

Notes on American Bookbindings

WILSON & NICHOLS BINDINGS

At the first public exhibition of Michael Papantonio's collection of early American bookbindings, at the Grolier Club in 1962, a copy of Cadwallader Colden's *Memoir . . . at the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals* (New York: W. A. Davis, 1825) was included, which was tooled 'Wilson & Nichols Bind.' at the foot of the spine. Wilson & Nichols bound and signed a number of official copies which were presented to prominent people, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, for example. Eventually Papantonio owned several of these presentation copies. The application of ornamental rolls and stamps varies from copy to copy, implying that the firm was a large one, with a wide selection of fancy tools.

Two other volumes in the Papantonio collection at AAS have bindings that can be attributed to Wilson & Nichols. They are:

Rogers, Samuel. *Italy, A Poem*. London, 1830. Bound in blue calf with blind and gilt tooling and a flat spine.

[Wetmore, Prosper M.] *Lexington, with other fugitive poems*. New York, G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830. Bound in green calf with blind and gilt tooling and a flat spine.

Although the Samuel Rogers volume has a binder's ticket, and the attribution is certain, the Wetmore poems binding (illustrated here) can be ascribed to Wilson & Nichols based upon the evidence of common ornamental tools and the manner of applying them. The fine scallop roll which was used on the panel and the chevron roll with alternating hatched and striped sections on the board edges and turn-ins of the Wetmore also

appear on the binding of the Samuel Rogers, and the scallop on the copy of the Cadwallader Colden illustrated as no. 47 in the catalogue of the Papantonio collection (New York, 1972). Another common characteristic of the work of the Wilson & Nichols shop appears to be the practice of separating the panels on the spine with either a heavy two-line fillet or double raised bands. The canal festival volume, a quarto, has the double raised bands; the Rogers and Wetmore books, both octavos, have flat spines with the heavy double lines.

Willman Spawn

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