Bookplate History

Although marks of ownership have been identified in the early tenth-century libraries of Egypt and Asia, the first known bookplate, produced by woodcut, dates back to mid-fifteenth century Germany. As books became more available after Gutenberg's invention of movable type around 1450, collectors began acquiring more books and commissioning their own bookplates. By 1480 German bookplates were much in evidence, simple designs in woodcut usually featuring heraldic designs of the owner's coat of arms. Among the famous artists creating these early bookplates were Albrecht Durer, Lucas Cranach the Elder, and Hans Holbein—the great names in art of the period.

Copperplate engraved bookplates appeared around 1525. Copper allows for highly detailed hand engraving resulting in more embellished designs. The eighteenth century brought many well designed and crafted plates, generally, as in earlier years, armorial although some depicted mythological or allegorical figures or landscapes. A typical plate of the era might include a view of the owner's estate with animals and birds, especially if related to the owner's name, and designs indicating a person's profession or hobby.

Early bookplate design has been classified into four design categories:

- Early English Style—coat of arms, name, date, title-pre-1700
- Jacobean style—ornate, formal, heraldic-1700-1745
- Chippendale style—lighter, ornate, flowering designs-1745-1790
- Ribbon and wreath—simpler design-post 1790
In the nineteenth century there was a return to the wood engraving process for bookplate production. These later wood engravings were produced using the end grain, allowing for more detail and less cost. Steel engraving also came into use because it allowed for cheaper production and more copies could be made without wear to the block.

Early nineteenth-century design generally continued the ornate style of the past, but later in the century bookplates began to show the changing artistic styles of the period such as romanticism and art nouveau. In the twentieth century, an even wider variety of styles were used ranging from art deco, to expressionism, to pop art.

**WILLIAM AUGUSTUS BREWER BOOKPLATE COLLECTION**

Manuscript Collection Number: GRA 115
Accessioned: Gift of Augusta LaMotte Brewer
Extent: approx. 13,000 items.
Reverend William Augustus Brewer was an avid bookplate collector. His wife, Augusta LaMotte Brewer, bequeathed his collection to the University of Delaware Library after her husband's death. The William Augustus Brewer Bookplate Collection comprises 12,680 printed bookplates dating mainly from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The designers of the bookplates include Thomas Bewick, Edward Burne-Jones, Kate Greenaway, William Hogarth, Howard Pyle, Rudolf Ruzicka, and James A. M. Whistler. Subjects illustrated in the bookplates are varied, including acrostics, birds, death's heads, medicine, music, rebuses, and science and portraits of historical and literary figures.

The collection has been left with the same organization (alphabetical by the name of the owner) and in the same housings used by Rev. Brewer. In 1957, the University of Delaware Library produced an index to the collection, which is included in this finding aid. The index is organized alphabetically by artists, owners, and subjects.

For Further Study

There are many books available about the history of bookplates. Searching Delcat using the browse subject option, then typing in "bookplates" identifies over 70 titles at the University of Delaware Library. A few general works include:

LOCATION: Morris Library Z995 .T73 1977

Lee, Brian North


LOCATION: Morris Library folio Z994 .G7 L44 1979

Butler, William Elliott, 1939-


LOCATION: Morris Library Z994 .A5 B88x 1986

Keenan, James P.
