

# Research Collections in the Library of Congress

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THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS has one of the most comprehensive research collections in existence of American children's books published since the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This collection's strength lies in books published prior to 1920, and is a result primarily of the national copyright law of 1870 requiring two copies of every book published in the United States to be deposited with the Library of Congress.

Among the 16,000-17,000 American juvenile titles selected for the Rare Book and Special Collections Division are many unique and valuable volumes.<sup>2</sup> Several thousand more juvenile titles are shelved in the General Collections, mixed with foreign and recent works.<sup>3</sup> Other early American books are housed in separate subject departments, such as music. The Library of Congress (LC) has collections of children's books which were begun more than a century before it was conceived that a library established for the use of Congress, the president of the United States, and other government officers should maintain books for children.

The story of how children's books came to LC, the beginning of the children's collection in the Rare Book Division, the development of a policy to serve readers as well as to collect books, and the establishment of a Children's Book Section dates almost to the founding of the library. A chronological list of events is provided in the appendix.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### THE BEGINNING OF THE CHILDREN'S COLLECTION

There were no children's books among the contents of the eleven hair trunks and one map case that arrived from a London dealer in 1800 to

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constitute the original Library of Congress.<sup>4</sup> In 1815, however, when Congress purchased the private collection of Thomas Jefferson to replace the books burned by the British in the War of 1812, there were a number of books not unfamiliar to the children of the day. Among these books, which Jefferson had collected for more than fifty years, were books dealing with America and every known science, five different editions of Aesop, a collection of La Fontaine's fables, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*.<sup>5</sup> According to Thomas D. Burney of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division, only Aesop was represented in the collection by American editions: Robert Dodsley's *Select Fables of Esop and Other Fabulists*, printed and sold by Benjamin Johnson in Philadelphia (1792); and *The Fables of Aesop, with his life, to which are added morals and remarks, accommodated to the youngest capacities*, by Robert Burton, printed and sold by Robert Bell in Philadelphia (1777).<sup>6</sup> Neither copy has survived.

It was a long time before Congress recognized the need to allocate funds for children's books. As early as 1882, however, funds were appropriated for the acquisition of the Benjamin Franklin collection, which included early primers and works printed by Franklin such as *The Poor Orphan's Legacy, Being a Short Collection of Godly Counsels and Exhortations to a Young Arising Generation. Primarily designed by the author for his own children but published that others may also reap benefit by them. By a minister of the gospel* (1734).<sup>7</sup>

Through the years children's books continued to accumulate, some slipping in as part of gift or purchase collections, but most arriving automatically through copyright deposit. The importance of the copyright law of 1870 should not be minimized. This law required two copies of every copyrighted book in the United States, juvenile as well as adult, to be deposited — first with the clerk of the United States District Court, and after 1871 with the Librarian of Congress. Once the system was established, books previously deposited in other places found their way to the national library, including valuable first editions of noted American writers such as Alcott and Clemens.

With no money budgeted or arrangements for housing or maintenance, children's books remained unclassified, uncataloged and consequently inaccessible. Some were shelved with adult books according to subject matter; others were merely stored.

#### CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN THE RARE BOOK DIVISION

The initial deliberate effort to collect historical children's books at LC stemmed from the appointment of Valta Parma in 1927 as the first

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curator of rare books. Eleanor Weakley Nolen welcomed the leadership of Valta Parma who, as she pointed out, was not only personally interested but was also very much aware of the significance of children's books as social history and of their consequent place as "an integral part of a national library."<sup>8</sup> She attributed to him the decision that LC establish a children's book collection in order not only to select and maintain the literary classics of each generation, but to provide a record of the nation's reading, including mass-produced works. Nolen credited him with devising the plan to shelve the books chronologically according to publication date, with the exception of more prolific nineteenth-century writers whose works were collected under the author's name. She further asserted, "Already the children's book collection in the Library of Congress is of incalculable value to everyone in any way connected with literature for children."<sup>9</sup>

For a symposium on collections of rare children's books, Parma gave credit for the start of LC's children's book collection to a nameless woman scholar who visited the Rare Book Reading Room around 1934 and requested assistance in gathering data for a doctoral dissertation on early American juvenile literature. As he put it: "A survey of the field showed the unusual possibilities in the Library of Congress, and the gathering of the Collection began."<sup>10</sup> Nolen enthusiastically praised this news in her article for *The Horn Book Magazine*: "For the first time in its history, the national library is building a collection of children's books!"<sup>11</sup>

From all over the library Parma sought, selected and assembled about 7000 books, primarily from the early 1700s to 1850. The books were then placed on steel shelves in a fireproof room which was maintained throughout the year at an even 70°F with 50 percent humidity in order to preserve fragile bindings and paper.

Shelved first in chronological order, the outward appearance of the books revealed their contents. Miniature toy books of the late eighteenth century, appealingly covered in printed paper, were a sharp contrast to the mass of slim, black Sunday School books from the American Sunday-School Union and other religious publishing houses of the nineteenth century. These in turn formed an interesting comparison with the rows of secular serials written specifically for boys or girls.

In the alphabetical section were the crowded shelves of Jacob Abbott (author of the Rollo series), Samuel Goodrich (creator of traveling schoolmaster Peter Parley), and of adventure stories for boys such as those by Charles A. Fosdick (Harry Castlemon), Horatio Alger, Jr. (of rags-to-riches fame), William Taylor Adams (Oliver Optic) and, most prolific of all, Edward S. Ellis. Here also were writers for girls, such as

Mrs. G.R. Alden (better known as Pansy), Rebecca Sophia Clarke (Sophie May, creator of *Little Prudy*), Harriet Mulford Stone Lothrop (Margaret Sidney of the *Five Little Peppers*), Susan Bogert Warner (Elizabeth Wetherell of *The Wide, Wide World*), Martha Finley (Farquharson of the *Elsie Dinsmore* series), and Louisa May Alcott.

Also included in the collection were such rarities as Jacob Johnson's "*Juvenile Miscellany* including Natural History for the use of children, ornamented with eighteen engravings," (Philadelphia, 1808); and "*A New History of Blue Beard*, written by Gaffer Black Beard, for the Amusement of Little Lack Beard and His Pretty Sisters, adorned with cuts," (Philadelphia, 1804). The earliest American juvenile Parma found was Cotton Mather's *A Family Well Ordered, or an essay to render parents and children happy in one another* (Boston, 1699) containing the typical Puritan admonition: "The Heavy Curse of God, will fall upon those Children that make Light of their Parents."<sup>12</sup>

In an editorial comment following Parma's article, there was mention of an anonymous individual book collector "through [whose] generosity . . . an annual sum [was] . . . to be provided . . . [to] enable the Library to undertake systematic collecting and bibliographical research over the whole field especially in the nineteenth century production."<sup>13</sup> This was probably a reference to J.K. Lilly, Jr., then vice-president of Lilly Endowment, who helped to purchase a number of important children's books in the 1930s. Another donor was Maude Blair, who gave 195 McGuffey Readers and spellers to the library in 1937. These included virtually all the first editions and helped make LC's collection one of the foremost in this field.<sup>14</sup>

Other gifts were set apart and kept intact as special collections in the Rare Book Division. In 1936 John Davis Batchelder of Washington, D.C., presented the library with a huge, heterogeneous collection of books, manuscripts, bindings, illustrations and broadsides representing several centuries. What is less known is that the juvenile literature in this collection filled an entire shelf. Most of the printed books were first editions or "association" copies. The gift collection included a wooden hornbook with an abacus consisting of two strings of wooden beads; a first edition Noah Webster "Grammatical Institute" (1783) wrapped in a contemporary needlework sampler; a New England primer (ca. 1800); a copy of Clement C. Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas" signed by the designer, Bruce Rogers; an autographed first edition, first issue in original cloth of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; and an 1893 copy of Alcott's *Jack and Jill*, with four pages of the original manuscript mounted in the volume.<sup>15</sup>

Also in the collection is the copy of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* by Frances

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Hodgson Burnett which contains inscriptions to the collector by both the author and the illustrator, Reginald Birch. Although the author of this book is an Englishwoman, it is included because the book was written while she was living in Washington, D.C., and was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in New York in 1886.<sup>16</sup>

On December 1, 1940, Frank J. Hogan, a Washington lawyer, one-time president of the American Bar Association, and book collector, donated eighty-six rare children's books, the oldest of which were three American hornbooks. His gift included ten New England primers, among them a copy of the rare 1775 Providence edition with the familiar prayer "Now I lay me down to sleep," and the only known copy of the Boston primer of 1790. Also in the collection was the tiny book *Cock Robin's Death and Funeral*, printed in Boston in 1780. This is the only known complete copy of this early American edition and appears both in *Yankee Doodle's Literary Sampler*<sup>17</sup> and in an article by Virginia Haviland entitled "Who Killed Cock Robin?"<sup>18</sup> (In the latter article, mention is made of an 1821 edition about a repentant Robin and his lady "Jane," as opposed to "Jenny" in the book from the Hogan collection.)

Not as old but almost as important was one of four known copies of Samuel Goodrich's *The Tales of Peter Parley About America* (Boston, 1827) which was the first of the popular series about that entertaining schoolmaster. A reproduction of two pages from another book in the series, *The Tales of Peter Parley About Europe* (Boston, 1828), appeared in *Yankee Doodle's Literary Sampler* and revealed the unfortunate racial stereotyping regarding Africa typical of the early nineteenth century. There was also a copy of *Metamorphosis; or a Transformation of Pictures, with Poetical explanations, for the amusement of young persons* (Philadelphia, 1814) rewritten from the English edition of 1654. A page of this was reproduced in both *Americana in Children's Books* and *Yankee Doodle's Literary Sampler*.

In 1952 actor Jean Hersholt and his wife presented to the Library of Congress, "as a small token of the gratitude and love"<sup>19</sup> they felt toward this country, their remarkable collection of Anderseniana, which included first editions, original letters, manuscripts and other material concerning Hans Christian Andersen. Although the writings of this Danish author would not normally come under the purview of an article devoted to historical American children's books, one particular aspect justifies its mention, i.e., the relationship which existed between Andersen and Horace E. Scudder, editor of the illustrated monthly *Riverside Magazine for Young People*. In the "Programme of the *Riverside Magazine for Young People*

for 1869," the editor proudly announced: "First of all, Hans Christian Andersen, the most eminent living writer for the young, has consented to be a regular contributor to the *Riverside*. . . . Hereafter, all his new stories will be introduced to the American public through the *Riverside* . . . , in advance of their publication in Denmark, Germany, and England."<sup>20</sup> The story "The Court Cards," one of the series of tales obtained by Scudder for first publication in his magazine, is reproduced in its entirety in *Yankee Doodle's Literary Sampler*.

In a separate area of the Rare Book Division are dime novels and periodicals. Represented are early magazines such as *Chatterbox* (an annual), *Our Young Folks*, *Parley's Magazine*, *Peter Parley's Annual*, *Riverside Magazine for Young People*, *The Juvenile Miscellany* and *The Youth Companion*.

Since Parma began the collection in 1934, the initial inventory of 7000 books has doubled. In describing the work of the department, William Matheson, current chief of the Rare Book Division, mentioned author Jacob Blanck, who, while researching his book *Harry Castlemon, Boys' Own Author*, helped identify many rare juveniles for transfer from the General Collections to the Rare Book Division.<sup>21</sup> This raises a question: If the children's books mentioned so far are only the most rare, the most important and the most valuable, what about the others?

#### FROM COLLECTING BOOKS TO SERVING READERS

Although there was progress toward gathering rare and valuable books in the Rare Book Division and establishing a children's book collection (which in turn was to attract other important books), it was a long struggle before services and tools were developed to enable interested scholars, teachers, librarians, social historians, and members of Congress to make proper use of the children's books scattered throughout the divisions of the library.

In 1944 a joint committee of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) was formed to retain a children's literature consultant for the staff of the Library of Congress. Money was raised to finance a survey of the juvenile holdings throughout the library and to develop a plan for service.<sup>22</sup>

In 1952 Frances Clarke Sayers of the New York Public Library conducted the study. After three months, she reported that "children's books are everywhere"<sup>23</sup> and submitted her conclusions of which the most relevant to this article follow:

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Children's books and reading constitute an area of research in their own right and as such have just claim to the service of the Library of Congress since interest in books and reading for children and young people is the major concern of librarians, educators, sociologists, anthropologists and everyone concerned with the future.

Children's books have value in the existing collections and are recognized for their ability to further knowledge and research.

Without the implementation of the specialist's knowledge of the material, the worth and value of existing collections are viti-ated.<sup>24</sup>

Sayers recommended that a center containing bibliographic aids necessary for research be established within the Library of Congress to serve as the focal point for work relating to children's books. She further recommended that a catalog be assembled to indicate the location of children's books throughout the library.<sup>25</sup>

Ten years later, LC was still without funds, space or staff for children's books. During that time, Irvin Kerlan, Associate Medical Director of the Food and Drug Administration and book collector, became Honorary Consultant on the Acquisition of Children's Books and did much to enrich the collection. Notwithstanding, Ruth Hill Viguers wrote in *The Horn Book Magazine* that while it was not surprising that the greatest research library in the United States should have unique resources in the field of children's literature, it was *very* surprising that this collection remained disorganized, uncataloged and thus inaccessible. She deplored the fact that Congress had never assumed full financial responsibility for LC in general and, in particular, for what she termed "this irreplaceable collection of children's books."<sup>26</sup>

Finally, on March 4, 1963, the Children's Book Section in the General Reference and Bibliography Division of the Reference Department began operations with the appointment of Virginia Haviland as its head. All this was made possible by congressional appropriation, complete with presidential approval.<sup>27</sup> The seemingly impossible had happened.

#### THE CHILDREN'S BOOK SECTION

From the initial hearings before the House Subcommittee on Legislative Appropriations, it was made clear that the "primary purpose" of the "proposed Children's Book Section" was "to provide reference and bibliographic services to government officials, children's librarians, pub-

lishers, writers and illustrators, and the general public, *but not to serve children.*"<sup>28</sup> No one disagreed. It is a testimony to Haviland's resourcefulness that she was able to capture the essence of the negative warning and turn it around to conceptualize a new vision for her office: "serving those who serve children."

In an article with that same title, Haviland outlined the purpose and practice of the new Children's Book Section, and described the assembly of a comprehensive reference collection. She introduced the shelflist containing entries for all children's fiction acquired since 1957 and for juvenile nonfiction classified with adult books in subject areas identified a decade earlier by graduate library school students. Haviland further gave a lively and long-overdue account of those children's books outside the Rare Book Division in the General Collections. The majority of children's books, she explained, were in the literature section classified as PZ, where fiction, folklore, poetry and simple science books were to be found. Also cited were the large collection of nineteenth-century periodicals such as *St. Nicholas* and *The Youth's Companion*, and the lesser-known serials among the periodicals of the general library collection. She mentioned the first American editions of Beatrix Potter, as well as shelves of Abbott, Alcott and other familiar nineteenth-century writers. Haviland made it abundantly clear that not all the early and unusual books were in Rare Book custody, stating finally, "The value of such a collection, unaffected by usual library wear-and-tear, lies in its potential for answering the kind of question that reaches out to a court of last appeal."<sup>29</sup>

With the growth and development of the Children's Book Section in the ensuing years, Sayers's recommendations began to be realized. In an interview for this article, Haviland acknowledged that within the limits of space and staff, the primary aims of Sayers's report, i.e., to assemble collections and develop bibliographies, had been achieved. She commented also that while resources and functions have remained basically unchanged, "a widening program of publishing, exhibitions and other cultural activities" has developed.<sup>30</sup>

On the tenth anniversary of the Children's Book Section's establishment, Paul Heins, editor of *The Horn Book Magazine*, described among Haviland's other activities, her "festive exhibits" and "the beautifully designed catalogues that remain as a permanent record," such as "One Hundred Years of ABC" or "Louisa May Alcott — A Centennial for *Little Women*."<sup>31</sup> Since then, the small but select catalog *Americana in Children's Books: Rarities from the 18th and 19th Centuries*, with its choice illustrations, has appeared.



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The most substantial compilation from the Children's Book Section has been *Children's Literature: A Guide to Reference Sources*.<sup>32</sup> Of special interest is the history and criticism section, which includes the following subtopics: historical studies; early magazines for children; and collections, catalogs and exhibitions. These contain lists of catalogs of library collections, exhibitions of old and rare books, and facsimile editions of special children's books; biographical/critical studies of important early writers and illustrators; and book lists useful for historical research. Under the heading "bibliography" an entire section is devoted to children's books in LC. This reference work is followed by both a first supplement (1972) and a second supplement (1977).<sup>33</sup> The latter, a commentary on the increase of books about books for children, is the longest. Together, these three volumes are of inestimable value for any research in children's literature.

Also of value is the anthology *Yankee Doodle's Literary Sampler* which carries superbly reproduced facsimiles of American juveniles. The two volumes of *Children's Books in the Rare Book Division of the Library of Congress*,<sup>34</sup> one arranged by author and one in chronological order of publication, are essential tools for examining the holdings in the rare books collection.

Finally, an article condensed from Haviland's lecture "Books for America's Children: 1776-1976"<sup>35</sup> is a superlative example of what can be achieved when a specialist and a collection come together. In the article, Haviland surveyed the history of children's books in America with specific examples from LC's rare book holdings. She mentioned gaps in the collection as well as particular gems. No more delightful introduction than this can be found to the history of American juveniles nor to the books available in this field at the Library of Congress.

### A NEW BEGINNING

In March 1978, the Children's Book Section of the Library of Congress was renamed the Children's Literature Center. No longer part of the General Reference and Bibliography Division in the Reader Services Department, it is now under the jurisdiction of the Associate Librarian of Congress as one of eight national programs. According to the *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* (April 1978), the new arrangement "more accurately reflects the principal focus of the unit." From the time of its inception, the section has not served children directly, but rather those adults and organizations concerned with "research, bibliographical,

and analytical studies in children's literature" both in this country and abroad.<sup>86</sup>

The change of name and location is not only more appropriate for the unit's purpose, but signals a new beginning. Today LC has more than a "collection of collections" of historical American children's books. It has largely fulfilled Sayers's goals of providing a reference and research center, gathering and compiling bibliographic aids and making accessible those children's books scattered throughout the library.

As a recognized national program, the Children's Literature Center now faces new opportunities to promote children's books and serve the needs of scholarship. The change in identification from "section" to "center" suggests an expansion of physical facilities, additional staff, and a broadening of national and international services. Such services hold exciting possibilities for earlier, swifter, surer access to the wealth of early American children's books available. The change also poses a challenge. The Library of Congress has come more than halfway in offering its resources and services; it is now up to scholars to take advantage of that offer and respond.

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## APPENDIX

Chronological Milestones in the Collection of  
 Historical American Children's Books in the Library of Congress

- 1800 Library of Congress established
- 1815 Thomas Jefferson collection (including Aesop) purchased
- 1870 U.S. copyright law enacted requiring deposit of copyright books (juvenile as well as adult)
- 1882 Franklin collection (including primers, Franklin publications for children) acquired
- 1927 Rare Book Division established, headed by Valta Parma
- 1934 Children's book collection started by Valta Parma
- 1936 Batchelder collection (including numerous juveniles) acquired
- 1937 Maude Blair gift of 195 McGuffey Readers
- 1940 Hogan gift of 86 choice juveniles
- 1944 Joint committee of ACEI and AAUW formed to obtain children's literature consultant
- 1952 Sayers's report, "Children's Books in the Library of Congress"
- 1952 Hersholt gift of Anderseniana
- 1957 Irvin Kerlan named Honorary Consultant on Acquisition of Children's Books
- 1963 Children's Book Section established, headed by Virginia Haviland
- 1965 "Serving Those Who Serve Children" published
- 1966 *Children's Literature: A Guide to Reference Sources* published
- 1972 First supplement published
- 1974 *Yankee Doodle's Literary Sampler* published
- 1975 *Children's Books in the Rare Book Division of the Library of Congress* (vols. 1 and 2) published
- 1977 Second supplement of *Children's Literature* published
- 1978 The Children's Literature Center established

U.S. Congress legislation, Congressional Record debates, Members of Congress, legislative process educational resources presented by the Library of Congress. Presented by the Library of Congress, Congress.gov is the official website for U.S. federal legislative information. More about Congress.gov. Visiting the U.S. Capitol.