

## *The Blue Print* (1966 – 1969)

*Paul Miller*

*The Blue Print* (*TBP*) was one of the earliest English-language publications solely dedicated to haiku. It was created by Ohio resident Ray Buckingham, and was primarily edited by himself and Marian M. Poe. Later issues would bring on editors Edith M. McKay (issue 2), June A. Margeson (issues 3-8), and Virginia N. Nelson (issues 7-8).

All editors were members of the Verse Writers Guild of Ohio, which met at the public library in downtown Columbus.<sup>1</sup> How Buckingham was introduced to haiku is unknown. A search of Charles Trumbull's haiku database reveals twelve haiku published in *American Haiku*, *Haiku Highlights*, and early issues of *Modern Haiku*. However, he also published haiku in *The Dream Shop*, the Verse Writers Guild's local journal, plus their 1968 Anthology, *Our Best to You*, and in small printers' journals. Buckingham published a book, *Under One Roof*, which he called a "collection of haiku-like portraits with some cinquains," in 1971.<sup>2</sup>

Editor Marian Poe learned of haiku from a 1966 talk led by fellow Guild member Virginia N. Nelson. After the talk, she rushed upstairs and checked out the library's three books on haiku. With three young children and a husband who was gone for weeks on duty for the Strategic Air Command, she thought she might have the time to type and submit poems with only three lines. She would go on to be an active and long-time member of the haiku community, publishing in nearly all American haiku journals well into the 2000s. How editors McKay, Margeson, and Nelson discovered haiku is also unknown.

Buckingham was also a member of the National Amateur Press Association (NAPA). NAPA had been established in 1876, "dedicated to the furtherance of Amateur Journalism as a hobby,"<sup>3</sup> and has at its heart what it calls the "Monthly Bundle," which is a monthly mailing containing the work of fellow NAPA members. During the 1960s, a member was entitled to send some form of printed material to NAPA's "mailer," who would on a monthly basis combine it with other members' material

and send it out to all members as the “Monthly Bundle.” Material usually consisted of small, four-to-eight page publications that contained a variety of subject matter, often related to letterpress publishing and its member organizations, but also short memoirs and poetry. Buckingham utilized this service to distribute *TBP* beyond the membership of the Verse Writers Guild.

Later issues of *TBP* were distributed beyond these two initial organizations. Poe recalls: “I’m not sure how anyone knew about TBP, but I had many haiku from which to choose. I remember getting some nice letters from kind editors (Kay Titus Mormino and Lorraine Ellis Harr, for instance) who knew much more about haiku than I. It was ‘on job training’ in haiku!” In one letter, from December 1967, Mormino recommended some books on haiku to Poe, specifically Henderson’s *Haiku in English* and Yasuda’s *The Japanese Haiku*. Of Yasuda, she added, “The latter is flawed by the translations included; Yasuda rhymed the haiku he used as illustrations! But simply disregard this....” She also suggested Poe seek out copies of the journals *American Haiku* and *Haiku West*. Of *American Haiku*, it listed *TBP* in its “Haiku Markets” section of the January 1968 issue.

Buckingham was in charge of the journal’s production, using fellow NAPA member Irwin O. Brandt of Kentucky to print the journal. Buckingham and Brandt had previously published *B & B Journal* (1963), *The Graveyard Gazette* (1963-1965), and *The Scratch Pad* (1966-1967); all three were distributed using NAPA’s “Monthly Bundle.” Buckingham would send each *TBP* editor a share of the journals that were not distributed via NAPA’s “Monthly Bundle.” The individual editors were responsible for the mailing costs.

The “First Issue” of *The Blue Print* (Winter, 1966/67) consisted of four 5”×7” pages. The masthead declared that the issue was “the product of a dedicated group of Haiku Enthusiasts,” and most likely only contained the work of Verse Writers Guild members. Considering the year and resources available for study, it is not surprising that all the poems were written in a 5-7-5 pattern, nor that they contain poetic devices such as personification and metaphor that would soon become outdated. Some haiku, like Louise W. Sutton’s, are quite beautiful, even if not quite haiku.

Readers will also note the initial capitals and terminal punctuation.

Down the singing winds  
Snow, like a white-dressed dancer  
Begins her ballet.

*Louise W. Sutton*

Bronze moon, chrome Dipper  
Stage cold war for top billing  
On nighttime marquee.

*Ray E. Buckingham*

Interestingly, the first issue makes no mention of NAPA, although in fact it was sent to NAPA members in the same “Monthly Bundle” as issue three in April 1968. This suggests that the first issue wasn’t originally meant to be circulated beyond the Verse Writers Guild, and also that there was a substantial delay between an issue’s date and the time when it became physically available. For example, the second issue was listed as “Summer-Autumn, 1967,” yet it wasn’t mailed to NAPA members until January, 1968. This deadline issue with the printer is not surprising considering the volunteer nature of the endeavor. Issue four was also distributed out of order (before issues three and one) and issue eight never seems to have been sent to NAPA’s “mailer.” This omission, however, doesn’t suggest that members of the Verse Writers Guild and other subscribers didn’t receive issue eight.<sup>4</sup> In fact, one set of issues that has survived comes down to us courtesy of Elizabeth Searle Lamb, who was neither a Verse Writers Guild or NAPA member.<sup>5</sup>

Issue Number Two (Summer-Autumn, 1967) was also 5”x7”, but twice the length of the first, and contained a short editorial by Buckingham. The text of the editorial is full of printer’s errors, which we have corrected below.

The haiku affords an excellent mechanical vehicle for both the beginning and the mature poet. The 5-7-5 arrangement is challenging and stimulating. If aligned without indentations, haiku present a sleek and an attractive appearance.

Haiku ought to have the flavor of nature and as such may be just a casual word sketch of a scene from an exceptional angle—a sort of candid shot. Unusual word treatments add zest. A hinted message is good, but not necessary. The haiku should prod the reader’s intellect.

There ought to be more rhymed haiku, involving a still greater concern

for word selection and imagination. Too, rhyming adds a touch of music and distinction to the haiku.

The issue contained twenty-eight haiku.

Monarch butterfly  
Blossoming upon budding,  
Orange milkweed plant.

*Edith M. McKay*

Silently the snow  
Proves the sun's intensity  
Even in winter.

*Marian M. Poe*

Issue Number Three (Winter, 1967) was the same size as its predecessor, and contained twenty-nine haiku. Of interest is a haiku by publisher and editor Dora Tompkins, of Danbury, Connecticut, whose journal *Nutmegger Poetry Club* contained four "Haiku Pages," of which Kay Mormino, the founder of *Modern Haiku*, was editor.

Feathered flakes of snow  
Falling one December day,  
White carols ring out.

Buckingham had undoubtedly contacted Tompkins because the January 1968 issue of the *Nutmegger Poetry Club* contained an announcement for *TBP*: "Ray E. Buckingham and Marian M. Poe are trying to get a new Haiku magazine started. It will be called THE BLUE PRINT. It is too small as yet to be on subscription basis, but they will print Haiku of those who contribute \$1.00. We need these outlets so let's help them get this started."

Number Three also contained a brief essay by Poe titled "Haiku Reading," in which she suggested that a single haiku, upon additional readings, revealed additional layers.

With issue Number Four (Spring 1968), the journal changed its format from a booklet into a six-sided tri-fold. Poe contributed another short essay on "Haiku and Humor." She noted: "Because the word 'classical' has been applied to haiku, do we often feel these poems must deal only with serious subjects? This is not necessarily true. If a haiku is to be more than

a nature poem, if it is to call forth emotion from the reader, then there is room in haiku writing for humor.”

Kay Mormino had a haiku accepted in issue Number Four, as did Mary Dragonetti; both would go on to play important roles in haiku.

In rain-dampened earth, A snail enjoys cool morning — Stripped down to the waist.	After the long rain, Curve of new moon glittering... Diadems for puddles.
<i>Kay Titus Mormino</i>	<i>Mary Dragonetti</i>

Issue Number Five (Summer 1968) is interesting because it contains a few haiku by poets whose aesthetic is more Asian than that of the Verse Writers Guild. For example, the following haiku by Lorraine Ellis Harr, later editor of *Dragonfly*. Harr’s haiku, minor padding aside, is a good example of a more objective haiku style. Also of note, each haiku from this point on is printed in three, stair-stepped lines and missing the compulsory capital letters that previously began lines two and three—undoubtedly an editorial choice.

Curled up ... sleeping  
in cool shadows under the porch;  
dog that barked all night.

It is clear from reading the early issues of *TBP* as well as issues of the Guild’s newsletter, *The Dream Shop*, that Ohio writers of this period maintained that personification and metaphor were legitimate haiku aesthetics. In fact, some poets—such as Buckingham—would continue to compose in this manner well into the 1970s. We suspect the Guild’s haiku aesthetic developed organically from their readings of available studies (Henderson, Yasuda) rather than informed by contemporary journals such as *American Haiku* or *Haiku West*. The poetics of the Guild poets make an interesting contrast with those, like Harr, from the burgeoning haiku community. Had *TBP* survived beyond its short run, it would have been interesting to witness the merging of these different rivers.

Editor June A. Margeson, in a reference to Poe's essay in the previous issue, noted "This issue [Number Five] of Blue Print is liberally sprinkled with humor (senryu)."

Even in frog school  
pollywogs protest the rules...  
muddy the water.

*June A. Margeson*

Beware little moths  
of that garden hypocrite,  
the praying mantis.

*Edith M. McKay*

Also included in issue Number Five was a haiku by Sydell Rosenberg, a future charter member of the Haiku Society of America.

Through a blue archway  
making elegant formations:  
pigeon chorus line.

Issue Number Six (Autumn 1968) included two notable poets: Elizabeth Searle Lamb, another charter member of the Haiku Society of America, as well as *Frogpond* editor from 1984-1990, and Willene H. Nusbaum, who would later serve as Editorial Assistant and Associate Editor at *Modern Haiku* under Kay Mormino and Robert Spiess.

The old tree has lost  
two huge branches in the storm —  
I burned my journals

*Elizabeth Searle Lamb*

Recalling water ...  
sand licks its salty tongue  
on deserted pilings.

*Willene H. Nusbaum*

Issue Number Seven (Winter 1968-69) included a haiku by R. Eugene Johnson, who published several articles in *Modern Haiku* as R.E.T. Johnson.

Enroute to my plane ...  
in the frozen rice paddy,  
a silhouette crane.

Two haiku by other poets:

Huddled in my coat  
I am still cold under trees  
naked in the wind.  
*Herta Rosenblatt*

Catching the moonbeams  
drifting through the window  
a pale grief on your face.  
*Neil Spratling*

Marian M. Poe contributed a short essay, “The Challenge of Haiku,” in which she addressed the 5-7-5 format: “Haiku ‘rules’ and ‘definitions’ swirl about like winter snow. The three lines of 5-7-5 syllables are only a starting point, not an unbreakable rule. But we begin to write within a framework. A beginner must have a starting point and a boundary.” She shifted then to a discussion of the haiku’s transmission from writer to reader. It is worth noting more fully.

There is emotion. Before and above all, there is emotion. One person stops. An inner awareness touched him. For a space of time he saw and felt a closeness to man’s eternal questioning. This person is, hopefully, the writer. He wants to tell of his experience. He writes his feeling in a haiku. And another person stops.

This person is, hopefully, the reader. Although the haiku writer, like the toddler, will stumble and fall, steps will be taken. Haiku will be written which convey emotion. The searching reader will feel a little closer to his own answer. And the enlightening circle of emotion, writer, haiku and reader, will begin again.

Issue Number Eight (Spring, 1969) saw the journal reformatted again, back to its original 5”x7” size, booklet form, with six pages, and was the last issue to be published. It contained the work of twenty-three poets, including newcomer John Wills. Wills would go on to be an influential voice in haiku.

A pinkish glow  
on the sycamore’s bark,  
but snow ... lingering.  
*Elizabeth Searle Lamb*

Sensitive springtime  
cries pink apple-blossom tears  
on green carpeting.  
*Ray E. Buckingham*

Child's torn tennis shoe  
 imbedded in drifting sand;  
 the tide is far out.

*Lorraine Ellis Harr*

A falling pebble —  
 bushes at the water's edge  
 just faintly glimmer.

*John Howard Wills*

The issue included a final short essay by Poe. In it she aptly noted:

Observation is a beginning. Every day is dramatic if we can only see it. There is drama in a line of ants. There is action under a stone. As we learn to observe, we learn to feel. Spirits can touch us. The spirit of haiku can be written for the reader. And if the reader, through our words, begins to see and feel, the haiku is a success.

Number Eight was the final issue, despite noting on its masthead that "Contributions are welcome." Only Buckingham knew for sure why it shuttered. Marian Poe's recollection is that it was due to increased postage costs, but it could have been at the behest of the printer, or simply that Buckingham felt the journal had run its course.

As a final tally, the eight issues of *The Blue Print* published 195 haiku by 94 poets, of whom 66% were women. While many of the haiku were beginners' efforts, or at least, came from an underdeveloped understanding of haiku aesthetics of the time, for a small journal with such a short run, *TBP* figured in the haiku careers of several poets who would go on to play important roles in the evolution of English-language haiku.

## NOTES

My deepest thanks to Marian M. Poe, without whose memory to draw upon this paper would have been much smaller and less interesting; additionally, she provided original material and small publications from which I was able to enlarge the story. Thanks also to Dave Tribby,



editor of *The Fossil*, for his research into NAPA mailings; the staff at the California State Library for their assistance with the American Haiku Archive; and Charles Trumbull for his editorial eye plus several pulls from his haiku database.

<sup>1</sup> [www.ohiopoetryassn.org](http://www.ohiopoetryassn.org).

<sup>2</sup> The American Haiku Archive contains a copy.

<sup>3</sup> [www.amateurpress.org](http://www.amateurpress.org).

<sup>4</sup> According to NAPA historian Gary Bossler, *TBP* issues were sent in the following “Monthly Bundles”: Issue One, Apr. 1968; Issue Two, Jan. 1968; Issue Three, Apr. 1968; Issue Four, Mar. 1968; Issue Five, Jul. 1968; Issue Six, Dec. 1968, and Issue Seven, Mar. 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Part of the Elizabeth Searle Lamb papers available at the American Haiku Archive. Since their access, Marian M. Poe has provided a full set of originals that have also been archived.