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AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN BIBLIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

BLEW, John. *The Lives and Work of Wright and Zoe Howes and the Story of U.S.iana*. Chicago: Published by the author, 2019. 2nd ed. 316pp. Illus., portraits. Orig. cloth, pictorial paper pastedown. \$50.00
Limited to 150 copies.

“An outstanding contribution to the history of the Americana field. Every Americanist of the past 60 years has viewed U.S.iana as an essential reference tool, but few of us have known anything about its compiler. John Blew fills that gap in engaging fashion”—from the foreword by J. Kevin Graffagnino.

An in-depth work on the Chicago bookseller and bibliographer whose U.S.iana is still one of the most consulted books in the libraries of Americanists. Born in 1882 in Macon Georgia, Howes attended Mercer University, a private men's college in Macon for a year before his father relocated the family to New York City. Howes attended Columbia University and then Columbia Law School, graduating in 1905. After practicing law for two years in Rogers, Arkansas, he entered the antiquarian book business, first working as a clerk in a Boston bookstore, and then briefly operating his own stores in Kansas City, Missouri, and San Antonio, Texas, before eventually moving to Chicago to work for Powner's Book Store in 1912. Zoe Heflin Reed, an Illinois native whom he had met in New York City some years earlier, joined him there shortly after.

Howes enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1917 with the country's entry into World War I. He spent two years in the army, first at Camp Grant, in Rockford, Illinois, and then in France, serving as an officer in an administrative capacity. He and Zoe married in 1919. Wright turned down an offer from Powner's to oversee their new Los Angeles location, instead choosing to remain in Chicago as vice president and manager of one of its Chicago stores. While there, he gained experience and built his own inventory. Near the end of 1924, Wright left Powner's, and the couple opened their first antiquarian bookshop—Wright Howes-Old and Rare Books. During this time, the Howeses met Everett D. Graff, the collector of Americana and Newberry Library trustee who patronized the store. For the next 45 years, Wright and Zoe would operate some version of this business from their various residences, specializing in rare and collectible Americana, with Wright's knowledge of American history complemented by Zoe's background in librarianship and bookbinding. Zoe also did the books and managed the business, allowing her husband to focus on acquiring and selling books, and maintaining relationships with customers. Wright Howes kept detailed notes about the books he handled, which would later become the basis for his seminal bibliographic work, U.S.IANA.

The Howeses moved to Chicago's north side in 1939. Instead of opening a new shop, they ran the bookselling business from their home, first at Chicago Ave. and Rush St. until 1951, and then at 1018 N. State St. That building, the Irving Apartments, was owned by the Newberry Library, located near it, and housed many Newberry employees. While there, Wright began compiling U.S.IANA, likely at the urging of Everett D. Graff, and with the aid of a fellowship from the Newberry. With much of Wright's research and writing done at the Newberry, the first edition of U.S.IANA was published in 1954, and the second, expanded edition in 1962.

When the Irving Apartments were sold and demolished in 1970, Wright and Zoe Howes sold their inventory and retired to Augusta, Georgia. Zoe Howes died in October 1977 at 90 years old; Wright Howes died 6 months later at the age of 95.