

*Cultural Crossroads:  
Print and Reading in Eighteenth-  
and Nineteenth-Century  
English-Speaking Montreal*

PATRICIA LOCKHART FLEMING

THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK in Canada draws on two long-established traditions of inquiry.<sup>1</sup> Quebec scholars have used quantitative measures such as library catalogues and records of book ownership as objective indices of cultural change. In English Canada we have applied the rigor of analytical bibliography to the study of Canadian imprints from 1752, when the first press was established at Halifax, on into the nineteenth century. As Thomas Tanselle has remarked of our adopted English practice,

1. The *History of the Book in Canada/Histoire du livre et de l'imprimé au Canada* will be published by the University of Toronto Press and Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal in English and in French in three volumes in 2004, 2005, and 2006. The project's website is [www.hbic.library.utoronto.ca](http://www.hbic.library.utoronto.ca).

Yvan Lamonde and Patricia Lockhart Fleming were invited to be co-presenters of the twentieth annual Wiggins Lecture as representatives of the History of the Book in Canada/Histoire du livre et de l'imprimé au Canada, which will define Canada's place within an international network of book history studies. This five-year project will culminate in the publication of six volumes (three in English, three in French) in conjunction with the University of Toronto Press and Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

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'the elaboration of details is always ready to burst through whatever bounds have been set for it.'<sup>2</sup>

What Yvan Lamonde and I propose today is to apply these two approaches, bibliographic and quantitative, or to echo our own discourse, material and cultural, to the history of printers and readers in Montreal. Founded as a Catholic mission in 1642, no press was established before Fleury Mesplet's arrival in 1776. He was born at Marseilles in 1734 into a printing family and probably apprenticed in Lyon, where his father worked as a printer. By 1773, when he was almost forty, Mesplet was printing in London, at Covent Garden. His motives for moving to Philadelphia the following year are not known. Some have speculated that he was recruited by Benjamin Franklin as a printer of French, but there is no record of their meeting.<sup>3</sup> However, there is evidence, both documentary and in surviving imprints, that Mesplet printed for the Continental Congress. There is additional evidence, from a memorial he submitted to Congress in 1783 when he was seeking compensation, that in 1776, 'upon the conquest of a part of the Province of Quebec by the Arms of the United States, it was thought expedient to establish a Press in the town of Montreal' and further that Mesplet, 'on account of his language and known attachment to the interests of the United States, was selected by Congress to direct such a Press, and did at the request of Congress, and in hopes of the support and recompense of that body, relinquish a comfortable situation and remove his Press at a very great expense, from Philadelphia to Montreal.'<sup>4</sup> Bearing a printer's commission from Congress, he set off in March of 1776 with his wife, all of his equipment, two printers, an editor whom he called 'my lettered man,' and a servant. After a tedious journey during

2. G. Thomas Tanselle, 'Enumerative Bibliography and the Physical Book,' in *Literature and Artifacts* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1998), 195.

3. R. W. McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet, the First Printer at Montreal,' *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 2d ser., 12 (1906): 197-310; Jean-Paul De La-grave, *Fleury Mesplet (1734-1794), imprimeur, éditeur, libraire, journaliste* (Montreal: Pate-naude, 1985), and *Voltaire's Man in America* (Montreal: Robert Davies, 1997).

4. McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet,' 251.

which most of his paper and books were damaged, he arrived at Montreal in May, shortly before the Continental army, which had been there since November, withdrew from the town. Mesplet and his men were detained for almost a month. Upon their release, he set up the press, and he continued as Montreal's only printer for almost twenty years, until his death in 1794. Even when he was held without charge for a second time, and he and his editor were seized and put on board a ship to Quebec City, where they were interned from June 1779 to September 1782, printing continued in Montreal 'chez Fleury Mesplet.'

The details of his life are drawn from civil records and church registers, the papers of Governor Haldimand and the correspondence of religious authorities, journals of the Continental Congress, notaries' records in Montreal, and two inventories of his possessions, the first for the bailiff's sale when a creditor had his property seized and sold in 1785, and the second in 1794, after his death, when his stock and furniture were itemized and then sold. There are no Mesplet papers, no daybook or ledger from his business, nothing but scattered invoices in the records of his customers. If we are to understand Mesplet as a printer, we must turn to his printing. The first attempt to identify imprints from London, Philadelphia, and Montreal was published almost a century ago.<sup>5</sup> That listing was developed by a second author for the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* in 1934.<sup>6</sup> The most recent bibliography, which describes Mesplet's work as part of a comprehensive study of Canadian imprints up to 1800, was published in 1999.<sup>7</sup>

Mesplet was part of a cohort of printers who set up shop in five of the provinces of modern-day Canada before 1800. My thinking

5. McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet,' 251.

6. Aegidius Fauteux, 'Fleury Mesplet: une étude sur les commencements de l'imprimerie dans la ville de Montréal,' *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 28 (1934): 164-93.

7. Marie Tremaine, *A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1751-1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), and Patricia Lockhart Fleming and Sandra Alston, *Early Canadian Printing: A Supplement to Marie Tremaine's A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1751-1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Tremaine and *Early Canadian Printing* (ECP) numbers are cited for Canadian imprints.

about them was inspired by my discovery of Jim Green's illuminating discussion of the book trade in the middle colonies in Volume I of *A History of the Book in America*.<sup>8</sup> He writes about the arrival of the second printers in Philadelphia and New York. They were not officially supported as printers to the government, nor were they controlled by church or state. They could print for the opposition, and their newspapers could be livelier and more local than those publishing all the government notices. By this distinction, Mesplet can be judged as both a first and a second printer. He was the first French printer in Canada and the first printer in Montreal, but he was the second printer in the province of Quebec, arriving a dozen years after the first shop was established. From what we know of Mesplet's ambitions when he travelled to Montreal in 1776, however, he may well have expected to be the official printer for a new government in Quebec; instead he stayed on, printing the daily life of Montreal, a town of some five to six thousand inhabitants.

Although presses were few and widely scattered in eighteenth-century Canada, printers were able to establish commercial ties among their shops. Some of Mesplet's earliest imprints, devotional works in French and his first almanac, were sold at Quebec by William Brown, who had arrived there from Philadelphia in 1764 to set up the first shop with his partner, Thomas Gilmore. They had worked together for William Dunlap in Philadelphia, and although Gilmore died young, Brown and his Scottish nephews, Samuel and John Neilson, continued to direct the most important and best-documented shop in eighteenth-century Canada.<sup>9</sup> Mesplet's other printing link, near the end of his life, was with Upper Canada, now Ontario. When the original province of Quebec was divided in 1791 to create a home for the English-speaking Loyalists settled west of Montreal along the shores of

8. James N. Green, 'English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin,' in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, eds. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press and American Antiquarian Society, 2000), 284-98.

9. Their records are located in the National Archives of Canada, MG24, B1.

the Great Lakes, Thomas Graves Simcoe, Ontario's founding lieutenant governor, stopped at Montreal on the way to his new capital to have proclamations printed in French and English by Mesplet. Lieutenant Governor Simcoe also recruited his printer Louis Roy in Montreal, probably in Mesplet's shop.

Despite the need to take a detour to Nova Scotia on the Atlantic shore, I cannot, in this place and during the 250th anniversary year, neglect the beginnings of printing in Canada—and the Worcester connection. Bartholomew Green, Jr., was the first printer to settle in Halifax in the summer of 1751, but he died just two weeks after his 'press & appurtenances' arrived from Boston in October. It was his former partner, John Bushell, who set up the shop and was printing there by March of 1752, with ornaments that Elizabeth Carroll Reilly has identified in Boston imprints of the 1730s and 1740s, cut by Bushell himself and used by members of the Green and Draper families.<sup>10</sup> This Boston stock passed to Bushell's successor, Anthony Henry, who continued the New England traffic by engaging a young Boston printer named Isaiah Thomas. Thomas's clash with authorities over the Stamp Act probably caused the suspension of Canada's first newspaper, the *Halifax Gazette*, in 1766. Unrepentant, Thomas returned to New England and, among his many achievements in the service of the new republic, founded the American Antiquarian Society.

The next wave of immigrant printers in Canada were the Loyalists: John Howe from Boston, William Lewis and John Ryan from New York, Christopher Sower from Germantown, and the group that settled briefly in Shelburne, on Nova Scotia's south shore: James Humphreys from Philadelphia, the three Robertsons from Albany and New York, and Thomas and James Swords, also from New York. Loyalists came to Shelburne when they were evacuated from New York in 1785, swelling the village to ten thousand inhabitants, a boomtown likely not seen again until the filming of *The Scarlet Letter* there several years ago.

10. Elizabeth Carroll Reilly, *Dictionary of Colonial American Printers' Ornaments and Illustrations* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1975), 203, 204, 245, 1132.

Given the origins of many of Canada's earliest printers, it is not surprising to find that their strategies for survival, if not success, are very close to those of eighteenth-century American printers: job printing, the steady income from a newspaper and an almanac, printing for government, the sale of stationery and books, and printing to order for an individual or organization, what Benjamin Franklin called 'book work.'

We know too little of Mesplet's London printing to apply any measure to it, but he may already have been looking to America when he printed *La Louisiane ensanglantée*, a history of Louisiana up to 1762.<sup>11</sup> During the three years he spent in Philadelphia, there was 'book work' for the Continental Congress, starting with two thousand copies of a twenty-page letter to the inhabitants of Quebec from the Congress in October 1774 (fig. 3).<sup>12</sup> The next letter Mesplet printed, eight pages in an edition of one thousand, was directed to the 'habitans opprimés' and signed by John Hancock in May 1775.<sup>13</sup> The third, a single sheet rather than a pamphlet, addressed to the inhabitants of the province of Canada early in 1776, announced military action against the province and urged Canadians to form their own congress.<sup>14</sup> This handbill exists in two states, one with the imprint of Mesplet and his new business partner, Charles Berger, and the other without an imprint. In that same year Mesplet printed a forty-page edition in French of military rules for the troops of the thirteen colonies.<sup>15</sup> Congress paid for the work in February 1776, when it was engaging him to travel to Canada as its printer.

In two other Philadelphia imprints we find Mesplet setting patterns he would follow in Montreal: the printing of literary works and his continuing reliance on France for texts. He also became a

11. *La Louisiane ensanglantée* (London: Fleury Mesplet, 1773).

12. *Lettre adressée aux habitans de la province de Québec* (Philadelphia: Fleury Mesplet, 1774).

13. *Lettre adressée aux habitans opprimés de la province de Québec* (Philadelphia: Fleury Mesplet, 1775).

14. *Aux habitans de la province du Canada* (Philadelphia: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1776).

15. *Règlement militaire* (Philadelphia: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1776).

LETTRE  
ADRESSÉE  
AUX HABITANS  
DE LA PROVINCE  
DE  
QUEBEC,

*Ci-devant le CANADA.*

De la part du CONGRÈS GÉNÉRAL de l'Amérique Septentrionale, tenu à Philadelphie.



*Imprimé & publié par Ordre du Congrès,*

A PHILADELPHIE,

De l'Imprimerie de FLEURY MESPLET.

M. DCC. LXXIV.

Fig. 3. *Lettre adressée aux habitans de la province de Quebec* (Philadelphia: Fleury Mesplet, 1774), the first of three letters addressed to the people of Quebec by the Continental Congress. Courtesy of National Library of Canada.

bilingual printer in 1774 with English and French on facing pages of a collection of sentimental and amusing anecdotes. On the title pages R. Aitken is named as bookseller 'opposite the London Coffee-house.'<sup>16</sup> Robert Aitken's manuscript account book in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania shows that Mesplet paid him to bind thirty-six copies of 'le gout Anecdotes.' Sales were not brisk since Mesplet still had forty copies on hand in 1785 and thirty-six stitched as pamphlets at his death nine years later. As for the Aitken binding, the only copy I have seen, in the British Library, is rebound. Mesplet's second Philadelphia venture, a minor literary work first published in Paris in 1761, bears the playful imprint of 'travelling printer' and the date 1776.<sup>17</sup> Attribution to Mesplet is based on a garland ornament he owned for almost twenty years and the presence of six copies in his after-death inventory.

Settled in Montreal and released from detention in July 1776, Mesplet printed energetically over the next six months. His 'book work,' almost certainly printed to order, included a seventeenth-century play acted by the students at the Collège de Montréal in August and the rules of a religious brotherhood that operated as a mutual benefit society under the direction of the powerful Sulpician order.<sup>18</sup> There was official printing too, in French, English, and French and English together, completed for a court clerk and the sheriff, a total of more than four thousand copies. Mesplet's invoice, tallied in shillings with a curious closing note alluding to his own financial need ('I am not among the most wealthy in the world'), has survived among the sheriff's papers (fig. 4). It includes a poster (*affiche*) printed in August, in both languages, concerning persons who suffered at the time of the 'Rebelles.'<sup>19</sup>

Among his early titles, Mesplet also printed the first of many devotional works, a popular hymnbook from seventeenth-century

16. *A Select Collection/Le Gout de bien de gens* (Philadelphia: Fleury Mesplet, 1774).

17. *L'Inoculation du bon sens* (Philadelphia: Chez l'Imprimeur Ambulant, 1776).

18. Pierre Brumoy, *Jonathas et David* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1776), Tremaine 229; 'Confrérie de l'adoration perpétuelle du S. Sacrement et de la Bonne Mort,' *Réglement* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1776), Tremaine/ECP 231.

19. National Archives of Canada, RG1, E15A, vol. 4, Judicial 1776.

*Memoire des ouvrages que le s<sup>r</sup> Mesplet a imprimé pour M<sup>r</sup> Gray, Sheriff, Saviour.*

du 15 Aout 1776, 150 affiches franc. & angl. au sujet des personnes qui ont souffert du tems des Rebelles	36	—
du 15 Septembre, 500 des grandes ordonnances	27	—
du 16 ——— 100 affiches, franc. & angl. au sujet des étrangers qui arriveront en cette ville, &c.	30	—
du 28 ——— 500 petits ordres	18	—
	<u>111</u>	<u>—</u>

*Donc quitte, fait à Montréal, le 3 oct. 1776.*  
*Fleury Mesplet*

*bien obligé à l'attention pressante de M<sup>r</sup> Gray, comme je ne suis pas des plus riches de ce monde, j'ai accepté la demande & le prie d'accepter mes respects. son dévot M<sup>r</sup> Mesplet*

Fig. 4. An invoice for job printing submitted by Fleury Mesplet, with his respects, to the sheriff Edward William Gray. The printer had arrived from Philadelphia in May but was detained by the authorities until July. Courtesy of National Archives of Canada, RG1, E15A, vol 4, Judicial 1776.

France in a volume of 610 pages.<sup>20</sup> Inserting a notice to the public at the end of the preliminaries, he offered his respects and then outlined his intention of printing and selling at the best possible price books for the usage of the Catholic church and a complete collection of works about 'our Holy Religion,' as well as good books of history and literature. Fifty copies of the hymnbook remained in his stock in 1785 and a bundle in sheets survived him. At the turn of the year, Mesplet published two almanacs for 1777—one in sheet form, his *Calendrier*, which continued almost uninterrupted until 1794; the other, a sixty-page pocket almanac, published annually for almost a decade.<sup>21</sup>

20. Laurent Durand, *Cantiques de l'ame dévote* (Quebec: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1776), Tremaine 232.

21. *Calendrier pour Montréal; Almanach curieux et intéressant.*

To sum up his first six months as proprietor, Mesplet had printed on his own account steady sellers such as almanacs and devotional books directed to a local market, he had printed for the most powerful religious community in Montreal and for its college, and local government had turned to him for forms and notices that would otherwise have been distributed in manuscript or ordered from Quebec. He should have succeeded financially, particularly given the generosity of Charles Berger, a friend who cleared his debts in Philadelphia and financed new printing equipment for Montreal. An absent partner, Berger was named on all of Mesplet's imprints until the arrangement was dissolved in 1778; Mesplet still owed him thousands of dollars in 1784, but it was another of his creditors who had his goods seized a year later. At that sale the printing equipment, two presses 'garnies,' was acquired by the sheriff, Edward William Gray, who rented it back to Mesplet because there was no one else to manage the shop.<sup>22</sup>

If we use the eighteenth-century American printer as a model to tabulate surviving imprints, titles from advertisements, and the sketchy records of government contracts, it is clear that Mesplet continued the pattern. He balanced printing on his own account with work for a community learning to use a local press for legal, commercial, spiritual, cultural, and personal interests. His known output varied, peaking in 1777 and 1778, when he printed seven more devotional books (more than 1,800 pages, some in large editions); three textbooks—two French classics and a local translation into Mohawk; and a mix of job, government, and book printing.

Midway through 1778, after writing to the governor for his approval and issuing a prospectus in French and English, Mesplet began publication of what he called his first 'periodical paper,' *Gazette du commerce et littéraire*. It was a small half-sheet quarto, almost entirely in French, with few advertisements or public notices and little news. The content was literary: essays, verses,

22. McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet,' 269.

philosophy, and scientific debates, some in excerpt but much locally written and signed with pseudonyms. It was suspect from the outset: the church found too much of Voltaire in the pages, the government too much sympathy with 'the popular cause.' After Mesplet's editor engaged in a series of abusive exchanges about local courts and judges, despite Mesplet's promise that there would be no mention of current affairs, the governor issued a warrant for their arrest and the paper ceased publication a day short of its first anniversary in June 1779.

During his three-year detention, Mesplet's almanac was published each year but one. A notice in the 1781 edition still listed books for sale at the office and stated that bookbinding was done. The sheriff continued to order small jobs from Mesplet's journeyman, but apart from a primer in English and Mohawk, the press was much less active until the master returned in September 1782.<sup>23</sup>

In this second chapter Mesplet resumed work as a general printer. There were fewer books of devotion—perhaps the market was saturated by the thousands of copies remaining in his inventory—but he reached a new market with local Protestant sermons.<sup>24</sup> Surviving job work includes a concert program for which he also printed the tickets, now lost. We do have another of his tickets, however, for a lottery to raise funds to build a prison in Montreal; he was paid to print the scheme and thousands of tickets. Maintaining his links with France and his interest in literary works, he reprinted a satire of French society in 1784 and, in the same year, *Paris en miniature*, a more critical work by a protégé of Voltaire, which was also published that year in Amsterdam, Geneva, and London.<sup>25</sup>

In 1785 Mesplet began publication of the *Montreal Gazette*/

23. Daniel Claus, *A Primer for the Use of the Mohawk Children* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet, 1781), Tremaine 355.

24. There are two examples by John Doty at AAS: *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of Christ's Church at Sorel* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet, 1786), ECP 478; and *An Address on the Subject of His Majesty's Royal Proclamation* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet, 1787), ECP 513.

25. *L'Écu de six francs* (Paris and Montreal: Fleury Mesplet, 1784), Tremaine 416; *Paris en miniature* (London and Montreal: Fleury Mesplet, 1784), Tremaine/ECP 420.

*Gazette de Montréal*, printed in French and English until his death and beyond—to the present day, in fact. Very much an eighteenth-century paper though less cluttered than most, it was a folio with foreign news on the first page and local notices on the last. Literary excerpts and the contributions of local authors were published in French and in English, but not always in translation. Although the *Gazette* is described as bilingual, sections were sometimes printed in only one language. The ‘Poet’s Corner,’ for example, was often in English, while foreign news might be copied from both French and English papers in the original. This practice is most striking at the time of the revolution in France. Until 1790 the *Gazette* was published without the customary royal arms centered at the head of page one, but in February of that year, with columns of 1789 news from Paris finally available for printing in Montreal, the blank between the English and French titles was taken over by the royal arms of Britain.

Occupied with a weekly paper, Mesplet printed fewer books on his own account. Although he continued the *Calendrier*, he suspended his pocket almanac. To secure his market, he turned to subscription publishing, first for the French edition of a local medical work that he had published in English the year before.<sup>26</sup> Thirty-three subscribers taking 128 copies were listed at the end of the text. A much more ambitious venture was a translation into French of Richard Burn’s standard handbook *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, first printed in London in 1755.<sup>27</sup> Proposing it as a guide for French citizens who were taking their place as officers in Quebec’s legal system, Mesplet announced his plan in the *Gazette* in December 1788. The work would be issued in eighteen monthly parts of thirty-two pages. In February he named eighty-six subscribers in the *Gazette*; a week later there were ninety-four; the total increased each week, reaching 205

26. Robert Jones, *Remarques sur la maladie contagieuse de la Baie Saint Paul* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet, 1787), Tremaine 517.

27. Richard Burn, *Le juge à paix et officier de paroisse* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet, 1789), Tremaine 583.

names from three towns, Montreal, Quebec, and Trois-Rivières, by April. The published subscriber list, a sort of honor roll that Mesplet also printed on the wrappers of the monthly parts, was a livelier invitation to buyers than his occasional listing of books and stationery for sale at the printing office. Although he almost invariably named himself as 'imprimeur et libraire' (printer and bookseller) until the last few years of his life, when he dropped bookseller from his imprint, there is little evidence at any period that Mesplet was active as a seller of books other than those he printed. He would use a blank half-page or even a blank leaf in his almanac to offer a selection from his stock; in the two *Gazettes* he usually announced his new books without a flourish for a couple of issues. On the rare occasion when he had imported books to sell, as he did in 1787, specifying 'Editions de Paris,' the listing is brief. His stationery supply was conventional: pens, papers, ink-stands, small instruments, engravings, and blank books. The five trictrac (backgammon) tables sold by the bailiff in 1785 may have been stock or perhaps furnishings for the back of the shop, which is said to have served as a lively meeting place for Mesplet and his circle. At his death the inventory taken in the store included more than 160 reams of paper: writing, printing, colored, and marbled, no doubt what remained of an order imported from London and advertised in the *Gazette* a few months earlier.<sup>28</sup>

Although Mesplet was the dominant figure in his shop, he never worked alone. Making no claim to be other than a printer (which presumably included selling this printed matter), he brought an editor, his 'lettered man,' with him from Philadelphia, describing him as 'the most essential person in his business.'<sup>29</sup> After their chilly welcome in Montreal, the first editor departed the province, and Mesplet engaged another, who worked and suffered with him for the next ten years. We know less of the two journeyman printers who made the trek from Philadelphia and were named in one of the depositions submitted to Congress. Jacques-Clément

28. Both inventories are reproduced in McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet,' 268-70, 280-302.

29. McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet,' 254.

Herse, who appears to have become a merchant, was active in Montreal's cultural life as one of the founders of a theater in 1789. John Gray remained in the shop, signing invoices for printing jobs completed while Mesplet was in jail in 1781 and 1782. He bought modestly at the final sale of his employer's effects: from among the frames and pictures, he chose 'trois Christ'—three images of Christ. It has always been assumed by Mesplet's biographers that Marie Mirabeau, whom he married in Lyons around 1765, also worked in the shop. The fact that he bound an apprentice, the only one documented in surviving records, just three months after her death in 1789, would support that speculation.<sup>30</sup> His apprentice, Alex Gunn, son of a schoolmaster, was engaged at the age of fifteen for a five-year term. Also present at the final sale, Gunn bought three shirts and a small billfold.

As Mesplet's apprentice, or *garçon imprimeur*, Gunn would have learned to print like a Frenchman, articulating the structure of a book to conform to the French model with characteristic details such as catchwords printed only between gatherings, rather than linking page to page in the English manner. When Mesplet printed a date in roman numerals on a title page, he divided the elements with periods, often spaced. At Quebec, William Brown, a Scot who had learned printing in Philadelphia, used commas to make roman numerals more legible or printed the date without spaces, the setting that was common in all the shops in the Maritime Provinces. It is the accumulation of such small details of compositorial practice that enables us to attribute unmarked work to a particular printer or shop. The systematic reconstruction of a printer's stock of types and ornaments is equally productive, not just for the identification and dating of imprints but to allow comparison through a region or across borders: which foundry's types were local printers using? how frequently did they add to the stock? did they import blocks or plates for illustrations? or did a local engraver cut the wood or copper?

30. McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet,' 271-72.

To demonstrate this point, we can follow Mesplet's garland ornament, a printer's flower that seems as distinctive as a fingerprint on his work (fig. 5). He used it in Philadelphia in 1774 for the book of anecdotes bound by Robert Aitken and again for the Congress's military rules in 1776. In Montreal he set it to frame and garnish title pages and to mark off small woodcuts in a book of hours. We find it in devotional works and in a medical pamphlet. It enhanced texts in French, English, Latin, and Mohawk. Although it was not Mesplet's only flower, it was the one he used most conspicuously, set in single pieces or joined as a frame. He printed it in both of his newspapers, where, for the first four years of the *Montreal Gazette*, it was the only ornament on the first page, set as a factotum boxing the first letter of each column of text. The ubiquity of this ornament throughout Mesplet's work permits attribution to his shop of government and job printing, such as a certificate granted by the governor as part of a ceremony bestowing a medal on a native chief in recognition of his 'fidelity, zeal, and attachment.'<sup>31</sup> Another of Mesplet's certificates rewarding fidelity to the Crown can be found among the papers of Loyalists in Ontario, where that same garland frames their entitlement to 'Family Lands and Additional Bounty.'<sup>32</sup>

Turning from the identification of ornaments as a tool in local attribution to the broader question of the trade in printers' supplies allows me to acknowledge Elizabeth Carroll Reilly and the American Antiquarian Society for her *Dictionary of Colonial American Printers' Ornaments and Illustrations*. It is the only reference source in which I have found Mesplet's garland, and he is the only printer in whose work she locates it.<sup>33</sup> My further search for the ornament has been random, but I have found it badly set as a headpiece in the *Idler* for 1783 and, more nobly, framing a portrait of Gutenberg on the frontispiece of Philip Luckombe's *History and*

31. Frederick Haldimand, Captain-General and Governor in Chief, 'In Consideration ...' British Library Add MSS21880, ff 178-81, ECP 298C.

32. Quebec (Province) Land Board, 'Certificate,' Archives of Ontario: MU 1624, Solomon Jones Papers, 1787-1794, ECP 654C.

33. Reilly, *Dictionary of Colonial Printers' Ornaments*, 639.



Dieu ayant créé le monde en six jours ,  
bénit & sanctifié le septieme.

*Le Dimanche en est la mémoire : sanctifions-le  
dignement.*

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LES VESPRES  
DU DIMANCHE.

*Pater noster , Ave Maria.*

Deus in adjutorium, &c. Gloria Patri, &c.

*Pseaume 109.*

**D**Ixit Dominus Domino meo : sede à  
dextris meis ;  
Donec ponam inimicos tuos : scabellum  
pedum tuorum.

Fig. 5. Fleury Mesplet used this garland ornament for almost two decades, first in Philadelphia and then in Montreal. Here it frames a woodcut of the Creation in one of his devotional works, *L'Office de la semaine sainte* (Montreal, 1778). Courtesy of National Library of Canada.

*Art of Printing*, published in London in 1771. Luckombe uses the garland throughout his book without identifying the source, even though a Caslon specimen is included in Part I of the work. It is probable that the garland came from an English foundry, despite the echo of fleur-de-lys in the design; certainly, Mesplet had furnished his shop with Caslon types and flowers as well as French ornaments such as a liberty cap. The documentary record of his numerous obligations mentions printing equipment only once, when Mesplet and his second wife signed a bond for the purchase of type and other materials from Europe in 1793.<sup>34</sup>

Too few of Mesplet's imprints survive in original binding to permit an evaluation of the work he advertised at his shop or the use made of binding tools that were sold with other materials after his death in 1794. One of his first projects of book work at Montreal in 1776 was an edition of the rules of a religious brotherhood directed by the Sulpician order, mentioned earlier. A surprising twenty-six copies of this pamphlet have survived, sixteen in original bindings.<sup>35</sup> They constitute a sampler of modest, somewhat shaky work, with copies bound in sheep, dark buckram, quarter-cloth, and paper, and paper printed in geometric and floral designs. It is the patterned paper that is especially interesting since in some copies it is pasted over a drab cloth binding, not to make the book stronger but to make it more appealing. Mesplet's shop does not appear to have been well equipped at that period: the boards are not square, the pasteboard is made from leaves of manuscript waste and fragments of the same patterned paper used for the coverings. Two of his pocket almanacs, one from 1779 and the other from 1782, when Mesplet was in jail, were also bound in floral paper. Perhaps Marie Mirabeau was the binder?

Even fewer leather bindings associated with Mesplet's shop have been located, but two well-documented examples highlight the loss. In an unusually effusive notice in the 1779 *Gazette*, he

34. McLachlan, 'Fleury Mesplet,' 278.

35. 'Confrérie de l'adoration perpétuelle du S. Sacrement et de la Bonne Mort,' in *Réglement* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1776), Tremaine/ECP 231.

offered three of his devotional works for sale: one 'printed in large type on good paper and properly bound,' a second 'very well bound and gilded on the edges,' and the third in a 'beautiful binding which imitates those of Europe.'<sup>36</sup> Single copies of the second and third bindings have survived, one in Toronto and the other in Ottawa.<sup>37</sup> They are almost identical: bound in the French style of calf gilt, the boards framed with a fern tip roll and floral corners, the spine framed with a red lettering-piece, and the compartments ornamented with a fleur-de-lys tool.

Fleury Mesplet opens so many questions, both bibliographical and cultural, for historians of the book in Canada that it is hard to draw a final picture. He died at the age of sixty, leaving a widow not yet thirty, a well-furnished dwelling, stacks of books, and numerous debts. Although he printed in a small town, his world was never narrow; he kept up with the book trade in France and with French printers in the United States. With his taste for literature and his encouragement of local authors, both in the famous back-room of his shop and in his *Gazettes*, Mesplet laid the foundations for the dynamic print culture of nineteenth-century Montreal, which Yvan Lamonde has explored throughout his academic life.

36. *Gazette du commerce et littéraire*, February 24, 1779.

37. Amable Bonnefons, *Le petit livre de vie* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1777), ECP 251, Toronto Public Library; *L'Office de la semaine sainte* (Montreal: Fleury Mesplet and Charles Berger, 1778), Tremaine/ECP 282, National Library of Canada.

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