The Greenwich Village Bookshop Door: A Portal to Bohemia, 1920-1925 Exploration

Name ___________________________ Date _______________________

THE HARRY RANSOM CENTER is a humanities research library and museum. Current exhibitions are on display in the galleries on the first floor. The Gutenberg Bible and the First Photograph are on permanent display in the lobby. The Ransom Center is free and open to the public.

In the Gallery

The Greenwich Village Bookshop Door: A Portal to Bohemia, 1920-1925

In the early 1920s, noteworthy visitors to Frank Shay’s Bookshop at 4 Christopher Street began autographing the narrow door that opened into the shop’s office. Signed by over 240 artists, writers, publishers, and other notable habitués of New York City’s Greenwich Village neighborhood, this unusual artifact is a literal portal to the past, revealing the rich mix of innovators—from anarchist poets to major commercial publishers—that defined this slice of Bohemia from 1920 to 1925.

1. What are the origins of the door? Where was it first hung and how did it find its way to the Harry Ransom Center?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What is the door rumored to have hidden in Frank Shay’s bookshop?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
3. Briefly describe the role of Frank Shay’s Bookshop in Greenwich Village’s history?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

4. A wide variety of authors, artists, playwrights, local business people and friends of the shop’s owners signed the Greenwich Village Bookshop door. Name 5 people who signed the door and list their professions.
1.____________________________________________________________________________________
2.____________________________________________________________________________________
3.____________________________________________________________________________________
4.____________________________________________________________________________________
5.____________________________________________________________________________________

5. Of the 242 signatures on the door, how many has the Harry Ransom Center been able to decipher?
____________________________________________________________________________________

6. Describe the evolution of the location of Frank Shay’s Bookshop through the years.
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

7. In the early 1920s, how was Greenwich Village redefining itself?
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

8. Why did Frank Shay print book covers in different colors?
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

10. What was the inspiration for Frank Shay’s traveling bookshop?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

11. What were some of Frank Shay’s creative methods for selling books?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

12. What was the first woman-owned bookshop in America?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

13. How did the curator decipher the signature “Bar Dar”? (Location: middle of the gallery, in the “Deciphering the Door” section)

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

14. Besides the door, select one other artifact and discuss its relevance to the history of the Greenwich Village.

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
15. How does the Greenwich Village bookshop door aid your understanding of the early 1920s?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

Need help? A guide to the exhibition is available at the front desk.