December 1994 (Really February 1995) #15

FINAL ISSUE:

May we thank all who have made the last fifteen issues of the Trade Bindings Research Newsletter a truly worthwhile experience for the Editors. Cynthia and I have been pleased at the response to an area of binding history which means a lot to us. She reminds me, also, that you have put hard cash up as a proof of your interest, and we would like to thank you all for having made this periodical possible with your support. The fine articles, comments, and input have indicated that some type of publication can be a success, and we would like to be at the top of the subscriber list if anyone else starts up a new mailing.

A few clean up points: 1) Please notice the wonderful new banner by Gene Freeman. (I had promised it for 1995 since we used Barbara Freeman’s this year, when she won the nickel toss!) 2) Back issues are still available. (See order sheet attached.) 3) An index is in progress and will be sent out gratis sometime in 1995 to ALL past subscribers. (I promise!) 4) If there is any problem about your subscription, please write; but according to my records this issue should satisfy all monies received. 5) Periodically Cynthia and I plan to issue separate publications, which we have been working on relating to trade bindings, and will use the membership mailing list to inform about them.

We would appreciate hearing from you on news and publications about trade bindings and related areas, as well as any title you issue which we might buy. Our abiding love of bindings does not quit just because time and energy constraints are currently driving the car!

[Signature]
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NOTES & QUERIES: Thanks

Mary Sawyer sent in several very interesting sharings, which I will be forwarding to a few of you, added to the next DD bibliography version, and Cynthia is pleased to put some in the MA Corner. Thank you, Mary.

N & Q: Calligraphy

For any desiring high quality calligraphic work check with Michael Hughey (P.O. Box 18122 Asheville NC 28814). The work I have seen is beautiful. Also thanks, Michael, for the information on the DD binding. It will be in the next version of the bibliography.

N & Q: Buy + sell

The response was so thin that the Newsletter would have tried a more modified plan if it had continued. For those still interested, contact Charles S. Kamen, Bookdealer (48 Montecello Lane, Storrs CT 06268) for suggestions or help. See below.

N & Q: Beardsley

A new work: A selective checklist of the published work of Aubrey Beardsley, by Mark Samuels Lasner, has been published by Thomas G. Boss, Fine Books (355 Boylston Street, 2nd Floor, Boston MA 02116).

N & Q: For sale

Malcolm M. Ferguson (1489 Main St, Concord, MA 01742) describes a tempting offer of a beginner's collection of 40 different Margaret Armstrong titles in "good, clean, tight copies (some being first printings and others being early printings before any cover design modifications)." Price $225. postpaid. "Yes, they are commoner titles, but a good start for a good gift. nevertheless." For information call (617) 421-1880 or fax (617) 536-7072.

The Library of the Boston Athenaeum was recently given the 1907 version of this volume. We already had the 1909 copy. It is interesting to note that, although no changes were made in MA’s design, the newer book is three eighths of an inch shorter in height and lacks gilding at the head of the textblock. This is more of an observation about trade binding manufacture than MA’s work, but does show that focusing on one aspect of a binding can lead to more careful study of the entire book-making process! Also, it might bring questions to mind concerning the value of a book. If we are collecting books with covers by MA, in the case of this particular design, is a 1909 version in excellent condition more valuable than a 1907 copy in very good condition?

Barbara Adams Hebard
Library of the Boston Athenaeum

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Reader Response to Possible MA Covers:

Mary G. Sawyer of Hockessin Delaware has sent the TBR some response on the possible MA covers that have been listed recently: "On the photocopies presented as possible MA’s in the last few issues of TBR, there are none that I would accept. The *Trees Shrubs and Vines* (by A.E. Parkhurst, New York: Scribners, 1903) was the most likely but Gullens and Espey specifically cite it as a look-alike.

I hadn’t seen this quote as I have always worked with the 1991 edition of the Margaret Armstrong bibliography. So I was able to hunt up the 1968 edition of this bibliography. *Trees, Shrubs, and Vines* was quite clearly labeled by Gullens and Espey as an imitation. "So individual are her identity tags for authors that, when she declined to do more work than interested her, the publishers sought out artists who would design in a style similar to that which Miss Armstrong had established for the authors. This can be seen in a number of imitations, all published by Scribner’s: Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, *Joy in the Morning* (1914), Paul Bourget, *Domestic Dramas* (1900) and *A Divorce* (1904), H.E. Parkhurst, *Trees, Shrubs, and Vines* (1903), Henry Van Dyke, *The Man Behind the Book* (1929), and John C. Van Dyke, *The Money God* (1908). There are also Myrtle Reed Titles in imitation: *The Myrtle Reed Year Book* (Putnam’s, 1911) and *A Woman’s Career* (Putnam’s, 1914)." p 3. It is this type of imitation of the Margaret Armstrong style that makes the identification of unsigned Margaret Armstrong covers such a challenge to the collector.

THE USE OF LETTERING TO IDENTIFY MARGARET ARMSTRONG’S BOOKCOVERS

Each artist has their own distinctive style that a practiced eye can learn to recognize. This artistic style is constantly evolving and developing with the artist. The study of artistic style has been the subject of endless art books and articles. In the field of graphic art, lettering becomes a central focus for the graphic artist and can be used to convey much. This was especially true before the years of computer generated alphabets. At the turn of the century when Margaret Armstrong was working on these bookcovers, the work, time, effort, and concentration that each graphic artist would put into the development of their lettering would have been considerable. Many artists would use established and time honored alphabets. This was not only safe but saved a considerable amount of time. This was not the case with Margaret Armstrong, her lettering was something that she developed as her own and it became as recognizable as handwriting. Familiarity with Margaret Armstrong’s style of lettering can be a useful tool to identify an unsigned cover.

Within five years of starting her career as a book cover designer, Margaret Armstrong had started the development of an bold, individual, and easily recognizable alphabet. Certain letters become especially distinguishable as Margaret Armstrong’s own style. An example would be the "R" with the long curving tail. Through the distinctive use of high cross bars and bowls in some letters and not in others she evolved an unusual alphabet that can be identified by the practiced eye. A word of caution, however, as her work became well know and she was sought after as a designer, then there were also imitators of her work and her alphabet. It seemed to have been common practice that lesser known and hence cheaper graphic artists to have been hired to design covers in increasingly popular Margaret Armstrong style. This imitation of her style sometimes occurred when Margaret Armstrong had previously done covers for an author and had established a certain graphic style for that author which was reconized by the buying public.

I will take as a maxim the quote "a picture is worth a thousand words" and have included just lettering from a small selection of MA covers. This is a subject much better illustrated than described. Please forgive my exclusion of much of the artistic design from these covers. I know that this chops up terrible the design element of the covers but there is simply not space for the entire cover. These samples are arranged by date. I have done this in order to illustrate the gradual development of her lettering over the years. Notice that it is not a smooth transition. Once a style of letter is used there is no guarantee that the same style of letter will appear in each succeeding book cover. Margaret Armstrong was too good a designer for that, fitting each word into an artistic whole with her ornamental detail and illustration. Also be aware that the copyright date simply indicated when a book was published, not when the cover was designed. It was also common for some cover designs to be used for multiple books, simply having someone else change the title. Take a look at the following examples of lettering and see if you can discern a pattern in her alphabet.

Cynthia Bruns
WANTED A MATCHMAKER
PAUL LEICESTER FORD

WANTED A CHAPERON
PAUL LEICESTER FORD

THE FORTUNES OF FIFI

THE GREY CLOAK
HAROLD MACGRATH

GORDON KEITH
BY THOMAS NELSON PAGE

UNDER the ROSE
THE MAN OF THE HOUR
OCTAVE THANET

THE CHATEAU OF MONTPLAISIR

THE MILITANTS
BY MARY SHIPMAN RAYMOND ANDREWS

UNDER THE CRUST
by Thomas Nelson Page

KINCAID'S BATTERY

MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL
Bibliography of Lettering Examples:


The cover of this book was not by Margaret Armstrong, instead the decorations inside are. The decorations throughout the book are done in an especially pale yellow. The lettering shown comes from the end papers.

Margaret Armstrong did the cover and the inside decorations for this book. The first lettering is from the cover, the second is from the title page. Notice the interesting use of left and right slant in her lettering in the title page.

Bibliography continued:


Like the previous book in 1904 written by the same author, this cover was not done by Margaret Armstrong. The inside decorations were and the lettering shown is taken from the endpapers.


A possible addition to the Margaret Armstrong checklist:

James Whitcomb Riley, The Boys of the Old Glee Club. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1907. light green ribbed cloth, while flowers and banner, dark green foliage with gold lettering.

I came across a cover that looks like a good possibility. The front of James Whitcomb Riley's The Boys of the Old Glee Club, Bobbs-Merrill 1907 reminds me of items 57, 173 and 194 on the Gullens checklist. The use of blossoms with woven foliage seems to be part of the Armstrong style. She, of course, did several other pieces for the Riley books.

Barbara Adams Hebard
Library of the Boston Athenaeum
DECORATIVE DESIGNERS (1895-1932) serial bibliography: T-V + X-Z


TAGGART, Marion Ames. *In the days of King Hal.* New York: Benziger Bros., 1902. - ? - PAQ (Jay Chambers)


THACKERAY, William Makepeace. *Vanity Fair: a novel without a hero.* New York: Crowell Co. [nd, 1893] - Unsigned - PAQ (Lee Thayer - "Without seeing the book, it is impossible to tell which of the many editions of Vanity Fair brought into print in 1896-1905 this might be.") + Lehner (circa 1900 - Unsigned) + Ogle (c1893 - Unsigned design by Lee Thayer. Oversize Crowell series.) + CSUF #2587 (peacock feather eyes)


THAYER, W. M. *From pioneer home to White House, life of Lincoln.* Chicago: Whitman + Co., 1927. - Unsigned - Ogle


THORPE, Francis Newton. *The spoils of empire; a romance of the old world and the new.* Boston: Little, Brown + Co., 1903. - Signed - Kamen + CSUF #2592


TROWBRIDGE, John Townsend. The three scouts. New York: Hurst + Co. [nd] - Signed - CSUF #2596


VAN DYNE, Edith [pseud of Frank L. Baum] Aunt Jane's nieces. Chicago: Reilly + Britton [nd, c1906] - Signed - UCLA ("A cover design for some later edition of this girl's series; the design appeared on reprints of the entire series.") + Munzer (series, c1911)

VON SCHEFFEL, Joseph V. Ekkeshard: a tale of the tenth century. New York: Crowell + Co. [nd, c1895] - Signed - CSUF #2599 (cloth backed printed boards - small 8vo)

VOORHIES, Frank G. Twisted history. New York: Dillingham, 1904. - ? - PAQ (Jay Chambers)
YEATS, Sidney Kilner Levett see LEVETT-YEATS, Sidney Kilner
- Kamen (Publishing information needs checking.)
YOUNG, Egerton. *Algonquin Indian tales*. Chicago: Revell, 1903. - ? -
PAQ (Lee Thayer)

N & Q: New monograph


N & Q: Article

Gene Freeman sent a copy of an article from The Penny Magazine, September 1842 called: "A day at a bookbinder's". It is most interesting and we are considering issuing it separately. Would anyone want to buy a copy for a modest amount? Please indicate interest.

N & Q: TBR Newsletter

For a finders fee! of $3. per issue, we will send postpaid back issues of the Newsletter #1-15. Color supplements (for $5. per sheet) are sold only with the purchase of #7 (MA) or #11 (DD) or #15 (MA). Write to ex-editors for more information.
Color Copies of Margaret Armstrong Bookcovers:


This bookcover was published in two different versions. The original is believed to be the cover with the bull dog as illustrated here. The later edition is missing the bulldog illustration and the subtitle "A Love Story" is added. Gullens and Espey state that the lettering "A Love Story" is not authentic and the change was most likely made so that any possible buyers of the book would not think that this was a dog story but rather a romantic tale. I find this an interesting example of the type of changes that can be commonly found in these book covers, changes that were often done for marketing reasons.


The cover on this book is particularly graceful and shows Margaret Armstrong's fine use of stylized flowers. The decorations inside this book are done in an especially fine three color process. The title page is partially illustrated in the article on lettering in this issue of the newsletter which will, even in black and white give you a feeling for this book. Margaret Armstrong also did six full page flower borders which surround the text plus various little designs throughout the book. A beautiful book to read from the artistic point of view. However, the story line admittedly is rather limp.


This cover was issued in a number of different colors such as dark green and gold on light green, dark green, purple and gold on white, purple and white on lavender, and dark blue and white on lavender as illustrated here. The title page and borders are done by Margaret Armstrong but are not individually signed. There are four different border designs. The borders, title page, and other decorations are done in light green, yellow and rust and have an rather rich intricate medieval effect overall.


This bookcover has been found in brown, dark green, red, olive green or blue as illustrated here. The gold gives the book an especially rich feeling and this cover is often felt by admirers of Margaret Armstrong's work to be a fine example for some of her best art.