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From the Collector's Library: Joel Munsell, Printer and Antiquarian in Albany, New York

Henry S. Bannister

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THE
Witchcraft Delusion

IN
NEW ENGLAND:

RISE, PROGRESS, AND TERMINATION,

AS EXHIBITED BY
DR. COTTON MATHER,

IN
THE WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD;

AND BY
MR. ROBERT CALEF,

IN HIS
MORE WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD.

WITH A
Preface, Introduction, and Notes,
By SAMUEL G. DRAKE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

The Wonders of the Invisible World.

PRINTED FOR W. ELLIOT WOODWARD,
ROXBURY, MASS.
MDCCLXVI.

Printed by Joel Munsell, Albany, New York, 1866

THE COURIER

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ASSOCIATES VOLUME XI, NUMBER 2

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FROM THE COLLECTOR'S LIBRARY

Joel Munsell, Printer and Antiquarian in Albany, New York

by Henry S. Bannister

Of the many beguiling avenues into which book collection can lead, the earliest to kindle my interest was local history. This all came about while I was a schoolboy and Cornelia Mertens, our local librarian, introduced me to Joshua V. H. Clark's *Onondaga: or Reminiscences of Earlier and Later Times*.¹ Later, I read the *Jesuit Relations*, especially those parts describing the experiences of Father LeMoyne at Onondaga. Francis Parkman's books and a host of others came to my attention in due course. Eventually, through an Albany book dealer, John Skinner, I found O'Callaghan's *Documentary History of the State of New York*. (When I received my copies from Mr. Skinner I found the four volumes to be infested with book lice and had to store them in a sealed carton with paradichlorobenzene for a week. This did the job, and there's never been a bug in them in all the years since!) Soon after, I read Donaldson's Adirondack history and the work of that fine printer, Joel Munsell.

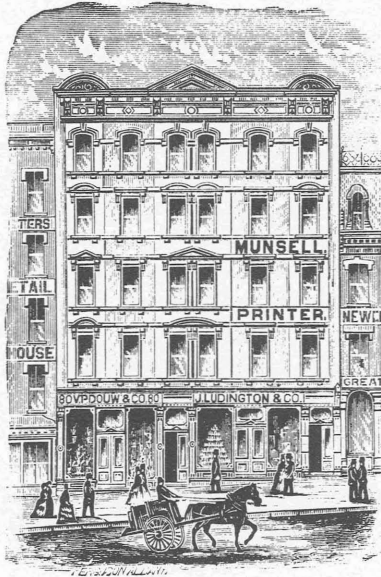
Joel Munsell was a true artist and craftsman. His love for fine printing and history became a motivating force in his work. It also kept him from becoming a wealthy man. His real riches are to be found in the fine historical books that came from his press and in the traditions he handed down to his sons. Joel Munsell was born in Northfield, Massachusetts, in 1808. His recollections of those boyhood days and of some of the people he knew in Northfield may be found in a delightful little collection of reminiscences he wrote toward the end of his career and printed privately in 1875.² In 1826, at

Mr. Bannister is a book collector and a member of the Board of Trustees of Library Associates. He has recently joined the Publication Board of *The Courier*.

¹There have been several Onondaga County histories written. In my opinion, Clark's *Onondaga*, which was published in two volumes in 1849 by Stoddard and Babcock in Syracuse, New York, is the best written and the most interesting reading.

²Joel Munsell, *Reminiscences of Men and Things in Northfield as I Knew Them, from 1812 to 1825*, Albany, 1875.

List of Historical,
GENEALOGICAL AND MISCELLANEOUS
BOOKS,



PUBLISHED BY

J. Munsell, 82 State Street, Albany, N.Y.

These are works of small editions, not stereotyped, and many of them nearly out of print. Prices do not include postages or express charges. Letters of inquiry should include a post-stamp.

Courtesy of the Rare Book Library, New York State Library, Albany, New York.

the age of eighteen, he moved to Troy, New York, and the following year he went to Albany to work for John Denio, a book dealer. While working as a clerk in this bookstore he planned his first venture as a publisher, a semi-weekly paper which he called *The Minerva*. It was to be a subscription publication and sell for thirty-seven and one-half cents per quarterly issue. Joel went out on North and South Market Streets to solicit subscriptions from passersby. With one hundred fifty subscriptions in his pocket, he set about putting his paper together during his spare time and evenings. The first issue was delivered to each patron by Joel as soon as it came off the press.³

For some reason Joel Munsell did not continue with this enterprise after the first quarter. He left his employer and *The Minerva* to work for a local newspaper as a compositor. Six years later, in 1834, he set up his own printing business and printed two items during the first year. The first was a folio published in partnership with Henry D. Stone. The second was a paper written by Paul Brown entitled *The Radical and Advocate of Equality*. It was a statement of concern over the morals and practical politics of the day – a subject much in the foreground today! Joel Munsell adds a wry footnote to this entry in his *Bibliotheca* commenting upon the author's impracticality in a pragmatic world and reminding us that most of the five hundred copies printed were ultimately used for wrapping paper.⁴

In the latter part of 1836 Munsell bought the printing firm of Thomas G. Wait, 58 State Street, where he remained for many years. Almost from the beginning, he exhibited an interest in local history. The number of historical items coming from his press increased yearly. One of the first was of a local nature and concerned a tavern robbery to which was added an account called, *Old Man of the Mountain, or the Gold Hunters of Joe's Hills*, by Josiah Priest. The following year, 1837, Munsell printed fifteen thousand copies of a collection of Priest's historical stories about the early settlers in the wilderness. For the most part, though, Munsell was busy with "bread and butter" printing for local religious groups, schools, libraries, societies, and so forth. With each succeeding year the entries in the *Bibliotheca* became longer and give us a clear indication of the nature of his printing activities and the growing reputation he enjoyed.⁵

In 1841 Josiah Priest had Munsell print another historical pamphlet entitled *The Fort Stanwix Captive, or New England Volunteer*. Six thousand copies were printed of this sixty-four page pamphlet. A curious piece came from the Munsell press in 1843 under the title, *The Bride of the Northern Wilds*, by Newton M. Curtis. Three thousand copies were printed. Under the

³Joel Munsell, *Bibliotheca Munselliana: A Catalogue of the Books and Pamphlets Issued from the Press of Joel Munsell from the Year 1828 to 1870*, Albany, Privately printed, 1872. (Reprinted: New York, Burt Franklin, 1969)

⁴Ibid., p. 5

⁵Ibid., p. 16

entry for this title in his *Bibliotheca Munsell* makes this observation: “The author of this pamphlet was a resident of Charlton, Saratoga County, of limited education, a whiskey drinking, tobacco chewing, profane swearing, and squalid specimen of humanity.”⁶ And more too. It is these occasional personal observations about his work and those for whom he printed that make reading Joel Munsell’s *Bibliotheca Munselliana* such a delight.

His abundant energies balked at enforced idleness. This shines forth in an entry for the year 1839 of a book by Arthur Prynne (his own pseudonym). He footnotes the entry for *The Full and True History of the Conquest of Mexico by Cortez* with this comment: “This was a *chap-book*, condensed from a well known work by Diaz, got up to aid in filling a temporary lull in business.”⁷

As Munsell’s business grew, he began to feel an urge to make another venture into publishing. A hint of this can be seen in the annotation he added to the entry for Henry R. Schoolcraft’s *Notes on the Iroquois*, printed in one thousand copies, in 1848. He writes, “This was originally published as a legislative document. I was struck with the interest attached to the subject, and proposed its republication to E. H. Pease, not yet having attempted to publish anything myself. The work owes its existence to my persuasion.”⁸ The yeast was fermenting; it was inevitable that before long the work of Joel Munsell would begin to exhibit his interest in the rich historical fields of eastern New York.

In 1841 Joel Munsell printed the first volume of John S. Wood’s *The American Magazine, and Repository of Useful Literature*. It is an interesting miscellany covering many subjects and including many engravings. An article by Joel Munsell under the title, “The Learned in Limbo,” appears on page 91. This publication does not appear in his *Bibliotheca Munselliana*.⁹

In 1863 Munsell printed a commemorative work. This one was to honor America’s first printer, William Bradford. Bradford was born in England in 1663 and came to America for a brief stay in 1682. Upon his return to England, he married, then in 1685 he returned to Pennsylvania, this time bringing his press with him. The book is an interesting one that tells much about William Bradford and the English Colonies of that time. The title page is a beautiful example of Munsell’s skill and is attractively printed in both red and black ink. An interesting commentary upon Munsell’s reputation and ability may be found in Note 5, page 104: “Mr. Joel Munsell, a native of Northfield, Massachusetts, and born in 1808, whose establishment of himself

⁶Ibid., p. 16

⁷Ibid., p. 10

⁸Ibid., p. 30

⁹John S. Wood and Barnabas Wood, eds., *The American Magazine, and Repository of Useful Literature. Devoted to Science, Literature and Arts; and Embellished with Numerous Engravings*, Vol. 1, July – December, 1841, Albany, John S. Wood, 1841.

A
MEMORIAL
OF
ALEXANDER ANDERSON, M. D.,

THE
First Engraver on Wood in America.

READ BEFORE THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, OCT. 6, 1876.

BY
BENSON J. LOSSING.

NEW YORK:
PRINTED FOR THE SUBSCRIBERS:
1872.

THE
AMERICAN
MAGAZINE,

AND
REPOSITORY OF USEFUL LITERATURE.
DEVOTED TO
SCIENCE, LITERATURE, AND ARTS,

AND ENBELLISHED WITH
NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS.

EDITED BY
JOHN S. WOOD, M. D., AND BARNABAS WOOD.
ASSISTED BY SEVERAL LITERARY GENTLEMEN.

VOLUME I.
(FROM JULY TO DECEMBER 1841, INCLUSIVE.)

ALBANY:
PUBLISHED BY B. WOOD.
1841.
J. MUNSELL, PRINTER.

From a bound collection of Munsell's book catalogs.

in Albany in 1827, away from the great commercial centres of the country, has not prevented his becoming the *facile princeps* of a choice class of our typographers, has till lately been as well known, perhaps, to the elegant few as to the less discriminating many.”¹⁰ The note continues in this vein to give praise to his literary and historical interests as well as to his skill and artistry.

Munsell’s interest in printing is exhibited in several publications about printing and papermaking that have come from his press. Among these are *The Typographical Miscellany*,¹¹ *A Chronology of Papermaking*,¹² and his *Outline of the History of Printing*.¹³ In 1872 he printed a beautiful memorial to Alexander Anderson, M.D., the first engraver on wood in America, for the New York Historical Society. It is an elegant book and contains many beautiful examples of Anderson’s work. The selection of Joel Munsell as the printer of this memorial to Anderson is a further tribute to his artistic ability and craftsmanship. The book does honor to engraver and printer alike.¹⁴

Evidence of Joel Munsell’s abiding interest in early American history, especially that of New York State, can be abundantly found in the many historical books he published. Neilson’s *Burgoyne’s Campaign* was published in 1844.¹⁵ It is an interesting account of that fateful and unsuccessful British attempt to drive a wedge between the American colonies and so bring the American rebellion to a quick end. Neilson’s book has for a long time been much sought after. The Munsell first edition is in much demand by collectors. It was reprinted by his son, Charles, in 1926. Demand for it continues, notwithstanding Munsell’s caustic comments about it in the *Bibliotheca Munselliana* where he writes, “The author occupied the heights, with his farm, where many visitors naturally resorted during the summer months. His book was intended to answer inquiries, and to aid in selling his property advantageously. But he borrowed money to pay expenses and being naturally embarrassed, and his sales not being so large as expected, the enterprise

¹⁰John William Wallace, *An Address Delivered at the Celebration by the New York Historical Society, May 20, 1863, of the Two Hundredth Birth Day of Mr. William Bradford, who introduced the Art of Printing into the Middle Colonies of British America*, Albany, Joel Munsell, 1863.

¹¹Joel Munsell, *The Typographical Miscellany*, Albany, 1850.

¹²Joel Munsell, *A Chronology of Paper and Papermaking*, Albany, 1851.

¹³Joel Munsell, *Outline of History of Printing*, Albany, 1839.

¹⁴Benson J. Lossing, *A Memorial of Alexander Anderson, M.D., the First Engraver on Wood in America*, Read before the New York Historical Society, October 5, 1870, Printed for the subscribers, Albany, J. Munsell, 1872.

¹⁵Charles Neilson, *An Original, Compiled and Corrected Account of Burgoyne’s Campaign, and the Memorable Battles of Bemis’s Heights, Sept. 19, and Oct. 7, 1777, from the most Authentic Sources of Information; Including many Interesting Incidents Connected with the same; and a Map of the Battle Ground*, Albany, Joel Munsell, 1844.

hastened his bankruptcy. He claimed that the battle was fought near his house, which was not so.”¹⁶

Burgoyne's Campaign was followed by Jephth Simms's *History of Schoharie County and Border Wars*. Two thousand copies were printed and sold personally by the author. This work remains one of the best accounts of the early history of the Schoharie Valley region. The first edition sold for one dollar and seventy-five cents. By 1872 second hand copies were bringing as much as eight dollars each.¹⁷

During his long and successful career, Munsell's reputation for fine printing continued to grow. He married twice. His first marriage was to Jane C. Bigelow in 1834. They were married for twenty years and during that time she bore him four children. Two years after Jane's death, Munsell married Mary Anne Reid. Six children were born of this marriage.¹⁸ The introduction which Joel Munsell wrote for a small book entitled, *Chips for the Chimney Corner*, gives us a fleeting glimpse into his family life. He wrote, "This volume of miscellany has been set by a lad of twelve years of age as his first exercise in typography. Although so many spend their lives in manipulating types and learn nothing comparatively, yet the thoughtful and studious compositor will acquire a knowledge of structure and minutiae of the language in the pursuit of his professional duties."¹⁹ In this statement we can see a father's pride and happiness in his son's interest and perseverance for the composition of this book was no small task for a beginner. Evidence is here, too, of the boy's interest in his father's trade and for the fine printing that would later be found in the books of Joel Munsell's Sons, especially that fine series known as "Munsell's Historical Series."

The work of Munsell and his sons shows a strong European influence in the fine printing, type styles, and in the beautifully printed title pages in which they so often used red as well as black ink. Drake's *The Witchcraft Delusion in New England* is a typical example. This was printed in two editions of which the "large edition" was issued in fifty numbered copies. The pages have wide margins and are embellished with many decorative initials and chapter headings. With its red and black printing, the title page is an especially attractive sample of Munsell typography.²⁰


¹⁶Joel Munsell, *Bibliotheca Munselliana*, Albany, 1872. p.21

¹⁷Jephth R. Simms, *History of Schoharie County and Border Wars of New York State: Containing also a Sketch of the Causes Which Led to the American Revolution, and Interesting Memoranda of the Mohawk Valley*, Albany, J. Munsell, 1845.

¹⁸John L. Latting, *Memorial Sketch of Joel Munsell*, Albany, Privately printed, 1880.

¹⁹Frank Munsell, comp., *Chips for the Chimney Corner*, Albany, Munsell's Steam Press, 1871. n.p.

²⁰Samuel G. Drake, *The Witchcraft Delusion in New England: Its Rise, Progress, and Termination, as Exhibited by Dr. Cotton Mather, in the Wonders of the Invisible World; and Mr. Robert Calef, in His More Wonders of the Invisible World, . . .* 3 Vols., Roxbury, Massachusetts, Printed for W. Elliot Woodward, 1866. (Title page, Volume I, shown on cover of this issue.)

AN
ADDRESS
DELIVERED AT THE
Celebration by the New York Historical Society,
MAY 20, 1863, OF THE
TWO HUNDREDTH BIRTH DAY
OF
Dr. William Bradford,
WHO
INTRODUCED THE ART OF PRINTING INTO THE MIDDLE
COLONIES OF BRITISH AMERICA.
BY
JOHN WILLIAM WALLACE
OF PHILADELPHIA.
*Published, with an Introductory Note, in Purjuance of a Resolution of the
New York Historical Society.*
PARTS OMITTED IN THE DELIVERY BEING NOW INSERTED.
"So that herein I may but be serviceable to the Truth and the Friends thereof."
WILLIAM BRADFORD,
"The first of the first month 1687."

ALBANY, N. Y. :
J. MUNSELL, 78 STATE STREET.
1863.

CHIPS
FOR THE
CHIMNEY CORNER.

GATHERED BY
FRANK MUNSELL.

"GIVE ME SOME WITTE AND WISDOME TALKS,
OF BLENDING WISDOM WITH PEN AND SCALE,
ON FEATHERS LIKE A PIGEON."



ALBANY, N. Y. :
MUNSELL'S STEAM PRESS.
1871.

PHILOBIBLON,
A
TREATISE ON THE LOVE OF BOOKS,
BY RICHARD DE BURY,
BISHOP OF DURHAM, AND LORD CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND.
FIRST AMERICAN EDITION,
WITH THE
LITERAL ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF JOHN B. INGLIS.

COLLATED AND CORRECTED, WITH NOTES,
BY SAMUEL HAND.



ALBANY :
JOEL MUNSELL.
MDCCLXI.

Another interesting example is the first American edition of Richard DeBury's *Philobiblon*, printed by Munsell in 1861. Two hundred copies of the regular edition were printed and thirty on large paper.²¹

Richard Aungervyle, most frequently known as Richard DeBury, was born on January 24, 1287, in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England. He was educated at Oxford and afterwards appointed tutor to Edward, Prince of Wales, later Edward III. After the succession of Edward III, DeBury held a number of royal appointments. He became Bishop of Durham and Lord Chancellor of England. While in the King's service, he made frequent visits to the Continent and took advantage of these opportunities to search out and acquire a large collection of manuscripts and books.

Philobiblon was completed on DeBury's fifty-eighth birthday, January 24, 1345, a few months before his death. Several copies of the manuscript exist. Out of these has arisen some question concerning the authorship of *Philobiblon*. It is, however, generally considered to be DeBury's work.

Philobiblon is a most personal expression of DeBury's love of books and book collecting and is in some respects a delightful essay on manners. Originally written in Latin, it was later translated into French and English. Munsell's edition gives the Latin text on the verso and the English translation on the recto page. Joel Munsell's decision to print an American edition of this work is a further indication of his antiquarian interests. It was the publication of such historical material, together with his insistence upon fine craftsmanship, that made him such an outstanding printer.

Joel Munsell printed a great variety of books, pamphlets, notices of special interest, book catalogs, and the like, besides his beloved historical series. These ranged from Robert MacFarlane's *The Mechanic's Mirror*, to catalogs for local schools, and *Munsell's Guide to the Hudson River by Railroad and Steamboat*. By 1851 he had printed some five hundred items.²² His *Bibliotheca Munselliana* was privately printed in 1872.²³ Only twenty copies were done. Two of these are in the Rare Book collection of the State Library in Albany; another is in the Historical collection of the Syracuse Public Library. This is an important bibliography, not only because it is supposed to include all but a few of the Munsell imprints from 1828 through 1870, but also, because of Munsell's wide interests, it provides a storehouse of bibliographical information about the early history of New York and New England. Fortunately, the *Bibliotheca Munselliana* was reprinted in 1969, in New York, by Burt Franklin.

Printed separately and also in Munsell's *Annals of Albany*, are some surprising bits of juvenilia. These include *The Adventures of Mother Hubbard*

²¹Richard DeBury, *Philobiblon, a Treatise on the Love of Books*, 1st American ed., John B. Inglis, trans., Albany, Joel Munsell, 1861. Biographical Notes, p. 16

²²John L. Latting, *Memorial Sketch of Joel Munsell*, Albany, Privately printed, 1880.

²³Joel Munsell, *Bibliotheca Munselliana*, Albany, 1872.

and *Her Dogs*, *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*, *The History of Goody Two-Shoes*, *The House that Jack Built* and others.²⁴ Munsell's interest in printing these perennial children's favorites adds another dimension to our view of his personality.

The list of Joel Munsell's work is long. Between 1828 and 1870 his press printed over twenty-three hundred items. He was the author of sixty-seven of these, and, under the pseudonym Arthur Prynne, of two others. These make up the entries in his *Bibliotheca Munselliana*. During the fifty-two year span of Munsell's printing activities, he printed many book catalogs of private collections, and in 1867, Joseph Sabin's *Catalog of a Small but select Collection of Books from a Private Library, for sale at the very low prices affixed*. The following year he printed three Sabin catalogs, one of which listed recent J. Munsell publications in small editions.²⁵

When compared with the work of many other upstate New York printers of the nineteenth century, much of Munsell's printing surpasses theirs in clarity and beauty. It is strange that the name of Joel Munsell, whose work is such an outstanding example of the printer's craft, is so little known today. Under the encouragement of Professor Lehman-Haupt, one of his former students completed a biographical study of Munsell entitled, *Joel Munsell, Printer and Antiquarian*. It was published by Columbia University Press in 1950, but is now out of print.²⁶

Munsell exhibited his antiquarian interests through an active membership in both the Albany Institute of History and Art and the American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, Massachusetts to whom he sent a copy of very nearly everything he printed. As a result, these organizations have a substantial collection of Munselliana. The American Antiquarian Society has a copy of Munsell's first publication, *The Minerva*, a scarce item, indeed.²⁷ A large Munsell collection is to be found in the New York State Library. There are many more examples of Munsell's work in library collections, however, than are apparent from an examination of library catalogs. The great majority of these imprints are hidden behind authors' names and are scattered throughout the library – often on the open shelves.

Syracuse University's Bird Library has a goodly number of Munsell editions and steps are being taken to bring these together in a related collection that will have a double significance; first, as an historical collection concerned with the early history of New York; secondly, as a part of a collection about the history of printing in America.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

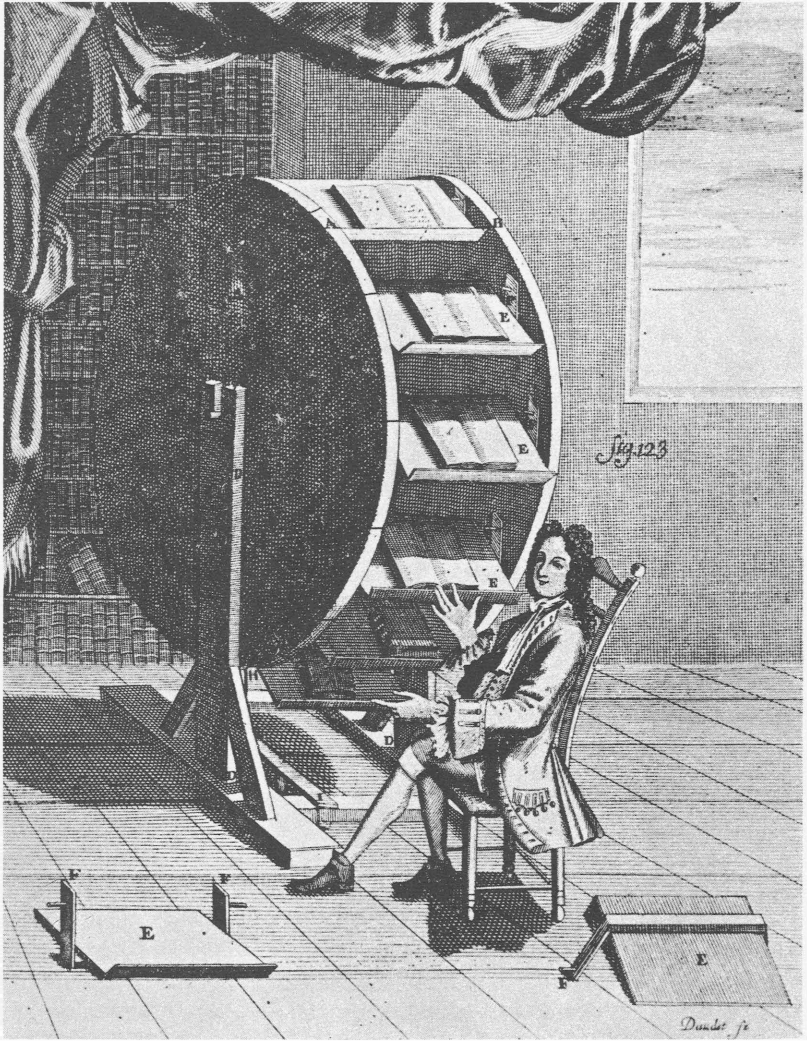
²⁶David S. Edelstein, *Joel Munsell; Printer and Antiquarian*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1950.

²⁷Telephone conversation with Mr. Marcus A. McCorison, Director and Librarian, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. February, 1974.

Joel Munsell's career was long and brought him much recognition, respect and honor and ended only with his death on June 15, 1880.



In spite of an interest in Joel Munsell that has covered many years, the task of preparing this short sketch has whetted my desire to know even more about the activities of the Munsell Press. I have learned from the experience and have enjoyed meeting those who, through their interest and kindness, have made it impossible for me to bring this to a conclusion without expressing my appreciation for their help. Mr. Darrell Welch, Rare Book Librarian at the State Library in Albany, spent much of his time during my visit showing me many of their treasures and giving me a great deal of assistance in my search for Munsell material. Mr. Marcus A. McCorison, Director and Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society was most kind when I telephoned him to inquire about their Munsell collection. The staff at the Bird Library were equally gracious, notwithstanding the difficulties under which they were working on the day of my visit. Mr. Henry McCormick and his staff at the Syracuse Public Library, and especially Mr. Gerald Parsons and his staff in the Historical Room, gave me more help than I can acknowledge. Finally, I cannot forget Mr. Hadwin Jenkins, whom I met quite by accident in the Historical Room of the Syracuse Public Library. Without his generous help much that I discovered there would have remained outside the ken of my search. Experiences such as these make book collecting a very pleasant pursuit, indeed. The friends one meets, through an interest such as book collecting and the association with books, is a warm, human experience too precious for me to express in words.



The Book and the Wheel Combined
Taken from *Recueil d'Ouvrages Curieux de Mathématique et de Méchanique* by N. Grollier de Servière, Lyon, D.Forey, 1719.