A Tale of Two Boards: A Study of A Bookbinding

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Prologue

In early 1977, almost thoughtlessly but with a newly minted interest in the history of American bookbinding, I began the research that underlies this essay. In 1981, I accepted an invitation to summarize what I’d learned at the American Printing History Association (APHA) meeting in September 1982. Current rather than historical events intruded on my time during that intervening year, and in 1982 I had as many questions, even more perhaps, as I had had in 1981, certainly more than I had had in 1977. The questions continued to gnaw, and I continued to unearth a fact here and there which went into later drafts read for library friends’ groups during the 1980s. Then I put the paper away, only to pick it up again around 2010, thinking to update it modestly and make it available on the internet. While the large number of images I’d incorporated in the original presentation made publication impossible in the 1980s, in the digital environment they were no longer an impediment.

From tiny acorns, so we’re told, mighty oak trees grow. “Modest updating” proved a chimera: the web had exposed a whole new root system! So I offer this tale with less confidence that I will, ever, conclude these stories. Today they still lack ends or beginnings; the pictures are sometimes merely pretty. The questions endure. Still, this essay does overdue honor to a largely forgotten but wonderfully skilled bookbinder, and, perhaps, it provides something of a model of idle curiosity usefully transmuted to obsessive need to know.

Chapter 1: The Object Examined

In the spring of 1977 a bookseller friend in Chicago, Douglas Stewart Wilson, knowing my interest in bookbinding, offered me a small volume – 105 by 180mm – in a handsome 19th century binding. The gold tooling was elegantly accomplished, but the most obviously curious feature was the inscription stamped on the two boards: “PRESENTED BY THE / REV. T. BREINTNALL / TO THE REV. H. P. POWERS. / NEW ARK MAY THE 23 1825.”

The Clergyman’s Companion, (1806).

The volume is also bibliographically curious. [1] It begins with the first 108 pages of an 1806 edition of the Episcopal Clergyman’s Companion which comprise, in words from the preface by Bishop John Henry Hobart, “those occasional offices which [the clergy of the Episcopal Church] use in
the discharge of their Parochial duties.” Hobart’s preface continues, “The Editor also has thought that it would not be improper to annex to this book a connected view of the opinions of some of the most Distinguished Divines of the Church on several important points of Divinity, and particularly, on the qualifications and duties of the Clericall Office,” but these latter 50 pages have been removed and several gatherings - 31 leaves - of blank wove paper water-marked “Butlers & Ward / 1818” bound in.

On these leaves, one or several hands have entered six distinct prayers, beginning variously, “‘Wherewith shall we come before the Lord ...;” “‘Almighty and most merciful Father...;” “‘Direct us this day, O Lord...;” on the left and on the right, “Our Father who art in heaven...;” “‘Almighty God, in whose hands ...;” and “‘O Lord and Merciful God....” The final ten leaves have been left blank, but to conclude the volume, at a date after binding, someone wrote a text headed “for a family under affliction” on the first four of 14 leaves of folded, blue-toned note paper, roughly trimmed the fore-edge, and tipped the stitched gathering into the volume.

Questions to my bookseller friend dashed any hopes of easily tracing provenance. He had himself discovered the volume in the shop of a colleague who had purchased many of the book lots at the sale of the Lawrence F. and Mary Ann Dicke collection in March 1975. Location of this volume in his neighbor’s stock suggested that it had been present in one of these lots, which had been considered minor and were largely overlooked at the auction of this vast accumulation of Americana. Lawrence Dicke, with his wife, a dealer in antiques, art works and books as well as a collector, operated a vigorous business, based in Chicago and Evanston, from the early 1920s. When he died in 1950, his wife carried on their activities until her own death in 1974. Tracing a single, inconsequential book through more than fifty years of business appeared hopeless, particularly when Dicke was, by all accounts, a secretive, even eccentric, man. [2]

Evidence from the water-marked paper proved of no great help. Gravell and Miller’s Catalogue of American Watermarks, 1690-1835 [3] reproduces a specimen of this mark and refers to Frances Edwards’ article on Connecticut paper mills in The Paper Maker [4]. Two brothers, Simeon and Asa Butler, founded the second paper mill in Connecticut in 1816 – their Eagle Mill in Suffield. By 1820 certainly, and from the evidence of this watermark by 1818, they had taken Andrew Ward into partnership. In 1820 the firm of Butlers & Ward obtained the first United States Government contract for American-made paper to be used by the Senate. Apparently at that time the molds were changed and the letters “U S” substituted for the date “1818”. The mill continued under various owners until destroyed by fire in 1877. That stationers might stock a quality paper or bookbinders select it for a Super Extra binding is of course no surprise. That the paper was made between 1818 and 1820 is little more than consistent with a binding probably finished in or near New York City in or about 1825. 

Looking at the book, then, left these questions to which it seemed there might be answers: Who was Rev. T. Breintnall? Rev. H. P. Powers? What happened in Newark on May 23, 1825? Might it be possible to learn who bound the book?

Chapter II: The Event Discovered

It seemed plausible that two men named as Reverend on the covers of an Episcopal text might be Episcopal clergy. Fortunately, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, from its early days, published a great many lists, directories, minutes of conventions and church histories, and I was quickly able to confirm that Thomas Breintnall was ordained a Deacon of the Church in 1818 (he is #410 in Cameron’s American Episcopal Clergy [5]). He was assigned in 1819 as Rector of Zion Church, New York City; remained at Zion until 1837 when he removed to the Philadelphia area where he worked until 1846; and moved to Newark, New Jersey only months before his death in 1847.

Henry P. Powers was ordained Deacon in 1820 by Bishop Hobart of New York – (he is #487 in Cameron’s list) – installed at Trinity Church, Newark on June 3rd 1821 and ordained a Priest there on October 16, 1822. He remained at Trinity until 1830, and then disappeared from the records available to me at The University of Chicago Library, where I was then employed. [6]

This much was easily gleaned, but the next step was by no means clearly indicated. Then, in one of those curious bits of serendipity which are at once a joy to librarians, a marvel to readers, and a source of our profound gratitude to the book trade, while browsing through a photocopied list of miscellaneous titles offered by Hieronymus Books, my newly sensitized eyes seized upon an entry: History of the Church of Zion and St. Timothy of New York, 1797-1894 by David Clarkson (New York: Putnam, 1894). Offered at $30 it was then beyond my budget, but a trip to Mansell Pre-56 [7] was not. Very shortly, courtesy of Washington University Library, a copy of Clarkson’s work was in my hands – and the event discovered on pages 40 and 41: 

My Clergyman’s Companion - does anyone not jump with me to the conclusion? - was Breintnall’s gift to Powers on the occasion of his marriage!

One question answered; another asked: What did Powers do with his book that it should surface a 150 years later in the Dicke sale?

Chapter III: Powers Pursued

Closer attention to Powers seemed warranted. Further use of Pre-56 established Powers as the author of three short works. The first, A Christmas Sermon delivered in 1821, was printed locally the following year. [8] My ear and mind have not been trained to attend to the subtleties of 19th century sermons, but the author’s brief foreword seems to me more objective than modest:

To the Vestry of Trinity Church, Newark.

Brethren:

In complying with your request, and granting the following Discourse for publication, I cannot forbear saying I am at a loss to account for the reception with which it met. It is the production of but ordinary effort; and, I say it without affectation, I cannot persuade myself that it is executed with more than ordinary success. Yet, such as it is, I submit it without alteration; hoping your judgment may not prove erroneous, that it may have a tendency to excite attention to the interesting duties of this day, and in other respects to do good. [9]

His second work, also a sermon of 20 pages, was delivered on New Year’s Day, 1825 [10]. Its theme is established by this paragraph:

Time is short when considered in reference

1. To eternity.

2. To human life.

3. To the business, and duties, with which life is loaded. [11]

His third, and to my knowledge final, work is more original and of greater current interest [12]. In discussing “the value of intellectual attainment; the defectiveness of female education, and the importance and feasibility of improving it” [13], Powers recommends the “best authors of rhetoric, and the best works of taste, … a thorough acquaintance with Locke, Reed, Stewart, or Brown,” [14] some study of astronomy, mathematics, music, and natural philosophy, including chemistry, and ends his Discourse with these words:

Ye fair ones, who have yet the season of pupilage to serve, rise, in the pride of your native powers, and evince your sex equal to more substantial accomplishments than the adjustment of ribbons, or the shaping of a dress. Emulate the worthy ones of your sex, who have broken through prejudice, and in defiance of obstacles, risen to literary consequence; demonstrate to a mistaken world, that you are competent to those sciences which expand, exalt, and dignify. Be not appalled at the false idea, that a wise woman is the dread and abhorrence of our sex. A loquacious pedant will indeed be shunned and detested: but it is only those who have dabbled in knowledge, whose brains are turned, and whose tongues are mad. More thorough acquisitions are as favourable to modesty as to morals. The deep majestic river flows smooth and silent; while nought but babbling is heard from the shallow stream. [15]

This final metaphor is the only justification I can find for the otherwise curious choice of a frontispiece to oppose the title page: “The Falls of St. Anthony in the River Mississippi.”

Then, in 1830, after these apparently vigorous years as Rector, the bishop of the diocese notes, abruptly, that Powers has resigned his church and left the diocese. His departure is made more mysterious in an 1846 pamphlet by his successor, Matthew N. Henderson: “with mental powers of no ordinary kind, and talent for popular eloquence, there were yet difficulties that interfered with [Powers’] usefulness and retarded the growth of the congregation.” But, “the incidents of this period are comparatively recent; I need not therefore dwell on them. [16]

A letter from Anne-Marie Salgat, librarian at the General Theological Seminary, put me onto Swords’ Pocket Almanac containing lists of the bishops and clergy in each diocese, and in these small, annually issued volumes we find Powers listed in 1831 and 1832, “residing in Detroit” [17]. Although he is not listed again until 1842, he apparently remained in Detroit during this period. In 1840 the Bishop of the then newly formed Diocese of Michigan reported:

On Tuesday, the 12th, I instituted the Rev. Mr. Powers, as rector of St. Luke’s church, Ypsilanti… the name of Mr. Powers has not hitherto appeared on the list of the clergymen of this diocese, although residing within its limits, and occasionally performing the duties of his office for several years. [18]

Powers seemed to have remained at St. Luke’s until 1847 or 1848. The 1848 Journal of the Diocese of Michigan contains his report for the preceding year:

Since our last convention, my health has generally been poor, for which reason I have not performed a very
A considerable amount of labor. I have preached several funeral sermons and performed some other ecclesiastical duties.

In the month of April I visited Ohio by invitation, and preached several times in Trinity Church, Lyme, Huron County. In this parish I found a number of families who were my early parishioners in New Jersey, and I cannot express my gratification and gratitude for the cordial welcome with which they greeted me. I also preached several times in the village of Bellevue, where I was most kindly treated. I likewise officiated in St. Paul’s Church, Lower Sandusky, where they have a fine edifice, and everything bore an attractive aspect. From all these places I received invitations to settle....

I am, as you are aware, suffering from a chronic bronchitis, and have not, therefore, as yet made up my mind whether it will be expedient to accept the charge of either of these places. [19]

In 1850, Swords’ places Powers in Lower Sandusky, Ohio and in 1851 he appears as Rector of St. Paul’s Church in that city. In the following years, however, he appears without post until 1855 when he is listed as rector-elect of Grace Church in Madison, Wisconsin. He remained in Wisconsin until 1865 — and beyond that, by 1982 and up to 2010, I found no trace of him. Then Google coughed up a link to the inventory of research files created by the Reverend Jasper Green Pennington, a more recent Rector of the Ypsilanti church, now lodged in the collection of Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan.

Pennington found that Powers was born in 1805. He followed a call from Bishop Hobart to Michigan Territory in the early 1830s — “a man of unusual gifts who found living in Michigan both a challenge and a cause of despair.” He became the first Episcopal priest at Grosse Isle, purchased 640 acres of land, and with his wife Eliza (1794-1864) added two sons to the two sons and a daughter born previously in the east. He also served as Supervisor of Monguagan Township in 1832 and 1835-1838.

Powers prospered financially, and by 1840 had formal charge of St. Luke’s Church, Ypsilanti, and begun a running conflict with the small and far from wealthy congregation which was never able to pay the modest agreed salary. Pennington finds much evidence that he disliked, and handled poorly, the mundane details of daily administration. At length he resigned, with money owed him, in 1846, continued to live in Ypsilanti and to be active in the ministry, preaching in many venues and taking charge of two parishes in Ohio and one in Wisconsin. Eliza died in April 1864 and was buried in Ypsilanti. Henry, “when he seemed to be returning home [from Wisconsin],” died in Indiana “in the 70th years [sic] of age [i.e., 1875].” Pennington was unable to discover his burial site, but determined it was not in the company of his wife.

One is left to imagine the several ways a small but attractive volume among the possessions of an Episcopal priest might come into the stock and the collection of an aggressive Chicago dealer and collector.

Chapter IV: Breintnall Investigated

The name Breintnall appears in Pennsylvania from quite an early date. One of the better known of the clan was Joseph Breintnall, a copier of deeds who became a close friend of Benjamin Franklin and the first secretary of the Library Company of Philadelphia [20]. Joseph died in 1746, however, and thus far I’ve not been able to relate Thomas Breintnall — born I know not where in 1793 — to him. Thomas was, we know, ordained deacon of the Episcopal church on May 31, 1818 by Bishop White of Pennsylvania and served briefly as a missionary in Huntingdon County — that is, in the Philadelphia area.

With reference to Dr. David Clarkson, the engraving of Thomas Breintnall is from his work. By June 1819, he had been installed as Rector of Zion Church, at Mott and Cross Streets, New York City. As we know, he married in 1825 — the engraving from Clarkson [IMAGE 4] seems to have been done about this time — and he stayed on at Zion until 1837 when “The prospect of usefulness in another but more destitute portion of the Lord’s vineyard, and the hope that you may obtain a successor whose labors will be more abundantly blessed, has induced me to resign the Rectorship of Zion Church.” [21]

The following year, 1838, found him a “Missionary at Hamiltonville, Philadelphia County.” Laid out by William Hamilton in 1804, with lots set aside for Protestant Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, the site of Hamiltonville is now ground largely occupied by the University of Pennsylvania.
The following year Breintnall was appointed Rector of Zion Church in Spring Garden, Philadelphia, now the intersection of 8th Street and Columbia Avenue and near the center of the barrio a few blocks south of Temple University. In 1846 Breintnall resigned this position and removed to Newark where he died, age 54, on May 24, 1847. He was buried in the Trinity Church yard. [22]

In the city directory for Newark for the year 1847, Rev. Thomas Breintnall is listed at 320 High Street corner of Market [23]. From 1848 through 1880 Sophia Augusta Breintnall, widow of Rev. Thomas, occupies 320 High. The Newark directories begin in 1835, however, and listed each year from 1835 through 1846 at 320 High Street we find Elizabeth Nelson, widow. After 1851 John H.H. Breintnall, first medical student, then M.D., shares this address. These entries suggest that the Breintnall’s returned to Newark at or near the death of Mrs. Breintnall’s mother and that their marriage produced at least one son, later a physician. With the assistance of the Newark Public Library I have been able to confirm all this and more. [24]

Chapter V: The Binder Sought

As those of you who have had reason to review the literature on American bookbinding will know, the secondary sources are few. There are Hannah French’s pioneering Early American Bookbinding by Hand [25] and Frank Comparato’s study of 19th binding machinery, Books for the Millions. [26] Studies by French, by Willman Spawn, and by others of binders active in the Colonies and the early Republic are beginning to accumulate. Binders principally active between 1820 and 1900 – one could indeed say the present – have been little studied and rarely systematically. The primary sources are themselves difficult to access, and only slowly coming online digitally. Much of the mass of 19th century publication remains unindexed and uncollected, and as few libraries have cataloged even their easily identified bindings, surviving examples by known binders are difficult indeed to locate.

Knowing all this in 1977 I was not sanguine about the prospects for discovering the Companion’s binder. Still, attempting to do so seemed a handy peg on which to hang continued investigation and an agreeably specific spur to attentiveness. To reduce somewhat the universe of possibilities it seemed wise to concentrate on binders active in New York City in 1825. I cast about for some way to determine who they were, and was soon led by Thomas Tanselle’s Guide to the Study of United States Imprints [27] to George L. McKay’s 1942 Register. [28]

Although McKay stops with 1820, I thought first to abstract from his book a list of binders, and perhaps stationers, active in say 1815 - 1820, reasoning that many would have remained in the trade five to ten years later. Backtracking McKay’s sources, however, I found that Chicago held a nearly complete run from 1820 through 1842 of his most important source for the post-1800 period: Longworth’s American Almanac, and I decided instead to compile a list of binders from the 1825 volume [29]. Ten hours later I had 66 names – and a conviction that I could manage an extension of McKay through 1842.

I was aware, of course, of the growth of the city in this period – the 1820 census found a population of 124,000 while that of 1840 counted 313,000 and a New York State Census in 1845 recorded 371,000. There was corresponding growth in the number of names in each year’s edition of Longworth’s Directory. Still, it appeared that a few hundred hours would suffice to read through the 22 volumes and copy out the relevant citations. A few thousand hours later the task was done: 5,000 names and an estimated 50,000 addresses had been selected from the 720,000 entries recorded by Longworth. I was not prepared, obviously, for the amount of information that could be teased from these directories. (Nor the work required to prepare it for publication: it appeared in 1993 as A Register of Artists, Engravers, Booksellers, Bookbinders, Printers & Publishers in New York City, 1821-42, Bibliographical Society of America).

Chapter VI: The Binder Revealed

For all my work with directories – time-consuming, fascinating, and instructive as it was – the Companion’s binder was identified by quite another route. Early on Terry Belanger [30] suggested I send a rubbing of the binding to Willman Spawn at the American Philosophical Society. Those of you who knew Willman (1920-2010), as I later had the pleasure of doing, will know of the massive file of rubbings taken from early American bindings which he created over many years and will also be aware of his prodigious memory for tools once seen.
Wilman soon called to say he was sure he had the hand-stamp in his collection, but since his 19th century rubbings were less well organized than his 18th century ones, he could not put his hands on it directly. A few months later, however, he wrote:

I have continued the search from time to time, and finally this past week I found the tool I remembered used on a signed binding of H.I. Megarey of New York. I recorded the binding some fifteen years ago when it was in a private collection in Providence; the owner later moved to Nova Scotia and I have no idea of his location now. [31]

Megarey first appears in McKay as a stationer, 281 Pearl Street, in 1811, but McKay also notes the firm of Megary & Andrews at 151 Water Street in both 1810 and 1811 [32]. McKay did not record all there is to find, however: Andrews is John Andrews who lives at 30 Gold Street in 1810, and Henry I. Megarey first appears in the 1809 directory, occupation painter, at 3 Old Slip. About Andrews I’ve learned nothing more: the name is too common to permit further tracing in the directories, and I’ve found no certain references to him elsewhere.

Megarey appears in the directories each year, however – at the six business addresses through 1820 noted by McKay and with no less than five changes in residence during the same years [33]. After 1842 the listings continue as publisher at 12 Greene Street, with a separate business address of 4 West Broadway Place in 1851 and 1852 and with residence at 19 Wooster Street in 1853. The following year, 1854, and again in 1856, Harriet, widow of Henry J., is listed at that address. Thus we have good reason to believe Megarey had a 45-year long career as stationer, bookbinder, and publisher.

He began his publishing activity quite early. In 1817 his name appears in the imprint of an edition of the Psalms [34] and in 1819 on the first of several editions of The Book of Common Prayer, this one sub-titled Megarey’s Elegant Edition and enhanced with illustrations [35]. An edition of the Psalms also published in 1819 carried his imprint, [36] as did in 1820 another edition of The Book of Common Prayer [37].

In 1821 he brought out the first, and apparently the only, volume of a literary miscellany called The Wanderer whose printed boards solicited contributions to future volumes. [38] In the same year he began to publish the first of several ambitious series of aquatints, John Hill’s Drawing Book of Landscape Scenery, consisting of twelve plates about 16 by 11 inches, each plate with four views, entirely hand-colored [39]. He also issued, with W.B. Gilley, the Prospectus of a new and splendid publication... The Hudson River Portfolio, a set of 25 aquatints based on a series of watercolors by William Guy Wall and engraved, again, by John Hill. This series was completed, with 20 rather than the announced 24 plates, in late 1825 or 1826. [IMAGE 6] Plate #20, “New York, From Governors Island,” 1820, is reproduced. [40] [41]

“New York, From Governors Island” from Megarey’s The Hudson River Portfolio (1820).

In 1822 I find reference to an edition of Arlincourt’s The Recluse [42] and William Russell McDonald’s collection of poems, Dublin Mail, wrongly attributed by Megarey to Thomas Moore [43]. In 1823 came John Galt’s Arorthy Legates, in 1824 Parry’s Journal of a second voyage for the discovery of a North-West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific [45], and in 1826 another edition – this in five volumes – of The Book of Common Prayer [46], Disraeli’s Vivian Gray [47], William Pinkney’s memoir [48], and another volume of Irish poetry, Robert Sweeny’s Odds and Ends. [49]

Megarey’s bindings – those that have been located at least – appear most commonly on copies of his editions of The Book of Common Prayer. Their earliest notice seems to be Richard Grant White’s in a newspaper article about 1875 which lavished praise on the binding of an 1819 volume whose binder was unknown to him. This article is quoted by William Loring Andrews, who identifies the binder, in his 1902 Bibliopegy in the United States. [50] Andrews describes two other Megarey bindings, one then owned by Beverly Chew with Megarey’s ticket, and illustrates the second, then owned by Bowen Pierson. Another copy is illustrated in the catalog of the Papantonio collection now held, as are these other Megarey bindings, by the American Antiquarian Society, [51] and by one in my possession.
Megarey binding on copies of the 1819 Book of Common Prayer; Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.
Five Megarey bindings were shown in the 1907 Grolier Club exhibition of *Leather bookbindings executed in America before 1850*. Four of these, again from the Beverly Chew collection, are now at the Huntington Library. [52]
Another copy, brown calf attributed to Megarey. Grolier 43. Courtesy of the Huntington Library.

Samuel Rogers, The Pleasures of Memory (1820), brown calf with Megarey’s ticket. Grolier 44. Courtesy of the Huntington Library.


The doublure of a copy of a 1797 London translation of Salomon Gessner’s The Death of Abel, with Megarey’s ticket on a second, marbled, endsheet, was tooled with the hand-stamp used on my Companion. This volume was in the collection of John R. Turner Ettlinger, the former Rhode Islander who became a long-time member of the faculty of the School of Library Service, Dalhousie University, and this the binding recorded by Willman Spawn in 1962. Ettlinger kindly provided these slides to me in 1982; he died in 2001, and the current location of this book is again, regrettably, unknown [53].

Megarey in his role as bookbinder is fascinating for a second reason. The earliest bookbinding manual published in the United States, a reprint of the third London edition of The Whole Art of Bookbinding, was published in Richmond, Virginia, 1824, by Peter Cottom. A price chart, about 15 by 15 inches, drawn up as the “New-York Friendly Association of Master Book-binders’ List of Prices, 1822” is bound, folded, into the Library of Congress copy. That the broadside was intended for this publication is made certain by the imprint which reads “Richmond: Published by Peter Cottom for the Art of Book-binding.” The list is signed Henry I. Megarey, President, and Charles Starr, Secretary.

I have found only one further reference to the Association: in 1942, reacting to the appearance of French’s “Early American Bookbinding,” in the Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, Albert Ehrman of England, then temporarily resident in New York, wrote to add names to her list of binders active before 1820, including nine drawn from “a list of members of the Association of Master Book Binders of New York published in 1822.” This list, a portion of a broadside, is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society as Rollo Silver brought to my attention. [54]

The Association’s price list merits attention which we cannot give here, and it is too large to reproduce effectively. It gives over a full column, however, to an explanation of terms (Morocco, Russian and Calf are described in Super Extra, Extra, Gilt, and Plain) and prices are charted by size (folio to 32mo.) and by covering material. Breintnall, it seems likely, was charged about $2.00 for Megarey’s work on the Companion. [55] Who can estimate the value of the pleasure H. P. Powers took from it over 50 years?

After 1826 Megarey’s name seems not to be associated with books, but prints and aquatints continue to appear at regular intervals until near his death. The view of South Street, engraved by William Bennett from his own painting, was issued in 1834. The view of New York was issued in 1836, engraved again by Bennett from a painting by John G. Chapman. It is one of a series of more than 20 folio views of American cities engraved by Bennett and issued between 1831 and 1842. Ten of these – including views of Baltimore, Boston, Troy, Buffalo, Detroit, New Orleans, Mobile, and Niagara Falls – carry Megarey’s imprint in the first state. [56] [IMAGE 22] The last aquatint to carry his name seems to be a view of the city from atop St. Paul’s Church, copyrighted by Megarey in 1849, engraved by Henry Papprill from a painting by John William Hill, son of the John Hill who had engraved...
the Hudson River Portfolio for Megarey some 25 years earlier. [57]

“New Orleans, taken from the opposite side a short distance above the Middle or Picayune Ferry.” (1841).

“There can be little doubt that Megarey had a long, varied, and active life. Yet we have nowhere found a biographical notice for him, even an obituary. His entry in Groce and Wallace’s Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564-1860 confuses him with his son John, born in 1818, a painter admitted to the National Academy of Design in 1844 and dead at the age of 27 in 1845. [58].

The name Megarey – consistently spelled M-E-G-A-R-E-Y by Henry but otherwise appearing M.-E or G-A-R-Y or G-A-R-R-Y – is not common in the New York directories before 1860, and we have compiled an inventory of them all. From this we can link Henry with some confidence to Thomas McGary, ornamental painter, gilder, and glazier; and to Alexander H. Megarey, who with his wife, Jane, manufactured and sold mathematical and nautical instruments between 1822 and 1851. At the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society Library we have found, on microfilm, Henry’s will, entered in probate in the Surrogate’s Court on December 12, 1853. [59] At the New-York Historical Society we located two documents signed by Megarey as well as a fascinating letter about the family written by a son, Charles, a “smart, correct man” and an exchange broker in “gold, sovereigns, money, etc.” [60] There is yet hope of more to learn about Megarey. [61]

Postlude

Oak trees produce acorns. They harbor truffles. Examination of a trifling little book has sprouted a bunch of branches, rooting around unearthed delectables. Were there but world enough, and time!

Endnotes

1. The Clergyman’s companion, containing the occasional offices of the Protestant Episcopal Church … New York: Printed for P.A. Mesier, No. 107, Pearl Street; Davis, Printer; 1806. (Shaw-Shoemaker 11221).


6. The minutes of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church typically, in this period, include lists of clergy assigned in each diocese as well as reports of changes and activities.


11. Ibid., p. 4.  
13. Ibid., p.[37.  
15. Ibid., p.17-18.  
17. Title varies; see Mansell Pre-56: NS 1109852.  
19. Ibid., 1848, p.24. For this and the previous reference I am grateful to Elinor S. Hearn, Assistant to the Archivist, Archives and Historical Collections, Episcopal Church, Austin, Texas.  
22. Breintnall’s death is noted, among other places, in the Newark Daily Advertiser for May 27, 1847 – unfortunately without obituary.  
24. I am delighted to acknowledge the assistance of Robert Blackwell, Principal Librarian of the New Jersey Reference Division of the Newark Public Library who provided confirmation of some details noted and leads for further investigation of the Breintnall’s and Nelson’s of Newark.  
29. Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory; …. New York: Thomas Longworth, 1825  
30. Belanger was at that time director of the Rare Book School at Columbia University, later removed to the University of Virginia.  
32. McKay, op. cit., p. 49.  
34. Though noted in the imprint catalog of the AAS I have been unable to confirm it elsewhere. Megarey apparently continued to bind, however: the Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York 1784-1831, VIII:621, note payment of $118 for 12 Portfolios for “Street Commissioner” (perhaps in conjunction with a survey of the East River) audited at the meeting of 26 August 1816. The Minutes for 28 February 1820 (X:761) note payment of $22 for “binding Laws of Corporation for Charleston.”  
38. The Wanderer. New York: H.I. Megarey, C.S. Van Winkle, printer, 1821. Only volume 1 published. The same year also saw Mary of Scotland; or, The Heir of Avenel, A Drama in Three Acts founded on the popular novel of The Abbot [by Scott], and originally performed at the Theater, New York, with universal applause. A critical abstract of this play can be found in Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Early American Women Dramatists 1775-1860 (New York: Garland, 1998), p. 188. Megarey’s name also appears in the imprint of a very early – among the earliest? – literary annual, The Wreath, a collection of poems from celebrated English authors (New York: W. B. Gilley & H. I. Megarey, 1821); this is noted in Frederick W. Faxon, Literary Annuals and Gift Books (Private Libraries Association, 1973 reprint of 1912 edition) whose chronological index of “all” the annuals listed actually begins with 1823.


43. [William Russell McDonald], Dublin Mail; or, Intercepted Correspondence by Thomas Moore. New York: H.I. Megarey, 1822. Noted by Roorbach, Bibliotheca Americana (under Moore, p. 374); Mansell Pre-56: NM 0037391; Shoemaker 8573.


47. [Beaconsfield, Benjamin Disraeli, 1st earl of], Vivian Grey. New York: Collins & Hannay … H.I. Megarey …., 1826. Mansell Pre-56: NB 0217346; Shoemaker-Coooper 23721.


49. Robert Sweeney, Odds and Ends; Original and Translated. New York: H.I. Megarey, 1826. Mansell Pre-56: NS 1096069; Shoemaker 26163. Also noted by Roorbach, op. cit., p.528. Roorbach also attributes “Voltaire, F.M., Henriade. Translated into English Verse. O 75 ... ’2” to Megarey; it has proved impossible to verify this title [but see note 44]. WorldCat (5/17/2005) identifies W. J. Bennett, 1787-1844, author; Henry I. Megarey, artist; Boston, from City Point near Sea Street. New York: Published by Henry I. Megarey, 1833; 2 holding libraries, but this is likely a separately issued aquatint.


54. Shoemaker 9697. A broadside apparently held uniquely by the American Antiquarian Society.

55. A medium and demy 12° of 350 pages finished Super Extra in morocco is priced at $2.00. Super Extra Morocco, from the “Explanation of terms, etc.,” included “Gilt edge, lined with coloured paper, rolled inside the square and on the edge, finished on the back in the best manner with match stamps, etc. the sides finished with large border rolls or stamps, and blank rolled. If tabling or centre work be added, it must be considered an extra charge.”

An 1825 trace of Megarey also appears in the *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York 1784-1831* (XIV: 627) in the form of a petition presented during debate on appropriate requirements to impose on gravesites:

> “We whose names are hereunto subscribed, certify that before and during a part of the time of the prevalence of the late Yellow Fever in New York, we resided in a neighborhood of Trinity Church burying ground; that we were frequently annoyed with the offensive effluvia arising from the said burying ground, and particularly so when the wind swept over its surface, before reaching us. The stench was so powerful, as to oblige many of us, to shut the doors and windows of our stores and dwellings, to keep out the sickening and disagreeable smell; Signed by Joseph Brewster, Richard McKenzie, Henry J. Megarey, William Gale Clark, Pelletreau & Upson, and others.” Since Megarey “resided” in the “neighborhood of Trinity Church,” it is even less surprising that he was known to Powers and Breintnall.

56. It is one of the four plates of Megarey’s *Street Views in the City of New York*. Phelps-Stokes, op. cit., offers a full description; see p. 589-90; 605-6.

57. See Phelps-Stokes, op. cit., p. 619-22. 73. Ibid., p. 698.


59. Records of the Surrogate’s Court, New York City, Book 109, p. 200-2. The will, read into the record in the presence of the heirs, directed the executors “to sell and convert into money” all assets, real and personal, pay debts and expenses, and establish a fund whose income was to be enjoyed by his wife, Harriet, during her lifetime. On her death the principle money” all assets, real and personal, pay debts and expenses, and establish a fund whose income was to be enjoyed by his wife, Harriet, during her lifetime. On her death the principle was to be equally divided among living children – Charles, Robert, James, Anna Campbell, Jane Hogan and Harriet – with a further proviso that grand-children, if orphaned, were heir to their parent’s share.

60. The characterization of Charles is quoted from the report of an agent of the R.G. Dun & Co. dated December 16, 1865 and entered in the company’s credit ledgers now on deposit with Harvard’s Baker Library. Vol. 341, p. 200.

The letter, a typed transcript of an ALS dated 20 February 1879 and addressed to a grand-niece, is in the cataloged collections of the Society. It traces the family from 1745 when “Mynheer and Dame” Dealing emigrated to New York from Holland. Their daughter Ann married Robert Affleck whose daughter Maria (1795-1828) was Henry Megarey’s first wife, Henry emigrating from Ireland in March 1800. Maria and Henry, the letter notes, were the parents of 10 children. The letter was loaned to the Historical Society in 1950 by Mrs. Anna C. Alexander, then of Long Island.

61. The New York Herald for Sunday, October 23, 1853 (newly searchable online) carries the following obituary note, Deaths: “On Friday evening, October 21, after a protracted illness, Henry J. Megarey, aged 72 years. / His friends are respectfully invited to attend his funeral, this afternoon, at two o’clock, from his late residence, No. 19 Wooster street.” He would thus have been born in 1781.

Appendix: Directories Described

In preparing the APHA talk I considered how to communicate some sense of the possibilities directories offer researchers. As it happened, the first card in my file was that for Abijah Abbot, first identified as a publisher in 1835. It became my practice to begin a record as each new name came up and to note in each succeeding year the appearance of that name whether it appeared with no, the same, or another occupation. It is reasonable to assume, I think, that the Abijah Abbot listed as clerk in 1837 and 1838 is the same person listed in 1836 as “proprietor and publisher of the New York Weekly Messenger,” since his address, 6 Suffolk, remains the same. Whether the accountant of 1839-1841 is the same man is less certain as the addresses vary.

Realizing early on that names often appeared in directories before bearing an occupation that brought them to my attention, I also backtracked all names at least four years. Consequently I could learn that Abbot came into the directories as early as 1827, perhaps 1826, and was in most years before 1835 a clerk of the United States Bank.

In 1835 there is a second entry for Abbot & Boggs. Among the Boggs’ we find William G. Boggs, listed as early as 1825 as printer and in his later years as publisher. He shares the 17 Ann Street address with Abbot in 1835. Most volumes of Longworth’s also contain a separate list of newspapers and periodicals. Checking this we find the New York Evening Post at 21 Pine Street in the 1838-1842 period during which Boggs appears as publisher.

A couple of dozen cards away were those for William C. Bryant, editor of the Evening Post from 1829; Bryant, Leggett & Company (the Leggett is William Leggett); Michael Burnham (whose widow Elizabeth appears in 1836); and William Coleman.

The story implicit here is partially completed by a source as ready to hand as the Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Scribners, 1943. Vol, 3, p.200-5) which, in its article on William Cullen Bryant, tells us that William Coleman, editor of the Evening Post, injured in an 1826 accident, hired Bryant as assistant. On Coleman’s death in 1829 Bryant became editor and, quickly, one-third owner. In June 1834, intending to leave the Post, Bryant sailed for Europe where word reached him in early 1836 that his partner Leggett was ill and the Post in financial trouble. On his return the paper was reorganized, Leggett separated, and Bryant assumed half-ownership, retaining editorial control of one of the country’s best known papers another four decades until his death in 1878.
This example is not typical in its complexity nor in the caliber of its characters. It does, however, suggest some of the richness of interrelated detail that can be traced in the directories.

The earliest New York City directory, published by David Franks, appeared in 1786. [1] It contained 800 names. Directories were issued annually thereafter with the first under the imprint of David Longworth, principally a publisher of plays, in 1796. In 1806 compilation was taken over by David’s son Thomas—"[my] father then deeming it an unthankful task, and the support of it not sufficient to reward his attentions to the work" [2] -- and continued each year, occasionally with competition from others, until 1842.

A study of the way in which directories were compiled, printed, distributed, and used would be a substantial contribution to the literature. While we wait for this study an outline can be read between the lines of the two or three page publisher’s advertisements which were a routine part of the directory. In New York, at least, the process began in May, encouraged perhaps by a convention whereby landlords set rents for the coming year on February 1st with May 1st the removal date for tenants who could not or chose not to meet the new rates. [3] The publisher hired canvassers to comb the city during May collecting names, occupations, and addresses which were put in alphabetical order by about the first of June, then set in type, printed, and bound for distribution in mid- to late June.

This schedule could be interrupted and interfered with at each step -- and Longworth’s annual lamentations indicate that indeed it was. In 1823 he writes:

... but never at any former time have we experienced so much difficulty in collecting the names as at the present season; the number of hands temporarily employed, and the nature of the task, subject us to peculiar difficulties, and the work being such as to exclude us from a personal superintendence of the labor, we are thereby exposed to much abuse; this year alone some of the hands were greatly in fault, which involved us in much extra expense and labor; consequently the number of additional names--[that is, the number listed out of alphabetical order at the end]--is greater than usual in our book. We would have the public bear in mind, that the method pursued [sic] by us in constructing our work renders it in our interest and convenience, that all our collections should primarily be done with all possible care and accuracy, all omissions produce a subsequent increase of expense and labor to us. [p. 494]

It is never entirely clear whose names the canvassers were to collect. The early advertisements manage to suggest that everyone’s was sought, but:

The very nature of the work renders perfection unhoped for: many people are shifting about at the time we take the names -- to obtain their address is almost an impossibility, and they think not of furnishing their address until the work is published, at which time they manifest their importance by finding fault. Some unenlightened merchants in this city have refused to furnish their names and address, when politely called upon; this is mentioned to account for some of the omissions. [1821, p. 488]

Longworth’s principal focus seems to have been somewhere between employed persons and heads of household. He says in 1822, “The number of names obtained in a house is from 1 to 4; frequently in the upper part of town, from 4 to 8, and in many instances more than 8.” [1822, p. 496]. In 1829 he amplified:

... as far as the Directory offers data for conjecture, the population must have increased in somewhat a greater proportion than the increase in the number of names, as the editor has endeavored, in the last two publications, to restrain the increasing bulk of the work by the judicious omission of many names that can be of no importance to persons in business, or to those who patronise [sic] the work; the names of laborers, colored people, persons in low obscurity who rent tenements by the week or month, may be excluded without impairing the utility of the work... [p. 638]

and in the following year, responding to a newspaper editorial, still further:

...The present editor is censured for omitting the names of journeyman mechanics, whom the writer thinks entitled to have their names in the Directory:-- So thinks the editor, and consequently the names of all persons doing business, heads of families whether journeyman or master mechanics, editors of newspapers, clerks, coloured people, gentlemen and commoners, are all indiscriminately inserted, without other distinction than that resulting from alphabetical arrangement. [1830, p. 673]

Women’s names make up a small percentage of the entries, appearing most frequently with the designation, “widow of...,” but from time to time as shopkeepers, milliners, boarding house keepers, teachers, and so on through a large number of trades. Several in the 1830’s are identified as map colorers.
Still, it must be the case that most women and all children are represented -- if at all -- by some male family member. Assuming that women and children made up 70% of the population permits a crude estimate of Longworth’s success. In 1820, for example, with a census population of 124,000, adult males may have numbered about 37,000. Longworth’s 23,000 entries for this year, adjusted downward 10% for the names of women, businesses, institutions, and so on, imply that he named about 56% of them. Similar calculations for 1830 and 1840 yield figures of 46% and 35% respectively. Longworth, as so many others, doubtless found it difficult to keep pace with the growth of the city.

Once obtained, however, names were not easily released. In 1838 Longworth writes:

The anger of not a few, and the displeasure of many, will be provoked upon finding their names and addresses in the Directory; in the compilation of the work, the object of the editor is only to render the work accurate and valuable; he therefore does not stop to inquire whether he has any right to publish the name and address of any individual; he is governed solely by the consideration that the public rely on the faithful performance of his duties; -- that confidence must not be betrayed; he therefore avows that he has disregarded all directions to omit names. [p. 723]

The names themselves posed severe problems. Many did not know how to spell, either their own names or those of others. In 1832 Longworth advised that one looking for the name “Pierce” check also under the spellings: Pairce, Pearce, Peirce, Persse, and Pirce. [p. 749-50] Some wanted their occupation described in detail -- Longworth insisted on a word or two -- others offered only generic descriptions, for example, “merchant,” which Longworth found of little value. Women wanted designation as Miss or Mrs.: no titles of any kind decreed Longworth.

Addresses, too, bedeviled the editor. Streets were not named, or named but called something else by their residents; numbered, renumbered, or renamed and renumbered. Few advertisements lack complaint about these matters, as in 1827:

A few years since Fulton Street was numbered throughout, which the Editor presumes to consider should have rendered unnecessary a renumbering of this street for a century to come; nevertheless it has again taken place, much to the dissatisfaction of the residents, and greatly to the displeasure of the Editor, who had just made his collections. [p.554]

Finally, the manuscript complete, publication still might be delayed. In apology for an unusually late appearance in 1839, Longworth notes:

Perhaps the Book might have been published some four or five days earlier, were there no obstacles in a Printing Office, -- but the difficulties in the business, prophetically denominated the “Black Art,” are beyond his control. [p. 751-2]

Never later than the end of July, however, the edition appeared. Longworth records printing 900 copies in 1823, 1040 in 1825; ten years later, in 1835, he ordered 2200 copies reporting 1700 sold the previous year. [p. 754] In 1839 he again reports a print run of 2200. [p. 751-2]

Sales were never adequate in Longworth’s opinion, and he was driven to annual frenzy by the thought of those who borrowed another’s copy of his book. In 1832 he sputtered:

[The editor] is not competent to express in sufficiently pointed terms, the indignation entertained for those wealthy persons who set so at defiance all the rights of meum and teum, as to resort throughout the year to their neighbor’s directory, thus enduring the humiliation of being dependent upon the unrequited assistance and labours of a man so humble as the Editor of the N.Y. Directory. [p. 750]

One would like to know not only the accuracy of this outline of the construction of the New York directories, but more about those which appeared in other cities early in the 19th century. There has been, to my knowledge, no general article on them despite Dorothea Spear’s 1961 *Bibliography of American Directories* through 1860. Neither have I yet found studies of their publishers, although these may be scattered in the literature. Yet by 1860, 80 American cities had populations greater than 13,000 and only seven of these had no directory in either 1859 or 1860. After 1820, directories were published more or less annually in most cities with a population greater than 10,000. [4]

Spear based her work on the great collection of directories at the American Antiquarian Society, citing copies located elsewhere when feasible. While it has thus been possible since 1961 to consult virtually all known directories, it was often not easy to do so before their re-publication in microform by Research Publications, Inc. in the mid-1970’s. This re-publication includes all but 45 of the more than 1600 directories cited by Spear and all directories published in 72 cities between 1861 and 1901. Micropublication of directories for most of these cities for the period 1902-1935 was in progress through the 1980s, and it appears that many directories have now been digitized, though perhaps not systematically. Ancestry.com may offer the most complete and accessible collection.
Notes


3. The custom is mentioned several times in passing by Longworth. It is also noted in Bayrd Still, Mirror for Gotham. (New York: New York University Press, 1956), where a satirical woodcut, “First Day of May in New York. -- A General Move” is reproduced on page 107. It is also reproduced as a frontispiece in Sidney F. Huttner & Elizabeth Stege Huttner, A Register of Artists, Engravers, Booksellers, Bookbinders, Printers & Publishers in New York City, 1821-42 (Bibliographical Society of America, 1993). This compilation of some 5,000 names and 50,000 addresses remains in print and is available from Oak Knoll Books.


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