



# The Book

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Newsletter of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture  
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## *The 1988 Summer Seminar*

Isaiah Thomas summer camp (with an emphasis on whiffleball)? Close encounters with Pierre Bourdieu? A feasting on the riches of the AAS collections? All of the above serve to characterize the 1988 Summer Seminar in the History of the Book in American Culture. Twenty persons from across the country met for ten days (June 18-28) to study "The Politics of Reading, Writing, and Publishing in Nineteenth-Century America," with a faculty that included Michael Warner, Robert Gross, Michael Winship, John Hench, AAS curators Gigi Barnhill and Sidney Berger, and the seminar's overall leader, David Hall.

The third in a series of such seminars, the 1988 version drew on literary theory and social history to illuminate transformations in the structure of publishing and writing in the nineteenth century. The firm of Ticknor and Fields, together with the writers who published in *Putnam's Monthly* (first series), provided an initial basis for

considering the rise of the publisher and (employing Bourdieu's categories) the emergence of the "author function." Much of the discussion took account of the politics of canon formation: how it was that certain writers and their books were eventually valorized as superior to "domestic" fiction. Another focus of discussion concerned "domination" and "authority" as ways of understanding the relationship between the printed word and social history. Roger Chartier has suggested that the history of the book can be a means of recasting social and cultural history; to use a French expression, the history of the book helps us to map the "cleavages" that pervade culture and society. Following the model of earlier seminars, each of the participants pursued individual research projects and presented the fruits of their research in reports during the final two days of the seminar. The reports, and the readings that gave the seminar its substance, may have left us perceiving continuities as much as ruptures, a "common culture" as well as the differences.



*Pictured are faculty and participants present at the Society's 1988 Summer Seminar in the History of the Book in American Culture: (seated, left to right) Warrington, Bray, Williams, Westbrook, Childress, Lindsey, Marcum, Culley; (standing, left to right) Hall, Keller-Cohen, Fleischmann, Torsney, Burnam, Warner, Thomas, Scott, Schurman, Mahan, Pardee, King, Gallegos, Barnhill, Sullivan, Hench, and Barbara Trippel Simmons, AAS curator of manuscripts.*

This year's participants were: Robert Bray, R. Forrest Colwell professor of American literature, Illinois Wesleyan University; Rosalind Remer Burnam, Ph.D. candidate in history, University of California at Los Angeles; Boyd Childress, reference librarian, Auburn University Library; Margo Culley, professor of English, University of Massachusetts at Amherst; Fritz Fleischmann, associate professor of English, Babson College; Bernardo P. Gallegos, assistant professor of education foundations, California State University at Los Angeles; Deborah Keller-Cohen, director, English Composition Board, University of Michigan; Cornelia S. King, processing librarian, Rare Books Department, Free Library of Philadelphia; Jonathan A. Lindsey, coordinator of library affairs, Baylor University; Harold E. Mahan, teaching assistant, Department of History, University of Wisconsin; Deanna B. Marcum, vice-president, Council on Library Resources, Washington, D.C.; Michael W. Pardee, Ph.D. candidate in American and New England studies, Boston University; Lydia Cushman Schurman, professor of English, Northern Virginia Community College; Alison M. Scott, assistant curator of rare books, Smith College Library; Sherry Sullivan, associate professor of English, University of Alabama at Birmingham; Amy M. Thomas, Ph.D. candidate in English, Duke University; Cheryl B. Torsney, assistant professor of English, West Virginia University; David Warrington, assistant librarian for special collections, Harvard Law School Library; Virginia M. Westbrook, consultant in history education, St. Paul, Minnesota; Daniel E. Williams, assistant professor of English, University of Mississippi.

D.D.H.

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The Editors welcome all news relevant to the interests of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture.

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## *Bidwell to Give 1988 Wiggins Lecture; Gross Selected for Following Year*

John Bidwell will deliver the sixth annual James Russell Wiggins Lecture in the History of the Book in American Culture at AAS on Wednesday afternoon, November 2, 1988. His topic will be "American History in Image and Text." In this lecture, Bidwell will consider the close relationship between the book and fugitive printed matter, (broadsides, prints, and job printing for example). Focusing on the Declaration of Independence as a text that was reprinted in a variety of forms — from unassuming pamphlets to elaborately engraved facsimiles, Bidwell will discuss the ways in which the techniques of the bibliographer and the art historian can be useful in realizing how this text was viewed, evoked, and interpreted throughout the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, Robert A. Gross has been selected to deliver the 1989 Wiggins Lecture.

Bidwell is reference acquisitions librarian at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California at Los Angeles. A former research fellow at AAS, he is a member of the executive committee of the Society's Program in the History of the Book in American Culture. Last fall he was the Rosenbach lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania.

The 1988 Wiggins Lecture will take place at 5:15 p.m. and is open to the public free of charge. A dinner, costing \$20.00, will follow in the Society's Goddard-Daniels House. Persons wishing to reserve a place at dinner should send payment to Anne-Cathrine Rapp, American Antiquarian Society, 185 Salisbury Street, Worcester, Massachusetts 01609, to arrive no later than October 27.

Gross, the lecturer in 1989, is professor of history and American studies at Amherst College. His Wiggins Lecture will be one of several activities planned by AAS to mark the 350th anniversary of the first printing executed in what is now the United States.

## *Book Notes*

MECHANIC ACCENTS: DIME NOVELS AND  
WORKING-CLASS CULTURE IN AMERICA

Michael Denning has undertaken to explicate the politics of dime novels in *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (Verso, 1987). The ways in which he goes about this task are unusually instructive about the possibilities and limitations of a cultural history that attempts to connect the formulaic conventions of mass-market literary texts with social history, in this case, a presumed social history of the "working class" in nineteenth-century America. *Mechanic Accents* is earnestly and honestly argued; in addressing the question of texts and their readers, and in drawing on the resources of literary theory, it advances the "history of the book." In this brief notice I want merely to high-

light a few of Denning's methodological and conceptual premises.

Denning rejects the "escapist" interpretation of dime novels and their story-paper equivalents. He regards them as embodying, however obliquely, the ideological conflicts of nineteenth-century America, including the ideological position of the "working class." He essays, in one chapter, to demonstrate that books were read primarily by the "working class," though at this point his definition of working class is so broad (it includes farmers, for example) and the evidence so entirely indirect, that the point has little force. There is, in any event, little serious effort to chart the distribution of these books or to deal with their producers. I pass by other efforts at establishing the politics of this material (as in citing "elite" opinion of them) to focus on Denning's central assertion: "The dime novels were, I suggest, neither the vehicle of workers' self-expression nor the propaganda tools of capitalists; they were a stage on which contradictory stories were produced, with new characters in old costumes, morals that were undermined by the tale, and words that could be spoken in different accents" (p. 81).

The social history of these texts lies, that is, within the texts themselves. In keeping with current literary theory, Denning views texts as embodying adversarial voices. His goal is to find "mechanic accents" — the voice of the working class — within the repertory of melodramatic episodes that constitutes so much of the substance of these stories. To this end, he summarizes in substantial detail the plot structures of particular studies, those, for example, that involve the "Molly McGuires." That so much of the plot structure and characterization seem to fly in the face of his enterprise — representing, as they do, "middle-class" values or what we might think of as the enduring formulae of melodrama — is all honestly laid out. Amid all this chaff, Denning finds a few grains of wheat: strikers who are praised and bosses who are criticized. That these references, and not others, were singularly meaningful to workers who felt them as contested is pure conjecture on Denning's part.

The case for "mechanic accents" also rests on the concept of "artisanal republicanism," or the moral fable of the Republic in peril. Denning seems to validate this fable less from the texts themselves than from secondary studies of the working class; and other historians (among whom I count myself) may naively suppose that it circulated very widely in nineteenth-century America. This comment goes to the heart of Denning's enterprise. He is legitimately critical of the term "popular culture" as too static. One gesture of this book is therefore in keeping with the rethinking of social and cultural history that many European historians have been engaged in: that is, to discard an older sociology that applied a reductive social history to the literary text and, instead, to trust the texts themselves. In this "age of texts," academic readers can find oppositional meaning in any text they care to

analyze. But it is a far different matter, and quite problematic, when someone attempts to translate this play of meaning into actual social history (e.g., the existence of a "working-class culture") or group consciousness. Denning must privilege certain passages or figures as "working class," not because we know that any nineteenth-century readers did so or because the makers of this literature were politically involved, but because he reverts to a prior (and a priori) social history.

D.D.H.

### *APHA Conference in Philadelphia*

"The Book Arts in Philadelphia, 1785-1840" will be the subject of the thirteenth annual conference of the American Printing History Association, which will take place on Saturday, September 24, 1988, from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., at the Library Company of Philadelphia. This is the first APHA conference outside New York City. The move is a recognition of the fact that APHA is more than ever a national organization, but the immediate attraction of Philadelphia is the opportunity to hold the conference in conjunction with one of the most ambitious exhibitions of rare books and manuscripts ever assembled, "Legacies of Genius."

The conference program will focus on the book arts in Philadelphia during its golden age, from the end of the Revolutionary War through 1840 and will examine and evaluate the city's contributions to printing, press manufacturing, typefounding, binding, and printmaking during this dynamic and creative period.

The program will consist of five talks. Edwin Wolf, 2nd, librarian emeritus of the Library Company, will discuss the fine printing and major publication projects of the period. Elizabeth Harris, curator of graphic arts at the Smithsonian Institution, will speak on printing press manufacturers such as Clymer, Ramage, and their successors. Jennifer B. Lee, curator of printed books at the John Hay Library, Brown University, will discuss the beginnings of the American typefounding industry in Philadelphia. Willman Spawn, curator of bindings at Bryn Mawr College Library, will talk about Philadelphia binders and their practices. Finally, Kenneth Finkel, curator of prints at the Library Company, will explore the connections between the growth of commercial printmaking and the changing images of the city.

During the course of the day there will be ample opportunity to see "Legacies of Genius" in the adjacent galleries of the Library Company and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The exhibition is sponsored by the sixteen-member Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSL), and it presents 250 of the most significant rare books and manuscripts from the collections of the consortium members. In addition, a

conference lunch will be hosted by the nearby University of the Arts, which will mount a major exhibition on the arts of the book as part of the inauguration of its new graduate program in the book arts.

The conference registration fee is \$25.00 for APHA members, \$35.00 for nonmembers, and \$15.00 for students; this includes lunch and a reception. For more information, write James Green at the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19107, or call (215) 546-3181.

### *Printing in the South, 1680-1800*

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the American Printing History Association are jointly sponsoring a symposium on "The History of Printing in the South, 1680-1800" at Williamsburg, Virginia, on October 30-31, 1988. This symposium brings together a vast array of scholarship on the subject, and it features a keynote

address, the J. Ben Lieberman Lecture (an annual lecture inaugurated by APHA in 1986), by James Gilreath of the Library of Congress.

The papers to be given at the symposium will consider colonial printing in Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia; Thomas Jefferson's Library and the Skipwith List; the Library of the Council of Colonial Virginia; book-binding in eighteenth-century Williamsburg; paper, ink, and type in the period; and the printers Buckner Stith, William Parks, George Roulston, and Robert Wells.

Moderators at the symposium include James N. Green, John Lancaster, Marcus A. McCorison, Edwin Wolf, 2nd, Mildred K. Abraham, and Ruth Mortimer.

Space will be limited, so preregistration is advised. The fee for preregistration is \$50.00. For more information, write: Printing Symposium, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, P.O. Box C, Williamsburg, Virginia 23187. Telephone (804) 220-7422.

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