

A M E R I C A N B O O K B I N D I N G S

An Exhibition in the Lobby  
of the Firestone Memorial Library  
of Bindings in the  
Department of Rare Books and Special Collections  
of the Princeton University Library  
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Princeton  
Princeton University Library  
Princeton, N. J.

Case 1

AMERICAN BOOKBINDINGS

As you can see from the examples in these cases, bookbinders have developed the binding far beyond mere protection. They have decorated the binding, making it a work of art in its own right. The binding now dazzles the eye, attracts the curious, and enhances the material bound within.

A book is essentially a pile of folded sheets of paper which have been printed on both sides and joined together. While the flexibility of paper makes it an excellent medium for printing, such flexibility does not allow for the long term safekeeping of paper. Hence, the pile of joined sheets needs a protective sheath and over the years the traditional codex binding has provided such protection.

1. A SERMON ON MAN'S PRIMITIVE STATE:  
AND THE FIRST COVENANT delivered before the Reverend  
Presbytery of New-Castle, April 13th 1748.

By Samuel Davies, Minister of the Gospel.

Philadelphia: Printed by William Bradford, at  
the sign of the Bible, in Second-Street. 1748.

Ed 5959.286

2. THE ANNALS OR HISTORY OF YALE-COLLEGE,  
in New Haven, in the colony of Connecticut,  
from the first founding thereof, in the year 1700,  
to the year 1766: with an appendix, containing  
the present state of the college, the method of  
instruction and government, with the officers,  
benefactors and graduates.

By Thomas Clap, A. M. President of the said  
college.

New Haven: Printed for John Hotchkiss and  
B. Mecom. 1766.

WIT 6628.256

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American binders of the Colonies had local traditions. As these two examples show, Boston (and other New England) binders made their covers from thin wooden boards with a horizontal grain. Philadelphia binders usually used pasteboard. In the Colonies, great numbers of books and pamphlets came from the printers unbound. The decision to bind a book was usually made by the purchaser. The customary material for an eighteenth century American binding was sheep, plain, uncolored and with suede side turned inward.

3. MORAL & INSTRUCTIVE TALES FROM THE IMPROVEMENT OF YOUNG LADIES calculated to amuse the mind and form the heart to virtue. First American edition.

Printed at Leominster. By Charles Prentiss.  
1797.

Ex 3580.647

4. SCHOOL DIALOGUES a new selection of dialogues, from a variety of the best plays in the English language. Designed for the use of schools and academies.

By Samuel B. Morse, A. M.

Printed at Boston, by Manning & Loring, for Thomas & Andrews. . . . Jan. 1797.

Ex3593.654

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These two black morocco bindings were done in Boston perhaps in 1736. They cover two funeral sermons for the wife of Jonathan Belcher, then Governor of Massachusetts-Bay, later Governor of New Jersey and benefactor of Princeton University (then College of New Jersey). Such somber bindings were evidently only a part of the elaborate material culture of New England funerals. Other aspects included mourning rings for the hands of the bereaved, leather gloves, printed sermons usually distributed in wrappers inked black, and a feast.

5. Thomas Prince. Christ Abolishing Death. . . . Boston: Printed by J. Draper, for D. Henchman, 1736.  
Mather Byles. To His Excellency Governor Belcher on the Death of his Lady. An Epistle. [Boston, 1736.]

Two volumes in one. Quarto, 9 x 7 inches. Black morocco, blind-tooled. Five raised cords on back, board edges and turn-ins blind-tooled, comb-marbled endpapers, edges stained black. Thick paper copies.

Provenance: Inscribed, "J. Belcher": "Mary Emelia Elizabeth Jennison, presented to her by her Honored Father in the year 1775" (her mother's funeral sermon and elegy). Bookplate of Jonathan Belcher. ?

(Ex) 1080.162.737 cop. 1 and cop. 2.

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Red straight-grained morocco, gilt- and blind-tooled by J. Katez, Philadelphia, about 1815. It was bound for Mrs. Julia Rush, the wife of Benjamin Rush, the great Philadelphia physician and member of the Princeton Class of 1760. Julia was the eldest daughter of Richard Stockton of Princeton.

6. Elias Boudinot. The Second Advent. Trenton: D. Fenton and S. Hutchinson, 1815.

Octavo, 8 1/8 x 5 3/8 inches, red straight-grained morocco, gilt- and blind-tooled, gilt board edges and turn-ins, green endpapers with leather hinges.

Provenance. Stamped, "Mrs. Julia Rush" in gilt at bottom of spine. Carroll Atwood Wilson (bookplate). R. Esmerian, Parke-Bernet, October 13, 1970, Lot. 34.

(Ex) 5794.202

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The Holy Bible printed in Trenton in 1791 and bound in Philadelphia by James Muir, one-time apprentice of Robert Aitken. For America, colored and decorated bindings, date only after 1760 and such extra gilt bindings were not common or in great demand in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. In fact, the demand for elaborate decoration did not really develop until the nineteenth century. As late as 1790 Mathew Carey (Philadelphia bookseller) complained to a Dublin bookseller that he could not sell a gilt spine for a shilling more than a plain one.

7. The Holy Bible. Trenton: Isaac Collins, 1791.

Quarto, 10 1/2 x 8 3/8 inches, ~~tree calf with red morocco title label~~, gilt board edges, marbled endpapers, ~~gilt edges~~.

Bound by James Muir, Philadelphia. Muir worked for Robert Aitken in 1775, and their continuing association is illustrated by Muir's use of an Aitken tool here. The scroll in the spine panel of the Bible is identical to that in the lower corners of the board of the Aitken Blair (1784).

Provenance. ~~Inscribed "The within sheets were presented to James Ewing as an acknowledgment for his attention in correcting the Press. Trenton, August 1st, 1792, By the Printer." Carroll Atwood Wilson (bookplate).~~

Ex 5179.1791

*E. Bowdoin's copy; Bible (both interleaved)*

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Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations bound for George Washington by James Muir, one of several skilled Scottish binders who emigrated to Philadelphia just before the Revolution.

References. M. Papantonio, "A Note on the Binding of Smith's Wealth of Nations," Princeton University Library Chronicle, XXXII, no. 2 (Winter, 1971).

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## Case 2

An edition of Aristophanes printed in Philadelphia in 1822. The book displays the American fashion of "marbleizing" which is commonly encountered in the decoration of mantelpieces and woodwork in American homes at this time.

8. ARISTOPHANES  
The works of the British Poets, with lives of the Authors. Edited by Robert Walsh, Jr. Translations. [Two volumes]

Philadelphia: published by Samuel F. Bradford, for John Laval, Philadelphia; James Eastburn, New-York; and Charles Ewer & Timothy Bedlington, Boston. William Brown, Printer. 1822.

Graphic Arts

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During the nineteenth century, bookbinding was greatly mechanized. Special stamping devices, chromolithography, and special materials (such as celluloid) made possible such elaborate bindings as these.

9. OH, WHY SHOULD THE SPIRIT OF MORTAL BE PROUD?  
By William Knox. Boston, 1883  
Illustrated by Miss L. B. Humphrey

A remarkable example of a gift-book in its original printed dust-jacket, with the original center-board to protect the fringed edges. This poem was Lincoln's favorite and was widely reprinted in various formats.

(ExMe) 3816.854.368

10. FRISK AND HIS FLOCK.  
New York, 1876  
By Mrs. D. P. Sanford

A brilliant example of its period, this volume is a curious blend of the old and the contemporary. The blocking and letter reflect older schools, but the roundel of Frisk and the chromolithograph set into the cover represent the taste of 1876.

"Elsie in the Play-room" is a typical illustration; all children in Victorian books seem to have had hydrocephalic tendencies. The initial letters for chapters are directly inspired by Pickering examples of forty years earlier.

(Walters) 1858-59, no 664; (ExMe) 3596.804.1876

11. WHAT IS WORTH WHILE?  
By Anna Robertson Brown. New York, 1893

Violets and flourishes, with fancy gold lettering and a white silk bow, on a celluloid cover with crinkled edges lined with gold. The pamphlet contains an inspirational address delivered to the Philadelphia branch of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae. Mrs. Brown decided that among the worth-while things are work, happiness, friendship, and faith.

(ExMe) 6336.589

12. HARRY BRADFORD'S CRUSADE  
By Joanna H. Mathews. New York, 1883

The designer of this binding is not known. Aqua cloth, blocked in gold, black, and red-brown: note the "Gothic" initial H, combined with the photographic realism of some of the other elements.

The illustrations, all of the High Sentimental school, usually feature children and animals in heart-touching situations.

(ExMe) 3851.75.343

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Publishers' salesmen used a sample like this when showing their wares to retail booksellers. This sample dates from ca. 1900 and was issued by Street and Smith, New York publishers established in 1855 and dubbed by one writer as "The Fiction Factory".

13. Street and Smith Bindings/Salesman's Sample Display/Ca. 1900. [Spine label on green slipcase; Metzdorf Collection]

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The showiness of a bookbinding had definite cash value and publishers found ways to turn profits with decorated books. This is a book salesman's sample book, complete with a portion of the text, sample binding styles, and leaflets for a canvasser about how to use the book during a sales presentation.

14. DEPARTMENTS or the manners, conduct, and dress of the most refined American society. . . .

Compiled from the latest reliable authorities.  
Detroit, Michigan. F. B. Dickerson & Co. 1880

Loaned by Stephen Ferguson

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"Table-Books" were volumes intended to be placed on the table -- in this case, the parlor table or the library table, where all visitors might see them and thus realize that they were visiting a truly cultured home.

The bindings were ornate -- in some cases, downright flashy -- and the decoration was repeated on both covers, so that if by chance a startled guest replaced the book wrong-side-down, it was still right-side-up.



15. A FOREST HYMN  
ExMe 3649.6.335

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Case 3

BINDINGS DESIGNED BY MARGARET ARMSTRONG

Working as a free-lance artist, Margaret Armstrong (1867-1944) designed more than 200 trade bindings for Scribners and other publishers between the 1880's and the 1920's. She has been called the single dominating figure in this branch of design in this period. Although indebted to European art nouveau and to the work of such English artists as Walter Crane, Charles Ricketts and Laurence Housman, Armstrong succeeded in creating an individual and distinctly American style, characterized by a wide range of colored cloths and colored inks (often combining many different colors on a single binding) and a lavish use of gold leaf.

16. PIPPA PASSES  
By Robert Browning  
(ExMe) 3647.372.1900
17. POEMS OF CABIN AND FIELD  
By Paul Laurence Dunbar  
1904  
Graphic Arts

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Two bindings by Christine Hamilton of New York (d. 1968). She studied in Paris and New York; her bindings were exhibited at the World's Fair in San Francisco in 1939 and several times thereafter in New York. Her husband was Sinclair Hamilton, Class of 1906, donor of the

Library's important collection of early American illustrated books. Together, they strongly supported the work of the Library for many years.

18. EPOCHS OF CHINESE & JAPANESE ART  
By Ernest F. Fenollosa

Volume 1 and 2

New York; Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers.

Graphic Arts

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Elaborate red morroco binding by the Club Bindery of New York done about 1910. The Bindery was established by the Grolier Club, the nation's first book collecting club, in order to patronize the craft and fulfill the members' need for fine binding of their libraries.

19. FRAGMENTA AUREA  
By Sir John Suckling

Printed by Humphrey Moseley, London.

Gift of Howard Behrman in 1982.  
(Ex) 3948.7.335 cop.2.

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20. Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884) with drawings by Elihu Vedder as well as binding design. This is the book that made Vedder famous. Copy no. 14 of an edition limited to 100 copies. Full morroco stamped in gold.

Graphic Arts, Hamilton Collection