



BOOKS AT BROWN

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FRIENDS of the LIBRARY OF BROWN UNIVERSITY: PROVIDENCE, R. I.

THE HARRIS COLLECTION SHEET MUSIC

ONE of the most fascinating ramifications of the huge Harris Collection is the department of sheet music, ever swelling silently behind the scenes in the Special Collections stack. It has just growed, Topsy-like, from something overlooked except when under foot, into something which scholars in the very near future are going to value highly.

No other part of the collection can be approached by so many different scholars. There is, of course, the poetry (our reason for collecting it). But it is also important for the study of American popular music and popular art. Bibliographers are interested in the imprints, especially the early ones. Collectors of theater material inquire about portraits of actors, pictures of theater buildings, minstrel troupes, and scenes from plays. Historians of American culture cannot afford to ignore the collection, for here is the soul of the American people, with its fads, fashions, and foibles, its politics and passions, its history and romances, its sentiments and satires and morals. Americans have always loved to sing, and it seems as though we have turned into song almost every phase of our life.

The collection probably began as an accumulation of settings of lyrics by Longfellow and others of our leading poets. Not long ago a Longfellow expert arrived in Providence to look over what we might have, and spent an entire day over the A's and B's. Thanks to the Saunders Collection, we may be tops in Whitman music. I think we have all the known Emily Dickinson songs. Our box of Poe music contains a number of rarities, including the almost undiscoverable Petersilea "Bells." And so we might continue.

Dr. Koopman, the former Librarian, who spent much time on the collection, noted that Stephen Foster's friend and lyrist, George Cooper (author of that school classic, "October Gave a Party"), had never collected his verses into a book, and that therefore the works of this copious and once distinguished American poet were to be found in sheet-music alone. We now have perhaps four hundred of his songs.

And Cooper was only one of the many who never published otherwise.

Besides the poets, there are the composers. Our great music has been our popular music; and here it is! — from “Yankee Doodle” (of which we have the exceedingly rare and precious first) up to the latest jazz. We can boast of our patriotic music, for Dr. Koopman gathered in every bit of Civil War music he could; during the last war we bought every piece as it was published; and our other wars are handsomely represented. I wish that our colored minstrels were equally good; but here the theater collectors got ahead of us. However, our Stephen Foster material is excellent, and we have a good representation of the other early minstrel songs. I confess that our early ragtime is weak. But the rest of the music is so rich that it can scarcely be described — spirituals and “art songs,” temperance tunes and drinking choruses, Harrigan and Hart numbers, old ballads, cowboy ballads, gay nineties ballads, blues, swing —.

We have many pictorial covers, printed, engraved, lithographed, plain or colored; but here, as I have said, the collectors have been ahead of us. For many years these were the only music-sheets which commanded a price, and naturally the dealers offered them to those who could pay well for them. Nevertheless, we have a representative collection, some of the items quite valuable. And we can boast of our collection of Endicott lithographs, which includes some of the best pictures of minstrels ever made.

This collection was made by the late Mr. F. Munroe Endicott, of Boston, and contained, so far as possible, a complete series of the music lithographed by the Endicott firm from 1830 to 1876. Mr. Endicott frequently visited us to go through our duplicates. He pointed out that we were discarding many valuable editions just because we already had one copy of the song, and that the history of any song's success was proved by the number of different issues. As a result, we simplified our method of handling sheet music, so that searching and filing were combined. Thus we now compare every copy with what we have, and we never discard any detectable variant. Consequently we have accumulated thirty-three different issues of “Ben Bolt” (not to mention continuations, replies, and publications under other titles) and sixteen issues of “Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep” — to choose two titles at random.

Now there are many interesting pieces which do not belong in the Harris Collection because they do not contain verses by Americans. These all go into the “Main Library Music.” Anything by an American composer finds a place here. Here are the old fiddle tunes and quadrilles; here are the waltzes and polkas and redowas and varsoviennes and

other dances; here are the marches and quick-steps, the "reveries" and more ambitious pieces. Naturally we put music by Brown men into an "Archives" collection. We have sorted out our Rhode Island music, of which we have probably the biggest collection in existence. Rhode Island was always a musical state. Besides such well-known composers as D. W. Reeves and George M. Cohan, we have almost everything by Oliver Shaw (I wish somebody would give us the first edition of his "For the Gentlemen," the first American chamber-music to be published), and boxes of the compositions of Francis W. Brown (the once famous composer of dance-music) and Jules Jordan. A gift of the manuscript music of Hugh F. MacColl, which has just been received, makes a very welcome addition to the collection of contemporary Rhode Island music.

These collections have been built up with almost no money. We have been obliged to rely mainly on gifts. Many a lady, tired of annually cleaning a pile of once cherished sheet music, has "found a home for the old horse" in our stacks. Occasionally, in a book store, we find a heap of unvalued music. It presents an occupational hazard, for the dirt of cellars and the dust of attics are breeding-places for cold-germs. The curator, however, has got round that allergy by buying a "respirator," of the kind which spray-gun painters use. Fitting over nose and mouth, it filters out the worst dirt.

But what a thrill when a new pile of music comes in! Who knows what may turn up? The last time, a little, unlikely-looking song about baseball, dated 1869, proved to be earlier than any yet discovered. In the next pile to arrive what may we find? Perhaps a "Jump Jim Crow" with a new set of words, or another early "burnt cork" song. Perhaps two or three Irving Berlins which never came in before. Perhaps a couple of early Graupner imprints, or a war song of 1812. Perhaps an unrecorded setting of Poe's "Annabel Lee" or "Eldorado." Or of "The Night before Christmas." Or of "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean." Or, maybe, an "Arkansas Traveller" with the dialogue. Or (one gets breathless) the long-sought "Massa Georgee Washington and Massa Lafayette" — or the genuine first issue of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" — or the first edition of the "Star Spangled Banner" — or even the original "Liberty Song" of 1768.

Now, Friends of Brown and of music, here is your opportunity to help build up our very important collection of music. We have over 36,000 accessioned sheets in the Harris Collection. This collection is backed up by over two hundred items in the Lincoln Collection; fifteen boxes of Rhode Island music; sixty boxes of Main Library music; also the song-sheets, broadsides, and songsters in Harris; also the books of

dance-music in Harris and Main. Anybody wishing to study American music should come here. There are two or three devoted friends who keep bringing us in choice items. What have *you*? Song books? dance books? hymnals? — but best of all, a pile of sheet music?

S. FOSTER DAMON

*Curator of the Harris Collection
of American Poetry and Plays*

REPORT OF PROGRESS

Part I.

For the benefit of the many Friends of the Library who are not able to come to the monthly meetings it seems desirable to make a general report of activities. (In fact, this has been our desire for some time, but Secretaries and Editors being only human, the report has never materialized until now.)

Following is a list of the monthly meetings of this year, to date. Since this is now past history, we are able to give you a brief summary of some of the talks.

OCTOBER 2, 1950. Peter and Edna Beilenson of the Peter Pauper Press spoke on their "Experiences in Printing." Their printing house is in Mount Vernon, New York, and the Beilenson's consider it a small "family," employing, as it does, only about ten people. Mr. Beilenson described his initial yearnings to become a printer, his apprenticeship to William Rudge for \$12 a week, and the influence of Edna in the format of the books, particularly in harmonizing of bindings with the contents. On display were books from the Peter Pauper Press which Mr. and Mrs. Beilenson had given to the Library. A more detailed account of this couple, famous in the printing world, will be found in the *Saturday Review of Literature* for September 9, 1950 (volume 33, no. 6).

NOVEMBER 6, 1950. Open House Night. This was a big night for both the Friends of the Library and the John Hay Library staff. Nothing of this sort had been done for a number of years and there was no way of knowing how welcome such a venture would prove. Happily, it turned out to be a very successful evening. Some two hundred Friends presented themselves between eight and ten in the evening and were given tours of the entire building. The points of interest were the Lincoln Collection, Bullard and Hoffman Napoleon

Collections, Knight and Peltz Stamp Collections, the stacks (eight miles of shelving on eight floors), the Special Collections room, five reading rooms, and the Order and Catalog Departments. There were special exhibitions on "Writing 3000 B.C.-1950 A.D.," "Stamp Design," an international exhibit on loan from the Museum of Modern Art, the new "Vocarium" equipment where one could hear poets reading from their own works, and the various photographic aids to research which we now have — microfilm, microcard, and microprint. Upon the completion of the tours, our Friends were refreshed with cakes and punch or coffee. The Library has been asked to repeat the performance for the Brown Club of Providence.

DECEMBER 4, 1950. Mr. William H. Tripp, Curator of the Old Dartmouth Historical Society and Whaling Museum, New Bedford, spoke on "Whaling, Past and Present." This was a most popular lecture and not only Friends but friends of Friends attended. Mr. Tripp showed some hundred and fifty lantern slides as he told anecdotes and described the whaling industry. He traced the development of whaling from the killing of stranded whales on shores through the eras of smallboats, schooners, barks and full rigged ships to the modern whale factories with their small "killer" boats. Many of his slides illustrated the declining days of New Bedford's great whaling fleet, ending with the wreck of the "Wanderer." Mr. Tripp described how the whaling industry was started for the purpose of obtaining whale oil for lamps and whale bone for corsets and is now carried on for the oil which is used as a substitute for vegetable oils in soap, margerines, and shortenings, as well as for the meat which helped keep the Britains alive in the last war.

An exhibition on "The Pursuit of the Whale" was on display, featuring books and prints from the library of Mr. Carleton D. Morse, supplemented by few from the Library's collection, a log book loaned by Mr. B. C. Clough, and some letters loaned by Mrs. E. E. Pattison. A large model of the "Morgan" was loaned by Mr. W. S. Cooper, a student at the University. Around the walls were paintings and etchings by Mr. George A. Gale, the marine artist, and loaned by him for the occasion.

FEBRUARY 5, 1951. Professor Kenneth A. Bernard, of the Department of History of Boston University, gave an excellent talk on "Lincoln and Civil Liberties." This was our seventh annual Lincoln meeting.

MARCH 5, 1951. Mr. E. E. Cummings read from his poems and also from his prose (The Enormous Room) to a large audience at Alumnae Hall. So rich was his voice, so shrewd and acute his emphasis

and timing, that even sceptics (and many, if they had not come to scoff, at least expected to be "shown" that this poet's very novel idiom could justify itself) were converted, and Mr. Cummings was compelled to waive, and graciously did, his modest reluctance to bestow autographs. It was, in short, an occasion.

APRIL 2, 1951. Professor Charles A. Kraus, famous chemist of Brown University, is to speak in the Metcalf Auditorium on "A Scientist Looks at the Humanities."

MAY 7, 1951. Mr. C. B. Larrabee, Editor of *Printers Ink*, will speak at the Annual Meeting of the Friends. His topic has not been announced.

A membership drive was made among the Rhode Island alumni of the University last June, resulting in seventy-six new members. This is just the beginning of a plan to invite all Brown alumni to become members of our organization. However, the work involved in sending out from ten to twelve thousand letters has seemed too great for the Secretary to tackle with the amount of help that the Library is able to offer. The project, for the time being, narrowed down to alumni resident in Rhode Island, which involved the sending out of some four thousand invitations. The income from the voluntary contributions of the Friends just barely covers the cost of publishing *Books at Brown*, postcard notices, speakers' fees, and so on. We would like to do more in the way of publishing than we have done in the past, but without a full-time secretary, this is impracticable. If we could increase our membership so that the income from voluntary contributions would cover not only the cost of meetings but also part of the salary of a secretary, we probably could guarantee in the way of *Books at Brown* a more regular and more comprehensive bulletin. Grateful acknowledgment is expressed to those who have so loyally supported our organization. The Friends will welcome any suggestions anyone may care to make with regard to future programs, new members, and the content of *Books at Brown*.

Two issues will appear shortly, the first of which will discuss a recent acquisition and the light it sheds on the activities of a Brown professor of the early 19th century (Professor Romeo Elton); the second will discuss the poetry of the Reverend John Pierpont, and will include a hitherto unpublished poem by him.

BENJAMIN C. CLOUGH

Editor

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