

Lanny's Library

BOB BRIER

Lanny and I became friends in the early 1970s, when he was Director of Chicago House. He and Martha used to kindly give me a room when I was working on projects in the Luxor area. Those were the days when Labib Habachi was holding court at Chicago House, using their fabulous library to research one of his books.

When Lanny left Chicago House, we kept in touch by meeting in Egypt, often when he was guiding an Oriental Institute group. When Lanny died, Peter Lacovara told me that Lanny's heirs were not sure what to do with Lanny's books, so I sent word that I'd be happy to help in any way I could. Somehow, our wires got crossed and I never heard back. Then Peter sent me the ad below:

Dates and Times:

Saturday, October 26, 2019

9:00 am–3:00 pm

Sunday, October 27, 2019

9:00 am–12:00 pm

Address:

26 Ragged Rock Rd, Old Saybrook, CT 06475

Description:

Just Books Estate Sale! Old Saybrook #26 Ragged Rock Road Saturday, October 26 9:00 am–3:00 pm and Sunday, October 27 9:00 am–noon Wonders of Ancient Egypt Approximately 10,000 scholarly titles on Egyptology including Excavation Reports and Related Subjects amassed and residing in the Library of the late Egyptologist Dr. Lanny Bell, scholar, professor and lecturer. Priced to Sell. Managed by Norman Legassie of Stepping Stones Antiques LLC 323 Boston Post Road, Old Saybrook, CT 06475 and Curt Wendler of Curt Wendler Rare Books 315 Boston Post Road, Old Saybrook, CT 06475 phone (203) 530-7508.

So, Lanny's library was going to be sold in a garage sale! I called Norm, the fellow in charge, to find out what was happening. He was both intelligent and straightforward. I explained that I bought loads of books for my students and asked him how much money he thought I should bring. He said, "Not that much, most of the books are \$3.00." He said there were some "specials" in a side room that were higher priced, but that was it. He suggested that I get there about a half hour early because people who frequent garage sales often arrive early to get in first! I drafted Dillon, one of my kids who had an SUV, to go with me so we could pack it with books.

We arrived a half hour early, and there were about twelve people on line ahead of us. As we waited, we talked with those on line. They were mostly local book dealers, who really didn't know anything about Egyptology books. No Archaeologia types, so when the doors opened, there was no great land rush, everyone ambled inside. I went to the "Specials" and it was just me, Dillon, and a book dealer who was look-

ing but clearly had no idea of what he was looking at. There was really nothing wonderful, or very rare: O.I. Medinet Habu Epigraphic Surveys, the Desroches-Noblecourt 2-vol. set on Abu Simbel, and things like that. They were very reasonably priced and I quickly piled up \$2,000 worth of books. After this, which took ten minutes, I went to look at the \$3.00 books. They were clearly where Lanny had always kept them, in the basement on bookshelves, and in the top floor on bookshelves. It was a very eclectic “library,” not what I had expected at all. It was almost as if Lanny went to every book sale in his area and bought every Egypt book he could find. So, here were four copies of Nancy Jenkins’ *The Boat Beneath the Pyramid*; five copies of Jonathan Cott’s *Om Seti*; six copies of Nick Reeves’ *The Complete Tutankhamun*; twenty copies of Cyril Aldred’s various books. It wasn’t a real working library like many of us have. Where were the runs of the JEA, the EEF excavation reports, EEF Surveys, BSA reports, copies of early travel accounts? I think it was because Lanny always had use of either the Chicago House library or the one at the Oriental Institute. In some ways it was disappointing, but I still bought 300+ books for my students.

As I was going through the house, I saw file cabinets with Lanny’s papers, epigraphic tracings, etc. I asked, “What was going to happen with them?” and Norm told me it wasn’t decided. They really didn’t know. I was afraid they might get thrown out and I told Norm I would find them a good home and explained why they were important. He said he would ask Lanny’s heirs who were inheriting the house and its contents and who were in charge. This was on Saturday. The sale was continuing on Sunday so I talked Dillon into driving up with his SUV again, to pick up some more books and see if we could rescue Lanny’s papers.

On Saturday I met one of Lanny’s heirs, who was not an academic, but very nice, and wanted to do the right thing. I explained where I thought Lanny’s papers could go. “How about Harvard?” Yes, that would be OK. I didn’t know if Peter Der Manuelian would want them for Harvard, but I had to save them. So, Dillon and I loaded the car with Lanny’s papers, and another two hundred books, which were now reduced to \$1.50. At the end of the day I asked Norm what was going to happen to the remaining three thousand or so books. He said they had to be cleared out somehow and intimated they might go to the dumpster! I asked if it would be OK if I arranged for the Harvard Egyptology students to drive down and take the books to divide among them. I knew Peter [Der Manuelian] had about ten grad students and my idea was that they could all get the beginnings of their private libraries free. It wasn’t easy working out the details as I was leaving for Cairo that week, but the students rented a U-Haul and brought all the books back to Harvard, where a room with shelves was chosen so they could put out the books, to see what they had. Then something resembling the NFL draft began, with students taking turns selecting books. So, in the end Lanny’s papers wound up at Harvard, and Lanny’s “library” went to deserving grad students.

When I returned from Egypt I was scheduled to give a lecture at Harvard on the Khufu I Boat and after my talk I went out to dinner with Peter Der Manuelian and his grad students. After answering their questions about the boat, we talked about Lanny’s library and all the books they had selected. One of the students, Julia Puglisi, told me that soon after they picked up Lanny’s books, she was working in Cairo and designed and had a rubber stamp made so each book could be stamped as coming from Lanny’s library.

“To say the name of the dead is to make him live again....”

