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In Praise of Bookshops

The Roycroft Campus, East Aurora, New York

by Jack Walsdorf (Vice President Domestic Sales, Blackwell North America)

For those lucky enough to attend ACRL in Pittsburgh this past March, the necessity of a Saturday night stay over to satisfy the needs of the airlines, meant a day free to enjoy either the sights of Pittsburgh (including the truly unusual Andy Warhol Museum) or to go further afield. For many it meant a Saturday visit to the world masterpiece of architecture, Falling Water, in Mill Run, Pennsylvania, an hour and a half south-east of Pittsburgh.

I chose to travel a bit further afield, making the more than four-hour drive northeast to a small village of some 7,000 folk near Buffalo. That village is East Aurora, New York, the long-time home of the thirteenth president of the United States, Millard Fillmore. This village of wonderful 19th century architecture in Federal, early Clapboard, Greek Revival, High Victorian and Queen Anne homes is renowned not for a single home, but for a whole campus — the Roycroft Campus.

Book lovers the world over know the name **Elbert Hubbard**, the bard of East Aurora. Hubbard, former soap salesman, failed student at Harvard, world traveler, author and master marketer was born in Bloomington, Illinois in 1856. He died in 1915 aboard the S.S. Lusitania, sunk by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland.

Hubbard may have made his money in soap, but after a visit to England in 1894, where he confesses to having been bitten by the bug of Morris, and to have "caught it," he returned to the states to found his **Roycroft Press**. Long laughed at by "real" collectors and some booksellers (one dealer's catalogue referred to a Roycroft book as "less ugly than most" and another book as having "one spine label mostly ripped away by the ghost of William Morris") and perhaps even a few librarians; Elbert Hubbard has withstood the test of time.

So it was to little East Aurora I drove on a snowy Friday evening. Saturday broke cold and clear, and the Roycroft Campus stood out brightly in the early morning sun: fourteen buildings in all, most built with local field stone gathered by farmers in the process of clearing their land after the spring thaw. My destination was in the very center of the campus, a building once known as the Copper Shop, where workmen turned out the highly prized Roycroft hand hammered

Arts and Crafts style copper pieces. The copper shop now houses the **Roycroft Gift Shop** under the careful and knowledgeable management of **Kitty Turgeon** and **Robert Rust**. The Roycroft Gift shop has become much more than a traditional "tourist" shop. It offers a vast array of original Roycroft books, broadsides, pamphlets, copper pieces and other Roycroft collectibles along with a full line of new books, magazines and pamphlets relating to the Arts and Crafts movement, Hubbard, Wright, Morris, Stickley and all the early craftsmen and women associated with the movement.

My personal favorite find was the 1994 video *Head, Heart and Hand: Elbert Hubbard and Roycrofters*, a clear presentation of the Roycroft Community and the major role it played in the popularization of the Arts and Crafts movement in America between 1895 and 1938. Also on hand was the associated book from the **University of Rochester Press**, carrying the same title: *Head, Heart and Hand*. Published in 1994, edited by **Marie Via** and **Marjorie B. Searl**, this is a catalogue to the exhibition at the **Memorial Art Gallery** in Rochester, an exhibition which will travel to five other sites throughout the U.S. during 1995 and 1996.

A strikingly small pamphlet entitled *Roycroft Desktop* also caught my attention, perhaps because of the bold quote on the back cover: "THE LIBRARY IS THE FIRST OF ROOMS." Written by **John Vanco** and published by the **Burchfield**—

Penny Art Center at Buffalo State College, this thirty-six page work gives a good, concise review of Hubbard and his many works.

Finally, I was able to acquire the March, 1995 issue of the *Architectural Digest*, with a six page article "Inside the Roycrofters' World: The Arts and Crafts Era Survives in Western New York." While giving much historical background information on the origins of the Roycroft movement, the article also

covers the grand reopening of the **Roycroft Inn** in June of this year.

Before we conclude this little journey to the home of **Elbert Hubbard**, it is fitting to reprint this brief story, told by his son, **Bert**, some fifteen years after Elbert's death: "He once high-lighted his numerous activities by telling the story of a call at **Brentano's**, New York booksellers. The book was marked \$3.00. I am a publisher," said Hubbard, "do I get a publisher's discount?" "Certainly, certainly," replied the clerk, sensing that he was waiting on Some One! "And being a printer, I get a printer's discount?" "Of course!" "And I am also an author and a bookseller. . . but by this time the flustered and befuddled clerk had disappeared in a mad dash for the restroom. 'And lo! When I had finished,' concluded Hubbard, 'Brentano's owed me \$2.70.'"

So, Elbert Hubbard and his Roycrofters live on and little bits of Hubbard, through his books, magazines, pamphlets, broadsides, and hammered copper can still be had at the Roycroft Gift Shop, East Aurora, Erie County, New York.

SHOP INFORMATION:

Roycroft Gift Shop

31 South Grove Street, East Aurora, New York 14052.

Hours: Monday through Saturday, 10:00 am-6:00 pm.

Sunday noon - 5:00 pm

Telephone: (716) 655-0571 Fax: (716) 655-0562