

# Kenneth Nebenzahl

## (September 16, 1927–January 29, 2020)

*From The Chicago Tribune, February 2, 2020*

**K**enneth Nebenzahl, who parlayed a childhood fascination with maps and an adult appetite for adventure, into a storied career as a Chicago rare books dealer, and explorer of the lesser-known world, has died. He was 92.

Nebenzahl passed away peacefully Wednesday at his home in Glencoe, IL, with Jossy, his wife, business and wayfaring partner of nearly 68 years, in his arms.

Ken and Jossy had decades of unusual travels to remote locales such as Morocco, Greenland, Haiti, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, The Himalayas, Mongolia, Burma, and Oman. As travelers from the 1960's to date the Nebenzahls chose sleeping bags over hotels, and Himalayan treks over cruises. Nebenzahl was as comfortable on camelback as in the boardrooms of the Newberry Library, University of Chicago, World Wildlife Fund, and The Phillips Society of the Library of Congress.

Born in Far Rockaway, NY, Nebenzahl joined the U.S. Marines, attended Columbia University, and found his calling as an Americana dealer and appraiser of rare books, maps, and manuscripts. He amassed collections in the U.S., Europe and Asia that included the first printing of the Declaration of Independence and a first draft of the U.S. Constitution. His acquisition in 1969 of the finest copy of *Audubon's Birds of America* set a record at auction for a printed book in the Guinness Book of World Records.

He wrote numerous books about maps and cartography, published by Rand McNally, University of Chicago Press, and Phaidon Press, translated into six languages.

He founded the Kenneth Nebenzahl, Jr., Lectures in the History of Cartography in 1966 at the Newberry Library, named after his predeceased son. The lectures have been dedicated to research in the study of the science, art and culture of map making.

In 1983, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree by the College of William and Mary for his "many contributions to the history of cartography..."

He will also be long remembered as a devoted conservationist and wildlife lover, whose family was his greatest love of all. In addition to Jossy, he is survived by three daughters, 7 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.



Ken Nebenzahl (Photo credit: Ed Dahl)

See the Chicago Sun-Times Obituary at <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2020/2/7/21125725/kenneth-nebenzahl-anti-quarian-map-dealer-newberry-library-audubon-declaration-of-independence>

**In Ken's own words in the Spring 2012 issue of this journal:**

**Cartographic Interests:** All aspects of the history of cartography, all cultures, all periods. Authored five books plus numerous chapters and journal articles on: American Revolutionary War maps and battle plans; European mapping of America; of Asia; the Holy Land; the U.S. frontier, 16<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. **Professional background:** Columbia, 1946–47; (DHL – William and Mary, 1983 – "...contributions to the history of Cartography....") **Comments:** At age ten, good fortune

allowed the completion of my collection of gratis oil company road maps with acquisition of the 48<sup>th</sup> state, Idaho; my first complete atlas! After WW II USMC service, mini-career experiments culminated in establishing KN Inc. with wife Jossy in 1957, beginning a life of maps and books, issuing 118 catalogues of Rare Books, Manuscripts, Maps and Prints. Activities include trusteeships: Newberry Library, University of Chicago, Adler Planetarium; founding member, Thirty-three year consultant to Rand McNally; Chicago Map Society (America's first); member SHD and WMS; founding co-chair Phillips Society, LOC (with Eric Wolf); Director, Imago Mundi since 1978. Attended and chaired sessions at ICHC in Europe and U.S. Founded the KN, Jr. Lectures in History of Cartography at the Newberry Library, 1963–. With John McCarter of Field Museum, developed the Festival of Maps in Chicago, 2007 (cf. *MAPS: Finding Our Place in the World*, ed. Akerman and Karrow). Delivered lectures throughout US, Tokyo and Rio. Our private collection is to be auctioned at Christie's, April 10, 2012; KN Inc. inventory to follow.

#### A remembrance from Art Holzheimer:

I first met Ken in the early 1960's. One of our partners had just redecorated his office and I was drawn to a pair of maps on the wall behind his desk. I contacted his decorator and learned they had come from Ken Nebenzahl. I set off to find the shop a few days later. Instead of a musty bookshop with an elderly dealer that I expected...I found myself on a high floor at 333 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago. I exited the elevator and opened the door to an elegant space with beautiful furnishings and a view of the lake. The proprietor was a tall, distinguished looking man who greeted me cordially and proceeded to show me some maps. I was hooked!

Ken was more than a dealer. He became a good friend and mentor. He introduced me to the Newberry Library and encouraged me to start a reference library of my own. He shared his vast knowledge and instructed me on ways to determine a map's authenticity. He always seemed to find items in excellent condition.

Ken encouraged me to join the International Map Collectors' Society (IMCoS) and attend the biennial International Conference on the History of Cartography (ICHC). Later, when Ralph Ehrenberg, Eric Wolf and Ken developed the Phillip Lee Phillips Society (the support group for the Geography and Map division at the Library of Congress), he invited me to become a founding member.

Ken authored several books about maps. He asked me to proofread one of his last books and we spent several pleasant hours together that summer in his lovely home.



Ken, Jossy and Hans Kok (ICHC Antwerp 2015)

Ken and his wife Jossy traveled extensively, often to exotic and unusual destinations. Each trip was carefully researched. Ken was a great storyteller and returned home with wonderful tales.

Ken was an important figure in the Chicago cultural institutions. He served on many boards and he and Jossy sponsored a lecture series on maps at the Newberry Library. They have ensured that the series will continue in the coming years.



Hal Meinheit, Tom Sander and Ken (ICHC Antwerp 2015)