

Obituaries

GEORGE LABAN HARDING

Though he called himself a business executive, or simply a telephone man, George Harding was a well-known authority on the history of printing in California. First he was an accountant in the service of the Todd Dry Dock and Construction Corporation of Tacoma, then with Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, and Bell Telephone Company of Nevada, rising through the middle and higher echelons from 1928 to retirement thirty years later. He continued collecting and working with books on printing, printers, and publishing till his death from cancer following surgery, at Berkeley, August 30, 1976, aged eighty-two years.

George grew up on the family farm near Indianapolis. He attended Indiana University and was graduated with the A.B. degree, class of 1915. From there he proceeded to the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, where he was most of all taken with a special curriculum, co-sponsored by the Society of Printers, Boston, designed to fit young men to be master printers. The special two-year curriculum was broad and searching and a memorable experience for George. It was ideally balanced between theory and practice, equally suited to the nurture of master printers and of the lifelong student and historian of printing he already looked forward to becoming in the future. The first year was given to concentrated study of the printed book in the artistic work of early printers, followed by lectures by experts on the technique of printing, topped off by courses in accounting, industrial organization, commercial resources, and commercial law. On completion of the first year the program called for four months' work in a printing office. This was a serious

on-the-job effort under demanding supervision, nor fooling around with type! Instruction in the second year was laboratory work in the main—practice in determining format, laying out copy, planning the work in the composing room, preparing specifications for paper and ink, estimating cost of various kinds of illustrations, and following jobs through the press. At the end of the two years he received the degree of master of business administration. Moreover he was cited by Daniel Berkeley Updike, one of the leaders of the printing course, for 'effective help' in a number of early researches that were later used by the great Boston printer in his book *Printing Types*.

George Harding's thorough grounding in the knowledge of books gained him a standing of quiet authority with connoisseurs, librarians, and collectors, and the respect of scholarly and artistic printers. Dealers sought his discriminating counsel, to mutual satisfaction. They liked his candor, fairness, and appreciation when they were able to furnish an item for his precious special collection on Pacific coast pioneer printers. He brought recognition to friends whose work he admired, as in the early specimens of the Grubborns while they were still in Indianapolis. He carried in his pocket, to show his friends, the W. A. Dwiggins design for his new Berkeley notepaper with the motto *Il faut cultiver notre jardin*. Dwiggins had been one of his instructors at Harvard.

After a decade of professional and personal experiences that George in mature life lumped in the single word 'vicissitudes,' he settled at Palo Alto, down the peninsula from the Golden Gate, in a house unpretentious but conveniently suited to the off-hours of a telephone man much occupied with study and writing, and keeping up with current auction and dealers' book catalogues. There he assembled materials, with proper emphasis on original documents, that went into his 1964 book, the fundamental account *Don Agustino V. Zamorano: Statesman, Soldier, Craftsman and California's First*

Printer. In the same period he carried through investigations for another biographical study, *Charles A. Murdock, Printer and Citizen of San Francisco: An Appraisal*, which, however, did not come to market till the autumn of 1972. Meanwhile from time to time he brought out as books, lectures, or articles a number of bibliographical contributions such as *The Tabitian Imprints of the London Missionary Society* and *A Census of California Spanish Imprints*. With the help of divers other hands, he rounded off his publications with a Zamorano Club production, *A Copybook from the Hand of Agustín V. Zamorano* (Los Angeles, 1974).

George Harding was all ready to make his move from full-time businessman to full-time book man when retirement caught up with him in the form of a check from Social Security. He was at that moment traveling on the east coast. He held the document high, stretched taut between his fists, and scanned it with a derisive flicker of a smile. Then, as sober accountant, he asked, "Do you think this will carry us through the month?" We didn't think so, though we did believe he'd manage. In any event he continued to find books and business papers and add them to the Edward C. Kemble Collections on American Printing and Publishing, which George had established at the California Historical Society.

He always maintained warm bonds of faith and loyalty with co-workers, with the Indiana home that had produced him, with friends, and with books and the people who made them. As a Republican he simply supported the views he had tested and found true. He drove a Lincoln with pleasure in its dependability and comfort: it was a book-finder's tool in which he ranged the continent: and it was also complimentary to a companion to be picked up in it on a fine Sunday morning to attend the Episcopal service. He gladly put himself to no end of trouble, as meeting a visitor at the Oakland station in the night—the friend would hear the pad-pad-paddling of the easy runner's feet down the long platform and

recognize the dark figure outside the window keeping step with the locomotive till both came to a halt and there were quietly spoken greetings (no puffing).

The Kemble Occasional, 'Issued now and then from the Edward C. Kemble Collections,' may escape attention among the full-dress contributions in George Harding's bibliography, and that would be unfortunate. The seventeen numbers, dated November 1964 to December 1976, are a treasury of digested information and Pacific Coast printing reference. The honorary curator of the Kemble and associated collections offered reminiscences and autobiographical notes and asides that are doubtless the best sources of knowledge and information about him. The seventeenth number is a memorial issue, 'Our Memories of George Laban Harding 1893-1976.'

Ray Nash

JOHN SICHER VAN EISEN KOHN

John Kohn, antiquarian bookseller, was born on the island of Manhattan on October 6, 1906, of a distinguished family many of whose members had also been born on the island. When someone expressed fears of being mugged in these environs, he was wont to reassure them by saying that not one of his relatives had suffered that indignity during a period of more than a century.

Kohn graduated from Williams College in 1928 and earned his master's degree from Harvard two years later. He was attracted to a career in bookselling very soon after he had completed his academic experience and spent a novitiate of four years at the Argosy Bookshop on East Fifty-ninth Street in New York. The valuable training he received at that busy and thriving shop emboldened him to establish his own business under the name of Collectors Bookshop. This enterprise

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.