

Collecting Antarcticana Some Highlights from the Joe Fitzsimmons Collection

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[The words in red indicate an image was shown.]

In the late 1960s I worked not far from here at Columbia University. Somehow—I wish I could remember exactly how—I got interested in book collecting. Back then Columbia had a graduate **school of library service**, so-called, and I audited several of the course offerings including the rare book course. I also read a few books on book collecting. What I learned was that you can't collect English literature, there's too much of it. You have to specialize. I had recently read **Cherry-Garrard's *The Worst Journey in the World*** and had enjoyed it. I read a few other Antarctic books and enjoyed them too. So I decided that I would collect Antarctic books; that would be my specialty. After all, how many could there be? Well, as it turns out, quite a few. At the moment I have 1,823 Antarctic titles in my collection. Plus a lot of pamphlets & booklets, maps, paintings, sculpture, and other art work, stamps, flags, ephemera and artifacts including Cherry-Garrard's **sledge harness**, Captain Scott's **pipe** from the tent he died in, and a **flag** Amundsen took over the North Pole and to the South Pole. All of this stuff is housed in my **library** in an old brick textile mill in downtown Jaffrey. My library is just over 600 square feet which is about the same size as Shackleton's Hut at Cape Royds.

The beginnings of my collection had three sources. The first was **Francis Edwards**, a well-established London bookseller of the sort that is now close to extinct. They issued catalogues and every third or fourth one was Voyages & Travel. In these there was always a Polar section.

The second source was 4th Avenue here in New York. This was then Book Row. There were scores of secondhand bookshops along this short avenue and in the immediate neighborhood, the one I remember most was **Biblo & Tannen**. I believe there are only two in the vicinity now: the well-known **Strand Bookstore** and **Alabaster Bookshop**. I picked up lots of two and three dollar books on 4th Avenue.

And the third was Swann Galleries which is still going strong here in New York. I bought my first book there in 1971. Back then it catered mostly to the trade. The décor was non-existent.

In the years since, my interest has waxed and waned. A year might go by without a purchase. Many of the books that were added were from booksellers such as **John Simper**, **Bob Finch**, **Jay Platt**, **Colin Bull**, **Gaston Renard**, **Paul Davies**, **Stuart Leggatt**, **Cameron Treleaven**, **Maggs**, **Sotherans**, **Bluntisham Books**, et al. A few books from **Christies**; none—so far—from Bonhams, I'm afraid.

Early on I decided not to collect Antarctic books in languages other than English and not to collect scientific reports. Of course, later I changed my mind and started collecting both to the detriment of my bank account. Overall I was very lucky to start

out when prices were much lower. Oh! And like Joe I'm mono-polar, not bi-polar. Just the Antarctic. It's less expensive that way.

Just recently I was at a small dinner party that included a prominent Boston bookseller husband & wife team. They characterized me as an "accumulator" not a collector. True, with a few exceptions I tend to buy all new Antarctic books and don't care that much about condition and dust jackets and association copies and such (I'd rather have them than not but generally don't want to pay the hefty premium), but I see myself as building a collection that I can use and that can be used by writers, students, researchers. And that happens: people visit my library for a day or perhaps two and use it for their purposes. But I digress. . .

So enough about me. It's now time to shift over to Joe. How did he come to create such a collection? For Joe I suspect it had something to do with his **Uncle Roy** who was a participant on Byrd's third Antarctic Expedition as we can see in the front matter of the catalogue. So whereas I was interested in book collecting and was looking for a suitable subject area to focus on, Joe had a subject in mind and was looking for a way to pursue it.

Joe approached his new hobby in a different way. He essentially had a list of books and checked each one off as it was added to his collection. His list was **Sydney Spence's Antarctic bibliography** which first appeared in 1966. Joe had a bespoke copy made, blank pages interleaved so he could record purchases. One purchase led to another; eventually he had accumulated perhaps 75% of the titles.

Joe and Beth traveled the world in search of books. They of course did some other things in those travels but searching for books gave a certain direction to their trips.

Among the dealers Joe depended on in developing his collection were, first and foremost, Jay Platt of the **West Side Book Shop** in the Fitzsimmons' home town of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

I too used Spence and added my catalogue number of the titles in my collection in the margins. I have long abandoned that in favor of doing the same with **Michael Rosove's** far larger and more detailed 2001 masterful bibliography.

Joe started actively building the collection around 1997. We are now on the eve of all these books finding new homes. Tom Lamb here at Bonhams described the offerings as perfectly suited for the beginning and aspiring collector. At the first **SouthPole-sium** held in my home town of Jaffrey, New Hampshire, back in 2012, we had a spirited discussion moderated by the distinguished librarian and polar collector, **David Stam**, about what collectors might do with their collections as they advanced into their golden years. There seems to be two avenues to consider: The first is to give the collection to some institution which, if one also gives a healthy endowment as well, a handsome catalogue and perhaps a cocktail reception will result. The second is to consign everything to auction and give a new generation of collectors the opportunity to enjoy the thrill of the chase and build their own libraries. Joe has decided on the second and here we are tonight. Tomorrow his collection will be dispersed and his labors will have come to an end.

Let's look at a few of the highpoints of the sale tomorrow; ones that particularly interest me:

Lot 1 is the first edition of Amundsen's *Sydpolen*. That's the one on the left. My copy's the one on the right. The color is the same just not in the photos. But do you see any real difference? The Norwegian flag is in color in Joe's copy. It's uncolored in mine. Which is better? Well, it looks better in color and in fact the first issue was in color; later ones weren't. Why? Who knows; perhaps it was more expensive to do it in color. So Joe's copy is the one to have.

Lot 2 is the first English edition of the same title. Estimate is \$1,500 to \$2,000. Now as it turns out my copy of this was the first rare Antarctic book that I recorded in my chronological list of books purchased, not just Antarctic. It's #155. I obtained this at a **Christie's Montreal** sale on February 11, 1970, nearly 50 years ago. I did it through a mail bid. What did I pay? \$18! No buyer's premium.

This raises a point. Some collectors are very reticent to divulge what they paid for a book. I'm not that way at all (particularly when the cost is dramatically lower than what one would pay today).

Lot 19 is the classic Antarctic book, Cherry-Garrard's *The Worst Journey in the World*. This is the book that got me, and many others, hooked on the Antarctic. This first Antarctic book I ever bought (#18 in my list). It was a 1965 edition and it was the first Antarctic book that I bought from Francis Edwards, May 22, 1969, price 30/-

Since then I've obtained over **20 editions**. My first edition I bought in 1971 from Henry Sotheran at £45. Sadly it didn't come with the tipped-in labels; Joe's copy does.

Many of you probably know the story behind the title of the book. It was originally going to be entitled *Never Again: Scott, Some Penguins and the Pole*. Once finished Cherry admitted to his friend and neighbor, George Bernard Shaw, that he didn't care for the title much and remarked in the same breath that it was *The Worst Journey in the World*. "There's your title," Shaw exclaimed.

Lot 54 is the four published volumes of *The South Polar Times*. Like the *Aurora Australis*, this expedition "newsletter" is a cornerstone of any Antarctic collection. The first issues to appear were edited by Shackleton and the second by Bernacchi during the Discovery expedition. Anonymous contributions were placed in a specially made **letterbox**. You can see it today at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge.

The issues making up Volume 3 were edited by Cherry-Garrard during the Terra Nova expedition. A single original copy of each of the monthly issues was produced and circulated among the members of the expedition. The published facsimiles appeared later and were issued by Smith, Elder & Co. which also published *The Voyage of the Discovery* and *Scott's Last Expedition* (Reginald Smith was Cherry-Garrard's cousin). Both of these titles are in tomorrow's sale.

The fourth volume didn't appear until recently. It was also edited by Cherry-Garrard but it lacked the marvelous artwork of Dr. Wilson (who by then had died with the Polar Party) and at the time was thought not worthy of publication. It finally appeared in 2010 as an imprint of SPRI and John & Sue Bonham. (It actually first

appeared three years earlier as a limited edition—7 copies—issued by the Erebus & Terror Press which is my imprint. It's a long story which I'll leave to another time.) The original Discovery expedition South Polar Times are at the [Royal Geographical Society](#). The originals that became the published Volume III are in the [British Library](#) (bound in elaborate sealskin bindings which can be seen beside Cherry-Garrard). And the single volume making up published Volume IV is at [SPRI](#).

Joe's set is distinguished in two ways: the first two volumes are association copies; they were owned by [Michael Barne](#), a member of the expedition. And these volumes sport their original dust wrappers which is quite uncommon and highly desirable.

Lot 55 is the *Aurora Australis*, the highpoint of any Antarctic collection and of this sale. As we know, it was the first (and possibly the only) book written, edited, illustrated, printed, bound and issued in the Antarctic during Shackleton's Nimrod expedition. The estimate for Joe's copy is \$70,000-\$100,000, the highest of the polar lots. The record price is held by a nearly pristine copy that appeared in the Sotheby's Franklin Brooke-Hitching sale of 2015: £122,500! My copy? I bought it in 1978 for £1,000 (\$1,925), the most I had ever paid for anything up to that time other than my first edition 1967 [Camaro](#) which cost not much more. Before I actually paid Francis Edwards' bill I took the copy to Harvard's [Houghton Library](#) to collate it against its copy. I went page-by-page until I was well past the halfway point. I came to an [illustration](#) in the Harvard copy entitled "Many Shekels were Needed for the Ship to Go Forth." It was missing from the one I was about to pay for. This caused me to pause. Now, this illustration appears on the verso with text on the recto so it would stand to reason that if the illustration was missing from my copy then there would be missing text as well. But the text in my copy reads right through with no gaps. Conversely, I had text that the Harvard copy did not have! The *Aurora* is printed on individual sheets that were punched and laced together. At first my theory was that a leaf (illustration on one side, text on the other) was missing from the copy. Either it had never been there in the first place or it had been, for whatever reason, removed from the copy. Perhaps someone fancied the illustration. But the problem was that there was new text where the illustration had earlier (?) been. The [Cape Royd's](#) hut is just over 600 square feet. The *Aurora* was produced during the winter months when all the expedition members were present and in residence. It was dark and cold outside and inside. It was dirty and a lot of activity was happening. I reckoned that the illustration in question somehow got destroyed. Perhaps stepped on or broken in some way. If so, there would be two choices: The artist Marston could turn out another one or the missing illustration could be replaced by new text. The latter would be the quicker and easier solution. (The collector Marty Greene has advanced an entirely different theory.) So I had without much effort discovered a variant and I have the satisfaction of seeing it referred to in catalogues (though not this one!).

That variant—no illustration—occurs in at least 8 copies out of the 67 I've inspected or know about. So it's rarer but that doesn't seem to affect the value one way or another.

A second variant has to do with the color lithographic [title page](#). On at least 31 of those I know of there appears over Mt Erebus what I earlier described as a "propeller"

device. After a lot of thought and discussion with other *Aurora* owners, I've concluded that this depicts a plume (poorly rendered) from this southernmost active volcano. The thing is, though, that some copies have this plume and others don't. One wonders why. And those that don't have the plume (at least 19 including Joe's) have in the same location on the illustration a ghosting effect resembling the plume. The lithographic plates used by the artist Marston were aluminum. Was the plume printed a number of times, then erased from the plate?

When the first facsimile of the *Aurora* was published by Bluntisham Books in 1986, 58 copies of the limited edition were issued, this being the number of copies worldwide that had been tracked down by then (by John Millard and myself). Copies continue to appear and the number now is 84 confirmed copies. Copies weren't numbered and twice Shackleton mentioned in writing differing numbers. The one mentioned in the catalogue is a letter accompanying a copy that Shackleton gave to **J. P. Morgan**. It reads, in part, "There are only 80 copies in existence that being the number printed and only 30 have been distributed." (A copy that sold at Christie's in 2000 was inscribed by Shackleton "To **Ernest Perris** from Ernest Shackleton. To one Editor of one million five hundred thousand copies per week from the Editor of ninety copies per year.")

Back to the J.P. Morgan copy. Who would have thought a 20th century book on the Antarctic would reside in this library known for its incunabula and medieval treasures? I discovered it this way. The **New York Public Library** has an *Aurora* in its Spencer Collection. When I went to see the copy in 1980 I was told it would take 2 or 3 hours to fetch it. So with that time to kill I headed down Madison Avenue to the **Morgan** thinking I would see what ever exhibit was on at the time. I did so and just before leaving I thought I might as well consult the library's catalogue and see if there were any Antarctic titles. And there it was, an *Aurora*, with the letter inside. Either Shackleton had received a donation from Morgan or was hoping for one in the future.

We'll never know for sure how many copies were issued. One of the reasons why is that apparently not all were bound up at Cape Royds. Printed sheets and presumably packing case boards were taken back to England and for several years after the expedition copies would be assembled when Shackleton thought he might present some likely donor a copy.

A notable book is missing from this sale. That's the edition deluxe of Shackleton's *The Heart of the Antarctic*, three volumes bound in vellum. I mention it even though it's not in the sale for a reason I'll get to in a moment. It's not a particularly difficult book to find but now pretty expensive. The third volume is *The Antarctic Book* which is notable because it is signed by all the members of the shore party. I bought a copy of just this one volume back in 1971 for £95. I've never been married but I *have* married a book or two over the years. I kept my eye open for the first two volumes so I could marry off my copy of *The Antarctic Book*. I was finally successful in 1988 but it cost me \$1,550.

I'd like to close this talk by saying something about Shackleton and books, graphics & printing. It seems to me that Shackleton more than any other polar explorer was drawn to editing and had an eye for good printing and design. His first effort as an editor was *O.H.M.S. An Illustrated Record of the Voyage of S.S. "Tintagel Castle" Conveying Twelve Hundred Soldiers from Southampton to Cape Town March 1900*. During the

Discovery expedition he edited *The South Polar Times*. During Nimrod he was editor of the *Aurora Australis* and must have been behind the edition deluxe of *The Heart of the Antarctic*. The last lot in this sale that suggests Shackleton's sensitivity to good graphic design is #57, the *Prospectus* for the Endurance expedition. Typographically it's a very impressive effort. There were two versions, as explained in the catalogue. The other is in the sale as well, Lot 120. Why not bid on both?

Good luck tomorrow, Joe!