

# Bibliographic Notes on Kent's Jewel—An Editor's Memoir

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## Background

*The Jewel—A Romance of Fairyland* was a small hand-made holographic manuscript in book form by Rockwell Kent, presented as a birthday gift in 1917 to his lover Hildegard Hirsch. It was an exquisite love-letter apparently created to resuscitate a troubled romance.

The single original of this book first came to public notice when it was sold to George and Gladys Spector of Queens, N.Y. at a Sotheby's auction, 24 Nov 1981, for \$1900 plus commission. The book had been placed at auction by Hildegard's nephew, Thompson Flint, who had grown up in the Larchmont, N.Y., house shared by his mother, Frieda, and her sister Hildegard Hirsch, a German dancer on the Follies stages of New York City.

In 1987, Gladys Spector asked The Baxter Society of Portland, Maine's bibliophilic club, to publish a facsimile edition of *The Jewel*; as director of the club's publications program and student of Rockwell Kent's books and artworks, I was honored to perform the duties of editor and producer of the facsimile edition. George and Gladys Spector, founders and longtime publishers of *The Kent Collector*, believed strongly that the book should be shared with a wide audience of Kent enthusiasts, so an edition of 500 copies was agreed upon.

To present the facsimile of the original in as close a replica as possible, including Kent's hand-made binding, with minimal added text in the body of the book, it was decided to create an explanatory Companion Essay which I authored to be housed in the same slipcase with the facsimile. Meriden-Stinehour was selected to photograph and print the actual facsimile; the companion essay was printed at The Shagbark

letterpress in Portland; and the hand-binding for each element was performed beautifully by Judi Conant, then of Guildhall, Vermont. The book made its appearance in November 1990 and was dedicated to the memory of George Spector, who did not live to see its publication. In 1991, *The Jewel* was awarded first place in "printing excellence" by the Maine Graphic Arts Association.

The purpose of my paper today is to present two or three additional aspects of the facsimile project not fully discussed or resolved in the 1990 publication, including the ultimate fate of the original manuscript book of 1917.

It is not my intention here to reiterate in detail the strong circumstantial evidence presented in the Companion Essay, which argues that Monhegan was probably where Kent made most of *The Jewel*. Although he was here on the island for 5-6 weeks until one week before he presented the book to Hildegard, some have argued that he could have rushed back to New York, composed and assembled the book and its seven original pen and ink drawings, bound it in paper over boards with spine in artist's canvas--all in one week and then deliver it to her November 6, 1917! The strongest argument against Monhegan as the site of its creation is that nowhere did Kent ever say where he made it (for that matter, his name does not appear on it) and the title page cites "New York" next to the date of November 6, 1917 (in Roman numerals). The last stage of production--stamping the gold title letters on the front cover of the binding--probably would have to be done where he would have access to a special stamping press: New York, not Monhegan.

## Sally's Change of Mind

As noted earlier, the Sectors generously concluded once they came into ownership of *The Jewel* in 1981 that it should not remain accessible only to them and a small number of those chosen by them to view it at their Queens apartment. They also knew enough about copyrights to know that ownership of the original artwork did not confer on them the right to reproduce the work without permission of the artist-author's estate, The Rockwell Kent Legacies Inc., of AuSable Forks, N.Y. Sally Kent Gorton, Kent's widow and executor, was then director of the Kent Legacies.

The Sectors were aware that Sally knew of *The Jewel*. In fact, she had placed a bid on it at the same auction when they bought it at Sotheby's. So, they were quite surprised when she flatly refused to give them permission to publish a facsimile on the grounds, as Gladys Spector later wrote me: "that it might hurt the living." They politely and strenuously argued with her, partly on the grounds that they knew and presumed she knew that Hildegard Hirsch had died around 1960 on a visit to Munich. It then occurred to them that she must have been thinking about someone or ones in the Kent family who might be hurt by publication of the book, and that might explain why Sally tried to purchase it,-- possibly to preclude its publication.

Sally was not Rockwell Kent's first wife, she was his third, but she maintained friendly relations with his first wife, Kathleen Whiting Kent, who had married Rockwell in 1908, well prior to his lengthy affair with Hildegard which began in 1916. At the time the Sectors acquired *The Jewel* in 1981, Kathleen Whiting Kent was still living (she died Oct. 14, 1990, at age 100); also living then were several of his children of that first marriage, of whom only Gordon, the youngest of five in that family, was living in 2007. (Gordon passed away August 17, 2009). Unfortunately, among the deceased now also is Sally, who passed on May 26, 2000.

About the time that George Spector died in 1987, Gladys again asked Sally if she would permit publication of a facsimile edition of *The Jewel*. This time Sally said she had no further objection. According to Linda DuBay, who was Sally's amanuensis for several years starting in the 1980s and until Sally's death in 2000, the change of mind probably was due to the simple principle of consultation by

Sally, particularly with Kathleen Kent, in the period following the Spectors' first request. Linda states that Sally consulted with Kathleen and with Kent's children and grandchildren on various matters; one example of her attitude toward Kathleen was that she voluntarily sent her portions of proceeds from the sale of Kent artworks by the Legacies from time to time. Gordon Kent also confirms that Sally consulted him occasionally, although he does not recall having been involved in any decisions regarding publication of *The Jewel*.

So it would appear that Sally's fear of "hurting the living" was no longer an issue in 1987, although none of the people in the family who were living in 1981 were in fact deceased by 1987,— at least none of those who might have been hurt by further confirmation of Kent's "transgressions"—his own word for his extramarital affairs.

Whatever Sally's reservations were originally, she became an enthusiastic supporter of *The Jewel* project once it began: she authored a thoughtful preface to the book, agreed to sign 100 "specials" of the edition with her signature "Sally" on the colophon page, and presented a number of the books as gifts to family and friends.

### Did Rockwell Kent name one of his daughters "Hildegarde"?

This is one of those peculiar side-bars to the story of *The Jewel* which really is not that important, except that it has engaged the minds and passions of some Kent authorities to a remarkable degree. It started with my noting in the Companion Essay that in Kent's letters to Hildegarde Hirsch from Monhegan in September and October 1917, he wrote of adoring his darling daughter Hildegarde. Further research on my part suggested that he was referring to his fourth child and youngest daughter, Barbara, (born June 7, 1915). Thus, I surmise that Kent had taken to calling his child "Hildegarde" as a further token of his affection for his lover, possibly to convince her that he really wanted to marry her—something she never believed. In 1918, during Kent's long trip to Alaska with his oldest son, Kathleen referred to the child as Barbara.

After publication of *The Jewel* I received an email from a well-known Kent scholar stating the child's name was in fact Hildegarde, and the fact she had been born in the year before Kent met Hildegarde Hirsch in 1916 was purely a coincidence! In fact there was a good reason for this confusion: Barbara herself thought that her birth-name was "Hildegarde" and so stated in the on-camera video interview by Fred Lewis. Gordon Kent told me that his father often gave nick-names to others in the family. If Barbara in later adulthood thought her birth-name had been "Hildegarde," it may show simply the persistence of her very early childhood memory. We owe a word of thanks to Eric Carter, Barbara's son, who wrote me that he had examined her birth certificate and could confirm that her registered name was "Barbara"-- he added that he had never heard of a "Hildegarde."

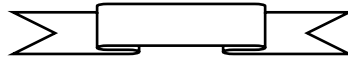
### Disappearance of *The Jewel*

The single original MS of *The Jewel* was in the custody of The Baxter Society for a few months during 1989-90 for the purpose of studying and photographing it. Then it was returned to Gladys Spector, its owner in Queens, N.Y. About a year later, she decided to ship it to a prospective buyer in Florida, who never received it. On April 22, 1991 the consignee and prospective purchaser of the book, Dr. Douglas Stringer of Panama City, Florida, received a notice from United Parcel Service stating that UPS had made delivery of the parcel at his address a few days before. Dr. Stringer however stated that he never received the parcel but that a slip was left at his address indicating delivery had been attempted. When he inquired at the UPS depot, they were unable to locate the parcel but acknowledged that delivery had been attempted and presumably the parcel was brought back to the depot by the driver.

On May 9, 1991, Gladys Spector filed a claim with UPS for the insured amount of the parcel and thereafter received payment in full on the claim. Many years have now passed since the book disappeared. It is now the property of UPS if it does reappear. Dr. Stringer has notified UPS that if the book is found, he wishes to purchase it as originally intended at the full insured value (\$5000.00) and

Gladys has notified UPS in writing that it would be her wish to have UPS offer it to Dr. Stringer for purchase.

Gladys states that the first person from UPS who contacted her about the loss of the book said it had probably been "mangled" in their sorting machinery, but this would be inconsistent with an attempted delivery at Dr. Stringer's address and there would be no logical reason to feed a parcel back into sorting machinery, which had been returned by a driver to the depot. Whether a delivery driver would know the insured value of a parcel, UPS will not comment. One can speculate on several possible explanations--the book fell off the truck on the way back to the depot, an employee purloined it with plans to sell it sooner or later, and so forth. So far, no bookseller has reported that the book has been presented for sale. As Gladys says: "Thank God we made the facsimile in time!" She has also advised UPS that the existence of the facsimile edition could help to identify the original. Now all who own the facsimile have, in effect, a first edition of *The Jewel*.



In sum, *The Jewel* was a little "literary comet" which streaked across the Kent book firmament, coming into view in 1981, staying around long enough to be studied, calibrated and photographed for the facsimile edition, then streaking off somewhere in 1991 after a brief decade in the public domain. It brought with it a number of bibliographic distinctions set out in the Companion Essay: when it appeared it was the earliest known book to be written, illustrated and bound by Rockwell Kent; it was also at that time the first previously unpublished book by him to be published after his death in 1971; also at that time it was the rarest Kent book known to exist, being only a single example not otherwise altered; some of its illustrations mark the first appearance of images and motifs used in later books and artworks, and using a fable as a storytelling vehicle would re-appear in later Kent works. For me it was a special privilege and pleasure to keep company with Kent's original little book for about a year and to see his artistry in that beautiful manuscript. Let us all hope that someday our orbits may again coincide!

## Availability of *The Jewel* Facsimile

The few remaining copies of the slip-cased *Jewel* are \$100 for the unsigned ed., \$150 for the “Sally” signed edition. The original prices when released in 1990 were 200/250. There were 400 unsigned and 100 signed. About 15-20 copies remain unsold.

Checks should be made out to Eliot Stanley at P.O. Box 1822, Portland, ME 04104 and an extra \$10 will cover shipping/handling costs.

Please email Mr. Stanley at [jaes15@maine.rr.com](mailto:jaes15@maine.rr.com) to ensure availability

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## Author's biography

In addition to his work on the facsimile edition of *The Jewel*, discussed in this paper, three articles by Eliot Stanley have appeared in *The Kent Collector*: "Monhegan's Mold Cast Kent," reprinted from the *Island Journal*, Summer, 1988 (also selected by that publication for their 2004 anthology as among the best writing of their first 20 years); "The Lively Poster Arts of Rockwell Kent," reprinted from *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 1989; and "Awash in Red" on the Kent-Farnsworth Museum controversy of the 1950s, *TKC*, v.xxxii, n.2, Summer 2006. In 1997, the Grolier Club in New York City presented an exhibition of 100 works from the Stanley Collection, considered one of the leading private collections of Kentiana. This paper is based on his seventeenth public lecture on Kent's paintings, books, and graphic arts. The author resides in Portland, Maine; his professional biography has appeared in *Who's Who in America*, for over 20 consecutive years. For this distinction, he was awarded the Marquis Lifetime Achievement Prize in 2017.