



Celebrating our 25th anniversary...

IN HUMAN YEARS, twenty-five years is not a long time; in publishing years it's an eternity. That's how long Penumbra Press has been publishing books ... and we're proud of it ... not that I'm going to take time now to review our successes and achievements, but I would like to acknowledge the contribution of particular individuals who helped inspire the early days.

When the idea of starting Penumbra Press took full shape in 1979, I had already published the work of several notable authors and artists in the magazine that became *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of Northern Arts*. Earlier in that decade I had published special issues on Thoreau MacDonald and Carl Schaefer, as well as A.J. Casson and Franklin Carmichael. I had gotten to know Thoreau and Carl quite well; we shared a resonance that, in my mind, derived from the way they perceived and projected the northland both in pictures and in words. Although there was a kind of minimalism to it, their verbal expression was as audible as their figurative expression was visible. Sometimes, though, it was difficult actually to understand if the shared sensibility was a real or imagined thing.

What I do know is that Thoreau and Carl's way of encouraging a young man's dream was enormously influential in developing both the shape and substance of Penumbra Press. It was also through their inspiration and friendship that others of their era helped to make even more tangible the direction that Penumbra had to go. As Naomi Jackson Groves used to say of her uncle A.Y. Jackson — my compass always points north! — it is the North that beckoned. In addition to Naomi, who also became a life-long friend until her death on Christmas Day three years ago, there was George Johnston, who penned several books for Penumbra Press, some of them translations, others his own prose and poetry. And there was Kathleen Daly, Yvonne McKague Housser, Lowrie Warrener ... all of them transfixed by the northland that was my backyard.

In May of 1979 *Maclean's* ran an article about small regional publishers; their lead to the story entitled "*What a little Moonbeam can do*" was this:

John Flood lives in Moonbeam, 200 miles south of James Bay, and the wolves sometimes howl at his door. He's not a trapper or a miner, though; John Flood is a publisher. He owns and runs the Penumbra Press which in February published two books of poetry and *Twelve Northern Drawings*, a limited edition of Algonquin sketches by Carl Schaefer — a friend and near contemporary of the Group of Seven. In April Penumbra published an unpublished novel by one of Canada's classic authors, Duncan Campbell Scott. Flood, an English teacher at Northern Ontario's far-flung Le Collège Universitaire de Hearst, wants Penumbra's books to be read across the country.... A few years ago Penumbra would have seemed incongruous: who ever heard of a publishing house not far from Kapuskasing? But with the rise of regional publishing, Flood's venture seems anything but bizarre."

Continued ...



Ironically, it was Carl Schaefer who talked me out of naming the venture Moonbeam Press. “You can do better than that,” he said in his gruff, smoker’s voice. And so it is that the titles *Maclean’s* identifies emerged from behind Moonbeam’s shadow and came to life as inaugural offerings from Penumbra Press. While it is worth noting that besides Penumbra, three of the five publishers Mark Abley wrote about in *Maclean’s* are also still in business ... Karl Seigler at Talonbooks, Marty Gervais at Black Moss, and Clyde Rose at Breakwater Books. Mel Hurtig, the fifth publisher, who saw himself “not as a regional publisher, but as a national publisher who happens to be in a region,” nonetheless continues to make his own significant contribution to Canadian culture by pursuing political aspirations that are of lesser interest to the other four.

I also want to acknowledge the contribution of some of the editors who have been part of Penumbra’s quarter century. Robert Stacey came along in the early days of Northward Journal’s treatment of Canadian artists, and undertook a number of projects that over the years would develop into significant publications: *Massanoga: The Art of Bon Echo*; *JEH MacDonald: Graphic Designer*; *William Thomas: Architect*; and *Iroquois Fires*, to name only a few; and he also served as copy and/or picture editor on *Montreal Movie Palaces*; *People In Struggle*; *Arctic Circle Songs* and research editor on *Artist Among the Wolves*. In the past five years, Douglas Campbell has been a prominent and indispensable editor, having put his delicate ear to just about every one of Penumbra’s books. I am grateful for their contribution to the press and humbled by their gifts with words, as I am with illustrators such as Peter Schwarz and Judi Pennanen, who have given visual beauty to several books since 1979. Authors through imagery and design, you might say, just a few of the unsung creators behind the books.

And the next twenty-five years...?

John Flood
President
Penumbra Press

