

The Joys of Miniature Books

C H A R L O T T E S M I T H

Since my earliest childhood, books have brought me great joy. I enjoy the feel of a fine binding, the smell of fresh ink when a new book is opened, the appearance of unusual type on a page, but most of all the wonderful things inside books. My earliest recollections are of sitting on my mother's lap and being read *The Three Bears* and *Peter Rabbit*.

Luckily, I married a man who enjoys reading every bit as much as I. In fact Tom feels a little insecure unless there are at least two or three unread books in our home.

My first rare book purchase was a copy of *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* by Charles Dickens purchased from Kroch's and Brentano's in Chicago. The book had been handsomely bound by Bayntun-Riviere of Bath, England, in full dark blue leather, with a gilt bust of Dickens on the front and his signature in gold on the back, a gilt-panelled spine with lovely floral designs, wide gilt dentelles, Cockerell endpapers, and all edges gilt.

After the purchase of this treasure I decided to try my hand at bidding on books at auctions. It was a perfect illustration of the adage, "Fools walk in where angels fear to tread." As time went on I became more critical and also more knowledgeable; having read a number of books about books, printing, and collecting, I realized I was not getting the books I most wanted. Many times my bids were topped by one pound at Sotheby's or five dollars at Swann Galleries, which meant that the individual attending the auction could always outbid the mail bidder. In addition, the books which I succeeded in purchasing were often missing a half-title or were not of fine quality.

So I began to make purchases from rare book catalogues which arrived in great quantity. Our son's bedroom had become my bookroom. One oak bookcase which he had left behind had become filled, and we asked the Amana craftsmen to make a large walnut bookcase for one wall. Before I realized it, not only was the new bookcase filled, but most of the shelves were crowded with double rows of books. One day Tom told me that he didn't care how many books I purchased, but I must keep them in the bookroom! What to do?

In 1970 a friend called my attention to an advertisement for *The Night before Christmas* in a miniature edition illustrated by Tasha Tudor. The price was \$5, and I sent for it. It was a delightful little book, having a full leather cover with a dust jacket, and the illustrations were some of the most charming I had ever seen. It was published by Achille St. Onge of Worcester, Massachusetts. It had been printed by Joh. Enschede en Zonen of Haarlem, Holland in an edition of 15,000 copies. Not only did its large edition make this book a non-rarity, but it was 3¾" tall, not a true miniature, which must be under 3". But along with this delightful little book was a brochure describing other miniatures which Mr. St. Onge had published, all under 3" and in smaller editions of 1,000 to 2,500 copies. Within a few months I had ordered nearly a dozen titles. I had stumbled quite by accident onto the miniature books published by the outstanding publisher of this genre in this century.

Achille St. Onge published his first miniature in 1935, *Noel, Christmas Echoes down the Ages*, "recaptured by Robert K. Shaw," printed by Stobbs Press at Worcester, and bound in full red leather by Wetherbee and Co. Today this book is the second rarest of the St. Onge titles; I purchased my copy in 1971 from William Graf in Iowa City.

Mr. St. Onge published more than a volume per year, 46 in all, until his death in 1978. He set unusually high standards for his books, using the finest craftsmen here and in Europe to print and to bind them.

The Merrymount Press in Boston printed his second miniature, *Friendship* by Ralph Waldo Emerson, in 1939. There were 950 copies, 850 of them bound with a silk bookmark by Sangorski and Sutcliffe of London. In a letter to me written in 1975 Mr. St. Onge said this was his favorite among his books. "It is very, very dainty." It was issued in a gold box, which was lacking from the copy I purchased in 1974.

Most of the St. Onge miniatures were written by American authors or dealt with Americana. Six exceptions were by British authors or on British subjects.

One of the most charming of the St. Onge miniatures is *Wild Apples* by Henry David Thoreau, 1946. This book was designed by Bruce Rogers and printed by the Marchbanks Press in New York. It is bound in full blind-tooled and gilt-stamped pigskin. Mrs. St. Onge told me of going with her husband to call on Bruce Rogers, by then an old man who lived very simply and who died the following year at age 87.

The rarest of the St. Onge miniatures is *The Inaugural Address of Thomas Jefferson*, 1943. From an edition of 200 copies, Archie destroyed all but 30, which he had already sold, because he was so displeased with them. The book originally sold for \$1.50 and today sells for as high as \$1,250.00. It is ironic that the book he considered the ugliest now commands the highest price!

Because of this, no more than 30 collectors can ever hope to have a complete St. Onge collection. I completed my collection before the publisher's death, and I wrote to tell him. He seemed to be as happy about it as I. At that time he thought there were only four other complete collections, but recently I have heard of two additional ones, and there are probably others.

In 1979 Robert E. Massmann, retired librarian of Teachers College of Connecticut in New Britain, himself a miniature book publisher, compiled a bibliography of the St. Onge miniatures. Today a few of the titles are still available from Mrs. St. Onge in Worcester.

Now that my attention had been drawn to miniature books, I came to realize that there were infinite aspects of miniature books to be explored. I wondered why I had not paid attention to them before. Antique miniature books start with exquisitely made incunabula, small enough to permit religious works to be taken along with the Renaissance traveler or carried about on his person. These rarities can be seen in museums, in libraries, and in a few private collections.

My husband and I saw several delicately beautiful, finely illuminated tiny manuscripts on vellum in a large private collection in Zollicon, Switzerland, in May of 1983. Irene Winterstein, the widow of a Zurich surgeon, began her collecting after World War II, when many older miniatures were to be found priced very reasonably in her country. Her collection is housed primarily in hanging bookshelves in several rooms in her home overlooking Lake Zurich.

Tom and I spent an afternoon in her home. She would place one of her illuminated manuscripts or an old book with a fore-edge painting in my hands, saying, "Take it, Charlotte, take it! You must look at it!" and I would examine each treasure. We saw such rarities as *The Cries of London*, published in 1802; *The Infant's Library*, published in 1800 in London; Viennese almanacs of the early nineteenth century with hand-colored costumes, and many, many other little gems. She had a box of miniature newspapers and a case of miniature dance programs. It was overwhelming—a day which sent my head reeling, and one I shall never forget.

The early printers were challenged with tiny printing types. Perhaps the most famous miniature books of the seventeenth century were printed by Jean Jannon of Sedan. He published a Virgil, dated 1625, and a Horace in 1627, each measuring about 3¼". (Collectors will stretch dimensions when an outstanding rarity is involved.) In 1628 he published a *New Testament* in Greek, printed in an elegant tiny Greek type believed by many printing experts to be the finest small Greek type ever created for a miniature edition.¹ Later, in 1828, Pickering of London designed a smaller

¹Louis W. Bondy, *Miniature Books: Their History from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (London: Sheppard Press, 1981).

Greek type for his miniature books, but it is generally believed to be not so attractive as that of Jannon. My copy of Jannon's *New Testament*, bound in ornately decorated leather with marbled endpapers, bears Maurice Baring's bookplate.

The Greek classics were also printed in the eighteenth century by the Foulis Press in Glasgow. I have a three-volume set of Pindar printed by Foulis in 1754, just 3" tall, bound in red morocco very attractively tooled with marbled endpapers, all edges gilt.

Calendars and almanacs were published from the seventeenth century on. In London the Company of Stationers turned out handsome little almanacs with views of new buildings extending over four pages, along with calendars, astronomical information, tables of reigning monarchs, coinage, church holidays, and occasional poems. These little gems were often bound in silver, silk, or tortoise shell as well as leather. I have a London *Almanack* of 1790 which measures 2¼" x 1¼" bound in red morocco with ornate floral designs on both covers and spine and a similarly decorated slipcase. It has a four-page view of York House, the residence of the Duke of York. A later copy for the year 1870 is identical in size and format, with a four-page illustration of the Metropolitan Meat Market.

France, Germany, and Austria also turned out almanacs with charming illustrations and poems in addition to calendar information and church holidays. One *Almanache Microscopique* in my collection is only 1 1/16" x ¾". It was published in 1818 in Paris by Chez Marcilly and has eight full-page illustrations of courting couples or goddesslike females. It is bound in full red morocco with a gilt center ornament with gilt fillets.

American almanacs were never so elaborate, although many, such as *Piso's Pocket Book Almanac* and *Hazeltine's Pocket Book Almanac* printed from 1879 until 1917, are highly collectible. They measure 2" x 1⅜" and were printed by E. T. Hazeltine of Warren, Pennsylvania, to advertise a patent medicine, *Piso's Cure*, for various retail pharmacies in the United States. The almanacs recorded postal rates in the United States, a list of church days, the four seasons, eclipses of the sun and moon, and testimonials from users of *Piso's* medicines. They were bound in colorful decorated wrappers, usually with the name and address of the drug store which gave them away printed on the back.

Thousands of juvenile devotional books in miniature format were distributed by the London and American Tract societies from 1830 until the end of the century. Some of their titles are *Dew Drops*, *Daily Food for Christians*, and *Small Rain upon a Tender Herb*. Most of my copies are bound in well-worn cloth, although a few are bound in worn leather fastened with a strap that bear witness to frequent readings.

Condensations of the Bible in miniature written for children are known as thumb Bibles. From 1601 until 1890 they were printed here and in Eng-

land in great quantities. The authority on these Bibles is Ruth Adomeit, whose *Three Centuries of Thumb Bibles* is essential for the collector interested in small Bibles.²

My earliest thumb Bible was printed in New York in 1814. It is 17/8" x 1 1/4" and is bound in brown leather. It was printed and sold by S. Wood, N. 357 Pearl Street. It has 16 wood or type metal cuts with captions.³ *A History of the Bible* (Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1825), the first of a long run of Phinney Bibles, is especially interesting in that the majority of the illustrations are portraits of neighboring farmers. Not only did the Phinneys publish a number of editions, but this edition was pirated by three different New London publishers.⁴ One child's Bible, "By a Lady of Cincinnati" published in 1834 by Truman, Smith, and Co.⁵ is reputed to have been written by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Many of these Bible stories were retold so as to frighten children into good behavior!

A very tiny yet very clear type designed by Henri Didot in the 1820s is only 2 1/2 point. The first volume printed in this type was La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes et Réflexions Morales* published by Lefèvre in Paris in 1827.⁶ On the right-hand bottom corner of the initial leaf of each signature will be found the name "H. Didot" in very small type. My copy measures 2 5/8" x 1 11/16" and is bound in red morocco ruled in gold with a blind-stamped border on the covers. It has blue silk endpapers, gilt edges, and carries the bookplate of Edwin B. Holden. It was later owned by Wilbur Macey Stone, who provided it with one of the little slipcases he made to house each of his rarer miniatures.

One of the most successful publishers of miniature books was David Bryce & Sons of Glasgow. Using photographic reduction, his firm produced very legible and fine miniature books in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bryce produced a tiny dictionary, calling it "the smallest in the world," which was presented in a little locket with a magnifying glass. Other Bryce miniatures included *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and a Koran. The Koran is printed entirely in Arabic, with the borders of the title page simulating a tiny Persian carpet. My copy measures 1 1/2" x 1", although there are some copies smaller than that. According to Louis W. Bondy these Korans were issued to Muslim soldiers during World War I and were regarded as talismans.⁷ My copy is in its original box with a figured design.

²Ruth Elizabeth Adomeit, *Three Centuries of Thumb Bibles: A Checklist* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980).

³Ibid., 45.

⁴Ibid., 76.

⁵Ibid., 95-96.

⁶Bondy, *Miniature Books*, 91.

⁷Ibid., 112.

The firm of G. Barbèra in Florence printed editions of Italian literature in tiny, clear type. In a 4½ point “Diamant Antiqua” they printed books from 1898 until 1935. My seven titles measure 2½” x 1⅞”. They are beautifully bound in leathers of various colors, lavishly decorated with gold on both covers, and are in the original embossed paper slipcases.

There has been some competition for printing the smallest book in the world. Ian Macdonald’s Gleniffer Press in Paisley, Scotland, published in 1978 *Three Blind Mice* measuring 2.1 x 2.1 millimeters. In a letter to me Mr. Macdonald described how he filed down 4-point type to fit 15 tiny pages of very fine paper which he had cut with a sharp scalpel. Using dental tweezers he glued these pages one at a time to the case in an edition of 45 copies. When my copy, #26, came I attempted to read it with a magnifying glass. I dropped it, but fortunately it fell in my lap. Had it dropped into the carpet, I might never have been able to find it!

Three years later, in 1981, Toppan Publishing Company of Tokyo printed an even tinier book, 1.4 x 1.4 millimeters, *The Lord’s Prayer*, but it is photographically reduced, not printed by letterpress. A magnifying lens is provided and also a “mother book,” 13/16” x 13/16” which can be read with the naked eye. Also included were handwritten instructions with a pencil sketch warning, “PLEASE! PLEASE! OPEN CAREFULLY!”

Today in the United States there are approximately one hundred miniature book publishers. For the most part their books are of a very high quality. Black Cat Press of Skokie, Illinois; Hillside Press of Roswell, Georgia; the Press of Ward Schori of Evanston; Dawson’s Book Shop of Los Angeles; and Borrower’s Press of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, are all major publishers.

Some of the bindings on the more costly small books are very attractive. Rebecca Saady Bingham of Rebecca Press of Hyattsville, Maryland, published *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* in 1983 in an edition of 150 copies, illustrated by Sarah Chamberlain. Its frontispiece is an orange and blue “Legend of Sleepy Hollow” ten-cent postage stamp. The book is 2⅜” x 2⅞” and was printed by Jane Pomeroy at the Burntcoat Press. There were 35 deluxe copies bound by the Green Dragon Bindery in full oasis leather with leather onlay and raised bands on the spine, and an orange and blue illustration by Chamberlain stamped on the cover. The book is housed in a blue and orange leather box lined with the special orange and blue marbled papers (by Christopher Weimann) also used as endpapers in the deluxe edition. The 35 copies have a 1940 Washington Irving one-cent stamp as a frontispiece, and one of the illustrations has been hand colored. Nine of the 35 deluxe copies bear a fore-edge painting of Sleepy Hollow executed by Sarah Chamberlain. This is a very impressive book.

There is a small group of very talented and dedicated individuals who write, illustrate, hand color, print by letterpress, and bind their own books. I find their books little marvels to contemplate. There are even a few of these gifted craftsmen who make or marble their own paper. Among them are the Rather Press of Oakland, Log-Anne Press of Santa Ana, Bookhaven Press of Rosemead, the Feathered Serpent Press of San Rafael, Figment Press of Mill Valley, Poole Press of Berkeley, Sunflower Press of Mill Valley, the Good Book Press of Santa Cruz, and Oak Park Press of Wichita.

Another of these master bookmen is James Lamar Weygand of Napanee, Indiana, whose Press of the Indiana Kid has produced 15 miniatures since 1963. He has also published many larger books and has written a long series of articles for the *American Book Collector* on American private presses. One of his miniatures, *The Bewick Connection* for Maestro Books, 1980, is an excellent example of his fine work. In an edition of 40 copies, written, set, printed, and bound by Weygand with illustrations by his wife, Joy, he writes an account of visits to places in England connected with the wood engraver Thomas Bewick. The book measures $2\frac{3}{4}$ " x $1\frac{7}{8}$ ". Mr. Weygand is scholarly and witty, and he is never too busy to answer the questions of a novice collector.

Another of the very talented individuals who produce fine books is Corinne Guiney of Wild Hare Press. *A Pressing Problem* (1983) is a poem written, illustrated, designed, printed, and bound in black leather by Corinne. Her poem is a humorous tale told in verse about a printer and his encounter with the devil. One hundred letterpress printing terms throughout the text, set in italic, are glossaried at the back of the book in a devil's dictionary. Six of her etchings are printed in this edition of 100 copies, of which 30 are deluxe in an embossed leather slipcase of devilish red leather.

Although he does not print his own books, perhaps the most creative miniature book publisher today is Robert E. Massmann of New Britain, Connecticut. His *Adventures of the Flighty Old Woman* (1966) is a miniature pictorial telescopic picture of "There was an old woman tossed up in a basket," unfolding downward in one continuous strip. Its 12 illustrations were drawn and hand colored by his son, Ernest. *Moby Dick Meets the Pequod* (1968) is a miniature peep show with three hand-colored panels by E. Helene Sherman which opens to a depth of 12" from $2\frac{5}{8}$ " x 2". His *Elusive Bon Mots, A Gem a Day to Keep Boredom at Bay* (1969) is a hexa-hexa-flexagon in two colors, $2\frac{5}{8}$ " x $2\frac{5}{8}$ " in a decorated sleeve with printed labels. *A Mark Twain Turnover* (1972) measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ " x $1\frac{5}{16}$ " is the first miniature "turnover" book with a story beginning from each cover and containing a hand-colored pop-up illustration. *Magic Nursery Rhymes* (1978), 2" x $1\frac{3}{4}$ ", contains 14 folding, hold-to-the-light plates.



An array of miniature books selected from various collections in The University of Iowa Libraries. At top center is a rare thumb Bible, its imprimatur leaf dated October 6, 1693, a gift from Christine K. and James M. Wallace.

These are only a few of Bob's most unusual books, and I eagerly await each publication from his press.

Bob has one of the largest miniature book collections in the world, and he is very generous about sharing it. On a visit to his home in Connecticut in 1980 Tom and I were shown shelf after shelf, box after box of tiny tomes, hearing about the history of each. Bob is so knowledgeable about this field that I learned a great deal about little-known books on the day we spent with him. After several hours, Bob paused briefly to ask "What else would you like to see?" I would ask for a general category, such as the Aunt Laura books, the Nazi miniatures published in Germany before and during World War II, silver bindings, and embroidered bindings. Bob would dash out of the room and come back, usually bearing a small case or box containing books I had merely read about.

In 1982 I asked Norman Forgue of Black Cat Press if he would print a book privately for Tom and me. Over the years Tom had been recounting to our granddaughters memories of his childhood. To me he seemed to have been an unusually imaginative child who had had some very interesting experiences. After his retirement from the Maytag Company in 1974, I persuaded him to write down some of these memoirs. It was these recollections which I asked Norman to print for us. We wanted an edition of 100 to give to family and friends. Norman told us that he would publish the book if we made 100 copies available to collectors who wanted every book published by his press, and he suggested an edition of 249 copies, the usual Black Cat number. The book was entitled *Yesterdays, Growing Up in Newton, Iowa*. It has 75 pages and seven pages of pictures, and it measures 2⁵/₈" x 2".

This venture seemed to whet our appetites for becoming publishers ourselves. During these years of collecting miniature books, I occasionally found myself wondering, "Why doesn't someone publish a book about ____? or ____?"

In May of 1983 we paid a visit to Joh. Enschede en Zonen in Haarlem, Holland. This firm has been established for 250 years, and they print all the stamps and paper money in Holland in addition to books and other fine work. Because many of the St. Onge miniatures were printed by the Enschede firm, they were my first choice as printer—if we could afford them. While there are many very expensive books being published today, I wanted to keep my publications in the medium-priced range. Prior to our visit I had mailed a manuscript to the firm, dealing with two rare editions of the *Rubaiyat*, telling of the dedication of two master bookmen.

The figure young Mr. Enschede quoted us on that happy, rainy May day was acceptable. We selected type, paper, and the leather binding. Because I wanted to use Cockerell endpapers, this selection took a little longer, but the morning spent in Haarlem was an exciting one.

Tom and I selected the name Tamazunchale Press. Forty-five years ago we had driven from Iowa to Mexico City on our honeymoon. The Pan-American highway had just been opened. Between Monterrey and Mexico City was a charming white building surrounded by blooming bougainvillea. During the night we could hear dogs (or coyotes?) barking in the hills, and we were awakened early in the morning by roosters crowing. The manager told us that this village of Tamazunchale was named for two Americans, early prospectors: one Thomas, the other Charlie. We have always felt possessive about that village which combined our own two first names, so we appropriated its name for our press.

Tamazunchale's first miniature book, *Book Interlude*, of which I am the author, was issued in October of 1983 in an edition of 250 copies. It is 2 11/16" x 1 3/4" and is bound in full maroon leather with Cockerell endpapers. A favorable review in the *Microbibliophile*⁸ and listings in miniature book catalogues brought orders from as far away as Japan, France, and Hawaii, as well as Canada and the United States. Our second book, *Autographs of Miniature Book Publishers*, was completed the first of January, 1984. It is made of 95 facsimile autographs of 80 miniature book publishers.

We hope to publish three or four miniature books each year, with some of them to be printed in Holland and some here in the United States. Our goal for the press is to publish miniatures of a high quality by well-known old and contemporary authors which we hope will appeal to collectors. We have eight books at the present time in various stages of completion, so it is a busy and stimulating little world which has opened up to us. We now understand the words of Wilbur Macey Stone, "dean of microbibliophiles," when he wrote: "The virus of the desire to collect miniature books spread in my bookish veins and I became a hopeless case, to my great satisfaction and joy."⁹

⁸*Microbibliophile* 7, no. 5 (November 1983): 14-15.

⁹Quoted in Bondy, *Miniature Books*, 186.