

# Notes and Comments

## Early Children's Books in the McGill University Libraries

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When by these gentle ways he [the child] begins to be able to read, some easy pleasant Book suited to his Capacity, should be put into his Hands, wherein the entertainment that he finds, might draw him on, and reward his Pains in Reading, and yet not such as should fill his Head with perfectly useless trumpery, or lay the principles of Vice and Folly.

John Locke. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 1693

Researchers of early children's literature can turn to a number of well known collections in Canada: The Osborne Collection, Boys and Girls House, Toronto Public Libraries, the Children's Literature Service at the National Library of Canada, the L.M. Montgomery Collection at the University of Guelph and the Arkley Collection at the University of British Columbia. Descriptions of these collections are available to scholars through various articles, books and bibliographies.

Among the treasures of McGill University Libraries are many early children's books with British, American and Canadian imprints, but because these are dispersed through several libraries their importance as a research collection has been overlooked. The two largest collections of early children's materials are housed in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections and in the rare book section of the Library and Information Studies Library. While the majority of volumes in the Rare Books Department are identified in the catalogue as children's books, some of the most interesting finds were only discovered by leafing through numerous card catalogue drawers. They are classified under various other headings such as "First Editions" and "Colgate". Shelved in the rare book room of the Blacker-Wood Library are several fine examples of early natural science works intended for children. Those interested in Canadian children's literature will also find early works in the Lande Collection, as well as on the shelves of the McLennan Library. Late nineteenth and twentieth-century children's books are collected in three campus libraries: Education, McLennan and Library and Information Studies.

The McGill collection to date has received little critical attention. To increase awareness and improve bibliographic access to these materials we intend to compile an annotated bibliography of early children's books in the McGill Libraries. Our work has concentrated on locating, identifying and classifying these materials. This note, a progress report on our research, highlights some of the earlier volumes with British and American imprints housed in the Department of Rare Books, and the rare book collection in the Library and Information Studies Library. In this preliminary study we have found over 1,000 volumes that are pre World War I.

As one of the main sources of verification, we have used the catalogue of the *Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books*, and have adopted and modified its system of genre classification. The Osborne Collection is world renowned for its comprehensiveness and scope. Comprising over 15,000 volumes, the collection ranges from a fourteenth-century manuscript of Aesop's fables, through sixteenth-century courtesy books, eighteenth-century chapbooks, nineteenth and early twentieth-century adventure stories, and ends in 1910.

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The history of the acquisition of early children's materials at McGill is somewhat obscure. There do not appear to be any papers that explicitly document the development of the collection. From a visit to the McGill Archives and a discussion with the former Rare Book Librarian it was discovered that many of these earlier works were acquired during the period Dr. Gerhard Lomer was University Librarian (1920-47) and Director of the Library School. He taught Children's Literature courses, and it would appear that his own personal interests influenced the purchase of many of the earlier works through the Friends of the Library Fund, for the Redpath Library.

Among the earliest and rarest items in the McGill Collection are the horn-books housed in the Department of Rare Books. These were the earliest lesson books made for children to use themselves. The horn-book was shaped like a racket or paddle and consisted of a recessed leaf of parchment or paper, secured all around by a narrow rim of copper fastened down with small tacks. Letters of the alphabet were written or etched on it, and many later ones also included a cross and the Lord's Prayer. Its name was derived from the thin transparent sheet of horn that was secured over the writing to protect the page from the child's hands. Andrew W. Tuer in *History of the Horn Book* explains that "a horn-book gradually came to mean an alphabetical tablet of any kind whether horn entered into the construction or not" (p. 5-6). The most common horn-books were made of wood or leather, the rarer of metal, ivory or bone. While a fine wooden sample is found in the Library Studies collection, there are three exquisite horn-books in Rare Books, one silver-plated, one of bone, and one of ivory dating back to the 17th century. It is interesting to note Eric Quayle's statement in *Early Children's Books: A Collector's Guide*, "There may have been ivory examples, but I know of none which have survived, although several set in silver—probably given to mark a special birthday and not meant for school use—can be seen in the showcases of museums" (p. 17). Our intention is to describe these fine specimens in detail in a future article.

Two early examples of instructional books written by schoolmasters are found in Rare Books. One is a first edition of *Cocker's morals; or the Muse's Spring Garden, adorned with many sententious disticks and poems in alphabetical order, fitted for the use of all publick and private grammar and writing schools*, (1675). Edward Cocker (1631-75), known also for *Cocker's Arithmetic*, was a celebrated writing master, and his name appeared on the title page of nearly 30 copy-books. The second, of related interest, is the work of another popular arithmetician Francis Walkingame (fl. 1751-85) *The Tutor's Assistant, being a compendium of arithmetic and a complete question book* (1792), first published in 1751. Housed in Library Studies is a fine representative collection of *Pinnock's Catechisms*, a series of books of instruction with questions and answers. Eighty-three Catechisms were published under William Pinnock's (1782-1843) name; however, most of these works were written by specialists in the subject. Included among the titles are a *Catechism of Geometry* (1823) and a *Catechism of General Knowledge* (1822).

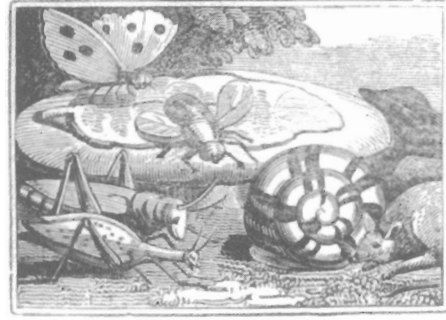
An exciting find in Rare Books is a first edition of John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Three hundred years ago, John Locke (1632-1704) celebrated philosopher and educationalist, advanced the revolutionary theory that instruction is best combined with entertainment. During this period the books intended for children were primarily instructional, moralistic or religious. Their only entertainment came from folk literature and inexpensive little pamphlets called chapbooks, which had filtered down to the child audience from adult popular culture. Locke's writings had an enormous influence on the rearing of English children, on the works of 18th and 19th century writers, and on the publishers of children's books.

John Newbery (1713-67), London bookseller in St. Paul's Churchyard and author, a disciple of Locke's, is acknowledged as the first publisher of children's books combining instruction with amusement. Attributed to Newbery is the tale of a young boy who desires to learn to read: *A History of Giles Gingerbread; a boy who lived upon learning* by Tom Trip (1764). A fine chapbook edition by Kendrew of York can be seen in Library Studies. As well there is an 1881

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And the Snail with her horns,  
Peeping out of a shell,  
Came fatigued with the distance,  
The length of an ell,



Mushroom the table,  
And in it was spread  
A Water-dock leaf,  
Which their table-cloth  
made.

Figure 1. An early chapbook edition of *Butterfly's Ball and Grasshopper's Feast*. London: Dean and Munday, [ca. 1815]. By William Roscoe.



THE  
PEACOCK "AT HOME:  
  
SEQUEL  
TO THE  
BUTTERFLY'S BALL.  
WRITTEN  
BY A LADY.  
AND  
ILLUSTRATED WITH ELEGANT ENGRAVINGS.  
  
LONDON:  
PRINTED FOR J. HARRIS, SUCCESSOR TO E. NEWBERRY AT THE  
ORIGINAL JUVENILE LIBRARY, THE CORNER OF  
21, PAUC'S CHURCH-YARD.  
1808.

Figure 2. *The Peacock "At Home" A Sequel to the Butterfly's Ball*. London: J. Harris, 1808. By Catherine Ann Dorset.

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facsimile edition of *Goody Two Shoes* (1765) published by Griffith and Farran, successors to Newbury and Harris, West Corner St. Paul's Churchyard.

The notable authors of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, mainly women, produced works of fiction that were clearly intended to educate and instil moral values and manners in children. Their writings were of two schools of thought, either of a theoretical non-religious nature, or infused with deep religious beliefs. Well known among the former are the books of the Edgeworths and Mary Wollstonecraft, who were influenced by the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) as well as by Locke. A first edition of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's (1744-1817) tale for children *Practical Education or, the History of Harry and Lucy*, volume 2 (1780) can be seen in Library Studies. Early editions of Maria Edgeworth's (1767-1840) *Parent's Assistant* (1796) and *Early Lessons* (1801) are also in Library Studies. A first edition of Maria Edgeworth's *Harry and Lucy Concluded* (1825) is housed in Rare Books. One of the most charming items in the Rare Book Collection is the first illustrated edition of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations, calculated to regulate the affections and form the mind to truth and goodness* (1791) with delicate engravings by William Blake.

Among the most influential religious writers of the period were Anna Barbauld (1743-1825), Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810), and Mary Sherwood (1775-1851). Together with her brother John Aiken (1747-1822) Mrs. Barbauld wrote a compilation of short stories, plays and articles. Early editions of this work, *Evenings at Home; or the Juvenile budget opened, consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces for the instruction and amusement of young persons* (1796-98) are housed in Rare Books. Both collections also have early editions of the well known works of Mrs. Trimmer, among them her *Fabulous Histories* (1786) promoting kindness to animals, later known as *The History of the Robins*, and of Mrs. Sherwood who is remembered for her fierce evangelical zeal. Representative of her works is the 1818 edition of *The History of little Henry and his bearer* (1814).

Poetry for children encompasses the entire range of children's literature: religious instruction, moral education and pure entertainment. The McGill Collection has fine examples of each. Library Studies has a 1769 edition of Isaac Watts' (1674-1748) *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715). Because Watts believed that children were naturally attracted to verse, he hoped the religious lessons thus imparted would be effortlessly and pleasurably retained, so providing "constant furniture" in child readers' minds. Another early example of devotional verse, found in Rare Books, is a 1793 edition of John Huddleston Wynne's (1743-88) *Choice Emblems, natural, historical, fabulous, moral and divine* (1775) presented in the tripartite form of the emblem book: illustration, moral and application.

Ann Taylor (1782-1866) and Jane Taylor (1783-1824) successfully continued both Isaac Watts' religious tradition and his polished verse form in *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (1804-05), *Rhymes for the Nursery* (1806) and *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1810). Library Studies has fine Victorian editions of these books. The Taylor sisters are major contributors to children's verse because of their focus on domestic and natural imagery in a strongly rhythmic, mnemonic form. Their most famous rhyme is "The Star," beginning "Twinkle, twinkle little star."

During the same period that the Taylor sisters were writing, William Roscoe (1753-1831) produced the first book of nonsense verse for children with *The Butterfly's Ball, and the Grasshopper's Feast* (1807). (Figure 1) An early illustrated booklet [ca. 1815] is housed in Library Studies, along with a sequel by Catherine Dorset (1750?-1817?) *The Peacock "At Home"* (1808), first published 1807. (Figure 2) The equal prominence of the delightful illustrations and text make these early examples of the picture book.

The collection in Rare Books is also enriched with a first edition of Christina Rossetti's (1830-94) *Goblin Market, and other Poems* (1862), with two magnificent Pre-Raphaelite designs by her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The title work moves poetry for children beyond the

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entertaining or the didactic with its compelling, disturbing narrative of archetypal greed and redemption. The end of the Victorian era is represented by the whimsical *In Fairyland* (1875), first published 1870, by William Allingham (1824-89) and illustrated by Richard Doyle. Housed in Rare Books, this poem was one of the initiators of the trend for "Fairie" verse which continued well into the 20th century.

Within the scope of this note it has only been possible to touch upon four genres: horn-books, books of instruction, stories pre- 1850 and poetry. These are representative of the wealth and breadth of early children's books in the McGill University Libraries. Hidden treasures such as the fine chapbook collection, works of famous illustrators, early children's periodicals, and adventure stories, to name but a few, deserve further attention, and will be highlighted in future research.

### References

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## A Portrait of Mary Todd Ferrier

by Conrad E. W. Graham

*Registrar, McCord Museum of Canadian History*

Mary Todd Ferrier (1799-1881)

oil on canvas, 1828

size: 76.2 × 63.5 cm.

inscribed on reverse: "Aged 28, 1828" artist: attributed to Levi Stevens (d. 1832)

purchase: Sotheby's Auction, Toronto, April 4, 1990

ex collection: John L. Russell

McCord Museum of Canadian History: M990.676.1

The portrait of Mary Todd Ferrier was purchased for the McCord collection at Sotheby's in Toronto on April 4, 1990. The acquisition of this portrait permitted the museum to re-unite a pair of portraits; as the portrait of her husband the Hon. James Ferrier (1800-1888), Chancellor of McGill University (1845-52) was already in the collection (M989X.76).

The painting shows a 3/4 face, waist to head portrait of a woman with a white gauze bonnet and wearing coral drop earrings. Her dress is black and rather severe but reflects the fashionable dress of the late 1820s.