

**Paper Talk Podcast
Episode 3: Timothy Barrett
Recorded on February 26, 2016**

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW

HELEN HIEBERT: Hi, this is Helen Hiebert, and I'm in Iowa with Tim Barrett. I'll let him tell us where we are because it's kind of long...Tim, I just want to say that I don't think you remember when we first met, but I do, because I was a young, [laughs] young person, and you meet so many of us, and it was in Boston at the Peabody when all the Japanese papermakers came over. I think Lauren Pearlman organized that.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yes, I remember that.

HELEN HIEBERT: And, it was fantastic to see. They brought all their equipment, all of their fiber, and now here I am for the first time seeing your facility.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, what I remember about that event was lying in bed at night in the wee hours of the morning in the hotel listening to the Japanese papermakers in the floor below having a complete drunken soiree, yelling and screaming, and feeling responsible, because I was helping to host them, but not feeling responsible enough to go down and, try in Japanese, and try to break up the party.

HELEN HIEBERT: Oh right, right. So, anyways, so what's the name of the facility here?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: The long version would be UI Center for the Book Research and Production Paper Facility.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, great, and so I just want to ask you how you got started with paper, what was the seed? When was the seed planted?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: I think probably when I was about 15 or 16. I mean, I grew up as a teenager enjoying making things with my hands, just building stuff, and I asked my father, at one point, how paper was made before the paper machine, and he was a professor of English in American literature, and he knew enough about the history of books to be able to describe this rectangular sieve-like device, and I thought the whole thing sounded really intriguing. It turns out Kalamazoo, Michigan was a paper town, and that had something to do with me getting started in this because when I needed pieces of old machine felt or forming fabric, there were local folks who did help me. But it wasn't until I was in high school, that I really started to snoop around in the library, and I found Dard Hunter's books, and that was a big deal for me when I found the books and realized that it was like, it was like opening a door to Alibaba's cavern. It wasn't suddenly to be curious about handmade paper, it was not just, you know, odd, here is somebody who really devoted his life to pursuing this, and not only that, but it was way more deep and broad and complicated and fascinating than I'd ever dreamed.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: So, I visited Larry Barker who was making paper at the Cranbrook Art Academy, and that was important. Made a little bit of paper in a shop I set up for myself at Antioch College in the early 70s, and then went and worked with Kathy and Howie Clark at Twinrocker, and from there I went onto the Fulbright in Japan. And so, that's the early part of the story.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right. So, let's talk a little bit about going to Japan and—because I write how-to books—your book really influenced me. You know, I looked...book writing for me came about by accident, so I'm just wondering how you approached...yeah, how did you approach it? How did you come up with your stuff for writing and its so detailed and friendly...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, I guess whether I'm writing an article or a book, I always start off by asking myself, alright if I were reading either, what would I like to find? What kind of information would I like to have? And therefore, you know, I always recommend Sukey Hughes' book in combination with mine because Sukey covers a lot of the kind of cultural craft aesthetic context for papermaking, and she does a great job of it. I wasn't particularly interested in it. I was interested in, okay, how does this actually work? How does this process function? Number one, and number two, what would you do if you actually wanted to do it.

HELEN HIEBERT: Um-hum.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: This is one of the things, one of the few shortcomings of Dard Hunter. You can read through all those books, and you think my goodness what a lot of detail, but then when you ask yourself how do I do it? There's nothing there.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: There's nothing there about beating degree and beating tackle, and you know, how do the Asians actually cook their raw fiber? What kind of alkali do they use, and in what concentration, and so on. So, my approach to Japanese papermaking was really focused on being able to do it. Because I wanted people to be able to do it, but also I figured if I can't explain how to do this, and if I can't do it myself, then I really don't understand it.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, sure.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: I really haven't gotten to the bottom of it.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, right, right, and so you mentioned Sukey Hughes. Her book is called *Washi*, and it came out...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: *Washi, the World of Japanese Paper*, I think, yeah.

HELEN HIEBERT: It came out before yours?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, that's right, a few years before mine.

HELEN HIEBERT: So, you were in Japan, and then you came back to America...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Right.

HELEN HIEBERT: And then, just tell me the transition to coming to Iowa.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, I came back from Japan after having spent a couple of years under a Fulbright...

HELEN HIEBERT: Well, how did the book come about?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, Henry Morris, when I was in Japan, he was a friend and real supporter, and I had been sending him letters with some of these stories, you know.

HELEN HIEBERT: He's in Seattle?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Henry was in Philadelphia at the time, and he was printing limited edition books, often, usually about the history of the craft, and he said, during this correspondence, "You know, you should keep track of all this stuff. This could make a good book some day." And I didn't really pay much attention to it. I had no, not a thing in my head about ever writing a book, let alone getting a job at a university, but I did keep notes, and when I came back, I put it together, and Richard Flavin agreed to do the drawings, and so Henry and I kind of worked this out by correspondence, and so he printed the first book, which was limited edition. And then I got a grant from NEA, I think, it seems to me it was five or ten-thousand dollars to redo the manuscript to include a hands-on portion, and that then became the trade edition that Weatherhill did.

HELEN HIEBERT: Okay.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: So...

HELEN HIEBERT: And the trade edition with hardback.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Initially, it was hardback.

HELEN HIEBERT: I haven't seen the initial edition, and then it was paperback.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Right, and then there were a couple of editions that had actual samples in the front, possibly one paperback edition with the samples, and then it is just a straight paperback version.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: And, I'm hoping to do a complementary book on Western papermaking soon, sometime in the near year or two, that would take a similar tack. I've been itching to write it. I just haven't been able to get around to it.

HELEN HIEBERT: Wonderful.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: But, you were asking about the transition from Japan to here, how I ended up here at the University of Iowa. So, I came back from Japan, you know, I had Japanese mould and *su*, and some Japanese fiber, and a camera, and three lenses, and lots of Japanese paper samples, and no money in the bank.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: So, then it was like, well what am I going to do now? So, at the same time, I was building a shop, a workspace, in my parent's barn in Kalamazoo. I did these two national lecture tours, and I had no intention of trying to get my name out there. I really just felt I needed to share this process, which I had learned.

HELEN HIEBERT: So, where did you go? What kind of places? Japan Society...?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, it was more art schools, art museums, and I sent out letters and eventually would go around and do like 30 stops during a three-month period.

HELEN HIEBERT: Okay.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: And, that brought in enough money to sort of last part of the way through the rest of the year, but the wolf was really at the door. I mean it was very, very difficult. I was trying to make paper and sell it, and that wasn't amounting to very much at all. And about this time, Kim Merker, here at the University of Iowa, unbeknownst to me was trying to create a center for the book, and he was working with the administration to create a position for a book conservator, book binding specialist, and for papermaker, and eventually, I got the position here and came in '86, and hit the ground running, and I have never looked back. It's just been absolutely fabulous for me, and I feel extremely lucky and have ever since I arrived.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, so let's fast-forward 30 years. Here we are today, can you just give me an overview of the papermaking aspect of your program?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, in a way we kind of fit the model of a university professor, in say chemistry, where that professor has a lab, where he's conducting research, and he has grad students who are working with him or her, and because they are really interested in his or her specialty, but they're also thinking about their own research and the path that they want to follow. And the work that takes place in the lab allows the professor to bring it into the classroom. For me, the research I've done on historical papers here in the research and production facility has allowed me to make changes in the production routines that we use when we produce paper for rare book and art conservation and book arts uses. But the important part of the story is that activity, the analysis of historical papers and the production at this facility, impacts the teaching that

takes place on the main campus in North Hall where the other Center for the Book classrooms are. So, you know I feel real lucky to be teaching the art and science of the craft that I love. I feel real lucky to have this production and research facility and just real proud to be associated with the program and this university. It's really been something.

HELEN HIEBERT: So, what's a typical year of papermaking classes?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, in the fall, I teach a class in Islamic and Asian-style papermaking, which actually starts off with Nepalese-style folding mould, sheet forming, goes to Islamic-style papermaking and then the Japanese, and that includes readings connected with the history of the craft or related aesthetics. And, there are, two-thirds of the class is kind of focused on demonstrations and assignments that I present to the students, and then the last third, they're able to pick a project that they want to do, and it may have a completely artistic tangent, it could be research-based. Then, we repeat that same format in the spring with Western papermaking. So, there's those two key classes.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: And, as you know, we've been eager to have summer classes or visitors, like you, who specialize in paper works or 2D or 3D techniques in paper because it's not something that I routinely teach, although the students are often resourceful and go right ahead and do that kind of thing with a lot of encouragement from me.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right. And so, you have a two-week or a month-long intensive sort of thing?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well in the summer, there's a summer class that's often taught by a visitor from off campus. Ann Marie Kennedy and Mary Hark, Bridget O'Malley are some of the people who've taught that class. It's problematic, though, because our MFA students have to conjure up tuition to be able to take that class. If they're lucky enough to have a research assistantship, where their tuition is paid for during a regular academic year, that's not the case in the summer. So, we've been eager to have more happen during the regular academic year, and so your visit here is important because you're doing this two-day workshop for us, and people at least get a taste of what the alternative approaches are.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, so tell me a little bit about your research overview.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, you know, it's funny because there is some of what I do that looks like well, he's really interested in the history of the craft, or, he's really interested in paper science, and it's true that those things factor into my research, but my main interest is an aesthetic one. Why do some Japanese papers have a certain kind of luster about them? Why do some of them feel soft and crisp at the same time and others don't? Why do certain European papers have a lot of character and integrity? How can they be really tough and strong and supple at the same time? So,

there are these aesthetic subtleties that really have driven all of the research, and in the course of doing that, science has turned out to be important in helping me answer some of those questions. Getting a grip on paper history or historical context has been important.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: But, it's really the aesthetics all along that has kind of driven everything.

HELEN HIEBERT: So, the look and the feel?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, why is one piece of paper—and we'll just eliminate machine-made papers for the moment—why does one piece of handmade paper seem dull and not particularly interesting at all and another piece of handmade paper seems to be really loaded with its own personality and...

HELEN HIEBERT: Yeah, do you have an anecdote of something you've researched and found out in this investigation?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, you know, the early one that often gets repeated, the early story that some people like and others don't, is, you know, analyzing these 15th-century papers early on—this was in the late '80s—for pH and some other characteristics, and sitting there one day and waiting for this pH meter needle to settle down, so I could record the pH, and I'm thinking to myself, I don't understand why these papers are so interesting. I don't know if all this science stuff going to tell me. And then, I noticed in the upper left-hand corner, there's a thumbprint from where the layer, almost certain that the layer picked the damp sheet up off the felt and moved it over to the pile and went right on to the next one. And I felt like, you know, if I put my thumb in that place, it was like 500 years just kind of disappeared, and so all those little touches of the hand, and even less obvious ones, all the time and effort that went into making the linen cloth, and all the times it was washed, all the sorting and fermentation, all that stuff, all that intimate contact between human beings and the raw material is actually there in the finished paper. So that constitutes a really different piece of paper than one that's made from say cotton liners or another raw fiber that's been cooked and bleached elsewhere, that's very carefully made and very refined. Those are two different pieces of paper.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: They have different histories and particularly, they have a different story when it comes to the selection and preparation of the raw material. So, it boils down to taking a close look at, in both Japanese and in early European papermaking, the raw materials, how they're selected, and how they're prepared, before you even form a sheet. Because that's the essence of the finished paper, kind of.

HELEN HIEBERT: Yeah, yeah, and I love that thumbprint story. I do love it because it reminds me of, I have some old English moulds that I got from Wookey Hole in England, and whenever I use them, I think about who was making paper? How many

sheets were made on these? What were they thinking? It's like you're in a time machine, going back between the centuries. It's fascinating.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah. I think that's one of the attractions to historical artifacts, in general, is that they do...they're alive. They have their own story to tell about their interaction with human beings, and once you start to learn to read those artifacts, whether it's a book or paper or rocking chairs or something, they turn out to be really loaded with information.

HELEN HIEBERT: Yeah, yeah, and I'm thinking about now, I listened to your podcast with Steve Miller recently, but it like cut off right when you were talking about—this is a little bit different topic but—going to another country, so you're experience in Japan, and how interacting with people from other countries really is, world peace could come from that. I don't remember what you said. Do you remember? You know, having to have the understanding and communicating between cultures.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well, I don't remember what sort of road I was going down with Steve on that. I mean, it's certainly true that—you know I remember at one point, this is maybe a completely different track—but I remember at one point when I went to, Mina Takahashi and I went to India as part of the United Nations Industrial Developmental Organization project to help improve the craft in India, and there was some concern in some quarters in America about the fact that we were going to help these people, because the price of labor is so cheap over there, and papers from India were already flooding the American market. So, I thought to myself, I hadn't gone yet, I was about to go...

HELEN HIEBERT: Right...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...and I thought to myself, you never really thought about that, so I got in touch with one of my teachers in Japan, and I presented this to him because I was being asked to go to India to help share Japanese techniques, and his basic response was, "Look it, don't worry about it. If the craft of papermaking hadn't moved all around the world, it would still be strictly China. You know, and we probably wouldn't even have machine papermaking, you know, this is something that's important to human culture all across the globe, and you go right ahead and teach them whatever you can."

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Now, when I got over there, I was happy to teach things, but I also said, "What have you got in the way of Islamic-style papers made in this country?" And they weren't particularly interested in it, but when I started digging into that whole story, it turns out they were fabulous papers...

HELEN HIEBERT: I bet...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...Islamic-style papers, and I tried to convince them, you know, you guys should forget about Japanese techniques and European techniques. If you

can make paper like this again, you can blow the lid right off the international handmade paper market because these are gorgeous. They're highly burnished and translucent. Well, they had a different plan, you know. They were interested in what they call technology transfer. They were really interested. So, of course sometimes you need someone from the outside to act as a mirror, and show you what you're right in the middle of yourself.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right. Right. Hum. Well, I just want to talk a little about your MacArthur award. I was honored to be asked to write one of the recommendation letters...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: I didn't know that, thank you...

HELEN HIEBERT: ...and I'm curious just about the process, how you found out. How they told you and your reflections on receiving that.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Well yeah, they're very, as you know, they are very secretive about this whole process, and I didn't know it was coming. The only hint that I had, was I got this really cryptic message from Asao Shimura in the Philippines, and everybody is sworn to secrecy, and he sent me an e-mail and he said, in his cryptic English, it said, "Big secret. All I say is you get this, it be very big."

HELEN HIEBERT: [Laughs]

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Asao [laughs], and I thought hum, I wonder what's going on. But then, you know, I forgot about it, and, you know, it's probably a year and a half later or something, I get this phone call, I'm in a faculty meeting with four of my colleagues, the phone rings. I shut it off in my pocket because I'm in the faculty meeting. The phone rings again, and I shut it off, and then I get a third call, and I thought, you know, my son's in trouble in high school or there's an issue here.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: So, I went out in the hallway, and [Daniel Socolow], I think his name was, he said, "This is [Daniel Socolow] of the MacArthur Foundation. Are you familiar with the MacArthur fellowships?", and I said, "Oh yes, indeed." And he said, "Do you know anyone who has received one?" And I said, "Well, I know Terry Belanger, who has" and he said, "Well there's someone else with the initials TB that has received one." And I said, "Alright, come on you've got to help me out here a little bit, you know tell me what the deal is?" And he said, "Well congratulations, I'm calling to...", and then he said, "Now you can't tell anyone about this. You can tell one person, your significant other or whatever, but you mustn't tell anyone else for another ten days until we're able to get a news release together and have some photographs taken." So then...

HELEN HIEBERT: [Laughs]

TIMOTHY BARRETT: So then, I go back into the faculty meeting, and everybody's like "What's all that about" I said, "Aw nothing." It's like, sorry to interrupt, no big deal.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right. Oh my gosh.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: So, then I called my wife and [laughs] she says, “You’re kidding me.” And I said, “No, I’m not. I just a phone call.

HELEN HIEBERT: [Laughs]

TIMOTHY BARRETT: She said, “You’re joking.” And I said, “Jody, you’re my wife, you know...

HELEN HIEBERT: [Laughs]

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...believe me, I just got this phone call.” It was amazing, I can’t believe it. So anyway, it was really great surprise. In a large part, I mean, it was good for me, obviously, on a lot of different levels, the money, the visibility, but it was very important, I think, to the visibility of the program here and to all of the book arts, you know...

HELEN HIEBERT: Right...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...that is just, that’s one of the wonderful things about the MacArthur is that an organic farmer can get one of these.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: You know an organic farmer without a you know terminal degree in anything can get one if he or she is doing something really special. So, it’s a great organization and really helped a lot on a lot of levels.

HELEN HIEBERT: Cool. Let’s just talk a little bit about who you’ve influenced; who has come through here, what they’re doing today. Pick one of two people you want to tell me about. I know there are many.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah. Well, there are many, and, you know Tatiana Ginsberg and Paul Denhoed, really, you know that they ended up going to Japan with different goals in mind, and Steph Rue is now in Korea pursuing the book arts. She’s kind of following on the heels of Aimee Lee, who was not a student of mine, but I think people have realized that there was something special about Tim’s experience abroad, number one, and number two, hum, seems like Fulbrights might be more accessible than many people think, or maybe, you know, if you allow yourself to think, maybe I could get a Fulbright, you know. If you don’t think that, then it’s guaranteed you’re not going to get one...

HELEN HIEBERT: Right...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...but it means you don’t try. So, I’m really happy that I’ve been able to inspire a number, a whole range of people who are going on to do things that I’m

never going to have time for, but they are things that they've, Lisa Miles, now is really interested in Mesoamerican beaten bark papers and Indonesian beaten bark papers and stuff, and she is going to, I'm pretty sure, she's going to do some great stuff with that, both from a historical craft perspective, but also artistic, while using it in her own art work. So, yeah, there's just too many people...

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, sure...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...to mention, but it's been a, you know, an honor to teach a lot of these people, and they're all inspiring to me, that's for sure.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, and let's talk a moment just about the, so you, you know, you have a certain interest in history and research, but there is also an artistic element of hand papermaking, and so I kind of just want to talk a little bit about what you know about the other facilities in the country that are teaching papermaking, and your colleagues at other institutions and their programs. Give me an overview of what's happening in America.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, it's interesting. I mean, I do think at the Center for the Book here, a lot of the MFA theses tend to be either limited edition artist books or one of a kind artist books, works of art, but we're really steeped in giving people a background in the history and technique of the various book artists, at the same time that there's a dialogue going on about art making. And that's a real rich kind of substrate of information that people can build on. I mean, I do think, say in the world of papermaking, that it's both exciting and dangerous when you go into a workshop or a course, and you begin to work creatively with paper pulp right away. There is something very American about that, you know. We don't have a long cultural history, so we just dive into stuff, and that's part of the reason fabulous art and craft come out of this country.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: But, then again, I think it's real important to be exposed to the history and technique, say of papermaking, at the same time you are experimenting. That's one of the things that characterizes your own work. You're interested in the history and technique of your craft, and it think it's a good, important thing. So, it kind of depends, you know, when people come to visit here, I try not to initially convince them to come here. I try to find out, you know, I ask questions like, "Do you like living in big cities or small towns?"

HELEN HIEBERT: Uh-huh.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: And if they tell me, they have an issue with small towns, I say, "Well listen, you should look at the Philadelphia program or Chicago."

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Because Tuscaloosa and Iowa City are small towns. And the reverse sometimes turns out to be a case, they're intimidated by big cities. So, try to find a little more about what the person really wants to do, and sometimes we end up saying, you know, "This place is really a good fit for you." So, I think that, you know, I don't know a lot about the course work and exactly what's going on in Chicago, but they have a beautiful papermaking facility...

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...and a lot of opportunity for, you know, installation performance-type approaches.

HELEN HIEBERT: Right, real interdisciplinary in the arts.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, right, and that's really important. Steve Miller and Anna Embree have a great program in Tuscaloosa that has a real focus on fine-press printing and bookbinding and papermaking, and a great program there, real inspired mentors, so, it's hard to, I think all of us continue to look to Dieu Donné as a real leader in the field of paper works, you know, ...

HELEN HIEBERT: Dieu Donné Paper Mill in New York City.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, for decades now, they've tried to provide an opportunity for artists to work creatively with paper, and sometimes it's a struggle, you know, people associate paper with craft or what, I don't know, associate it with do-it-yourself stuff that people do on Saturdays, but once they take a look at it, the potential is awesome. And because it has no tradition, that is to say paper works, I mean, yes, it's linked to the history and technique of the papermaking craft, but because the techniques are literally being invented as we go along, it's not a bad place to be, it's like wide-open territory for an artist. It's a very exciting place to be. So, the same is true for books, in a way. So, I think the potential for the future is really pretty exciting for all this, even though there aren't a lot of great jobs out there. I think, but I, you know, this sounds crazy, but I think those of us who are specialists at books and paper produced in a traditional way or artistically are going to be, we are going to be the priesthood of the future because the digital thing is going to become one hundred times more cool than it is right now. Everything is going to go completely holographic...

HELEN HIEBERT: Right...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...and not in, 10 or 20 years from now, if you're trying to seduce somebody you are not going to do it with a hologram, you're going to do it with a handmade piece of paper, hand calligraphed on a specially prepared substrate that has different layers of color work into it, and that person is going to get that invitation, and they're going to come to dinner with you. They're going to say, "Where did you get this thing?"

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: And I just think culturally, we're going to go through those transitions, and I think it's going to be very exciting.

HELEN HIEBERT: Cool. So, I just want to wrap up with some of the ways that people can find out about you online, since we're talking, or touching paper. You've given me a tour here, and you sell papers, the Center for the Book sells a few papers?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah, the UI Center for the Book, our website is going through a transition right now, so I'm not exactly what sure you're going to encounter, but if you just Google UI Center for the Book, you'll get to our main website, and there's a link to our store, where you can buy books and handmade papers. My main research on historical European papers, if you Google Paper Through Time, Barrett, the first thing that comes up is a website that explains a lot of the research on the historical papers.

HELEN HIEBERT: Okay. And, of course, your book *Japanese Papermaking*. I don't know if we've said the title.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: That's right, that's available through the Center for the Book.

HELEN HIEBERT: And some videos on the website...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Videos on Youtube. If you search Chancery Papermaking, there's a couple of videos that will come up that show our Western sheet production, and we sell some videos on Western and Japanese papers that are available too.

HELEN HIEBERT: Great, and so just since you mentioned the Chancery papermaking, you told me that you're trying to replicate what was done. You can explain it better than I can, in terms of sheet production.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Yeah. Well, what's interesting about this, you know, so I spent several years going through this nondestructive analysis of 1,500 historical paper samples, really in an attempt, as I mentioned earlier, to get at the aesthetics of these 15th-century papers. Why do they seem to be so special? Are they really different or are they more or less the same when you analyze their chemical content and other characteristics? Well, it turns out they are way different. They have a lot more gelatin in them and a lot more calcium in them than paper made in subsequent centuries. They're thicker. They tend to be lighter in color. Now what's weird about this, if you're interested in the aesthetics as I am...

HELEN HIEBERT: Um-hum...

TIMOTHY BARRETT: ...if you go ahead and make papers using that formula, it's not really a complete formula, but let's say you use what you've discovered from those analyses, you don't get paper that's special, like the old stuff. So, the question is, if it's not the ingredients, then what the heck is it?

HELEN HIEBERT: Right.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: And my latest thought has been, well, they were making it in teams of three people, 1,500, 2,000 sheets in a day. They were making a lot of this stuff as a utilitarian commodity that was intended to go into daily use, be part of people's lives, and in the process of doing that, the skilled workers produced paper that is very well made, but it has little thumbprints in the corner of these sheets. It has these little dings, these things that happen when you're in a hurry. So, there's this tension between excellent workmanship and getting the job done, and that produces some of that character. So, we've tried to replicate some of these production routines to see if we can get a little closer to that aesthetic. And it's funny, because the students and I figured out, we did enough of this to realize we probably could make 150 to 200 sheets in an hour. If you did that for ten hours, then you could make 1,500 to 2,000 sheets in a day. And once I got to that point, I thought well this is good, this has really been interesting, and the students started saying, let's try, let's try, let's go ahead and try. I said, "Try what?" "You know, Tim, make 2,000 sheets in a day." And so, we did, we only made 1,350, but were going to try again because we are trying to figure out how they were able to do this. I mean it just increased tenfold, once again, my respect for these earlier workers. I mean it's phenomenal what they did, and to devote their whole lives to it, do that six days a week, most of their lives, is really something to imagine.

HELEN HIEBERT: Yeah, wow. Okay, is there anything else you want to add?

TIMOTHY BARRETT: No, well I appreciate your coming. It has really been fun getting to know you a little better and hear your story, and we're glad you were able to take the time and come visit, and we welcome others to come and see what we're up to here, too.

HELEN HIEBERT: Awesome, thanks, Tim.

TIMOTHY BARRETT: Sure.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcription by Elva Svendsen, April 28, 2021.
With editorial input by Mina Takahashi.

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Episode 3 aired on June 3, 2016. This episode and all episodes of Helen Hiebert's Paper Talk podcast are available for listening on Hiebert's website, <http://helenhiebertstudio.com/podcast/>. While the interviews are best experienced as audio recordings, Hand Papermaking and Helen Hiebert collaborated on this transcription project to serve as a research aid.

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Hand Papermaking, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing traditional and contemporary ideas in the art of hand papermaking through its print and online publications. (www.handpapermaking.org)

Helen Hiebert is a Colorado artist who constructs installations, sculptures, films, artist books, and works in paper using handmade paper as her primary medium. She teaches, lectures, and exhibits her work internationally and online, and is the author of several how-to books about papermaking and paper crafts. Hiebert writes a weekly blog called *The Sunday Paper*, interviews papermakers and paper artists on her podcast *Paper Talk*, and holds an annual paper retreat and papermaking master classes in her Red Cliff studio. (helenhiebertstudio.com)