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## The Bridwell Quill. Issue 1: In the Beginning

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# The Bridwell Quill

a note from the director



September 1, 2018

Issue 1: In the Beginning

Here commences *The Bridwell Quill*—a monthly reflection and note from the Director of Bridwell Library.<sup>1</sup> Before getting into the details of our inaugural issue, I want to thank Michelle Ried, our trusty and diligent staff member, who when I first approached her with the idea of a monthly director’s newsletter, came up with a list of about a dozen titles for me. I quickly agreed that “The Bridwell Quill” was a suitable old-style name, conveying the utility of a feathered pen and some Dickensian-era scribbles from a Marley or Pickwick or Chuzzlewit about the duties, experiences, and reflections of one’s professional station in the world. I will admit some fondness around the “Quill” language and that time period—in college two decades ago, a professor and advisor of mine suggested that I should have been born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to which I cautiously demurred, and thanked the Almighty for saving me from the consumptive maladies of that century. My reference to Charles Dickens’ characters is no mistake, but a bad habit, hard to flush from my vocabulary, as I just left my old home of Indianapolis and a nearly five-year-old Dickens club that I started with some colleagues. Having come to know many of Dickens’ works during that time, I was pleased to discover that both Bridwell and DeGolyer hold various original works by the author.

It may be of surprise too that Dickens was deeply informed by biblical writings, many of which he incorporated into his novels. In fact, the core themes of this book group had been “Christianity, social justice, and the city” in Dickens. These topical issues bore more of the social gospel than we expected in nearly every novel and non-fiction writing he produced, while also illuminating contemporary debates occurring in theological schools today about social justice and inequality.

Having now arrived in the heart of beef country, I’ve taken partial leave from reading Dickens and have transitioned to more regional histories and literary topics—I’m slowly plodding through Michener’s mammoth volume aptly titled *Texas*, and learning our local history from SMU Professor Emeritus Darwin Payne’s *100 Years on the Hilltop*, and Joseph L. Allen’s *Perkins School of Theology: A Centennial History*. In the first month of joining Bridwell Library, I have had some tremendously wonderful experiences and have met a range of incredibly talented, professional, and committed staff, faculty, and students. It has taken some time to study and learn the campus, the departments and units, and office arrangements. And just as there is the diversity of the campus, its buildings, departments, and peoples, so too has Dallas and its environs proved to be equally interesting, diverse, and intriguing. I’ve made trips

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<sup>1</sup> As we explore the many aspects of this library, one topic that I will address is the history and use of the definite article in front of our esteemed institution—and what

the historical preferences have been: “the Bridwell” or simply “Bridwell.”



**Bridwell artifacts displayed among the DMA exhibits**

to some of the metroplex’s museums (DMA, Meadows) and small galleries (Dallas Contemporary in the Design District, MCL Grand Art Galleries in the suburb of Lewisville); tried the quality and abundant styles of foods in Deep Ellum, Knox/Henderson, Lower Greenville, Bishop Arts, Oak Cliff, Lakewood, Casa Linda, and Northwest Dallas; and travelled up north to Richardson, Garland, Frisco, and Plano to find some of the best Asian cuisines available: *jiaozi* in Taiwanese dumpling shops, sliced fried pork cutlets in Japanese *tonkatsu* kiosks, and freshly steamed shallot buns in one of the many local Korean markets. On Sundays, I’ve made the rounds to multiple churches, getting a sense of the broader community of congregations in DFW, including Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Methodist congregations, where I have met dozens of people, many of whom already knew about Perkins and Bridwell. Some of these individuals were SMU students or even faculty at one time. In the process of getting to know a city like Dallas, the triune virtues of food, religion, and culture meld together into a unified expression of our experiences and allow us to better understand the things we don’t know, while examining the things we think we already know. For instance, in my short time in Dallas, I have even gone to the Rodeo—and like Bridwell, I’m not sure if I’m supposed to say “the Rodeo” or just “Rodeo”—a discussion for next month’s dispatch. That said, I want to think about

what a place, a city, a neighborhood, a community has to offer in the way of culture and afford the opportunity to think about how the experiences of “the Rodeo” and “Bridwell Library” may in fact be more similar expressions of religion and culture than we might readily admit.



**Rodeo in Mesquite, TX**

My hope in these reflections is to develop a voice in which I can share with you some of these themes. This first note has been formulated after years of receiving and reading a whole host of such newsletters from directors’ desks. One of my favorite is called “Francesca’s Traveling iPad”—a regular report on the comings and goings of the Glimmerglass Opera director Francesca Zambello, which recounts her travels to far-flung locals and islands like Sicily, Cyprus, and Sardinia, where she finds artisanal recipes for boar fettuccine in pesto sauce, or a magnificent crepe a la Corfu. Affectionate readers may also enjoy a rustic image of her dog Rome, strategically placed on Otsego Lake at dawn. I have no pets. I scoop no litter. But I promise to provide some entertaining tidbits about Bridwell, DFW, and the world in-between.



Items from the triennial DeGolyer Conference

In my first weeks here, Bridwell successfully hosted its triennial DeGolyer Bookbinding Conference. We had several dozen visitors in attendance and our teaching sessions were very well received. The Bridwell Staff and our retiring director and my predecessor, Roberta Schaafsma, worked

tremendously hard preparing all aspects of the conference, all of which proved necessary for its continued success. The daylong event included a lunch-time lecture by a previous DeGolyer Conference winner, an evening reception and rewards ceremony capped off by the opening of the galleries and viewings of the competition entries.

Several visitors have made their way through our halls and into our galleries and classrooms. The Hispanic Summer Program brought several students to view rare materials from the Latinx



Abyssinian cuisine (*chechebsa*)

historical traditions, while a group of Albanian Gheg-speaking Kosovars visited to examine various Islamic texts, including a rare interlinear Arabic-Persian teaching Qur'an. We have also been lucky to have some truly interesting and

outstanding conversations with faculty, staff, and students on such wide-ranging topics as cowboy music, Islamic law, St. Augustine, the history of

French pipe organs, and the connections between Abyssinian cuisine (such as *chechebsa*) and Ethiopian Bibles at Bridwell in the ancient form of the language called *Ge'ez*.



Ethiopian prayer books at Bridwell

Bridwell Library is part of a community of supporters rich in diversity and history. I hope that by engaging in both my explorations of the metropex and the ideas and creativity among staff, faculty, students, and community, we can cultivate a productive space for thought, conversation, and active engagement with the world. I have known about Bridwell for several years and have come to appreciate it more each time I have visited. Now that I am here as part of the community I value its fullness even more. In the first weeks, I overlapped with my predecessor Roberta, and learned a tremendous amount from her wisdom and insight. In the last few weeks, I have been continuing to learn and have found the staff of Bridwell to be an exceptional group of committed professionals. I want to thank all of them in my first letter to the community. And I want to thank all of you for joining us on this new adventure.

Pax vobiscum! ~ AJE

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