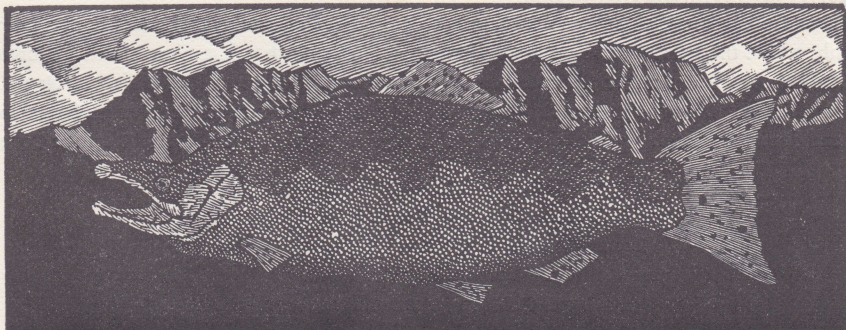


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University of Oklahoma Press

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On the last page of *Black-letter*, Jeffrey Atherton introduces a note of irony, a final guffaw, if you will — the colophon from Abbot Johann Trithemius of Sponheim's *Annales Hirsauigienses*, in which Johann Gutenberg is not mentioned at all, but the not-so-gracious banker Johann Fust and his son-in-law, Peter Schoeffer, having learned his lessons well from Herr Gutenberg, now proudly accept the laurels for "inventing the art of printing." *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

— Dr. Adela S. Roatcap

### In Memoriam: STELLA PATRI

1 November 1896 — 31 March 2001

by Joanne Sonnichsen

The dark, oily waters of the flooding Arno river in Florence receded, leaving in their wake an incredible amount of damage. On 4 November 1966, the librarians of Florence called for help for the thousands of soggy, seemingly irreplaceable books. An American bookbinder, fresh from specialized studies in England, France, and Italy, and professional work in San Francisco, responded.

Thus began, at the age of seventy, Stella Patri's international reputation in book restoration. Other countries have their pioneers in the research and amazing new developments in book restoration which have evolved as a result of the Florence flood — Stella Patri was our own. Stella was now working in her true vocation, one that was to last nearly thirty years and was to be stopped only by failing eyesight and deteriorating health.

During this period Stella's continuing studies and research established her as a source of information on materials and techniques. Her investigations into the nature of vellum, for example, developed into an important resource for other bookbinders, and she was generous with her advice and help. Her first love was paper, and her research into the nature of paper took her from night-school courses in chemistry to the paper makers of Japan. As her reputation grew, she worked for a succession of libraries and private collectors.



Petite but strong, full of the capacity for enjoyment, Stella was open and vivacious. Fierce in her zeal against the enemies of quality, in books as well as in life, she was equally outspoken when these enemies (carelessness, insensitivity, etc.) were remotely suggested.

In Stella's second-floor bindery, complete with her bindery cats, she welcomed colleagues, clients, and other student bookbinders with a warm smile and obvious interest.

Born in Canada, Stella came to San Francisco in time for the 1906 earthquake and fire. Here she met and married Italian-born artist Giacomo Patri. The idea of Stella's binding of Giacomo's 1938 book, *White Collar*, introduced her to the charms of bookbinding. She was able to study for a while with Octavia Holden until it became obvious that *White Collar*, printed at home in individual sheets, could not be bound in a traditional fashion. Now she had found her vocation, but her lessons had to be terminated. She returned to her job of raising three boys, Piero, Ramo, and Tito, and taking good care of the family during the Depression. During World War II, Stella, a pacifist, worked first as a welder on Liberty ships, then for the American Red Cross.

In 1952, she, Giacomo, Piero, and Tito went to Milan, where Piero was studying architecture. Yes, there was a bookbinding course, but she wasn't allowed into the college, and private lessons would have meant family disruption. Again, the dream was postponed.

After twenty-five years, Stella and Giacomo divorced, and Stella began work in San Rafael at the Cottage Book Shop. At last she was finally able to pursue her study of bookbinding, and for the next few years, on her day off, she studied with Peter Fahey. Stella later worked for booksellers Newbegin and Paul Elder, but found that the demands of her job did not leave enough time or energy for bookbinding in the evenings. By that time she had decided to concentrate on book restoration, and she knew she needed further study. When she "retired," she felt that she could use her ninety dollars a month from Social Security for living expenses while studying in Europe. In 1962 she left San Francisco for Rome and the study of document restoration at the Istituto di Patologia del Libro. Stella remained there for four months until she could no longer stand

Rome's summer heat. She left for Paris and study in leather and gold with Jules Fache. Then she went to England to work another four months with a retired bookbinder.

Stella returned to San Francisco. Peter Fahey, in Europe at the time, let Stella use her bindery and had left a few commissions for her to complete, but her first professional test came from Mrs. Tommasini at the U.C. Medical Library. Stella was given nineteen books to restore, which she completed to everyone's (her own included) satisfaction.

In the fall of 1966 Stella decided to take a combined vacation, leather-purchasing trip, and visit with her youngest son, Tito, then in London. On 4 November she read of the flood in Florence. She knew she could be of help, but, at seventy, not by carrying the books out of the mud. Her offer of help was accepted, and in late December she joined the team led by Roger Powell. After a month she felt that she had to return to her work in San Francisco. Soon afterward she received a telephone call requesting her services again in Florence, this time as a paid professional. She returned for two months on her second session and later in the year spent another month in Florence, this time with Anthony Cains's team.

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Back in San Francisco, her growing reputation for well-researched, meticulous work established her as the expert in book restoration. In 1972 she became one of the founding members of The Hand Bookbinders of California (still a dynamic organization after nearly thirty years) and a contributing presence at meetings until her health no longer permitted her to attend.

In 1988, the Women of Achievement, Vision and Excellence (WAVE) award, given to exceptional women over the age of seventy (now presented by Lifeprint), was presented to Stella for her leadership and pioneering spirit in her contributions to the community. She was awarded the title of Honorary Member of the Guild of Book Workers in 1993. Stella was feted by the Hand Bookbinders of California in 1996, and 1 November 1996 was designated "Stella Nicole Patri Day" by Mayor Willie Brown.

In 1995 Stella Patri became one of the earliest recipients of the Oscar Lewis Award of the Book Club of California for her outstanding contribution to the book arts.

One of the treasures of the Book Club of California library is the collection of transcribed oral histories of those concerned with fine printing and books, and it is here that you can meet Stella at age eighty-three. Within "The Hand Bookbinding Tradition in the San Francisco Bay Area," Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, 1982, is Stella Patri's fascinating history told as she might tell it to you. Her voice, her authority, her reservations, and her unique charm come through the written page as she still continues to inspire and delight.

## Serendipity

### MUSINGS FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

In mid-June, the American Library Association came to town. For this occasion, Peter Koch, printer of the renowned *Quarterly News-Letter*, turned his talents elsewhere. Off his press came twelve hundred crisply designed copies of *Rare Books & Manuscript Collections in the Libraries of the*