

The November 2006 East Coast Meeting of The Oughtred Society. Report by Paul McConnell

Oughtred Society members enjoyed their annual East Coast meeting on the 11th of November at the Holiday Inn Select in Claymont, Delaware. Members from as far west as California and as far east as Israel were on hand to share their interest in slide rules and other forms of calculating devices.

Those attending were Ed Chamberlain, Bob De Cesaris, Zach Fluhr, Ray Giordano, Louis Gotlib, Jeff Hamm, Kate Matthews and her parents Bob and Margie Ryan, Paul McConnell, Caroline Mossup, Bob Otnes, Ted and Fay Palen, Tom Russo Sr., Tom Russo Jr, Conrad Schure, Tom Wyman, and Nathan Zeldes,

Time seemed to fly by as members set up their tables in the showroom, socialized with their friends and acquaintances, and examined the wonderful things on display during the morning session. The following is a brief summary of the displays:

- Ed Chamberlain – Ed’s presentation focused on French slide rules and other instruments.
- Louis Gotlib – Louis offered a broad variety of like-new slide rules.
- Bob Otnes – Bob displayed a selection of early adders, including one on the reverse side of a slide rule.
- Conrad Schure – Conrad showed some gems from his collection, including an extremely rare Nystrom’s Calculator by Young of Philadelphia and an equally rare Baldwin adder.
- Caroline Mossup – Caroline offered a nice selection of slide rules and some excellent books.
- Jeff Hamm– Jeff’s presentation highlighted his exhibition on the history of calculating devices which is installed at the Washington College
- Ted and Fay Palen – The Palens set up shop with a range of slide rules, books, and instruments that had something of interest for everyone.
- Zach Fluhr– Zach presented an impressive array of circular slide rules.
- Bob De Cesaris – Bob displayed his favorite rules, especially a large selection of Fowlers.
- Ray Giordano – Ray’s table featured a selection of rare and valuable books and an 18th century ivory and silver sector.

- Tom Wyman – Tom presented a fine display of gaugers' instruments, with an interesting link to Thomas Payne and Robert Burns.
- Kate Matthews – Kate brought an interesting selection of slide rules and drafting-related materials.
- Paul McConnell – Paul showed a cautionary display of slide rules exhibiting deterioration possibly caused by storage in a certain type of container. /note1/

While socializing, I had the honor of speaking with Bob Ryan, Kate Matthews' father.

Bob chose to recognize Veterans Day by wearing a ball cap emblazoned with the name of the U. S. Navy aircraft carrier on which he served during World War II. Bob was an aviation ordnance man on board the USS Franklin (CV-13), and survived the bombing of that ship on the 19th of March 1945.

After the morning session, the group adjourned to the dining room for a meal and the presentations by the speakers. Conrad Schure served as the master of ceremonies. Kate Matthews led the way with a summary of the data collected in the recent membership survey. She noted that the response level was good and the results were encouraging. Kate said the age distribution for members was a typical bell-shaped curve, offering hope that there are younger members who will carry the Society on into the future. The survey confirmed that Society members are primarily collectors who generally favor antiques and mechanical computing devices. Kate observed that Web-oriented respondents listed different priorities and expectations than paper-oriented members. Suggestions received from the survey were primarily positive. Kate expressed mild surprise that so many members felt they did not have enough material to write an article for the Journal. She encouraged members to share their knowledge with the rest of us and to avoid being intimidated by the excellent quality of the articles normally found in the Journal.

The next presentation focused on the future of the Thomas A. Russo Museum of Business History and Technology (MBH&T). Tom Russo Jr. described the remarkable progress made to date toward establishing a world-class museum, and outlined the museum's vision for a future of growth and contributions to the community. A focus on education is central to the museum's goal. The MBH&T has received certification as an educational institution from Delaware and surrounding states. That certification permits the museum to host classes of school children for tours and educational activities. Conference facilities for

business are also part of the plan. The next major milestone for the museum is to find a suitable permanent home for the collection and facilities. Tom displayed several potential sites, along with architectural sketches illustrating possible exhibition layouts and gallery arrangement.

Tom Wyman emphasized reaching out to the public and young people during his presentation, and acknowledged the common goal shared by the Oughtred Society and the MBH&T. All three of these presentations were noteworthy for the positive view they took for the future of our organizations.

Bob Otnes focused on the technical aspects of our interests with a talk on mechanical adders. Software compatibility issues prevented Bob from showing his visual presentation, but many of the devices covered by his text were available for examination at Bob's table. Bob thoughtfully provided each member with a CD-ROM copy of the work, complete to date, on a book he is writing. The CD-ROM includes the text, over a dozen colorful photographs of early mechanical adders, and an extensive bibliography.

After a final discussion on the practice of limiting sales to the afternoon session, which the members chose to continue to follow, Conrad closed the luncheon session and the group returned to the showroom for the afternoon auction.

The auction moved quickly, with winning bids ranging from \$2.00 for a Cox's Stadia Computer by Gurley to \$2200.00 for an early 19th Century folding gauger's rule. After the auction ended a few members negotiated for deals on unsold items while the rest of the participants packed up their possessions and surrendered the showroom to a wedding party.

From the Holiday Inn, most of the attendees went to tour the nearby Thomas A. Russo Museum of Business History and Technology in Wilmington. The tour was truly wonderful. Tom Russo Sr. kindly guided small groups through the several rooms of artifacts, while other groups wandered the halls to review something of interest, explore the extensive library, or sat and talked about what they had seen over snacks. From the Sholes and Glidden typewriter, the Chinese character typewriter, the cryptographic machines, pencil sharpeners, Dictaphones, check writers, spirit duplicators, time clocks, staplers, adding machines, and personal computers to the horse measuring cane, the magazine advertisements, advertising playing cards and product-related toys,

the Museum of Business History and Technology boasts an incredible range of artifacts.

Some of my personal favorites were the L. C. Smith & Corona typewriter with the animal keyboard for teaching children the fundamentals of touch typing – including an original set of small finger rings with each keyboard animal represented for the appropriate finger; the Automatic Bookkeeping Register Company Model 2 cash register, serial number 2, that was awarded a Gold Medal by the International Jury at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition at San Francisco in 1915 – complete with the original certificate and the Gold Medal; and the entire wall displaying one of each model of typewriter ever produced by the Remington typewriter company.

Again in 2006, the Oughtred Society's East Coast Meeting offered a full and memorable day for all who attended. Thanks to the officers, members, and guests who helped organize the event.

Paul McConnell

/Note1/ For the curious, Paul's display included examples of slide rules from the American Blueprint Company, the Eugene Dietzgen Company, the Keuffel and Esser Company, and the Frederick Post Company (by Hemmi). For each company, rules of approximately the same vintage were shown, some having been stored in fiber cases and some having been stored in leather cases. In every example, the rule stored in the fiber case showed signs of deterioration significantly more advanced than the similar rule stored in the leather case. The most obvious sign of deterioration was a browning of the celluloid scales. The fiber cases were usually black, often had a leather flap, and were common in the 1940s and 1950s. The conclusion that fiber cases may accelerate the deterioration of the celluloid scales on slide rules is based on casual observations, but seems to be consistent.