I moved to the Amherst area in October 2006, after six months of living in Germany and Switzerland spent following the trail of Robert Walser, a Swiss writer who died on Christmas Day 1956, out for a walk in the snow. All the while I was abroad, I was corresponding with American followers of Walser, a disproportionate number of whom seemed to be found around the pioneer valley. And so, upon arrival, it seemed natural to found the Robert Walser Society of Western Massachusetts. For four years, the RWSWM has had Walser gatherings (readings, book and translation sharings) at Amherst Books each Christmas Day with other events and publications (under the Minutes Books imprint) throughout the year.

Parallel to this, my private library of Walser and Walser-related holdings has swelled beyond every imaginable boundary. An informal sweep of the shelves reveals well over 100 volumes by— with more than twice that many “on”—Walser. From the beginning, my interest in Walser has dovetailed with an interest in writers who themselves are readers of his work. At last count—and it seems to grow every week—I’ve now acquired books by over 100 writers (and artists) who admire Walser (I’m not even counting a handful of naysayers.)

1 In addition to the forty plus included or referenced in my bibliography: Giorgio Agamban, Donald Antrim, Jesse Ball, Donald Barthelme, Jedediah Berry, Sven Birkerts, Harold Bloom, Roberto Bolaño, Jenny Boully, Max Brod, MacGregor Card, Billy Childish, Heather Christle, J.M. Coetzee, Robert Creeley, Trinie Dalton, Lydia Davis, Ben Doller (Doyle), Sandra Doller (Miller), Debora Eisenberg, Jonathan Franzen, William Gass, Matthea Harvey, Alexander Hemon, Gert Hoffmann, Gad Hollander, Millay Hyatt, Fleur Jaeggy, Mark Kipniss, James Kirkup, Benjamin Kunkel, Sam Lipsyte, Eugene Lim, Wyatt Mason, Friederike Mayröcker, Ben Mirov, Joan Nelson, Eileen Myles, Geoff Olsen, Lisa Olstein, Jack Pendarvis, Emily Pettit, Herbert Pfoestl, Brothers Quay, Tomas Salamun, Damion Searls, Jesse Seldess, Mark Scroggins, Lynne Sharon Schwartz, Piotr Sommer, Susan Sontag, John Taylor, Emily Toder, Ned Vizzini, Martin Walser, Eliot Weinberger, Karen Weiser, Urs Widmer, John Dermot Woods, Matvei Yankelevich, Steven Zultanski.
Much of the growth has been organic. Although “Do you read Walser?” is not infrequently the first question I ask a writer (in Germany one must add Robert, as Martin Walser—no relation, though an ardent admirer—is better known), it is now just as likely that people send me books or ask about Walser: What to read first? Who to read next? With this, a happy arrangement has developed. As my collection has benefited from the generosity of others, it befits the collection to return the kindness. For several years now, the Walser & Co. Lending Library has been operating more or less honorably. I’ve lost a few books, but nothing compared to what I’ve gained in friends, and, yes, more books. I’ve brought Walser’s current translator, Susan Bernofsky to lecture for Simmons library school students (about her time at the Walser-Archive[e]) and to read for UMass MFA students and the larger community. My girlfriend (before meeting her, I had heard that she had taught The Robber) and I made a pilgrimage to Austin this past summer to meet Walser’s first translator (into any language), Christopher Middleton, who kindly donated his “Walser collection” (two large boxes, only two volumes of which made it into the bibliography) and encouraged me in my own translation. (I was discouraged somewhat, however, upon viewing his Jakob von Gunten notebook at the Harry Ransom Center that he had translated the novel in 9 days. I’ve been working on Walser’s first book, nearly finished, in a notebook of my own for as many years!)

Even so, there is growing to be done. Although the Walser-Archiv gave me a set of the 6-volume Mikrogramme (Microscripts, see 8 and 9) in 2006, they gave me so much else that I had to leave these behind with a friend. I still don’t have the first, facsimile edition of Der Räuber. Among the Co., Ilse Aichinger’s first two books in English and Peter Gizzi’s first book, Periplum, remain just out of reach. And these are just the desiderata that emerged as I compiled the below. A sum such as $750 would fill these gaps and so much more.
1. Walser, Robert. *Gedichten*. [Poems.] Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1908. First Edition. One of 300 copies of a deluxe edition (illustrated, and with a cover designed by, Karl Walser) of the only collection of RW’s poems (reprinted by Cassirer in 1918, expanded by Carl Seelig in 1944) to appear in his lifetime. Found, miraculously cheap, in the tiny town Walluf where I was an au pair. (The only other copies were in Berlin and Zürich.)


3. Walser, Robert. *Jakob von Gunten*. Zürich: Sternberg, 1950. Sir Malcolm Pasley’s copy, with his signature, of the “new edition” of the last novel RW published in his lifetime, considered by many, including Kafka, to be his best book. (The last RW title to be published separately before the first edition of his Collected Works: see next entry.) Pasley, knighted for his work in preserving and editing Kafka’s manuscripts, has made notes throughout on the relation of the novel to Kafka’s work. A postcard from Pasley, and an unsigned *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) review [by Michael Hamburger], the first in English, have been laid in.

4. Walser, Robert. *Dichtungen in Prosa*. 1. Band. [Writings in Prose, Volume 1]. Genf [Geneva]: Holle Verlag, 1953. The first volume of a never-completed edition of Walser’s Works, the first attempted, edited by Carl Seelig, Walser’s only friend during the asylum years and his literary executor (the Edition was cut short by Seelig’s untimely death, in a car accident, in 1962.) This copy came from the library of Harry Zohn (see 7), translator of Kafka and Walter Benjamin (see 8) and has been inscribed “from a friend of the writer [i.e. RW]” by Seelig, on Christmas 1953, just three years to the day before Walser died, walking in the snow. (Compare Karl Walser’s chillingly prescient illustration below, from 1, above.)


7. Walser, Robert. *Jakob von Gunten*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969. Several copies each of both the cloth and paper issue, including translator Middleton’s copy of the latter (inscribed) and (fellow translator: see 4) Zohn’s copy of the former (with the original typescript of his review, containing three full pages of detailed critique that didn’t make it into the lengthy review—from the *Saturday Review*—also included). The first printing of this book, now reissued by the New York Review of Books Classics (my collection includes the scarce first printing of that edition, with the “microscript” cover), though (slightly) less expensive than 5, remains the most desirable edition of Walser’s work in English, both for the striking cover(s) and its status as the book the introduced Walser to an American readership.

7. Walser, Robert. *The Robber*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. The (scarce) cloth issue. Inscribed by the translator, Susan Bernofsky, “for Walser & Co!” Withdrawn from a public library, it was the inaugural acquisition of the Walser & Co. Lending Library, complete with a card detailing borrowers (including, from the bibliography below alone, Ashbery, Bernofsky herself, Crawford, Gizzi, Hawkey, Ruefle, Tate, Wier, and Wolf, among many others). The *TLS* review by John Ashbery, clipped by my father, which led to my discovery of RW, is displayed on the front of the custom (archival) box I designed for this item, which was issued without a dust jacket. Also built into the box is a facsimile of the manuscript (in so-called “microscript”), on 12 octavo sheets, containing the entire 141 page novel. (*Der Räuber*, my favorite book, was not published until 1972 (see Desiderata), after a decade of deciphering the manuscript (see 8 and 9).

[Color images of these and other volumes can be found at: walserandco.blogspot.com]
8. Walser, Robert. *The Microscripts*. New York: New Directions /Christine Burgin Gallery, 2010. An Advanced Review Copy (my review for *The Believer*, to be published in tiny font on a subscription card sized insert, miming the microscript format, is forthcoming, as is the book and accompanying exhibition—which I am working to bring to the Mortimer Rare Book Room’s gallery—in May) of a milestone publication, a catalog with lavish reproductions of selected *Mikrogramme*, with Susan Bernofsky’s translation and Walter Benjamin’s Walser essay as afterword. I also have one of four copies of a set of galleys of the microscripts themselves (the publishers and translator have the others.)

9. Walser, Robert. “Unter eine Linde: eine unveröffentliche Skizze,” [Under a Linden Tree: an unpublished sketch], part of a posthumous Walser portfolio compiled by Seelig for the now legendary Oktober 1957 issue of *DU*, a folio-sized Swiss cultural magazine, in which a microscript, magnified and original size, was reproduced for the first time, with Seelig’s accompanying explication: “This undecipherable secret code of the writer’s own invention which he employed in the 1920s and later at the beginning of his mental illness can only be interpreted as a fearful retreating from the public eye and a calligraphically enchanting camouflage he used to hide his thoughts from the public.” It was this reproduction that convinced a then graduate student, Jochen Greven (eventual editor of the first completed—sans microscripts—Collected Works, in 20 volumes, which edition, purchased at a library sale at Oberlin for $10 got me started as a serious reader—and slow translator of RW), that the microscripts were not in fact a code, but simply a miniature and meticulous (if messy) version of a common German script (*Kurrent*). Since then, a scholarly edition of six volumes (see Desiderata) has appeared. This issue of *DU* is so scarce that Susan Bernofsky reported that she has seen one only during her residency at the Walser-Archiv (then in Zürich). Among the other pieces in the portfolio are J.C. [= Christopher] Middleton’s first published writing on RW (in German!), the first appearance of an excerpt from Seelig’s Wanderungen (see 39), RW’s own “Lebenslauf” (a peculiar resumé of sorts), a page of RW’s handwriting (normal size), and a full color reproduction of a painting by Karl Walser.

10. Acconci, Vito Hannibal and Mayer, Bernadette. *O to 9*. Number 2. New York: 0 to 9, August 1967. Statistically, the scarcest item in my RW collection is also among the most treasured artifacts in a 20C poetry collection that outpaces the former in breadth and monetary (if not sentimental) value. The second issue of this virtually impossible to find high water mark of the mimeo revolution opens with Robert Scott’s translation of “Kleist in Thun,” the first appearance in translation of RW’s greatest story. Recently reprinted by Ugly Duckling Presse, original issues of *O to 9* are still sought (but seldom found) by collectors.


13. Bernhard, Thomas. Wittgensteins Neffe: Eine Freundschaft. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982. [Wittgenstein’s Nephew.] I have every edition of this, my favorite book not by RW, the title of which spurred a sub-collection of books called Wittgenstein’s ____________ (a partial list: City, Devil, Ladder, Mistress, Poker, Trousers.) As with Ashbery, I could have entered a whole Bernhard collection as I have virtually every first American, British, and German edition of each of his books. As far as I know, Bernhard never went on record as an RW reader. But he was.

14. Bernofsky, Susan (translator of four—soon to be six—volumes of RW). Archival material: chiefly correspondence relating to her recent and forthcoming translations (The Assistant, The Tanners, The Microscripts, and Berlin Stories) of RW, but also related to her earlier translations (Masquerade and The Robber), and the RW issue of the Review of Contemporary Fiction she co-edited (which included correspondence with the filmmakers The Brothers Quay), but also, e.g., a manuscript draft of a page from her forthcoming biography of Walser, which page is to be printed in a catalog of Walser & Co, tentatively titled The Minutes of the Robert Walser Society of Western Massachusetts.

15. Büchner, Georg. Gesammelte Werke. [Collected Works.] Zürich, Artemis Verlag, 1944. Büchner is the only author on this list whom Walser read (and wrote about). I chose this volume from among many (Büchner is another hero) because it was edited by Carl Seelig, and belonged to Sir Malcolm Pasley (with his sfp and notes.)


18. Crawford, Stanley. *The Log of the S.S. the Mrs. Unguentine*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971. The first appearance of this newly classic novel, now considered the touchstone of Gordon Lish’s early years at Knopf (1972; reissued in 2008 by Dalkey Archive). When he read in the Visiting Writers Series at UMass last Spring, Crawford inscribed this copy (upon request: he confessed that he didn’t know RW’s work) to “the Robert Walser Society of Western Massachusetts,” remarking that it would be more valuable (it’s a scarce book, and in pristine condition) if he flat-signed it. As a visiting professor at UMass this semester, he has made great use of the Walser & Co. lending library, and is presently savoring *Jakob von Gunten*.


20. Eugenides, Jeff (= Jeffrey). “Capricious Gardens,” in the *Gettysburg Review* (Winter 1989). Eugenides’ first published story; 17 pages, not since reprinted. The last issue of the GR with Donald Barthelme, a Walser reader, on the masthead (he died that fall.) Maurice Natanson’s essay (on Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, one of Barthelme’s favorite books) is inscribed by the author (on its first page). A signed program from Eugenides’ May 3, 2008 appearance at the Morgan Library, where he gave a boisterous reading of Walser’s story, “Trousers,” is laid in.

21. Frisch, Max. *Tagebuch: 1946-1949*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1958. From the library of Eva Schiffer, Emeritus Professor of German at UMass. Frisch’s *Diaries*, wherein he recorded a dream he had (which both The New Yorker and New Directions have inscribed as historic fact): Someone reported an authentic encounter between Walser and Lenin … whereby Walser asked Lenin a single question. Do you like fruitcake [sic: Glarner pear bread] too? I didn’t doubt the authenticity in the dream and sided with Robert Walser when I woke—I was still siding with Robert Walser as I shaved.

23. Grass, Günter. *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*. Göttingen: Steidl, 2006. Although he was at the center of a firestorm brought on by a controversial confession in this memoir which he signed for me at the Frankfurt Oper[a] in September 2006, I (as if in Frisch’s dream) asked only a single question: *Haben Sie Robert Walser auch gerne?* After a look of bewilderment, I got enough of an answer to justify his inclusion here.

24. Hawkey, Christian (alumnus of UMass MFA program, and co-founder of jubilat) Correspondence relating to translation of Walser, Ilse Aichinger, Uljana Wolf, and Paul Celan, among countless other projects, including Hawkey’s own work.

25. Hecht, Julie. *The Unprofessionals*. New York: Random House, 2003. First edition. Cloth and dust jacket. With promotional material laid in (ironically, as the book’s editor was fired shortly before publication and no actual promotion took place.) Hecht’s narrator, the American Bernhard, professes her love for Walser, in this, the best first novel of the millennium thus far.

26. Hesse, Hermann. Archival material. Sizable archive of books (many lovingly inscribed) and letters from Hesse (and his wife) to my parents’ teacher (and mine) Eugen Kullmann. Including also photographs of Kullmann and Hesse, an original (and possibly unpublished!) poem (in manuscript), and a walking stick that may have seen duty with the guru, who wishfully declared “If Robert Walser had 100,000 readers, the world would be better.” (See 31)


29. Kafka, Franz. *Der Prozess*. [The Trial.] Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1925. A first edition of the only book to rival *Der Räuber*, written about the same time. Kafka and Walser were made for each other. At the library sale where I got the complete set of Walser, I also got the Wolff (Walser’s publisher who emigrated) American edition of Kafka’s *Werke*. This copy is in need of repair (which I can’t afford), which is the only way I could afford it. The cover, by Georg Salter (who added the e after he emigrated, see 17), is still lustrous.

30. Kasper, Michael. “Walser’s Last Words” (original text/collage). I met Michael, Amherst College reference librarian by day, avant-garde (belle) lettrist by night, at the first RW Christmas gathering, in 2006. Since then I have become an avid collector of his work, including mail art and artist books, but prize nothing more than the collage (paired with a dialogue imagining RW’s last conversation) he made for *The Minutes*.

31. Koeppen, Wolfgang. Ephemera. A Suhrkamp catalog from 2006, a souvenir from my travels during the Walser-Sommer (Summer) commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death. This particular catalog features an cover marking the 100th birthdays of Beckett and Bernhard, and the 50th anniversaries of the death of Brecht and…Wolfgang Koeppen, whose name was new to me. Why would Suhrkamp, Walser’s publisher in Germany since his death, choose this unknown Koeppen over a figure who was having a major renaissance? (I spoke to someone at Suhrkamp who speculated it was because they had just made a major show of his 125th birthday in 2003.) In any case, I was astonished to discover that Walser was there anyway, a figure, as the title of Jochen Greven’s major study has it, on the margins. In the page devoted to Koeppen, there was a picture of this (wonderful, as it turns out) author, sitting in an easy chair with a poster of Beckett looming large overhead. Below this, tucked behind the chair, one can barely make out another, smaller poster, with just text: Hesse’s quote about Walser (see 26). Since this discovery, I’ve had this picture hanging above my desk. (Of course, I have several back-up catalogs for the archive!)


33. Middleton, Christopher. Archival material. In addition to giving me his “Walser collection,” (thanks to M. Kasper for sending him my RW translations, which prompted this unexpected dream pilgrimage), Middleton gave me a copy of a diary entry in which he had his own dream about Walser (far more elaborate, but no less magical than Frisch’s) which I plan to report as fact in *The Minutes*. 


34. Mirra, Helen. *Names & Poems*. Chicago: White Walls, 1999. One of 500 copies. Mirra has drawn on Walser’s work for a number of her installations, including, recently, an index to *The Robber* in *Cabinet*.


40. Spender, Stephen. *Great German Short Stories*. New York: Dell, 1960. An influential paperback, now somewhat uncommon, the true first appearance of RW in America. (This was Tom Whalen’s introduction to RW.) Featuring also authors RW read (Büchner, von Hofmannsthal, Keller, Kleist, Rilke, Stifter) and vice versa (Aichinger’s “The Bound Man” and its precursor, Kafka’s “In the Penal Settlement.”)

41. Swiss Institute (New York), *Take Care*. Swiss Institute / Kunsthalle Palazzo, Liestal. A remarkable catalog, one of a number of publications of the Institute for which “Robert Walser is the spiritual godfather” (Joan Nelson’s *Fragments of Imaginary Landscapes* being a better known example). A selection of staggeringly beautiful and assured work by Swiss artists.


45. Waldrop, Rosmarie and Keith. *Since Volume One*. Providence: Burning Deck, 1975. Inscribed by the authors to James Laughlin, a joining of two of the most important avant-garde publishers of the 20C.

46. Whalen, Tom. Manuscript. “Novel the Twenty-third,” the Walser novel from *26 Novels*. Whalen is also a longtime translator of RW.

47. Wier, Dara. *Fly on the Wall*. Providence: Oat City Press, 1996. One of 75 copies. A beautiful letterpress volume about a bookseller. Wier was the first member of the Robert Walser Society of Western Massachusetts.


49. Wölfli, Adolf. Not a reader of Walser, but they shared a roof for a few months in 1929. Among the scarcer Wölfli items in my collection is the first issue of Jean Dubuffet’s *Art Brut*.

50. The next acquisition.