

## JOHN M. PATTERSON: *A SHORT RETROSPECTIVE*

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John M. Patterson was born in Philadelphia on March 4, 1874. After attending public schools, he took at the age of 14 a position in a stock-broker's office earning \$2.50 a week, and subsequently he clerked for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Deciding to study law, Patterson attended preparatory school and was subsequently admitted to law school at the University of Pennsylvania. There, the study of law required three years, but Patterson completed his work in two, applied to the courts to take the bar examination, and passed. During the Spanish-American War, Patterson enlisted as a color sergeant in the First Pennsylvania Volunteers. Before leaving the service, he rose to the rank of captain in command of Company L, 19th Regiment. In 1902, while practicing law, Patterson was appointed assistant city solicitor.

As a young man, Patterson was fond of athletics. As a member of the Vesper boat club, he was a skilled oarsman. His strength of character was demonstrated dramatically in the summer of 1903, when he leaped from an Atlantic City pier, fully clothed except for his overcoat, and saved the life of an exhausted swimmer. A Philadelphia newspaper reported that, when asked about this event, Patterson said: "Oh, what's the use of trying to make a hero of me . . . the man was not drowning. All he wanted was company in the water, as he had lost his head." In 1909, in another act of bravery, Patterson entered a burning building in Philadelphia, climbed to the third story, and carried an endangered child to safety.

No doubt due to Patterson's intelligence and strength of character, his legal career progressed rapidly. After having been appointed assistant district attorney in 1904, he was appointed in June 1913 to fill a vacancy in the Common Pleas Court No. 1. In this position, Patterson

carried on a distinguished public service career and was often cited in the Philadelphia press for landmark legal decisions.

In 1917, when the United States entered World War I, Patterson was one of the first volunteers to offer his services to Theodore Roosevelt, when the colonel announced his plans to form the "Roosevelt Division," a cavalry unit, and take this division to France. Roosevelt was denied permission from the government, and Patterson, then in his forties, did not serve. However, Patterson did use his enormous popularity and public presence to speak out on behalf of the recruitment and volunteer efforts.

In 1919, John Patterson had a political setback: he was unsuccessful as a candidate for the Republican nomination for mayor, losing by the tiny margin of just over 1300 votes. He continued his legal career, and then in the spring of 1922, retired from the bench and re-entered private practice. Public speculation at the time treated his unexpected retirement as motivated by Patterson's wish to build a personal fortune, since he had suffered under the relatively lower pay of public service.

In 1925, Patterson again moved toward public service: he ran on the Republican ticket for district attorney of Philadelphia. In late October, as the election approached, he was quietly admitted to Lankenau Hospital and underwent surgery for gallstone colic, from which he had suffered for several years. On October 30 he was pronounced out of all danger and recovering well, but his health suddenly worsened, and he died from complications on November 3, at the age of 51, four hours after winning the election.

Patterson was survived by his wife Edna, daughters Marie Louise and Helen India, and infant granddaughter Patricia. Some newspapers reported that 100,000 people came to pay their respects in advance of his funeral.

Judge Patterson's legal career paralleled a lifelong devotion to charitable and social works. He served as trustee of Temple University, Garretson Hospital, and Samaritan Hospital. He was a director of



Maternity Hospital. In 1921, Patterson dressed as Santa Claus and distributed 2000 baskets of "Christmas cheer" to families of prisoners in local jails. On the occasion of his sixteenth wedding anniversary, Patterson took 700 youngsters from poorer sections of Philadelphia on an all-day outing to Neshaminy Falls. In May 1922, Patterson sold a portion of his library in New York to raise much-needed funds. His many friends, upon hearing of the sale, arranged for a testimonial dinner, at which \$5000 was pledged to enable Patterson to purchase a new library. Patterson refused the gift, and requested that the funds be distributed among various charitable institutions. In June 1922, Patterson was elevated by the King of Italy to chevalier of the Order of the Crown of Italy.

While professional success and charitable endeavor figured prominently in Judge Patterson's life, he also displayed a passionate love for books and book collecting. His love was an active one, as he served as both president and vice president of the Philadelphia branch of the Dickens Fellowship, and was elected to the Grolier Club of New York in 1921.

The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* for Sunday morning, January 9, 1916 ran an important article written by journalist Joseph Jackson, who had interviewed Patterson on the subject of his library. In it, Patterson revealed to Jackson much about his love for books, which he had been collecting for twenty years, and about his library, which then held 10,000 volumes. Jackson wrote:

He [Patterson] told me how he had contrived to gather so many interesting books and relics, for his library contains a large number of interesting autograph letters of persons of prominence either in the literary world or in history . . . They have been gathered from everywhere books are sold, from visits to bookstores in this country and in England, from catalogs from various parts of the world and from auction. . . . Becoming interested in Dickens, first in his works, then in his career, the Judge started to collect first editions of the novelist.

Jackson continued: "In answer to my question as to his reason for having his library in three places, the Judge replied that he liked to

have his books with him. 'It might be inconvenient were it not that I have a large part of my Dickens collection always at hand so I can use it when getting up material for Dickens papers for the Fellowship.'"

Jackson and other journalists also documented a Patterson library that reached well beyond Charles Dickens. As a lifelong resident of Philadelphia, with a keen interest in Philadelphia history, Patterson acquired William Penn's copy of the Bible, inscribed by Penn to his son. Among other association items in the Patterson collection was the door knocker from Dr. Johnson's house in Gough Square. Patterson also had a second folio Shakespeare, a leaf from the Gutenberg Bible, first editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and a 27-line fragment on vellum of *Donatus*. When Jackson asked Patterson if he had moved on from collecting Dickens, he said he had, as there appeared to be nothing more left of the great novelist for him to collect! Patterson showed off his most valuable Dickens book, a first issue of *Oliver Twist* inscribed by Dickens to his friend Serjeant Talfourd, the dedicatee of *Pickwick Papers*.

Eight years after Jackson's newspaper article appeared, Patterson was interviewed again, in December 1924 and in the last year of his life. When the journalist asked about Dickens and Christmas, Patterson replied:

Dickens has been called the "Great Heart of Bookland" . . . Thackeray called him the Christmas prophet. Of one thing it is certain, however. He understood the spirit of the time as no other man ever has done. . . .

Alive to all its beauty, susceptible and responsive to all its suggestions and romance, he [Dickens] reveled in it with all the breathless interest and intensity of a child. . . .

He caught its mystery, and his heart throbbed with its poetry.

Patterson, touched by the artistic vibrancy of Dickens, had collected what pleased him.

## THREE GENERATIONS OF COLLECTING

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*The Extraordinary Life of Charles Dickens* exhibit, web site and book have been collaborative efforts of father and son, Ralph Jay Crawford, Jr. and Bruce Jay Crawford.

### *Inspirations for this Exhibition*

Three important considerations guided Ralph and Bruce Crawford's proposal to mount this Grolier Club exhibition.

- The first was to present a collection rich with ephemeral material, for an exhibit that would be visually appealing and that could be developed into a narrative about an author's life and writings.
- The second consideration was to present material which had a special connection to the Grolier Club.
- Last, and partly at the suggestion of Eric Holzenberg, was to apply technology to extend the range and breadth of the exhibit.

As a result of these considerations, Ralph and Bruce proposed *The Extraordinary Life of Charles Dickens*, based on the Patterson archive of Dickens material. To permit web users to browse the Patterson archive they created the web site: [www.charlesdickensononline.com](http://www.charlesdickensononline.com).

At the time this volume went to press, web site visitors were recorded from the following locations: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Dubai, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Seychelles Islands, Slovak Republic, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom.

### *Ralph Crawford's Comments on a Collecting Family*

I became a rare-book collector in 1953 when I began collecting material relating to Charles Dickens. My first purchase was the *Mystery of Edwin Drood* in the original parts, purchased from Dawson's Book Shop in Los Angeles.



- 4] Eckel, John C. *The First Editions of the Writings of Charles Dickens and Their Values: A Bibliography*. London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1913.

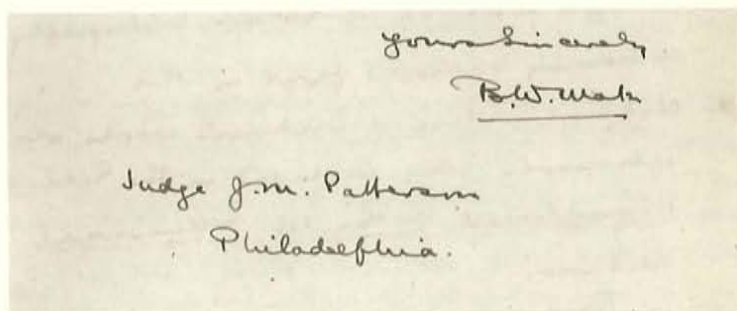
Number 99 of an edition of 250 on large paper, signed by Eckel and by the Managing Director of Chapman and Hall. Judge Patterson intended to extra-illustrate this *Bibliography* with material on view at the present Grolier Club exhibition.

- 5] Clipped newspaper article excerpted from *The Clique Office*, February 28, 1914.

A mixed but generally favorable review of Eckel's *Bibliography*. The article mentions the Grolier Club, some of its members, and the Dickens exhibition mounted by the Club in 1913.

- 6] B. W. Matz. Undated reproduction of a photograph.

Matz, a Dickens scholar, edited the National Edition of the works of Charles Dickens, published in London from 1906 to 1908.



NO. 7

- 7] B. W. Matz. Autograph letter signed, 12 November 1914, to Judge J. M. Patterson, on stationery of *The Dickensian*.

Patterson obviously had written to Matz regarding the articles on pages 202 and 203 of Eckel's *Bibliography*, and presumably in connection with compiling this archive of extra-illustration material. In this two-page letter, Matz states that Dickens collaborated with others on articles in *Household Words*. Matz also writes, with reference to these articles, that they "would make another volume in themselves."