



The Aldus Society
PO Box 1150
Worthington, OH 43085
Aldussociety.com

Reprinted with permission from The Columbus Dispatch

From Moneymaker to Papermaker: Chillicothe Resident Embraces Legacy of Preceding Generations

(September 11, 2001)

By Bill Eichenberger, Dispatch Book Critic

Paper is a tool of the learned, a raw material for bookmaking. Paper is the household furniture of the chancery, the treasure of scholars, a preserver of human friendship. O, my paper! You are indeed a splendid thing.

-- Abraham a Santa Clara, 17th-century priest

Dard Hunter III had everything figured out.

The day he graduated from college, where he was studying business management, he would put on his stockbroker's suit and take Wall Street by storm.

No way would he follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. No way would he have anything to do with papermaking.

"I was never one to do anything I didn't really want to do," Hunter said recently at Mountain House, the family home in Chillicothe for eight decades.

In 1989, when Dard Hunter II died, everything changed.

"I saw the light," the son said.

The light guided him back to his grandfather's legacy as a graphic designer and the world's foremost authority on the history of papermaking, and to his father's legacy as a bookmaker and craftsman of the highest order.

And so Hunter founded Dard Hunter Studios at Mountain House, where paper is still made by hand and 175 original designs by his grandfather are still applied to cards, prints, stationery, ceramics and jewelry.

At the turn of the century, grandfather Hunter, an artist, was working for his father's newspaper in Chillicothe.

In 1904 he joined the renowned Roycrofters arts-and-crafts community in East Aurora, N.Y. Later he studied elements of graphic design and bookmaking in Vienna, Austria; worked in Austria and England; then returned to the United States, where he founded a paper mill in Marlborough, N.Y.

At the time, in 1912, not a single mill in the country was producing handmade paper.

Hunter eventually traveled the world studying papermaking techniques. He wrote 20 books on the subject, including eight that he made entirely by himself.

Mass-produced books can be beautiful, although many aren't; but handmade books can be stunning as works of art. The only entirely harmonious book, Hunter thought, is conceived, written and manufactured by one person.

The first order of business when Dard Hunter III chose to pursue papermaking was to restore Mountain House; the second was to figure out how to use printing equipment nearly 100 years old.

He happened to run into printers Mark and Marilyn Nero of Chandler, Ariz., who visit Mountain House three or four times a year to work the manual printing press.

"We met in an Internet chat room," Mark Nero said recently during a break at Mountain House. "Dard (III) asked a question about adjusting the press roller and signed off, 'Dard Hunter.' I sent him a message back asking, 'Dard Hunter who?' And he sent me the reply 'Dard Hunter III, that's who.'"

"Of course I knew all about the Roycrofters, collected their stuff. And I knew all about Dard Hunter."

The trio struck up a friendship that in turn inspired Hunter to hire the Neros.

"We make reprints rather than reproductions," Nero said. "It's a fine distinction, but we use 100 percent of Dard's designs, down to the colors. And we use the same press Dard used."

Papermaking and printing by hand are labor-intensive: The Neros take an entire workweek to produce 50 three-color prints.

They are in good company, though: Hunter II and his father worked for years producing the 1950 magnum opus *Papermaking by Hand in America*. The two earned 5 cents an hour for their effort, they estimated.

"Doing all this by hand has never been a get-rich-quick scheme," Nero said with a laugh.

Hunter concurred: "My father actually lost money on his (1981) book *The Life Work of Dard Hunter*."

The limited-edition biography, handmade, features all 175 designs.

Papermaking by Hand and *Life Work* sell for as much as \$12,500 apiece in rare-book catalogs.

Still, the Hunter designs have never really gone away.

"They have been imitated so much that they have always been here, there and everywhere," Nero said.

"Lots of people will look at one of Dard's designs and say, 'Oh, I recognize that.' But they won't know who Dard is.

"We're trying to bring the name Dard Hunter back."

Although he seeks to preserve his grandfather's legacy, Hunter doesn't see himself as someone on a mission.

"I never knew my grandfather. He died before I was born," he said. "Whenever I talked to my father about my grandfather, I was interested in Dard Hunter the man rather than Dard Hunter the achiever.

"So, in a strange way, I feel something of a curator of a site; in a crazy way, I don't feel a family connection when it comes to my grandfather's work."

His grandfather and father had a passion for handmade books and other objects. (His father made furniture for Mountain House.) And, although they understood the practicality of automation, they harbored a prejudice.

“My father’s biggest complaint was about softbound books. He didn’t care for them at all,” Hunter recalled. “He never sold reprint rights to his books, because he didn’t want to see them produced in paperback.”

He did make an exception:

“He sold the rights to *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* to Dover Publishing. And when he saw the paperback edition of it, he almost flipped out.

“But he understood the need for it, too. He understood that a \$15 paperback edition made it possible for students to buy a book they couldn’t afford if it were a \$100 hardcover.”

Thanks to his ubiquitous designs, Dard Hunter has cast a long shadow on arts and crafts in the United States.

Dianne Ayres, owner of Arts and Crafts Period Textiles in Oakland, Calif., uses two of the designs for her linens.

“We use the tulip design and the rose design,” she said. “You see Dard Hunter’s rose everywhere in arts and crafts. I think his designs are really striking in their simplicity.”

Hunter is pleased that Ayres credits his grandfather by name in her catalog and on her Web site.

“And as a way of saying thank you,” he said, “Dianne sends us the textile scraps, which we use to make paper.”

Paper that Hunter didn’t intend to make -- no, sir -- until he saw the light.