

THE BOOKPLATE COLLECTION OF THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY  
by  
Georgia Brady Barnhill, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Graphic Arts

The American Antiquarian Society (AAS) is a learned society and research library whose collections focus on the history of British North America from settlement through the centennial year 1876. The collections of the library include a vast amount of research material - books, pamphlets, almanacs, children's literature, newspapers, manuscripts, and an important graphic arts collection including prints, broadsides, music, photographs, and maps. Within the graphic arts department is probably the nation's finest collection of American Bookplates.

The collection of bookplates at the American Antiquarian Society started modestly with the assistance of Herbert E. Lombard in 1914. His collection came to the Society after a fire in his home almost destroyed his library. Although Lombard originally considered his collection on deposit, he soon converted it to an outright gift and continued to improve and secure additions to the collection until his death in 1940. The collection was relatively small; there were about 2,300 plates in the original deposit. Most of the bookplates were engraved after 1850, but the collection did include William Brattle's book label of 1677 as well as examples designed and engraved by Paul Revere, Nathaniel Hurd, and Henry Dawkins. The collection was particularly strong in the plates of Edwin D. French, Arthur N. Macdonald, Sidney L. Smith, J. Winfred Spenceley, and William F. Hopson.

The accumulation started so modestly by Herbert Lombard has grown to number well over 30,000 bookplates. Approximately 20,000 of these are bookplates of individuals. This portion of the collection is arranged alphabetically. Although the Society's library focuses on the period of American history before 1877, this collection does contain twentieth-century bookplates, though the emphasis is most definitely on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The second major division of the collection is that of institutional bookplates. With the exception of a few institutions, this collection is arranged by the name of the town or city in which the library is located. This portion of the collection numbers approximately 11,000 items. There are also about 2,300 English bookplates, 150 Mexican and South American examples, and 75 Hawaiian bookplates.

Additional boxes house the bookplates of Edwin D. French, Arthur N. Macdonald, Sidney L. Smith, J. Winfred Spenceley, William F. Hopson, Dorothy Sturgis Harding, and miscellaneous plates and proofs in smaller numbers of Edmund H. Garrett, Tomothy Cole, F. C. Blank, Arthur Engler, and Samuel Hollyer. It is fortunate that there are separate collections of the works of these designers, because the collection as a whole is not indexed by designer or

engraver. However, Charles Dexter Allen's AMERICAN BOOK-PLATES (1894) is indexed by engraver, and the Society's copy of the book is annotated to reflect the Society's holdings. There is also a collection of typed lists of bookplates by individual designers, probably compiled by Herbert Lombard. They have been annotated by Clarence S. Brigham to reflect the Society's holdings. Of course, many bookplates in the nineteenth century were printed typographically and cannot be readily attributed to a designer or engraver.

The Society continues to collect bookplates. If books acquired by the Society have bookplates in them, the plates are photocopied and added to the collection with information about the provenance of the original plate so that it can be located on the library shelves as necessary. Occasionally, bookplates are purchased from bookdealers.

Housed with the bookplates is the secondary literature about bookplates. Although the focus is clearly on American plates, included are works on West Indian, British, Canadian, as well as European bookplates. Many of these books are illustrated with original bookplates. The shelf arrangement is by author, and the books are catalogued in the main card catalogue. Among periodical titles are volumes I-XVIII of the JOURNAL OF THE EX LIBRIS SOCIETY, THE BOOK OF BOOK PLATES, and THE BOOK-PLATE BOOKLET. In addition to the monographic literature, there is the three-volume catalogue of the British Museum Collection, published in 1903 and 1904.

The history of the Society's bookplate collection is an interesting one. Clearly, Lombard's enthusiasms for bookplates infected Clarence S. Brigham, librarian and later director of the Society from 1908 to 1959, who added substantially to it in the ensuing years. For example, in 1916 the Society purchased the James Terry collection, which included about 10,000 ex libris. Terry (1844-1912) was a man of many interests. His collection of bookplates was linked to his interest in the history of personal and institutional libraries of America. With his collection of bookplates came five boxes of correspondence, most of which pertains to his collection or to the history of New England libraries. Among his correspondents were Charles Dexter Allen, William E. Baillie, Albert C. Bates, William F. Hopson, and Frederick J. Libbie. Additional boxes contain notes on American engravers, original records of several late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Connecticut libraries, and notes on American libraries and bookplates. Two years later, in 1918, the Society exchanged duplicate bookplates with William E. Baillie of Bridgeport, Connecticut. His collection later went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Shortly thereafter, the collection of Frank E. Marshall of Philadelphia was acquired. This collection of some 20,000 plates also came with the collector's notes, adding to the usefulness of the entire collection. Marshall's collection included about 750 eighteenth-century American examples, an astounding number. Prior to this acquisition, the Society had one of the three best collection in the country. Marshall's collection, rich in bookplates of signers of the Declaration of Independence, colonial governors, and eighteenth-century bibliophiles, was one of the other two. Reporting on this acquisition, Clarence Brigham suggested that, after the merger, the duplicates from the two collections would form the fourth largest collection.

Charles Dexter Allen was the leading collector and student of American book-



plates in the late nineteenth century, as evidenced by his published checklist of the genre. Frederick J. Libbie helped the Society acquire Allen's collection and notes for a projected second edition of *AMERICAN BOOK-PLATES* in 1921. The same year Charles Veatch's collection of western American plates arrived.

Herbert Lombard carried on an extensive correspondence with bookplate designers and book collectors to acquire bookplates. Much of this correspondence is preserved in the Society's manuscript department. Numbering nine boxes, it contains innumerable letters to Lombard, as well as correspondence to Clarence Brigham and R. W. G. Vail, the Society's librarian from 1930 to 1939. As a result of Lombard's efforts, designers such as Stanley Harrod, F. C. Blank, Elisha Brown Bird, and Dorothy Sturgis Harding donated examples of their work to AAS.

Edward S. Potter, a physician from Cresco, Pennsylvania, and later Santa Barbara, California, attempted to create a definitive list of American ex libris to 1825 in the early 1920s. The Society has his typed descriptions of the plates he saw in the Baillie Collection and at AAS. The correspondence reveals that Dr. Potter gave up his medical practice in California only to find himself devoting more time than he expected to his three-acre grove of lemon trees. This activity diminished the time available for bookplates, and his list was never completed.

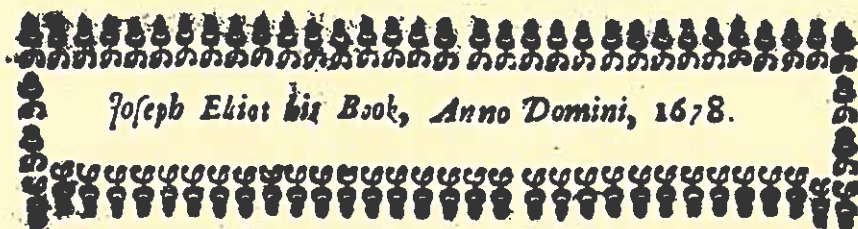
The Society has three important collections of correspondence and works by three bookplate designers - Sidney Lawton Smith (1845-1929), Edwin David French (1851-1906), and Dorothy Sturgis Harding (1891-1978). Within the Society's manuscripts department are six boxes of Smith's correspondence and records, much of which pertains to bookplate commissions. Among his clients were the most important book collectors in America. There is also a record book kept by Smith, with entries describing correspondence concerning orders for bookplates from 1899 to 1928. In the graphic arts department, in addition to a complete set of his bookplates, is a collection of his copperplates, engraving tools, and impressions of his other prints, designs for book illustrations and ornaments, and some sketches for bookplates. From this collection, it is evident that bookplate design was only a portion of this man's artistic work.

In addition to the proofs of Edwin D. French's bookplates in the collection, the manuscripts department has fourteen volumes of correspondence to French from individuals, societies, and institutions concerning commissions for ex libris designs. There are also two scrapbook volumes containing a miscellany of newspaper clippings, programs of exhibits, articles, and obituaries of French. A scrapbook in the bookplate collection contains sketches, proofs, and some design sources, such as photographs for those plates featuring portraits.

In 1978 the Society acquired the papers and designs of Dorothy Sturgis Harding. Since her father's architectural firm designed the building now housing the American Antiquarian Society, it is particularly appropriate that her collection resides in the library. The manuscripts department contains eight boxes of correspondence with her clients and the companies with whom she contracted to print her bookplates. The bookplate collection includes proofs of her bookplates as well as the original artwork for many of them. These major collections of three of the foremost bookplate design-



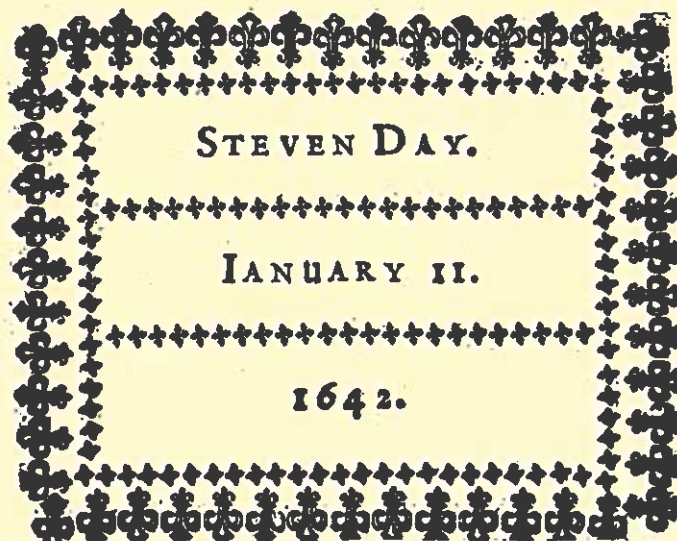
ers are highlights of the collection as a whole, and they provide a wealth of information on the commercial production of bookplates in this century.



(Marshall and Lombard bookplates reduced from oversized prints.)

The Society maintains this collection for several reasons. First, the ex libris are important as examples of engraving and printing. The Colonial examples relate well to our collections of engraved trade cards, maps, views, portraits, and book illustrations. Secondly, the bookplates are the best evidence of the identities of American individual and institutional book collectors. For circulating libraries of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the bookplate may be the only proof of the existence of a given library. Thirdly, the Society considers the provenance of a volume important enough to record this information in the machine-readable cataloguing of the Society's pre-eminent collections of early American imprints. Information on provenance will be accessible through the Society's local system, when it is in place. The evidence of ownership includes bookplates and signatures. That information coupled with the individual bookplates would provide excellent information on book ownership and reading in America.

In 1915 Herbert Lombard suggested to Charles Dexter Allen that the American Antiquarian Society should become the location of the "national collection"



of bookplates. Although nothing formal ever resulted from this suggestion, the collection which resulted from the efforts of Lombard, Brigham, and supporters of the Society in this century must be regarded as a national treasure.

• \_\_\_\_\_ •

Correction: The October 1988 issue of BOOK-PLATES IN THE NEWS was misnumbered; it should be NUMBER SEVENTY-FOUR.

• \_\_\_\_\_ •



