

THE COOK / MARKS COLLECTION

INTERNATIONAL PUPPETRY MUSEUM BOOK IS UNDERWAY!

by Luman Coad

It's finally happening. Several years ago the International Puppetry Museum Board formed a committee to ensure the creation of a commemorative book of photographs in celebration of Alan Cook's 80th birthday. The committee members decided to focus on the North American puppets in the Cook/Marks Puppet Collection – leaving the international figures for a second book. At my request and because I have experience in book publication, the entire project became my responsibility with the full approval of the IPM Board and the book committee members.

For years the puppet world has heard about the massive collection of historic puppets assembled by Alan Cook during his lifetime. At festivals Alan would display some of the puppets but these only whetted our appetites to see more of the collection.

Preserving the Collection

In the early 1990s, a group of interested Los Angeles puppeteers formed the Conservatory of Puppetry Arts to organize and conserve Alan's collection. Volunteers began cataloguing the puppets as they were moved to a secure location from Alan's house. Whenever possible, exhibits were mounted in museums and other venues to showcase the collection. When the society was reorganized as a 501(c)3 non-profit society, the name was changed to the International Puppetry Museum. Then, in recognition and gratitude of Jackee Marks' many years of financial support which enabled IPM to continue its work, the Board officially named the collection the "Cook/Marks Puppet Collection."

A permanent home in Seattle

Several years ago IPM began seeking a permanent home for the collection. Possible museums were investigated but didn't meet the Board's expectations. Then Dmitri Carter of the Northwest Puppet Center in Seattle expressed his intent to create a puppetry research center. He already had secured several other notable collections including those of Lettie Connell Schubert and Josie Robbins, as well as the Carter Family's own library and puppet collection. The IPM Board was impressed with Dmitri's professionalism, experience, and vision so details were quickly ironed out for the collection to be moved to Seattle where it will be seen in rotating exhibitions in the lobby of the Northwest Puppet Center's delightful theatre. As well, touring exhibits will be arranged whenever possible.

After assuming the responsibility for the commemorative book, my first task was to cull through the IPM database to select puppet treasures for photographing. Many difficult choices had to be made but finally the list was pared to about two hundred figures and sent to IPM in Pasadena where it was met with consternation. The volunteer staff was

preparing to move the entire collection to Seattle and didn't have the time, energy or facilities to search out the quantity of puppets on the "Wish List." And so the book project came to a near halt until the bulk of the collection had been relocated.

As truckload after truckload of puppets were brought north from Pasadena, Dmitri negotiated the purchase of another building where the entire collection could be safely stored, catalogued, and conserved.



The Team of Five: Mary Decker, Luman Coad, Jackee Marks, Alan Cook and Dmitri Carter • Photo by Lisa Marks

When the final large truckload arrived in Seattle last Spring, Dmitri and I decided to schedule the photography for September as it would give him time to locate the puppets on my list. Meanwhile I began photographing our own puppets as a trial exercise and to work out an efficient method for photographing so many figures in the shortest possible time.

Nine days of photography

When I arrived in Seattle in early September, more than half requested puppets were waiting and as I worked, Dmitri looked for the others. The problem was, although each box had a list of the figures it was supposed to contain, many times the puppet we wanted wasn't there. But we'd discover other exciting figures which were then photographed.



Dmitri Carter and Luman Coad carefully prepare, light and photograph puppets from the collection, one by one. Above, a shadow figure by Martin Stevens; right, Millesandre, a Coad Canada puppet that is part of the collection. Photos by Lisa Marks.



the computer. (Thank goodness for digital photography - the cost of colour film and processing would have been prohibitive.) While I work on the images, Mary and other members of the book committee are recording Alan's stories which will be in sidebars accompanying the colour portraits.

The next major problem will be to finance the initial printing of a limited edition of the book. A fund-raising campaign was started two years ago at Alan's 80th birthday celebration but less than half the needed amount has been gathered. If you would like to ensure this book becomes a reality, please send your donation to:

International Puppetry Museum
 c/o Jackee Marks
 702 The Strand
 Hermosa Beach, CA 99254-4557

Luman Coad, Coad Canada Puppets, has been an acclaimed performer and teacher for many years. His company, Charlemagne Press, publishes a catalogue of books devoted to puppetry.

For me, the session was like an extended birthday morning. Each box revealed historic figures and what an honour and privilege to pose them for the camera. For example, we found exquisite puppets from the Tatterman Marionettes' productions of "She Stoops to Conquer" and "Taming of the Shrew."

Jackee Marks and her daughter Lisa arrived a week after the photography session began and by then an efficient routine has been established. Jackee photographed Dmitri and myself as we worked while Lisa gathered information for the IPM webpage which she compiles. Two days later Alan Cook and Mary Decker arrived and Mary began interviewing Alan for his stories about the puppets and the puppeteers.

In all, 257 puppets were photographed in nine days. I am now sorting through the 3000+ images in



Now housing The Lettie Connell Schubert Collection, The Josie Robbins Collection, The Cook/Marks Collection and The Carter Family Collection, Northwest Puppet Center has become the most extensive puppetry research library in the Western Hemisphere. Photo by Dmitri Carter.



Witch, by Roger Dennis



Lady in Black, by Bill Baird