

# Joseph Riggs Dunlap (1913 – 2004)

*Theo Rehak*

Joseph 'Joe' Dunlap, Life Member and North American Secretary of the US William Morris Society for many decades, passed away on 1 March 2004. A leading figure in William Morris studies in the United States, as a writer, mentor, lecturer, and collector, he obtained his BA from Wooster College in 1936. A BS in Library Science followed in 1937. He received his MA in Medieval History in 1943, and Doctor of Library Science in 1972, all from Columbia University.

Born in Weishien [now Wei-fang], China on 8 February 1913, he was the eldest of five children born to Robert Weyer and Alice Logan Dunlap. His father was a medical doctor, who went to China under the auspices of the Presbyterian Mission Board, and was a man of deep faith and compassion. When a young child Joseph contracted tuberculosis, but eventually recovered, spending a good portion of his waking hours being tutored, working at his studies and resting in bed. As a consequence, he would acquire patience and dedication as a scholar, delighting in history and especially languages: both his own and that of his birth country. His command of the Chinese language never left him, and he was fluent in at least two dialects. In later years, he would sometimes sing his favourite hymns in Chinese, to the delight of his family and friends.

It was Medieval History and the strongly contested political polemics at Columbia in the late thirties, which led him to discover William Morris. The Second World War interrupted his academic pursuits and despite his personal beliefs and medical history he was drafted. He did not resist, and managed to be assigned to unarmed overseas duty. Attached to the 379<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion, 70<sup>th</sup> Division, he served 12 months in the European Theatre, and was awarded two battle stars for the Rhineland and Central European campaigns. Remarkably, he would also spend some months in London studying

Chinese again at the School of Oriental and African Studies, until his discharge in 1946. As he related, 'the Army had all these GIs overseas and not enough transportation to get them back home for months, so I took advantage of this'.

Joseph would continue to pursue his interest in William Morris. He maintained an active correspondence and interaction with Morrisian scholars in the States and abroad. In 1955 the William Morris Society was formally organised, and in 1957, while on six-month sabbatical in England, he met and befriended R. C. H. Briggs, our Society's first Honorary Secretary. Together they helped curate the first WMS exhibition, *The Typographical Adventure of William Morris*, which would set a standard for the Society and put our organisation 'on the map'. Visits to the Hammersmith home of Miss Dorothy Walker [daughter of Emery Walker] and our Society's first Honorary President, Sir Sidney Cockerell, at Kew ensued. As Mr. Briggs would write in a recent letter, 'We were both exploring the life and work of William Morris. I admired his determination, self-discipline and quiet efficiency in the pursuit of his study, and profited by the example of his scholarly method'. The men remained good friends through the years, a friendship reinforced by Joe's subsequent visits in the late 1960s and afterwards.

Devoted to the cause of Morris, Joseph organised the WMS in North America (the on-going independent Canadian Society would come later). He would find and motivate people who agreed to collect dues and organise events in the Midwest and West Coast, as well as those in the immediate New York City area. The scheme to have 'regional secretaries' was maintained for about 15 years. In time this network would dwindle and fall away, but our Society continued to draw and maintain members from all over the country. However the Dunlap enclave survived and flourished. As early as 1959 he began to publish a Newsletter (*News From Anywhere*), at least two editions of a membership directory, and for several years he held forth every 1 May, presiding over a *May Wine Celebration*, which many distinguished colleagues and fellow Morrisians regularly attended.

The 1970s were particularly prolific. In 1974 he lectured at the Typophiles Holiday Luncheon to a standing-room-only gathering of Morrisians, American Printing History Association members, and Typophiles at the renowned Lotos Club in Manhattan. This lecture

was *On the Heritage of William Morris: Some Considerations, Typographic and Otherwise*, later published by the Typophiles in 1976. This same year saw the successful reweaving and sale by subscription of over 50 yards of Morris's magnificent *Bird* design, a double-woven woollen fabric made on the Jacquard looms of Scalamandré Silks of Long Island City. Joseph's collection of Morris & Company samples would also provide exemplars for a small range of printed chintz revivals, including *Brother Rabbit* and *Strawberry Thief*, among others, also held and sold through that company's collection of historic designs. Always an admirer of fine hand work, Joe encouraged the production of a limited number of sterling silver brooches, fashioned after the famous Kelmscott 'primrose' watermark, done by lost-wax casting, many of which were enhanced by cloisonné enamels.

A more profound gift of his energies was his support and encouragement of all Morrisian interest and research, especially publishing and lecturing, which furthered the cause of Morris in the USA. He contributed his 'William Morris as Calligrapher' essay to the Morgan Library's definitive and powerfully successful 1976 exhibition, *William Morris and the Art of the Book*. Few others could have brought to this oft-neglected pursuit of Morris the subtle analysis and appreciation Joseph wielded. His quiet reserve and a genuine amiable curiosity made his presence a welcome and nurturing resource for many scholars and students. When lecturing he was modest, yet quietly assertive, and he won over his audiences easily. Upon being introduced with many superlatives, he once gently remarked, 'That sounded somewhat familiar, but I *cannot imagine* whom you could possibly be referring to...'. His theory of being 'only three handshakes away from William Morris, [by way of his meeting Cockerell in 1957] and that anyone present in this very room tonight could be but four!' always moved his listeners to applause.

In 1981 he would succeed in returning to his place of birth in Chefoo [now Yantai], visiting Temple Hill and the house where he had lived until he was fourteen. The reverie of his memories would vie with the realities of what he found there. 'It was an extraordinary feeling to be back again, but it also reminds one of how differently things can turn out in life,' he said.

My last remembrance of Joe in public was at the Burne-Jones Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1998, observing him

listen with great patience to someone propounding annoyingly incorrect 'history' and its 'interpretation' regarding Burne-Jones and Morris. He rolled his eyes and let it pass. 'It is enough to know that people are still talking...' he observed. As he soldiered on into his maturity he stayed close to his library where, surrounded by his books and ephemera, and a loving family, he never lost his dedication to, and affection for William Morris.

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE WRITING OF  
JOSEPH DUNLAP

*The Book That Never Was*. New York: Oriole Editions, 1971. 86pp. This work discussed the plan by Morris and Burne-Jones in the 1860s to publish an illustrated edition of *The Story of Cupid and Psyche*. The scheme foundered when they could not find a typeface consonant with EBJ's wood engravings.

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[Book Review] William Morris, *The Story of Cupid and Psyche*. London and Cambridge: Clover Hill Editions, 1974. For *Victorian Poetry* 13 (Fall–Winter, 1975): pp. 181–84. The Clover Hill Edition set the text in Morris's Troy type and printed from the original Burne-Jones wood-cuts. This issue of *VP* was devoted to the work of William Morris.

*On the Heritage of William Morris: Some Considerations, Typographic and Otherwise*. An Address Delivered on the Occasion of the Annual Typophiles Christmas Luncheon, December 12, 1974. New York: The Typophiles, 1976. (Typophiles Monograph).

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Cambridge: University Printing House, 1976. 18pp. Dunlap was asked to revise a lecture originally given in 1957 and first published in 1964 for this keepsake, printed by the Cambridge University Press in Caxton's quinqucentenary year.

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