

Jake Zeitlin, Impresario of the Printed Word

By Jacob L. Chernofsky

Jacob Israel Zeitlin, 84, on August 30, in Los Angeles, author, poet, and eminent rare book dealer, for many years recognized as the dean of the antiquarian book trade in the United States. For more than half a century, Jake Zeitlin was the friend and confidant of many of the nation's great authors and a mentor to two generations of rare book dealers.

An authority on early books in science, medicine and other fields, as well as art, his expertise was sought after by leading scholars and academic institutions. He was responsible for helping to build major collections in many institutions.

Born in Racine, Wisconsin, November 4, 1902, Jake Zeitlin moved with his family to Fort Worth, Texas, where he attended Central High School and worked in his father's vinegar works. It was in that city that he first got to know Carl Sandburg, who remained a friend until the latter's death in 1967. He also began his writing career and got his first exposure to bookselling in Fort Worth.

Trek to Los Angeles

In 1925, Jake walked and hitch-hiked to Los Angeles where he had decided to settle. His first job in California was for the *B'nai B'rith Messenger*, a local Anglo-Jewish community weekly newspaper. His career in journalism did not last long and he went to work for the Doheny Oil Company, driving a truck and performing gardener's chores.

He continued to write and publish and launched his career in bookselling when he was employed by the Holmes Book Company, and the Book Departments of May Company and Bullock's.

In 1926, his poem "Gypsy Nights" was published in the *San Francisco Review*, a work that was later reprinted in the L. A. G. Strong Anthology, *Best Poems of 1926*.

Jake's first book of poems, *Whispers and Chants*, was published in 1927 in an edition of 500 copies by the Lantern Press in San Francisco. His friend, Carl Sandburg, contributed the Foreword:

"Now we have the boy, the young man, Jake Zeitlin, stepping forth as a poet. Dreams and impressions come to him and they take word shapes, and he must put down the words. He has the value, the merit, and the quality of the inevitable. He will go on writing; he is worth reading in the commencement of his work. Some of his lines, as the years pass and he looks at

them, scans his early childhood, he may wish to change, to revise. A few others he will treasure as too good to change. Thus life goes with all artists."

He began on his own, as an independent bookseller in April 1927, selling books out of a suitcase. A year later he opened his first shop in small premises designed by Frank Lloyd Wright at 567 South Hope Street. His initial stock was actually a consignment provided by Louis Epstein who had just sold his Acadia Bookshop on Sixth Street.

It was in this shop that he began exhibiting art. His first exhibit was of Edward Weston's photographs in May 1928 and he also displayed the works of Rockwell Kent, Marie Laurencin and Peter Krasnow — all shown for the first time on the West Coast.

In that same year, Jake began his first major activity in helping to build rare book collections. He assisted A. Elmer Belt in putting together his great Leonardo da Vinci Collection and he was instrumental in bringing it as a gift to the University of California at Los Angeles. Jake also issued his first catalogue in 1928.



In 1929 Zeitlin moved his shop to 705-1/2 West Sixth Street. He began to import fine press books from England — Nonesuch Press, Golden Cockerell Press, Eric

The Texas Years

Jake Zeitlin was brought by his family to Fort Worth, Texas, in 1905, when he was less than three years old. He remained in that Texas city for 20 years, and they were the years that influenced his tastes, choices and goals that would determine the course of his entire life.

He attended public school and Central High School and then worked in his father's vinegar works, driving a truck and making deliveries. The other drivers his father hired to make the deliveries would invariably abscond with the payments, so Jake was the only one who could be trusted with the receipts.

But Jake had his dreams, and they centered around writing and books even when he was a teenager. Fate also had a hand in influencing Jake toward the book trade during these Texas years.

Jake's father was the one who was always contacted by the police when any Jewish boys got into trouble. He would usually bail them out and give

them employment in his vinegar factory. On one occasion, he was called when two boys arrived in town on a freight train. The boys were Ben Abramson and Jerry Nedwick who made a lasting impression on Jake. Ben enchanted Jake with his bookselling stories of his years at McClurg's Bookshop in Chicago, and it was then that Jake decided to become a bookseller.

While still in high school, Jake attended an assembly where he heard the young poet, Carl Sandburg, reciting his poetry and playing the guitar. That too was the kind of life Jake wanted.

After graduation, Jake worked as a bookseller and also began writing poetry and reviewing books for the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*. He was the winner of the Texas State Poetry Prize awarded by Baylor University in 1922.

When Jake Zeitlin finally left Fort Worth for California in 1925, he had his sights set on a writing and bookselling career.

Gill Woodcuts and first editions of contemporary English and American authors.

At about that time, Jake organized a group of writers and artists who began to publish the magazine, *Opinion*, and for about two years, that publication featured work by Carey McWilliams, Gordon Ray Young, Paul Jordan-Smith and other Southern California writers who subsequently became prominent in the literary world.

It was also in the back room of Zeitlin's shop on Sixth Street that the Rounce & Coffin Club, dedicated to fine printing, was established with Grant Dahlstrom, Ward Ritchie (who worked briefly for

Jake), Gregg Anderson, Saul Marks and Paul Landacre.

One of the major achievements of Rounce & Coffin, which was founded in 1930, was its sponsorship of the Annual Western Books Exhibition of fine book-making.

In the early 1930s, Jake founded the Primavera Press, originally a vanity publishing firm, that produced works by Phil Townsend Hanna, Louise Seymour Jones, Idwal Jones, Lawrence Clark Powell, and other California authors.

In the mid 1930s, Jake began contributing to *Reader's Digest*, including an article, "Trifles Today, Treasures Tomor-

row," the first article on collecting ephemeral material, a field that has grown substantially in recent years.

Jake's next bookshop location was at 614 West Sixth Street, which he occupied in 1936. He held numerous exhibitions there of fine prints, photography and graphic arts, including the first Western American exhibit of Kathe Kollwitz in 1937.

A major transaction in Western Americana was his purchase and sale to the Bancroft Library, at the University of California, Berkeley, of the Kino Papers — 75 original documents of the Jesuit and Franciscan founders of California. He also found in London the original manuscript of Venegas, *History of California*, and he arranged for its purchase also by the Bancroft Library.

In the late 1930s, Jake was involved in material of D. H. Lawrence and his circle. He became the agent for Frieda Lawrence in the sale of D. H. Lawrence manuscripts. He met Aldous Huxley at the Lawrence Ranch in New Mexico and arranged for the first motion picture assignment that brought Huxley to California as a permanent resident.

Jake published two books and a pamphlet by Huxley and maintained a friendship with him that lasted until Huxley's death in 1963. He also contributed an essay to the Huxley Memorial Volume.

Jake's next move was to 624 South Carondelet Street in 1938. Here he exhibited the sculpture of Gordon Newell, the work of Will Connell, the photographer who documented Southern California and Hollywood life, as well as the work of Max Yavno, a leading innovator among American photographers.

Zeitlin contributed articles on City Planning and Language, and wrote a column in *Arts & Architecture* from 1938 to 1942. He assisted in organizing and wrote the Constitution and By-Laws for the Barlow Society for the History of Medicine; also the Society for the History of the Medical Sciences at UCLA, and served on the boards of both associations.

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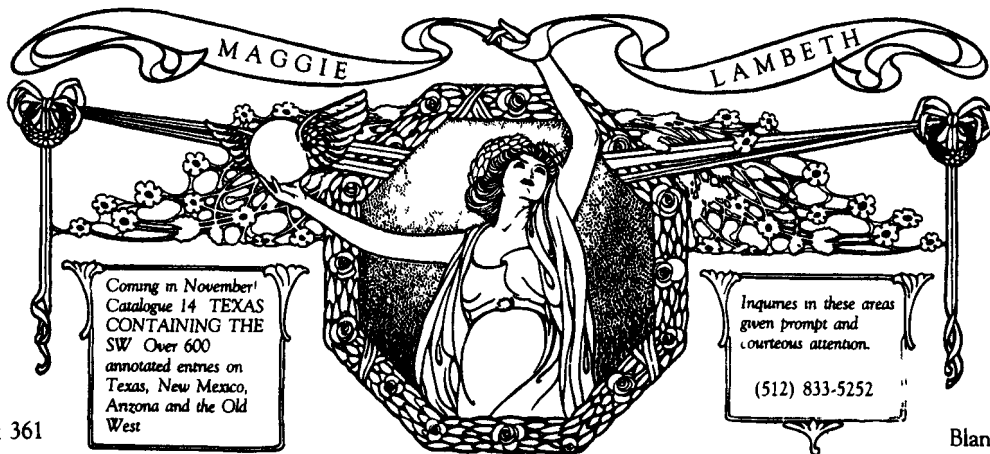
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an informal *festschrift* that included tributes by notable representatives of the world of libraries, book and print collecting, and printing.

In 1971, Jake published the fourth revised edition of Harris Newmark's *Sixty Years in Southern California*.

Jake had sponsored and encouraged most of the fine printers of Southern California, and published numerous books from the presses of Ward Ritchie, Grant Dahlstrom and Saul Marks. He also lectured on Southern California Printers at a Symposium on Modern Printing sponsored by the Typophiles Society.

In 1983, Jake achieved the most significant financial milestone of his career when he sold a collection of 144 illuminated manuscripts ranging from the seventh to the 16th centuries, to the Getty Museum for more than \$30 million, believed to be the largest single sale ever made in the rare book world.

Among his honors and awards were the Award of Merit of the California Historical Society for outstanding contributions to California history, election to membership of the American Antiquarian Society, election to membership in the International Academy for the History of Medicine, and in June 1981 Occidental College conferred on him Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

Zeitlin is survived by his wife, Josephine VerBrugge Zeitlin, their son Joel Leob Zeitlin, their daughter Adriana Katlin, Judith Armstrong Zeitlin, a daughter from his first marriage, and David John Zeitlin, a son from his second marriage.

Thomas Crowe, 75, on July 10, of a heart attack, in England; antiquarian bookseller. He was born in Wrexham, North Wales, where he developed an early familiarity with the antiquarian book business through his grandfather, father and mother, all of whom were in the book trade. At the age of 21 he moved to Norwich, where he established his business at 77 Upper St. Giles Street, a location he was to occupy — with the exception of the six years he served in the army during World War II — for the next 54 years. During his career he was an active participant in England's Antiquarian Booksellers Association, involved in the operation of the organization and its book fairs.

Hamish Maclaren, 86, on July 25, in Scotland; author and publisher. He was born in Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland, and

was later educated at the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth. Following his service in the Navy he became a literary editor, and was poetry editor of *The Spectator* from 1928 to 1936. His best-known works are *Sailor with Banjo*, a narrative poem which interweaves folk material with the literary thread; and *Private Opinions of a British Bluejacket*, a modernist work written phonetically. A collection of short stories, *Cockalorum*, was published in 1936. During the 1950s he was the representative in Scotland for the Laurence Book Company and the Transatlantic Book Service.

Allen T. Klots Jr., 66, on July 20 in New York City; editor. He was a senior editor at Dodd, Mead where, during his 39-year career, he worked with Langston Hughes, Martha Gelhorn, Hal Prince, Arna Bontemps and other authors. A native of New York City, he graduated from Yale in 1943. He served in the Navy from 1943 to 1946, before joining Dodd, Mead.

J. Rives Childs, 94, on July 15 in Richmond, Va.; author. He was the author of 14 books, four of which were on the subject of Casanova, the 18th-century Italian adventurer. His most recent book, a biography of Casanova, is scheduled to be published this fall. Born in Lynchburg, Va., he graduated from Randolph-Macon College and received a master of arts degree from Harvard University. He joined the foreign service and spent 30 years as a United States diplomatic and consular official in Jerusalem, Cairo, Teheran and Tangiers. His last diplomatic post was as Ambassador to Ethiopia. In 1948 his account of the diplomatic corps, *American Foreign Service*, was published. A well-known authority on Casanova, he was a former president of the International Casanova Society and the editor of *Casanova Gleanings*, the Society's magazine.

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In 1948, Jake moved to his last location, the Red Barn at 615 North La Cienega Blvd.

He lectured at many universities and colleges including UCLA, University of California, Berkeley, Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara and San Diego, as well as the Universities of Illinois, Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Iowa and Minnesota on subjects related to rare books and the History of Science.

Always dedicated to helping fledgling booksellers, he was one of the first keynote speakers at the Antiquarian Book Trade Seminars held each year at the University of Denver in Cooperation with **AB Bookman's Weekly**. He was so moved by the country's only intensive training program for the antiquarian book trade that he returned to join the faculty for several years until his health did not permit the trip. His beloved wife, Josephine, always accompanied him.

He delivered addresses for the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association at national Conferences in Philadelphia, Montreal and Lawrence, Kansas. His address on censorship entitled "Who Shall Silence All the Airs and Madrigals" delivered before the California Library Association in Los Angeles in 1964, was later published in *Keys to Understanding*, Harper & Row, New York, 1968, and in *Book Selection and Censorship*, R. R. Bowker, New York, 1969.

In another action against censorship, Jake was a joint plaintiff in litigation that resulted in a landmark decision on censorship by the California State Supreme Court (Zeitlin vs. Arnebergh).

Zeitlin was a former President of the Southern California Chapter of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, and was a member of the A.B.A.A. National Board.

During his career, Jake represented many great collectors of the History of Science. He negotiated the purchase of the Herbert M. Evans Collection of the History of Science for presentation by Lessing J. Rosenwald to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University.

Among the collectors in the History of Science that he represented were Robert B. Honeyman, Jr., Everett DeGolyer, Jr., Joseph Halle Schaffner, as well as many important American libraries. He represented them at auctions as well as in private negotiations.

Jake contributed papers on the History of Science to learned journals such as *ISIS*. In 1964 he was invited to participate in the 400th anniversary celebration of Galileo Galilei, and to deliver a paper in Florence. His extensive bibliographical study entitled "The Bibliographical Misadventures of Galileo Galilei" was published at Pisa and Rome by the Italian

Commission to Celebrate the Galileo Quadricentenary.

Together with his wife and partner, Josephine VerBrugge Zeitlin, Jake supported a series of Lectures on Bibliography under the auspices of the School of Library Science of UCLA. Speakers have included the foremost British and American Bibliographers including Sir Frank Francis, Director of the British Library; Frederick B. Adams, Librarian of the Pierpont Morgan Library, and Gordon Ray, President of the Guggenheim Foundation.

While he was instrumental in bringing many important gifts of collections to

UCLA, including the Grunewald Graphic Arts Collection, he personally gave several manuscript collections including those of Paul Jordan-Smith, Idwal Jones and Aldous Huxley.

Jake established the Collection of Printing Ephemera at the UCLA Department of Special Collections, and he founded and supported Annual Book Collecting Prizes at California State College in Los Angeles, the University of California, Riverside, and the University of Texas, Austin.

In 1967, on the occasion of his 65th birthday and 40th anniversary as a bookseller, he was presented with a *Garland* —

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