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What's New: annotated Lully score

Friday, December 27th, 2013...9:30 am

All seal hunting and no letterpress printing makes Jack a dull boy

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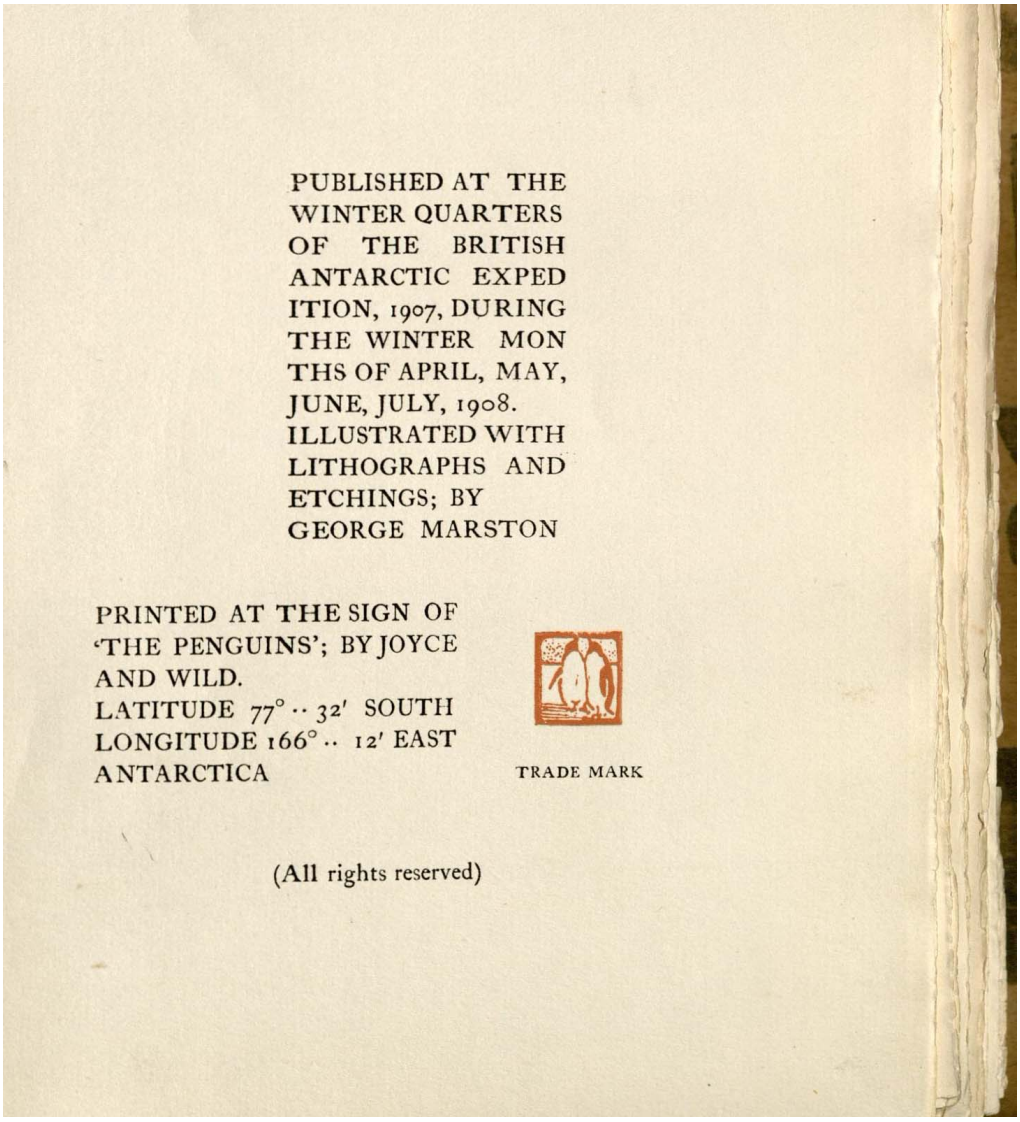
In 1908, Sir Ernest Shackleton and his British Polar Expedition made publication history: they created the first book ever produced on the continent of Antarctica.



PUBLISHED AT THE
WINTER QUARTERS
OF THE BRITISH
ANTARCTIC EXPED
ITION, 1907, DURING
THE WINTER MON
THS OF APRIL, MAY,
JUNE, JULY, 1908.
ILLUSTRATED WITH
LITHOGRAPHS AND
ETCHINGS; BY
GEORGE MARSTON

PRINTED AT THE SIGN OF
'THE PENGUINS'; BY JOYCE
AND WILD.
LATITUDE 77° .. 32′ SOUTH
LONGITUDE 166° .. 12′ EAST
ANTARCTICA

TRADE MARK

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Produced "at the Sign of the Penguins" while the team overwintered at Cape Royds before attempting the South Pole, *Aurora Australis* consists of about one hundred and twenty unnumbered loose sheets laced in wooden covers and bound in seal skin.

Its ten pieces of writing make up a serious anthology with surprising literary merit. There is a poem by Shackleton, attributed to Nemo in the table of contents and to Veritas at the end of the text (this poem is also signed "Veritas" in some copies).

MIDWINTER NIGHT.

The acetylene splutters and flickers,
The night comes into its own.
Outside Ambrose and Terror
Are snarling over a bone.

And this is the tale the watchman,
Awake in the dead of night,
Tells of the fourteen sleepers
Whose snoring gives him the blight.

The revels of Eros and Bacchus
Are mingled in some of their dreams,
For the songs they gustily gurgle
Are allied to bibulous themes.

And subjects re barmaids and bottles,
Whisky and barrels of beer,
Are mixed with amorous pleadings
That sound decidedly queer.

AURORA AUSTRALIS.

Darling you really love me?
Stutters one dreaming swain;
The watchman whispers "Never,"
And the dreamer writhes in pain.

From the corner cabin a mutter,
The listener kens not what;
It sounds like "yon pale moon,"
Or some other poetic rot.

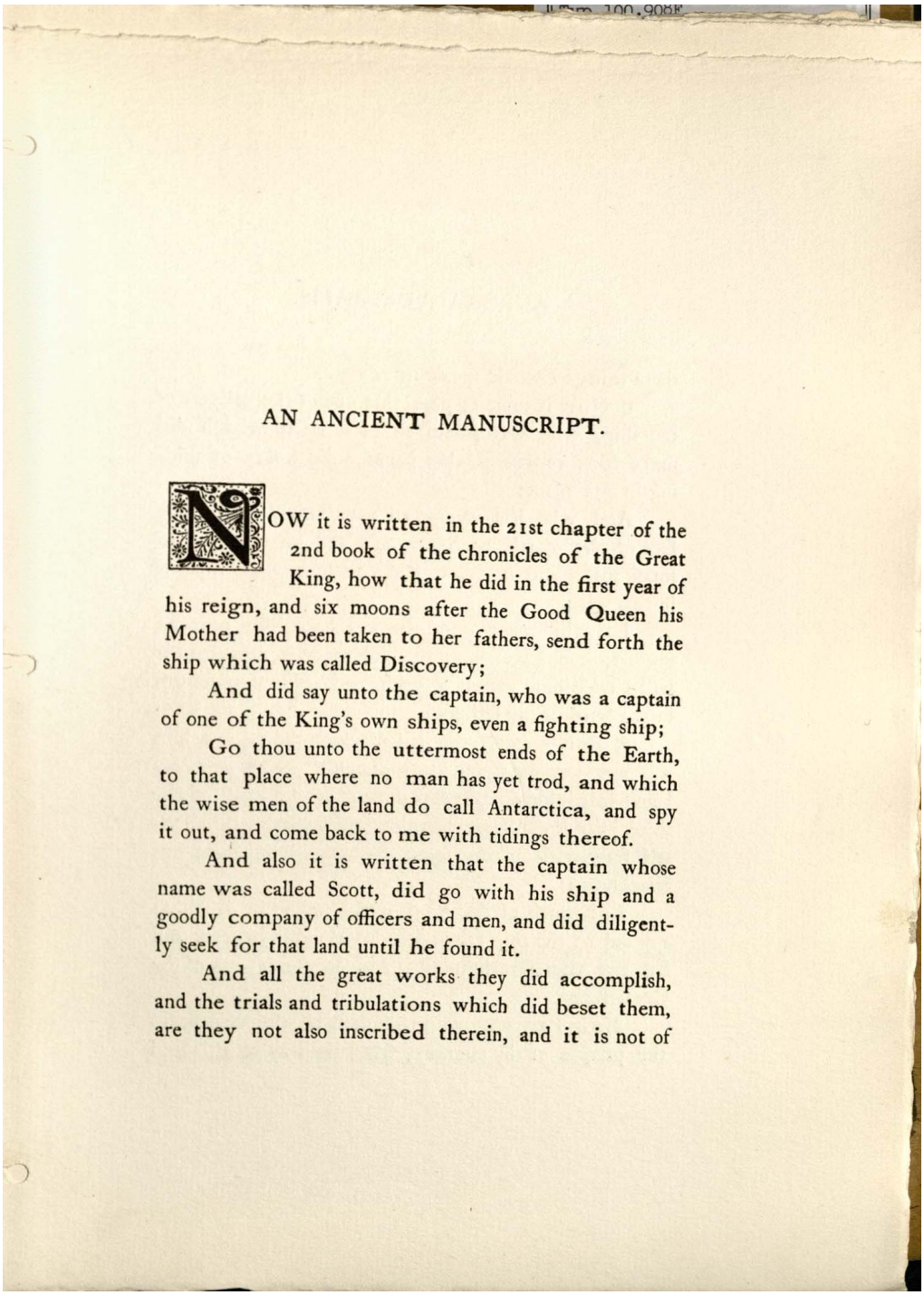
Murder is done in another's dream
And falls from shuddering heights;
Erebus rises to dance on the sea
And the dreamer flees south in tights.

Another sails north on the broken ice
Just dressed in Nature's clothes,
Whilst seals and penguins grin in delight
And the frost plays hell with his toes.

And some see tailors they knew of yore,
Stalk in with their mile-long bills;
And everyone when morning broke
Made a rush for calomel pills.

VERITAS.

Petty officer Frank Wild, under the pseudonym Wand Erer, wrote an essay in the style of the King James Bible.



AN ANCIENT MANUSCRIPT.

NOW it is written in the 21st chapter of the 2nd book of the chronicles of the Great King, how that he did in the first year of his reign, and six moons after the Good Queen his Mother had been taken to her fathers, send forth the ship which was called Discovery;

And did say unto the captain, who was a captain of one of the King's own ships, even a fighting ship;

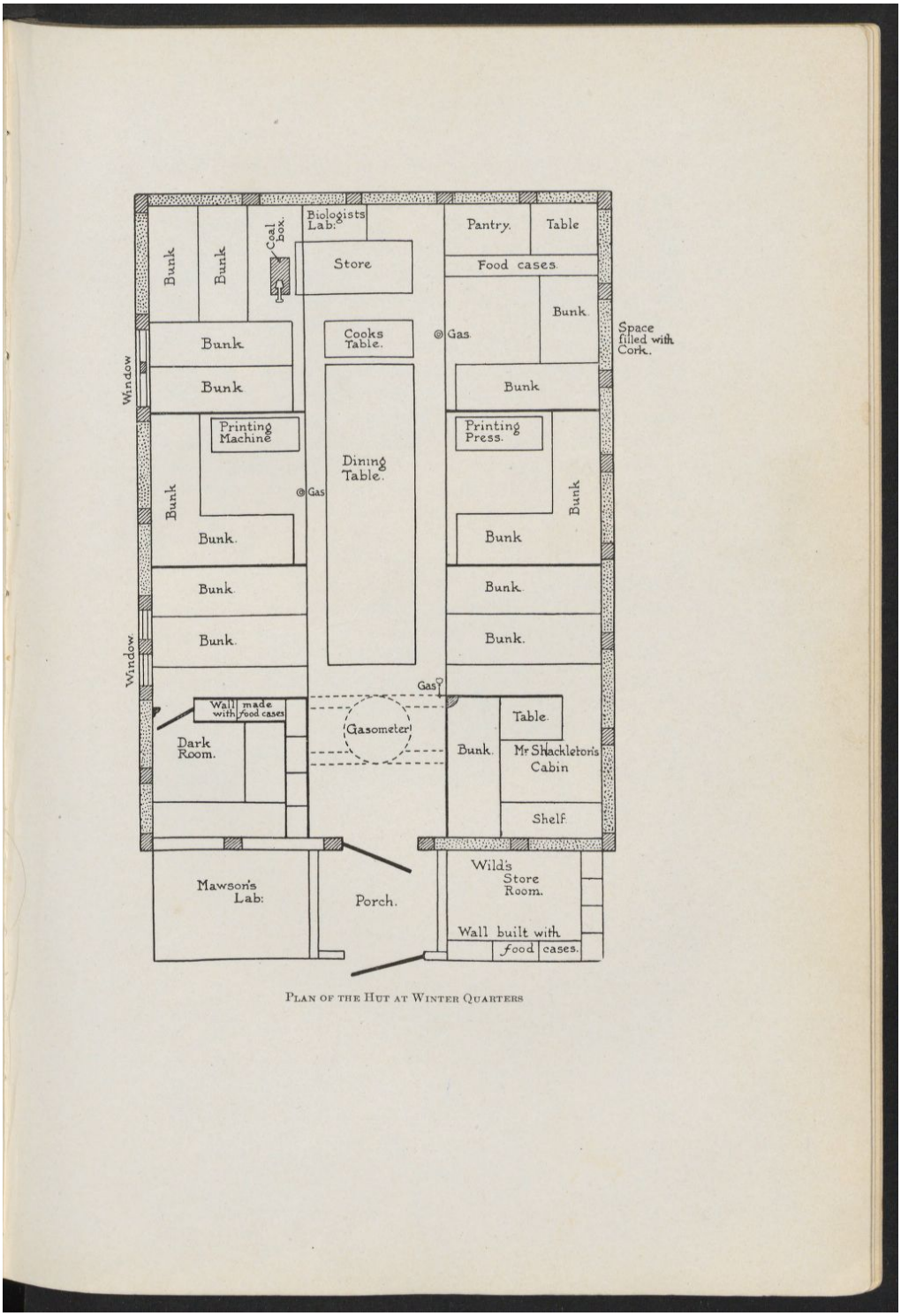
Go thou unto the uttermost ends of the Earth, to that place where no man has yet trod, and which the wise men of the land do call Antarctica, and spy it out, and come back to me with tidings thereof.

And also it is written that the captain whose name was called Scott, did go with his ship and a goodly company of officers and men, and did diligently seek for that land until he found it.

And all the great works they did accomplish, and the trials and tribulations which did beset them, are they not also inscribed therein, and it is not of

And there is a fanciful short story by geologist Douglas Mawson, "Bathybia," proposing that the South Pole, still unseen in 1908, might in fact be a deep crater filled with giant insects and luxuriant plant life, including a forest of toadstools into which an unsuspecting polar explorer might tumble.

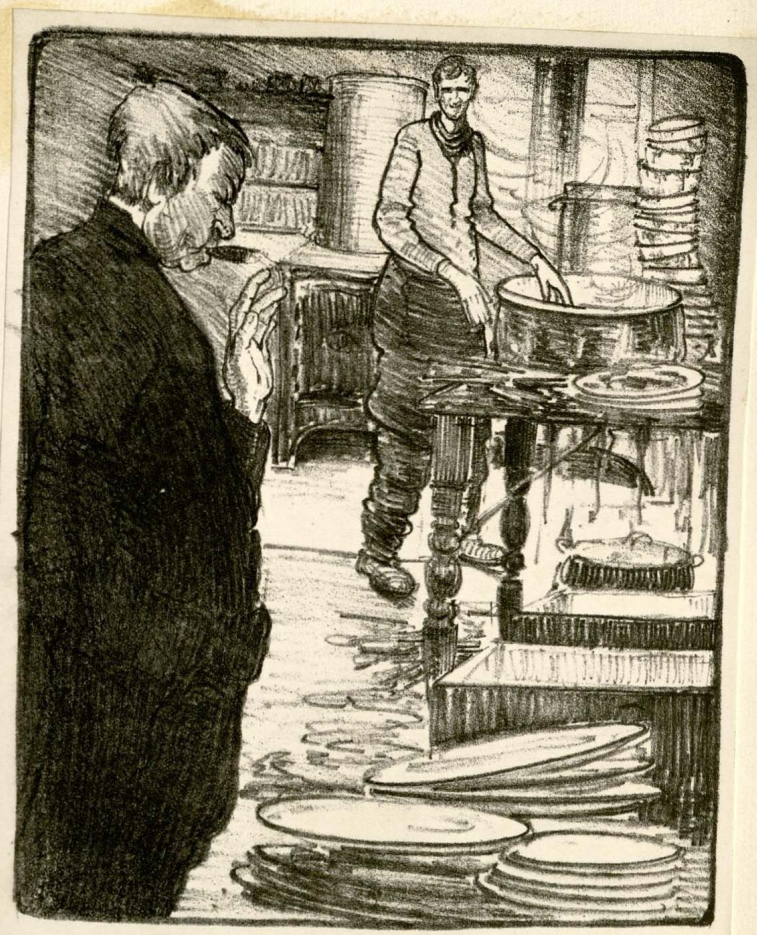
Immediately before the expedition set sail in 1907, Wild and another petty officer, Ernest Joyce, took a crash course in typesetting and letterpress printing. A traditional seven-year apprenticeship was compressed into three weeks' intense training by the renowned London firm of Sir Joseph Causton and Sons Ltd., who equipped Shackleton with a miniature printing plant: two presses (a 10′ x 7′ Albion and a small etching press, labelled "printing machine" and "printing press" in the hut plan below), high-quality handmade paper with handsome deckle edges and a generous supply of ink.

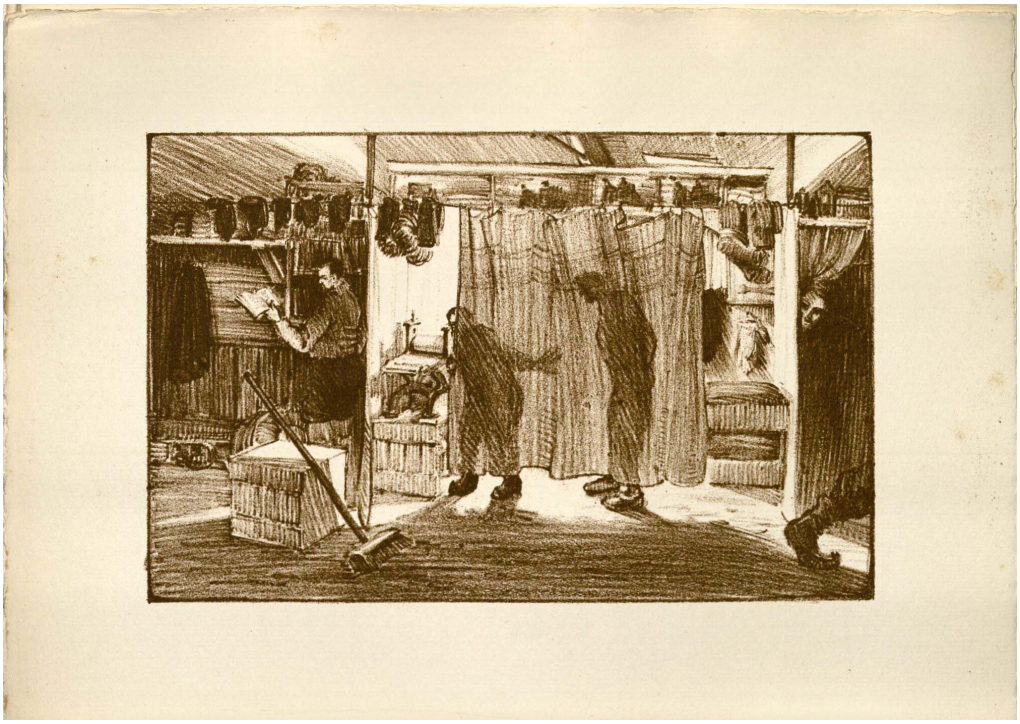


PLAN OF THE HUT AT WINTER QUARTERS

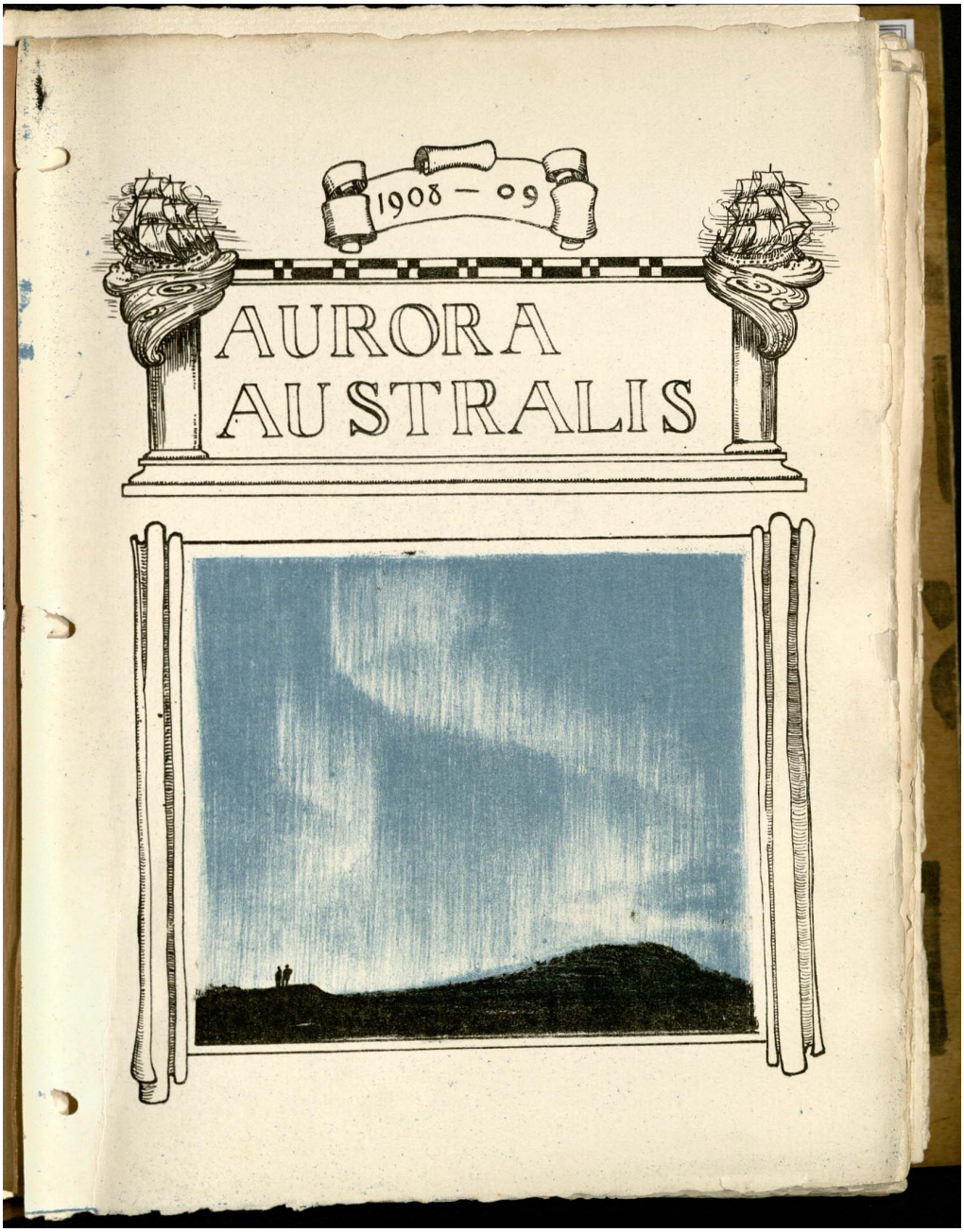
The ingenuity of *Aurora Australis* is apparent in Shackleton's clever scheme to furnish the book with covers by repurposing the crates in which the team's perishables had been imported from Europe and New Zealand.

Aurora Australis is richly illustrated with etchings and watercolors by the expedition's official artist, George "Putty" Marston. These depict daily life in close quarters as well as the natural wonders of the antarctic landscape.



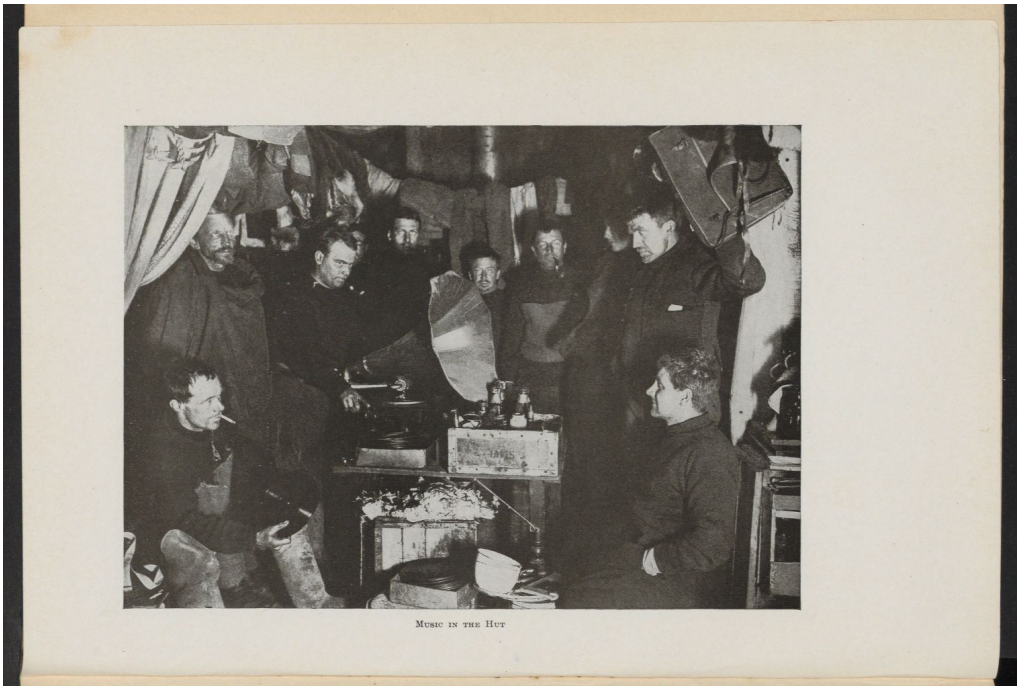


Marston’s style is spare and somewhat workmanlike. When he used color he did so flamboyantly, as in this frontispiece showing the southern lights of the book’s title.



Marston also created the book's design. It is a pleasure to read and features suitably vast expanses of blank white space.

In *The Heart of the Antarctic, Being the Story of the British Antarctic Expedition 1907-1909*, Shackleton tells of two purposes behind *Aurora Australis*: to create a unique record of the moments before his first ascent of the South Pole plateau (this mission was not quite achieved, in part because the expedition had insufficient food and no skis), and as one of many cultural activities intended to keep the men occupied for four long, cold, dark months.



Music in the Hut

From Shackleton's description, the print shop in the hut at Cape Royds sounds like a constant source of fascination and frustration: Joyce and Wild were inexperienced, the ink froze, the plates were sensitive to the salt in the water and of course the hut was very cramped and dark.

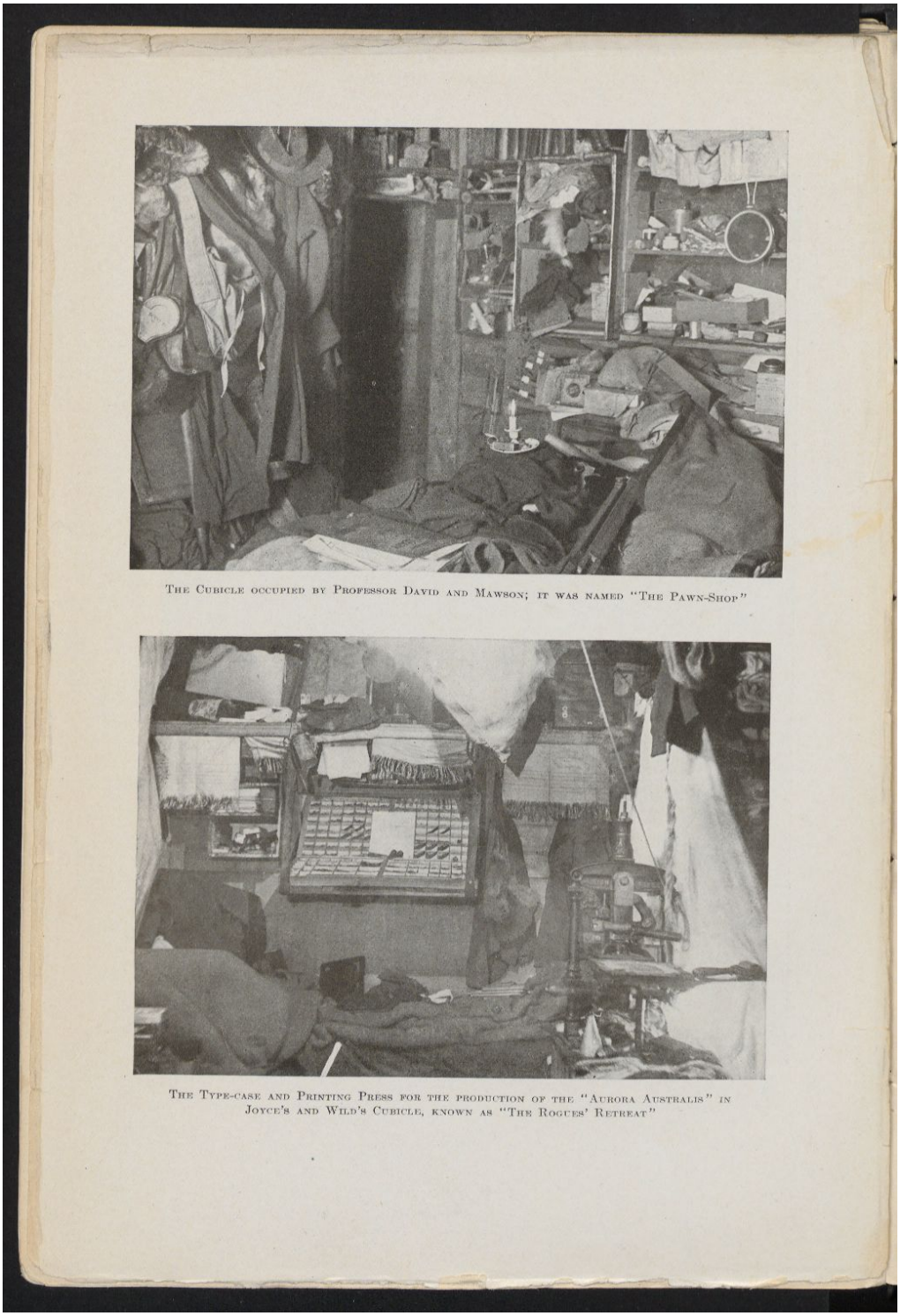
Those overwintering in Antarctica today must still labor to fend off "polar ennui." The U.S. Antarctic Program Participant Guide, 2013-2014 promises "radio programming from volunteer DJs, a library, clubs, climbing wall, gymnasium, weight room, aerobics room, art shows, chili cook-offs, running races, yoga classes, dances, league play, lessons, lectures, etc."

Copies of *Aurora Australis* are not numbered. It is believed that no more than a hundred were manufactured, possibly intended for sale but in the end distributed as gifts to the expedition's friends and financial supporters. There was no institutional or governmental support for the British Polar Expedition; Shackleton was entirely reliant on private loans and gifts and returned to England with heavy debts.

The seventy or so copies whose present whereabouts are known can be identified by the words stencilled on their boards, as the packing crates could be cut, cleaned and polished but were indelibly stamped with their original labels: there are Petit Pois, Stewed Kidneys and Chocolate copies, for example.

Harvard College Library
the gift of
Donald McKay Frost

Houghton's Aurora Australis is stencilled "[J & T B]AYLEY Ltd [Exp]ORT [Pac]KERS [Lon]DON E C" on the inside front board, and "[Brit]ISH [Antar]CTIC [Exped]ITION [19]07 on the inside back board. It was a gift of Donald McKay Frost (1877-1958), a Back Bay attorney and noted book collector with a strong interest in the history and settlement of western America. The Houghton collections also contain a copy of the Julienne Soup facsimile.



THE CUBICLE OCCUPIED BY PROFESSOR DAVID AND MAWSON; IT WAS NAMED "THE PAWN-SHOP"

THE TYPE-CASE AND PRINTING PRESS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF THE "AURORA AUSTRALIS" IN JOYCE'S AND WILD'S CUBICLE, KNOWN AS "THE ROGUES' RETREAT"

[Thanks to Christina Linklater, Project Music Cataloger, for contributing this post.]

1 Comment

Filed under Modern

1 Comment

- The first book letterpress printed in Antarctica 1907 | Prints & Books
  December 30th, 2013 at 11:22 am

  [...] are more images and information about the book on the blog of Harvard's Houghton Library, who have a copy of

the [...]

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