

Clara Hatton, An Appreciation

by Karen Jones

IN CELEBRATION OF ITS SESQUICENTENNIAL, Colorado State University (CSU) is honoring Clara Hatton, the founder of its Art and Art History departments. *Clara Hatton: A Vision for Art at CSU*, on display February 8 to June 20, 2021, is curated by Dr. Emily Moore, Associate Professor of Art History and Associate Curator of Art, Colorado State University; and Bill North, independent curator and Director of the Clara Hatton Center, Salina Art Center, Kansas. Visit <https://artmuseum.colostate.edu/exhibitions> for details. A catalog of the exhibit is also available; for more information, call 970-491-1989. The exhibition demonstrates the breadth of her art—from bookbinding to metal working, oil painting to watercolors, printmaking to calligraphy, ceramics to weaving.

In 1936, Hatton (1901-1991) was hired as one of the earliest faculty members to teach design in the Division of Home Economics. Over the next thirty years, she built an art curriculum at the college, teaching a variety of media herself and hiring the faculty who would help her establish the Department of Art in 1953.

Born in Bunker Hill, Kansas, the oldest of six children, she worked her way through school after enrolling at the University of Kansas in 1922. She exhibited at a faculty show there in 1934, displaying work in a variety of media. The Smithsonian purchased one of her woodcut prints (Shambles Restaurant) in 1935. During her final year at KU (1934-35) she taught bookbinding, among other classes, under the supervision of Prof. Rosemary Ketcham,¹ her binding teacher. Included in the exhibition is Clara's first binding in leather, *Poems of Henry W. Longfellow*. The binding was made by Clara while she was a student at KU in 1925.

At the height of the Depression, Clara was encouraged to take an unpaid sabbatical from KU, so she went to London to study in 1935-36.² In 1961, when she joined GBW, she reminisced at great length when responding to a query from the Guild about her studies in London, indicating that she attended the Central School of Arts and Crafts and the Royal College of Art, taking classes in bookbinding with William F. Matthews, Sydney (Sandy) Cockerell, Peter McLiesh and Lynton Lamb—all students of Douglas Cockerell. Matthews was her main instructor and taught her finishing. Lamb taught book design. Sandy Cockerell taught her marbling and how to make her own finishing tools. She particularly appreciated learning how to sharpen knives and gravers, and continued to make her own tools throughout her career. She noted that some of the recipes she learned in her classes had to be changed for use in the dry climate of Colorado.

Clara also described her delight in being invited for tea with the Cockerells at Letchworth and seeing parts of the *Codex Sinaiticus* as it was being restored. She was able to purchase one of the alum-tawed pig skins Cockerell had purchased for the bindings of the *Codex*. Apparently, the British Museum rejected those skins, noting that a pig is considered an “unclean” animal in the Old Testament; goat was chosen instead.³

She also purchased a set of 24 pt. handle letters that she used on several of her bindings. The font is the Doves Type, designed by Emery Walker for the Doves Press in 1900. Douglas Cockerell apprenticed with T. J. Cobden Sanderson at the Doves Bindery for four years (1893-97) before opening his own bindery. Sydney (Sandy) Cockerell (son of Douglas) worked at the family bindery starting in 1924 and ran it after his father retired in 1935. I was able to establish provenance of the handle letters through correspondence with Karen Smith, curator of special collections at Dalhousie University, which holds a collection of Douglas Cockerell bindings. For a description of the collection, see *Vessels of Light*, Karen E. M. Smith, Dalhousie University Libraries, Dalhousie University Halifax, Nova Scotia; 1996.

In addition to binding, Clara found time to study calligraphy with Lawrence Christie and Rosemary Ratcliffe. She wrote out and illuminated the “Book of Ruth” (see below) in that class. She also attended lectures by Edward Johnston, Grailey Hewitt, and William Gardner. She was very appreciative of being able to learn “when the revival of the book crafts was at its height.”⁴

The important influence of Clara's year in England was evident in her future studies. In 1944-45, she took a sabbatical from CSU to earn her MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art. She worked in the ceramics department with Maija Grotell and spent time at the Cranbrook Press. Her thesis, “Design in the Graphic Arts,” is basically a history of printmaking and the book arts, illustrated by samples of her work and citing much of what she learned in England.⁵

As one of the first art professors hired by CSU, Clara increased the number of art courses offered and hired more faculty, many of whom were graduates of KU. Her method was to teach a class herself until interest was established, then hire faculty with expertise in that medium to continue developing the class. As acting head of the department in 1950 she taught ceramics, drawing, painting, bookbinding, and art history.⁶

The CSU catalog bulletin of 1946-47 lists bookbinding as part of the “handcrafts” classes offered.

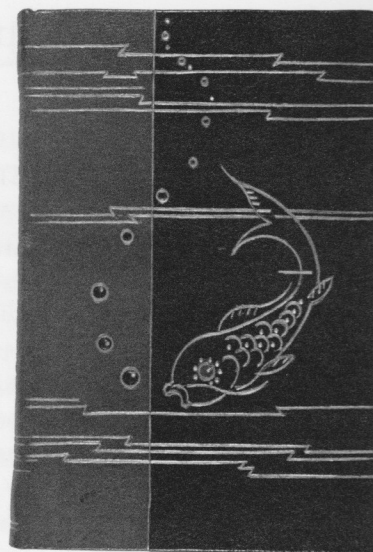
This was a new course Hatton developed as part of a post-WWII program in occupational therapy, "Course of Study in Occupational therapy and Related Art." She created this program as, "an appropriate response to the needs of the post-war (WWII) period, that eventually became one in which the College achieved national recognition."⁶ Eventually the Occupational Therapy program split off from Art, around the time that Clara established the Art Department as its own entity in 1953.⁷

Under her tenure, an Art majors program followed in 1957. By the time she retired in 1966, she was chair of a department with twenty faculty members and eighty majors. When CSU built its first Visual Arts complex in 1974-75, the exhibition gallery was named in her honor. She also received a citation for distinguished professional achievement from KU that year.⁸

After retiring, she moved to Salina, Kansas, and continued to work in a variety of media. There was an exhibition of her bindings in 1978 at the Perry-Castaneda Library at UT, Austin. At a retrospective exhibition in 1979 at CSU, she exhibited oils, watercolors, bindings, calligraphy, etchings, engravings, woodcuts, textiles, jewelry, pottery and drawings. One of her bindings, *The Book of Kells*, was selected for the GBW 75th anniversary show in 1981 and *The Book of Ruth* was exhibited at the GBW Centennial in New York, 2006. In addition to bindings created for herself and family members, she accepted commissions. She bound her last book in 1984 and died in Salina in 1991 at age 90.⁹

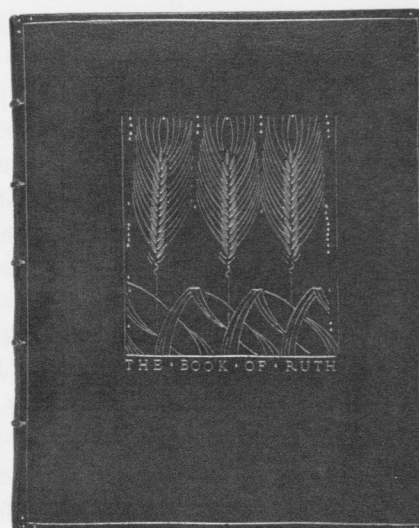
My appreciation of Clara began when I was introduced to her work while doing re-search for an exhibition entitled, Bookbinding in Colorado.¹⁰ Learning more about the range of craft techniques that she had mastered and excelled in, I could not help but be impressed by how much time she devoted to a craft that was not one that she taught once the Art Dept. at CSU was established. As a book conservator, I appreciate the time and practice needed to produce a fine binding. She must have loved binding very much to pursue it in addition to all her other work.

Most of the bindings she completed started with previously bound textblocks that she disbound, then re-sewed on raised cords—lacing-on boards before covering with goat-skin. She sometimes used other materials as covering material for the boards. They were all bound in the English craft-binding tradition. However, she did scribe the text of at least two of her bindings. They are my favorites:



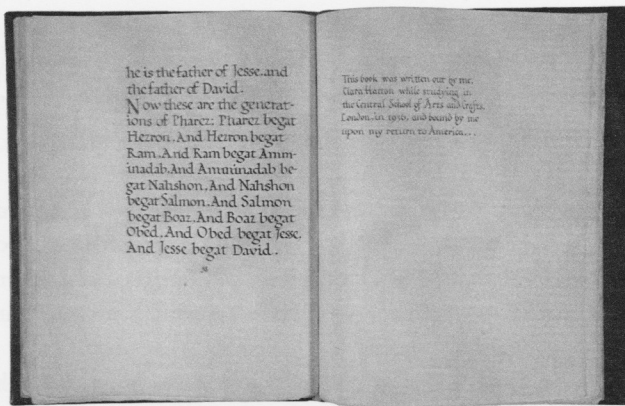
THE VERY WISE MINNOW

The text was scribed by Hatton in Sept. 1935, before she started writing classes at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London. It is bound in full leather, with a whimsical design of fish tooled in silver with leather onlays. The design is built from an assortment of gouges and other decorative brass hand tools.

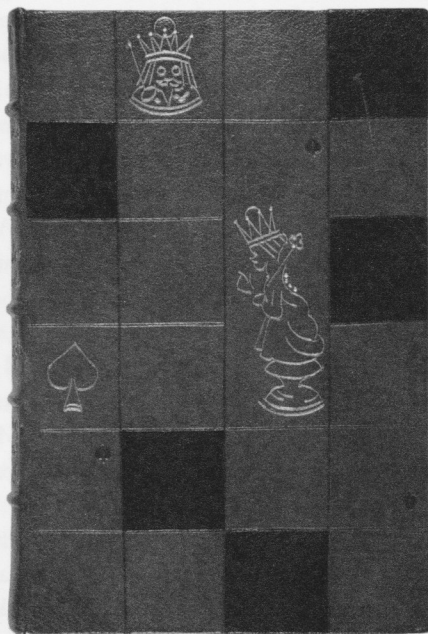


THE BOOK OF RUTH

According to the colophon, the text was scribed by Hatton in 1936, while studying at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, and bound after she returned to the U.S. The binding is not dated. Bound in full Morroco goat, the covers are tooled in a strong stylized design of wheat sheaves made from an assortment of gouges and decorative brass hand tools. The spine and front cover are titled in gold, using 24pt. Doves handle letters.



Colophon from the Book of Ruth



ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

Another binding with fanciful tooling is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; Three Sirens Press, ca. 1930. Bound in red leather, the spine titling letter forms are built up with gouges, line segments, and other decorative brass hand tools. The charming cover decoration is tooled in blind in a grid pattern to suggest a chess board. Black leather on-lays fill in the board. Figures from the illustrated text, tooled in gold (built up with gouges, line segments, and other decorative brass hand tools) complete the design, which continues onto the wide turn-ins.

Thanks in large part to the efforts of her niece, Ora Shay, Hatton's accomplishments are being appreciated anew. There is now a Clara Hatton Center, Inc., headquartered in Salina, Kansas. The exhibition on the CSU campus is a beginning. Hatton devoted her life to her career—a pioneer in the field of education at the time; and she expressed her creative self in the many mediums she mastered. That bookbinding was one of them speaks to her perseverance and energy and the joy of creating beautiful books that were a synthesis of her many talents.

Karen Jones is a book and paper conservator in private practice in Denver. A long-time member of GBW and board member of the Rocky Mtn. chapter, she wrote and presented "Westward Bound: Surveying the History of Bookbinding and the Book Arts in the Rocky Mountain West" for the Guild centennial in 2006.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Conroy, Tom. "Teaching Genealogies of American Hand Bookbinders," GBW Journal Vol. 1 XXVIII, 1990.
- 2 KU archives.
- 3 Correspondence from C Hatton to GBW secretary Thomas Patterson, 1961.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Hatton thesis, Cranbrook archives.
- 6 Annual report submitted by Hatton, 1950.
- 7 *Democracy's College in the Centennial State: A History of Colorado State University*, J. Hanson; Salt Lake City, UT; Publisher's Press, 1977.
- 8 CSU archives.
- 9 Oral interview with Ora Shay, niece of Clara Hatton.
- 10 Bookbinding in Colorado exhibition catalog, Auraria Library, Denver CO, 1994.