

ENDICO

haute conduite watercolors

by:

Bob Fugett

CURATOR'S GUIDE

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- 1) “Haute Conduite: Introduction to a Fine Art Analysis of Endico Watercolor Technique”
- 2) “Haute Conduite: Gallery Handout”
- 3) this edition originally titled: “Gallery Catalog”

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Photograph of *Triple Figure Drawing* (#2369) courtesy of: John Humes Photography

Special thanks to Dr. Jean F. Goetinck, Professor of French, University of Arizona, and Christine Louvet, our Basque friend, for helping confirm the term *haute conduite* carried no unfortunate and irresolvable previous connotation. And to Frank W. Robinson, Director of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University for his long suffering input providing insight into what curators like to know about.

No artist worked more rapidly than she did, and her pictures had such merit that they sold for higher prices than those of [other] well-known contemporary painters, whose works fill our galleries. - Pliny the Elder (c. 77 A.D.)

Who should use this guide

- 1) Museum docents and curators who need to stay abreast of trends in contemporary art.
- 2) Collectors and enthusiasts of Endico watercolor originals who want a better understanding of the *haute conduite* style.

What is included

- 1) The introduction and first two chapters of the Endico book outlining the historic perspective, process and materials of *haute conduite* watercolor
- 2) Full color plates† of selected Endico *haute conduite* paintings loose bound to easily swap out for extensions and updates

† Best viewed under 5000K daylight corrected lamps

Introduction

Mary Endico often hears, from people viewing her strong abstract watercolors for the first time, “Very impressive. Are these acrylics or oils? I’ve never seen anything like them. What style of art is this?”

She has always been at a loss how to respond. First off they are neither acrylics nor oils but watercolors. Mary’s development of specific watercolor technique, plus her bold use of unique compositional elements, has truly gone beyond what was done before and fuels the misunderstanding regarding materials. Endico paintings are without precedence in many ways. Therefore no easy answer has existed to, “What style of art is this?”

A context exists to the development of the Endico style that is broad enough to warrant an entirely new term. Borrowing, then combining the two French words “haute” and “conduite,” together serves at once to provide a heading for Endico style while establishing a somewhat neutral expression to be imbued with descriptions of first the historic context, then the rigorous long term personal commitment and finally the uncompromising acquisition of technical skills that was required to produce the unique body of work which is the Endico progenesis.

Translations of “haute” include ‘high’, ‘lofty’ or ‘intense’. In the world of affairs “conduite” means ‘direction, management or control’. Therefore coining the words into an English term can begin by stating that a literal translation of the two is “intense control.” From there the definition of *haute conduite* as a term referring to the Endico watercolor style must be completed by pointing to examples of the art that it names while explaining that art’s genesis.

The description of the historical context inspects the late 20th century geopolitical circumstances existing in the United States as Mary began her quest to expand the limits of watercolor lexicon well beyond traditional usage. At that time there was a long standing expression of a cultural incentive to produce such work,

and that provided ample economic rewards allowing Mary full-time opportunity to develop skills that would coalesce into the Endico *haute conduite* style. It was a democratic environment that also allowed this development to take place outside mainstream traditional paths. The continuance of this state of artistic and economic freedom allows others who aspire to the same level of artistic achievement to follow in Mary’s footsteps. It is not an easy path, but it is a possible path.

The description of the personal commitment required to achieve this level of work is instructive to others who may be just starting out, or already well on their way, towards providing the same degree of artistic excellence and in so doing providing the same positive impact on the people they touch. The immediately observable aspect of that impact is generally referred to as art appreciation, but more specifically it is something that speaks to and promotes the creative spark residing in all of us. *Haute conduite* flows from and then further inspires commitment to creative excellence.



Endico Museum Room, Sugar Loaf, NY

Finally, a description of the technical skills required to produce *haute conduite* solidly illuminates the central core of its existence and its continuation. Mastery of these various demanding aspects may proceed along many routes, as will be shown, but the final synthesis of those skills into the Endico *haute conduite* watercolor style could only come after successful completion of a multitude of rigorous struggles to control an extremely unstable and fickle medium—wet on wet watercolor. It is this assiduous list of requirements that in part causes Mary’s watercolors to often be mistaken for acrylics or oils.

The deft handling of brush, water and color required to produce the pure, crisp strokes of *haute conduite* watercolor was virtually unheard of in pure aqueous media before Mary Endico lead the way.

However all three of these elements: historic context, commitment to excellence, and technical mastery are actually inseparably intermingled in the creation of *haute conduite*.

The three elements are only separated here because the thing being discussed is viewed in retrospect and from afar.

Life is massively parallel, but words are inherently serial.



Endico Studio archival scanning-back camera

This curator's guide reprints the introduction and first two chapters from the Endico book so that gallery owners and personnel along with museum docents may use it as an educational resource.

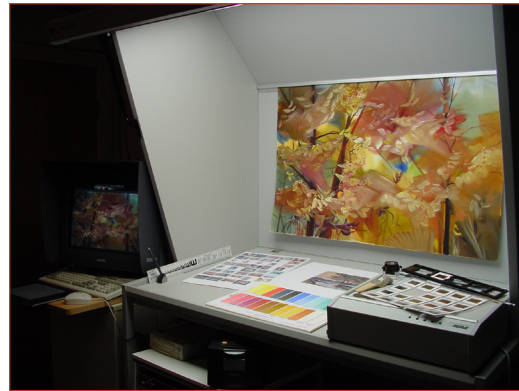
This *Introduction* gives a brief overview and lays the groundwork for the book in progress.

Chapter 1, *The Dance*, describes the Endico painting process and gives insight into the style's genesis.

Chapter 2, *Lasting Impact*, details the materials and techniques used to produce *haute conduite* watercolor.

Color plates are bound in a convenient format so they may be easily swapped out for updates provided by the Endico studio.

In the original version of this guide, all plates were scanned, printed and proofed with close hands-on supervision by Mary Endico to assure best possible match to the texture, feel, and color of the original paintings.

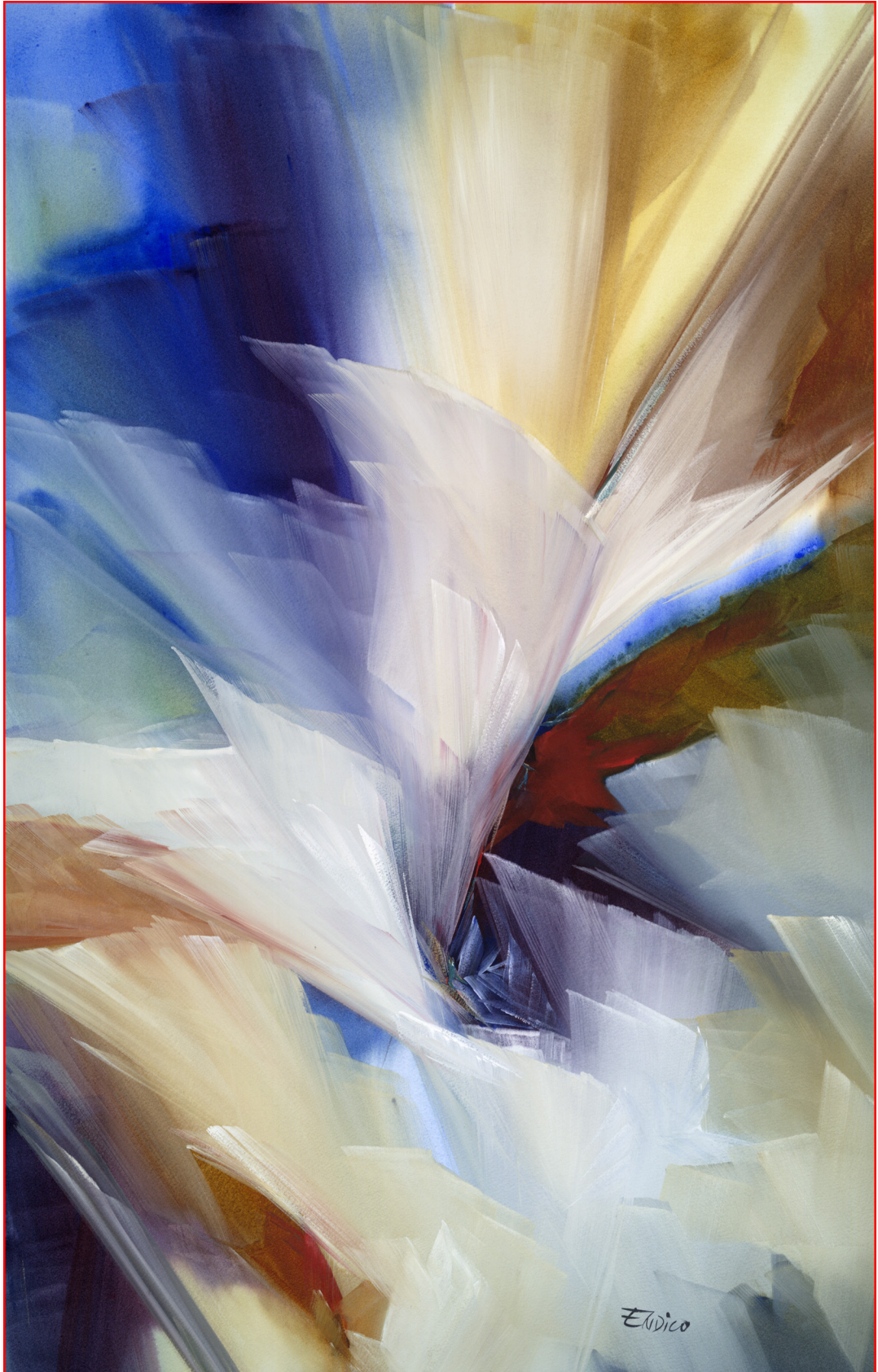


Digital file being compared to the original painting

However, even then, they were merely reproductions and could not reveal the full range of color, detail, and drama that is *haute conduite* watercolor.

Originals must be seen first hand to be fully appreciated.

For more about haute conduite process see the book: *Botanical Rain: the semiotics and history of an enduring Endico image*, by Bob Fugett (978-0-9827073-1-9).



#1005 - 38" x 24" haute conduite watercolor

www.endico.com

The Perfect Storm



#457 - 32" x 22" haute conduite watercolor

www.endico.com

Chapter 1: The Dance

The starter's pistol fires a resounding crack. The dance begins.

From just above, the daylight white glow of color corrected fluorescent bulbs spreads down like a tent with the artist inside. Scattered around are the tools of this trade. Old credit cards cut up in various ways to provide the range of edge-shapes needed to move color around just so. There are fine sable brushes of all sizes, each one having gained its own special character through use, each one's character fully known to the artist...more edge on this one, more spread on another, one for a particular highlight.

A gray decades old cylindrical plastic quart container is almost full of equally gray water. The outside of it is spattered with dashes of color long ago dried; the inside is also spattered with fresh colors that slowly melt into the surface of the gray water and turn gray themselves. Almost everything else within a radius of several feet has flecks and drips of dried watercolor, chance pointillist patterns built up from over a quarter century lying in the path of a rare creative drive. An arm's length of brilliant white paper soaked through and through with water lays flat against the slightly tilted, stiff acrylic sheet which is the easel. Across the spread of paper, glistening palm sized pools of water reflect the overhead lights. A few shimmering drops fall off the edges of the plastic.

It is just before hours. The blinds are drawn and all is quiet in the studio/gallery. An occasional low rumble wells up in the walls as a car passes along the street beside. A distinctive music plays softly in the background. It is a music that has lent a texture to this process for so long. Now is a rare moment of calm in this artist's day, but one regularly set aside and elongated in order to paint the very special pieces.

Nobody heard that starter's pistol fire, but it went off just the same. From the very moment the sheet of water was poured soaking over the paper, it was already beginning to dry. Now the race is on to complete the painting



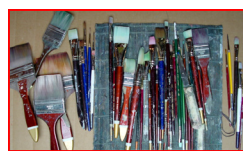
before the materials lose the eloquence found in their extreme fluidity.

To the careless observer it appears nothing much is happening. The artist's arm sweeps over the paper in a broad smooth round-house gesture. Immediately the three inch brush in hand stutters slightly and counteracts the round-house with a flicking reverse. The bristles bend gently, just graze the paper's surface, then rebound and fly away as quickly as they approached.

A closer look at the painting reveals that the deft, graceful movement has left a shining perfectly matched trail of Alizarin Crimson over the elegant Quinacridone Gold feathered on just before. The two swaths blend momentarily as the artist taps her palette and returns with a carefully timed third stroke of Purple Madder. The multilayer of color wells up briefly and immediately begins its predicted settling into a rich permanent history of the dance being performed above it. At once transparent and chromatically deep, the colors merge in a kaleidoscopic illusion of glazing.

To the uninitiated it may appear accidental, or even magic, but this is *haute conduite* watercolor.

It has taken Mary Endico a lifetime to make this look easy. What appears casual is rather like a combination physical ballet and musical jazz improvisation. It is quick, precisely timed, and inventive. The whole body and spirit are engaged. The results are enduring and astonishing!



The permanence of the materials assures the original intent of the paintings may be preserved for centuries. Their bold precise strength can cause those who appreciate such work to have an observable visceral reaction. Every significant stroke of the artist's brush fulfills the contract with the enthusiast to provide art with lasting impact.

To the connoisseur this is true watercolor at its finest. The best wet on wet materials used in this way are unforgiving.

One slight misstep can bring the whole process tumbling to an abrupt and muddy halt.

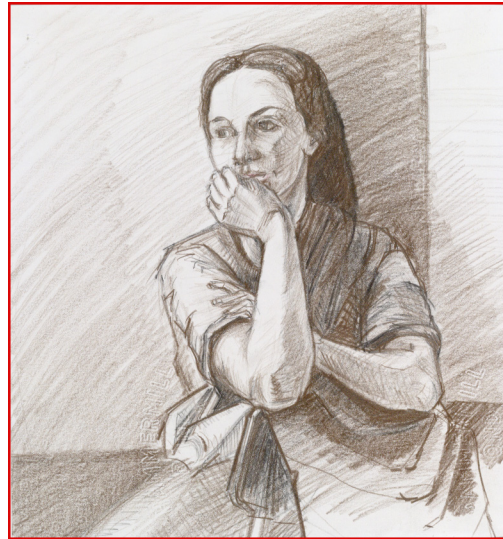
No reworking is possible as with dry brush technique, or with the slow layering of glazed oils and acrylics, or with the scumbling of gouache, or when all three techniques are combined in mixed water-media.

Even direct oil painting technique provides a chance for repair, but wet on wet watercolor is fast, brutal and final. Keeping the end-product clear, crisp and unmuddied is an awesome task.

There are few masters, and Mary Endico has gone well beyond mastery to innovate a style—*haute conduite*.



#0246



#1792



#1789



#1724



#2369



#1801

Early Endico works antecedent to *haute conduite*:

- #0246 - still life watercolor on Arches (1979)
- #1792 - conte pencil on bond paper (1974)
- #1789 - figurative watercolor on newsprint (1971)
- #1724 - cityscape watercolor on Arches (1979)
- #2369 - conte pencil on bond paper (1976)
- #1801 - landscape watercolor on Arches (1980)

Chapter 2: Lasting Impact

For a work of art to endure, it must first of all last.

The preceding sentence may seem so obvious (and cute) it need not be stated. However it embodies an idea that is often overlooked—that a work of art, charged with projecting a message down through the ages, must first and foremost be durable enough to survive those ages.

No matter how commanding, unique and instructive a work of art is, if it is not implemented using materials able to withstand the effects of time, it will soon fall apart and disappear, taking its message with it. Therefore Endico *haute conduite* watercolors are created by combining the finest paints, paper and protectants in order to preserve their intense character for centuries. They are as long lasting as oils on canvas.¹

Under constant assault by: airborne pollutants and natural chemical processes, stresses of changing temperature and humidity, sand blasting effects of both natural and artificial light, not to mention possible wear and tear from thoughtless (or even rough) handling; all physical objects are in dire peril. This is especially true for ground breaking works of art that bring their material components to the finest edge of artistic excellence.

In large part the strength, beauty and impact of Endico watercolors results from the precise control of color passages, balanced and contrasted, often with great subtlety, supporting in every way the underlying composition and design elements. The paintings are striking when viewed from a distance, and their emerging details are ever more meaningful as one comes closer. Finally visible: patterns found within patterns, small fully realized compositions intertwined in the larger perspectives. This is not at all an accident.

The full meaning of these paintings will be lost if the purposeful detail of fine brush stroke and precise color placement are obscured by the degradation of aging. Print reproductions may exist, and digital archives may allow these to be reprinted indefinitely, but these are only copies that cannot hope to match the brilliant reality of the originals. The historical record of the level of control possible with today's watercolor will be meaningless if the originals fade. Therefore struggle for longevity is at the heart of the Endico creative process.

Haute conduite watercolor is accomplished using highest quality acid-free (neutral pH) 100% cotton rag paper. Heavy 140lb cold press is chosen because of its physical durability along with its specific drying and water retention characteristics.

No gouache or acrylics are used. Only AA/A artist grade watercolor paints are used to provide the fluid expressiveness of pure aquarelle media while avoiding fugitive colors (those that fade easily) from lesser quality paints.

Distilled water is used as a bar to chemical contaminants in the water source.



Paintings are executed under 5000K color corrected daylight fluorescent bulbs that provide a standard reference, plus a promise that hues chosen will diverge gracefully when viewed under various other light sources. Bulbs are monitored electronically and replaced when deviating from a specified range.

The completed paintings are mounted using tapes, mat and backing that match the specifications of the paper. They are single-hinge mounted to neutral pH archival matting with acid-free glue and linen tape. Then painting, mat, and foam core are assembled and circumference bound to UV protective glazing using acid-free framing tape. The whole is protected in a non-corrosive rigid aluminum frame.

The single-hinge mounting method allows the painting to breathe and adjust to changes in temperature and humidity while the mat holds the painting away from the glazing, safe from possible condensation. Each of the framed paintings also bears a sticker describing care and handling information which is itself printed on acid-free paper and affixed to the outside of the foam core backing using archival double sided tape, giving collectors correct information regarding best practices preservation techniques.

Earlier Endico works, and those outside of *haute conduite* style, may be created using slight variations on the techniques and materials described here. However Mary has maintained a long standing tradition of using the highest quality materials known to be available.

Those who appreciate *haute conduite* watercolor can have an observable physical reaction. Some find the depth of color and complexity of the paintings so thrilling that their excitement is revealed by an autonomic response. Most obviously they exhibit a blushing of the skin and slight perspiration.

They are reacting to the combined strength of all aspects of the painting (the strong underlying composition, exact inner design of brush stroke, carefully executed contrasting color passages) being precisely synchronized to a basic human aesthetic.

Each step taken, from materials selection through paint application then on to final assembly, is carefully made to insure that all these facets which speak to the essential human aesthetic are preserved, so future generations may continue to enjoy Endico *haute conduite* watercolors and be instructed by this record of artistic excellence.

1. Mayer, Ralph. *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*. New York: Viking Press, 1970. (pp. 294-295)



*Endico home & studio
Sugar Loaf, NY*

ENDICO WATERCOLORS color plates

Earlier editions of this Curator's Guide were prepared and printed by the Endico studio itself, where every effort was made to provide the closest representation of the watercolors possible.

However, the resulting color plates were still never a perfect copy of the original watercolors.

Printing technologies have come a long way in the last 30 years, so this production printing version comes close to the original guide, while it is still impossible to repeat the dynamic depth, subtle texture, and aesthetic "feel" of hand painted watercolors.

So be aware it is still true (and always will be) that an original, is an original, is an original, and no print will ever be able to express the full truth of original artwork.

In any case, the plates provided here give a general idea, but you really must see the originals in person to experience their essence.

from permanent collection: Asheville Museum, Asheville, NC



#223 - 22" x 30" haute conduite watercolor (Red Ice Caverns)

www.endico.com

from permanent collection: Chester Historical Society, Chester, NY



#5760 - 22" x 30" haute conduite watercolor (Bleu Bird Nesting)

www.endicott.com

from permanent collection: Kentucky Museum, Bowling Green, KY



#222 - 22" x 30" haute conduite watercolor (Red Kryptonite)

www.endicott.com

from permanent collection: New York State Museum, Albany, NY



#7162 - 5" x 7" bond paper, pencil (Grab That Pussy Fist)

www.endico.com



www.endico.com

#1538 - 30" x 38" haute conduite watercolor



www.endico.com

#1540 - 20" x 28" haute conduite watercolor



Studio

www.endico.com

#570 - 23" x 35" haute conduite watercolor



www.endico.com

#424 - 22" x 22" haute conduite watercolor



www.endico.com

#6 - 22" x 30" haute conduite watercolor



www.endico.com

#444 - 22" x 30" haute conduite watercolor



www.endico.com

#944 - 20" x 20 1/2" haute conduite watercolor

included National Watercolor Society, 2015-16 International Small Image China Exchange: "Two Countries Juried Exhibition"



#1890 - 7" x 6" visée watercolor (Dissected World View)

www.endico.com



www.ending.com

#6284 - 26" x 40" haute conduite watercolor

In addition to indications given as to color plates shown in this curator's guide with regard to Endico watercolors included in permanent museum collections, some have also been included in juried shows:

- #6 OCWS (awarded)
National Exhibit of American Watercolors 1984
Knickerbocker Artists
Louisiana International 1988
- #222 NEWS International 1991 (awarded)
Kentucky Watercolor Society 1994
- #223 National Watercolor Society 72nd Annual 1992
- #424 National Watercolor Society 81st Annual Exhibition 2001
San Diego 21st International 2002
Watercolor Art Society-Houston, Challenge of Champions 2003
- #444 *American Watercolor Society*, 139th Annual International Exhibition 2006
NEWS 24th International 2000 ("The John Pike Award")
International Watermedia Twelve 2001
Catherine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club 105th Annual Exhibit 2001
- #475 International Society of Experimental Artists 2001 Exhibition
NEWS 26th International 2002

For an exhaustive listing of Endico watercolor awards and juried shows see: www.endico.com. For more about the history of Mary's watercolor process see: *Botanical Rain: the semiotics and history of an enduring Endico image*, by Bob Fugett (978-0-9827073-1-9)



Selfie - Mary Endico Fugett
5/16/2017

"No artist worked more rapidly than she did, and her pictures had such merit that they sold for higher prices than those of [other] well-known contemporary painters, whose works fill our galleries."
- Pliny the Elder (c. 77 A.D.)¹

1. The quote above comes from Book 35 of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (on Roman Painting) and was taken from the secondary source:

Janson, H. W., and Anthony F. Janson. *History of Art*. 1913. 6 ed. Wilmington, NC: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2001. 195. [for context see: www.endico.com]

