



Publish & Perish: Printed Ephemera and Social History

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“... without the aid of original records and authentic documents, history will be nothing more than a well-combined series of conjectures and amusing fables”¹

During the summer of 1991 the Friends of The University of Iowa Libraries sponsored an exhibition entitled “Publish & Perish: Printed Ephemera and Social History.” The purpose of the exhibition was to highlight ephemera as a primary source for scholarship, especially in the social sciences, by displaying items that, by definition, are seemingly contradictory for historical research. Before the relationship between printed ephemera and historical research can be measured, the question “Exactly what is printed ephemera?” must be answered.

Printed ephemera, as John Lewis pointed out, is the oldest dated example of printing, pre-dating Gutenberg’s Bible by two years; he cited as an example one of the Mainz Indulgences printed as a broadside in 1454.² The history and literature of the elite were consciously recorded in printed books, while broad-

¹From a broadside distributed in 1805 by John Pintard, founder of the New-York Historical Society. Quoted from Larry E. Sullivan, “Books, Power and the Development of Libraries in the New Republic: The Prison and Other Journals of John Pintard of New York,” *Journal of Library History*, 21/2 (1986), p. 419.

²John Lewis, *Printed Ephemera: the Changing Uses of Type and Letterforms in English and American Printing* (Suffolk, Cowell, 1962), p. 11.

sides and posters, or printed ephemera, more accurately reflected the daily activities of those who shaped history. Such ephemera has long been encountered in all phases of everyday life.

During his tenure as Printer to the University of Oxford (1925-1946), John Johnson amassed a vast collection of "over two and a half thousand folio filing boxes, . . . , several hundred large folders, several cabinets of drawers, and many hundreds of volumes " of examples of printing related to the history of the University Press which he had accumulated in his official capacity.³ Privately, as time and circumstance permitted, he also acquired for the collection other examples of job printing to supplement the Press collection. Johnson described these materials as "everything which would ordinarily go into the waste paper basket after use, everything printed which is not actually a book."⁴ In 1968 when this collection was transferred to the Bodleian Library by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press, it totalled over two million separate items.

On the other side of the Atlantic a similar transfer of printed ephemera to a research institution occurred in 1926 when Bella Landauer, a well-known collector of printed materials, presented to the New-York Historical Society the initial installment of bookplates and trading cards from her extensive personal collection; at that time the collection was estimated to exceed more than one million pieces.⁵ While Landauer's collecting interest originally was limited to bookplates, it increased to include all forms of sub-literary printing. Commenting on her collecting style Landauer noted: "Some fireworks shoot off rockets in all directions; perhaps I can be classified in that category."⁶

³Quoted from Oxford University. Bodleian Library, *The John Johnson Collection: Catalogue of an Exhibition* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, 1971), p. 4.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵Mary Black, *American Advertising Posters of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, Dover, 1976), p. v.

⁶Bella Landauer, "Collecting and Recollecting," *New-York Historical Quarterly*, 43/3 (1959), p. 342.

Through the foresighted action of these two individuals and others with similar interests, by their resolute tenacity in tracking down and recording these printed materials, the bits and scraps of ages-gone-by were preserved for future generations of historians. These scholars recognized the importance of these "throwaways" as primary resources for the study of social, political, cultural and economic history, offering clues to the climate of the day. Used for illustrations in books, these materials have had a greater impact than would a lengthy narrative description.

The genre of printed ephemera encompasses the printed artifacts which captured the attention and evinced the dedication and enthusiasm for their acquisition and preservation by Johnson, Landauer and others. Only in recent years have these materials been recognized as legitimate resources for studies of the past. But, while the champions of printed ephemera were struggling to legitimize its acceptance, there was spirited disagreement among themselves to find an inclusive definition for it.

Defining ephemera parallels the riddle which challenged the blind men describing an elephant. Depending on its access or arrangement, presentation or purpose, the definition of printed ephemera is different for the librarian, archivist, museum curator, researcher, hobbyist and dealer.

In 1971 John Pemberton was commissioned by the British Social Science Research Council, to review in the broadest terms the availability of and access to printed ephemera ". . . in the social sciences in national, university, and specialist libraries in Great Britain."⁷ He was charged with determining the legitimacy of the complaints by British social science researchers regarding the lack of primary research materials in their areas of specialty. For the purposes of his investigation Pemberton defined ephemera ". . . as documents which have been produced in connection with a particular event or item of

⁷John E. Pemberton, *The National Provision of Printed Ephemera in the Social Sciences* (Coventry, University of Warwick Library, 1971), p. 4.

current interest and which are not taken to survive the topicality of their message."⁸ His survey identified thirty-nine categories of ephemera—from advertising circulars to university calendars.

Appealing more to the interests of collectors than to those of researchers, Maurice Rickards, the founder of the Ephemera Society of Great Britain in 1975, did not define the subject but described ephemera in the rather broad brushstroke statement “. . . the word, ephemera, is used to denote the transient everyday items of paper . . . , vital when they are needed, wastepaper immediately afterwards. They flourish for a moment and are done.”⁹ However, to emphasize the importance of printed ephemera he continued:

Above and beyond its immediate purpose, it expresses a fragment of social history, a reflection of the spirit of its time. As with other human records, as with the fashion-plate itself, its style is soon out of date.¹⁰

In an attempt to separate ephemera from minor publications such as pamphlets, and to refute the issue of the importance of ephemera after its topicality had expired, Chris Makepeace extended the other definitions by differentiating between verbal and illustrative messages and printing and illustrative processes.¹¹ He also qualified his position, stating that “. . . most items have a limited useful life, although the life of an item will vary according to the purpose for which it is produced and may well be of interest to scholars and collectors”¹² This observation recognized that, indeed, latter-day trade cards were produced solely with the collector in mind, and that both young and old took delight in preserving

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 6. Pemberton's definition included all forms of non-manuscript materials (e.g., maps, aerial photographs).

⁹Maurice Rickards, *This is Ephemera* (Brattleboro, VT, Gossamer Press, 1977), p. 7.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹Chris E. Makepeace, *Ephemera: a Book on Its Collection, Conservation and Use* (Brookfield, VT, Gower, 1985).

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 10.

them in scrapbooks. The fact that they also served as “reminder advertising” in no way inhibited their popularity.

While a struggle for a viable definition of ephemera continues, hobbyists and researchers who work with it agree that printed ephemera is among the richest primary resources for information on cultural, economic, and social customs and traditions. In fact, in addition to complementing manuscript and printed resources for research, in many cases these materials may be the only source of much needed information.

Because of the diversity of artifacts comprising ephemera (Makepeace identifies 126 different categories from “Acknowledgement Slips” to “Wrappers”) and an ever increasing interest in its historical significance, the Ephemera Society of Great Britain was founded as a forum for the exchange of information.¹³ As interest in ephemera began to spread worldwide other Ephemera Societies were formed: America (1980), Australia (1986), and Canada (1988). Additionally, in 1984, the original Ephemera Society established the Foundation of Ephemera Studies.

Each of these Ephemera Societies meets at least annually, usually in conjunction with ephemera fairs where dealers buy, sell, and trade their merchandise. At the first meeting of the Ephemera Society of America (1980), participants had the opportunity to hear presentations by specialists in printing and ephemera fields. Speakers discussed topics ranging from the history of broadsides and their significance to scholars (“Vignettes of the Past: American Historical Broadsides Through the War of 1812”) to how current culture and tastes influence the design and subject matter of chromolithographs (“Chromolithograph, Popular Taste, Fine Arts: the Things Used up as True Cultural Indicators”).

Continuing in its eleventh year in the development of ephemera scholarship, the Ephemera Society of America co-hosted with the Ephemera Society of Canada a two day Ephemera Symposium in October, 1991. Presentations in-

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 220-223.

cluded a discussion of the development of the trading card ("Advertising Trade Cards: Form as an Analog of the Content of Commerce") and a review of one of the pioneers in modern advertising ("A Baby in Every Bottle: The Curative Powers of Lydia E. Pinkham Advertising").

Although the University Libraries does not have an explicit collection of printed ephemera, this type of material is scattered throughout all of the historical manuscript collections. Materials for the exhibition "Publish & Perish" were drawn from but twenty-two of the approximately 500 manuscript collections housed in the Special Collections Department. Those collections, which had earlier been identified as being rich in examples of printed ephemera, were the primary sources for the items displayed.

Some 394 individual pieces comprised the final selection of exhibited items, including greeting cards, advertising or trade cards, calendars, merchandising catalogs, posters, broadsides, bookplates, calling and mourning cards, stationery letterheads, theater and motion picture playbills, and sheet music, which were for the most part at least fifty years old (another subjective definition of ephemera). The items were then organized into the following categories for display: Medicine and Nostrums, Nutrition and Victuals, Leisure, Printing, People and Issues, Commercial Enterprises, Greeting Cards, Moving Picture Programs, Entertainment Industry, Calendars, and Sheet Music.

While a number of collections were drawn upon for examples, one collection that might be singled out for its richness of materials is the John Springer Collection of Printing and Advertising Materials, from which numerous examples of printed ephemera were taken. In 1936, Springer presented this collection to the Libraries, along with another one consisting of books and periodicals (3,249 volumes) on typography and printing. At that time the latter was considered to be one of the finest collections on printing in the Midwest.

Born in Pennsylvania in 1850 Springer moved to Iowa with his family prior to the Civil War. Too young to serve in the army, Springer at age 16 became a printer's devil for the *State*

War Department, Washington, April 20, 1865.

\$100,000 REWARD!

THE MURDERER

Of our late beloved President, ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

IS STILL AT LARGE.

\$50,000 REWARD!

will be paid by this Department for his apprehension, in addition to any reward offered by Municipal Authorities or State Executives.

\$25,000 REWARD!

will be paid for the apprehension of JOHN B. SURRATT, one of Booth's accomplices.

\$25,000 REWARD!

will be paid for the apprehension of DANIEL C. HARROLD, another of Booth's accomplices.

LIBERAL REWARDS will be paid for any information that shall conduce to the arrest of either of the above-named criminals, or their accomplices.

All persons harboring or concealing the said persons, or either of them, or aiding or assisting their concealment or escape, will be treated as accomplices in the murder of the President and the attempted assassination of the Secretary of State, and shall be subject to trial before a Military Commission and the punishment of **DEATH**.

Let the stain of innocent blood be removed from the land by the arrest and punishment of the murderers.

All good citizens are exhorted to aid public justice on this occasion. Every man should consider his own conscience charged with this solemn duty, and rest neither night nor day until it be accomplished.

EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War.

DESCRIPTIONS.—BOOTH is 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, slender build, high forehead, black hair, black eyes, and wears a heavy black mustache.
JOHN B. SURRATT is about 5 feet 3 inches. Hair rather thin on forehead, eyes rather light, no beard. Weight 140 or 150 pounds. Complexion rather pale and clear. With color in his cheeks. Wears light clothes of fine quality. Shoulders square; chest bones rather prominent; thin narrow; nose projecting at the tip, forehead rather low and square forehead. Part of his hair on the right side and rather long. His lips are firmly set. A thin nose.
DANIEL C. HARROLD is 33 years of age, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, rather broad chested, rather light built; dark hair, little (if any) mustache, dark eyes, weighs about 175 pounds.

GEO. F. HERBERT & CO., Printers and Stationers, cor. First and Pine Streets, N. Y.

REWARD BILL FOR THE APPREHENSION OF
BOOTH, SURRATT AND HARROLD

Reward broadside for the apprehension of Booth, Surratt and Herold

Press, which was published by Economy Advertising in Iowa City. He was co-owner and editor of that newspaper from 1882 until 1894. When Economy Advertising sold the *State Press* in 1904 Springer remained with the advertising firm in various capacities until his retirement in 1926. It was during his years

working for Economy Advertising and the *State Press* that Springer gained the reputation as a master printer and the best proofreader in the state in the early days of Iowa newspaper history. Also it was during this time that he acquired typographic specimens, advertising or trade cards, merchandising catalogs, calendars and a host of other pieces of ephemera related to printing.¹⁴ The topical headings from the index to the collection reflect the wealth and breadth of materials in it: Advertising Literature: Companies & Industries; Printing Machinery & Equipment; Paper; Type & Typography; Type Foundries & Agents; Printing Presses; Printing Ink; and Expositions are but a few examples of the broad spectrum of items in the collection.

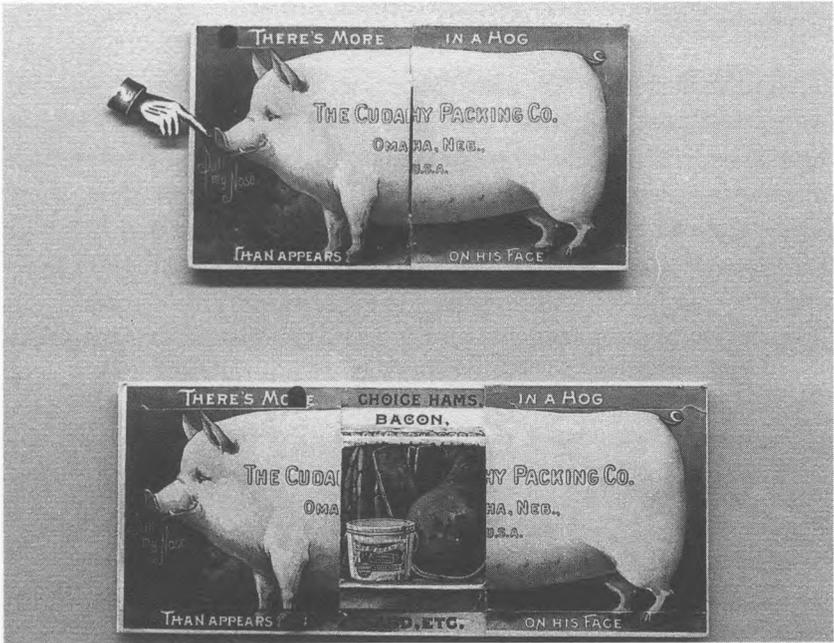
Trading or advertising cards in the Springer Collection represent all types and varieties, in both content and format, and illustrate the coming-of-age of advertising. Some of the more notable which were used in the display include:

- A mechanical trade card for Cudahy Packing Company depicted a chromolithograph of a hog which, when opened by pulling the hog's snout, pictures the various products which are available from processed hogs - "choice hams, bacon, lard."¹⁵
- A chromolithograph advertisement for the patent medicine "Bovinine, the original raw food. Will permanently cure dyspepsia, nervous prostration, neuralgia, liver troubles, cutaneous diseases, loss of flesh and strength, insomnia, general debility."
- A metamorphic-mechanical card which depicts a woman in a full skirt, carrying an umbrella in one hand and a purse in the other, with the caption, "It's not the face."¹⁶ When a flap at the bottom

¹⁴Russell E. Kiesele, "John Springer, Iowa's Great Printer, as Scholar and Craftsman," *The Iowa Publisher and Bulletin of the Iowa Press Association*, 13/2 (1941), pp. 5-6.

¹⁵A mechanical trade card is one which requires some type of action. According to Lou McCulloch, "The mechanical action may be caused by opening the card, folding a side, pulling a tab, revolving a disc, or lifting a flap." In Lou W. McCulloch, *Paper Americana: A Collector's Guide* (New York, A. S. Barnes, 1980), p. 42.

¹⁶McCulloch defines a metamorphic card as, "A transformation physically, changing shape or attitude in some way, as a before-and-after picture." Often metamorphic was combined with mechanical to create different views. *Ibid.*, p. 173.



A mechanical trading card

is opened, the figure becomes a man, with the umbrella, but with his other hand in his pocket. The uncovered caption reads "but the clothes that make the man."

One of the best known and most popular advertising campaigns was for Pears' Soap; the exhibition included one of their most well liked ads (ca. 1890). The chromolithographic card depicts two scenes, separated in the middle by the word, "Pears'" in ornately designed letters. The top scene shows a cherub-faced infant with a frustrated expression attempting to reach a bar of Pears' Soap which had fallen on the oriental carpet. The caption for this frame reads, "He won't be happy 'till he gets it!" The bottom scene depicts the happy infant holding the soap, with the caption, "He's got it & he's happy now." The man responsible for this ad and many others that were as successful was Thomas Barrat, part owner and adver-

tising director of the company who is quoted as saying, "Any fool can make soap. It takes a clever man to sell it."¹⁷

Also included from the Springer collection were several examples of calling cards. The sole purpose of calling or visiting cards was to announce the name of a visitor when a person was making a social call. The rules of etiquette regarding their presentation were complex and rigid, so much so that it led to the following editorial comments:

It was a simple device and easy to understand. But the simplicity of it became irritating to certain arbiters of etiquette and complications were introduced. Instead of the visiting-card remaining as an announcement, as was intended, it was changed to serve as a memorandum. Hence, things have been carried to such a point that now when a married woman starts out to pay calls she is required to carry a veritable package of cards, and she is expected to leave not only her own, but two of her husband's cards at each house at which she calls. This does not imply at all that the husband accompanies the wife. . . . It is not etiquette: it is nonsense."¹⁸

While a few calling cards were embossed with some sort of design, most were decorated with color lithographs. Popular motifs included floral arrangements, pastoral and seasonal scenes, and small animals or birds with the name of the bearer either written in Spencerian calligraphy or printed in a typographic style of choice. Similar but more ornate than calling cards were "tokens of affections," which, in addition to serving the function of the calling card, also carried some phrase of endearment such as, "Friendship's Tie, Love Sincere," or "A token of regard for thee, In this my simple offering see." Generally these cards were on glazed card stock with elaborate illustrations of floral arrangements or wreaths, clasping hands and doves or cupids. Because there was seldom any room left for a person's name, and being smaller in size, the tokens of

¹⁷James Playsted Wood, *The Story of Advertising* (New York, Ronald Press, 1958), p. 228.

¹⁸"Abuse of the Visiting Card," *Ladies' Home Journal*, 14/6 (1897), p. 14.

affection were often glued at one corner to a traditional calling card, hiding the name until lifted.

Another collection with a wealth of a limited type of printed ephemera is the Szathmary Collection of Culinary Arts. Included with an extensive gift of books from Chef Louis Szathmary in 1989 were over 3,000 recipe pamphlets or booklets. Ranging in size from a single leaf to several pages, but too small to be considered a book, these items were generally produced as "giveaways" by major suppliers of ingredients used in the preparation of food. Few remain in existence today. One such item which was included in the exhibition was the oddity, *The Vital Question* (1899), prepared for distribution by the Cereal Machine Company, the manufacturer of Shredded Whole Wheat Biscuits, Granulated Wheat-Shred, Wheat-Shred Drink, and Wheat-Shred Baby Food. This pamphlet consisted of 262 recipes for breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and drinks made from shredded wheat products.

Other examples from the Szathmary Collection included in the exhibition were seven different Jell-o recipe pamphlets, dating from 1909 to 1937; one was entitled *Jack and Mary's Jell-o Recipe Book* (1937) referring to the endorsement of Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone. There are fifty-eight different Jell-o pamphlets in the collection.¹⁹

One display case in the exhibition was used solely for sheet music which was dated between 1881 and 1919. The illustrated covers and comic titles of these items often are more memorable and interesting than the melodies. One such example is the cover of the piece *Whoop! Whoop!! Whoop!!! Make a Noise Like a Hoop and Roll Away* (1908) which states that it was "Longfellowed" by Ren Shields and "Beethovenized" by J. Fred Helf. Another, *Toot Your Horn, Kid, You're in a Fog* was, as the cover states, stylized by Al Jolson.

¹⁹The titles of the other six pamphlets on display were: *What Six Famous Cooks Say of Jell-o*, *Quick, Easy, Jell-o Wonder Dishes*, *Thrifty Jell-o Recipes to Brighten your Menus*, *What You Can Do with Jell-o*, and *Jell-o: America's Most Favorite Dessert* (Two). Even though the titles are the same for these last two pamphlets, the recipes contained therein are different.



Sheet music, 1881-1919

These materials and others like them scattered throughout the Libraries' manuscript collections are windows to the past. How they can be used for historical research is open to one's imagination, but indeed, printed ephemera has a legitimate and important place in academic inquiry.