

# Signa Houghteling

*Recipient of The Laura Young Award  
2012*

This year the Laura Young Award for Service to the Guild of Book Workers will be given to Signa (Judy) Houghteling, Local Organizer of the 28<sup>th</sup> Seminar on Standards of Excellence in Hand Bookbinding held in San Francisco in 2009 and past Editor of the Guild's Journal.

From 2001 to 2005 Signa was the Guild's *Journal* editor. At the same time she was President of The Hand Bookbinders of California. A true multi-tasker. Hand Bookbinders serves as a kind of de facto Northern California branch of the GBW since there is a great overlap in membership in both organizations.

For the 28<sup>th</sup> Standards Seminar, Signa chaired the committee of GBW and Hand Bookbinders in April of 2008 when she was asked to take over, replacing the retiring chairman. She encouraged and led an enthusiastic committee to a successful seminar. She did so during a particularly stressful time: her husband Joe was ill and needing much attention; he died three months later. Signa says now that working on the planning helped her through that difficult period.

Growing up in Bay Village, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, Signa got started in arts and crafts early. She was influenced by graduates of the Cleveland Institute of Art, who founded the local "Bay Crafters", a group offering classes in arts and crafts. She took those classes during her school and college years, and also attended the Cleveland Institute of Art. She graduated in studio art from Connecticut College for Women and, when she moved to San Francisco after her graduation, pursued the arts and crafts at the San Francisco Art Institute. Her first job was part time wallpaper designer and secretary. Sometime during those years she traveled extensively, alone, circumnavigating the world.

Later, married in Maryland, Signa taught decorative arts, mostly American furniture of the Colonial and Federal Periods, and Impressionism and Post-Impression at the University of Maryland Extension. During that period, she restored and decorated in period style an early 19<sup>th</sup> c. plantation house.

After the marriage failed, she worked in Washington, D.C. in adult education for the National Endowment for the Humanities. She was one of the founding staff of the State-Based Program, which still funds programs in humanities and public policy in every state.



Returning to San Francisco in 1974, Signa began to remodel residential property, doing much of the physical work herself. She also became a practicing goldsmith. Working with her hands has always been her passion.

In 1991, Signa learned "desktop publishing" and self-published a memoir of a family trip in the 1950s. She produced 13 copies of text and then looked for ways of binding them. A book on Japanese stab binding taught her one way. Looking for instruction in traditional bookbinding, she applied and was accepted by Eleanor Ramsey as a student. She joined the Hand Bookbinders of California in 1993 and in 1996 she joined the Guild of Book Workers. She became involved in both organizations as Editor of the Guild *Journal* and as President of HBC in 2001. She remains active

in the Hand Bookbinders, heading the Hospitality Committee for years, advising the Board, filling in wherever needed. She is now Exhibition Chair for HBC's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition, which will open at Stanford University in July, moving on to the Olin Library at Mills College in October.

If Signa had served only in those capacities for the Hand Bookbinders, her work would have been important, but her invaluable contributions to the work of the organization have been outstanding. She has done the same for the Guild of Book Workers – if it needed doing, Signa did it.

In 1995, Signa helped plan the 4<sup>th</sup> International Marblers' Gathering in Istanbul, continuing to encourage marblers in the Bay Area.

In 2005 and 2006, Judy and Margaret Johnson worked together to document, photograph and eventually give a talk about the First 100 years in Bookbinding in America on the West Coast.

Signa and her husband hosted visiting bookbinding workshop instructors for many years and formed lasting friendships with binders from the U.S. and Europe. She has since moved into a retirement community but remains active in the Hand Bookbinders and will return to her bookbinding after her present job of getting the HBC 40<sup>th</sup> underway.

Margaret Johnson