Handpress Printing and Manuscript Culture: A History of the Book Teaching and Research Collection

What on the surface seems an eclectic assortment of both rare and commonplace antiquarian books reveals itself, upon closer inspection, to be a collection that seizes upon the book as a material object, a unique repository for a wealth of historical evidence -- physical form, processes of production and circulation, associative links, ownership marks, and so forth -- and interprets it as a multifaceted teaching and research tool. Gathering together books from numerous countries and subjects from throughout the handpress period (fifteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries), this collection is designed to push beyond the stories contained within books, to inquire after the stories of the books and what those stories have to say about our history, culture, and humanity.
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Essay

This collection represents one half of a larger collection that has formed partially through serendipity and partially through design, the over-arching theme of which is teaching the history of the book. I have focused my collecting in the past several years on this objective because it is my intention to teach this subject in my professional career. Materials in this subset focus on the handpress period (fifteenth through mid-nineteenth century) as well as examples of manuscript culture from that period. I am drawn to texts that open a window into a particular place and moment in time, offering the opportunity to tangibly demonstrate a facet of the making, circulating, receiving, and occasionally un-making of material texts. Some of my books, for example, provide good illustrations of bindings, printing practices, the use of engravings, marginalia, reading habits, the links between economic conditions and publishing trends, and so forth. Because the parameters of my collection are thus methodological and broad, the books contained in it are from many different periods, cultures, genres, and authors. When taken together, however, they serve as teaching tools that complement each other.

I am interested in the stories of the books as much as the stories in them. Many of my books bear telling readers’ marks, important associative links to previous owners, or physical features that stand as evidence of how the book was treated, understood, and used. My faith in these physical features as links to the past may be slightly romantic, but it is also instructive in helping (in a small way) recuperate our collective knowledge of how, why, and what readers of the early printing period read, and how the mutable form of those physical documents changed the nature, and result, of the reader-text interaction.
Certain parts of my collection came to me in a decidedly unorganized fashion. For example, several years ago my grandfather gave me a substantial portion of his personal library; thus subsets of my present collection represent interests that he had (for example, eighteenth-century English works translated into French). Other volumes have been added to the collection in similar ways, such as gifts from well-intentioned family members. One advantage of focusing on the history of the book as a guiding principle for collecting is that these unplanned additions almost always fit into the collection – every book has its own story to tell. Last year, however, I decided that I did not know nearly enough of the stories behind many of my books. I resolved to research as precisely as possible the history of each book I owned and (of particular importance) how I might use it in teaching the history of the book in general. The results of this ongoing project are made available to friends and family, and anyone else interested in the subject, through a blog that I update with a different book roughly once every week. Since its launch in early February 2009, over 2,500 visitors from 43 countries have visited the site. It has proven to be an excellent tool both for managing my own self-education about my collection and for sharing my books and their stories with others.

My plans for the future of my collection are to continue adding books that demonstrate lucidly a particular aspect of textual culture or that in some material way offer a telling and unique connection to a specific past. I have also taken an interest in building a subset within the collection, looking at how the specific context of a book’s manufacture influences its appearance (and hence reception). To accomplish this, I have set myself the goal of gathering all of the imprints – books, pamphlets, almanacs, newspapers, forms, and other ephemera – of a single printer. The printer I’ve selected
(for rather nostalgic reasons) is the firm of Samuel and Ebenezer Hall, the first print shop in Salem, MA (my hometown), which operated from 1768 to 1775. The Halls’ shop has the distinction of being the third printing press in the colony of Massachusetts – making their imprints important pieces of early American history and also, unfortunately, rather rare. Like all truly worthwhile collecting goals, it is likely never to be fully realized – a fact with which I am at peace; for the hungry book-collector, the pursuit is, after all, just as rewarding as the possession.
Alger, Israel, ed. *The Holy Bible…Divided into Syllables as they Ought to be Pronounced*. Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1825.

Very thick, first edition of Alger’s “Pronouncing Bible”, using John Walker’s system of pronunciation marks, along with guides to pronouncing Greek, Latin, and Aramaic names, to allow readers to share passages aloud correctly. Printed in stereotype by T. H. Carter & Company. Leaf of “recommendations” from pastors, rectors, and heads of seminaries and schools (all Protestant, most from the Boston area); publisher’s advertisements for *The Pronouncing Testament, The Pronouncing Introduction to Murray’s English Reader*, and *The Pronouncing English Reader*. The New Testament had been published separately in 1822; text here is the 1822 text bound together with a translation of the Old Testament for a single volume. Owner’s inscription of Jonathan Cowls, member of a founding family of Amherst, MA. Some foxing throughout. Bound in brown leather; spine cracked and some pull damage to top.


Written by the Oxford don, scholar, and clergyman who penned the highly influential *The Whole Duty of Man*; theological/philosophical treatise on how to pursue and achieve happiness. Pastoral frontispiece of angels visiting a sleeping shepherd. Rebound in twentieth century; front board detached.


307-page compendium of events, anecdotes, and literature from a broad spectrum of sources; includes international news, diplomacy, scientific experiments, freaks of nature, acts of Parliament, lawsuits of note, trade figures, theatrical productions, poetry, and theological/philosophical essays. Preface notes, that though “Europe may be said to be perfectly quiet”, the peace produces an “abundance of events of a very interesting nature”; also references the “savage war [that] has unfortunately broke out in America”. Original leather boards, hinges coming loose.


In addition to a life of the author and a lengthy section of commentary remarks, provides a “new translation” of Apuleius’s *Liber de Deo Socratis*, presented in the form of parallel passages, with Latin passages on the verso and the French on the facing recto. Original leather binding.


Highly detailed guidebook to the “general customs” of the French town of Verdun and the surrounding county, including, for example, its properties, institutions of law and public order, nobility and gentry, and accounts of trials from 1741 to publication.
Original leather binding; includes 1866 owner’s inscription in French. Flyleaf also bears inscription of Stanley Dell, dated “Sept. 26, 1916. Verdun.” Peculiar because this date puts Dell (judging from the format of his date, probably an American) in the town of Verdun in the middle of the Battle of Verdun (a battle in which the Americans were not involved) at the precise moment the town was being bombarded by German artillery. What was he doing there? And why did he stop to acquire (or loot?) an antiquarian book?

559-page fair copy manuscript transcription of a 1726 French translation of an unidentified English book that uses scriptural and patristic sources to delineate a highly elaborate code of conduct for Christians choosing “to live in chastity and acquire perfection”. In original leather binding. Includes transcription of De Villiers’s license for the original book. An excellent opportunity to teach on the permeable boundary between print and manuscript and the ways in which textual media are fluid rather than distinct.

Anonymous. *Letter.* France[?], 1605[?].
Untranslated document [letter] in French on large, folded folio sheet bearing continental watermark used prior to 1605. Multiple inks of clearly different hues. Good example of European secretary hand and of variances in early homemade inks.

Part of scarce six-volume anthology of French prose fiction and essays (no library of public record owns the entire set); this volume consists principally of historical narratives. *Ex libris* Meadville Theological School, Unitarian seminary formerly of Pennsylvania. Owner’s inscription dated 1770. Original calf binding; front board loose.

443-page folio account ledger for an unidentified business (apparently in a mechanical industry) in Troy, NY in 1840. Later owner pasted clippings from newspapers and magazines (mostly from New York sources from the 1850s) over most pages; clippings include topics such as current events and politics, poetry, jokes and anecdotes, and crime; numerous illustrations from varied sources. Final page used for pencil jottings including penmanship practice, arithmetic, and spelling trials (“parsimonious”, “happy”, etc.). Soft leather binding with tooling, bumped and chipped in many places.

Third of the three folio collections of early modern dramatists (after Jonson’s of 1616 and Shakespeare’s of 1623) that marked the transition of plays from the status of ephemera to the status of literature and the transition of dramatists from mere entertainers to generally-recognized “authors”. This copy is complete, except for the frontispiece portrait of Fletcher; some pages are repaired. The binding is exquisite late eighteenth century gilded green leather. Bookplate of Fairfax of Cameron, a Scottish peerage since 1627, with property and family in Virginia and Maryland into the twentieth century.
Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Contes de J. Bocace.* Vol. III. “Londres” [Paris]: s.n., 1779. One volume of ten; a “new translation” into French, prepared by Antoine Sabatier de Castres. Includes numerous *belles gravures* of sometimes scandalous scenes from the tales; several plates have been delicately hand-colored. Original marbled boards with cracking leather and gilded spine.

Butler, Samuel. *Hudibras.* Troy: Wright, Goodenow, & Stockwell, 1806. First American edition of this important epic verse satire of English social and political life during the Civil War (1642-1660); essentially a reprint of a 1774 English edition prepared by Zachary Grey. Changes Grey’s annotation from endnotes to footnotes, includes his life of the author. *Ex libris* from Springfield College Library; also bears owner’s inscription of Samuel L. Doggett, American education pioneer and father of Springfield College president Laurence Doggett.

Cavendish, George. *The Life of Cardinal Wolsey.* Two vols. London: Harding, Triphook, and Lepard, 1825. Detailed, though often biased, biography of the infamous sixteenth-century cardinal whose failure to secure a divorce for Henry VIII from Catherine of Aragon resulted in England’s divorce from the Roman Catholic Church; written by Wolsey’s household usher. This edition prepared, with annotations, illustrations, and “metrical visions from the original autograph manuscript” by bookseller-turned-antiquarian Samuel Weller Singer. An early owner has added occasional marginalia critiquing some of Singer’s editorial choices. Expertly rebound in modern red cloth with gilded title on spines.

Conti, Natale. *Natalis Comitis Mythologiae, sive Explicationis Fabularum.* Geneva: Samuel Crispinus [?], 1612. Thick volume of tales from classical mythology, accompanied by explanatory commentary, originally published in Venice in 1567 and popular across the continent. Crispinus printed this edition and published a later edition; the name of this publisher, however, has been cancelled on the title-page imprint. Vellum binding with some stenciling; several gatherings have separated from the binding. Series of multiple owner’s inscriptions, in Latin, on verso facing title page; they span from 1614 to 1925.

Dickens, Charles. *Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby.* Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839. First American book edition of Dickens’s third full novel; an unauthorized version (one of the many that, amongst other reasons, lead to the author’s American visit of 1842). Includes black-and-white engravings after the original serial’s illustrations by Hablot Browne (“Phiz”). Various gatherings on various stocks, suggesting the hasty, piecemeal nature of the printing; several chapters, with their illustrations, are actually taken directly from an early illicit serial publication of the novel and bound into the book. Heavily read: some pages loose, inexpertly repaired; marbled boards intact but leather spine largely in pieces; two sets of owner’s marginalia, one giving reader’s marks and the other making typographic corrections and bibliographic notes.

Volumes I and II appeared in 1559 and 1560 respectively; annotated by copious author and translator Giovanni Battista Egnazio. This volume completes a sequence of lives of Roman leaders (mostly emperors) adapted from classical authors such as Trebellius Pollio and Flavius Vopiscus. Early owner inscription dated 1596. Tight vellum binding; first and last opening expose flaps of medieval illuminated manuscript (possibly from a document on the sacraments) used to wrap the spine of the book.


Wide-ranging essay offering parental advice on raising children, an enumeration of children’s “obligations and duties” to parents, proposals for training and remunerating teachers, a plan for making all “common schools” free of cost, reprints of the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, New Jersey and New York Constitutions, and periodically inserted “amusing, chaste anecdotes growing out of the domestic and scholastic circle”. Owner’s penciled inscription on front pastedown; cloth binding with gilded title on front board. Some foxing.

[Goldsmith, Oliver.]* The Vicar of Wakefield*. Halle: Friedrich Francke, 1787.

Peculiar edition of Goldsmith’s popular fictitious memoir, published in Germany and with “accents” in the text to indicate how to properly inflect each word in English (perhaps to help teach the language). Annotation by various hands throughout; one hand has used the errata list to correct typographic errors; another has supplied translations and notes in German in the margins at places. Illustrated frontispiece of Dr. Primrose. Original papered boards and leather spine very worn.


Collection of verse narratives written by noted Covent Garden actor and dramatist; two volumes bound together in one. Generous use of quotation from other sources (especially Bible and Shakespeare); despite the title, several of the tales are adapted from contemporary fiction and drama. Includes a list of subscribers (“encouragers of this work”) giving the names of many prominent members of London social and theatrical communities. Front board missing and foxing throughout. Owners’ inscriptions include Philadelphia printer, journalist, and lawyer William J. Duane, who briefly served as U.S. Secretary of the Treasury in the 1830s.


Fictional narrative of “Rassealas, Prince of Abyssinia” and his quest for happiness. Illustrative frontispiece; portrait of Johnson on initial title page (publisher’s name misspelled on initial title; leaf loose). Foxing throughout; owner’s inscription includes number probably in reference to place in collection. Original owner was Thomas Buffum, member of early Salem, MA Quaker family who owned the house this collector grew up
in (The Buffum House, on Buffum Street). Foxing throughout; full leather binding with
gilded decorative border and blind impressions.

Philadelphia: Carey Lea, & Blanchard, 1838.
Irving’s break-out book, a famously humorous invented history of the settlement of New
York, from “the beginning of the world to the end of the Dutch dynasty”, being “the only
Authentic History of the Times that ever hath been or ever will be published.” First
published in 1809 following an elaborate hoax perpetrated by Irving in an attempt to
publicize the name of fictional New York historian “Diedrich Knickerbocker”; hugely
popular and appeared in many editions following the original publication. Two owner’s
inscriptions; original owner was Thomas Buffum, member of early Salem, MA Quaker
family who owned the house this collector grew up in (The Buffum House, on Buffum
Street). Leather binding with gilded black labels on spines; three of the four boards
rejoined to spine with glue. Foxing throughout.

Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States. *The Methodist Harmonist*. Third
Oblong hymnal book for religious services. Unlike predecessor hymnals, which only
provided lyrics, this included both lyrics (only one stanza; the singer was expected to
know the rest from memory) and music; further, it provided separate, harmonized parts
for multiple singers. Includes instructive prefatory section on the “Science of Music” and
how to interpret notation. Marbled boards with leather spine; some foxing throughout.

University of Cambridge, 1825.
Large folio, in Latin, of complicated theological work attributed to this major early
modern poet and writer; edited by the clergyman who was personal librarian to King
George IV and would later himself become Bishop of Winchester. The manuscript of *De
Doctrina Christiana* was discovered in the State Paper Office at Whitehall in 1823.
Sumner’s edition was the first publication of the text (thus this copy is a “first published
edition” of a work by Milton); it was accompanied by his own translation published in
the same year. Frontispiece provides facsimile reproductions of extracts from the original
manuscript. Includes brief preface by Sumner and publisher’s advertisement for two other
works (one a sermon and the other a theological work by Sumner). Bookplate of Leonard
Brassey, relation of Earl Thomas Brassey; owner’s inscription of modern owner. Red
dges to paper; blue ribbon page-marker. Leather binding and gilded title, decorations on
spine (title erroneously describes contents as “Milton’s Prose Works” and “Vol. III” of
the two-volume set listed below); spine crumbling slightly, both front and rear boards
detached. Internally, however, text block is tight and in excellent condition.

Revised edition of Birch’s 1738 collected works of this major early modern poet and
writer; large folio volumes. Frontispiece to Vol. I is bust portrait of Milton. Contents
include biography and essays on Milton’s writing. Bookplate of Leonard Brassey,
relation of Earl Thomas Brassey; owner’s inscription of modern owner. Red edges to paper; ribbon page-markers. Leather binding and gilded titles, decorations on spines; spines severely deteriorated (inexpert attempt to repair with tape at some point), front board with first gathering of Vol. I detached. Internally, however, text block is tight and in excellent condition. Binding not original; likely provided by later owner to make matching three-volume set with *De Doctrina Christiana* (see above).

Extremely popular revenge tragedy adapted from a French translation of an ancient Chinese epic; staged at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and featured famed actor David Garrick in the role of Zamti (“a Mandarine”). The binding is later, likely late nineteenth century: an opportunity to explain the practice of rebinding and the dangers in judging the age of a book by its cover alone.


Enormously popular reading and elocation textbook dedicated to John Quincy Adams; first published in 1844. Filled with numerous examples, passages, and rules relating to proper English pronunciation. Concludes with testimonial advertisements printed on different stock. Many pages missing, including final leaf of the preface, first leaf of the testimonials, and the entire title-page. Owner’s inscriptions establish *terminus ad quem* of 1855. Soft full calf binding; boards very loose.

**Smith, John Thomas. *A Book for a Rainy Day*. London: Richard Bentley, 1845.**

**Staniford, Daniel. The Art of Reading. Boston: West & Richardson, 1817.**
Twelfth edition of widely-used textbook on reading, elocution, and general decorum; presents selections of both original and reprinted speeches, dialogues, and “harangues” in a variety of genres as samples for exercises. Heavily used copy bearing several early owner’s marks; boards once covered in gray paper, now almost entirely exposed wood.

Volumes XI-XIII of Cooke’s Edition of Select Novels, Or, Novelist’s Pocket Library, a series Cooke published between 1770 and 1800. Starts with a brief account of Sterne’s life and his book’s history. Includes some illustrative plates and the peculiar typographic features of the original printing of the comic novel, including a marbled page and blank page. Well-read copies stamped with owner’s name (T. Greaves); one volume’s spine inexpertly repaired with tape.

**Taylor, Rev. Isaac. Scenes in Asia for the Amusement and Instruction of Little Tarry-at-Home Travellers. Hartford: Silas Andrus, 1830.**
Small book of traveler’s tales, myths, pseudo-geography, and prints of (largely imagined) action-packed scenes from around Asia, the Middle East, and the south Pacific. Well-read copy with some spine damage and most of the frontispiece map torn out. Part of a long tradition of fictitious travel narratives presented as fact in the service of religious ends.

New edition of collected works of the major national poet of ancient Rome, along with essays by leading eighteenth-century classics scholars; first published in 1753. Contents include *Aeneid* (trans. Christopher Pitt) and the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, with notes (trans. by Joseph Warton). Essays by Holdsworth, Spence, and (new to this edition) Heyne (from his 1771 edition of Virgil’s works); also the following essays: on Book VI of *Aeneid* by Warburton, on Aeneas’s shield by Whitehead, on the character of Iapis by Atterbury (Bishop of Rochester), and three on the genres of pastoral, didactic, and epic poetry by Warton. Vol. I begins with dedication, advertisement, and then a biography and (Latin) chronology. Illustrated frontispieces and engravings throughout, including large fold-out illustration of Aeneas’s shield to accompany Whitehead’s essay (Vol. III) and fold-out map of Aeneas’s journeys around the Mediterranean at the start of Vol. IV. Inserted into Vol. I is newspaper clipping on Virgil from 1847. Marbled flyleaves and pastedowns; leather binding with gilded border, compartments on spine with gilded decoration and titles. Foxing throughout all volumes; front board of Vols. I, II, and IV detached, all others very loose. Owner’s inscription and, in Vols. II-IV, bookplate of Benjamin C. Ridgate (London attorney who moved to Baltimore in the 1830s).
Webster, Samuel. *Young Children and Infants declared by Christ Members of his Gospel Church or Kingdom*. Salem: Samuel and Ebenezer Hall, 1773.
First edition of pamphlet defending the baptism of children (though “plunging not necessary”) in the form of two “discourses” delivered to the West Congregation of the Massachusetts town of Salisbury on September 20th, 1772. Good example of colonial printing from the first print shop in Salem (the third in Massachusetts), operated by two brothers, one of whom trained under Ben Franklin. Epigraphs from Justin Martyr and Iraeneus (with notes) on title page; preface from Webster before content. 54 pages in quarto. Unidentifiable early newspaper scrap inserted. Front sheet of wrapper with title and ornaments, repaired with stitching; also one leaf internal repaired with stitching. Worn leather spine stitched on (partially missing) with additional stitching in paper beneath; edges of pages very ragged and final leaf very chipped and torn. Owner’s inscription “P. Livermore”, undated.