



Brian W. Kratzer

Jim Croft of Santa, Idaho, sits with the final creation of a hand-bound book and other books he has crafted. The book on its end was created for the Moscow Food Co-op to hold the first seven years of Co-op newsletters. The clasp spells "Co-op."

Moscow Food Co-op bound in history

BY VERA WHITE
Staff Writer

Jim Croft left his remote homestead outside the village of Santa, Idaho, Monday to deliver a book to a friend in Moscow — a \$4,000 book containing the first seven years of the Moscow Food Co-op Newsletter.

A bit pricey to find out what the Co-op was doing between 1984 and 1991?

Newsletter editor Bill London didn't think so.

"Bill asked me to do it this way because my specialty is large, heavy books," explained Croft, a Co-op member since 1977. "There is a lot more challenge in making a large book because they require more support if you expect it to last."

Croft, a master craftsman who creates books bound in the medieval style, uses hand tools only with materials common to medieval European bookbinders.

The newsletter pages were trimmed by hand with a plow held in a wooden

viser, treated with beeswax, then polished to a fine sheen. Croft used split-like shakes to ensure the grain was straight in the Oregon white oak used on the cover.

Croft often grows his own flax for book linen, but the paper in this book was made out of recycled fire hose linen. As a finishing touch, the book's bronze hinges spell out "Co-op."

It took the 47-year-old bookmaker close to 400 hours to complete.

"It's the closest traditional binding in the world to the old, pre-Gutenberg style," Croft boasted.

Graduating from Texas Christian University in 1969 with a degree in history, Croft went to Europe where he "spent a lot of time" in the book area of the British Museum, coming home vowing to make quality books "from scratch."

He came to Idaho in 1977, "where there was wilderness, cheap land, and not too many people." He lives on 30

acres three miles from Santa with wife, Melody, and their three children.

Croft teaches a class in medieval book-making every July, attracting people from all over the world to the two-week workshop. He spent the past two winters restoring all the Territorial Law Journals from 1864 to 1889 for the state of Idaho.

"I can't afford to collect rare books so I have to make them," Croft joked.

He views Johannes Gutenberg's 14th century press with mixed emotion.

"It was the dawn of civilization, but it was the beginning of the end for quality-bound books," he said.

• The book is scheduled to be on display at the University of Idaho Library, Special Collections Department, through March 14. From March 15 to April 15, the book will be displayed in the glass case at the Moscow Public Library as part of a display of material from the Co-op. The book may also be displayed at Moscow's Renaissance Fair May 6-7.