretty young--I went to see him, and Ed gave me a letter saying, "Dear Fred: Be kind to David Magee. Let him down lightly," or something. "Ever yours, Ed." I didn't present this letter of introduction. I just kept it. It is one of my rarest possessions. Ed Grabhorn letters in his own hand, you know, are frightfully rare. He hardly ever wrote a letter, you know, in his own handwriting. He used to dictate to Jane most of the time. And so you don't often find letters entirely in his holograph.

But Goudy was very nice to me indeed. The book was published at \$35, which was, I suppose,

Magee: quite a bit of money in those days. But it was a frightfully expensive book to produce. It's handset, naturally, and all those illustrations and original leaves we tipped in made it a costly production. Do you know it took us four years to sell out? Remember this was published in 1940 and the war didn't help.

Teiser: What size was the edition?

Magee: The edition was only 200 copies or 225. Two hundred I think. I should know. And then, you see, the war came along and nobody had \$35 or nobody cared. I know I had about six or eight copies for years, but finally it sold out. Now it sells for about \$300, \$250 to \$300.

Teiser: And going up daily, probably.

Magee: I expect so. I find it very hard to get indeed these days. Of course, I have my own copy.

Teiser: Where did you find the books? You had the Heller collection to begin with.

Magee: That to begin with. And Edwin once in a great while would turn up something that he had in the basement. But we also went to see Francis Farquhar's collection. Who else did we use? Val was awfully complete, you know. And then George Harding had some stuff. George Harding had been in touch with

Magee: the Grabhorns during the Indianapolis days, and he had some letters, back and forth. He had collected various promotional things that Ed had printed. Ed printed nothing of any importance in Indianapolis. Nothing. They were all advertising gimmicks and promotional leaflets and that sort of thing.

Teiser: And some things that they thought were funny.

Magee: Well, they did two awful books of poems. One, The Laugh of Christ and Other Original Linnets. Probably Ed told you all about this, didn't he?

Teiser: He told something about it, but...

Magee: He [the author, St. Claire Jones] was apparently the secretary of the governor of Indiana or the mayor of Indianapolis or something, and he thought he was a great poet. He published two books. I can't think of the name of the other one. I should know. They're frightfully difficult to get. There were just 100 copies printed.

Teiser: Had you heard of the Grabhorns before you came to San Francisco?

Magee: No. No. You see, they had only been here five years when I arrived. Of course I did get to know them pretty well after a while through Albert Bender, who was always a very good customer of mine, from the very beginning.

Albert Bender

Teiser: Can you evaluate his position in this whole development of interest in...

Magee: Albert Bender?

Teiser: Yes.

Magee: Yes, I think I can in a way. He was a great patron and he helped all sorts of people in every kind of art. I mean, painters, sculptors--artists of all kinds. Every Saturday of his life he came into my shop, and every Saturday he sat on the sofa and every Saturday he went to sleep. He'd sleep through all sorts of people, but if anybody of any importance came in, he woke up. It was the most extraordinary thing. [Laughter] He dearly loved a celebrity. He was a sweet man, though.

He had a passion for big books, you know. He was a very small man himself; I don't suppose he was much more than five feet. I remember he always bought large folios, which were a drug on the market, you know, but he always bought them and gave them to Mills. Mills must have an immense collection of books about Greek coins and Roman ruins and other such things bound in full leather. They used to cost

Magee: next to nothing, you know--about \$5. Albert always bought them. He'd never buy a book from the shelf. If I wanted to sell him a book, I had to put it on the floor. Always. Even though it had just come in. Even if it hadn't just come in, he still wouldn't buy it if it was on the shelves. There's a certain psychology about this, you know. One time I was going to get rid of a lot of books that I just didn't want. I was going to give them to the Goodwill or Salvation Army. I put them all in a corner, and, you know, everybody who came in made a beeline for this corner and I sold about half of them. They never would have sold on the shelves--never. So, as you see, there are sometimes books on the floor here. [Laughter]

Teiser: I gather that Bender thought he went looking for bargains a good deal.

Magee: Well, I think he did to a certain extent. He was very generous though, and he bought an immense number of books from me. And he, of course, encouraged the Grabhorns. He was one of their earliest patrons. As he was to the Windsor Press.

Teiser: James Johnson told me he didn't want to give an interview about the Windsor Press, that it was long past. And so what we have on the Windsor Press we

Teiser: have had to get from others. So any recollections that you have would be helpful.

Magee: I knew Cecil better than I knew Jim. I haven't seen him in ages. They went out of the field of fine printing years ago. When they ran the Windsor Press, they printed very nicely. They were rather imitative, I think, especially of Bruce Rogers.

But Albert would give them books to print for the Book Club of California. He was always having things printed by one or another printer--Lead Kindly Light was one of his favorites, you know, and the Sermon on the Mount, and such old chestnuts. But he'd give them around to his friends. He'd have 100 copies printed and present them to his friends.

Teiser: As broadsides?

Magee: Broadsides. It was mainly broadsides. A great many. If you look in the index of the Grabhorn bibliography, you'll see an awful lot of numbers after Albert M. Bender.

Teiser: Was he the main influence in the early Book Club?

Magee: Yes, he was, certainly. He was the treasurer I think or secretary for many, many years. Something like forty years. You see, the Book Club started in 1912 and they published their first book in 1914.

Magee: Edward Robeson Taylor was the first president of the Book Club, and W.R.K. Young was the vice president. Albert Bender was the secretary, I think, or treasurer. I wrote all this up in my history of the Book Club, so you'll forgive me if I forget.

Teiser: That book was written for what occasion?

Magee: The [publication of the] hundredth book. The Hundredth Book was the bibliography which I compiled.*

I became a member of the Book Club, I think, in 1935, around there. I have been a great devotee of it ever since.

The Second Grabhorn Bibliography and Other Publications

Teiser: To get back to the Grabhorns, which I have led you away from--you've described something of the first bibliography. Let's continue onto the second one.

Magee: Well, the time came when the second one should be done, and this was in 1955 or 1956. Sixteen years had gone by and the Grabhorns had printed an immense number of books. So I approached Ellie Heller but she was so busy--you know, she was

*Magee, David. The Hundredth Book, A Bibliography of the Publications of The Book Club of California & a History of the Club. San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1958.

Magee: California committee chairman or something of the Democratic Party and she was in Washington half the time. It just was too much for her and so she couldn't. And so my wife helped me; we did it together. The basis of this one was Florence Walter's* collection, to whom the book is dedicated.** (And incidentally the first volume is dedicated to Albert Bender.) She was wonderful--we had the run of her drawing room, her books, and with all the paraphernalia we used, you know, we made an awful mess. We used to go up there about twice a week in the morning and just work at it.

If there are any errors in that, I really don't know. I think there probably are. I'm sure there must be.

Teiser: If you don't know them it might be assumed that there aren't.

Magee: I haven't had them pointed out. Usually people love to point them out to you, [laughter] that being human nature.

Teiser: How long did it take you?

Magee: Well, that one, I should imagine, took us two years. About two years.

*Mrs. John I. Walter.

**Magee, Dorothy and David. Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1940-1956. San Francisco: [David Magee], 1957.

Teiser: Did the Grabhorns work with you on the editorial part of that one as much as on the earlier one?

Magee: Yes, they helped as much, but you know they always start out rather unenthusiastically and then they end up very enthusiastic. They couldn't care anything about it at all in the beginning. They couldn't be bothered. I remember there was a book written by a man called Cressler. I went in one day and said, "Can you tell me who this man is and where he's from?" Both Bob and Ed categorically denied ever printing the book. So there again I showed them the colophon and there was the printer's mark and their name. So, oh yes, they did. They remembered something. Ed came up and he said, "All I can remember is he never paid us," [laughter] which is a cry I've heard many a time from Ed. And Bill Grover said, "Now I think he came from Indianapolis." And Ed said, "No, no, no, no. It was Detroit." This is the way we had to drag the stuff out of them, and finally we got it right and we wrote to Mrs. Cressler (Mr. Cressler had died) and found all the information we needed--why it was printed and how many, etcetera.

Teiser: Ed Grabhorn in his interview spoke a bit as if nobody ever paid him enough. And I gather, although he was not at all well at the time of his interview--

Teiser: I gather this had been fairly characteristic of him all along, to exaggerate.

Magee: Oh, always exaggerating. Never got a penny. The Book Club of California was the worst offender.

[Laughter]

Well, actually one time the Book Club did only pay the printers as the books were sold, because they just didn't have the money. It worked a hardship on printers, who had to pay for their paper and ink, their help and that sort of thing. It wasn't easy.

Teiser: You were the publisher of both of the bibliographies yourself?

Magee: Yes. That's right.

Teiser: What other notable books have you published?

Magee: Well, I got a whole series of "leaf" books mainly dealing with illuminated manuscripts. I have done I think five in all, four or five. They all had introductions by Dr. Schulz of the Huntington Library,* who is the head of the manuscript department there. They are very handsome books, and they're frightfully difficult to get now.

Teiser: Over what period were they published?

Magee: I can't remember the date of the first one. I can look it up in the bibliography. I think it was just

*Dr. H.C. Schulz.

Magee: before the war. About 1938-39, and then I did one, oh, quite recently, about seven or eight years ago.

Teiser: Over that span?

Magee: That span, yes. And they were all quite different, you see.

Teiser: Who printed them?

Magee: They were all printed by the Grabhorns.

Teiser: In what sizes?

Magee: They varied. They varied according to the size of the original leaf of the manuscript, you see. One was quite tall--one was huge.

Teiser: I meant what size editions?

Magee: Oh, none were more than 200. Most of them were 100, 75, or 125--something like that.

Teiser: Most of the books that you have published you have sold how, by direct orders?

Magee: Yes, that's right.

Teiser: Not through bookstores?

Magee: Oh, yes. I've sold to bookstores. Yes. I sell to dealers. They weren't published for very much money. I published the first one, I think, for \$10 or \$15. Of course that was more money than it is today, as you know.

Teiser: What do they sell for now?

Magee: Well, I know one that I would give \$300 for if I

Magee: could find it. That actually was not an illuminated "leaf" book. That was a book I did on the four folios of Shakespeare, with the original leaves from all four folios. That was a very early one the Grabhorns did. And that's terribly difficult to get. There were only seventy-five. It had to be limited to the number of leaves I had of the first folio, which was the difficult one to get. You can always get the second and the fourth, and sometimes you can get the third. Broken copies and so on. I never break up a perfect book; these were all imperfect copies.

Teiser: Have most of those found their way into libraries, do you think, by now?

Magee: Oh, a great many of them have. As I say, they are very, very difficult to find indeed.

Bookselling and Book Buying

Teiser: I suppose this is a problem, isn't it, for a bookseller, that gradually so many things get out of circulation by going into libraries.

Magee: Indeed they do. I like selling books to libraries, but every time I do I realize I shall never see it

Magee: again.

Teiser: Do you like the idea of book auctions?

Magee: Yes and no. I think all sorts of silly things happen at book auctions. You know, people have auction fever and they pay much too much for stuff. But once in a while I've bought some awfully cheap books. It had been a rainy day or something and no one was there. People had missed it.

Teiser: Do you go to New York and England to the auctions pretty much?

Magee: I go to England usually twice a year, and to New York at least that or sometimes three times.

Teiser: I've been told recently that books are so expensive in England that it's difficult to...

Magee: They are. They're terribly high. Awfully high. But, of course I've been very, very lucky. Do you want me to talk about this or do you want me to talk about the Grabhorns?

Teiser: I'd like you to talk about this too.

Magee: I have been very fortunate. Of course I've been in business for over forty years, so a lot of my customers, who were fairly elderly when I started as a beardless boy, have died and I've been able to buy their libraries, which helps very much. I mean, these young kids going into business now have an

Magee: awful time because they don't have any customers. They don't have any customers who are about to die. I don't wish to be gloomy or anything. [Laughter] I always feel a little ghoulish when I look at the obits. [Laughter]

Teiser: Well, the whole business of buying and selling books must have changed tremendously since you first knew it, hasn't it?

Magee: Oh, it has. Enormously.

Teiser: How many very wealthy collectors of the kind--oh, buyers like Bender and the Clark brothers, are there now?

Magee: You see, Bender wasn't really a collector. He had a smallish library, but he bought mainly to give away to Mills College and that sort of thing.

But the first really great library I bought was the George D. Lyman library. You know, he was the pediatrician here in town and he had a great collection, and he left instructions in his will that I was to handle the library. It was an immense and magnificent library of Californiana. He died I think in 1949 or 1950.

But it was much more money than I could possibly-- do you want me to talk about money?

Teiser: Yes.

Magee: I paid in the neighborhood of \$35,000 for his library. But I didn't have \$35,000 in 1950. But the Wells Fargo Bank, bless their hearts, lent me the money. I had a guarantee that the Bancroft Library would buy \$15,000 of it and the California Historical Society would buy \$5,000, so I had \$20,000 I could count on selling right away, which pleased the bank. It pleased me, too.

There were over sixteen unique items in that library. Today I shudder to think what I would have to pay for the whole collection; \$200,000 I suppose. Well, there was a Zenas Leonard* there, you know, which the Bancroft didn't have. So they had to have it. It was Henry Wagner's copy. Oh, it was a lovely library!

The next one I bought was the McArthur library, which was one of the best collections on the Northwest ever to come on the market. Wonderful collection. "Tam" McArthur, he was always known as. A very old friend and very dear friend, who died. And then I continued to buy libraries of that caliber, which was a lifesaver to me really. Buying individual books is not a very paying concern.

Teiser: What about, on the other hand, the selling? Has the character of the buyers changed over the years?

*The Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard,
1839.

Magee: Well, it's changed in one respect, I think. I have many more libraries than I used to have. I used to rely almost solely on individuals when I was first in business. And then, of course, I have varied my stock immensely over the years. I started in by selling only modern first editions. This is usual when you're twenty, twenty-one, because this is what you understand. It was what you've been reading. But I sort of slowly got out of that into fine press books and then eventually into early printed books, fifteenth and sixteenth century books, which is my love now really.

Teiser: Are there many individuals who buy them now?

Magee: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I'm very fond of illuminated manuscripts, but the price has risen so astronomically now that hardly anyone can afford them.

Teiser: I'm just trying to think of what great private libraries there are in these years in San Francisco.

Magee: Well, there aren't very many, you know. I'm selling much more to [institutional] libraries. I've just sold a Victorian catalogue which I've been working on for five years, which is a vast undertaking, to Brigham Young [University]. Have you seen the catalogue?

Teiser: No.

Magee: I'll show it to you later on. The Grabhorns printed it, Grabhorn-Hoyem. It took me five years to collect the material for the catalogue. You tie up an immense amount of money, because this collection ran up to six figures. They're very pleased at Brigham Young to have acquired it. And I was pleased to sell it as a whole because it saves an immense amount of trouble, writing to individuals, writing and saying it's sold, wrapping up hundreds of small packages, etcetera, you know.

The Grabhorn Press

Teiser: Let's go back to the Grabhorns. One of the things that we have bits of is the atmosphere of the shop. People have written about it and people have discussed it, and we got a bit of it from Bob,* a bit from Ed. But perhaps you can describe it as you saw it.

Magee: Well, I've seen it over so many years, you know.

Teiser: Well, how it changed, perhaps, if it changed.

Magee: I think perhaps the most interesting thing that one notices is how dependent Ed was on Bob and Bob on Ed.

*In Grabhorn, Robert. Fine Printing and the Grabhorn Press, a 1968 interview in this series.

Magee: Whether other people have mentioned that or not...

Teiser: Jane [Grabhorn] discussed it quite interestingly, from her point of view.* I would very much like to have an outsider's point of view.

Magee: So many times I've been in there when Ed would come up and say to Bob, "What do you think of this?" Bob would say, "Well, I don't know. It's not quite right. Let's try something else." And they would set up another page and another until they finally got it right. I don't know whether you know the book, Landless John. In the second bibliography we reproduced three experimental title pages for that. It is most interesting to see the three and how the final one was obviously far and away the best. And they did many more, probably ten title pages, but they just reproduced three trials in the bibliography.

Teiser: What do you feel each of them contributed to the enterprise, each of those men?

Magee: Well, of course, it's very difficult really to say. It was a perfect team. Just perfect. Then, of course, they always had the pressmen, like Bill Grover--Sherwood Grover. He would always stick his oar in too, you know. And, of course, before the war, in the mid-'thirties, there were always

*In an addendum to the Robert Grabhorn interview.

Magee: apprentices who were coming in and going out--Helen Gentry and Dorothy Grover.... But many of them didn't stay very long. But there again, I've written up all of that in the "Two Gentlemen."

Teiser: Did the atmosphere of the shop change over the years, do you think?

Magee: I wouldn't have thought terribly, no. No, I don't think so.

Teiser: Bob, in Bob Grabhorn's interview, he spoke I thought rather wistfully about the fact that he had never operated a press. Apparently this had always been rather a disappointment to him.

Magee: Yes. I never saw Bob once at a press. He was always with a stick in his hand, or locking something up. That was his job, and Ed was the pressman. Come to think of it, I hadn't realized it, I have never seen Bob, ever, print anything. I didn't realize this sort of gnawed his soul a little bit. But I imagine it might.

Of course, if the Grabhorns have one weakness-- Jane won't like me for this--it's their bindings. Pretty as they are, they are not very substantial bindings. And I think it's their one great weakness, or was, perhaps I should say.

Teiser: I think they indicated that it was largely a matter

Teiser: of economics.

Magee: Well, of course, they had a first-class binder in Bill Wheeler. There was a strange character.

[Laughter] He was a weirdy, but he was an awfully good binder. His binding on the Aesop's Fables was really a beauty, and on the Maundevile* too. Those two books. Masterpieces.

Teiser: There was some discussion of Hazel Dreis and the Leaves of Grass

Magee: Well, Hazel Dreis was about the world's worst binder. I am told--I don't know how true this is, I've never been able to find this out--that Hazel Dreis really didn't bind that book. She started to, and that Bill Wheeler did it. But I've never known about the truth of that.

Teiser: I think Ed Grabhorn said she started it and he finished it.

Magee: I think that's so. There was another good binder there after Bill sort of departed. I think his name was Andrews, if I recall. His name is in the back of the bibliography, the first bibliography, I think. I'll check that. He wasn't there very long. He was quite good.

But then, you see, Jane took over and went on. Not that the bindings are bad, but they're not

*The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile.

Magee: substantial. They don't hold up and they curl.

I at one time owned a book bound by Ed. It was the most appalling thing. [Laughter] I wish I had it now.

Teiser: Did Bob and Ed's tastes differ?

Magee: Not particularly. They seemed to agree always that something was wrong with it or something was very right with it. At least in my hearing. However, I wasn't up there all the time by any means. I was up often, in and out, especially when working on the bibliographies, because we always had to bother them about some question.

But where Bob is so remarkable is his knowledge of types. I mean, every typeface, just by glancing at it. Awfully good.

Teiser: We don't have on the record really anything about the schism that brought about the breakup of the Grabhorn Press.

Magee: Well, I think, to be quite blunt about it, it was woman trouble. I mean, the two wives couldn't get along. Jane and Irma. As you probably know, Ed and Bob were never partners. Bob worked for Ed and received a salary, and I think that caused a certain amount of unhappiness on Jane's part, certainly.

Teiser: I suppose that was partly because Ed had access

Teiser: to capital.

Magee: Yes. You see, he married a rich wife. Marjorie was very well off.* And, I think, in fact I know, this was what broke it up [the disagreement of the wives]. It certainly was personal. Of course I think it's a terrible shame that it ever happened. Awful shame.

Teiser: Early on, it was called The Press of Edwin and Robert Grabhorn.

Magee: Well, sometimes it was that and sometimes it was the Grabhorn Press, sometimes E. and R. Grabhorn. They varied their colophons tremendously.

Teiser: But that early one would indicate that they were considered equal in the enterprise to begin with.

Magee: That's right. Well, I always thought they were, for many years. I had no idea that Bob was just [on] salary.

Well, he's found a nice niche now, I think, where there's not too hard work. I mean, Andy's* young and can take most of the burden off Bob and Jane.

Teiser: Do you feel they're doing good work?

*Edwin Grabhorn's second wife. He married, following her death, Irma Engel.

*Andrew Hoyem.

Magee: Yes, I do. I don't think it's as good as it was.

Teiser: Why not?

Magee: Well, I don't know. I think Bob's tired, and Andy is inclined to be a little slapdash, just a little. Whereas before Bob and Ed would spent hours and hours on the most trivial thing really. It always had to come out right.

Teiser: I think Bob feels that Andy sometimes over-embellishes things, but he doesn't want to stop him.

Magee: No, that's right. Well, this book that they're doing now on Alaska is a case in point. I don't like the title page at all. I told them so. Not that it makes any difference. [Laughter] I think it's a cluttered title page; I think it's dreadful.*

Teiser: When you've made any criticisms, has it ever made a difference?

Magee: No. Never. And that's the way it should be. I've never, with all the books they've done for me, I've never said a word. I think all my publications done by the Grabhorns are perfect books, except for the last illuminated manuscript "leaf." Ed insisted that Mary do an illustration for it, and it was simply God-awful. Awful! It ruined the book. But I couldn't say this. You don't go to a man and say,

*It was later changed.

Magee: "Look, your daughter has ruined my book." So I just gulped and took it. But I didn't like it one bit. It was slapdash and crude and just wrong. But there was nothing I could do about it.

Teiser: Didn't she do some of the work on the Shakespeare series?

Magee: She did them all. I didn't like them. But that's purely personal. Some people liked them very much indeed. But not I.

Incidentally, Ed had his first stroke when The Tempest was being printed. One eye was off, and it shows in The Tempest because many copies were off register.* They had to throw away an awful lot of them. I remember I came across it by accident. I had bought ten or fifteen copies of this book. I was looking through one and suddenly saw that a page was off register, and I found it in about three copies out of the fifteen that I bought. And that was purely because Ed was not seeing right; his vision was off.

Teiser: I see. I'm glad to have this, because that dates the beginning of his illness.

Magee: That's right. It does.

Teiser: After that, did Bob take over more in the shop? Was there any change in the operation?

*It was published in 1951.

Magee: I don't think so. They always, you know, got down to work very early, at 8:30, and they closed somewhat early. They were very hard workers, both of them.

Teiser: Do you think of any other aspects of their work?

Magee: Well, I noticed one thing. As they grew older they were less and less inclined to publish stuff. They were much more inclined to take commissions from other publishers, or privately print books. They didn't want to sell direct. They hated, and always did hate, the mechanics of publishing--the wrapping and the billing and that sort of thing. It bored them to death. Well, it is the most boring part of it.

Teiser: So that meant that there were fewer and fewer books generated by them.

Magee: Yes. You see, in the early days they generated a great many books, like Aesop and the Maundevile and the Leaves of Grass. Actually the Leaves of Grass and Maundevile were sold outright to Random House, to Bennett Cerf; but they started as projects of their own. And often when they did get bored, even in those days, they sold a whole edition to the Book Club of California. You sometimes see a book with the colophon reading "printed for E. and

Magee: R. Grabhorn," and then they've cancelled it and sold it to the Book Club and so it had a new colophon, the Book Club of California. It's happened in two or three instances.

Teiser: How was their work considered throughout the United States and in Europe?

Magee: I've quoted poor old George Jones so many times-- he thought they were the best printers in the world. And I think everybody realizes they were the most original printers. But they're sloppy printers, you know. There's nearly always a typo in their books. I've seldom seen a Grabhorn without one. And one I found on a title page one day. [Laughter] Ed was furious. [Laughter] They had printed the whole thing. They had a B for an F, in "of." [Laughter]

Teiser: Did it go through that way?

Magee: They said nobody else would catch it. And nobody has. [Laughter]

They're not so well known in Europe as, shall we say, Bruce Rogers is, or was. But certainly when their books come up for sale in London they fetch lots of money.

There are a great many collectors of Grabhorn, but they're mainly in this country. There are some

Magee: people who collect Grabhorn complete, or try to. No one has a complete collection, not even Ellie Heller. Nor does Florence Walter.

Teiser: You mean complete as to books or complete as to everything?

Magee: Everything--books, pamphlets.

Teiser: Neither of them has even complete books?

Magee: No. Neither of them. Nobody has. The best collection in public hands is in the Huntington Library.

Teiser: What about USF's collection from William Partmann?

Magee: Oh, no. No. Nothing like complete. Ellie Heller has the best collection and Florence Walter has the second best collection. As I say, of the public libraries, Huntington has the best, and the New York Public. And Wellesley is very good, too. Wellesley has a nice collection. Not as good though as New York Public or Huntington..

Teiser: Are there any large collections in Europe?

Magee: Well, oddly enough, Albert Bender, you know, used to send books to Trinity College, Dublin. And right near the Book of Kells you'll see a little case of California printing--Nash, Grabhorn, Taylor & Taylor. It was there the last time I was there, which was four or five years ago, and it was put in, oh, long

Magee: before Albert died.

Teiser: We were in Paris briefly last year and talking to a bookseller, Jammes, who seemed to know all about the Grabhorns.

Magee: Oh really? Well, a lot of English dealers do too, you know, and a lot of English libraries. The British Museum buys most of the Grabhorn books as they come out. There's a collection now in South Australia which I started, years ago, and they buy everything. Oh, this must have started twelve, fifteen years ago. The public library of South Australia. They've got a fine collection.

And Brigham Young has a good collection too, now, since I've been helping them build up their library.

Teiser: Well, I guess we have covered the Grabhorns fairly well. Shall we, on another occasion, continue and perhaps discuss the other printers that you have known in this area?

Magee: Yes, yes. I know most of them.

Interview, April 9, 1969

Magee: If you've thought of any more questions, maybe I can answer them.

Teiser: You may have spoken of this inferentially. Although, as we were discussing, Ed Grabhorn always thought he was paid too little, actually people who had business dealing with the Grabhorns never came out angry with them, did they? I mean, they were really easy...

Magee: Very. We never had a cross word. Never. Of course Ed had a persecution complex really. That's what it boils down to. Because he was always saying rather unpleasant things about people. I remember-- did you ever know Jackson Burke? Well, Jack and I used to play a game, you know. When he went to see them, he would call me up afterwards and he'd say, "Well, so-and-so got raked over the coals today. You were all right, and Warren Howell got badly raked," and so forth. I'd go up there and he [Ed] would tell me all of these things about nobody paying him, and it was a piteous cry and almost a

Magee: continuous one.

Teiser: It is reflected in his interview and I didn't want it to seem that his character had changed after he became ill if it hadn't.

Magee: No, he was always that way. I mean, ever since I had known him, and I'd known him for well over thirty years.

Teiser: But it was he who always did the business arrangements, was it, rather than Bob?

Magee: Yes, I think so, but they never really were businessmen--ever. They never had any idea of what they were doing financially. I mean, literally, this was the great artist in them, I think. They didn't care about the cost. Of course, as I've written before, when Douglas Watson went in there, you know, as the business manager (I didn't mention his name in the article that I wrote), he drove them up the wall because he'd say, "No, you can't print that." Ed would say, "All right, we'll print so-and-so." "No," Douglas would say. "It's too long a book; it will be too expensive." And they'd argue. It didn't last very long. I don't know how long Watson was there, but probably not more than six months, if that.

Teiser: But it was Ed who did at least nominally handle the business end?

Magee: That's right. But you see, they never did any cost accounting. They never figured out, the way Andy does, exactly the cost of paper, the cost of binding, the time, the cost of composition. Ed would just say, "Oh, it will cost you so much." And most of the time I don't think they made any money.

The Fine Printing Tradition in San Francisco

Teiser: Who are the other printers, then, with whom you have dealt and whom you've known?

Magee: I've dealt with a good many of them--Lawton Kennedy and, of course, I'm very fond of Al Sperisen. He's one of my oldest friends, and I always think he has awfully good ideas. The Black Vine Press, which was, you know, Al and Harold Seeger, did some awfully nice work.

Teiser: Do you think it had a significance in the general flow of fine printing from this area?

Magee: No, I wouldn't think so. After all they were more or less--they were professional printers, of course, but they never printed anything very large or impressive. They did, oh, half a dozen books, I

Magee: suppose, for the Book Club. I remember their keepsakes. I've always liked their work very much.

Of course, Adrian Wilson I think is a very able printer. Have you taped him?

Teiser: Yes. I'd like your ideas about him and your appraisal of his position, his work.

Magee: Well, I think he's important. He doesn't do an awful lot of printing; he does more designing, you know. I'm ashamed to say I haven't read his book which came out about six months ago, on the designing of books, but I'm told it's very good indeed. I think he's very able indeed, and that was a disasterous fire [Adrian Wilson's home and studio burned February 10, 1968]. I had to do the appraisal for him afterwards, from memory really. It was an awful job.

Teiser: When did you first know Adrian?

Magee: Oh, I suppose when he first started the Interplayers. I think that book, Printing for Theater, is a marvelous book. Isn't it funny, I think the price was \$32, and do you know he had a hard time selling it? And now try to find one, just try to find one.

Teiser: If you can, how much does it go for?

Magee: Well, I just sold one for \$165. That's the first one I'd had in two years, three years maybe. It's a

Magee: beautiful book; it's a great book.

Teiser: Did you help him as a young fellow? Did you give him...

Magee: No, I didn't. You see, my publishing, you know, is very sporadic.

Teiser: I mean just in the matter of encouragement or introductions or anything of that sort?

Magee: I can't remember. I've written so much stuff, you know, about people and things that I've really forgotten. Someone is threatening to do a bibliography of me. [Laughter] Well...I haven't got the stuff. This man who is going to do it has most of it, so maybe it will occur one day.

Teiser: Oh, that would be good. That would be a source of an awful lot of...

Magee: Much to my embarrassment.

Teiser: ...source of a large body of information, really.

Magee: Well, it's surprising what you have done and forget about, you know.

Teiser: You mentioned Lawton Kennedy. Has he ever printed for you?

Magee: Yes. He did a little book, very nice little book, on the death of Captain Cook, written by a man called David Samiwell. It's the best account of Cook's death, because Samiwell was there, and it's

Magee: the only really honest account of the death because the official account was just whitewashed badly. The original Samiwell is a very rare book, very rare indeed.

So Lawton printed that for me, and he did a very nice job indeed. Lawton is a good, solid printer, but I think he has no imagination.

Everything the Grabhorns touch has a little magic to it, you know. It's extraordinary. They'd do just one thing--for example, in The Ship of Fools I told you about yesterday, which was Jim Hart's first book, and they wanted to make it a pretty book and so they took woodcuts from the volume and used them as marginal drawings. And they're just enchanting. And the very last one was a man with a horn, in fact. That was their colophon, the "grab-horn," which I thought was ingenious.

And, getting back to Lawton, I mean, I do think he's a very good printer indeed, but all his books look alike. I can see a row of them right there. I could see those twenty miles away and I'd know they were Lawton Kennedy's.

It is curious, isn't it. There are so many good printers in this town.

Teiser: Why do you think it is?

Magee: Everyone has tried to figure this thing out but nobody's been able to. Some think it's the climate. [Laughter]

Teiser: Ed Grabhorn said it was partly the climate that made him come here because of being able to keep paper damp.

Magee: Yes. But then it varies so. That works against it too. I mean, you can get a damp day like this and tomorrow might be just a boiler, you know, with no humidity at all.

Teiser: What are the other theories?

Magee: Well, I don't know. Of course they had a very early printer here who was a damned good one; that was Bosqui, Edward Bosqui. And he was the first of the local printers who really studied the book and how it should be made.

And then you had, oh hell, what's the name of the man who followed him? Murdock--that's the man. But then, of course, Taylor and Taylor and Nash came along. But they were so imitative, you know. I mean, they were just imitations of Kelmscott Press and Doves Press.

Teiser: You don't give Nash, then, much...

Magee: I give Nash tremendous credit for certain things. His composition was magnificent, but he never printed

Magee: a book, you know. Never, as I'm sure you know. But, I remember Al Sperisen and I have always talked about the wonderful rules he made. They're just marvelous. No one has ever been able to touch him for that.

I never knew Nash very well, though. He was a grumpy fellow. When I had anything to do with him, he was.

Teiser: Did you ever try to do business with him?

Magee: No, never. No, you see, he went up to Oregon when I was fairly young. You see, I went into business in 1928 and I think by 1935 he had left San Francisco. I'm not sure of the date when he left, but it was before the war.

Teiser: Were you in his printing office?

Magee: Oh, yes. But not often.

Teiser: What was your impression of it?

Magee: Terribly neat. FauntLeRoy, of course, was a neat little man, and a very able man too. But as I recall, all Nash's stuff was printed outside, at some press. FauntLeRoy used to just stand there with the printer, you know, and examine the sheets as they came off the press.

But his Dante is a great book. The four-volume Dante. No doubt about it. But then he could do

Magee: those frightful broadsides for Mrs. Doheny. Have you ever seen them? Oh, they're the most appalling things. They're all done in purple and greens and reds and pinks, and usually religious matters, as you'd expect. Like the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer and that sort of thing. And then he'd turn around and do "When Willie Wet the Bed," you know, that tiresome thing of Eugene Field's.

Did you ever see the wonderful picture of Ed Grabhorn laughing in a chair with a picture of Nash up right above, a photograph of Nash? I used it as a frontispiece of my Grabhorn catalogue.

Teiser: Mrs. Farquhar took it, is that the one?

Magee: That's right, yes.

Well, as you know, I've just written a memorial [of Edwin Grabhorn] for the Roxburghe Club. This is one of five I've done so far. I hope no more. To make five different ones is not very easy, you know. And we're using two or three of Marjorie Farquhar's photographs with that.

Teiser: What are the other memorials?

Magee: Well, I've got two for the Book Club. I wrote the little one that was slipped in, you know, [to the Quarterly News-Letter] that Bill Grover printed. And then I did a piece culled from all the various

Magee: remarks people made about Ed, which was printed in the Quarterly in the body of the text. And then I've done one for the Antiquarian Bookman. Does that make five? Something like that.

It's very difficult, you know, to write five different aspects of him. I mean, as a member of the Roxburghe Club, he hardly ever came to meetings. In fact I've never seen Ed at a meeting of the Roxburghe Club in the fifteen years that I've been a member.

But he was awfully generous about printing for them. He did a wonderful thing on Japanese prints which he gave as a keepsake, with three original prints. That's a nice little rarity too. There were only fifty done.

Ed was very generous that way, and he was awfully good to people who came in and, you know, looked around the press. I think he loved to waste time. I always remember one time going in there. It was about four days before Christmas and Ed had about two dozen Christmas cards to finish up for people, and here he was sweeping the shop out.

[Laughter] He couldn't be bothered to get to the press.

Teiser: Back to the general tradition of printing here and

Teiser: why there have been so many good printers. Do you think they kind of kept generating each other, as you were implying?

Magee: I think they did.

Teiser: Were they drawing each other here?

Magee: Now, whether Ed came because he knew the reputation of Nash--but Nash didn't have much reputation then, you know. His reputation really came in the 'twenties, because when he was at the Tomoye Press, which was Paul Elder's press, you know, he called himself Jack Nash. And then he got kind of high and fancy--he called himself John Henry Nash and put all his Litt. D.'s after it. He was a great showman. I mean, you've seen those Christmas books he did for Clark in Los Angeles, haven't you? They're most elaborate. But you know, I'm told--I don't know this for absolute fact--I'm told he charged \$50,000, which makes it work out at about \$200 a copy. These were given away. But he died broke. Honestly broke.

But I don't think Ed Grabhorn was influenced by anybody, except at the very beginning I think he was much influenced by Bruce Rogers. This I'm sure of. But he cut away from it very rapidly.

Teiser: What other printers have contributed, in your view, to this tradition? Maybe I'm trying to make it more

Teiser: of a unified thing than it is.

Magee: Well, of course, there were the Windsor boys, but they didn't last very long. They were very imitative too, I thought, particularly of Bruce Rogers. They never got away from it. All their books are alike, in my opinion. There was a book they did that I'm very fond of, on tobacco, for the Book Club. It's a real beauty. I'm very fond of that.

I think the Book Club has been a great benefit to many printers around here. It's been far and away the most active Book Club in the country, you know.

Teiser: Are there any others like it in the world, really?

Magee: Well, the Grolier Club in New York is somewhat similar. The Grolier Club is much more social. I've been a member of it for some years. It hasn't benefited me very much, though. I never remember to go there when I'm in New York. [Laughter]

Teiser: Well, the Book Club you have been very active in, haven't you?

Magee: Oh, yes.

Teiser: How long were you editor of the Quarterly?

Magee: Oh, God! It seems forever. I still am. I can't get rid of it. I've been editor for it seems like

Magee: a century. Trouble is every president who comes in, he's always a friend of mine, and he always says, "You will carry on the Quarterly won't you?" I say, "Oh, could I please be relieved?" "No." So I go on, and it stumbles from issue to issue and somehow gets out.

The Post-Grabhorn Printers

Teiser: As editor of that, then, you deal with some of the so-called younger printers now?

Magee: Yes. Well, I don't do very much of the technical end of it. I leave that to Dorothy Whitnah. Arlen Philpott, you know, is the printer of the Quarterly now. The Grabhorns printed it for many, many, many years. And then Taylor and Taylor did it for a year or so, but now we gave it to Arlen.

Teiser: Do you think he's doing a good job?

Magee: Very nice indeed. I think it's very attractive.

Teiser: He's one of the people who's been mentioned as one of the future hopes for the fine printing profession.

Magee: Yes. Well, of course, he got his training at the Grabhorns', you know. I don't think he ever will really break into the sort of big-time printing,

Magee: because he has innumerable children, you know, to support and I think another wife too. His present wife is a darling. And I think he's now printing full time. There was a time when he was sort of moonlighting, printing on the side.

Teiser: Is he doing anything else of significance besides the Quarterly?

Magee: Only my stationery. [Laughter] He does my stationery for me. I've never seen a real book from him. I think one of these days he may do one. He gets help, you know, from Mallette Dean.

Teiser: Yes. Mallette Dean himself has been part of the fine printing scene.

Magee: Yes, he has.

Teiser: He's hard to place in it, however.

Magee: He is difficult. That Physiologus he did for the Book Club is a beautiful book, a lovely book. As a matter of fact, you know, you asked me about Adrian Wilson. The first book that the Roxburghe Club published under what we call the Albert M. Bender Memorial Fund, as the publishing venture is called, was printed by Adrian Wilson. Its title is Bully Waterman, by Richard H. Dillon. I was more or less responsible for this publication--Dick's first. What reminded me of it was the second one was done

Magee: by Mallette Dean, German Travellers in California. A nice little book. Of course, he helps Lew and Dorothy Allen out, you know. And, of course, Lew and Dorothy, you know, are perhaps the only commercial printers--and they are commercial printers and they sell their stuff--working from a handpress. And I think they're just great.

Teiser: You've seen their books on the market over the years. How have they gone?

Magee: Oh, tremendously. Tremendously. I always used to say that one great fault in their books was they have a somewhat pastel quality. And to prove me wrong--I think they must have overheard this--they published Conrad's--oh, which one was it? [Aside: What was that Conrad book that they...? Mrs. Magee: Youth. Magee: Was it Youth? Mrs. Magee: I think so.] Youth, with illustrations by Hughes-Stanton, which had the most staggering bright colors you ever saw in your life. You started every time you looked at the page.

I think that Dorothy usually does the coloring. She always tends toward pastel shades.

Teiser: I have heard that they tend to use too many colors, perhaps.

Magee: Well, I think it probably is quite a valid criticism.

Magee: But their presswork is awfully good. Very good.

Teiser: How have their books appreciated in value?

Magee: You see, they're so limited. Very seldom do they do more than 140 copies of anything, except when they do something for the Book Club and then of course they have to do more. But with only 140, you know-- of course, their books are expensive. They're usually published at around \$60-\$65.

Teiser: Doesn't a large proportion of each edition go into libraries?

Magee: An awful lot does, yes. I've been trying to complete an Allen collection for Yale, and I've still got one book to go. I can't find it.

Teiser: Which one is that?

Magee: Oh, it's an awfully unimportant book. It isn't a book at all, really. It was an elaborate Christmas card; it was Shelley's Ode to the West Wind. And it's six pages, I think, or four pages. But I can't find it. I thought I had one of my own, as I'm sure he sent me one, but it's gone.

His first book is frightfully difficult. It's a book of poems of his father's. I've only seen but one copy of it. It's a terribly rare book.

Teiser: Is it good?

Magee: No. The poems? The poems are frightening.

Teiser: But could you tell from the printing what kind of work he was going to be doing by now?

Magee: Well, it's so long ago since I had this one copy-- it must have been five or six years ago--that I really don't remember. It didn't have any great "oomph" to it. The second book they did was The First Californiac, which is a nice pleasant little book.

Teiser: But their work has grown?

Magee: Oh, grown tremendously. Unfortunately they have been much influenced by the French. They insist on doing this French style of book which I can't bear. Their Polyglot Bibles, for example, is just a bunch of confetti to me. The leaves all fall out. I don't like it at all.

But we've always had a policy at the Book Club, you know, that the printer is never dictated to as to how he should print a book. But in this instance, there was a committee formed, which I was on, to have him explain to us why this book had to be done this way. And he did, and I was still agin it. I think Oscar was the only other person who was agin it too, but he insisted that the printer should have absolutely clear say in it and not be interfered with in any way, by the board of directors or anybody

*The Great Polyglot Bibles.

Magee: else. Which makes sense. You trust a printer to print a book, and let him go ahead and do it.

Teiser: That has been one of the beneficial factors in the club's influence, has it not?

Magee: That's right. And, of course, as you know, we spread our favors at the Book Club. I mean, every printer gets a chance, if he's able to do the work.

Teiser: Stauffacher has printed a few things, hasn't he, for the Book Club?

Magee: Yes. He did that wonderful book on "Catnachery." I'm very fond of it.

Teiser: Where would you place him in this whole scheme?

Magee: I think his work is very good. Jack's a funny boy. I don't know him terribly well; I mean, I've known him for years but...I tried to help him out a little bit when he was first trying to publish books. He published a book on bicycle polo. Did you ever see it? It's the only book on the subject. It's played in India, you know, and refers to polo on a bicycle. I've always tried to sell the books of these young printers, you know to encourage them.

Another one is Don Kelley, of the Feathered Serpent Press. He's been printing the poems, you know, of Professor Richardson* over in Berkeley. Why, I believe Richardson is still alive and I think

*Leon J. Richardson.

Magee: he's in his late nineties. You know, the first book that Don printed, I think, was Old Cronies, which was a book of poems by Professor Richardson. It's a nice little book. He prints occasionally an announcement for the Roxburghe Club. Of course, he's got a full-time job. He used to be at the Academy of Sciences, but now he's doing something else, isn't he? I have the sort of strange feeling that it's something to do with the Sierra Club, but I may be wrong.

Teiser: Is Jack Stauffacher continuing to work and print books?

Magee: Yes, he is. I don't think he's got a press. He may have; I may be wrong about that. I think he just designs a book and has somebody print it. Has a commercial printer print it.

Teiser: What about Brother Antoninus?

Magee: Oh, well, of course, I think he's just great. I'm very, very fond of him and I think he's a marvelous printer. That Psalter, you know, never got off the ground really. He printed about seventy pages of it--is a wonderful thing. Mrs. Doheny, you know, bought the sheets and had them bound and gave them to libraries.

Teiser: Have any ever got on the market?

Magee: Yes, I've sold three of them for immense sums of money; \$750, which is a lot of money. Where are you going to find one? There were only forty-nine of them. It's a beautiful piece of printing, just lovely. I don't pretend to know much about his verse. I published a book of them about a year ago. I did it purely really to help out Ken Carpenter. Do you remember Ken? He's up at the University of Nevada now. He printed it, by hand.

Teiser: What was the title?

Magee: It's called The Springing of the Blade. And it was really a lovely book. I have his first book, A Privacy of Speech. Of course, he [William Everson, now Brother Antoninus] printed a lot of stuff, you know, when he was in the conscientious objector camps. I never knew a man who had so many names for presses. The Untied Press, I can't remember half of them now, but every time he printed a book he had a new name for his press. It was very confusing to bibliographers.

Teiser: Do any of those ever come through your hands?

Magee: I have had them, yes. I've had them all, I think, at one time or another.

Teiser: Do they show any evidences of his future excellence?

Magee: Oh, none whatsoever. They're printed on terrible

Magee: paper and very cramped and show absolutely no feeling for design or anything. But then, of course, when he printed his first real book, A Privacy of Speech, with woodcuts by Mary Fabilli, his genius was immediately apparent. He was--and still is--such a perfectionist you know, that in this particular instance the colophon reads one hundred copies but actually less than sixty got out. The rest of them he threw away. They didn't come up to his standards.

Teiser: Amazing man.

Magee: Extraordinary. I hadn't seen him in about three years until the other day, which is beside the point, but he must have gained something like sixty pounds. He used to be frightfully thin. I mean really a drainpipe. And now he's filled out. Amazing.

These printers come to mind. I had forgotten all about Don Kelley, for example, as being a printer. And, of course, there's Roger Levenson, over in Berkeley. I'm very fond of Roger but he's very temperamental in character. Every time we want him to do something he's always full of enthusiasm to do this thing, and then it all falls apart.

Teiser: Do you admire his printing?

Magee: Yes, in a limited way. Yes, I do. He's learned

Magee: everything probably from Lawton Kennedy. He wouldn't thank me for saying that, but I think it's true.

Haywood Hunt, I think he's still alive, you know. Have you interviewed him? He's a great old character. He owns the only piece of printing of Ed Grabhorn's done in Seattle. It's a little announcement of the opening of the press, and we reproduced it in the bibliography. In fact, I borrowed it from Haywood to do so. I went in about a year ago to see Lawton about something and popped in to see Haywood, and I said, "How about this? Have you still got it?" And he said, "I never had it. Never had it. I don't know what you're talking about." And so I showed it to him in the bibliography. He had the bibliography right there. I said, "This thing." He said, "Never belonged to me." But I know it did. Of course, he's getting pretty old.

Teiser: His memory is a little variable now.

Magee: Is he doing any kind of work at all?

Teiser: He's doing some label printing. I think he's about to retire.

Magee: And, of course, there's Wallace Kibbee.

Teiser: Yes. Have you known him over the years?

Magee: Oh, for many years, yes.

Teiser: Has he ever done any printing for you?

Magee: Not for me, no. I don't think he has. No, I don't think so. No.

Teiser: He has very good taste.

Magee: Yes. That's right. I'm very fond of Wally. But I haven't seen him recently. You see, he's sort of semi-retired. He lives over in Marin County, as I recall.

Teiser: Are there any others who you think of who have been significant in the past, the recent past?

Magee: I think we've covered most of them.

The Economics of Fine Printing

Teiser: The question I keep bringing up in each of these interviews is, what next? What kind of fine printing can continue?

Magee: Well, just so long as we have an inflationary period it will continue. But the cost of printing is getting so great. I mean, I'm just appalled. Just the commercial printing of regular publishers, you know. I mean, I remember I published a novel years ago and it was \$2.50. Now it would be about \$6 if it was published today. It's terrible.

Teiser: Of course, the paperback business has cut into

Teiser: ordinary publishing, I guess, tremendously.

Magee: I suppose it has. I'm out of the new book business entirely. I mean, I came out here...

Teiser: And it doesn't seem to have any relationship at all. I mean, I can see no effect, no crosscurrents at all with fine printing.

Magee: No. But there was a time, of course--there was one publisher who always liked to make good books, and that was Alfred Knopf. He's a great collector of Grabhorn, by the way. All his books show a sense of design at least.

Teiser: How many fine printers are printing here now?

Magee: Adrian Wilson, Grabhorn-Hoyem, Lawton Kennedy and the Allens. There are about four, I would say, that are full time and at it all the time. Because the Allens bring out two books a year, which isn't really very many, but when you consider they're printed by hand and hand illuminated, that's all they can produce.

Teiser: Well, that's a fairly varied group, now that I think of it.

Magee: Yes, it really is. And they're all quite different. Lawton is the most commercial of them, of course.

Teiser: Although Adrian does a lot of very business-like designing for Eastern publishers.

Magee: Yes, I know he does. There was a time when he was designing for the University of California Press.

Teiser: I think he still may occasionally.

Magee: Yes, that's right. You saw Jane Wilson's checklist in the Quarterly, didn't you?

Teiser: Yes, I did. Do you think they all will continue as long as we have inflation?

Magee: Well, I suppose so. I'd hate to see if we had a depression how many would go to the wall. I worry a little bit about Grabhorn and Hoyem because they've got so many mouths to feed down there. I mean, there's Andy and Jane and Bob and the pressman. That's a lot of mouths.

Teiser: Yes. They seem to be doing a good deal, though.

Magee: They are. They haven't been very successful with their publishing ventures, I'm sorry to say.

Teiser: That book of Jane's, I gather, hasn't really gone like wildfire.

Magee: No, and The Pearl didn't go very well. They asked my advice about The Pearl. I said, "Well, I don't think it's going to sell, because nobody gives a damn about a tenth century poem really. Even in a modern version." The original's unreadable, sort of a Beowulf type thing, you know. I'm afraid it laid a rather serious egg, which is a pity.

Magee: They're doing this book on Alaska. A trip this artist [Otis Oldfield] made.

Teiser: They're publishing that themselves, are they?

Magee: Yes.

Teiser: The Allens, of course, seem to me to take themselves a little out of the category, not because they (we went into this in their interview) don't operate under strict economic rules now, but that they were so well financed to begin with, I think, that they almost are out of the category.

Magee: Well, they are really because they don't have to print for a living. They do it and are dedicated and professional printers. But I know what you mean. They don't have to keep hours and they don't have to probably consider costs as much as others.

The Grabhorns had an awful time in 1929, rather I should say 1930, 1931 or 1932. That's when they started to print the Americana series, producing books at a low cost. Before they produced books that sold for \$100, but they then produced a book which sold for \$2.50. And at that the whole thing-- The Americana series--would have collapsed if it hadn't been for Joseph Henry Jackson giving the Murieta a terrific review, which sold out the whole series. They had sold only forty copies of the

*Joaquin Murieta, The Brigand Chief of California, 1932.

Magee: Murieta to date, and then Joe reviewed it in the Chronicle and the Grabhorns sold out the entire edition. It's extraordinary the hold that man had on the public. He could sell out an edition.

Joe used to come to my shop--we used to have lunch together at least once a week or sometimes twice a week--and he was always in the shop, picking up news about what was going on.

Writing and Editing

Teiser: I was talking with Harriet Parsons, and she suggested that I remind you to tell a bit about your own writing. She also said that when she came to you to apply for the job as secretary, you asked her if she often cried. You had apparently had a secretary who did.

Magee: My first secretary was Lee Orford, who does "The Gory Road" [San Francisco Chronicle mystery book review column], you know, and writes detective stories. Then, let's see...I can't remember. I guess Harriet came to me just during the war, when I was out of the shop an awful lot. But as for my writings, I don't know what to say about them, really.

Magee: I've published a novel.

Teiser: Have you always been interested in writing?

Magee: Yes. I edited a magazine when I was nine.

Teiser: Devoted to what subject?

Magee: Well, it was devoted to all sorts of things--stamp collecting, bird's eggs, the kind of things kids enjoy. It didn't last long. I think there were only two numbers, if there were that. This was when I was in my prep school, and I was one of the editors of the thing. It was all in aid of Blue Cross, which was for horses what Red Cross was--and is--to people. This was during World War I. And one thing I hate is horses, you know. I can't bear them. I think they have four very dangerous corners and large teeth and every time I get on one I'm gone. They know I hate them and they throw me off. As I told you yesterday, I come from a long line of huntin' and fishin' and shootin' squires on my mother's side, but it's left out of me. I can't remember much about the magazine really except it was one of those sorts of mimeographed jobs that we sold to our parents for the exorbitant sum of a shilling or something, in order to support hospitals for these horses that got wounded in World War I. [Laughter] My contribution to the magazine was a

Magee: poem. I think it must have been a great tragedy; it made my father laugh.

But for serious writing, I wrote a novel which Houghton Mifflin published in 1941 called Jam Tomorrow. It had a merry little sale. It squeaked into a second edition. And then, of course, Pearl Harbor came along and that ruined everything. Well, for a long time, you know, my friends--the cads--would telephone me and say, "I saw a copy of Jam Tomorrow for forty-nine cents. Can I buy it for you?" [Laughter] But now I've had the laugh on them; the other day I saw a copy catalogued by a Southern California dealer for \$10. I was talking to this man and I said, "I bet you didn't sell that copy of Jam Tomorrow for \$10." He said, "Yes, I did, and I sold it to the Huntington Library." [Laughter]

But I've, oh, I've published a few things. I published a small article in the Atlantic Monthly one time, but most of my stuff has been very ephemeral. I've edited a lot of stuff--introductions. I've done a couple for the Book Club. I did Ace High,* which was a dime novel they reprinted.

Teiser: Harriet was mentioning a book that she was very fond of, about the adventures of a cat. Do you remember it?

*Tripp, C.E. Ace High, The 'Frisco Detective.
San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1948.

Magee: Oh, yes. That was my cat in Berkeley, who decided that he didn't like Berkeley at all. We moved over there (my daughter was in college) and he took off. It was called, My Ascent of Grizzly Peak, and he was gone for about ten days, and we gave him up for lost, you know. And then one day he just showed up at the window and he was very hungry and his paws were very scratched and he came in and he punished us for ten days. And he lived to be almost nineteen. I'm very fond of cats. At one time we had fourteen. It was all caused by one mother who produced two litters a year of four cats. [Laughter] It never varied. And you run out of friends after a while, you know. You run out of friends, at least, who will take a kitten off your hands.

Teiser: Who printed it?

Magee: Grabhorn. It's frightfully difficult to get now. Awfully difficult. Because the aelurophiles want it apparently as well as Grabhorn people.

Teiser: Yes. I suppose they're worse than rail fans, aren't they?

Magee: Why, I suppose, yes. People are never half-hearted about cats, you know. You either love them or you hate them. I'm very fond of them.

Teiser: What was the Atlantic Monthly article?

Magee: Oh, that was not an article really, it was sort of a short story. That was some years ago.

Teiser: Do you write fiction at all any more?

Magee: I'm always starting them and I always drop them. Jam Tomorrow was fiction. And, I've really forgotten what I have written. Isn't that awful? I'd like to have a list for the bibliography this man is compiling.

Teiser: Do you want to put his name in the record?

Magee: Yes. It's J. E. (Jack) Reynolds, who is a bookseller in Van Nuys and a very old friend of mine. He collects Mageeana. There was an amusing episode. Do you know the Sacramento Book Collectors' Club?

Teiser: Yes.

Magee: Well, do you know Fred Wemmer? Well, apparently, for some strange reason, Fred Wemmer's wife collects me. [Laughter] All the members of the Sacramento Book Club were asked their collecting interests, and people wrote "Western Americana," "Alpine," and "Voyages to the northwest," and various things, and Fred Wemmer's wife just wrote "Magee," which confused everybody. [Laughter] I was ineffably touched.

Now what have I done else? Of course, I did the bibliography of the Book Club, you know, and

- Magee: of course, the two Grabhorns in collaboration.
And, of course, you'd be surprised how many things I've written for the Quarterly when I had to fill up space under pseudonyms. [Laughter]
- Teiser: Some day someone is going to go through the Book Club Quarterly and find all the names that don't exist....
- Magee: That's right.
- Teiser: ...because didn't Oscar Lewis do the same thing?
- Magee: Yes, he did [laughter] and I followed suit.
- Teiser: I tried to get him to remember as many as possible of his pseudonyms. What were yours?
- Magee: Pseudonymous Bosch was one. And, oh, I've signed people's initials. I really can't remember. But Pseudonymous Bosch was my favorite.
- Teiser: [Laughing] Can you spell it?
- Magee: It's awfully difficult. Bosch is B-o-s-c-h.
- Teiser: [Laughter] Yes...
- Magee: [Laughter] You know that, I'm sure.
- Teiser: But Pseudonymous?
- Magee: Pseudonymous--it's impossible to spell. I'm a very poor speller.
- Teiser: I'll look it up. Actually when did you start editing the Book Club Quarterly?
- Magee: I knew you were going to ask me that question, and

Magee: I really don't think I could tell you. I would say--Dorothy, do you know when I started editing the Quarterly?

Mrs.

Magee: I think about 17 or 18 years ago.

Magee: Is it that long? Oh, it wasn't that long ago, was it?

Teiser: Did you take over just after Oscar Lewis?

Magee: No, no I didn't. Lew Allen was editor for a while, and then Donald Biggs took over for I think two or three numbers, and I think I took it over from Donald Biggs. But it seems to me I've done it forever. Oh, it's kind of fun.

Teiser: What other things have you edited or written?

Magee: Well, I have been chairman of the Library Committee at the Bohemian Club and have edited many of the Library Notes. We get them out sporadically--two or three a year. I have also written a Grove Play--1964, I think. It was called The Buccaneers and was based on Treasure Island. Next year, 1970, the Club will produce another Grove Play of mine. It's called The Bonny Cravat and is based--very loosely--on Alfred Noyes' poem The Highwayman.

Teiser: Anything else for the Bohemian Club?

Magee: Oh, a few Thursday night shows--skits, one-act

Magee: plays--a Thanksgiving show--oh, and a Christmas play.

Teiser: Which of your writings do you think the best?

Magee: That's a difficult question. I think perhaps a piece I did for the Book Club Quarterly called "The Afternoon of a Poet." This was an experience I had with James Stephens, the Irish poet. It was reprinted in Second Reading. This was a Book Club publication, edited by Oscar Lewis.

Teiser: Any others?

Magee: Well, there was an article I did for an anthology of true crime. My piece was about an Oakland dentist. It was called "The Death of a Dentist." The anthology was The Graveside Companion, published in New York.

All the pieces were originals, written expressly for the collection. But a funny thing happened a couple of years after the book was published. I got a letter from a New York literary agent saying that they had had an offer from an English magazine of \$42.00 for the rights to publish this "Death of a Dentist." I was curious to find out what magazine. I think I wrote the agent asking, but he never answered. I never did find out. I remember I spoke to some of the other contributors

Magee: wondering if they had had similar offers. But they hadn't. I can only imagine it was bought by a dental magazine. A trade journal sort of thing.

Teiser: To get back to printing in California, have you ever done any printing yourself.

Magee: Yes, but only as a rank amateur. Many years ago I suggested to Jackson Burke that he give a class in printing. He agreed and four of us signed up. There were myself, Ellie Heller, her sister Aline Levison* and a man called Burgess. I can't remember anything about this fellow. I haven't seen him from that day to this. I think some hobby had been suggested to him by his psychiatrist. How he found out about us I can't imagine.

Teiser: Did you actually print anything?

Magee: Yes. We did a broadside. I remember it was just after war broke out in Europe and I suggested we print George the Sixth's speech to the British people. I wonder if I still have my copy. We each pulled two copies, I think. Perhaps I gave them away, though I can't imagine who would want them.

Teiser: Did you enjoy printing?

Magee: Yes and no. I found it very difficult to set type because I'm left-handed. They don't make sticks

*Mrs. George Levison.

Magee: for left-handed people. So I was always the slowest in the class. But I did enjoy it. The company was good.

Actually I had done some printing before this-- with Paul Bissinger on a small table press. I believe he called it The Russian Hill Press. Come to think of it, I don't know why; he lived then in Pacific Heights--on Divisadero. Paul learned to print from Hartley Jackson, then, I think, at the Stanford Press. Jackson also taught Jim Hart, I believe. Though I'm not sure of this.

Paul Bissinger's first book was a Lafcadio Hearn short story. He printed twelve copies. Quite a rarity these days. I set a little of the type for this. I then printed by myself a poem of G. K. Chesterton's--"The Donkey." It's a lovely poem. I don't remember how many, but it couldn't have been more than ten copies. I came across a copy the other day. It's really not bad.

That's been the extent of my printing adventures which isn't very much I must confess.

Teiser: Al Sperisen told me you had done something for the Grolier Club. What was that?

Magee: Oh, yes. Carroll Harris* wanted to do a keepsake

*Col. Carroll T. Harris of Mackenzie & Harris.

Magee: for the members of the Grolier Club when they visited San Francisco in--I'm guessing now--1960. 1961? He suggested a book about fine Northern California presses and binderies. I remember he rang me up and asked me to compile it. * I said, "But, Carroll, they're coming in about two weeks from now. I can't possibly get it done in time." "Oh, yes, you can. The Grabhorns are going to drop everything to print it. The books will be exhibited at the Legion of Honor for the Grolier dinner out there."

Teiser: Who put on the dinner?

Magee: The Book Club of California, I think. Or perhaps it was the Roxburghe Club. Yes, it was the Roxburghers who put it on.

Teiser: And did you get the keepsake finished in time?

Magee: I did but it damn near killed me. I wrote the whole thing in forty-eight hours. And it's a book--a small folio of some thirty to forty pages. It's a very handsome book, incidentally.

*Magee, David. Fine Printing and Bookbinding from San Francisco and its Environs. San Francisco: [Privately published] 1961.

INDEX

- Allen (Lewis and Dorothy), 55-56, 57, 64, 66
 Angelo, Valenti; 10, 11, 14
Antiquarian Bookman, 50
 Antoninus, Brother, 59, 69
- Bancroft Library, 27
 Bender, Albert, 11, 15, 16-19, 20, 26, 40
 Biggs, Donald, 73
 Bissinger, Paul, 76
 Black Vine Press, 43
 Bohemian Club, 73
 Book Club of California, 18, 19, 22, 37, 38, 49, 52, 57, 77
 Book Club of California Quarterly, 49, 52-53, 54, 72-74
 Bosch, Pseudonymous (Pseud.), 72
 Bosqui, Edward, 47
 Brigham Young University, 28, 29, 40
 Burgess, _____, 75
 Burke, Jackson, 41, 75
- California Historical Society, 27
 Carpenter, Ken, 60
 Cerf, Bennett, 37
 Chesterton, G.K., 7, 8, 76
 Children's Bookshop, 5
 Currer, Mary Frances Richardson, 1
 Curwen Press, 7, 8
- Dean, Mallette, 54, 55
 Doheny, Mrs. Estelle, 49, 59
 Doves Press, 47
 Dreis, Hazel, 32
- Elder, Paul, see Tomoye Press
 Everson, William, see Antoninus, Brother
- Fabilli, Mary, 61
 Farquhar, Francis, 14
 Farquhar, Marjorie (Mrs. Francis), 49
 FauntLeRoy (Joseph), 48
 Feathered Serpent Press, 58
 Franciscan Type, 13

- Gentry, Helen, 31
 Goudy, Frederic, 13
 Grabhorn bibliography (First), 11-15, 18
 Grabhorn bibliography (Second), 19-21
 Grabhorn, Bob (Robert), 31, 33, 36, 42
 Grabhorn, Ed[win], 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 21, 41, 42, 47, 50,
 51 and passim
 Grabhorn-Hoyem Press, 29, 64, 65
 Grabhorn, Irma Engel, 33, 34
 Grabhorn, Jane, 13, 30, 31, 32, 33, 65
 Grabhorn, Marjorie, 34
 Grabhorn, Mary, 35
 Grabhorn Press, 10, 11, 15, 19, 21, 24, 20, 30, 33, 34,
 35, 37, 39, 40, 53, 66, 70, 77 and passim
 Grolier Club, 52, 76, 77
 Grover, Bill (Sherwood), 21, 30, 49
 Grover, Dorothy, 31
- Harding, George, 14-15
 Harris, Carroll T., 76, 77
 Hart, Jim (James D.), 9, 46, 76
 Heber, Richard
 Heller, Ellie (Mrs. Edward), 10, 11, 19, 39, 75
 Hewitt, Tom, 9, 10
 Howell, John, 3-4, 5, 6
 Howell, Warren, 41
 Hoyem, Andrew, 34, 35
 Hughes-Stanton, (Blair), 55
 Hunt, Haywood, 62
 Huntington Library, 22, 39
- Jackson, Hartley, 76
 Jackson, Joseph Henry, 66-67
 Johnson, Cecil, 18
 Johnson, James, 17, 18
 Jones, George, 38
 Jones, St. Claire, 15
- Kelley, Don, 58-59, 61
 Kelmscott Press, 47
 Kennedy, Lawton, 43, 45, 46, 62, 64
 Kibbee, Wallace, 62-63
 Knopf, Alfred, 64
- Levenson, Roger, 61
 Levison, Aline (Mrs. George), 75
 Lewis, Oscar, 57, 72, 73
 Lyman, George D., 26

McArthur, "Tam", 27
 Mills College, 16, 26
 Moore, Miss _____, 5
 Murdock, _____, 47

 Nash, John Henry, 39, 47, 48, 49, 51
 New York Public Library, 39

 Oldfield, Otis, 66
 Orford, Lee, 67

 Parsons, Harriet, 67
 Partmann, William, 39
 Philpott, Arlen, 53, 54
 Powell, Mrs. _____, 6

 Random House, 37
 Reynolds, J.E. (Jack), 7
 Richardson, Prof. Leon J., 58-59
 Rogers, Bruce, 18, 38, 51, 52
 Roxburghe Club, 49, 50, 77
 Russian Hill Press, 76

 Sacramento Book Collectors' Club, 71
 Samiwell, David, 45
 Schulz, Dr. H.C., 22
 Seeger, Harold, 43
 Sierra Club, 59
 Simon, Oliver, 8
 Sotheby's, 2
 Sperisen, Albert, 43, 48, 76
 Stauffacher, Jack, 58, 59
 Stephens, James, 74
 Stern, John, 3
 Stern, Mrs. Sigmund, 3
 Straus, Levi (and family), 3

 Taylor, Edward Robeson, 19
 Taylor & Taylor, 39, 47, 53
 Tomoye Press, 51
 Trinity College, Dublin, 39
 Type, see Franciscan

 University of San Francisco, 39
 Untied Press, 60

Wagner, Henry, 27
Walter, Florence (Mrs. John I.), 20, 39
Watson, Douglas, 10, 42
Wellesley College Library, 39
Wemmer, Fred, 71
Wheeler, Bill, 32
Wilson, Adrian, 44-45, 54, 64
Wilson, Jane, 65
Wilson, Peter, 2
Windsor Press, 17, 18, 52

Young, W.R.K., 19
Yunge-Bateman, Jack, 7

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THE INTERVIEW

- Ace High, The 'Frisco Detective, 69
Aesop's Fables, 32, 37
- Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1915-1940, 11-15, 18
Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1940-1956, 19-21
Bully Waterman, 54
- Catnachery, 58
- First Californiac, The, 57
- German Travellers in California, 55
Great Polyglot Bibles, The, 57
- Hundredth Book, The, 19
- Joaquin Murieta, the Brigand Chief of California, 66-67
- King Lear, 7-8
- Laugh of Christ and Other Original Linnets, The, 15
Landless John, 30
Leaves of Grass, 32, 37
- Magee, David
The Bonny Cravat, 73
The Buccaneers, 73
Jam Tomorrow, 69, 71
My Ascent of Grizzly Peak, 70
- Maundevile, see Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile
- Pearl, The, 65
Physiologus, 54
Printing for Theater, 44-45
Privacy of Speech, A, 60, 61
- Richardson, Leon J., Old Cronies, 57

Second Reading, 74

Shakespeare folios leaf book, 24

Shelley's Ode to the West Wind, 56

Ship of Fools, The, 9, 46

Springing of the Blade, The, 60

Tempest, The, 36

Victorian catalogue, 28

Voilage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile, 32, 37

Youth, 55

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.

