“Anything written on rare-book cataloging just now is bound to be controversial.” These were Paul Dunkin’s opening words to his influential How to Catalog a Rare Book, written over forty years ago. In the 1973 second edition of his work he asked the fundamental question, “How much is enough?” and responded astutely, “Probably no two catalogers will agree.” His opinions and counsel might have been different had he written his work in 1992, but the question remains the same. Once we have determined that a book is to be cataloged and have given it basic AACR2 treatment, how do we know what the next step should be, and when do we stop? This is not a glib query now that there is an ever-growing interest in the cultural and popular history represented in our old books, and thesauri exist for providing access to everything from a book’s “foxing” and “broken types” to its “cyanotypes” and “opalotypes.”

In this paper I will consider just one aspect of these questions: cataloging 19th-century illustrations and bindings. Even if we acknowledge the unity of a book’s textual and physical elements, the illustrations and binding stand apart. What makes the “decorative elements” of books special? As Dunkin put it: “The rare book is a fascinating material object, a document in the history of civilization . . . [and] the fact that the rare book itself is valued as a material object must be the keynote of any useful approach to rare-book cataloging.” If we do not want to lose contact with the cultural heritage intrinsic to books, catalogers must provide access points to them and describe their physical qualities.

There has yet to be a collective effort to safeguard 19th-century artifacts. The two major reasons for this are the material’s relative youth (“what is new must not be rare”) and relative abundance (“what is plentiful must not be rare”). Edwin Wolf’s From Gothic Windows to Peacocks: American Embossed Leather Bindings 1825–1855 demonstrates what can be learned about 19th-century readership, design, social tastes and customs, and printing, binding, and publishing practices from studying a genre previously considered “undistinguished.” When Wolf was trying to locate embossed

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bindings in institutions nationwide, he discovered that at some of the potentially richest sources—such as the Library of Congress and New York Public Library—much of the material originally bound in embossed bindings had been rebound in “sturdier” buckram. We are now beginning to realize what can be learned about the 19th century from ephemera genres such as pictorial wrappers. Since they were intended to be discarded, it is amazing that so many still exist, and it is distressing to think how many more of them have perished at the hands of librarians.

In *Preserving the Illustrated Text*, the Commission on Preservation and Access’ Joint Task Force on Text and Image recognized the importance of graphic images found in brittle 19th-century texts, concluding that “a beginning must be made now to preserve illustrated books and periodicals from the era 1850 to 1880.” The authors also concluded that available information on these graphic materials is undependable and insufficient to produce comprehensive recommendations. Librarians, archivists, curators, and catalogers have been challenged to provide a systematic examination of this material.

In deciding which illustrated books and bindings deserve special attention, four major considerations come immediately to mind:

(1) Cataloging should be collection driven. For example, if an institution has a collection of publishers’ bindings or if bindings are of interest to the institution’s patrons, the cataloger should consider tracing binding styles.

(2) Cataloging is patron driven. An institution must decide who the “primary” patron is, and cataloging should reflect this patron’s needs. For example, for some researchers primary interest in *Homes of American Statesmen* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Co.; London: Simpson, Low, Son and Co., 1854) lies in the information it contains on American statesmen, historic buildings, and 19th-century views on these subjects. That this was the first American book to be illustrated with a photograph is of equal if not more interest to the Library Company, where we have a large American photography collection, and our patrons take a keen interest in the history of the book. Our cataloging points this out and makes appropriate added entries.

There is a secondary, larger audience we should not ignore—the one which accesses our materials through the network databases and the Internet. To serve these extramural patrons, standardized cataloging practices and vocabularies are necessary. For instance, the photographic frontispiece of *Homes of American Statesmen*, de-
scribed in the volume as a “crystallotype or sun picture,” is technically a salt print; the correlative approved (i.e., standard) term in Descriptive Terms for Graphic Materials: Genre and Physical Characteristic Headings (GMGPC) is “salted paper photoprint.”

A third audience we should consider is that of future generations. In Preserving Harvard’s Retrospective Collections, the authors concluded that “the challenge is to hand on the rather ordinary documents from [a given] period” and that the subjective notion of “importance” should not be used as a criterion because “agreement as to what is important would only show that we are well-adjusted acculturated products of the ideology of our time and place.” We might often wish that previous catalogers had taken a more expansive attitude towards the material in their care, and although this cannot be our sole motivation, we should try to think of future needs in our cataloging.

(3) Cataloging is heavily influenced by finances. While there may be many good reasons to provide lengthier transcriptions, more notes, and more subject and added entries, there are limits to what is physically and financially possible. The labor and database searching costs involved in trying to determine the full names and birth and death dates of all 30 illustrators named in Robert Tomes’s The War With the South (New York: Virtue & Yorston, 1862–67) are considerable. Establishing headings for the corporate names represented or tracing the numerous graphic processes (mezzotints, steel engravings, lithographs, ambrotypes) and binding attributes (gilt edges, publisher’s cloth, quarter sheep) would only add to the costs.

(4) Cataloging responds to the item being cataloged. When cataloging a book, we should ask: What are its distinguishing physical features? There is only one way to tell: through an understanding of the material. There is no substitute for an educated eye to see if access should be provided to a particular attribute of a book. As Jackie Dooley and Helena Zinkham point out, “rare book catalogers assign their terms based on their knowledge of the importance of a book’s content and artifactual value.” Are a lot of broken-down, mildly decorated, cloth publishers’ bindings from the 1890s worth taking note of or tracing? My judgment would tell me no. On the other hand, if one of them is an early, unsigned example of the work of the respected designer Margaret Armstrong, then an added entry is important.

To become acquainted with 19th-century illustrations and bindings one must read secondary material on the subject and study as many samples as possible. The secondary material available varies widely, from books, journals, and catalogs, to databases and electronic bulletin boards. For example, Leaflets of Memory (Philadelphia: E.H. Butler & Co., 1852) bears in its preface the memorial “nor is less praise due to Mr. Altemus, for the taste and ability displayed in the ornamental binding.” Thanks to Mary Parke-Johnson’s “An Inventory of the Joseph T. Altemus Bookbindery, Philadelphia, 1854” in the Papers of the BSA, we are able to identify this Mr. Altemus, one of a large clan of binders, as Joseph T.
Contemporary sources are also useful in discovering details of a book’s production: for example, contemporary city directories, printed advertisements, memoirs, and periodicals. An advertisement from the Book Buyer says that Houghton, Mifflin & Co. issued both a regular and a large paper edition of Lewis Wallace’s *The Fair God* in 1898, both illustrated by Eric Pape, the latter with the photogravures on Japan paper and with a jacket design by Pape. These two editions with such distinct design features are not differentiated in the National Union Catalog (NUC) or RLIN.

More important than the secondary or contemporary literature is the book itself. For example, if one did not look closely, one might miss such an identifier as Benjamin Bradley’s thirteen-millimeter blind-embossed bookbinder’s stamp which frequently appears on Boston imprints from the mid-century; or the seven-millimeter bookbinder’s ticket of Galway of Dublin, which appears on the inside corner of the front paste-down of William Scribble’s *Erin’s Fairy Spell* (Dublin: McGlassan and Gill, 1865); or the one-millimeter stamp of C. Hasert of Stuttgart, which appears on the front board of *Der Jugengarten . . . gegrundet von Ottilie Wildemuth* (Stuttgart: Gebruder Kruner, ca. 1870). The context is also important: on its own, any one chromolithographed wrapper from the mid- to late-19th century is probably not outstanding, but a collection of them can say a great deal about popular taste and sentiments of the day. As John Carter pointed out, in distinguishing binding characteristics “the more practiced the eye the clearer they become.”

Variants come to the forefront when cataloging 19th-century printed material; identifying illustration and binding states is an integral part in documenting variants. In the very rare first American edition, first state of *Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1885), the illustration picturing Silas Philip shows the fly of his trousers at a curve. An even rarer second state—presumably the work of a prankster in the printing shop—is what earlier generations have referred to as “ribald.” The third state shows a fly which is basically straight up and down. To complicate *Huck Finn’s* bibliographic history further, the frontispiece also appears in numerous states. Half of the special collections with first edition *Huckleberry Finn* records in the RLIN database do not cite the *Bibliography of American Literature* or distinguish which state is in their possession.

Identifying illustration processes can be very difficult; consequently, one might be best advised to describe illustrations in the most basic of terms. Electrotyping was the customary process used in the duplication of graphic images in books and periodicals from the 1850s well into the 1890s. But, as Gaskell has pointed out, distinguishing an electrotype from a wood engraving is nearly impossible, and what is more, an electrotype of a wood engraving could be used for years in the reprinting of a work, complicating the dating of a particular volume. The artist Joseph Adams was an American pioneer of the electrotype. He created models for Harper’s celebrated 1846 *Illuminated Bible*. When cataloging this Bible, we could use the GMGPC term “wood engravings” to describe what were originally such, but a more accurate and
useful description of this work would include reference to its pivotal role in the development of electrotype.\textsuperscript{13}

While in some senses technology may be a cataloger’s savior, it is currently a heavy cross to bear when trying to provide adequate access to “special” collections. No longer restrained by the physical limitations imposed on us by card catalogs, we are now faced with defining intellectual limits to our records. There are technology’s practical problems as well: we have all experienced the frustrations inherent in a clustering model like that employed by RLIN—which not only buries variants, but completely different editions in a primary cluster—and the master record concept of OCLC which does not display local tracings. Local online systems have limitations which frequently make descriptive cataloging standards appear useless. Should we bother tracing genres and physical characteristics if our online catalog does not index them? Do we want to worry about conflicts between the various thesauri and LCSH if these terms are all indexed together?

Cataloging codes and catalogers’ tools are also often a problem. We are frequently confused by differences between AACR2 and DCRB; e.g., DCRB lists the term “diagram” as permissible in the second element of the physical description area, AACR2 does not. Moreover, the term “diagram” is not defined in DCRB’s glossary.

There is also the question of whether we should be employing DCRB for the cataloging of 19th-century material since some specific guidelines are problematic. DCRB 7C18 states that binding is a characteristic that needs placing in a “copy specific” note. This clearly does not apply to the majority of 19th-century bindings. DCRB 5C3 states, “Do not describe hand-colored illustrations as colored unless there is evidence that the publication was issued with hand-coloring” [in the physical description area]. The majority of books with hand-colored illustrations published from the end of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century were issued that way. Perhaps DCRB should recommend that it is appropriate to indicate hand-coloring for books from this period in this area.

\textit{Robert H. Collyer, Psychography, or, The Embodiment of Thought. \ldots\ (Philadelphia [etc.]: Sold by Zieber \& Co. [etc.], 1843).}
In their article "The Object as Subject: Providing Access to Genres, Forms of Material and Physical Formats," Jackie Dooley and Helena Zinkham describe some of the pitfalls involved in trying to use the various thesauri created by the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ACRL, the Getty Center, the Library of Congress, and the Research Libraries Group. These problems include conflicting and imprecise vocabulary, varying field applications, and indeterminate subdivision procedures. Should I employ the term "yapp style bindings" or "circuit edges" to describe a style of binding that overlaps a book's edges? Neither term is defined in Binding Terms, and they are used almost interchangeably by Glaister and Carter. Leake's Patent "Relievo leather" binding was a highly respected style of binding from the mid-century whose most prominent designer was Owen Jones. Another genre consisting of "varnished wood sides, tartan paper onlay"—not surprisingly found on Victorian editions of Scott—were popularly referred to as "mauchline ware." While I cannot imagine the special collection that would want to trace the "guards" of its bindings, neither "relievo" nor "mauchline ware" appear in Binding Terms. This points to an added difficulty with this particular thesaurus: it places far too much emphasis on binding elements and not enough on the full bindings themselves. As Dunkin put it, "a cataloger tells only what a rare book looks like; a bibliographer tells how it came to look that way."

Both DCRB and the RBMS thesauri emphasize that usage is voluntary and many of the guidelines have optional alternatives, resulting in erratic application within institutions and on the national and international levels. This is an issue which should be addressed. The growing acceptance of "local" terminology in the 655 and 755 fields further complicates matters. Having gone so far in establishing standard terminology, we are now faced with the prospects of no constraints at all. This may be an Achilles' heel rather than a saving grace; the numerous options provided by these cataloging tools are almost too many for any reasonable person to apply. Maybe it is time that like institutions got together and tried to implement the same subdivision practices, the same guidelines, and the same "options."

SIX GUIDELINES
Experience and research have led to the formulation of the following six guidelines for the description of the decorative elements of 19th-century imprints:

(1) When tracing illustrations and bindings, standardized terminology drawn from established cataloging tools should be used whenever possible. We are breaking new ground here, but bibliographers and historians have been studying the 19th century and defining workable nomenclature for its books almost since 1901. "Striped cloth bindings" is not a term used in any of the cataloging literature, but it has been identified as a genre by both McLean and Ball.

(2) We must realize that establishing absolute authority for the technological terminology and for names of persons and firms involved in the creation of 19th-
century illustrations and bindings is unrealistic. When we think we have finally pinned down the correct form of a name or identified a process definitively, we may discover we had it all wrong in the first place. “Relative authority” is acceptable.

(3) Although giving up a specific battle, we may well eventually win the war, particularly if we catalog precisely and with adequate documentation. Such documentation—which will last beyond the particular needs of a particular generation—can be in the form of local files, annotated thesauri, cross-references in the catalog, and articulate notes in the cataloging record.

(4) Although it does not hurt to err on the side of excess, we should ask ourselves why we are tracing a certain attribute. Are we simply clogging up the databases with tracings of undistinguished publishers’ bindings or lithographs? With regard to notes, only the grossest distinctions are worth making. This is particularly true when dealing with something we know little about, which lends little to an item’s overall accessibility, or relates to a complicated issue. For instance, subjects probably better left alone by catalogers are the overly precise descriptions of binding colors and complicated photographic and photomechanical processes.

(5) We should not worry about changing our minds. Cataloging should be considered a process of growth.

(6) We must cooperate both inside our institution and outside. With other catalogers, curators, and users we are able to resolve some of the conflicts we face. We all rely heavily on the fine work done by catalogers of such institutions as the American Antiquarian Society, the New-York Historical Society, and Dartmouth College. Anyone cataloging Victorian publishers’ bindings should pay attention to the Trade Bindings Research Newsletter whose contributors compile bibliographies of the major Victorian trade binders and designers and discuss standard terminology for those bindings’ colors and designs. A consortium being gathered to address the need for standards and guidelines in the descriptive cataloging of sheet music is drawing on the expertise of art catalogers, music catalogers, and rare book catalogers.

CONCLUSION
From observing cataloging records in the RLIN database, it is obvious that the majority of records for 19th-century material do not appear to have the user’s interests in mind; these records are often extremely brief and inaccurate. Libraries are still not according to 19th-century material the attention it deserves.

The historical environment in which a book was produced and the role which the book played in that environment determine the type and amount of attention which should be accorded it by the cataloger. A gilt-decorated flap binding from the first quarter of the 19th century is a very unusual example of the flap genre for its period; its gilt is not. We must stop ignoring the finer points of the books we are cataloging by learning to discern the novel from the common and then attending to them appropriately. Descriptive cataloging is an art, not a science. Seen in this light,
probably more can be learned from example than from all the rules that have ever been written. There is a beauty in this and a potential for style in descriptive cataloging—that is what makes it so interesting and fulfilling.

The differences that are often pointed out as existing between bibliographers and descriptive catalogers are not so great; rather the dynamics between them are quite sympathetic. Today, fewer bibliographers are following the rigorous standards proposed by Bowers and his peers, and catalogers are frequently the ones who are doing the more indepth descriptive work on individual items. In fact, I like to think that the descriptive cataloger is simply a refined, sophisticated breed of bibliographer, who after all is described in the dictionary as “one versed in the description and cataloging of printed matter.”

NOTES

1. Paul Shaner Dunkin, How to Catalog a Rare Book (Chicago: American Library Association, 1951), p. 1; Second edition, revised (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), pp. 1–3. Dunkin suggests that “it is not . . . the cataloger’s job to decide if a book is rare; that has been decided before the book reached his desk. For his purposes any book which has value primarily as a physical object is a rare book” (p. 2). And while we all know that in the real world such distinctions are not so simple, for the purposes of this paper I am going to go along with this assumption.


3. I will not be discussing maps or illustrated sheet music, even though they are related by technique, as these have traditionally fallen to map and music catalogers to wrestle with.

4. Dunkin, How to Catalog a Rare Book, p. 1.


8. Despite the fact that Armstrong is actually named on the title page as designer of numerous volumes in the RLIN database, a majority of the records do not trace her.

9. The electronic bulletin boards, NOTRBCAT, EXLIBRIS, and SHARP, have had some fascinating discussions on subjects ranging from the proper use of the GMGPC term “illuminations” to how to describe binding colors. Donald Farren recently used the bulletin boards to alert readers to his excellent hand list on 19th-century British and American bindings and binders.

10. The Papers of the BSA 80, no. 2 (1966).


12. See BAL 3415 for full details.


14. Dooley and Zinkham, “The Object as Subject.”
15. The Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ALA is responsible for *Binding Terms*; the Getty Center for the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus*; the Library of Congress for *LCSH* and *GMGPC*; and RLG for *Form Terms for Archival and Manuscripts Control*.


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