

American Bibliographical Notes

A BOGUS BOSTON IMPRINT YIELDS AN UNRECORDED TITLE

The first comprehensive publication of the laws of the Province of New Hampshire, excluding the ten-page compilation of 1699, was printed in 1716 by Benjamin Green, of Boston, for Eleazar Russel, of Portsmouth. Entitled *Acts and Laws, Passed by the General Court . . . of His Majesties Province of New-Hampshire . . .*, it consisted of a title page, a three-page 'Table' and sixty pages of text. Two years later it was augmented by an issue of session laws, paged 61-131; in 1719 by another issue, paged 133-156; and in 1722 by a third supplement, paged 157-163, all printed on the Green press. No other compilation or issue of session laws is recorded until 1761.

In 1885, the volume was reprinted in a typeface somewhat similar to that used in the original, but the imprint date on the title page was 1726, rather than 1716. Evans noted it (number 2784) as a reprint of the 1716 edition with a different imprint date and paged (2), 7, 171. It was difficult to explain, however, how a presumably faithful reprint could bear the 1726 date, why the 'Table' ran to seven pages rather than three, and why there were 171 pages rather than 163. Evans may easily be excused for not attempting to answer those questions.

It would appear that, by 1722, the New Hampshire General Court considered that the basic sixty-page publication, together with its supplements, was a sufficiently complete body of law for the time being, and ordered the printing of a new seven-page 'Table' that would incorporate the substance of the three supplements. Exactly when it was printed and by whom is not now evident, but it is to be found in copies owned by the New Hampshire State Library and the American Antiquarian Society.

Otherwise, it was known that the 1885 version was made from the original in the New Hampshire State Library. An examination of that copy reveals that only a small fragment of the original title page remains, and that it has been pieced out by a pen-and-ink copy of the 1716 title page, but with the date changed to 1726. The reason for that change appears to be the presence of a theretofore unknown copy of session laws, published by Green in 1726, which was simply added to the basic volume by some previous owner. Presumably the progenitors of the 1885 reprint, seeking some authority for an imprint date, noted Green's 1726 colophon and mistakenly assumed that the entire volume had been retrospectively published in that year.

Finally, the pagination of the 1726 issue of the session laws, 157-163, as well as the signatures, Ss-[Tt²], duplicated those of the 1722 session laws. That printer's error was tacitly corrected in the 1885 reprint and the world was presented with a 171-page book. Perhaps it should also be noted that the average person using the New Hampshire State Library copy might easily overlook the presence of the 1726 session laws as a separate imprint. Like the three earlier supplements, it has no title page but begins with a cut of the royal arms, followed by a militia act passed in 1722.

While much of the foregoing information may be gleaned from Evans, and from the 'Check-List of New Hampshire Laws' contained in the 1892 report of the New Hampshire State Librarian, the existence of the session laws published by Benjamin Green of Boston in 1726 has yet to be acknowledged in any major American bibliography.

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