

YEAR BOOK 1969 / 1970



FIG. 1 Same size reproduction of the original drawing.

GENESIS OF A ROCKWELL KENT BOOKPLATE DESIGN

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Many times the thought processes of a creative artist can be found in the preliminary stages of his work, whether that creator is at work composing music, writing an essay, or making a drawing or a painting. To many this is an intriguing and entertaining process, to some a strange and uninteresting endeavor, but to people associated with bookplates, in having one designed for them, who collect and exchange them, it brings untold hours of pleasure and enjoyment and, we might add, intellectual stimulation. In seeing preparatory sketches, in making suggestions as to changes, in seeing the finished drawing and the final print, all seem to satisfy and fulfill a natural acquisitive desire.

For Christmas of 1970, I was the happy recipient of *A Portfolio of Sketches: 1956* which contained many preliminary drawings, layouts and finished tracings from the late American artist and writer, Rockwell Kent, and his equally talented wife, Sally. To my great surprise and

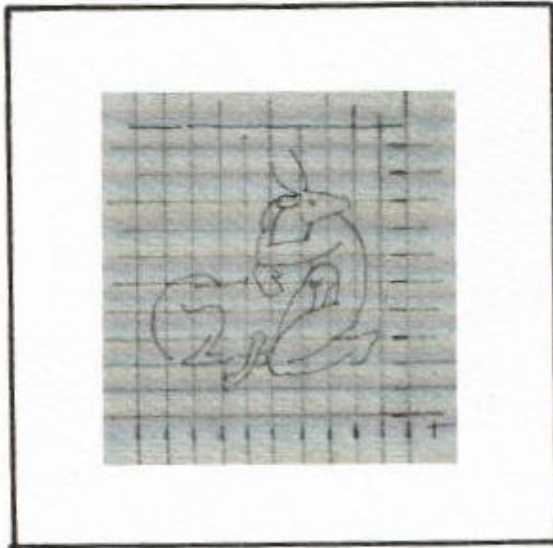


FIG. 2 Scaled tracing used for enlarging drawing to working size for pen and ink fill in.



FIG. 3 Marking device for "H.H." See page 76 *Bookplates & Marks Of Rockwell Kent.*

delight I found, in addition to designs for stationery, ceramics and those related to the book, that most of the sketches were of preliminary tries and layouts for bookplates, along with finished tracings of many of them. This was a treasure trove indeed, and one I thought should be shared. Going through the portfolio, as I turned sheet after sheet, I discovered one of which I had previous knowledge, the awareness being made apparent as I remembered having received a print of this particular bookplate from the artist many years prior to the present viewing. Then too, there was an original drawing of which I owned a reproduction which was mounted in my files. The fortunate owner of this beautiful and unusual bookplate is Jeannette Clarke.

Bookplates deal with the association of ideas, symbols, with likes and dislikes. In studying the Clarke bookplate, both as to the creation of it and seeing it in its initial stages and as a finished design, I remembered a number of variant associations and uses of it. No, it was not exactly the same as in this finished print, as its genesis was a small original drawing done in pen and ink almost a half century earlier. My curiosity being aroused, I tracked it down in my files and in my books. It proved a stimulating and rewarding experience and, when asked by our editor, Mrs. Arellanes, to do a piece on this late artist

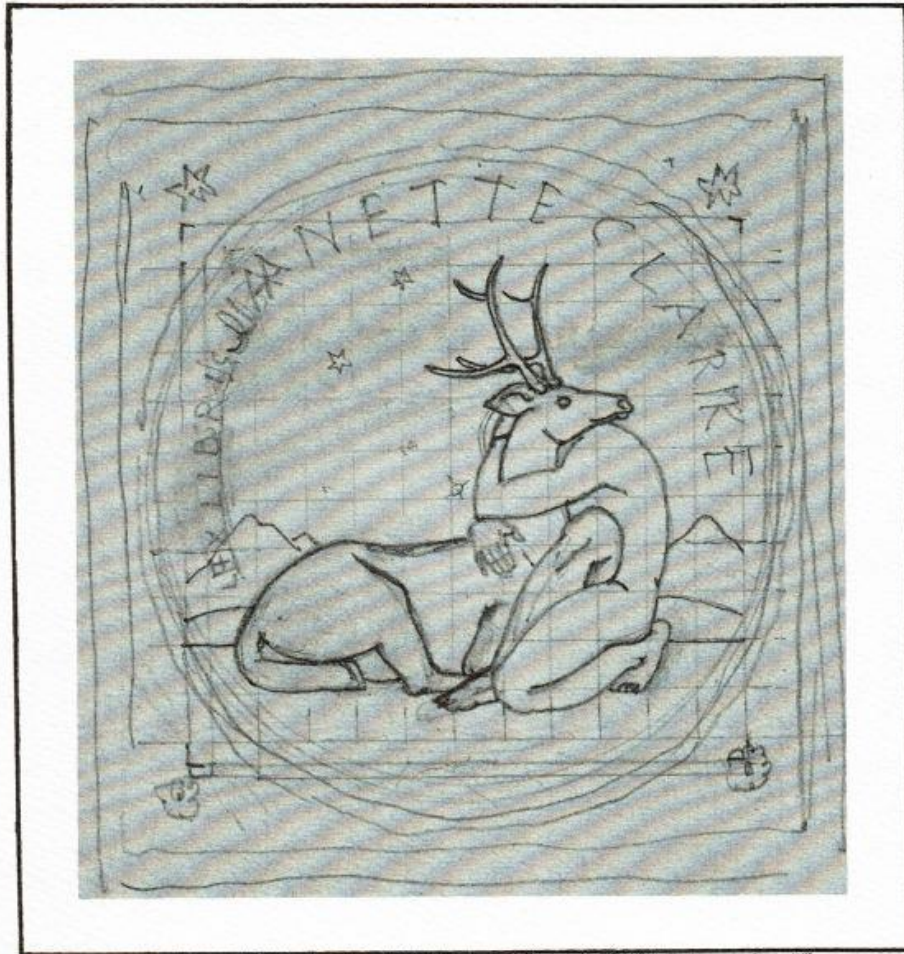


FIG. 4 Original layout sketch of which only the central portion of the drawing was used.

who had done so much in the bookplate field, I readily accepted, for I already had written a piece with the idea of keeping it as a record in the event of possible future publication.

The origin of the Jeannette Clarke bookplate began in 1919 when the artist went with his small son to spend a year on Fox Island, approximately twelve miles out of Seward, Alaska. Many drawings and paintings resulted from this great experience, and a record of it can

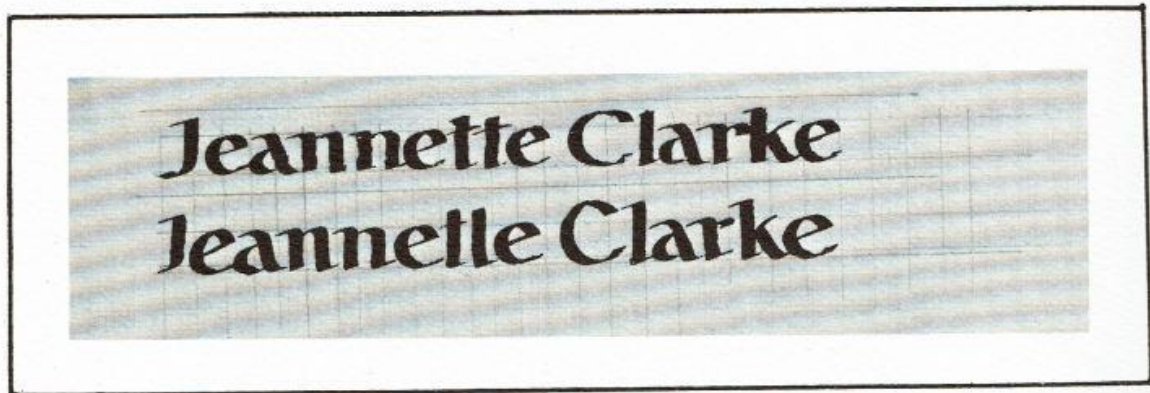


FIG. 5 Lettering pen tries and scaled for possible use.

be found in his book, *Wilderness*, written from his letters and journal kept at the time.

Drawings, like paintings, come in all shapes and sizes, and both large and small. Of the many small drawings, some were used as wood engravings, others as bookplates, still others as stationery designs and devices. And more often than not, the artist gave them away as gifts to his family, friends, and associates. So the little "Man and Deer" pen and ink drawing has had a fascinating history since its early beginnings in 1919 to its final destination as we find it the beautiful bookplate designed for Jeannette Clarke in 1956.

We find it first used as a device in *The Bookplates & Marks of Rockwell Kent* in 1929. Then in 1933 it appears as a decorative division marker underneath a title section of the book, *Rockwellkentiana*, by Rockwell Kent and Carl Zigrosser. It appears also in the artist's autobiography, *It's Me O Lord*, published in 1955, probably its last use before it was redesigned and used as the bookplate for Jeannette Clarke.

In Figure 1 we note the original pen and ink drawing of the man and a deer. There is little doubt that it was originally created to transfer to wood and to be cut as a wood engraving. Many of the small drawings were done with this in mind, for Mr. Kent was intrigued with the process at that particular time in his career. However, many of these small wood engravings ended as bookplates. The artist would cut in

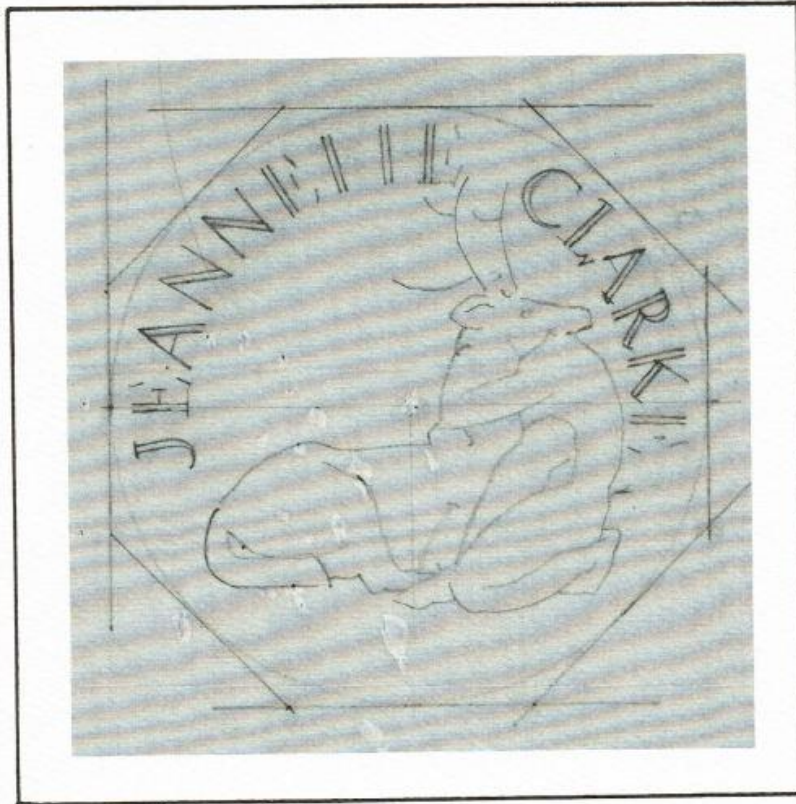


FIG. 6 Final tracing for completed bookplate design.

the initials of the recipient and the block would be finished and ready for the printer. It is surprising to note, however, how many were left in their original state and eventually were applied in use for bookplate designs. The scaled tracing for enlargement purposes was made from this drawing and is shown in Figure 2. It is in this size that the drawing appears on page 65 in *Rockwellkentiana*, and on page 236 in *It's Me O Lord*, the two books by Kent mentioned above. In Figure 3 we see the original drawing greatly reduced and used with a single line frame border, printed in gray on page 76 of *The Bookplates & Marks of Rockwell Kent*.



FIG. 7 Reproduction of the completed bookplate design.

Figure 4 is of great interest as more is evident than meets the eye at first viewing. The scale has been enlarged and the drawing made to a working size. A circular band of lettering is super-imposed over the square, six-cornered stars at the top and decorative flowers at the bottom, with the drawing showing up darker in the reproduction because it was used as the finished tracing in transferring the design. Figure 4 shows attempts at lettering with a lettering pen over a scaled layout in the event this style of lettering would be used in either a square or circular position in the finished design.

We come to the final tracing in Figure 6 and see the band of lettering around the design at the top, the square has been trimmed to an octagonal form, and the six-cornered stars are found in the sky and the decorative flowers are found in the grass portions of the design—both having been moved from the border to within the design proper and, thereby, being incorporated into the main parts of the composition. The feeling for “squareness” has not been lost, the band of lettering still carries the feeling of the “circle”. In other words, most of the

original elements going through the creative process of the artist's composing procedures have been preserved and improved.

The finished bookplate design was inked in as we see it in the final layout in Figure 6 and is about twice the size of the finished bookplate shown in Figure 7. Here in the design of the Jeannette Clarke bookplate, we have followed through the steps in its creative process, having its genesis in a small pen and ink drawing, proceeding through its various applications, and ending, with variations, in this beautiful bookplate print.

One of the credos of this great artist and writer was "To bring more beauty to people." Another, "All art should belong to those who love it most." Surely this small work of art fits within two important artistic credos.

