Cataloging 19th-Century Children’s Books

CORNELIA S. KING

Many librarians, catalogers among them, assume that cataloging children’s books must be very easy work, and any discussion thereof necessarily brief. One librarian summed it up by saying, “All you have to do is title plus . . . ‘Bunnies’.” When I hear this I feel a certain amount of righteous indignation; cataloging 19th-century children’s books involves more than title-page transcription and an obvious subject heading. I also feel that it puts the whole matter into perspective. Ultimately, we who are working with historical children’s books are looking at relatively minor publications—but we are looking at them very intensely.

The patrons we serve work with groups of materials. Typically they are literary and social historians who are looking for patterns rather than the significance of single items. This is an important fact to bear in mind in making cataloging rules and policies. Uniformity is very important so that records can be used for purposes of comparison and contrast.

Frequently a patron wants to see a group of works by one particular author, such as Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale, author of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and editor of Godey’s Lady’s Book. At The Free Library of Philadelphia, the A. S. W. Rosenbach Collection of Early American Children’s Books has editions of numerous children’s books she either wrote or edited. One such item is a copy of her Poems for Our Children (Boston, 1830) which contains the first book appearance of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” It is a 24-page item with printed wrappers. Consider the cataloging issues it raises. The title page presents no major challenges to the cataloger: the title proper is set off typographically from the other title information, followed by a statement of responsibility. The imprint conforms to the regular pattern of the 260 field. The cataloger does not transcribe the quotation from the writings of Mrs. Sigourney, in accordance with Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books (DCRB) 1A2, but may discuss it in a note, depending on local practice. Then comes the issue of the phrase “Part First.” The cataloger needs to investigate this—is Poems for Our Children a multipart work?

Cornelia S. King is Head of Technical Services in the Rare Book Department of The Free Library of Philadelphia.
Fortunately for the cataloger, Mrs. Hale’s works are described in *The Bibliography of American Literature (BAL)*. For this title *BAL* lists two colors of paper stock for the wrappers (pink and tan—ours are tan) and notes that, despite the statement on the title page, there were no succeeding parts, so the cataloger would indicate “No more published” in a note.

The phrase “Part First” follows “By Mrs. Sarah J. Hale” on the title page and belongs as a second segment of the statement of responsibility. That way the transcription follows the layout of the title page. “Part First” as a quoted note would be a valid alternative under the rules, but that would split the transcription of the title page into two parts of the cataloging record—something to be avoided wherever possible.

Parts of the imprint not found together on the item being cataloged should be brought together. It is best to transcribe the manufacturing statement as subfields “e” and “f” of the 260 field and make a note indicating that the printer’s name has been taken from the verso of the title page. This is not provided for in *DCRB*, but it is of prevailing importance to have all aspects of production and distribution put forth in one place in the record. Creating a manufacturing statement instead of adding to the existing subfield “b” makes it clear that this is not linked directly to the imprint as set forth on the title page. (One should also create a manufacturing statement if such a statement is set apart typographically on the title page from the rest of the imprint.)

The presence of the tan wrappers is a key point to note. In the 19th century, wrappers were often discarded when owners bound pamphlets, either singly or in groups, into volumes. Today wrappers are essential to understanding how an item was issued by the publisher, and a pamphlet which was issued with wrappers is incomplete without them for both collectors and scholars.

At the Free Library we use the terms “front wrapper,” “back wrapper,” and “wrappers” to indicate both front and back wrappers. But would “upper” and “lower” be better than “front” and “back” to parallel the common terms “upper” and “lower board”? Or should we discuss wrappers in terms of the four pages they form? Is the front plus the back wrapper a (singular) printed wrapper or (plural) printed wrappers? It would
be useful for the rare book world to determine rules for the usage of terms found in ACRL's publication *Binding Terms*. The cataloger needs these terms to discuss wrappers in designating such things as the location of the publisher's advertisements that so frequently appear on them. It is important to note the presence of such advertisements to help scholars who study publishing and business history.

Mrs. Hale was an editor more often than an author. In her preface to an 1849 children's book entitled *Aunt Mary's New Stories for Young People*, she states that if she didn't highly approve of the book she "should not have given it the sanction of our name." From this the cataloger can surmise that Mrs. Hale is not "the person chiefly responsible for the creation of the intellectual or artistic content of the work" (in the language of AACR2). So who is? Is it Aunt Mary, if these are Aunt Mary's "new stories for young people"? Is Aunt Mary a woman who would have been embarrassed to have her full name in print unless in her marriage announcement or in her obituary? Looking at the person in the frontispiece, one wonders whether Aunt Mary has a receding hairline and a vague resemblance to Benjamin Franklin. Or is there an Aunt Mary at all; perhaps this is a marketing attempt to appeal to young children, or to appeal to children who enjoyed *Aunt Mary's Library*, a series of books by Mrs. Mary Hughes, a British author of children's books. The cataloger can find that James Munroe & Co. advertised a book entitled *Aunt Mary's Stories* in the ten pages of advertisements that follow the end of the text, but no copies of this work, to which *Aunt Mary's New Stories* presumably is the sequel, can be located today.

There is no evidence linking this Aunt Mary with Mrs. Hughes, or Mary Hodgson (another Aunt Mary in the name authority file), or the Aunt Mary who authored *The

Edinburgh Doll. In cataloging it is better to err on the side of caution than to indicate more certainty than one can substantiate. Thus the cataloger is better off entering this as a title-main-entry record, listing the stories by title in a contents note, and giving access to Mrs. Hale, the editor, in an added entry, than hazard ing an unsubstantiated guess about the identity of Aunt Mary.

It is often hard to determine the name of the author of 19th-century children’s books. Father Johnson (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1850), for example, has the statement of responsibility: “by the author of ‘Dying Hours,’ ‘Doing Good,’ &c.” Here, too, no copies of Dying Hours or Doing Good appear to have survived, so identification of the author is not possible by that route (as is allowed under AACR2 22.11D). The titles themselves have a generic quality, too, unlike identifiable titles like Tom Jones, Pamela, or Joseph Andrews. Nor can the cataloger prove that the phrase “By the author of ‘Dying Hours’ . . . is commonly associated with a particular author, so it would be preferable not to establish this longish phrase as an access point at all, and enter this under title.

Frequently, in fact, tract societies (such as the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, in this case) intentionally obscured the name of the individual author in order to focus on their own role of commissioning, revising, and approving the books they published. This title page states: “Written for the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, and approved by the Committee of Publication,” so the book was in fact a
commissioned work, and it would be ahistorical for the cataloger to work overly hard to construct an author for an item that was primarily part of a unified program of evangelical education and socialization.

Cataloging tracts often involves a more basic problem than identifying authors. Frequently it is unclear whether an item is a work of fiction or not. Take the typical pious death story in which a preschooler convinces his alcoholic father to forswear drink and embrace the Gospel. The child then utters his last breath in prayer, with a smile on his lips, and a Bible clasped to his little chest. These stories strain credibility unless, as Mark Twain reasoned, "the good little boys all died before our time." One wonders. These stories purport to be fact; the cataloger should treat them as biographies if there are specific details that indicate a real child actually existed. The worst result of cataloging them as biographies would be subject headings for fictitious persons. Take Emily Spare, the title character of *Experience and Happy Death of Emily Spare* (New York, 1837). Emily was an orphan who died of dropsy and right up to her death "manifested an unshaken confidence in her Saviour." The cataloger has Emily's age, the day she died, and can observe that the tract does not contain much dialog (a typical sign of non-fiction). With this evidence, the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church has convinced the cataloger that this is biography. *A Memoir of H—G*—(Philadelphia, 1824), published by the Tract Association of Friends, is less "convincing." Little H—G—has long conversations with her family and associates before her radiant death, and these conversations are represented verbatim. This tract seems much more fictive than the Methodist tract.

Catalogers of 19th-century children's books have frequent need to refer to the rule on modifications of texts because so many early children's books are, in fact,
adaptations of well-known adult texts. AACR2 rule 21.10A on adaptations for children is very clear:

- Enter an adaptation under the name of the adapter.
- If the name of the adapter is unknown, enter under title.
- Make a name-title added entry for the original work.
- In case of doubt, enter the record under the heading for the original work.

Therefore, the cataloger confidently gives an adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe* a title-main-entry because the edition statement reads, "A new edition, carefully adapted to youth," and the adapter is not known. "Defoe, Daniel, dates, Robinson Crusoe" becomes an added entry. This case is clear.

But what about the 31-page edition which does not list Defoe as the author? Many editions of the adult classic, including the first edition of 1719 (which purports to have been written by Robinson Crusoe himself), do not list Defoe as the author. Should one presume it is an adaptation simply because of its brevity? But what if it is an abridgement (abridgements, after all, get entered under the heading for the original)? It would be relatively easy in most libraries for the cataloger to compare the text to the original. But consider the Rosenbach Collection’s short versions of the *Adventures of Captain Robert Singleton*, another title by Defoe. Libraries are less likely to have editions of the original text for that title or might have a number of varying texts. It is easy to imagine problems arising in determining which of several texts is the definitive author’s text, to which a putative adaptation might be compared. In the interest of making progress in the work at hand, the cataloger should leave textual bibliography to the province of literary scholarship and decide that doubt exists. And it does, whether some small amount of doubt or copious, unresolvable doubt. The cataloger should enter this title under the heading for the original work, a name/uniform title combination: Defoe, Daniel, dates, Robinson Crusoe. A little bit of procrastinate cutting is better than uneven attention to textual comparisons. That way the whole collection reflects roughly the same degree of scrutiny of detail, and the catalogers generously are leaving something for the scholars.

Nineteenth-century children’s books often appeared in series. In some cases commercial publishers issued them—for example, Sidney Babcock issued New Haven toy books with complex numbering. Mrs. Sherwood’s *The Improved Boy* (New Haven, 1830) is Book 17 of *Babcock’s New Series*, within the second edition of his subseries called the “No. 1’s.” But, unlike modern publishing, a number of different publishers often issued books in the same series simultaneously. These were author’s series—not publisher’s series. Authors like Noah Webster derived royalties from many publishers for the same text. Lyman Cobb also was particularly successful as an author of spellers, readers, and other textbooks for young children. For example, the Free Library has two 1836 editions of no. 10 of his third series, *Pretty Stories for All Good Children*, one published in Oxford, N.Y., and the other in New York City. The
title vignettes differ, as do the dates at the end of the preface and the press figures. But the texts appear to derive from the same setting of type, probably by way of stereotype plates. Just tracing the history of a series such as Cobb's toys would provide valuable information on the extremely complex fabric of interconnections among authors and publishers in the early 19th century.

Whole series should be made retrievable to the extent that they can be identified. Tract publishers make this a harder task than commercial publishers because they often used serial numbering without a series title. Good spade work has been done by the American Antiquarian Society for series issued by organizations such as the American Tract Society. In addition, publishers' advertisements and catalogs often list the titles of various series. But we need to anticipate a future point when we will need to do large-scale maintenance on series in cataloging records, to make series designations thoroughly consistent and clear, and to reconcile what can be reconciled.

One final issue is dating undated publications. Publishers extended the salability of their imprints by not dating them. Assigning publication dates to undated works is facilitated by a knowledge of publishing history. With John Tebbel's multivolume *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (New York & London: R.R. Bowker, 1972-81), city directories, and the online authority records, the cataloger is equipped with valuable data. Mahlon Day, for example, was located at 376 Pearl St. between 1825 and 1833, which narrows the possible date of a particular publication. For undated items, copyright statements can indicate the beginning of a possible range of dates. Dated inscriptions indicate the end of a range. There may be a time in the future when successive efforts uncover more data and catalogers can revise early records by providing fuller information. Such is the nature of all bibliographic work.

The most important aspect of cataloging early American children's books is to get records into the databases to encourage use of the materials in all of our collections. When all else fails, I like to remember a sign in a Philadelphia shop that sells supplies for the practice of the occult. It reads: "We only aim to aid."
Numinous Press announces...

**ROBERT STONE**

**A Bibliography, 1960-1992**

Compiled by Ken Lopez and Bev Chaney

The first bibliography of the National Book Award-winning author of *Dog Soldiers*, whose latest novel, *Outerbridge Reach*, was chosen by *The New York Times Book Review* one of the nine best books of the year. Clothbound. 124 pp., over 240 entries, including novels, book and periodical appearances, translations, screenplays. Illustrated. Indexed.

- With a critical introduction to his work by Canadian scholar Mark Levene; an essay on collecting Robert Stone's writing by librarian Charles Michaud; and a short *previously unpublished statement by Robert Stone* on the origins of his writing.
- Trade edition, 750 copies - $40.00
- Limited edition, 150 numbered copies *signed by Robert Stone* - $125.00

AVAILABLE FROM:

Ken Lopez—Bookseller, 51 Huntington Road, Hadley MA 01035
(413) 584-4827    FAX (413) 584-2045

---

**Princeton University Library Publications**

... make more readily available scarce or unique material in the Library, including:


*Graphic Americana: The Art & Technique of Printed Ephemera.* By Dale Roylance. Fully illustrated in color.

For a complete listing & prices, write to:

Friends of the Princeton University Library
One Washington Road
Princeton, NJ 08544-2098

Telephone: (609) 258-3155