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**From the Selected Works of Sidney F. Huttner**

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# The Publishers' Trade List Annual and Book Collecting

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/shuttner/27/>

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***The Publishers' Trade List Annual and Book Collecting:***

**When a book has been produced in hundred of editions, keeping track of them requires help.**

Sidney F. Huttner

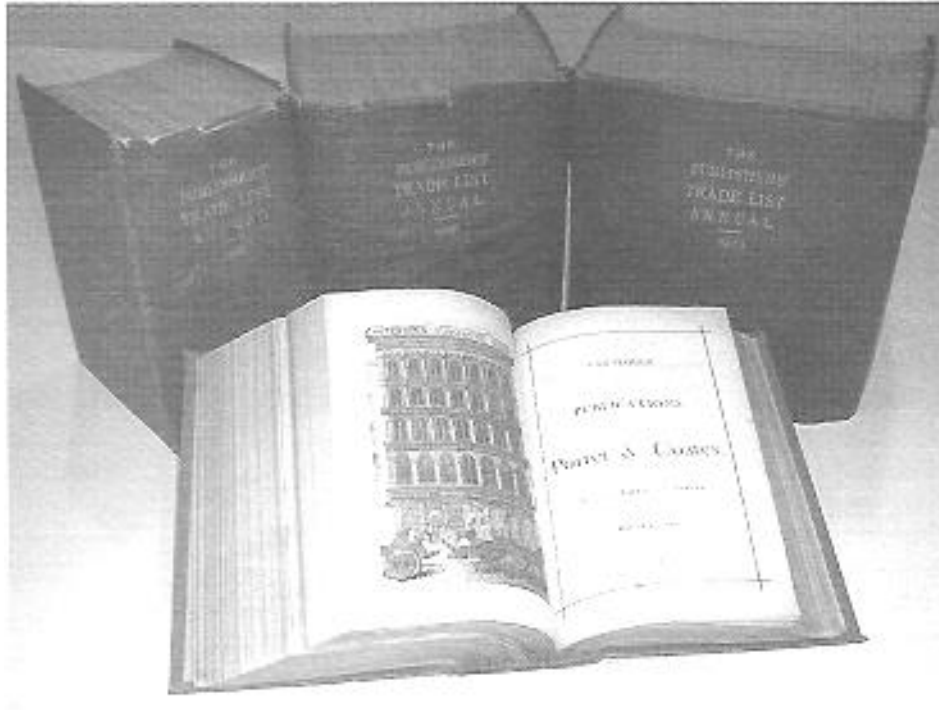
Few people are called to *read* directories. But it appears I am one of them.

Owen Meredith's *Lucile* wormed its way into my attention in 1985. Despite 19 years of fairly dedicated effort I have been able to collect copies of only about 700 of the more than 2000 American editions I am confident were published between 1860 and 1938. My confidence is based on a monument of American bibliography of which most collectors are blissfully -- I choose that word carefully! -- unaware. Monument it may be; easy to find and use, it ain't.

The publishing trade magazine *Publishers' Weekly* (*PW*) began publication in New York City in 1872. As it still does today, *PW* carried news of interest to the trade, advertising, and descriptions of new publications. Its editor, Frederick Leypoldt, intended to continue the work of men whose bibliographies are well remembered by Americana collectors -- works such as Orville A. Roorbach's *Bibliotheca Americana*, which catalogs American imprints from 1820 to 1861, and James Kelly's three volumes of *The American Catalogue of Books*, covering ten years starting in 1861. In addition to getting out *Publishers' Weekly* 52 weeks a year, Leypoldt continued Kelly's *American Catalogue* with eleven volumes for the period 1876 to 1910.

Leypoldt started another publication, *Publishers' Trade List Annual* (*PTLA*), in 1873 as the basis on which a full catalog of United States imprints might eventually be founded. The title page of the second (1874) volume reads in full: "The Publishers' Trade List Annual, Embracing the Full Trade Lists of American Publishers, together with an Alphabetical Reference List of Books recorded in the Publisher's Weekly from January 16, 1873, to June 27, 1874, and the American Educational Catalogue for 1874. With Alphabetical Indexes of Firms and Trade Specialities. New York: Office of the Publishers' Weekly, 37 Park Row. October, 1874."

Leypoldt's idea was straight-forward: ask every American publisher to submit by a specified date a specified number of copies of a catalog of the firm's publications. Collate the resulting catalogs, provide some indices and other preliminary matter, and bind the result into a volume that could be distributed back to booksellers, libraries, and other potential book buyers and distributors. The call for submissions must have included general specifications on size: the volumes are relatively uniform, page size about 8 by 11 inches, but grow thicker with each passing year as both individual catalogs and the number of publishers submitting them grow larger. By 1900, the volumes are a foot thick and unwieldy in the extreme.



Content varies. Some catalogs were little more than lists with price and order information. Others offer substantial descriptions of individual books and series. Relatively few are illustrated in the 1870s; by the late 1880s, however, more and more are illustrated with line cuts and half-tones, often of bindings, later dust jackets, and also of authors, manufacturing facilities, and publisher's offices. Paper quality varies but is, in general, not very good.

A second part of Leypoldt's idea was to index each year's *PTLA* to provide access to individual authors and titles. Regrettably he never got to this. His successors, the H. W. Wilson Company, tried with the *Cummulative Book Index* in 1898 and produced volumes of *The United States Catalog* in 1899, 1902, 1912, and 1928, all sadly incomplete and ad hoc. Leypoldt's ambition was not realized until 1948, when *PTLA* became the source document for *Books in Print* (now an online database, *Bowker's Global Books in Print*). It is safe to say that the content of volumes published prior to 1948 is not easily or reliably accessed.

However, relatively few publisher's catalogs survive, and those which do are widely scattered, and *PTLA* thus remains an invaluable resource for research of late 19th century imprints. Maddeningly, an informal survey in 1995-1997 suggests that runs of the pre-1920 volumes, which libraries far and wide must once have held, are now far from common. Full or nearly full runs of *PTLA* have so far been identified at only a dozen American libraries. Chicago is fortunate

indeed to have at least two copies -- one at the Newberry and one at the Center for Research Libraries (to which Iowa sent its run in the 1980s). During the 1970s, the Meckler Corporation published a somewhat more accessible microfiche edition of *PTLA* 1903-1981, but for the early years it is find-me-if-you-can.

After you've accepted the fact there is only look-for-the-page access to individual titles, another maddening thing about *PTLA* is that it is possible to know which publishers are represented in which years only by seeking out a run and -- looking. Thereby finding, of course, all too often, that Leypoldt didn't find the firm or that the publisher didn't bother to contribute in the year you need him to have done so.

Each volume of *PTLA* is prefaced by a single alphabetical list of publishers contributing catalogs and of publishers and others who chose to offer display advertisements in lieu of catalogs. It appears that most catalogs arrived in a timely way and were arranged in alphabetical order by name of publisher; a few, inevitably, arrived late and were placed in a supplement bound after the primary sequence. Advertisements might appear on the cover of the binding, on endsheets or preliminary pages, or on pages inserted after the supplement. The principal purpose of the index was to point to these various locations.

From the late 1970s through the 1980s I drudged my way through some 750,000 city directory entries to produce, with editorial help by my wife, Elizabeth Stege Huttner, *A Register of Artists, Engravers, Booksellers, Bookbinders, Printers & Publishers in New York City, 1821-1842* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1993). [It continues a work of similar title by George L. McKay (New York Public Library, 1942) for the period 1633-1820.]

To scout out copies of *Lucile*, I turned to the *PTLA*, and found myself again reading directories for fun and profit. What I eventually was able to document was something over 2000 editions of a book nobody reads anymore. For that matter, it's not a book they *should* be reading! But it is a fascinating episode of American publishing history.

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Huttner, Head of Special Collections, The University of Iowa Libraries, has compiled an index to the lists of contributors from each volume of the *PTLA* 1873-1947 that is available on the web at <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/lucile/ptla/history.htm>.

2015 Notes: Copies of the *PTLA* volumes at Cornell and University of California for 1876, 1877, 1880, 1881, 1882, 1883, 1884, 1887, 1917 and copies at the University of Michigan for 1975-2000 have now been scanned by Google and made available to <http://www.HathiTrust.org>.

The late volumes can, of course, be used only in "limited view," and many of the earlier volumes are disfigured by out of focus pages near the beginning and end of the volumes – filming of further volumes was terminated when Cornell realized that Google scanners could successfully film only volumes no more than five inches thick and by the 1880s annual volumes had grown to over 11 inches in thickness. Still, *some* of the information is now on the web.

Second, John Hruschka's *How Books Came to America: The Rise of the American Book Trade*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012) begins with remarks on Gutenberg and Columbus, but nearly half his book (pages 96-182) is given over to Frederick Leypoldt (1835-1884) and the "order" he imposed on the U.S. book trade with *Publishers' Weekly* (1871+), *Publishers' Trade List Annual* (1873+), and his many other trade-oriented publications. The book is a fresh, stimulating, and compact look at U.S. publishing history.