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Arts and Crafts Movement Leader William Morris Focus of Events

Oct. 13, 2014

The legacy of William Morris, a leading member of the Arts and Crafts Movement, will be the subject of four public events Oct. 22-24 on the campus of Illinois Wesleyan University.

The program brings together the disciplines of art, economics, history and politics as represented through the life of one transformative individual, according to Meg Miner, University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian and associate professor. Morris was a 19th-century English designer, writer, philosopher and founder of the Kelmscott Press, a publisher influencing the revival of the private press.

“At a time when the Industrial Revolution in Britain and elsewhere had reduced workers to mechanized toil, Morris argued for the importance of creative labor,” said Miner. “As a founder of the Arts and Crafts movement and Britain's first historical preservation society, he wrote and lectured on the vital connections between society and art, as embodied in his beautiful book and textile designs, stood for issues of equality and social justice, and became a crusading Socialist.”

Morris was also an influential figure for Elbert Hubbard, a native of McLean County. Hubbard founded the Roycrofters (in East Aurora, N.Y.) inspired by Morris’ Kelmscott Press.

Two Morris scholars will present an opening convocation Oct. 22. Jack Walsdorf, a book collector, author and president of the William Morris Society in the U.S., and Florence Boos, author and former president of the William Morris Society in the U.S., will speak at 11 a.m. at Evelyn Chapel.

“Both Walsdorf and Boos have written books on Morris from different perspectives,” said University Librarian Karen Schmidt. “Jack’s focus has been on Morris from the point of a collector, while Florence has written about Morris as a poet, utopian writer, and social reformer.”



William Morris



A resident of Portland, Ore., Walsdorf estimates he has collected more than 9,000 books in his nearly 50-year odyssey as a collector. He is the author of *On Collecting William Morris: A Memoir*. Walsdorf is also lending several Morris-related items from his personal collection for exhibit at The Ames Library through Nov. 14. Walsdorf will narrate highlights of the exhibit Oct. 22 at 4 p.m.

A professor of English at the University of Iowa, Boos is the author of *The Artist & The Capitalist: William Morris & Richard Marsden*. She will present a lecture Oct. 22 at 5:30 p.m. on Morris’ relation to the Garden City Movement, a mixed-use urban planning design theory that

developed in response to poor living conditions in cities during the Industrial Revolution.

A leaf from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, published by Kelmscott in 1896, will be one of the items on loan to The Ames Library through Nov. 14 .

Walsdorf will discuss Hubbard's connection to Morris Oct. 24 at 5 p.m. at the McLean County Museum of History. Miner said attendees are invited to bring one or two books from their collections for an "Antiques Road Show" type of assessment with Walsdorf narrating.

Schmidt said she believes these events are particularly relevant for Illinois Wesleyan because the program brings together several disciplines. "Through the lens of Morris, we can reflect on how the many threads of the liberal arts connect with one another through an individual whose influence is present in contemporary society," said Schmidt.

The program is made possible by a Re-Centering the Humanities grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.