
As the authors say in the Introduction, less than a century ago an almanac was as standard a part of the furniture of the European mind as the Bible. Almost every home had one and they were, therefore, the mainstay of many a publishing house. Although the calendar was the essential base of the almanac, other materials it contained varied enormously and often controversially in a young country where the government controlled what appeared in the press.

Australian almanacs had an important role in the transmission of utilitarian information across the vast new territory and included commercial and residential information of use these days to genealogical research. But there were from the early years also specialised almanacs – for sailors, women, gardeners, farmers, tailors, and gold diggers. Print runs were sometimes in the dozens rather than the hundreds and yet surprisingly many survive in Australian archives. As the authors say, that they survive at all is amazing. How many of us today, for example, keep old telephone directories and calendars?

The bibliography is arranged geographically, and within those divisions chronologically. The final section is almanacs with Australian content published overseas. In practice this means the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and aimed chiefly at emigrants and immigrants. There are some very rudimentary maps and nice black and white illustrations as well as a lovely, coloured frontispiece.

This is an expensive little book but well produced and thoroughly scholarly, a model of its kind.


The annual lecture at the Osborne Collection of Early Children’s Books once again comes the way of the *Papers of the Bibliographical*
Society of Canada almost three years after the event and a year after publication. Yet it is always a pleasure to have these lectures in print. They are nice little pamphlets.

Brian Alderson subtitles his lecture “Some ruminations on texts and what are called para-texts.” He speaks of what he terms the personality of books. He imagines Hans Christian Andersen reporting the conversation between books in a parcel. He looks at the transitions of some editions and at some series imprints. He is for some reason scathing about what he terms “academic commentators,” for which I read historians of the book. He says we don’t concern ourselves with the physical form of texts, the status of that physical form, its variants or its place in “a wider field of historical influences.” This is not the place to argue that he is wrong. But we know he is. He speaks of the physical form of the book as though it is something book historians ignore in favour of the study of texts in a very limited definition of the term. Perhaps he doesn’t realise it, but those of us working in the field would fully endorse his later statement that arriving at an historical understanding of a book through bibliographical analysis is fundamental. It is what we do every day.

Despite such generalisations and allowing for a good deal of free jumping from topic to topic, there are a lot of really interesting examples of children’s publishers’ practices, generational changes in children’s books and publishing. His late nineteenth and early twentieth century American examples are especially good.

The book is illustrated throughout in black and white, and with eight pages of beautiful reproductions in the centre. The appendix is an extended study of some of the editions of Isaac Watts’s Divine Songs, a bibliographical project that certainly warrants the attention Alderson elsewhere advocates.


This is not really a book: hence no ISBN. G. Thomas Tanselle regularly makes available for sale through the Books Arts Press at the University of Virginia his syllabus for his bibliography course at Colombia University. This is the nineteenth revision, and the fifth