Hello again. My name is Patrick Coleman and I am the Acquisitions Librarian here at the Minnesota Historical Society Library. Now I’m sure I don’t have to tell you that in this Library of 500,000 thousand volumes we collect Minnesota history. What you may be surprised to learn is that we also try to document Minnesota culture. And one way we do that is by acquiring books that are fine press books or artists’ books.


And this is a wonderful way to stretch our dollar and get a big bang for our buck because in one volume you’ll often get great Minnesota literature, great Minnesota fine press printing, great design work, and you get great crafts. And some of those crafts are binding, paper making – it’s a really good way to document a big part of Minnesota’s culture and especially the culture of the book.

Photos: Minnesota Center for Book Arts

Now this is not something that’s new although there has been a great renewed interest in this with the Minnesota Center for Book Arts opening 25 years ago in Minneapolis, Minnesota. And they have been doing a great job of bringing in all kinds of artists and craftspeople to work on books and disseminate their knowledge to school kids and through classes to adults and basically to keep this craft alive.

But it’s not particularly new. This is something that has a long, proud tradition in Minnesota. There was another big boom in fine press printing in the
early 20th century. Artists like Mary Moulton Cheney who had a press called the Chemeth Press; you had Emerson Wulling, who was the longest printer in the history of mankind; and Fred Totten Phelps.


I wanted to show you one example of one of these early books. This is the text by Thomas Job and it’s *The Hounds of Hell*, published in Minneapolis in 1928. It’s a beautiful book. Often in the early 20th century people used a typeface that was reminiscent of earlier printed books or even manuscript books. But this is a gorgeously done book with wonderful illustrations.

Image: close up of colophon

But there’s always with fine press books a colophon. It’ll tell you how limited the books are. These are usually limited to a small number of books, maybe up to three hundred. Sometimes there are deluxe editions of the books that are lettered copies. It’ll tell you who put the book together, who designed it, who printed it, who made the paper, and where it came from and anything else you needed to know about it. Most importantly it’ll tell you the date and the publisher of the book.


So that’s kind of the history. But then there was a boom in the 80s of fine press printing and fine press artists. One of the notable works we have here in the Collection – one of the notable artists – is Gaylord Schanilec. He came in sometime in the 80s and was looking for a project and they were about the tear down the High Bridge in Saint Paul. He went back and looked in our newspaper files and found stories about the construction of the High Bridge and other interesting facts. Then he produced this lovely book with his art work illustrating it. It ends with the bridge in the river.

It’s a wonderful book but I’d encourage you to come and take a look at them. We have literally hundreds more and it’s a great tradition in Minnesota history and culture and I think you’ll enjoy the books. Thank you.