

# Winfred Porter Truesdell: Champlain's International Art Publisher

## by David Patrick

Written exclusively for the Clinton County Historical Association's *North Country Notes* newsletter (June, 2019) and presented here by permission of the Association.

Winfred Porter Truesdell was an internationally known art publisher who lived in the Village of Champlain, New York. He amassed a collection of thousands of bookplates, lithographs and photographs and published many books related to printing between the years 1903 and 1933. His best-known publication was a periodical called "*The Print Connoisseur*" which he published for 12 years. Truesdell started printing near Boston but moved to New York City and then to Champlain, New York, where he lived for 18 years. It is likely that many people today have never heard of Truesdell. He is certainly Champlain's unknown art publisher.

Truesdell was an art connoisseur at an early age. By 1901, at the age of 24, his passion was collecting printed bookplates. His first wife Amy also had an interest in bookplates and designed some herself.



Left: A sketch of Winfred Porter Truesdell signed by sketch artist William Oberhardt and Truesdell and given to Hugh McLellan. From the article, "The 'Heads' of Oberhardt," June 1921, of the *Print Connoisseur*. Courtesy CCHA.

Right: Frederick Reynolds (left) and W.P. Truesdell (right) at Hugh McLellan's house in Champlain in the summer of 1922. Reynolds was a famous mezzotint printer from NYC who printed portraits of many famous people. Courtesy Special Collections, Feinberg Library, State University of New York College at Plattsburgh.

What is a "bookplate?" It is essentially a printed label that the owner of a book would use to indicate to others, especially if the book was loaned, who the book belonged to. Instead of writing the name of the owner in the book, book owners could easily paste a printed label in the book with their name on it. The bookplate evolved over time to encompass elaborate, custom designs that were made by engraving copper or zinc plates similar to that of lithograph prints.



A bookplate made by bookplate engraver E.B. Bird, 1904. Private collection.

Truesdell lived near Boston where many bookplate artists and collectors lived. He contributed articles to national and international magazines devoted to bookplate collecting. Between the years 1902 and 1908, he is mentioned numerous times in the periodical "*Journal of the Ex Libris Society*" which was published in England ("ex libris" is Latin for "bookplate"). The editor noted the high quality of his 5,000-piece collection.

Around 1903, Truesdell purchased a printing press and called his publishing business the "Troutsdale Press." Between 1903 and 1907, he published 12 booklets that showcased the work of various bookplate artists. After 1907, Truesdell's interests in bookplates appears to have waned. He was now interested in a similar field: engraving and lithography.

During the 1910's Truesdell focused his work on American and European engravers who made beautiful lithograph prints. Publishing at the time relied on artist-engravers to reproduce portraits, paintings, drawings and historic scenes in astonishing

detail using engraved copper plates, etched zinc plates, blocks of wood or even carved linoleum. The engraved plates were used in a printing press for mass production of the image. Over the next 30 years, Truesdell collected over 9,000 lithograph prints. He bought many prints on three European vacations in the early 1920s.

#### ***"The Print Connoisseur"* Magazine**

Starting in October of 1920, Truesdell printed a quarterly magazine called "*The Print Connoisseur*" which was devoted to articles related to engravings and engravers, print makers and artists. The magazine ran from 1920 to 1932 and comprised 46 issues.

Truesdell's *Print Connoisseur* magazine usually had four or five articles written by guest writers. Truesdell sometimes wrote one or two articles himself for an issue. The magazine included high quality prints of engravings and wood cuts. Most magazine covers were printed in black and white but some were printed in color. Truesdell supported his magazine through subscriptions and ads placed in the back.

Truesdell's studio was originally in New York City when he started printing *The Print Connoisseur* in 1920. In 1922 and 1923, he had the Clinton Press in Plattsburgh print the magazine while he was in the process of moving to Champlain or traveling in Europe. Between 1924 and 1926 Hugh McLellan of Champlain used his newly established Moorsfield Press to print the magazine. Afterwards, Truesdell printed them himself.

#### **Truesdell's Book Publishing (1924-1933)**

In 1924, Truesdell published his first large book on the work of artist and engraver Charles Meryon which was written by Loys Delteil (who also contributed articles to his magazine). Other books followed for the work of engravers Henry Wolf (1927) and Gustav Kruell (1929), both books written by Ralph Clifton Smith.

Truesdell was considered an authority on George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War and often gave talks on the subjects. In 1926 and 1927, he published several important books related to the lithographs of Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth, the first northern soldier killed in the Civil War. Truesdell's Ellsworth books were an expansion of the articles printed in his *Print Connoisseur* magazine in April and July of 1926.

Truesdell spent many years collecting Abraham Lincoln lithographs. In 1916, he planned to publish all of the portraits and engravings of Abraham Lincoln. He was in discussions with Frederick Hill Meserve (1865-1962) to use prints of Meserve's Lincoln photographs for the upcoming book. In 1911, Meserve had published his authoritative book on all of the Lincoln photographs known to exist. Truesdell wanted to print a similar book and Meserve offered him 112 prints from his exclusive negatives. Four years later, in 1920, Truesdell printed an announcement for the upcoming book but it wouldn't be until 1933 before he printed Volume 2 of the planned four-volume series. Truesdell died before printing the other three volumes.

#### **The McLellan Lincoln Collection**

In 1918, Hugh McLellan semi-retired from the architectural business in N.Y.C. and moved back to Champlain to settle his father's estate. His father, Charles Woodberry McLellan, had been a friend of Abraham Lincoln and Robert Todd Lincoln from 1856 to 1860 in Springfield, Illinois, and continued his friendship with Robert up to his death. At the end of his life, Charles was one of the top five Lincoln collectors in the country (known as one of the "Big Five.") His Lincoln collection was stored in a large, fire proof vault in the McLellan cottage and contained many letters written by Lincoln from 1838 to 1865. The most important letter he owned was a reply by Lincoln to the Thomas Jefferson Day Dinner celebration in Boston in 1858. Lincoln was unable to attend, but his letter, really a speech, was read at the dinner and is said to have helped him win the East. Hugh McLellan printed the letter in 1923 with his Moorsfield Press for Commencement weekend at Brown University.

Truesdell was also very interested in the Lincoln collection and visited McLellan several times to see it. Over the next five years, he helped McLellan catalog the collection, arranged meetings with buyers and auction houses, and kept abreast of similar auctions from the other "Big Five." He also used some of McLellan's material for his upcoming Lincoln books.

After negotiating with various agents and collectors, Hugh and his brother Malcolm sold their father's collection to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in 1923 for \$43,500 (over \$648,000 today). Rockefeller, in turn, donated it to Brown University where it is known today as the "McLellan Lincoln Collection."

## The Moorsfield Press

When Hugh McLellan founded the Moorsfield Press in 1919, he had a basic knowledge of printing from his days at college printing envelopes. Truesdell had 16 years of experience working with a printing press and was also an experienced publisher. He was instrumental in helping McLellan establish his press and quickly became his mentor. McLellan's first publication in 1919 acknowledged Truesdell's assistance: *"The kindly advice of Mr. Winfred Porter Truesdell in the typography of this brochure, and his assistance and encouragement, are gratefully acknowledged."*

In 1922, McLellan suggested to Truesdell that he move to Champlain and establish his own press. McLellan wrote: *"I may say that the Moorsfield Press is a flourishing institution around here. I told you about Mr. Truesdell sending his Golding 12x18 press up. I have installed a motor on it, and Woodberry [son Woody] is now singing in the other room as he runs off a job on it. Mr. Truesdell is here now, and we've been printing for a week... I am trying to induce Truesdell to come up here permanently and open up a real printing office - at any rate we would be kept busy."*

In the early 1920s, Truesdell went to Europe three times in search of art and to sell ads for his magazine. He asked McLellan to help with the production of his magazine which was being printed by the Clinton Press in Plattsburgh. He needed McLellan to manage his affairs, pay bills, handle printing problems and correspond with authors. McLellan found his hands full handling Truesdell's work as well as overdue bills. This work left little time for his own printing.

When the Moorsfield Press became more established, McLellan and Truesdell printed the magazine in 1926 and 1927. These publications show the unique style of the Caslon old-style font. It is the same font that McLellan would use when he issued his own historical magazine called the *"Moorsfield Antiquarian"* in 1937 and 1938 as well as many historical pamphlets he printed over the years.

In 1945, Hugh McLellan was one of the founding members of the Clinton County Historical Association as well as President. His son Woody published the *North Country Notes* newsletter using the Moorsfield Press starting in 1960.

## Truesdell's Life, Education and Marriage

Winfred Porter Truesdell was born on November 13, 1877, in Lynn, Massachusetts. According to Woody McLellan, Truesdell "was a self-educated man, never having obtained a formal high school education, yet he spoke French and Spanish fluently and became popular as an after-dinner speaker." He also described him as a "remarkably brilliant man."

After Truesdell moved to Champlain, he met school teacher Edythe Gettys. They married in August of 1924 and lived on Oak St. in Champlain. On May 27, 1939, Truesdell died at his house of a heart attack after being ill for a year. He was buried in the Glenwood Cemetery in Champlain.



Edythe Gettys, circa 1904-07. From Paine's Studio glass plate collection at CCHA.

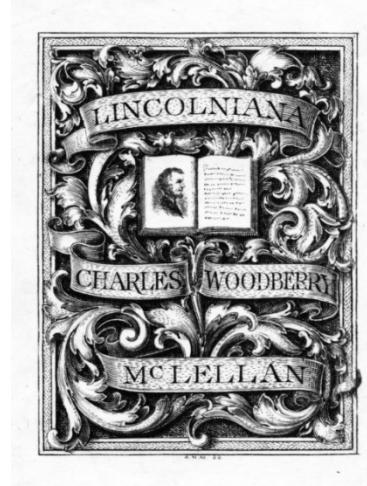
After her husband died, Edythe never moved his books or the printing press. When she died in 1970, several heirs settled the estate and disposed of the art collection, books, printing press and house. Most of Truesdell's bookplates, magazines, lithographs and photographs were donated to Special Collections, Feinberg Library at SUNY-Plattsburgh by the Fall of 1971 and encompassed approximately 9,381 items. General art books were placed in the main collection. Today, the collection of lithographs and photographs have been indexed and are available for researchers.

### Author Bio

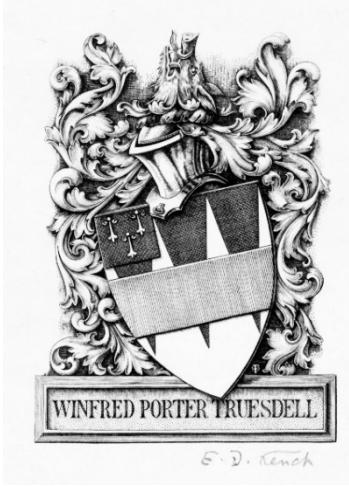
David Patrick is a direct descendent of Judge Pliny Moore of Champlain through his oldest child, Noadiah. He is also related to Hugh McLellan, architect, historian and printer. David has written extensively about the Moore, Nye and McLellan families of Champlain and has published fifteen historic calendars related to the Town of Champlain's history. Research material and some images courtesy Special Collections, Feinberg Library, State University of New York, College at Plattsburgh. Other images from the collection of the Clinton County Historical Association and two private collections.



Bookplate made for "Big Five" Lincoln collector Judd Stewart in 1909 by engraver Arthur Nelson MacDonald. Private collection.



Bookplate made for "Big Five" Lincoln collector Charles Woodberry McLellan (father of Hugh McLellan) in 1922 by engraver Arthur Nelson MacDonald. Private collection.



Bookplate made for Winfred Porter Truesdell and signed by the artist. Private collection.



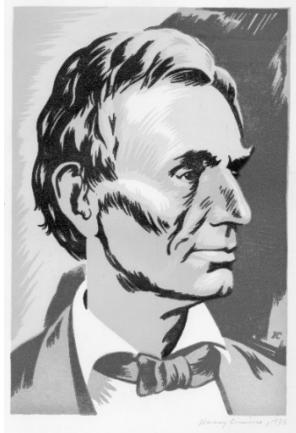
Lithograph of British Gen. John Burgoyne. Courtesy Special Collections, Feinberg Library, State University of New York College at Plattsburgh.



Lithograph of Thomas Macdonough. Courtesy Special Collections, Feinberg Library, State University of New York College at Plattsburgh.



Lithograph of Elmer E. Ellsworth, first northern casualty in the Civil War. Private collection.



Color wood cut from "Engraved & Lithographed Portraits of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 2." Private collection.



Color wood cut from the *Print Connoisseur* article "Edward Wilson's Marines." Private collection.



Color wood cut of Elmer E. Ellsworth. Private collection.