

## Secondary Sources for the Study of Historical Children's Books

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SOME YEARS AGO, this author was commissioned to produce a study of juvenile literature published between 1700 and 1900. The specific topic chosen for this study was the various illustrated, didactic books written for children.<sup>1</sup> This topic was not only of personal interest, as an art librarian, but also seemed to be one which would illuminate an untapped source of social history indicating changing attitudes toward children. Although this study was centered primarily on books published in Great Britain, research of similar publications of other countries led to some interesting discoveries.

Collectors of china, glass, paintings or furniture can reasonably expect — given sufficient money — to obtain works from a variety of different countries, since there has always been a considerable market for and traffic in such objects. Secondhand and antiquarian bookshops bear witness to the fact that, in the past, books were also frequently exchanged between countries — with the exception, however, of children's books (at least this is not generally the case in Europe). While there are a number of foreign children's books in all great collections, in order to study in depth the historical children's books of any country, one must go to that country. Before the advent in recent times of the international edition, children's books were not really considered marketable on a worldwide scale. Translations of foreign works can certainly be found in every country, but the originals prove elusive.

For this reason, when asked to contribute an article to this issue, I

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felt myself to be quite unqualified for the task. However, remembering problems encountered in writing the earlier study and the various ways I had informed myself about early American children's books (actual examples of which are difficult to procure in the United Kingdom), it seemed I might be able to review what I had and had not found, and explore those areas which remain inadequately covered. This article, therefore, is based on one person's experience — experience gained at some distance from the subject. Such a vantage point, however, should in itself be revealing, for we can all learn from each other; few of us prefer to work in isolation — particularly when our juvenile literature shares a common language (and to some extent, a common heritage) and its contributions have enriched children's reading on both sides of the Atlantic. What follows is thus a list of sources, both primary and secondary, which have proved useful in this research.

The first and most important source of information for any study of historical children's literature is *Early American Children's Books* by A.S.W. Rosenbach.<sup>2</sup> I was fortunate to be able to consult the original Southworth Press edition, published in Portland, Maine, in 1933. (This work was reprinted in paperback by Dover Publications in 1971.) An invaluable guide, this book contains a description of Rosenbach's own collection with full bibliographic detail. Some information has been superseded by more recent scholarship, but the book remains a marvelous introduction to the subject because of its wide range of information and the links it provides with similar children's books published in England. The pattern of children's book publishing can be followed from the beginning, for much of the early American literature was imported from England and then adapted to the American market. The style of Rosenbach's entries is best indicated by the examples shown below.

**THE NEW-ENGLAND PRIMER Improved.** For the more easy attaining the true reading of English to which is added, The Assembly of Divines Catechism. Boston: Printed and Sold by the Book-sellers, 1784. [97]

Octavo, 32 leaves, A-D<sup>s</sup>. Fine portrait of Washington on the recto of the first leaf. Woodcuts in the text.

Original half sheep over wooden boards, uncut.

Heartman 76 (with a slight variation in the form of the date) locates only one copy.

Contains the Shorter Catechism, and the Dialogue between Christ, Youth and the Devil, with Watt's Cradle Hymn and John Rogers' Advice to his Children, but is without the Versus for Little Children and other hymns.

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The alphabet couplets do not conform to those as in the edition of Rogers and Fowle, 1749, some few, though not all, of the biblical couplets as in the edition of S. Kneeland, 1762 being used.

Many of the cuts are the same as in the Philadelphia edition of Charles Cist, 1782. It is noticeable that although the triplet for the letter O is the one concerning Young Obadiah, David, Josiah, the cut for the Royal Oak, the tree that saved his Royal Majesty, has been retained. This edition contains several woodcuts in addition to those in illustration of the alphabet couplets and the burning of John Rogers.

THE UNCLE'S PRESENT, A New Battledoor. Philadelphia: Published by Jacob Johnson, 147 Market Street, n.d. [c. 1810]. [428]

Four leaves, the first and last pasted down to the covers, the 2 inner ones pasted together making 4 pages in all, containing 24 letters of alphabet cries in six compartments to a page; in the original covers with a flap reading *Come, read and learn*; the front and back cover have at the top, *Read, and be wise*, below this an alphabet, a woodcut by A. Anderson, numerals, and on the front cover the imprint of Benjamin Warner, 147 Market Street, without date; the lower cover has the lower case alphabet in roman and italic letters, a different woodcut, the numerals, and no imprint.

The Cries illustrating the alphabet are a very pretty set, and are probably an early set of Newcastle or York Cries by Bewick. They include Newcastle Salmon; Yorkshire Cakes, muffin or crumpet; and Great News in the London Gazette. The letters J and U are omitted in order to have 24 letters for the 24 compartments.

The battledore was an offshoot of the hornbook, and was printed on the double fold of stiff cardboard with the extra piece folded over in order to fit it for the double purpose it had to serve. In school it was used for teaching children the alphabet, whilst out of school it served as the battledore in the game of shuttlecock and battledore.

This form of battledore is supposed to have been invented in London about 1746 by Benjamin Collins, famous as the printer of the first edition of *The Vicar of Wakefield* at Salisbury.

The value of Rosenbach's work is apparent from these examples; not only is bibliographical information included, enabling identification of a particular copy or edition, but the incidental information provided on all aspects of children's books is itself instructive reading.

The next book consulted was Harvey Darton's *Children's Books in England; Five Centuries of Social Life*.<sup>3</sup> I might be thought chauvinistic to refer to a book so clearly defining its topic as "English," but Darton's work is important to anyone concerned with the study of early children's books, because it appraises the literature common to all the English-speaking world and relates it to the existing social and cultural conditions affecting children's literature. It is a book which bears rereading, inviting reflection on ideas casually mentioned by this knowledgeable and pioneering writer. Darton does not neglect the 2-way commerce across the Atlan-

tic, and his book includes a very interesting section on the "Peter Parley episode" in which New Englander Samuel Griswold Goodrich tangled with Felix Summerly (Sir Henry Cole of London) over the kinds of books to place in the hands of the young. The creator of Peter Parley was of the school that disapproved of folk and fairy tales, and he produced a large number of well-illustrated factual children's books. The popularity of these books in England is indicated by the number of imitations, which Darton has fascinatingly traced. In the second edition of Darton's book, an additional bibliography includes books by writers such as Bertha Mahoney and Lillian H. Smith to provide the reader with a brief guide to sources on the history of American children's books.

It is, of course, possible for the distant foreigner (in the United Kingdom, for example) to obtain at least a general idea of the history of American children's books from any good book on English-language literature. An excellent example is the new edition of Mary Thwaite's *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading*<sup>4</sup> which appeared in 1972 and contains about sixteen pages on the subject. Thwaite's bibliography also provides a useful annotated guide to sources, and in addition, includes the biographies of well-known authors and illustrators. However, not all the books listed are easily available outside the United States.

In the same year that Thwaite's second edition appeared, a work was published which had been eagerly awaited by everyone interested in early American children's books: *A Bibliography of American Children's Books Printed Prior to 1821* by d'Alté Welch.<sup>5</sup> This work is prefaced by a brief "Chronological History of American Children's Books" and a list of the works consulted, both English and American. The bibliography itself is a mine of information, but like most mines, extraction is not easy. For the identification of a particularly rare work, this is the source to consult first. It is arranged alphabetically by author (or by title when no author is known); an index to printers, publishers and imprints is also provided. A typical entry reads as follows:

1293.10 [—] VERBUM SEMPERNITERNUM. A New Edition. Boston: Printed by Thomas Fleet, 1801.

1st ½ t. [1], [2], 1st t. [3], [4-12], 13-160, 2nd ½ t. [i], [ii], 2nd t. [iii], [iv-v], vi, [1], 2-107, [108], [i], ii-iv, [i], ii-iv p.; 5.5 cm.; bound in leather over w. bds. On p. [162] the cut of an open book with the word "Bible" on it is a *New England Primer* alphabet cut used in *The Holy Bible In Verse* in 1717 in

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492.1; 1724 in 492.3; 1729 in 492.4. The cuts on p.[4] and [108] of the *Salvator Mundi* are the same ones used by T. & J. Fleet for a capital, p. 3, in *The Prodigal Daughter*, Boston, [ca. 1790], no. 1068.10.

1st half title: The Bible.

2nd half title: The New Testament.

2nd title: *Salvator Mundi*. Thirteenth Edition, with Amendments.

Boston: Printed by T. Fleet. 1802.

MWA-W° (1st ½ t.[1], p.[2] 25-26, 49-50, 71-72 of *Verbum Sempiternum wanting*); MB; Shaw 1383.

Welch's is the true bibliographer's tool and collector's manual in that it gives locations as well as descriptions. However, it is daunting to look at and, of course, it only includes books printed prior to 1821. In view of the proliferation of children's books during the nineteenth century, this is probably all that can be hoped for. Subsequent similar studies will no doubt have to be confined to individual collections or particular subjects.

Catalogs of great collections, whether private or public, are always a valuable source of information. Two important public collections for which printed catalogs have been produced are the Osborne collection in Toronto and the Library of Congress's collection in Washington.<sup>6</sup> The Osborne catalog is annotated, but almost entirely confined to English books, as the donor was an English librarian. It is one of the great catalogs of children's books, however, and since so much juvenile reading was shared by English speakers on both sides of the Atlantic, information in this catalog on a particular title, its history, author or illustrator can be of considerable use in the field of American children's books, too.

The main catalog for American children's publications has to be that of the Children's Books Section of the Rare Book Division of the Library of Congress. This catalog is simply a computer printout of catalog cards of the library's holdings published in two volumes, one arranged by author and the other chronologically by publication date. However, since it is a library catalog and not a bibliography nor intended as such, it has certain limitations. It is not annotated, as is the Osborne catalog — but then, what working library does have detailed information on its catalog cards? Like most library catalogs, it exhibits certain idiosyncracies, but these are well worth mastering because of the essential value of the

work as a whole. For someone used to a different form of cataloging, certain practices, such as the interfiling of *boys* and *boy's* are somewhat unexpected. Moreover, the beginning of the catalog has a section labeled "undated" while within the work itself many undated books are given "circa" dates. Similarly, authors' names are provided for anonymous works. It remains, however, a most useful location list for researching American children's books, and a great amount of work went into the identification of authors and the estimation of publication dates. It would be churlish to ask for more when so much is given (and the difficulties of the Children's Book Section are so great) — but a subject guide to the collection would be invaluable. However, such a complaint is perhaps unwarranted in view of the fact that so few libraries have published catalogs of their children's books collections.

There are various indirect ways in which the researcher of early children's books (of any country) can find information. It would be impossible to list all such sources, but some suggestions can be made. Mention of other useful titles can often be found within books themselves. Eighteenth-century English publishers, like John Newbery and John Marshall, sometimes inserted brief "commercials" for their other publications within a book; for instance, "Tommy had been so good that his father bought him a copy of. . . ." Memoirs and reminiscences can also be fruitful sources of information when the author reveals favorite childhood writers. Books such as Alice M. Earle's *Child Life in Colonial Days*<sup>7</sup> also contain information on other books. The distinction between a school "reader" and a child's first book can be quite fine, and a study of the advertisement sections at the back of such school books can prove profitable. These sections are usually in the form of publisher's lists, and appear in adult as well as juvenile books. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century lists of this sort are so useful in dating works and even in proving a work's existence that they should be considered reference sources in their own right.

Periodicals, especially those of a literary nature, also carried advertisements and reviews of children's books, especially around Christmas time. Admittedly, these sources are not always readily accessible, even in those libraries with policies of not removing advertisement pages before binding in order "to save space on the shelf." Nevertheless, almost any file of magazines or newspapers may yield information for the diligent searcher — though the rewards are sometimes very meager. It can only be pointed out here that the field for research is much wider than it might appear and information may be found in related areas of study.

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It is up to the researcher to uncover possible (if unlikely) sources of information on early children's books.

A very obvious source of information about children's books of any period is biographies — of either writers or illustrators. To these can be added the "biographies" of famous publishing houses. A number of well-known firms in England have at various times commissioned the writing of the history of their business, and no doubt this has been the case in the United States also. Frederick Warne & Co., for example, publishers of Beatrix Potter's works, issued many children's books in the last half of the nineteenth century. Their books were issued in America as well as in England, and the history of this firm can provide a useful quarry for information.<sup>8</sup> In the case of biographies of eminent writers, information about their children's books may be well hidden in an adventurous life story. The bibliographical sources of well-known writers, such as Frances Hodgson Burnett, Louisa May Alcott and Mark Twain, are easily available. Earlier or less well known writers may still be awaiting their biographers, and references to their children's books may be scattered in local newspapers and obituaries.

Biographies of illustrators are a particularly fruitful source of information concerning children's books because so many works written for children include illustrations. However, the illustrator has received less attention than colleagues working in oils or stone, and many studies of the children's book illustrators are still to be written. The later artists, like Howard Pyle, have received attention, while the very names of earlier illustrators have been forgotten. Even when an artist is of the first rank, there is a tendency of biographers to concentrate on major works to the exclusion of book illustration, so that biographical research in this area often involves a lot of searching through indexes — which some of the older or chattier books do not even provide.

Periodical indexes are another important source of information. First in importance is *The Horn Book Magazine*.<sup>9</sup> Other journals, such as *Phaedrus*, *Bookbird* and *Signal*<sup>10</sup> may be more international in coverage, but their indexes are worth searching, and it must be remembered that even their items on contemporary works will provide useful information for future students.

Less regular in their publication, but of extreme importance to the children's book researcher because they are compiled by specialists for specialists, are the antiquarian booksellers' catalogs. Children's books appear in these under various guises. They may be included in general lists, where they require some searching out, or they may be listed separ-

ately under "juvenilia." Some catalogs from specialist booksellers, like Justin Schiller of New York, are devoted entirely to children's books. Such catalogs are not only useful to the collector, but the scholarly nature of the list often makes its own contribution to the knowledge of early children's books, and is therefore of great use to the researcher. Somewhat less useful than the publications of Justin Schiller and his fellow dealers are the auction sale catalogs. For some years now, Sotheby Parke Bernet has held regular auctions of children's books at their London premises. Although many of the lots for sale are of English origin, the catalogs always merit careful scrutiny. In any case, the extent to which the children's books of the United States and the United Kingdom have crossed and recrossed the Atlantic cannot be overly emphasized. "Fanny Fern" books appeared in England as well as in Boston (where they originated), just as many John Newbery titles are recorded by Rosenbach and Welch in their American guise.

The alert seeker of information on early American children's books will find sources in many places besides those mentioned here; the eye becomes accustomed to search for what it wants, rejecting the irrelevant. A researcher of the history of chapbooks once related that he found it helpful to look at old prints of peddlers because these often showed chapbooks pinned to their person or displayed on their trays. The sources of information for the study of early American children's books can thus be as diverse as the researcher cares to make them, for who knows in what unexpected place can be found a hitherto-unknown piece of information about a significant landmark in American literature?

Finally, if asked what I should most wish to find in the way of information concerning early American children's books, there would be several elements to the response. First, I would like a concise and straightforward history of American children's literature to be made available, so that I could view the whole range in perspective. Obviously, I would also like this book to take into account the social and economic conditions of the United States at various periods in its history, so that I could "contrast and compare" the differences in development between American and British or European books and determine the reasons for these differences. It would be helpful to have works which deal with individual periods—and, of course, special subjects. Also needed are bibliographies on the children's book output of well-known artists and writers. More catalogs of special collections, both private and public, are needed, and equally important to the researcher is knowledge of the location of these collections along with any other pertinent information.

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A guide to children's book collections in the United States as a whole would be a very useful reference tool. It must not be forgotten that such a work requires regular revision. Last of all, upon reviewing the subjects covered in this issue of *Library Trends*, and the authority of the presenters, I can only wish the issue had been available ten years ago — and hope its information will be regularly updated!

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