
The APHA Newsletter

A Publication of the American Printing History Association

October–December 1995 No. 122



Martin Hutner, APHA President

APHA Twentieth Annual Conference

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Printing: The Book In Jefferson's Virginia and the Early Republic

CHARLOTTESVILLE 20-22 OCTOBER 1995

The early birds were able to arrive at beautiful Charlottesville before the deluge, which flooded out the low-lying corner between the conference hotel and Alderman Library, site of Friday's opening reception, making apparent the distinction between those who pack lightly and those who travel with extra pairs of shoes. It was well worth braving the raging waters, however, to bask in the presence of fellow APHA types and enjoy the buffet supper and the Bibliographical Fair skillfully engineered

by Terry Belanger and the Book Arts Press faithful. Bookish videos, exhibits of some of the Press's collections, and hands-on demonstrations of printing on a common press put everyone in the proper mood for the main event.

The weather improved on Saturday, when some 88 attendees were greeted by program chair Terry Belanger, who told us it was Martin Hutner who came up with the now-obvious idea to center the conference on Thomas Jefferson, the mastermind of the University of Virginia.

Thomas Jefferson and the Book Arts, David Whitesell

Surrounded as we were by the beauty and simplicity of Jefferson's Virginia during the conference, David Whitesell, of the firm Richard C. Ramer Old & Rare Books, New York City, gave us a glimpse of the inner man. As a result of his research into Jefferson's writings, and those of his biographers, Whitesell presented Jefferson as a discerning and conscientious bookman. Whitesell's talk covered Jefferson and the physical book, his interaction with the book trades, and his interest in technical innovation.

Biographer Millicent Sowerby wrote that Jefferson was interested in the content of books and not in typographic treasures. From Jefferson's writings Whitesell learned that his preferences in books extended to: their size, ably bound in handy sizes over folios or quartos; their composition, for roman letterforms, their roundness and symmetry; and their form, for typography that emphasized clarity and restrained elements.

While Jefferson was a prolific writer, very few of his works were in print before his death. Whitesell presented the details of the publication of several editions of his *Notes on the History of Virginia*. As Secretary of State of the United States, Jefferson was responsible for government printing and Whitesell presented evidence of his work with several printers in New York and Philadelphia. Whitesell also described several technical improvements devised by Jefferson for

In Memoriam

It is with deep regret and sadness that we note the death of our past president, Peter Van Wingen, on Sunday, November 26. He was a splendid combination of fine bookman, librarian, scholar, and friend. All the good things

Peter accomplished in life were done with his special, quiet grace. He bore his terrible illness with dignity and admirable fortitude. Peter will be greatly mourned and greatly missed because our world will now be that much poorer for his leaving it.

—Martin Hutner

various copying devices, including a redesigned copying press, reduced in size, that Jefferson carried when he travelled.

Whitesell summed up his talk with a description of Jefferson's view on the book arts. His research showed that plenty of evidence exists to indicate Jefferson's awareness of the elements of the physical book and his concern for the elements of book construction and design, both for the books in his own library and for those he wrote and published.

The Cowl Knows Best What Will Suit in Virginia: Parson Weems on Southern Readers, James Green

In the beginning of the 19th century, Mason Locke Weems roamed the hills and fertile valleys of rural Virginia as sales agent for the Philadelphia booksellers Matthew Carey and, later, Caleb P. Wayne. We may know Weems best for inventing the tale of George Washington and his inability to lie (about a certain cherry tree). This day however, James Green, Assistant Librarian, Library Company of Philadelphia, talked about Weems' success as a booksellers' agent. Green analyzed a body of correspondence between Weems and his employers. It seems that Weems was a colorful correspondent as he was an author, and his letters were full of advice to the booksellers about the needs and desires of southern readers, the salability of books, and book distribution techniques. Green's talk was peppered with Weems' witticisms and anecdotes.

Green was able to extract from Weems' correspondence a quantity of advice on the nature of book selling, the importance of price in the salability of an edition, and the nature of markup and market structure in the Philadelphia book trade. Green described the geography of the small southern towns, the political structure of the community, and the strength of the patriarchal network in the literary marketplace. Though it was commonly known that women and children were the readers, the selections were made by men, and the texts had to be in their best interest. Green pointed out that even in Weems' own moralistic tales the discrepancy between entertaining the reader and conveying moral instruction was apparent. Green developed throughout his talk Weems' belief that selling good books was good business. Green provided the audience with plenty of proof that Weems went about his business providing the southern reading public with plenty of good books.

At this point, we broke for lunch. Walking a short distance over now-dry ground, many of us took advantage of the time to visit the famous Rotunda and see the exhibit "Wastepaper-basket Archeology: Printed Ephemera from the Collection of Calvin P. Otto," an extensive display of a large variety of materials. After lunch, there was time to see the display in the McGregor Room, "Arise and Build! A Centennial Commemoration of the 1895 Rotunda Fire: before settling in for the final papers.

Jefferson's Library, Douglas Wilson

After lunch, Douglas L. Wilson, Director of the International Center for Jefferson Studies of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, spoke on "Thomas Jefferson and his Library." He described Jefferson as a bibliophile from childhood. A family story claimed he had read all the books in his father's library by the age of five.

Jefferson began collecting as a schoolboy, inherited his father's collection at the age of 14, and never stopped buying. He lost his collection a few years after starting his law practice, and despaired of representing his clients adequately without his references. But by 1783, he had over 2600 volumes. During his years in Paris, 1784-1789, he doubled the size of his collection. At the time he offered to sell his library to Congress, after theirs burned in 1814, he had 6700 volumes, an incredible size for the day. He retained hundreds of volumes, in a different house, that formed the beginning of his last collection, numbering some 1600 volumes at his death.

His collection was not merely large, but carefully chosen in law, politics, history, philosophy, literature, the fine arts, and Jefferson's special delight, the classics, which he saw as full of knowledge as well as wisdom. His books were not just a collection, but the library in which he committed "prodigies of reading" in an imposing array of languages.

Because he used his books so extensively, he cataloged them and had an organizational scheme, referred to as "a blueprint of Jefferson's mind." This classification scheme was adopted by the Library of Congress when they brought his library.

Most of Jefferson's books have been destroyed by fire since his day, but his library is still well-known, if under-studied. And what, Wilson asked, would give Jefferson more pleasure than knowing that his collection would continue to be discussed by generations after him?

Robert Simpson, Rosalind Remer

Rosalind Remer, Assistant Professor of History at Moravian College, discussed a printer of Jefferson's time in "From Apprentice to Publisher in the New Republic: the Case of Robert Simpson." Simpson left Scotland for the United States in 1788. His father, a master carpenter, gave him a good education, but in Philadelphia, Simpson apprenticed himself to a printer by the name of Brown, as he saw no chance to live by clerking. His formal education was of use to him as a printer, however, and he hoped to raise himself back above artisan status. The times were hard; he complained of abuse by his master, and even took him to court. Printing in the U.S. had fewer rules than in Britain, but it was very hard for journeymen to find work, and especially to make it to master status, leading to great turnover. Brown's saw 150 journeymen in three years. In the first couple of decades of the 19th century, the journeymen tried to reduce the numbers of apprentices making journeyman status.

When Simpson left Brown's as a journeyman, he found work, but found it very hard; the hours long, the money short. Worried that he would never make master status in either America or Scotland, he looked to publishing to get the money to return home rich and set himself above the artisan level. With two friends, he published the eight volume a new edition of *The World Displayed* by subscription. Remer pointed out how radical this decision by a journeyman printer to publish a book was, and how it shows the structures of the book trade breaking down in the new Republic.

Subscription publishing was popular at the time, and was the only way for these entrepreneurs to get started. They were to publish 48 parts of 80 pages each, using the money collected for the early numbers to support the later ones. They found 1463 subscribers, including Thomas Jefferson, and used the subscription list as collateral with the printer and engraver. Gathering subscriptions, and keeping them, was very hard work, but Simpson was able eventually to buy out his partners.

In 1796, he published a second work, Captain John Carver's travels in the US, also by subscription. He could sign up subscribers while taking *The World Displayed* around, but the second book was apparently harder to sell.

Simpson did fairly well, however — tired of America, he was able to move back to Scotland with enough money to buy a farm. Unfortunately, on the way home, the boat he was on with his cargo of barrel staves and pot ash broth with his nest egg, was taken by French privateers off Ireland. Simpson retained \$2000 hidden under the floorboards of the boat, and put in an insurance claim on his lost cargo. he remained an entrepreneur in Scotland, speculating in real estate and establishing himself as a printer and publisher, producing school books until his retirement from publishing in 1823 at the age of 51.

Oh, Mr. Jefferson, Roger Stoddard

Roger Stoddard, Curator of Rare Books, Harvard College Library, expounded to the plaintive theme of, "Oh, Mr. Jefferson, After All these Years, Why Do We Know So Little About the Books of Your Time?" Many of us know about specific books through indexes, bibliographies and photographs. Unfortunately, the information contained in such sources is often incomplete, misleading, or false. If you want to know a book, you had better examine it closely yourself. Even then, the observable information does not always tell the truth. Using the works of several eighteenth-century poets, Stoddard explained the problem.

Correct information as to the place and date of the production of a book as well as the true identity of its author are often very hard to come by. Books are controlled by language, laws, and beliefs as well as their physical properties. For a variety of reasons, persons involved with their production sometimes felt it necessary to conceal their identities. The true identity of the printer is not always provided. Bindings of the same texts may contain important information but they may also be replacements.

The only way to solve these problems is by studying as many books in a particular area as possible, examining the paper, printing, and all other details together with advertisements and other documentary evidence thereby producing new and accurate information. It is an enormous task, but if APHA members do not do it, no one else will.

Elton Hall

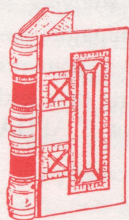
After this call to arms, we repaired once again to the Book Arts Press rooms to continue the conversation. Discussion continued over dinner at Charlottesville's many restaurants, so that some of us had difficulty making the 7:30 a.m. bus on Sunday morning to Monticello, where we took the tour, lingering in the rooms which held Jefferson's library in his inventive (need you ask) bookboxes-cum-bookcases, admiring the genius which allows the tour guide to proudly point out the books left on the dining-room mantelpiece for snatched reading while waiting for dinner. We then wandered the grounds before returning home, having heard much about Jefferson, his ideas and his books, and seen their physical remains on the University of Virginia campus and at his estate.

Many thanks are due to Terry Belanger, Program Chair, and Heather Moore, Local Arrangements Chair, for a well-produced conference. Thanks also to those who helped produce the entertainment: Catherine Boyd, Peter-john Byrnes, James Davis, David Ferris, Melissa Kirsch, and Kelly Tetterton.

Editorial thanks to Elton Hall for the description of Roger Stoddard's talk.



The Editorial Committee of *The APHA Newsletter* welcomes your news, announcements, comments and corrections. *The Newsletter* is published four times yearly by the American Printing History Association. Subscriptions are through membership in APHA. Individual memberships for the calendar year are \$30; \$35 for Institutions; \$60 for Contributing memberships; \$15 for Student memberships. Included in that membership is a subscription to *Printing History*, APHA's semiannual scholarly journal. Advertising in the journal is available at \$250 for a full page. APHA's mailing list can be rented for one-time use at \$100. Address all correspondence to APHA, P.O. Box 4922, Grand Central Station, New York NY 10163-4922. Copyright © 1994 by the American Printing History Association. All rights reserved.



Book Talk

There's a term in literature called "romantic irony," in which the piece of fiction deliberately seeks to destroy, through various devices, the illusion that it is reality and not a story being told. Perhaps there also ought to be the term "typographic irony," in which the work of literature calls attention to itself as a printed artifact.

This is more or less the theme of 2 recent books, *Textual Bodies: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Print*, by Michael Kaufmann (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1994. 140 p.), and Claire Hoertz Badaracco's *Trading Words: Poetry, Typography and Illustrated Books in the Modern Literary Economy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 259 p.). Members of this organization will find both books interesting for their different perspectives (neither author is a printing historian), and in the case of Kaufmann's book especially, a little disappointing.

Kaufmann begins his short study with 18th century English literature, referring to, as you might guess, some of the printed elements in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. But the bulk of the argument revolves around William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, and William Gass's *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*. The confines of this column don't permit a detailed analysis of the book. Suffice it to say that the disappointment for this audience will come from the fact that the author presents no illustrative examples of the points he is trying to make. He talks about typographic techniques, but never shows us.

Badaracco's book ranges widely in issues of 20th century typography, looking at the conscious use of graphics for marketing literature of all kinds. Topics include the importance of typography in advertising, where at times the layout is a more important reality than the text itself, *Poetry* magazine, Erza Pound, *Monotype* (with a cute picture of Beatrice Ward as a Barnard College undergraduate), R.R. Donnelley, and limited edition illustrated books.

If all of this seems a bit disjointed, it is. Although the work does not present itself as a collection of individual essays, that's what it seems to be. The connection among them, other than the very general one of early 20th century typography, is not always clear. The book does contain plenty of visual examples, although not always the ones that the reader wants. Nonetheless, Badaracco gives us plenty of food for thought about the meaning of modern graphic design.

Philip A. Metzger

Exhibitions and Events:

SAN FRANCISCO AREA, CA

Pacific Center for the Book Arts present Evening & Weekends: structured salon-like gatherings to share work and meet other members. March 3, 2-4 p.m., featuring Mary Laird, Jocelyn Bergen, and David Lance Goines, and May 5, 2-4 p.m., featuring Kathleen Burch, Jaime Robles, and Dorothy Yule. For more information, call Alisa Golden (510) 527-1767.

NORTHAMPTON, MA

"Books Illustrated: A Symposium Celebrating the Work of Ruth Mortimer" will be held at Smith College, on April 12-13, 1996. The symposium will highlight four aspects of Ruth Mortimer's work: collecting, scholarship, teaching and librarianship. Barry Moser will give the opening address. G. Thomas Tanselle will also be among the featured speakers. The symposium is open to all. For more information, contact Mary Irwin, Neilson Library, Smith College, Northampton, MA 02063. (413) 585-2903.

NEW YORK, NY

"Poets in A War," December 6, 1995 - February 17, 1996 and "Lithography's Faces: the First Generation," March 5 - May 4, 1996. Both exhibits open to the public at the Grolier Club, Monday - Saturday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

PROVIDENCE, RI

"Sure Guides, New Systems, and Practical Methods: How-To Books from the Colonial World." October 25, 1995 - March 1, 1996 at the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.



New Members

David A. Berona, North Berwick, ME	F.J. Levy, Seattle, WA
Robin Brabham, Newell, NC	Philip E. Lewis, Glandale, CA
Barbara A. Brannon, Columbia, SC	Rod McDonald, North York, Ontario CANADA
La Nina M. Clayton, New York, NY	Roberta Malmgren, Culver City, CA
Michèle V. Cloonan, Northampton, MA	Matthias Otto, Berlin, GERMANY
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