Notes

Michael Coady, John Murphy, A Notebook

Mary Dalton*

Some years ago (fifteen? twenty?) an intriguing little notebook fell into my hands. A friend had discovered it in an abandoned house in Brigus, Conception Bay. Because he knew of my connection to Chapel's Cove, he gave it to me.

The little book, covered in black leather, is five and a half inches wide, three and seven sixteenths in height, and approximately seven sixteenths thick. It is hand-sewn, with thread knotted on the outside of the leather spine. Marks of a rectangular depression at the midway point of the front cover indicate that it originally had a clasp or a lock of some kind.

The leather cover is worn down to its thick cardboard innards at the top, and there are crease marks on the front and back covers, suggesting that it has seen hard wear, perhaps being carried in a back pocket. Since many of its pages are taken up with surveying notes, this seems a plausible guess. Many pages are grimy and stained. At various places some pages have been torn out.

The notebook has passed through many hands, as there are several kinds of calculations and several writing styles within it. It was used to jot down numbers for adding, for doodling, for recording the dimensions of property, for recording receipts, for calculating how to find a leap year, how to find the golden numbers.

Among numbers scrawled on the reverse side of the first page can be found in pencil the following in a graceful hand: This Book belongs to Michael Coady Painter St Johns Newfoundland January 6th 1848. But it is a man named John Murphy who seems to have made many of the entries in the notebook. Or did the notebook pass back and forth between Coady and Murphy?

* Mary Dalton is the author of four books of poetry and Professor of English at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Michael Coady records some transaction involving John Murphy of Chapless (*sic*) Cove, possibly the surveying of a road; his note is dated 6 October 1847. And in May of 1846 there is a statement of Coady's contracting to serve John Murphy "in the capacity of fisherman or otherwise" and "to have as Wages the sum of Thirty Pounds Currency and my washing."

This tattered little book is a treasure trove of legal transactions as well as of lists and lore, but what caught my attention in particular is a two-page list in ink, in John Murphy's beautiful copperplate handwriting, a list headed "1848 Catalogue of Books" (Figure 1). This is the list:

New Monthly Magazine
Chambers's Miscellany of Useful Hou (*sic*)
Nelsons British Library
The Hunchback of Notre Dame
Johnsons Dictionary
Students of Blenheim Forest
Challoners Meditations
Hay's sincere Christain (*sic*)
Cook's Voyages Around the world
Buchan's Domestic Medicine
Macartney Embassy to China
The Historical Traveller-bygone
The Disowned by Bulwer
OHalloran the Insurgent Chief
The Farmer of Inglewood Forest
Franklin's Life and Essay's (*sic*)
Falconers Shipwreck
Johnsons Pocket Dictionary
Shakespear Work
Ovid's Art of Love
Nevelles of Garretstown
The Few by C. Spendler
The Rose of Thistle Isle by E. Carles [?]
The Destroyer
The Southern Belle
Blanche Livingstone
Penny Magazine
The New Irish Journal
Debretts Peerage

1848 Catalogue of Books	Vol.
New Monthly Magazine	2
Chambers's Miscellany of Useful Arts	4
Nelson's British Library	1
The Hunch-back of Notre Dame	1
Johnson's Dictionary	1
Student of Blenheim Forest	1
Challoner's Meditations	2
Hays's Sincere Christian	2
Cook's Voyages Round the World	1
Bushman's Domestic Medicine	1
Macartney Embassy to China	1
The Historical Traveller by Gore	2
The Discarded by Bulwer	2
O'Halloran the Insurgent Chief	1
The Farmer of Englewood Forest	1
Franklin's Life and Essays	1
Falconer's Shipwreck	1
Johnson's Pocket Dictionary	1
Shakespeare Works	1
Orvid's Art of Love	1

Figure 1: The first page of list headed "1848 Catalogue of Books."
Photo by Chris Hammond.

The Widow Barnaby
The Purgative
Anna of Edinburgh
Domestic Economy
The Young Mans best Companion
The Young Mans Companion
Tom Jones The Fondling (*sic*)
Scripture
The Old and New Testament
The spirit of the Nation
A Treatise on Arithmetic
The Following of Christ
Catholic Piety
The Path to Paradise or way to salv (*sic*)
Path to Paradise~or Catholic companion
Technical Memory
The Stranger [?] to Paris

There were storytellers and ballad-makers in the Chapel's Cove of that day, but in generalizing about the oral tradition some forget what my tattered notebook brings vividly before us: there were readers and scribes among us.

SOMMAIRE

Cet article décrit le contenu d'un carnet datant de la moitié du dix-neuvième siècle trouvé à Brigus, Conception Bay, Terre-Neuve. On y découvre entre autres des notes d'arpentage, des vérifications arithmétiques, des anecdotes et un registre d'actes juridiques. S'ajoute aussi une liste datée de 1848 de titres de livres qui auraient figuré dans une bibliothèque personnelle de la région.