

The New-England Psalm-Singer, 1770

REVERE'S engraving for William Billings's *New-England Psalm-Singer* in 1770 was his largest undertaking. It consisted of an engraved frontispiece and a total of 116 pages of engraved music. The title-page of the book, enclosed in a border of type ornaments, is as follows:

The/ New-England Psalm-Singer:/ or,/ American Chorister./ Containing/ A Number of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems and Canons./ In Four and Five Parts./ [Never before Published.]/ Composed by William Billings,/ A Native of Boston, in New-England./ [Four lines of quotations.] Boston: New-England. Printed by Edes and Gill./ And to be Sold by them at their Printing-Office in Queen-Street; by Deacon Elliot, under Liberty-Tree;/ by Josiah Flagg, in Fish-Street; by Gillam Bass, the Corner of Ann-Street, and by the Author./ [Price Eight Shillings, L.M.].

The size of the volume is $6\frac{1}{4}$ high by $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. The collation is as follows:

Frontispiece
Title-page
Page 2, Preface
Pages 3-9, Essay on Sound
Page 10, poem "On Music," by Rev. Dr. Byles
Blank page
Pages 1-8, engraved music
Page 8 reverse, blank
Pages 9-21, text of Introduction to Rules of Music
Page 22, New-England Hymn, by Rev. Dr. Byles
Pages 1-108, engraved music
Page 109, text of explanation
Page [110], Hymn by Rev. Mr. Whitefield
Page [111], Alphabetical List of Tunes (generally pasted on back cover)

William Billings's preface is dated October 7, 1770. On page 21 of the Introduction is inserted the following Advertisement: "To the generous Subscribers for this Book. The Author having to his great Loss deferred the Publication of these Sheets for Eighteen Months, to have them put upon American Paper, hopes the Delay will be pardoned; and the good Ladies, Heads of the Families, into whose Hands they may fall, will zealously endeavour to furnish the Paper Mills with all the Fragments of Linnen they can possibly afford: Paper being the Vehicle of Literature, and Literature the Spring and Security of human Happiness."

Edes and Gill, in their *Boston Gazette* of December 10, 1770, announce the publication as follows:

WILLIAM BILLINGS

Takes this Method to inform the Public, that his Composition of Church-Musick intituled, The New England PSALM SINGER, is published, and to be had at Edes and Gill's Printing Office in Queen Street; at Deacon Elliot's under Liberty-Tree; at Mr. Josiah Flagg's in Fish-Street; and at Mr. Gillam Bass's, near the Flat Conduit — where Subscribers and other Purchasers may apply for Books. — Those Persons that have Subscription Papers in their Hands, are desired to leave them at Edes and Gill's Office; and in so doing, they will oblige their humble Servant,

WILLIAM BILLINGS,

P. S. Any Gentlemen Subscribers, or others that incline to purchase, who reside in the County of Plymouth, may be supply'd by applying to Capt. Joseph Cushing in Hanover, rear North-River Bridge.

This advertisement was occasionally repeated in subsequent issues until the spring of 1771. Deacon John Eliot was a bookseller, whose place of business was next to the Tree of Liberty. He was a deacon of the Hollis Street Church, and died November 14, 1771, aged eighty-one (Thomas's *History of Printing*, 1874 edition, Volume 2, page 223). Josiah Flagg, in addition to his early trade of jeweller, was a composer of church music and it was he who had compiled the *Collection of the best Psalm Tunes*, published at Boston in 1764, for which Revere had engraved the plates. He was later a concert manager and in 1773 established a band which gave several concerts in Faneuil Hall (see F. L. Ritter's *Music in America*, 1883, page 44, and J. T. Howard's *Our American Music*, third edition, 1946,

page 64). Gillam Bass, born 1746 and died 1816, was a prominent patriot and a member of the Committee of Correspondence.

William Billings, author of the book, was the pioneer American composer. Born in Boston, October 7, 1746, and died September 29, 1800, he was a tanner by trade and a self-taught musician. He published six collections of music, became a music teacher and choir-master, and influenced music in New England more than anyone of the eighteenth century (see N. D. Gould's *Church Music in America*, 1853, pages 42-51; F. L. Ritter's *Music in America*, 1883, pages 56-68; F. J. Metcalf's *American Writers of Sacred Music*, 1925, pages 51-64; L. C. Elson's *History of American Music*, 1925, pages 12-19; J. T. Howard's *Our American Music*, third edition, 1946, pages 49-57; Raymond Morin's "William Billings" in *New England Quarterly*, Volume 14, page 30).

Revere's frontispiece shows seven men seated around a table, with singing-books before them. Around the scene is a staff of music, engraved in an oval and consisting of a canon in six parts. The words are not here repeated, as they are shown in Plate number 25. The plate is signed "P Revere sculp." The size of the print to the outside of the engraving is $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, by $6\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide. There is every reason to believe that Revere designed as well as engraved the plate, as the drawing is crude and no English original is known. Revere engraved all of the music for the book, both staff and words, one hundred and sixteen pages in all. No charge for the engraving appears in Revere's Day Book, nor is any bill for the work known. A comparison to show the approximate cost of the engraving can be made from Revere's charge of £ 150 for one half of engraving the copper plates for Josiah Flagg's *Collection of Psalm Tunes* published in 1765, a book of sixty-six pages.

The known copies of *The New-England Psalm-Singer* are as follows:

American Antiquarian Society. Two copies. One is perfect, in original binding, and the frontispiece, which has wide margins, is here reproduced. It was purchased from C. F. Heartman, April 4, 1925. The second copy was bought by Perry Walton from Thomas J. Taylor of Taunton in 1928, sold to Mrs. Nathaniel Thayer in 1929, and came to Edward H. R. Revere after Mrs. Thayer's death in 1934. In June, 1951, Mr. Revere presented the volume to the American Anti-

quarian Society in memory of Pauline Revere Thayer. It is perfect, in original binding, except that the lower line of the frontispiece is slightly shaved.

William L. Clements Library. Two copies. One is complete, in original binding, but modern marbled paper on the boards, containing the inscription "Poley Pitcher, Her Book; Peter Read Singing Master of Attleborough 1778," received as a gift from Fannie Read Cook in 1937. The other copy lacks only pages 97-108, and is in original binding — source untraced.

John Carter Brown Library. Complete copy. Bought in 1944 from Goodspeed's Book Shop. Although perfect and in original covers, the lower line on the frontispiece is worn, affecting a few letters.

Boston Public Library. Complete. Purchased at E. B. Holden Sale at American Art Association, April 21, 1910. The Holden copy lacked pages 97-108 which, however, were supplied in 1940 from an imperfect copy.

Library of Congress. Two imperfect copies. One, lacking only pages 97-108, was the Manson-Appleton copy bought at Libbie's, May 15, 1906. The other, lacking only pages 109-[110], was bought at the Fabyan Sale at the American Art Association, February 17, 1920. The two, if put together, would form a perfect copy.

Massachusetts Historical Society. Two imperfect copies. One lacks the frontispiece, pages 109 and [110] at the end of the book, and has the final leaf of Index mutilated. The other copy is only a fragment, but it includes the frontispiece with the lower line shaved at the lower left corner, and the three final pages. The two, if combined, would constitute a perfect copy, except for the slightly imperfect frontispiece.

Huntington Library. Lacks pages 109-[110]. The F. R. Halsey copy acquired in 1915. Mr. Halsey bought it at the M. Stickney Sale at Libbie's, November 25, 1907.

Watkinson Library. Lacks pages 89-96, 99-102, 109-[111]. Obtained many years ago from Charles Wells of Hartford.

Yale University. Lacks title-page, pages 1, 6-7, of the first section of engraved music, and pages 109-[110] of the final text. It was the Lowell Mason copy, which went to Yale in 1873.

New York Public Library. Two copies, both imperfect. One, acquired from the stock of Thomas J. Taylor of Taunton in 1934, lacks the frontispiece, pages 1-8 of preliminary text, pages 1-8, 13-14 of the second paging, and pages 81-88 of the engraved music. The other copy, bought at a Henkels Sale, April 24, 1928, lacks frontispiece, page 1, 6-7 of the second paging, pages 81-82, 87-88, 99-102 of the engraved music, and pages 109-[110] of the final text.

At least seventeen copies of the *New-England Psalm-Singer* have been sold at auction, although some are the same copies sold twice. The collations are frequently misleading, as the cataloguers did not know what constituted a perfect copy. The list of auction sales follows:

- Libbie (Thayer Sale) February 8, 1898 (number 175) \$19. Lacks 8 leaves after page 80.
- Libbie (Manson Sale) March 14, 1899 (number 2811) \$85. Lacks pages 97-108. The copy noted by Goss.
- Libbie (Whipple Sale) April 7, 1903 (number 1250) \$105. Lacks pages at end. 4 pages misbound. Pages 97-108 irregular. *Frontispiece reproduced.*
- Libbie (Bartlett Sale) May 19, 1903 (number 1244) \$226. Complete. Bought by Hartranft. *Frontispiece reproduced.*
- Libbie (Appleton Sale) May 15, 1906 (number 1945) \$135. Contains only 96 pages of engraved music and 3 pages of text at end. Bought by Library of Congress. *Frontispiece reproduced.*
- Libbie (M. Stickney Sale) November 25, 1907 (number 1618) \$140. Lacks pages 109-[110]. Bought by Dodd, Mead Company for F. R. Halsey. *Frontispiece reproduced.*
- Libbie (J. Stickney Sale) March 22, 1910 (number 1440) \$26. Lacks frontispiece and pages 109-[111].
- American Art (Holden Sale) April 21, 1910 (number 2992) \$101. Lacks pages 97-108. Bought by R. Fridenberg.
- Scott & O'Shaughnessy April 22, 1915 (number 490) \$15. Lacks frontispiece, 8 leaves of music and apparently pages 109-[111].
- Scott & O'Shaughnessy December 8, 1916 (number 31) \$240. Bought by G. D. Smith. *Frontispiece reproduced.*
- American Art (Fabyan Sale) February 17, 1920 (number 104) \$210. Complete. Bought by F. Morris for Library of Congress. *Frontispiece reproduced.*

- Heartman April 4, 1925 (number 151) \$203. Apparently the Scott & O'Shaughnessy, 1916, copy.
- Henkels April 24, 1928 (number 852) \$10.50. Lacks frontispiece and pages 81, 87, 99-102. Bought by New York Public Library.
- Ritter March 11, 1931 (number 24) \$95. Lacks frontispiece, pages 65, 109-[110].
- Parke-Bernet December 8, 1939 (number 303) \$45. Lacks leaf I. Autograph of Asa Dyer. Bought by Goodspeed.
- G. A. Baker March 31, 1942 (number 109) \$6. Lacks 4 pages and has other defects. Bought by Aldine Book Company.
- Parke-Bernet November 18, 1946 (number 503) \$150. Plate slightly defective at outer side. Title-page torn. Lacks page [111]. Bought by Goodspeed.

Revere's engraved frontispiece has been reproduced many times, including E. H. Goss's *Life of Paul Revere*, 1891, Volume 1, page 56; W. L. Andrews's *Paul Revere*, 1901, page 61; A. W. H. Eaton's *The Famous Mather Byles*, 1914, page 110; and at least six auction catalogues as noted in the checklist of auction sales. These reproductions were all shown in much reduced form. The only reproduction in exact size was in Raymond Morin's article on William Billings in the *New England Quarterly*, 1941, Volume 14, page 30, and only slightly reduced in Harriet E. O'Brien's *Paul Revere's Own Story*, 1929, page 33.