August 1948

The "New Colophon"

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 2, no.6, May 1948, p.117-120

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 administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
al invitation, but let no reader of these pages hesitate because of not having been specially invited. See the statement on page 3 of the cover.

Better still, let each member of the Associates act as a committee of one to invite one or two others to join. Can you win two members for us before October?

THE "NEW COLOPHON"

VISITORS to the Treasure Room in the college library have often shown interest in the current issue of the Colophon, but more often than not they have also shown unfamiliarity with it. This book-collector's magazine, bound in stiff covers like a book, ought to be known to every Colby Library Associate.

The word "colophon" comes from the name of a city in Asia where artists were so well known for expert work that the ancient Greeks invented one of their many wise sayings, in which they spoke of "putting a colophon to anything," meaning "putting the finishing touch to it." After the invention of printing, this "finishing touch" came to mean the page at the end of a book, on which the printer "signed off." "Finished by me in Venice on the twentieth day of October, 1492. Praise the Lord!" So reads the "colophon" in one of the books in the Colby Library. Before the use of title-pages had become common, the colophon was not infrequently the only way of dating and placing the publication of a book.

The word "colophon" was chosen in 1930 (or shortly before) as the title of one of the most ably edited periodicals devoted to books, and to books-about-books, and to book-collectors, published in America; and for ten years prior to "Pearl Harbor" it delighted the hearts, even though it depleted the purses, of many a bibliophile all over the country. The war put an end to its quarterly appearances; but
last autumn the welcome announcement was received that plans were afoot to revive it under the title *The New Colophon*. Equally welcome was the news that the resuscitated quarterly was to be printed by The Anthoensen Press, of Portland, Maine. When *The Publishers' Weekly* for November 22, 1947, announced the resumption of publication of the *Colophon*, it stated (page 2401) that the *New Colophon* would have to be good, if it were to meet the stiff competition that had arisen since the original *Colophon's* first number. Four university libraries—Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Rochester—now publish gazettes, or bulletins, or chronicles, all of them devoted to satisfying the bibliophilic interests of their readers, and the *Colby Library Quarterly* was mentioned as “a flourishing five-year-old with a high degree of readability and scholarly importance.” No effort has been made on Mayflower Hill to enlighten the writer in the *Publishers' Weekly* on the subject of how far and to what degree we are “flourishing,” but in our own Colby circles you may safely report, without fear of contradiction, that we would flourish much more luxuriantly if each member of the Colby Library Associates would gain another Associate for our membership between now and the time the snow will fly.

The *New Colophon* made its initial bow with an issue dated January 1948, and the April number provided an interesting tour among the shelves of the Robinson Memorial Treasure Room in the Colby College Library.

On one shelf in the corner where our Hardy Collection is kept, there are various copies and editions of Hardy's Napoleonic novel *The Trumpet-Major*. In another part of the room, where rare first editions of American authors are shelved, there is a copy of A. B. Longstreet's once-famous *Georgia Scenes*, first published in 1835. In a third place, among books of exploration and travel, there is a copy of *Travels in Canada and the United States* by an Englishman named John Lambert. His book was widely read in England at the time of the War of 1812. And in our file of
photostatic copies of rare material, there is a curious work entitled "The Ghost of Baron Steuben" by Oliver Hillhouse Prince. Lastly, in that part of the Robinson Room where historical works are shelved, there is a set of the *History of the Wars occasioned by the French Revolution*, by C. H. Gifford, London, 1817. The article in the *New Colophon*, entitled "A Ghost from a Barber Shop," points out a surprising relationship among these apparently unrelated works. Baron Steuben was the German army officer who introduced military drill into the undisciplined ranks of George Washington's army; and when O. H. Prince, in (or about) 1807, wrote a description of the way in which the militia drilled in Georgia, it got into print under the title "The Ghost of Baron Steuben." Prince's amusing description was published, among various other appearances, in a short-lived periodical in Salem, Massachusetts, called *The Barber's Shop* in September 1807. A few months later, John Lambert, while visiting in Charleston, South Carolina, came upon a copy of Prince's sketch; he carried it back to London with him, and there published it in his *Travels*. This book went through three editions; it came to the attention of the historian, C. H. Gifford, who lifted Prince's sketch from Lambert's pages, and republished it in his *History of the Wars*. When, in 1880, Thomas Hardy came to write his novel, *The Trumpet-Major*, he appropriated out of Gifford's pages the substance of Prince's original sketch for use in one of the chapters of the novel. Meanwhile, another American author, A. B. Longstreet, had also reprinted Prince's sketch. In *Georgia Scenes*, Longstreet published the description of the militia drill; and by 1880 Longstreet's amusing book had become widely enough known (it went through ten or more editions) to make the drill-sketch familiar to many American readers. When some of them found the same description in Hardy's *Trumpet-Major*, they promptly accused him of stealing from A. B. Longstreet. Hardy denied this and said he had never heard of Longstreet's book. Now, after sixty-six years, the facts are all in—and
Professor Weber's article in the *New Colophon*, based upon the materials in the rare book room of the Colby Library, at last makes clear what happened. Or isn't it clear, even yet?

---

AN "UNKNOWN" BOOK-COLLECTOR

*By James Humphry, III*

Through the generosity of Mr. James A. Healy, of New York City, the Colby College Library has recently received a copy of Eugene Lyons' *Our Unknown Ex-President: A Portrait of Herbert Hoover*. This biographical study throws a clear and much-needed light upon the character and career of our former president, but it is not this fact that holds our attention here and now. It will interest Colby Library Associates to learn that Herbert Hoover shares their love of books, and that in the course of his travels he has assembled a remarkable library. Eugene Lyons' account of one book in that library is worth repeating:

One of the old books that intrigued him was the celebrated *De Re Metallica* published in 1556 by Agricola, the Latin pen name of a German scientist of that century. Though scholars had tried to translate it... in the intervening centuries, they had given up the task as hopeless... On and off for years Hoover and... Mrs. Hoover... had played with the book, translating passages for the fun of it... In 1907 the Hoovers decided to undertake a translation in all earnestness. They carted their notes and manuscripts with them all around the world... and in five years they were ready with the first accurate English translation of the classic.

Some years before, Hoover had helped put his friend Edgar Rickard into business in London as publisher of a mining journal... The magazine had prospered. It now sponsored the publication of Agricola in an elegant format, bound in white vellum like the medieval original edition, and reproducing the original wood-cuts and initial letters. It is today a highly valued collector's item.*