
Discovering a signed binding or a bookbinder’s ticket is a highly gratifying moment to anyone researching the history of bookbinding. A colourful and engaging collage of bookbinders’ tickets and stamps thus immediately intrigues and rewards the reader in the endpapers of Spawn and Kinsella’s most recent book. Their collaboration identifies 238 separate bookbinders or bookbinderies located in eighty-seven American cities and towns in nineteen states operating from the mid-eighteenth century until 1876 based on evidence from tickets and stamps in the Bryn Mawr College collection.

Willman Spawn documents his initial forays into bookbinding history matching Philadelphia bookbinder Robert Aitken’s waste-book entries to actual bindings. Spawn’s legendary collection of ten thousand pencil rubbings of bindings assisted him in identifying other bindings executed by a particular bookbinder through the recognition of tool patterns. Bindings decorated with multiple tools increased the possibility of matching other bindings, although reliance on tool identification alone was not enough, as tools were replaced, “borrowed, given away, or sold” (13). Spawn studied the physical bindings to discover techniques and styles used by certain binders with specific tools. Archival evidence in waste books, ledgers, and correspondence between people in the book trades assisted in identifying binders.

Spawn maintained three files to assist in identification of binders: chronological by imprint date, assumed geographical location, and overall binding design. Not all bindings could be matched to a binder and vice versa. After careful examination of fourteen bindings, Spawn identified an anonymous “itinerant German binder” active between 1790 and 1820 who travelled through eastern and central Pennsylvania rebinding hymn books and Bibles in German communities. In another case, he amassed valuable archival evidence about binder Thomas Anderton, including an inventory of his Philadelphia shop in 1772, but has been unable to attribute a binding to his shop.

The present study describes 307 bindings, 204 of which have tickets, as well as 22 loose tickets. The tickets range in size, shape, and amount of text. Spawn and Kinsella’s definition of *binder’s ticket* extends to include advertisements that are incorporated in the end leaves of a text (entry 243). Bindings were also stamped with the
binder’s name. There are fifty-nine examples of an engraved binder’s stamp and five examples of a binder’s name applied to a binding using hand tools. Forty-four examples consist of ink or embossed stamps on endpapers used after the 1840s. The total number of tickets, engraved designations, or stamps described in the volume is 329. As Thomas Kinsella notes in his essay “Signed Bindings,” what began as a form of advertisement is now evidence, providing insight into production, distribution, and ownership of books.

Kinsella highlights the ambiguity inherent when interpreting bookbinder’s tickets that advertise binding and bookselling enterprises as it is unclear whether “tickets signify the work of a binder or the sale of a bookseller” (27). He cites one example of a bookseller and stationer’s ticket without reference to binding, where archival evidence indicated an active binding business. On the evidence of a single ticket, it is difficult to state with confidence who bound and who sold the book; examination of multiple copies may reveal tickets of other binders or booksellers.

Items are organized alphabetically in American Signed Bindings Through 1876 by state, city, and bookbinder in a chronological order. Title of the work is the first section of the entry followed by a two-column format that documents size, material of binding, spine structure (tight back versus hollow back), endbands, board edge, turn-ins, edges of text block, endpapers, and provenance. A short description of binding decoration follows. The location and size of the binder’s ticket is described and its text is transcribed. Notes provide additional detail gleaned from directories, business histories, bibliographical references, instances of previously published illustrations of the binding, and other titles seen with an identical ticket. Five indexes provide additional useful access to the descriptive entries.

There are minor inconsistencies in the binding descriptions which are not clarified in any prefatory notes. For example, endbands are described as “modern cloth, yellow and green” (entry 73) and as “machine made, pink and purple” (entry 74). It is not clear if there is a difference between these endband descriptions, or whether the main distinction is “machine made” versus “worked” endbands. Some cloth bindings are described according to Krupp’s classification (entries 46, 49), and others are described as “brown cloth” (entry 45), “brown ribbed cloth” (entry 51), and “blue cloth with horizontal banding” (entry 55).

Reproductions of the binder’s tickets provide a visual reference. The endpaper collage gives the reader a sense of colour, shape, size,
and texture of the tickets, embossed stamps, and tooled names. The in-text grey-scale reproductions of the embossed and stamped designs are often difficult to decipher, as they are in their original bindings. Some of the tickets are textual and visual feasts such as the tickets for Samuel Taylor and John Dean of Philadelphia (entries 247, 248) and the image of a blank book with laced-on bands on the ticket of P. A. Mesier of New York (entry 151).

Those with interests in the history of Canadian bookbinding should note the inclusion of a small yellow ticket for Montreal bookbinder Hill in the endpaper collage with no other reference to Hill in the text. Perhaps it could be a starting point for a similar study of Canadian signed bindings.

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The Academy Edition reproduces, for the first time, the full text of the original serial version of Rolf Boldrewood’s Robbery Under Arms, which was initially published in the Sydney Mail between 1882 and 1883. The novel is set in the mid-nineteenth century Australian colonies of New South Wales and Victoria, and it follows the adventures of Dick Marston, his family, and the British gentleman bandit, Starlight. The violent history and exploits of Ned Kelly and other bushrangers that terrorized the colonies in the 1860s and 1870s influenced the novel, which Boldrewood claimed, in the preface to the 1889 Macmillan edition, was based on fact. In Robbery Under Arms, Dick Marston recounts his career as a bush bandit, a gold rush miner, and eventually a repentant thief. There is a palpable tension in the novel between Boldrewood’s sympathies with a colonial ruling class, which he was a part of, and the bush society to which Marston and his family belong.

Boldrewood wrote many stories about Australian life that often drew upon his experiences as a police magistrate in New South Wales, but the popularity of this bushranger romance overshadowed all of his other works. Robbery Under Arms earned Thomas Alexander Browne,