

Eugene Field
and His Books



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*600 copies of this keepsake
have been published to accompany an exhibition
marking the centennials of Eugene Field's death
and the founding of the Caxton Club,
held in the Department of Special Collections
December 9, 1994 ☺ ☺ ☺ March 20, 1995*

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ver the course of a brief but prolific writing career, Eugene Field (1850-1895) achieved remarkable popularity and made a lasting contribution to the world of books. He spent the last twelve years of his life in Chicago, where he was part of a circle devoted to books, book collecting and fine printing. In his column in the *Chicago Daily News*, "Sharps and Flats," and in his book publication and collecting activities, Field promoted the writers, publishers and collectors who formed Chicago's developing cultural community. Their efforts culminated in the founding of the Caxton Club, devoted to "the literary study and promotion of the arts pertaining to the production of books," on January 26, 1895, just months before Field's sudden death.

Field is remembered today chiefly as a writer of poems for children such as "Little Boy Blue," "Wynkin, Blynkin and Nod," and of humorous stories and verse. Field's enduring appeal derives from his irreverent humor and lively imagination; and, by fashioning these into a distinctive persona, he created a model for contemporary journalism. Thirty years after his death Harriet Monroe, the founding editor of *Poetry* magazine, recalled: "It would be incomplete to call Field a humorist, although he could be the funniest of men. Humor was but one phase of his abiding sense of life's inexplicable incongruities."

"Eugene Field and His Books" has been drawn from the collection of Frank J. Piehl (Ph.D., 1952) and the Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library. In his centennial history of the Caxton Club, Dr. Piehl notes that "By the time of his death, Field had left a legacy to Chicago bibliophiles -- he had catalyzed the formation of a new book club." This exhibition surveying Field's career is part of a city-wide celebration of a century of the book in Chicago.



Field's youth gave ample indication of the high spirits that characterize his writing. He was born in St. Louis on September 2, 1850, and spent much of his childhood in New England. The Puritan environment apparently fueled a rebellious personality, for his school career was distinguished by pranks and little serious study. Field's first ambition was the stage, and he retained a lifelong fascination with the theater and theatrical personalities. Field began writing for a newspaper during the one year he spent at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois; he went on to the University of Missouri at Columbia, where he achieved notoriety for practical jokes.

After a trip to Europe in 1872 during which he exhausted the resources of an inheritance, Field returned to marry Julia Comstock of St. Joseph, Missouri, and join the staff of the *St. Louis Daily Journal* as a cub reporter. Over the next few years he worked at several midwestern newspapers and wrote some verse. One of his poems, "The Little Peach," published while he was city editor of the *Kansas City Times*, drew him to national attention. Field later referred to it as "popular but rotten."

In two columns that he wrote as managing editor of the *Denver Tribune*, Field began to develop the style for which he would soon become famous. "Odds and Ends" parodied and poked fun at the pretensions of the rough western town and its people, and "For the Little Folks" contained poems and stories for children. *The Model Primer*, a collection of his prose published during this time, helped to foster Field's growing reputation.

Field arrived in Chicago in 1883, hired as an editorial staff writer by Melville E. Stone, founding editor of the *Chicago Daily News*. "Sharps and Flats," Field's daily column, quickly became a widely read and much-loved feature across the Midwest. The columns were filled with

verse, stories, reviews, commentary and gossip; Field's subjects ranged from politics, theater and other cultural events to books, libraries and literature. Field's stories, essays and poems have a stylistic and thematic consistency that translated easily into book publications, transforming ephemeral journalistic pieces into a permanent part of American literary and cultural history.



Chicago in the 1890s was an active participant in the American response to William Morris's efforts to revive the craft of fine printing in England. Stone & Kimball, a small press devoted to producing fine books, was founded in 1893 by two Harvard classmates, one of whom -- Herbert Stuart Stone -- was the son of Field's employer, the newspaperman Melville E. Stone. In 1894, the year Stone and Kimball moved from Cambridge to Chicago, they founded a literary periodical, *The Chap-Book*, which was an important voice for new Chicago writers. The following year W. Irving Way and Chauncey L. Williams established another fine press in Chicago.

Disappointed by the shabby appearance of his first two books, issued by commercial publishers, Field determined that the publication of his works would be an occasion to produce and promote fine books. His subsequent writings were typically issued in two formats: a small number of copies on fine paper and a trade edition. The limited editions, for example Field's translations and paraphrases of Horace, *Echoes from the Sabine Farm*, were often available only by subscription or private distribution. Printed at the University Press in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the De Vinne Press in New York; or by fine presses, Field's books exemplify the high quality attained by craft printers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Field's involvement with the book collecting world made him quite aware of the appeal that limited editions held for collectors. In fact, he frequently traded copies of his works for desired books owned by other collectors, and he regularly prepared elaborate manuscript copies of his works for presentation to his friends and pursuit by collectors. His meticulous attention to the physical appearance of his works also reflected what he considered suitable for an author of his stature. In his column, he drew a clear connection between physical and intellectual quality: "The writer of 'Sharps and Flats' requests that publishers and authors send him no more papercover books. He simply throws away all books of this kind, it being his notion that a book that is worth reading is surely worth keeping, and is therefore entitled to durable dress."



Despite his lackluster academic career, Field became passionately interested in and knowledgeable about the classics and English literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. His voluminous reading led him to haunt Alexander C. McClurg's bookstore at the corner of Madison and Wabash, where he encountered the regulars in the rare book section. The group included William F. Poole, librarian of the Chicago Public Library and later first librarian of the Newberry; businessmen George A. Armour, Charles J. Barnes and James W. Ellsworth; and clergymen Frank Wakeley Gunsaulus, president of the Armour Institute and an early benefactor of the University of Chicago Library, and Frank M. Bristol. By 1889 Field had dubbed these secular and clerical collectors "Saints and Sinners," and his columns contained regular if apocryphal reports of their meetings and bookish adventures. On New Year's Eve in 1890 Field convened the group for its one actual meeting, reading an original poem entitled, "Dibdin's Ghost."

His gently satiric portraits of the collecting mania were the work of a fellow sufferer, and Field was also amassing a collection of thousands of books. His interests were eclectic and offbeat, encompassing established authors and others little known in their own day or ours. His acquisitions, limited by his budget and family responsibilities, did not include great rarities such as others of the group were bringing to Chicago, but his library reflected his wide-ranging interests and unusual taste. When a book collecting club, the Duodecimos, was formed in July 1893 for the purpose of publishing fine books, Field was one of the twelve original members.

Field also contributed to the literature of book collecting with an introduction to Stone & Kimball's *First Printings of American Authors*, published in 1893; and the essays collected in *The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac*, left nearly finished at Field's death. In *The Love Affairs*, a loosely autobiographical account of a young man's lifelong passion for books, Field explains that "There are very many kinds of book collectors, but I think all may be grouped in three classes, viz.: Those who collect from vanity; those who collect for the benefits of learning; those who collect through a veneration and love for books." Field himself had a little of each collecting motivation, and his bibliophilic writings convey this empathic understanding.



In the three decades following Eugene Field's death on November 4, 1895, his works were compiled, collected, anthologized, set to music and reprinted; schools, libraries and parks were named for him; monuments to him were erected in several cities, including one in Lincoln Park for which children sold copies of a commemorative volume, *Field Flowers*; and he was memorialized in several biographical reminiscences published by his friends. Field's Chicago home, maintained intact for thirty years, was the site of

many pilgrimages: The *University of Chicago Weekly* reported a visit in July 1901 by a group of "professors of English literature, of art, of history, of Greek, and of Latin in many universities throughout the country." The Field collecting craze even spawned forged presentation copies produced by his son, Pinny.

Although Field's popularity began to wane in the 1930s, his writings continue to delight children and book collectors and have a strong appeal to fine printers. His role in promoting appreciation of the book arts in Chicago endures in the tradition of the Caxton Club; and his whimsical, intense commitment to books and literature provides a unique portrait of late nineteenth-century American culture.



Exhibition Checklist

(Except where noted, items are from the collection of Frank J. Piehl)

History and Transactions of the Editors' and Publishers' Association of Missouri, 1867-76. Compiled for the Association by J.W. Barrett. Canton, Mo.: Canton Press Print, 1876. Field's copy of the journal that contained his first appearance in print, "A Weird Idyl -- 'Solomon Burch's Fighting Editor.'" Signed by Field and inscribed, under the poem's title, "a youthful indiscretion."

Eugene Field. Autograph manuscript biographical sketch [ca. 1881], 1 p.; framed with: autograph letter signed, to [Will M.?] Clemens, [Denver], April 10, 1882, 1 p., and photograph of Field.

Eugene Field. *The Model Primer*... Brooklyn, N.Y.: Fred Tredwell [1882]. Reprint of the first edition, published in Denver in 1881.

Eugene Field. *Culture's Garland*... With an Introduction by Julian Hawthorne. Boston: Ticknor and Co., 1887. Bound in green cloth. Formerly in the Estelle Doheny Collection.

Eugene Field. *Culture's Garland*... With an Introduction by Julian Hawthorne. Boston: Ticknor and Co., 1887. In paper wrappers.

Eugene Field. "The Old Story." Autograph manuscript signed, London, November 17, 1889, 2 pp. Formerly in the collections of John Spoor, founding member of the Caxton Club; and Estelle Doheny.

Eugene Field. Autograph letter signed, to Harriet Monroe, London, December 18, 1889, 8 pp. With a manuscript poem, "As I was going to Bethlehem town." Harriet Monroe Papers. University of Chicago Library.

Eugene Field. *A Little Book of Profitable Tales*... Chicago [Privately Printed for Subscribers], 1889. Number 172 of 250 copies. Inscribed to Charles J. Barnes, founding member of the Caxton Club, December 3, 1890.

Eugene and Roswell M. Field. *Echoes from the Sabine Farm*... New Rochelle, N.Y.: Francis Wilson, 1891. Number 4 of 30 copies printed on Japan paper. Inscribed to James W. Ellsworth, founding member and first president of the Caxton Club, April 2, 1892, with a four-line poem to Ellsworth, signed by Field.

Eugene and Roswell M. Field. *Echoes from the Sabine Farm*... Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1893. Number 391 of 500 copies. With an introduction, "Ad Lectorem," by Field; and two substitutions in place of "To Maecenas in Chicago," omitted at the request of the publisher.

Eugene Field. Autograph letter signed, to Francis Wilson, November 21, 1891, 2 pp. Bequest of Lessing Rosenthal. University of Chicago Library.

Eugene Field. "To Chloe." Autograph manuscript signed [1891], 1 p. *Echoes* contains a translation of "To Chloe" by Roswell Field and several paraphrases of the ode by Eugene Field, including this one marked "Original copy."

"William E. Gladstone. *The Odes of Horace Translated Into English*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894. Field's copy, with his note explaining how he obtained Gladstone's ax and inscribed eight lines of verse on it.

Eugene Field. Autograph letter signed, to W. Irving Way, London, January 17, 1890, 8 pp.

Eugene Field. *Second Book of Verse...* Chicago: Melville E. Stone, 1892. Number 6 of 12 copies printed on Japan paper. Inscribed to Melville E. Stone, "Once my employer, Always my friend and invariably my creditor... Christmas, 1892."

Eugene Field. *The Holy-Cross and Other Tales*. Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1893. One of 20 copies printed on Japan paper, with an eight-line inscription by Field from the text, December 1893.

Eugene Field. *Love-Songs of Childhood*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894. Number 87 of 106 copies.

Benjamin Franklin. *Facsimile of Poor Richard's Almanack for 1733*. With an Introduction by John Bigelow... [Chicago]: The Duodecimos, 1894. Field's copy, number 4 of 12 vellum copies.

Eugene Field. "Little Mistress Sans-Merci." Autograph manuscript signed [1892], 4 pp.; autograph letter signed, to Francis Peabody, Chicago, February 5, 1892, conveying the unpublished poem as a "valentine for Mrs. Peabody."

Herbert S. Stone. *First Editions of American Authors. A Manual for Book-Lovers...* With an Introduction by Eugene Field. Cambridge, Mass.: Stone & Kimball, 1893. One of 50 large paper copies, signed "Editor's Copy, Stone & Kimball."

Eugene Field. *The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896. Number 118 of 150 copies.

Eugene Field. "The Temptation of Friar Gonsol." Autograph manuscript signed, January 22, 1889, 4 pp. Gift of Frank W. Gunsaulus, University of Chicago Ms. 228. Field's tale relates how Friar Gonsol (Frank W. Gunsaulus) and Friar Francis (Frank M. Bristol) were tempted by a rare book.

Eugene Field. *The Temptation of Friar Gonsol...* Washington, D.C.: Woodward & Lothrop, 1900. Number 26 of 50 copies printed for sale in England by Byron S. Adams.

Some Letters of Edgar Allen Poe to E.H.N. Patterson of Oquakwka, Illinois, With Comments by Eugene Field. Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1898. One of 186 copies. In his account of Poe's support for a plan to establish a national literary magazine, Field referred to Augustus Mitchell's description of Oquakwka.

S. Augustus Mitchell. *Illinois in 1837...* Philadelphia: S. Augustus Mitchell, Grigg & Elliott, 1837. First issue. From the Library of Eugene Field.

Julian Ralph. *Chicago and the World's Fair...* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893. Inscribed to Eugene Field. From the Library of Eugene Field.

Charles Josiah Adams. *Where is My Dog? Or, Is Man Alone Immortal?* New York: Fowler & Wells, 1893. Inscribed to Eugene Field. From the Library of Eugene Field.

The Library of the Late Eugene Field... New York: The Anderson Galleries, 1923.

Eugene Field. *The Writings in Prose and Verse...* Sabine Edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896-1901. 12 volumes. Number 21 of 100 copies printed on Japan paper. Volumes 1-10 inscribed to DeWitt Miller, member of the Duodecimos and the Caxton Club, by authors of the prefaces to each volume; prospectus, and salesman's dummy for the 1901 Sabine Edition of *The Writings in Prose and Verse*.

Eugene Field. *Poems of Childhood*. With Illustrations by Maxfield Parrish. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894.

Eugene Field. *Songs of Childhood...* Music by Reginald de Koven and Others. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896.

Eugene Field. *With Trumpet and Drum*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892. Inscribed by Field, "Dec. 25th, 1892"; another copy, with a possibly forged inscription, "Dec. 15, 1893."

Eugene Field. *Florence Bardsley's Story...* Chicago: W. Irving Way, 1897. Number 10 of 25 copies printed on Japan paper. Illuminated by Carrie Way.

Eugene Field. *The Mouse and the Moonbeam*. New York, 1919. One of 250 copies printed by William Edwin Rudge.

Eugene Field. *A Comic Primer*. Edited by C. Merton Babcock; With Illustrations by Wendy Watson. Mount Vernon, N.Y.: Peter Pauper Press, 1966.

Eugene Field. *Our Debt to Monkish Men*. Wood Engravings by John DePol. Council Bluffs, Iowa: The Yellow Barn Press, 1987. Number 10 of 120 copies.

