

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 4
Issue 1 *February*

Article 4

February 1955

The Colby College Press: An Anniversary Report

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 4, no.1, February 1955, p.6-16

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

6 Colby Library Quarterly

enlarged and revised by Christopher Morley and Louella D. Everett. In each edition there have been many Bible quotations, and later ones had also a few from the Book of Common Prayer, but number eleven was the first to include quotations from the Apocrypha. Also Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, William Blake and many others were first included in this edition and retained in the latest, number twelve, enlarged and revised by the same editors in 1948. This great book has 1,831 pages. The main text to page 787 stands identical with the 1937 edition; thence forward it is entirely re-edited and has 253 added pages.

Reading of John Bartlett's numerous literary and publishing activities, one would naturally picture him as a serious, scholarly type, with few interests outside his reading. But Dr. M. H. Morgan's article describes him as a "lover of social life and blest with close friendships. His sense of humor and his never-failing cheerfulness made him a delightful companion and even in extreme old age, although he abounded in anecdotes of the past, he never lost interest in the affairs of the day." He belonged to many clubs, to the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, and to the Boston Society of Sons of the Revolution.

John Bartlett died on December 3, 1905, at the age of eighty-five, his beloved wife having died a year earlier.

THE COLBY COLLEGE PRESS

An Anniversary Report

As that mythical prodigy "every schoolboy" knows, William Caxton set up the first printing press in England in 1476. Only two years later, a press was set up at Oxford—to produce learned works for the university rather than the popular books favored by Caxton himself. Thus early in the history of typography was the

Colby Library Quarterly 7

printing press recognized as the best and handiest tool in the educator's kit.

The promptness with which that fact was appreciated by scholars at Oxford was closely paralleled by the promptness with which teachers at Colby saw the same light. Instruction at "Waterville College" (as it was then called) began in August 1818. The newly assembled faculty soon found out that there was no printing press in Waterville, and in 1823—only five years later—a printer named John Burleigh was brought to Waterville. Burleigh didn't *come*; he was *brought*. He printed (in 1823) the first sheet of the *Waterville Intelligencer*. In October 1824 William Hastings printed, in Waterville, the first catalogue issued by the newly founded college. With those modest beginnings, Waterville, Maine, began to be and has ever since continued to be a place where printing and publishing have gone hand in hand with teaching and learning.

When The Johns Hopkins University was founded in 1876, its first president, Daniel Coit Gilman, remarked in his inaugural address that one of the ways in which he expected the new university to spread knowledge was "as a publishing body." Professors and lecturers should, he believed, "give to the world in print the result of their researches." On a later occasion, President Gilman expressed his conviction that "it is one of the noblest duties of a university to advance knowledge *and to diffuse it* [our italics], not merely among those who can attend . . . lectures, but far and wide." As a result of this conviction, the university in Baltimore was only two years old when it established a Press—the oldest university press in America but one that is still youthful. Only two years ago, in 1953, it celebrated its seventy-fifth birthday. In commemorating that event, *The Johns Hopkins Magazine* proudly remarked, in its issue for December 1953, that the products of university presses now "rank among the most significant books in the world" but added, sadly, that they "seldom make money."

8 Colby Library Quarterly

According to Burton L. Stratton, Production Manager for the Harvard University Press, "there are forty-six university presses listed in the current Directory of the Association of American University Presses. . . . They all have one highly commendable objective—to help broadcast scholarship."¹ That is what Colby College has tried to do, ever since it began to use the printing press for the wider diffusion of knowledge. From *A Geological Study of the Fox Islands* by George Otis Smith half a century ago, to *Kennebec Yesterdays* by Ernest Marriner only a few weeks ago, Colby has placed its imprint upon a series of learned books in which any publisher might take pride. The usefulness of these publications to scholars working at a distance from Waterville, Maine, is well illustrated in a recent book published by the University of California Press, for Edwin S. Fussell's *Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Literary Background of a Traditional Poet* (1954) contains thirteen references to, quotations from, or citations of, one or another of the Colby publications about Robinson. More about them later.

"We'd like to say unequivocally," declared Harvey Breit a year ago,² "that we are admirers of The Michigan State College Press. They are doing their job as a college press at the same time that they are publishing some first-rate trade books. . . . Of course, Michigan State College is really a university and so the other day it requested the State Legislature to change its name to Michigan State University."

We know at least one Colby graduate who would be very happy if the State Legislature in Michigan *would* oblige, for he was once heard to boast that the Colby College Press is the *only* College Press in the United States; and when we called his attention to the existence of the Michigan State College Press, he replied, like Harvey Breit, that Michigan State College "is really a university" and that it

¹ *Publishers' Weekly*, Vol. 166 (October 2, 1954), page 1498.

² In the *New York Times Book Review*, February 28, 1954, page 8.

Colby Library Quarterly 9

ought to stop "sailing under false colors." We have thus far been unable (and of course not very eager) to disprove his assertion that the Colby College Press is the only small-liberal-arts-college, privately-endowed-institutional press in America. It is now celebrating the tenth anniversary of its founding.

This does not mean that Colby has been producing books only since 1945: far from it! But not until ten years ago did the Trustees of the College feel that the period of youthful experimentation, of cautious trial, had been passed and accordingly authorized the use of "Colby College Press" for future Waterville publications. The first book to bear that imprint was *Hardy in America* by Carl J. Weber (1946). Prior to that, books had been published by "Colby College," or by "The Trustees of Colby College," or by the "Colby College Library," or under some other similar designation; but after more than forty years of successful publication of books and pamphlets, it seemed to the Trustees foolish to deny that the age of adolescence had been outlived.

When we say "successful publication," we of course mean just one thing—financially successful. Books cost money; they have always cost money, and the cost of manufacture has risen sharply since the war. The testimony from Oxford—oldest of learned publishers (in English)—is very clear on this point. "It now costs three and one-half times as much to produce a book as in 1939 . . . and . . . the price of books is felt as a serious burden in all ranks of learning and by the public at large." This lament (quoted from *Oxford*, December 1953, page 29) finds an echo on every American campus where a university press is trying to make both ends meet. It is an old, old story. A volume recently published by Duke University Press provides us with an instructive concrete example of the problem that confronts the publisher:—

In 1884 James R. Osgood—a Maine man, by the way, but

10 Colby Library Quarterly

then engaged in business in Boston—published Thomas Sergeant Perry's *From Opitz to Lessing*. This book was applauded by the critics and reviewers as "well-digested," "good reading," and "interesting," and was declared to be commendable for its idiomatic style as well as for the great light it threw on its scholarly subject. Osgood, however, was too experienced a publisher to expect a large sale for a book on literary history and so he printed only five hundred copies—and had agreed in the first place to publish Perry's book only when William Dean Howells promised to make good any loss which the publication might entail for the publisher. Under this guarantee Osgood had proceeded. The book was printed and published and several hundred copies were sold. Then Osgood left Boston, moved to England, and eventually died there; he is buried in London. Eleven years after the appearance of *From Opitz to Lessing*, Perry—who had, apparently, never in all that time been given any report on the sales of his book—began to wonder whether he might expect any return on it. He asked a friend to inquire. B. H. Ticknor, of the publishing firm that had succeeded to Osgood's business in Boston, replied as follows:

It cost, in round numbers, to make plates and print 500 copies: \$275. We sold, say, 200 copies: \$150. Loss: \$125. We gave away, say, 75 copies, and turned over to H[oughton] M[ifflin] and C[ompany] as waste, 225 copies, which they disposed of as waste. We never called on Mr Howells to recoup the loss under the guarantee he made. . . . Mr Perry is certainly not entitled to any copyright [i.e., to any payment of royalty]. . . . If there is any claim in the matter, it should be mine against him . . . for the \$125.00 lost upon [his book]. . . .³

The Colby College Press has never had any such experience—that is, of having to dispose of, "as waste," a larger number of copies than had been sold. The Colby College Press has never disposed of any books "as waste" and has been reasonably accurate in estimating the size of

³ Virginia Harlow, *Thomas Sergeant Perry: a Biography* (Durham, N. C., Duke University Press, 1950), page 132.

Colby Library Quarterly 11

“demand” for each title it has published. This does not mean that each title has proved profitable; some have not. But on others there has been sufficient profit to make up the loss. On this point let us quote Burton L. Stratton once again: “If in the multiplication and distribution of a printed and bound message enough money is gleaned to pay for the work and the materials, then the Press has indeed won its right to publish. If it fails to break even, *as happens time and again* [our italics], the director and the managing board are in exactly the same position . . . as any organization that loses money. . . . They must make up the loss . . . in order to survive. . . .”⁴ Fortunately, one Colby publication made enough profit to offset the loss on three others—the profitable one being an edition of a thousand copies (all now sold) of a work the total audience for which was estimated by an experienced New York publisher at “about 400 copies.” On the other hand, the Press still has on hand “about 400 copies” of another work, unsold even though offered for sale at little more than the cost of manufacture.

Previous mention has been made of the early date at which the printing press first appeared in Waterville—only five years after classes first met in Waterville College. Of late, however, none of the books published by the Colby College Press have been printed in Waterville, but *all* of them have been printed in Maine. The Press has been very fortunate in its printers, and a number of books with Colby imprint have been singled out by competent judges for honorable mention. In 1948, for example, *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett* was chosen by the jury of the American Institute of Graphic Arts as one of the Fifty Books of the Year, and in 1949 The Bookbuilders’ Workshop, of Boston, selected *A Thousand and One Fore-Edge Paintings* by Carl J. Weber as one of New England’s Best Books of 1949. Both are now out of print.

In commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the es-

⁴ *Publishers’ Weekly*, October 2, 1954, page 1500.

12 Colby Library Quarterly

tablishment of the Colby College Press, Professor James Humphry III—who serves the college not only as professor of bibliography and as librarian but also as business manager of the Colby College Press—has set up a Semicentennial Exhibition of “Books from Colby.” His exhibit is confined to the twentieth century—a restriction that leads to the omission of some “old favorites”⁵—but the list of the titles will serve to provide our readers with a convenient summary of the publishing activities of the Colby College Press (and its predecessors) during the past half-century.

PUBLISHED BY COLBY

1. George Otis Smith: *A Geological Study of the Fox Islands, Maine*, 1902.
2. Abraham W. Jackson: *A Memoir of Samuel King Smith*, October, 1905. (Dr. Smith was editor of *Zion's Advocate* and from 1850 to 1892 was Professor of Rhetoric at Colby.)
3. Edwin C. Whittemore: *A Memoir of William Elder*, October, 1906.
4. Fred M. Preble: *A Memoir of Laban Edwards Warren*, April, 1907.
5. George Otis Smith: *The Nation's Dependence on Nature*, April, 1909.
6. Charles P. Chipman: *The Formative Period in Colby's History*, May, 1912.
7. Edwin Carey Whittemore: *Colby College 1820-1925: An Account of its Beginnings, Progress and Service*, 1927.
8. Arthur J. Roberts: *Footprints: Selections from the Writings of Arthur J. Roberts*, edited by Carl J. Weber, 1928.

⁵ For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson's *The Method of Nature*, “an oration delivered in Waterville College in Maine, August 11, 1841.” Mr. Humphry's exclusion of this title (and others like it) is, however, quite logical; for while it is a Colby oration, it is *not* a Colby publication. Emerson's little “book” was published in Boston by Simpkins in 1841.

Colby Library Quarterly 13

9. Carl J. Weber: *In Thomas Hardy's Workshop*. Colby College Monograph No. 6. May, 1934.
10. Richard J. Lougee: *The Physiography of the Quinnipiac-Farmington Lowland in Connecticut*. Colby College Monograph No. 7. December, 1938.
11. Carl J. Weber: *Rebekah Owen and Thomas Hardy*. Colby College Monograph No. 8. May, 1939.
12. Thomas Hardy: *Revenge Is Sweet*: two short stories by Thomas Hardy, edited with an Introduction on Hardy's Uncollected Tales, by Carl J. Weber, 1940.
13. Carroll A. Wilson: *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Grolier Club Centenary Exhibition of the Works of Thomas Hardy*. Colby College Monograph No. 9; illustrated. December, 1940. \$1.50
14. Carl J. Weber: *The Jubilee of Tess*: Catalogue of an Exhibition in Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy, July, 1941. Illustrated.
15. Carl J. Weber: *The First Hundred Years of Thomas Hardy*: a Centennial Bibliography of Hardiana. March, 1942.
16. Thomas Hardy: *Maumbury Ring*, by the Historian of Wessex. November, 1942.
17. Thomas Hardy: *The Thieves Who Couldn't Help Sneezing*, with a Foreword on Hardy's First Christmas Story, by Carl J. Weber. December, 1942.
18. Edwin Arlington Robinson: *Letters to Howard George Schmitt*, with an introduction by Carl J. Weber. July, 1943.
19. N. Orwin Rush: *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Carl J. Weber*. Colby College Monograph No. 10. January, 1944. Fifty cents.

14 Colby Library Quarterly

20. Esther Willard Bates: *Edwin Arlington Robinson and his Manuscripts*. Colby College Monograph No. 11. April, 1944.

21. N. Orwin Rush: *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Rufus M. Jones*. Colby College Monograph No. 12. August, 1944.

22. Carl J. Weber: *Hardy Music at Colby*: a descriptive check-list with an introduction. Colby College Monograph No. 13. February, 1945. \$1.00

23. A. E. Housman: *A Shropshire Lad*. Jubilee Edition, edited with an Introduction and Notes, Critical Commentary, and Bibliography by Carl J. Weber. February, 1946. \$1.50

24. *Eight Hundred Years of Fine Printing*: a catalogue of an exhibition of Rare Books, 1146-1946, with a reproduction in red and blue of the large initial "B" from the famous Fust and Schoeffer *Psalter* of 1457. May, 1946. Red cloth, \$2.00

25. Carl J. Weber: *Hardy in America*: a Study of Thomas Hardy and his American Readers, Publishers, and Critics. June, 1946.

26. Sarah Orne Jewett: *Letters*, transcribed from the original autographs in the Colby College Library. August, 1947.

27. Carl J. Weber: *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Jacob Abbott*, based primarily upon the Abbott Collection in the Colby College Library and supplemented by the Jacob Abbott Books in a score of other libraries. Colby College Monograph No. 14. September, 1948.

• 28. Ernest Cummings Marriner: *Jim Connolly and the Fishermen of Gloucester*: an Appreciation of James Brendan Connolly at Eighty, with two portraits, a Bibliography of Connolly's Published Writings, and a complete list of the

Colby Library Quarterly 15

inscribed first editions in the Connolly Collection presented to the Colby College Library by James Augustine Healy. Colby College Monograph No. 15. April, 1949.

29. Carl J. Weber: *A Thousand and One Fore-Edge Paintings*, with Notes on the Artists, Bookbinders, Publishers, and Other Men and Women Connected with the History of a Curious Art. Colby College Monograph No. 16. Twenty-four illustrations. May, 1949.

30. Samuel M. Green: *The Winslow Homer Paintings at Colby College*. Colby College Monograph No. 17. June, 1949.

31. Clara C. Weber and Carl J. Weber: *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sarah Orne Jewett*, published on the Centenary of Miss Jewett's birth, September 3, 1949. Colby College Monograph No. 18. \$4.50

32. Sarah Orne Jewett: *Lady Ferry*, with an Introduction by Annie E. Mower. April, 1950. \$3.50

33. James Humphry III: *The Library of Edwin Arlington Robinson: a Descriptive Catalogue*, with a brief preface on Robinson and his Books. Colby College Monograph No. 19. October, 1950. \$3.00

34. Kenneth Roberts: *Don't Say That About Maine!* Maroon wrapper; frontispiece. 1951. One dollar.

35. Carl J. Weber: *Hardy and the Lady from Madison Square*. Colby College Monograph No. 20. April, 1952. \$5.00

36. Benton L. Hatch: *A Preliminary Check List of Waterville, Maine, Imprints through 1850*. Index. 1952. Fifty cents.

37. Thomas Hardy: *Letters*, transcribed from the original autographs in the Colby College Library and edited with an Introduction and Notes by Carl J. Weber. 1954. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 53-7346. \$5.00

16 Colby Library Quarterly

38. Harold Trowbridge Pulsifer: *Poems 1912-1947*, edited with a Foreword by Alice Mansur Packard and Frederick C. Packard, Jr., and with a biographical Memoir by Hermann Hagedorn. Illustrated; indexed. April, 1954. \$3.75

39. Ernest Marriner: *Kennebec Yesterdays*. Colby College Monograph No. 21. October, 1954. Illustrated; indexed. \$3.75

40. Charles Dickens: *The Little Carol*, being *A Christmas Carol* abridged and edited for reading aloud at Christmas, by Philo Calhoun. November, 1954. Illustrated. Cloth, \$3.00. (A paper-bound edition at two dollars, published on November 2, 1954, was sold out before Christmas.)

Most of these books are now out of print—some have been long out of print—but in each case where the Business Manager informs us that he is still able to fill orders, he has supplied the price of the book (and he has asked us to add that the Colby College Press pays the postage whenever a check accompanies the order for a book!).



A RECENT GIFT

FROM Mr. Frederic E. Camp, of East Bluehill, Maine, the Library has received a copy of a beautifully executed book—one designed by P. J. Conkwright—published by Princeton University Library on the occasion (1954) of the restoration and exhibition of Princeton's pre-Revolutionary "philosophical apparatus." This is an eighteenth-century planetarium built by the Pennsylvania clock-maker and astronomer David Rittenhouse. The book is enriched by nearly two dozen illustrations—collotypes by the Meriden Gravure Company of an excellence that have made this Connecticut firm famous.