

Peter Verheyen

*Recipient of the GBW Lifetime Achievement Award
2016*

It is no exaggeration to say that Peter has been a positive part of my daily bookbinding life for the past 22 years. —Jeff Peachey, bookbinder, conservator, toolmaker.

Peter Verheyen is the recipient of the Guild of Book Workers 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award for his pioneering use of digital technology to build community by sharing information and encouraging discourse on all aspects of the book arts.

*Peter's founding of the BookArts listserv and affiliated web site in 1994, followed by the respected online journal, The Bonefolder, constituted a visionary's recognition of the Internet's potential at a time when online networking was still a vague and slightly unsettling prospect for many book artists. The listserv and journal turned Internet vastness into a virtual town square, facilitating artist collaborations, the education of a collector audience, and the maturation of the field as a whole. Peter has embraced many roles, including artist, educator, editor, librarian, conservator, and exhibitions curator. His vision for this field, and his skill and persistence in carrying out and sustaining that vision, continues to immeasurably enrich and expand the audience for books, art and culture. —Betty Bright, independent scholar and curator, author of *No Longer Innocent: Book Art In America 1960–1980**

The impact of Peter's work has been global; worldwide there are nearly 2500 subscribers to Book_Arts-L, now in its twenty-second year. Topics on the list cover all manner of technical concerns, educational and professional issues, and philosophical discussions on art and craft. Its impact has been so far-reaching that *American Craft Magazine*, in its "70 Years of Making" issue (Aug/Sept 2011), honored Book-Arts_L by giving it a place on the timeline for "Paper" in the 1990s, one of five highlights that also included the St. Johns Bible.

If Book-Arts_L is the platform upon which a community coalesced and has flourished, the Book Arts Web—its counterpart project, which Peter created and continues to curate—remains the foremost resource in the field, with tutorials, online exhibits, supply directories, professional and educational opportunities, and numerous external links: a literal one-stop shopping destination for book arts information. For the many practitioners, both novice and veteran, who have no local experts or mentors to call on, Book_Arts-L and the Book Arts Web are a professional lifeline.

In 2004 Peter founded *The Bonefolder*, an open access, online book arts journal: an in-depth extension of the Book Arts Web featuring significant articles on the same broad variety of topics, written by established and emerging experts, and peer-reviewed by an editorial board of leading binders, book artists, and conservators. Although the *Bonefolder* ceased publication in 2013, *The Bonefolder Extras* blog remains active under Peter's direction, publishing book reviews and other material of interest to bookworkers. Both continue to serve a broad, global readership, as witnessed by more than 590,000 downloads at the time of this writing.

Peter began his involvement in the book arts while a work-study student in the preservation department at the Johns Hopkins University Library, then led by John Dean. At that time, Hopkins's preservation department hosted a very active apprentice training program, exposing Peter to all facets of the field. In 1984, his senior year, Peter took a semester off to intern in the conservation lab of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, Germany. During this time he decided to pursue bookbinding and conservation as a career. After graduation, Peter returned to Germany to begin a formal apprenticeship

in hand bookbinding at the Kunstbuchbinderei Klein in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, passing his examinations in 1987. He also studied at the Centro del bel libro Ascona in Switzerland.

After an internship with Frank Mowery at the Folger Shakespeare Library, he moved to Chicago, where he worked first at Monastery Hill Bindery and then with William Minter. He recalls his time with Minter as “perhaps the best period in [my] career because of the challenging and nurturing environment.” Peter left Chicago for Yale University library, then in 1993 became rare book conservator at the Cornell University library, once again working with John Dean. In 1995 he established the conservation lab at the Syracuse University library, where in 2008 he was named head of preservation and conservation, a position that included digitizing special collections. Peter led the preservation program for five years.

Peter served on the board of the Guild of Book Workers in a variety of positions for fourteen years. As exhibitions chair he curated the monumental *100th Anniversary Exhibition*, really two exhibitions, including both historical and contemporary components. As publicity chair he brought the Guild online. He presented at Standards formally in 2001 demonstrating the vellum over boards binding structure, and informally in several Friday Forum poster sessions.

Peter is himself an accomplished binder. His work is exhibited internationally, nationally, and regionally. He was awarded the *Harmatan Leather Award for Forwarding* in the Society of Bookbinders’ 2003 Competition and was invited to participate in the 2014–15 Designer Bookbinders’ *InsideOUT: Contemporary Bindings of Private Press Books*. This exhibit was a conceptual echo of the first GBW exhibition Peter organized, the 1992 *Fine Printers Finely Bound, Too*.

Despite changes in his roles at work that progressively moved him away from the bench and into broader administrative positions, Peter maintains his haptic connections to bookbinding, albeit at a more relaxed pace. In part this is due to increasing mobility and manual dexterity issues, but it is also due to his deepening interest in mid-nineteenth- to twentieth-century German binding. His English translation of Ernst Collin’s 1922 fictional dialogue between a bookbinder and a collector, *Pressbengel (The Bone Folder)*, first appeared in the 2009 *Guild of Book Workers Journal*. A fine press edition by Don Rash’s Boss Dog Press is now in production. Peter recently completed a history of W. Collin, Court Bookbinders in Berlin, and a bibliography of the writings of Ernst Collin in both German and English, material he has shared extensively on his Pressbengel Project Blog. His research into the Collin family, exhibition bindings, and articles on binding structures including the springback, millimeter, vellum over boards, and stiffened paper bindings have done much to broaden awareness in the United States of the German binding tradition.

Peter is deeply committed to the open access model of freely sharing his work, and has written on the topic in a variety of forums. He has extended this free, unrestricted access to his published binding tutorials and his research on the Collin family. He formatted his translation of *The Bonefolder* into signatures and made it available for free download. Numerous bookbinding instructors have taken advantage of this opportunity to easily and inexpensively provide their students with a topical, printed text block.

It is also important to note the democratic nature of Peter’s endeavors: *The Bonefolder* journal actively solicited articles by authors at any stage of their career, likewise the annual *Bind-O-Rama* online exhibit (2004–2015) was open to anyone who wished to submit work. As coordinator of the Standards Seminar’s *Friday Forum* program, Peter encouraged anyone and everyone to demonstrate a technique, show a binding they had created, or display a product they had developed.

Peter also supports the community on a deeply personal level. He mentored interns while head of preservation at Syracuse; for many years opened his private studio to students; and most recently taught

book repair to an out-of-town library school student via Skype. His visibility through Book_Arts-L and the Book Arts Web often leads people he has never met to email him with questions. He answers each one fully, clearly, patiently, and respectfully. He collects what he describes as “exemplars of structures by book artists whose work I admire and with whom I've had interesting interactions.” These may be well known artists or people whose work he encountered for the first time in a *Bind-O-Rama* or through a post on Book_Arts-L. These chance interactions often are the beginning of a career-long advocacy and friendship.

What a great reason to celebrate wonderful Peter Verheyen! What a generous friend he has been, sharing valuable information, fostering important book-related dialogue, supporting artists and binders. His book arts list alone has provided me with leads on great opportunities, many of which have shaped the course of my life in the last ten years. —Sarah Bryant, book artist

Peter Verheyen makes available the accumulated wisdom of the community and generously shares his personal knowledge. He empowers and creates opportunities for other members of the community to do likewise. In 2009 he was awarded the Laura Young Award, which recognizes members who have made an outstanding contribution of service to the Guild of Book Workers. The Guild's 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes the global impact of his work.

Peter Verheyen's Book Arts Web is online at www.philobiblon.com

Karen Hanmer