
Bibliography and Bookselling in the *Bibliotheca Americana* Tradition

M. LINDSAY VAN TINE

THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES on a lesser-known bibliographic tradition: not the analytical bibliography that took shape under William Bradshaw and culminated in the New Bibliography of the twentieth century, but the humbler *Bibliotheca Americana*, or bibliography of books “relating to America,” which developed in large part through the efforts of a group of booksellers, collectors, and semi-professional bibliographers in the nineteenth century United States. The *Bibliotheca Americana* tradition stretches back to the seventeenth century—it is commonly held to begin with Antonio de León Pinelo’s 1629 *Epitome*—but it reached its fullest expression in the nineteenth, culminating in Joseph Sabin’s monumental 29-volume *Bibliotheca Americana: A Dictionary of Books Relating to America*, begun in 1867 and completed, under the direction of the Bibliographical Society of America, in 1936.¹

1. For an introduction to the Americana tradition, see William S. Reese, *Collectors, Booksellers, and Libraries: Essays on Americanists and the Rare Book Market* (New Haven, CT: Overland Press, 2018); J. Kevin Graffagnino, Terese M. Austin, Jayne Ptolemy, and Brian Leigh Dunnigan, eds., *The Pioneer Americanists: Early Collectors, Dealers, and Bibliographers* (Ann Arbor: The Clements Library at the University of

M. Lindsay Van Tine (Philadelphia, PA) is a book historian, early Americanist, and digital humanist currently based at the Special Collections Research Center at Temple University Libraries, where she is a senior project archivist. She is at work on her first book, *The Invention of Americana: New World Inscription and the Archive of Empire in the Americas*, and an associated digital project, the Digital Bibliotheca Americana.

Americana could in some ways be considered the black sheep of bibliography writ large. As recently as 1984, G. Thomas Tanselle lamented the “primitive state” of analytical bibliography for American books, calling the whole situation “depressing.”² He attributed the problem to the fact that Americana has from the beginning been a historical and geographic concept rather than a literary one, and its major works are very different from the literary texts around which Anglo-American analytical bibliography and textual editing developed. Precisely because of its backwardness by the standards of analytical bibliography, however, this seemingly marginal tradition can show us something important not just about the role of the book trade in bibliography but also, more broadly, about the potential of a materialist approach to disciplinary history.

In the decades before Sabin, the *Bibliotheca Americana* was shaped by figures like Obadiah Rich, Henry Stevens, and John Russell Bartlett, all of whom were also actively involved in the book trade. As booksellers, they helped collectors like John Carter Brown and James Lenox, and institutions like Harvard and the Library of Congress, build collections of Americana in the United States. At the same time, as bibliographers, they used their access to these rare materials to produce the trade, auction, and library catalogues that systematized them. The late bookseller and scholar William S. Reese, whose work on the contributions of booksellers to the Americana tradition is the most extensive and thoughtful of recent decades, has noted the unusual degree to which Americanist bibliography has emerged from the book trade. “A substantial number of the most important reference works in Americana,” he writes, “are by booksellers, whether formal bibliographies, sales catalogues, or collection catalogues growing out of their efforts.”³

While work on the *Bibliotheca Americana* has generally acknowledged that the catalogues created by these booksellers have some bibliographical value, it has also assumed that they were merely the first stages of a

Michigan, 2017); see also Thomas R. Adams, “Bibliotheca Americana: A Merry Maze of Changing Concepts,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 63, no. 4 (1969): 247–60; and Lawrence C. Wroth, “Early Americana,” *Standards of Bibliographical Description*, ed. Curt F. Bühler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 93–120.

2. G. Thomas Tanselle, “The Bibliography and Textual Study of American Books,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 95 (1985): 113–51, 115.

3. Reese, *Collectors, Booksellers, and Libraries*, 75.

trajectory that has progressed towards ever-greater accuracy and analytical weight. This article will challenge that assumption through a focus on the career of Henry Stevens, “the great monopolist” of the mid-century trade,⁴ who is often considered the Americana bookseller most enmeshed in commercial concerns. The great unfinished work of Stevens’s life, however, was the most ambitiously “scientific” American bibliography of the nineteenth century: a comprehensive *Bibliographia Americana* sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and endorsed by Harvard, the British Museum, and the Library of Congress. The project was never completed, but portions of it appeared in more ephemeral form in his various catalogues. Focusing on Stevens’s unfinished *Bibliographia* and the fragments that remain to us in his published output, this article will sketch out an alternate history of the *Bibliotheca Americana* tradition that offers a new perspective on the relationship between bibliography and the book trade. Ultimately, it gestures towards a model for the history of bibliography that is grounded in the materiality of bibliographical production.

THE BIBLIOTHECA AMERICANA TRADITION

In the nineteenth century, Anglo-American bibliographers understood “America” in its earliest sense as the entire Western Hemisphere, and their bibliographies aimed to encompass all printed works relating to New World history.⁵ Americanist bibliography was in this period dominated by US bibliographers, who were motivated by the sense that hemispheric history—and the material sources that documented it—could be rightfully claimed by the United States. After the successful Spanish American independence movements in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the United States embraced the new nations of Mexico and Gran Colombia in republican solidarity, and the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 consolidated a new sense of a shared hemispheric identity distinct from the Old World. Historians were anxious for access to sources that would enable them to write nationalist works that

4. Reese, *Collectors, Booksellers, and Libraries*, 7.

5. While this article focuses on the Anglo-American tradition of the mid-nineteenth century, the *Bibliotheca Americanas* of Obadiah Rich, Henri Ternaux-Compans, and others were crucially dependent on an earlier Iberian tradition that ran from Pinelo’s *Epitome* (1629) through Antonio de Alcedo’s *Bibliotheca Americana* (1791/1807). A chapter on Americanist bibliography in the Iberian colonial context, co-authored with Clayton McCarl, is in preparation.

encompassed the whole sweep of New World history, and there was great demand for information about a newly opened and independent Spanish America. At the same moment, in Spain, the Napoleonic Wars and subsequent political turmoil on the Continent had led to a boom in the antiquarian book trade as religious institutions were shut down and private family collections were sold off by those forced into exile. Public institutions, private collectors, and scholars in the United States began to build collections of early books, manuscripts, and maps pertaining to New World discovery, exploration, and colonization, not just in British North America, but also in Spanish America and the Caribbean. Book-sellers like Obadiah Rich, who had facilitated this transfer, produced early *Bibliotheca Americana* that began as sales catalogues and were later repurposed as checklists to track rapidly growing collections. These collections in turn enabled the creation of new catalogues and bibliographies.

As a term, “Americana” derives from the Latin titles of these bibliographies; originally a mere modifier, it came to be used as a noun referring to the books contained within. Use of the term became widespread in the middle decades of the nineteenth century as demand by wealthy collectors raised prices and made Americana into a recognized—and prestigious—collecting category. By the mid-1880s, significant collections had been amassed in the United States, bibliographies and catalogues had emerged through access to them, and the meaning of “Americana” had come to seem self-evident. In 1886, Harvard librarian and historian Justin Winsor consolidated this developing understanding of Americana in an article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and later expanded into an introductory essay in his multivolume *Narrative and Critical History of America*.⁶ At the outset, Winsor announces that his subject is the “class of literature which book-lovers have learned to call Americana,” invoking the term’s identification with collecting.⁷ He defines the scope of Americana somewhat tautologically as the body of texts that began with the 1493 Columbus letters and, by his own moment, had swelled to fill a projected thirty volumes of Sabin’s comprehensive *Dictionary*. Finally, Winsor surveys the

6. Justin Winsor, “Americana,” *Atlantic Monthly* 57, no. 341 (March 1886): 317–25. The revised essay is Winsor, “Introduction, Part I: Americana in Libraries and Bibliographies,” *Narrative and Critical History of America* vol. 1, ed. Justin Winsor (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1889), i–xviii.

7. Winsor, “Americana,” 317.

major US collections that have amassed such materials, identifying John Carter Brown's as undoubtedly the most famous. He declares John Russell Bartlett's catalogue of the collection, first published in 1865 and published in a revised edition in 1875, as "probably the most extensive printed list of all Americana previous to 1800."⁸

The strong association of Americana with books as physical objects is reinforced by the materialist connotations of the term *bibliotheca* with which it often appears. The use of the Latin word *bibliotheca* in the bibliographical sense originates in the sixteenth century with Conrad Gesner's *Bibliotheca universalis* (1545). By the middle of the seventeenth century it had become the typical name for bibliographies, but still retained shades of its original meaning, "library."⁹ Into the nineteenth century, *bibliotheca* had three simultaneous connotations: a library, the collection of books within it, and the catalogue or bibliography that structured their meaning.¹⁰ The term *bibliographia*, meanwhile, began to be used in its modern sense, to mean "description of books," in the seventeenth century.¹¹ Both terms remained in use until the second half of the nineteenth century, with the more materially oriented *bibliotheca* often appearing in the titles of booksellers' and library catalogues, and *bibliographia* meaning something closer to a scholarly reference work.¹²

The nineteenth-century distinction between the terms *bibliographia* and *bibliotheca* roughly corresponds to another set of terms coined by the Prussian bibliographer Friedrich Ebert, whose *General Bibliographical Dictionary* appeared in English translation in 1837. In it, Ebert proposed a distinction between what he called "pure" and "restricted" bibliography. "Pure" bibliography, for Ebert, was concerned with the scholarly value

8. Winsor, "Americana," 323.

9. Rudolf Blum, *Bibliographia, an Inquiry into Its Definition and Designations* (Chicago: American Library Association; Folkestone, Kent, England: Dawson, 1980), 16–17.

10. Luigi Balsamo, *Bibliography: History of a Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: B. M. Rosenthal, 1990), 5, 26–59, 89. The term's Romance-language derivatives, *bibliothèque* and *biblioteca*, also retained this triple meaning. See Roger Chartier, "Libraries without Walls," *Representations* 42 (1993): 38–52, 39–41, and Jonathan Carlyon, *Andrés González de Barcia and the Creation of the Colonial Spanish American Library* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 137.

11. Blum, *Bibliographia*, 12, 19–21.

12. Blum, *Bibliographia*, 136, 185; Balsamo, *Bibliography*, 92–93, 60–142.

of the works it described, while “restricted” bibliography focused on “the inclinations of collectors, the actual demand, and the marketable value.”¹³ Rudolph Blum has glossed this as “literary” vs. “typographical” bibliography, because the former is concerned with important scholarly works, and the latter with commercially valuable older works of interest to bibliophiles.¹⁴

Most work on the Americana tradition has understood the relationship between bibliography and bookselling in similar terms: there is “pure,” scholarly bibliography on the one hand, and “restricted,” commercial bookselling on the other. Recognizing that the nineteenth-century *Bibliotheca Americana* developed in large part through the efforts of booksellers, this work has placed it in opposition to the more “scientific” bibliography emerging in the same period. While acknowledging that the catalogues of these booksellers have some real bibliographical merit, it assumes that they were merely the first stages in a progression towards ever-greater accuracy and analytical weight. In 1949, for instance, John Carter Brown Library director Lawrence C. Wroth cast the history of Americanist bibliography as “a slow advance toward an effective standard of organization and description of printed Americana.”¹⁵ Given this teleological framework, it is not surprising that his account skips straight from the late eighteenth century to Henry Harrisse’s 1866 *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima*, omitting any mention of Stevens and the other bibliographer-booksellers instrumental in the creation of the library he headed.¹⁶ Twenty years later, his successor Thomas Adams did the same, on the assumption that “true bibliography” must be “prepared for its own sake not as an adjunct to something else.”¹⁷

This insistence on the distinction between, per Adams, “Americana as seen by collectors” and “Americana as it is viewed by professional bibliographers” has distorted our understanding of how the field actually developed. While Ebert emphasizes the commercial nature of “restricted”

13. Friedrich Adolf Ebert, “Preface,” *A General Bibliographical Dictionary* vol. 1, trans. Arthur Browne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1837), iv. However, Ebert ultimately aimed to combine the two.

14. Blum, *Bibliographia*, 149.

15. Wroth, “Early Americana,” 95.

16. Wroth, “Early Americana,” 97–98.

17. Adams, “Bibliotheca Americana,” 254.

bibliography, pairing it with the term *bibliotheca* helps us see its broader material implications. By promoting the circulation of books in the marketplace, it also enables these books to come to rest in the libraries of collectors. The commerce promoted by “restricted” forms like booksellers’ catalogues leads to the development of collections that become the basis for a more “pure,” scholarly bibliography. If we take bookselling as a shorthand for the whole material process of the circulation, accumulation, and consolidation of books into libraries, the opposition between “pure” and “restricted,” between the *bibliographia* and the *bibliotheca*, begins to loosen.

We can understand the development of Americanist bibliography as just such a cycle. As David D. Hall has noted, “[t]he transformation in the scale and nature of private book collecting had immediate consequences for bibliographical practice in America.”¹⁸ Early attempts at systematic enumerative bibliography, he explains, grew out of the need of collectors and booksellers for better information about rare Americana. These aided in the formation of collections, which in turn enabled the making of new bibliographies as well as other forms of scholarship. Bookseller John Carter, meanwhile, argued that there is an “intimate” relationship between bibliography and the rare book trade, one that goes deeper than the acknowledged dependence of booksellers and collectors on the information contained in bibliographies. He points out that private collectors have often performed a “generous and largely disinterested service” to bibliographers, by “buying, and putting freely at our disposal, books which our public libraries cannot or will not purchase.”¹⁹ The bibliographies that result are then used by booksellers to guide their trade, which in turn supplies and enlarges private collections.

And the boundary between private collection and public library often holds for only for a generation; George Watson Cole reminds us that many private collections “have found a final resting-place in public libraries,” arriving either intact, through bequest, or piecemeal, as collections

18. David D. Hall, “Erudition and Learned Culture,” in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 3: The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, ed. Scott E. Casper, Jeffrey D. Groves, Stephen W. Nissenbaum, and Michael Winship (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007): 347–360, 356.

19. John Carter, “Bibliography and the Rare Book Trade,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 48, no. 3 (1954): 219–29, 222.

are posthumously dispersed at auction.²⁰ Hugh Amory goes even further, wryly concluding that “there are no book collectors, whose efforts, however admirable, only shuffle about earlier assemblages of books until . . . they slumber undisturbed in a public institution.”²¹

However, this awareness of a cycle in which the book trade and bibliography are interdependent has not extended to a rethinking of binary logic that undergirds nearly all previous work on the Americana tradition. While bibliographical scholarship has itself moved beyond the positivist, teleological assumptions of “scientific” bibliography, we have not yet reevaluated disciplinary history accordingly. By putting the history of Americanist bibliography into dialogue with recent work on the embodied, material conditions of knowledge-production, this article offers a new account of the *Bibliotheca Americana*, one that models the possibilities of a bibliographical history grounded in materiality.²²

HENRY STEVENS AND THE *BIBLIOGRAPHIA AMERICANA*

In the mid-nineteenth century, Henry Stevens was instrumental in facilitating the relocation of Americana from Europe to the United States.²³

20. George Watson Cole, “Book-Collectors as Benefactors of Public Libraries,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 9, no. 3/4 (January 1915): 47–110, 97.

21. Hugh Amory, *Bibliography and the Book Trades: Studies in the Print Culture of Early New England*, ed. David D. Hall (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 150.

22. In doing so, it aims to put Americanist bibliography into conversation with recent work that considers the material foundations and structures of knowledge that enable intellectual production. See Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2012); Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2010); James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017); Ronald E. Day, *Indexing It All* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2014); Markus Krajewski, *Paper Machines: About Cards & Catalogs, 1548–1929*, trans. Peter Krapp (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011).

23. The fullest treatment of Stevens is Wyman W. Parker’s monograph *Henry Stevens of Vermont: American Rare Book Dealer in London, 1845–1886* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1963) and related articles “Henry Stevens Sweeps the States,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 52, no. 4 (1958): 249–61, and “Henry Stevens:

Through this transfer, he also advanced the bibliographic tradition that aimed to systematize and conceptualize these materials as Americana. At the beginning of his career, Stevens managed to engineer the first major transfer of private European libraries to collectors in the United States. In the mid-1840s, Obadiah Rich, the pioneering bookseller of the previous generation, had acquired the entire collection of French diplomat Henri Ternaux-Compans as well as portions of the Irish Lord Kingsborough's collection. In 1846, Stevens brokered the sale of these materials to John Carter Brown and James Lenox, forming the basis of the first two major private collections of Americana in the United States.²⁴

With this material consolidation came a wave of new bibliographical production. Existing bibliographies became checklists for growing collections; these checklists were eventually turned into library catalogues, library catalogues became auction catalogues after the collector's death, and all of these more ephemeral forms were eventually drawn upon to produce new bibliographies that increasingly attempted to indicate holdings. Henri Ternaux-Compans's 1837 *Bibliothèque américaine* was an early standard.²⁵ While it was minimal from a bibliographical perspective, lacking

The Making of a Bookseller," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 48, no. 2 (1954): 149–69; Victor Hugo Paltsits also offers an extensive introduction in Henry Stevens, *Recollections of James Lenox and the Formation of His Library*, ed. Victor Hugo Paltsits (New York: New York Public Library, 1951).

24. See Henry R. Wagner, "Hispanic Americana in the John Carter Brown Library," *Essays Honoring Lawrence C. Wroth* (Portland, ME: Anthoensen Press, 1951), 423–55; Reese, *Collectors, Booksellers, and Libraries*, 1–11, 71–73; Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, 47–62, 92–104. On Ternaux-Compans, see Henry R. Wagner, *Henri Ternaux-Compans: The First Collector of Hispanic-Americana* (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1954); Henry R. Wagner, *Henri Ternaux Compans: A Bibliography* (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1957). On Rich, see Paul Norman Tucker, "Obadiah Rich, 1783–1850: Early American Hispanist" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1973); Adrian W. Knepper, "Obadiah Rich: Bibliopole," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 49, no. 2 (1955): 112–30. On the manuscripts sold to Lenox, now known as the Obadiah Rich collection at the New York Public Library, see Edwin Blake Brownrigg, *Colonial Latin American Manuscripts and Transcripts in the Obadiah Rich Collection: An Inventory and Index* (New York: New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, 1978).

25. Henri Ternaux-Compans, *Bibliothèque américaine, ou, Catalogue des ouvrages relatifs à l'Amérique qui ont paru depuis sa découverte jusqu'à l'an 1700* (Paris: Arthus-Bertrand, 1837).

pagination and collations, it was the most comprehensive list of Americana then extant, containing 1,153 works printed before 1700. Brown used Ternaux-Compans's *Bibliothèque* as a checklist to track his holdings and to identify gaps to fill. Ternaux-Compans had based his bibliography on his own private library, so it was always in some sense also the catalogue of a collection; once Brown inherited this collection, Ternaux-Compans's *Bibliothèque* continued to operate in both these senses. The phrase "not in Ternaux" was frequently penciled in the wide margins, conjuring the dual meaning of Ternaux-Compans's physical collection and his list of it, and interleaved sheets were increasingly filled with additions that marked both material acquisition and the fleshing out of a foundational but increasingly inadequate bibliographical standard.

After the 1846 sale, Stevens continued to supply Brown and Lenox with material to expand their collections and became the book agent for the British Museum. Definitively established in the book trade, he also turned to bibliography. In 1848, two decades before Sabin, Stevens proposed a project every bit as ambitious: a comprehensive *Bibliographia Americana* containing "[a]ll books relating to America, and all books printed in America, prior to the year 1700," as well as "the more important unpublished manuscripts"²⁶ (see fig. 1). Endorsed by Jared Sparks, Peter Force, and other leading historians, with subscribers that included the Library of Congress and the American Antiquarian Society, it would be printed as part of the Smithsonian's new "Contributions to Knowledge" series and distributed freely. Based on examinations of the books themselves, the descriptions were to include full titles with colophon, collations, comparisons of editions and translations, market value, bibliographical and biographical notes, and holdings information; the work was also to contain three indices, a full history of printing in America, and an introduction to the "materials of early American History and the principal collections in Europe and America." In a letter explaining his plan to Lenox, Stevens declared: "In a word the catalogue is to be the fullest, best & most carefully made catalogue that was ever published."²⁷

26. Henry Stevens, "Prospectus of a *Bibliographia Americana*," Appendix A, *Third Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution*, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, H. R. Miscellaneous, No. 48 (Washington, DC: Tappin & Streeter, 1849): 55–60.

27. Henry Stevens to James Lenox, London, 21 July 1848, James Lenox Papers, Box 3, Folder 29, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Hereafter cited as JLP-NYPL.

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APPENDIX A.

PROSPECTUS.

BIBLIOGRAPHIA AMERICANA:

A Bibliographical Account of the Sources of Early American History; comprising a description of books relating to America, printed prior to the year 1700, and of all books printed in America from 1543 to 1700, together with notices of many of the more important unpublished manuscripts.

Prepared by Henry Stevens, and published under the direction of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington.

PLAN OF THE WORK.

1. It will contain a descriptive list of all books relating to America, and of all books printed in America, prior to the year 1700, which may be found in the principal public and private libraries of Europe and America, or which are described in other works; together with notices of many of the more important unpublished manuscripts.
2. The descriptions will be made, as far as possible, from an examination of the books themselves. If any be taken from other sources of information they will be distinguished by some peculiar mark.
4. The titles, including the imprint or colophon, will in all cases be given in full, word for word, and letter for letter.
4. The collation of each book will be given; that is, such a description as will indicate a perfect copy.
5. The market value of the books, with the prices at which they have been sold at public sales, will, whenever possible, be given.
6. Different editions and various translations of the principal works will be diligently compared with each other, and their variations and relative merits pointed out, especially of such works as the Collections of Voyages and Travels by De Bry, Hulsius, Ramusius, Hakluyt, Purchas, Thevenot, etc.; the corresponding parts of which will be compared, not only with each other, but with the editions of the works from which they were translated, abridged, or reprinted.
7. Bibliographical notes will be appended when deemed necessary, containing abstracts of the contents of the works when the titles fail to give a proper idea of them; anecdotes of authors, printers, engravers, etc.; important items of historical and geographical information; notices of peculiarities of copies, as large paper, vellum, cancelled leaves, etc.; the number of copies printed; together with the comparative rarity and intrinsic value of the works.
8. The notes upon the books printed in America will comprise a full history of the origin and progress of printing in North and South America, from the year 1543 to 1700.

Fig. 1: Henry Stevens, "Prospectus of a Bibliographia Americana," *Third Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution*, 1849. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Libraries.

Stevens's proposal was provisionally accepted by the Smithsonian in July 1848, making it only the second chosen for publication in the "Contributions to Knowledge" series. The first had been E. G. Squier and Edwin Hamilton Davis's *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley* (1848), which recounted an archeological expedition to unearth the remains of pre-Columbian civilizations in North America. In order to present bibliography as a science equal to ethnology, it is not surprising that Stevens chose to call his work a *Bibliographia*, which made it an outlier in a tradition full of *Bibliothecas*. The term *Bibliographia* signals that the work will be something akin to "pure" bibliography, a "contribution to knowledge" that approaches its subject with an eye toward scholarly rather than commercial value.

Despite its name, however, Stevens's *Bibliographia Americana* was to be based on the collections he was helping to create and depended on access to them. He explained to Lenox that the foundation of his *Bibliographia Americana* would be the libraries of Harvard and the British Museum, as well as the private collections of Brown and Lenox himself—the last three of which he was almost exclusively supplying. He planned to start work at the British Museum, as it had the most extensive collection, and then make trips to the others. Once he had described all the books in these major collections, he would supplement them with the works that passed through his hands as a dealer and seek out additional materials if necessary.²⁸ From the beginning, then, Stevens understood that a complete bibliography of Americana would have to begin with a census of the strongest collections and would depend on full access to them.

Access to these books was a crucial precondition for the development of Americanist bibliography. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, access was limited because the materials were mainly in Europe and in the hands of aristocratic families or religious orders. By the second half of the century, many of the works in these collections had been relocated to London or increasingly the United States, but they were again consolidating in private collections, to which access was often possible but never a given. In the preface to his 1866 *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima*, Henry Harrisse attributed any errors in the work to his insufficient access to the materials, explaining that "in the preparation of such an elaborate bibliography, the great condition precedent is a free, untrammled, and

28. Stevens to Lenox, Boston, 20 June 1848, Box 3, Folder 29, JLP-NYPL.

repeated access to the books which the bibliographer intends to describe"; unfortunately, however, "these facilities it has been denied to us to command."²⁹ Likewise, the third and final editor of Sabin's dictionary, Robert W. G. Vail, considered access to be Sabin's "fearful handicap": though he had "a phenomenal memory for bibliographical details," by the time he began his work much of the rarest Americana had already come to rest in private collections.³⁰

By virtue of his continuing relationship with Brown and Lenox, his status as the book agent of the British Museum, and the sheer volume of his transactions, particularly with associates in the United States, Stevens had greater access to early and rare Americana than anyone in the middle decades of the century. A retrospective evaluation of his career ventured that "doubtless more of the early books relating to America passed through the hands of Henry Stevens than of any other one man."³¹ And it was precisely for this reason that the most prominent scholars of the day thought he was equipped to carry out such a monumentally ambitious project. In his endorsement, Jared Sparks vouched for Stevens's "uncommon facilities" for the task; of all his qualifications, most important was his experience in the trade, which had given him "a practical knowledge essential to this undertaking, and which can scarcely be attained by any other individual."³²

The proposed *Bibliographia Americana's* grounding in physical collections was not just a means of producing the work but also a key feature of the finished product, which was to include information about the locations of known copies. In other words, the *Bibliographia Americana* was not just a bibliography but also a union catalogue. Smithsonian secretary Joseph Henry and assistant secretary and librarian Charles Coffin Jewett seem to have envisioned the project as a vehicle for surveying the holdings of American libraries. In 1848, Stevens reported, Henry "seem[ed] desirous that the work should be made as complete and perfect as possible and

29. Henry Harrisse, *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima: A Description of Works Relating to America Published between the Years 1492 and 1551* (New York: Philes, 1866), lii.

30. Robert W. G. Vail, "Sabin's 'Dictionary,'" *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 31, no. 1 (1937): 1-9, 6.

31. "Gleanings from Old Catalogues 2 - Henry Stevens," *American Book-Lore* 1, no. 4 (1899): 94-96, 94.

32. Stevens, "Prospectus of a *Bibliographia Americana*," 59.

that as many of the public and private libraries of this country should be represented as possible.”³³ In this way, it would act as a national union catalogue for the class of books seen as most crucial to national interests. In his formal endorsement of the project, Sparks emphasized the calendaring of materials as the most valuable part of the proposed work:

Many of these books are extremely rare, and are scattered in various libraries. I think it may be with safety affirmed, that not a single work on the first settlement and early history of any one of the old States has been written with the use of all the books relating to the subject; first, because in many cases, the authors did not know of the existence of the books; and secondly, because when they possessed this knowledge they had no means of ascertaining where the books could be found.³⁴

As a union catalogue, the *Bibliographia Americana* would enable historians to write more complete national histories by allowing them to discover and access relevant works. And beyond facilitating better access to existing collections, Sparks thought, it would also be a means of strengthening them. He explained that, “[b]y serving not only as a catalogue of all the books relating to America in any library, but likewise of all in which it is deficient,” the *Bibliographia Americana* would enable libraries to identify and then fill the gaps in their collections.³⁵

Stevens seems to have shared this patriotic vision; he would later tell his mother that, once the work had been seen into print, he would “feel that I have done something well for my Country and my self, & *you*.” In order to get the proposal off of the ground, however, he had to look first to his finances. While the Smithsonian would cover the costs of printing, Stevens needed to enlist private subscribers to cover the costs of preparing the work. The first order of business, then, was to convince his two major clients, Brown and Lenox, to commit to the project. To do so, he cast the *Bibliographia Americana* as an opportunity to commission catalogues of their own private collections, catalogues that, he assured Lenox, could

33. Stevens to Lenox, Boston, 26 June 1848, Box 3, Folder 29, JLP-NYPL. Jewett would later publish his own survey of library holdings in the United States; see Charles C. Jewett, “Notices of Public Libraries in the United States of America,” Appendix, *Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Senate Miscellaneous, No. 120 (Washington, DC: Printed for the Senate, 1850): 3–207.

34. Stevens, “Prospectus of a *Bibliographia Americana*,” 59.

35. Stevens, “Prospectus of a *Bibliographia Americana*,” 59.

not be had “so cheap in any other way.” Moreover, these catalogues were to have a built-in improvement upon the interleaved Ternaux-Compans and Rich bibliographies Brown and Lenox were both using as checklists to track their growing collections. As Stevens explained to Lenox, the *Bibliographia Americana* would be not only “a complete catalogue of all the books in your own collection” but also “a full catalogue of books *not* in it,” and would therefore “be of service to you in enabling you to know which you do not possess.”³⁶

While he appealed to Lenox and Brown in terms of the benefit to their own collections, Stevens also gestured towards his larger vision, which was to facilitate the development of American libraries writ large. He explained that in surveying European libraries for the catalogue, he would surely locate many duplicates that could be “procure[d] in recompense” for a copy of the finished work: “This is then not only a plan for making a complete catalogue of yours and other American libraries but a plan for completing said libraries by furnishing both titles and books.”³⁷

For a variety of reasons, not least of which was that Stevens would not be paid until the manuscript was delivered to the Smithsonian, the *Bibliographia Americana* was never completed. While Stevens’s subscribers had committed large sums to cover his expenses in preparing the work, under the terms of the proposal he was not to receive any of these funds until he had submitted the complete manuscript. Stevens had initially promised this submission by January 1850, only eighteen months after the acceptance of the proposal, but he was still working intensively on the project throughout the 1850s. Therefore, he had to carry on in the trade to support himself.

Often, he managed to devise ways to combine the two. Fragments of Stevens’s life-long work on the *Bibliographia Americana* appeared in more ephemeral form in various auction and book catalogues, subscription serials, and other bibliographic genres associated with bookselling. Recovering the *Bibliographia Americana*, and understanding that it was the animating force behind all of Stevens’s seemingly miscellaneous output over the following decades, puts those works in a new light.³⁸

36. Stevens to Lenox, London, 26 June 1848, Box 3, Folder 29, JLP-NYPL.

37. Stevens, “Prospectus of a *Bibliographia Americana*,” 59.

38. The fullest examination to date is Victor Hugo Paltsits, “Proposal of Henry Stevens for a ‘*Bibliographia Americana*’ to the Year 1700, to be Published by the

PROOF SHEETS AND PRICE LISTS

While Stevens began to preserve descriptions of books that passed through his hands after the proposal was accepted, his first intensive period of actual production came in early 1852.³⁹ In March 1852, he began to print what he described as proof sheets of the *Bibliographia Americana*, keeping Brown and Lenox apprised of his progress in the frequent business correspondence he maintained with them.

On 5 March 1852, Stevens sent Lenox “two of the first proof slips, of titles,” explaining:

These of course are full of errors, but I go carefully over every title with the book before me. Then the translation is to be revised – Next the Collation of each book is to be added in a type differing from the text & translation. There will be three distinct sizes of type, so that at once the eye will catch the text or the translation or the collations & notes. For instance, throughout all translations will be in the same type. My second proof will be thrown into small quarto form with the collations, the names of possessors of copies, & the prices. These proofs will be sent to you as fast as the sheets are ready – When finally corrected 25 copies will be struck off with blank spaces left between the titles for the purpose of adding MS notes hereafter – From the strictly privately printed work my final work is to be printed by the Smithsonian Institution. In this way I hope to arrive at considerable accuracy.⁴⁰

Here, Stevens presents the proof sheets as specimens and evidence of progress for one of the major subscribers to his *Bibliographia Americana*.

As he continued to work on the proofs, however, and circulated them for his clients and fellow bibliographers to check against their own copies, he was also using them as sales catalogues of his stock in hand. In November 1852, he sent two half-sheets of unbound proofs to Lenox, Brown, and the Library of Congress (see fig. 2).⁴¹ While he again presents them

Smithsonian Institution,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 36, no. 4 (1942): 245–66.

39. Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, 169.

40. Stevens to Lenox, London, 5 March 1852, Box 4, Folder 1, JLP-NYPL.

41. Stevens to Lenox, London, 19 November 1852, Box 4, Folder 1, JLP-NYPL. Only Brown’s copies survive. They are tipped in to a revised set of proofs bound into a presentation copy to Brown dated 10 March 1853. They would be reissued in January 1854 as *Stevens’s American Bibliographer*, but lack the paper wrapper, introductory note, fold-out facsimiles, and frontispiece of the latter. The John Carter Brown Library has generously digitized this presentation copy in full and made it openly accessible at https://archive.org/details/stevenssamericanooostev_o. Readers are invited to view additional details online.

1	ABINGDON (Earl of). Thoughts on the Letter of Edmund Burke, Esq; to the Sheriffs of Bristol on the Affairs of America. By the Earl of Abingdon, 4th Edition. W. Jackson, Oxford n. d. 68 pp. 8vo. <i>sh. 1s.</i>	2	6
2	ACCOUNT (An) of the Customs and Manners of the Micmaks and Maricheets Savage Nations, now dependent on the Government of Cape-Breton, from an original French Manuscript-Letter, never published, written by a French Abbot, who resided many years, in quality of Missionary, amongst them. To which are annexed Several Pieces, relative to the Savages, to Nova Scotia, and to North-America in general. London 1758. 2 titles, viii. 138 pp. 8vo. <i>1/2 new</i>	7	6 R. 9.
3	ACCOUNT (An) of the Loss of His Majesty's Ship Deal Castle, commanded by Capt. James Hawkins, off the Island of Porto Rico, during the Hurricane in the West-Indies, in the Year 1780. London 1787. 8vo.	2	6
4	ACLAMACION/ y/ Pendones/ qve levanto/ la/ mvy noble y coronada/ ciudad/ De los Reyes/, por/ el catolico/ y/ avgvstissimo/ Rey D. Carlos II. deste nombre/ N. S./ con festiva solemnidad./ El/ dia 17. de Octvbre./ Ano/ de 1666./ Con licencia./ En Lima, en la Imprinta de Jvan de/ Quevedo y Zarate. 6 prel. and 43 folioed leaves, with large folding copper-plate. 4to. <i>fine copy, old calf.</i>	1	1

Fig. 2: Preliminary proof sheets for Henry Stevens's *Bibliographia Americana*, ruled and annotated to serve as a price list. Tipped in to Z1207 .S84 copy 2, John Carter Brown Library (hereafter JCBL). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

as specimens of the *Bibliographia Americana*, through Stevens's manuscript insertions they also function as a price list of his recent inventory. In an accompanying letter, he explained to Lenox that every book in the catalogue was close at hand and available for sale. Stevens hand-lined these proof sheets with columns like an auction catalogue, and penciled in running numbers on the left and prices on the right. The "prices in MS.," he assured Lenox, "are the lowest net prices & are the same in the three copies of proofs sent."⁴² Details about bindings and other features of the individual items offered for sale, as well as typical bookseller catalogue descriptions like "very fine copy," are penciled in at the end of entries. Thus, the manuscript overlays transform ideal copies into unique physical artifacts, turning the bibliography into a priced booksellers' list. These proof sheets encapsulate Stevens's bibliographical method, which developed out of the unique economic and material circumstances of the production of his works. As a bookseller, Stevens catalogued materials as they passed through his hands, literally "booking" these entries in printed sheets that he considered proofs of the monumental *Bibliographia Americana*. More immediately, however, these sheets could be pressed into service as catalogues, allowing Stevens to sell the works, refresh his stock, and repeat the process.

In March 1853, Stevens sent Brown and Lenox a full set of revised proof sheets (see fig. 3). They had been fleshed out considerably; while the first set has four entries on the first page, the revised set only has three because they have been expanded to include full title transcriptions and collations. Again, these revised proof sheets are in one sense tokens of progress towards the *Bibliographia Americana*, and Stevens points out the fuller titles and more accurate collations while also asking Brown and Lenox for their assistance in comparing his descriptions with their copies. However, he also informs them he has "nearly all the books by me and shall be glad to sell them."⁴³ Lenox responded to both of these appeals, ordering a few books from the sheets but also carefully going over all ninety-six pages of Stevens's descriptions and sending him detailed notes.⁴⁴

42. Stevens to Lenox, London, 19 November 1852, Box 4, Folder 1, JLP-NYPL.

43. Stevens to Lenox, London, 3 December 1852, Box 4, Folder 1, JLP-NYPL.

44. Lenox's endorsement of Stevens's 3 December 1852 letter states that he answered on 28 December 1852 and "ordered a few books from the enclosed sheets" (Stevens to Lenox, London, 3 December 1852, Box 4, Folder 1, JLP-NYPL).

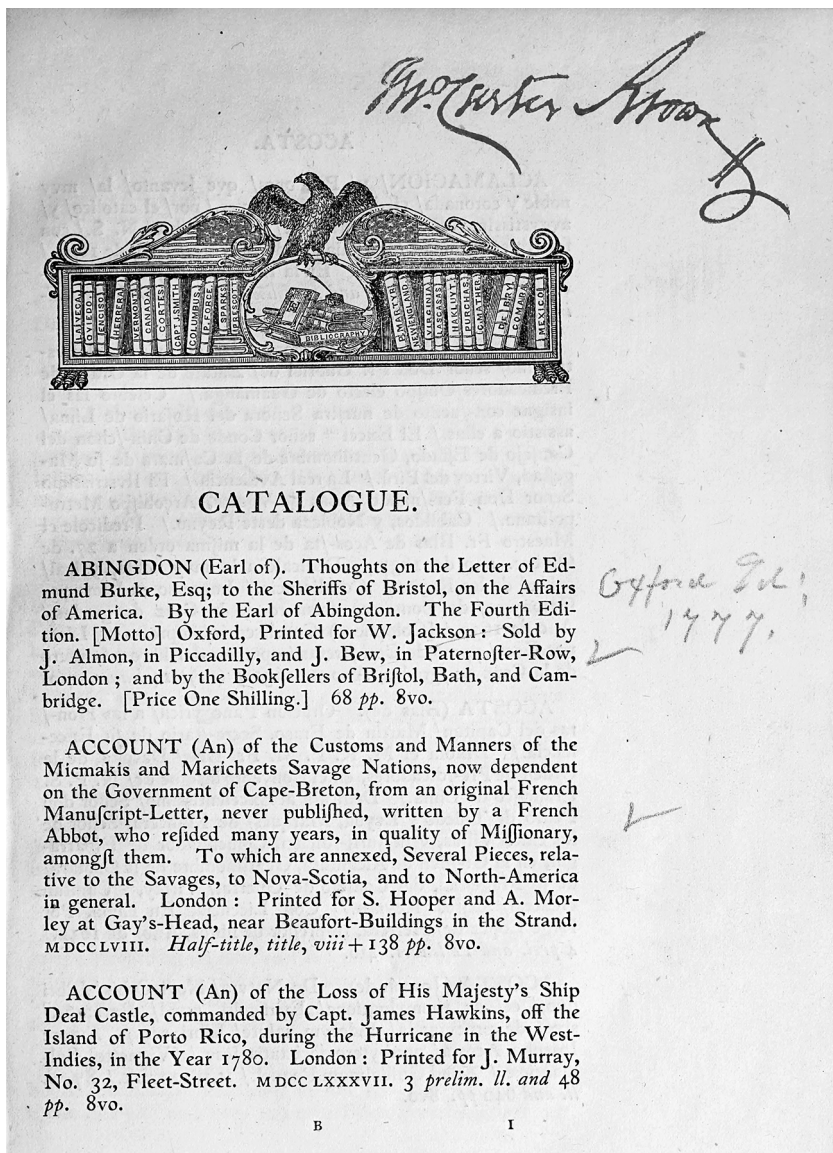


Fig. 3: Revised proof sheets in a presentation copy to John Carter Brown dated 10 March 1853, Z1207 .S84 copy 2, JCBL. They would be reissued in January 1854 as *Stevens's American Bibliographer*, but lack the paper wrapper, introductory note, fold-out facsimiles, and frontispiece of the latter. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Brown was less sure what to make of Stevens's conflation of pure and restricted bibliography, writing:

It is certainly a great collection of rare Books, but I really do not know what to make of it; whether it be a "sale cat^c" or is part & parcel of your "Bib^a Americana" long time since announced. I cannot decide which.

The 16 sheets sent me 3d Dec, '52 were marked with prices, & you then wrote "I trust that from this Catalogue of mine, as well as from Smith's, you will make large Selections, as you will be Tolerably sure of getting the Books you order."

I did not order any thing from the 16 pp. first sent, thinking I would wait til the remainder came forward, but [this] portion . . . is not marked & moreover it contains so many rare Books – the Cortez' 2^o Letter & the 2^o Eds; &c &c that I think it cannot be a list of works offered for sale.⁴⁵

Two days later, Brown wrote again: "I have been examining your Cat^c & I am puzzling to tell what it means, – it certainly contains a large number of rare Books which makes me think that you have not got them on hand for sale, & then if you mean it for a Catalogue to comprise all books now known on America it is very deficient." Throwing up his hands, Brown concluded, "I can only say that if you have them on hand for sale, I should like to add some few of them to my Bib^a Americana."⁴⁶ Reverting to the more familiar use of a catalogue as checklist, Brown had ticked the works he already owned, and he marked forty-two additional items he wished to send for. While he often used Ternaux numbers as shorthand when placing orders, he referenced the page numbers of this new checklist in his response to Stevens.

In his reply, Stevens was conciliatory:

I do not wonder that you are puzzled with the small portion of my catalogue (96pp) which I sent you by Dr. Cogswell. It is not a catalogue of all books on America, but only of such works of rarity as I happen to have by me at the time of the sheets passing through the press. You will perceive by the care that is taken to have the titles as correct as possible that I must have the books before me. Some of the Books are already yours, but not yet delivered – of the 42 lots which

45. Brown to Stevens, Providence, 1 April 1853, Box 37, Folder 5, Henry Stevens Papers (Collection 801), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Hereafter cited as HSP-UCLA.

46. Brown to Stevens, Providence, 4 April 1853, Box 37, Folder 5, HSP-UCLA.

you order in your last letter of the 4th April I have already looked out for you about every one of them, tho there are two of them that I may have promised to Mr. Lenox.⁴⁷

For the remainder of the letter, Stevens alternates between describing the ninety-six pages as proof sheets of the *Bibliographia Americana* and as a mere list of stock on hand. Claiming that another 150 pages were soon to be printed, bringing the volume down to the letter “K,” Stevens describes a volume “printed on thick fine paper with many maps & plates” in an edition of only ninety-nine copies for private circulation. At the end of the letter, however, perhaps in an attempt to cater to what seems to be Brown’s primary interest in the sheets, Stevens reframes the central purpose of the work: “It is only a catalogue of my books for sale,” he concedes, “but in this way I intend to collect titles & brief collations . . . so as to better be able to trace variations and editions.”⁴⁸ However, muddying the waters further is the fact that, as Stevens acknowledges, a number of the works listed in the catalogue had already been purchased by Brown but have not yet been delivered.

Apparently not satisfied with this explanation, in his next letter Brown reversed course on several of the books he had ordered. “In fact,” he continued, “not knowing what the prices are, I do not care much about any of them, unless they be chg^d at a very moderate rate. – I should prefer to see the Books first & to know their prices before deciding about buying them.”⁴⁹ At least in the context of his relationship with his bookseller, Brown was uninterested in books that did not have a price attached. His wish to avoid becoming attached to a book without knowing the cost was not unreasonable; this was after all a business relationship in which Stevens’s objective was to extract the highest possible price and Brown’s was to pay the lowest. Throughout this exchange, Brown’s responses bring the differing expectations for catalogues and bibliographies into focus, and rather astutely identify the tensions inherent in Stevens’s attempt to combine the two.

47. Stevens to Brown, London, 20 April 1853, Letterbook vol. 9, Henry Stevens Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan. Hereafter cited as HSP-WCL.

48. Stevens to Brown, London, 20 April 1853, Letterbook vol. 9, HSP-WCL.

49. Brown to Stevens, Providence, 10 May 1853, Box 37, Folder 5, HSP-UCLA.

By late 1853, Stevens had decided to repurpose this material yet again as a monthly periodical titled *Stevens's American Bibliographer*.⁵⁰ In a circular dated 30 November 1853, Stevens explains that the object of the work is to “‘book’ materials for my *Bibliographia Americana* which I have for some years been preparing for the Smithsonian Institution,” as well as to “receive the co-operation of librarians and bibliographers in the examination and collation of rare books relating to America.”⁵¹ In a letter to Lenox, Stevens elaborated further, explaining that he was “going on with the printing of the catalogue” but would “issue it as a monthly periodical.” This, he hoped, would “drive me forward regularly with my *Bibliographia Americana*.”⁵²

While Stevens initially envisioned issuing *Stevens's American Bibliographer* monthly for two or three years, only two numbers were issued in early 1854 (see fig. 4).⁵³ As a unit they consisted of the same ninety-six pages of proof sheets Stevens had sent to Brown and Lenox the previous year, with the addition of two fold-out facsimiles, a frontispiece, a preliminary note, and paper wrappers. In the preliminary note, Stevens insists that “my aim was and still is . . . [t]o afford to the future historians of my country and continent a complete *Bibliographia Americana*,” and reprints a portion of the 1848 Smithsonian prospectus to outline its particulars.⁵⁴ He then repeats the circular’s explanation of the purpose of this “preliminary work,” which is to “book” material for the final *Bibliographia Americana* and to “receive the co-operation of librarians and bibliographers” in proofreading and correcting it. To avoid confusion, however, the proof

50. Bound proof sheets in a presentation copy to Brown dated 10 March 1853, Z1207 .S84 copy 2, John Carter Brown Library (hereafter JCBL). The same set of bound proof sheets exists in a presentation copy to James Lenox dated 10 March 1853, *KAY n.c. copy 3, Rare Book Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (hereafter RBD-NYPL).

51. “Stevens’s American Bibliographer,” dated 30 November 1853, enclosure in Stevens to Lenox, London, 6 January 1854, Box 4, Folder 5, JLP-NYPL.

52. Stevens to Lenox, London, 6 January 1854, Box 4, Folder 6, JLP-NYPL.

53. Henry Stevens, *Stevens's American Bibliographer* 1, nos. 1–2 (January–February) (Chiswick: Printed by C. Whittingham, 1854) (hereafter cited as *SAB*). The John Carter Brown Library has generously digitized *SAB* in full and made it openly accessible at <https://archive.org/details/stevenssamericanoostev>. Readers are invited to view additional details online.

54. *SAB* 1.1, iv, iv–vi.

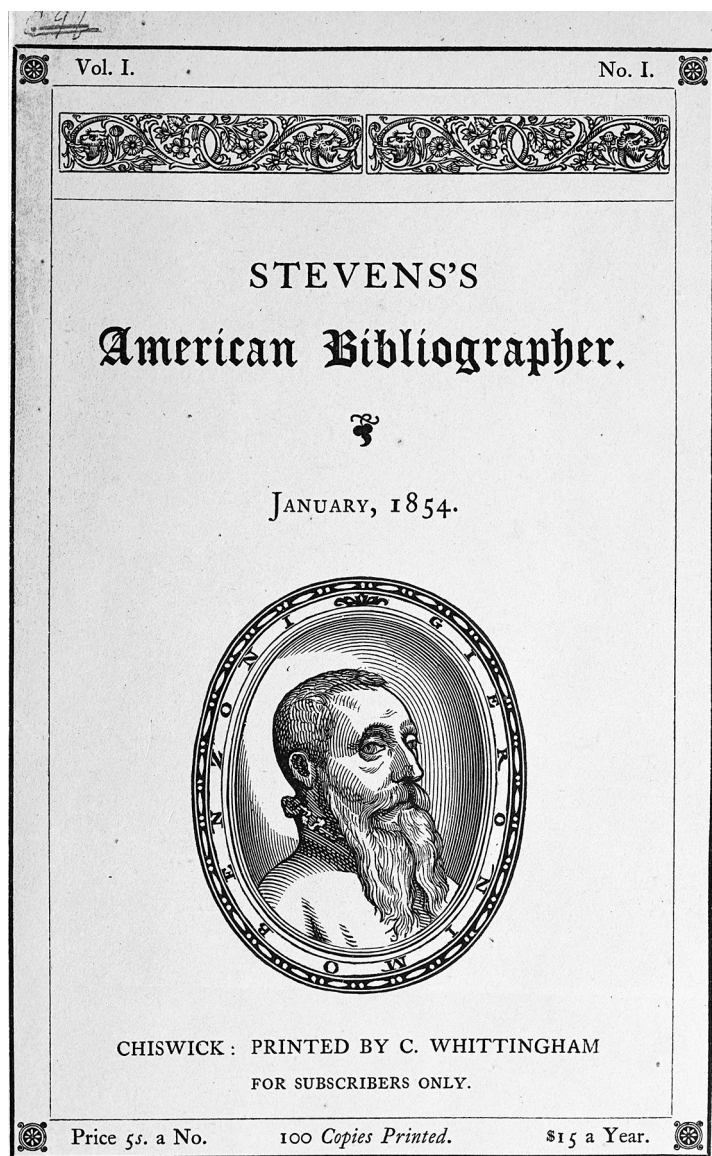


Fig. 4: Paper wrapper for *Stevens's American Bibliographer* 1, no. 1, Z1207 .S84, JCBL. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

sheets “will be considered as privately printed, and be issued to subscribers only, in the form of a monthly periodical, under the title of *Stevens’s American Bibliographer*.” Further, to “interfere as little as possible” with the *Bibliographia Americana*, “nothing will be printed in this which can as well be printed for the first time in the larger work.”⁵⁵ This somewhat tortuous logic can probably be explained by the fact that, under the terms of his agreement with the Smithsonian, the final *Bibliographia Americana* was to be strictly non-commercial. Stevens, aware that printing material from the *Bibliographia Americana* under a different title and charging subscriptions for it might be violating that agreement in spirit if not in practice, took pains to distinguish the proof sheets from the work proper and to justify their circulation by insisting it was for the sake of securing the greatest possible accuracy for the *Bibliographia Americana* itself.

The 1853 proof sheets already have fairly lavish production values, with numerous facsimiles of illustrations and ornaments from the original works. And while the two issues of *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* are still presented instrumentally as proof sheets, they feature two large fold-out facsimiles and a full-page frontispiece Stevens had commissioned from the originals. Privately printed at Chiswick Press in its new Basle Roman typeface, *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* also reflects the press’s interest in revival types and ornaments. As a specimen of fine press printing, the work is an outlier among booksellers’ catalogues of the period. As David McKitterick tells us, while illustrated catalogues did exist, they appeared on an “intermittent” basis. Because the primary purpose of book trade catalogues was to sell books, the “overwhelming need” was to “convey to possible purchasers the desirability of the books on offer,” usually “at the least possible expense.”⁵⁶ Stevens, however, tended to ignore the expenses associated with his catalogues. His biographer Wyman Parker called them “the most expensively prepared type of book known to man,” not only because of the fine-press aesthetic, but also because Stevens commonly

55. *SAB* 1.1, vi–vii.

56. David McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books: Private Interest and Public Memory, 1600–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 261. Conveying desirability could sometimes work at cross-purposes with keeping costs low; while elaborate descriptions emphasized a work’s rarity and importance in the minds of prospective buyers, they also increased the total number of pages to be printed. On the whole, booksellers’ catalogues tended towards the utilitarian.

kept his works in standing type for years as he continued to “book” materials.⁵⁷

One factor may have been that Stevens conceptualized *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* not only as proof sheets for, but also as a “specimen” of the eventual *Bibliographia Americana*. While he printed these mock-ups at his own expense, the Smithsonian was to cover the cost of printing the final work, and the standards for the “Contributions to Knowledge” series were high: *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, the first work issued, had featured forty-eight lithographed maps and plates and 207 wood engravings.

Stevens may also have intended *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* to appeal to the tastes of his most important clients. It has much in common with Bartlett’s catalogue of Brown’s library (1865) and Harris’s *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* (1866), which are usually credited with pioneering the use of facsimiles. They were in turn informed by the aesthetic standards that had developed for catalogues of private “gentlemen’s libraries,” which had proliferated in the nineteenth century as bibliomania spread and collecting became increasingly fashionable. Intended, at least in part, to “flatter an owner’s vanity and advertise his possession of rare and costly books,” these catalogues were usually “examples of luxurious printing” that showcased “bibliophilic treasures.”⁵⁸ Brown had envisioned the catalogue of his own private library in similar terms as early as 1848, when Stevens was hard at work convincing him to subscribe to the *Bibliographia Americana*. Brown had made it known that, if the scheme was to furnish him a catalogue, he wanted it to be a handsome one. As Stevens explained in the midst of these negotiations, “if the work is to be done he desires that it should be done in style.”⁵⁹ So if *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* anticipated the monumentality of a Smithsonian “contribution,” it also anticipated Bartlett’s eventual catalogue of Brown’s collection. While Brown, expecting a price list, found the proof sheets confusing in 1852, if they had been defined as “part & parcel” of the “Bib^a Americana” he would presumably have agreed that they were being “done in style.”

57. Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, 180, 231, 236, 317.

58. Archer Taylor, *Book Catalogues: Their Varieties and Uses* (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1957), 8.

59. Stevens to Lenox, Boston, 26 June 1848, Box 3, Folder 29, JLP-NYPL.

By 1857, Stevens had completed another two volumes of proofs with around 3,000 additional titles in alphabetical order. They only encompassed his current stock, however, so were not cumulative with his earlier work. These volumes stood in type at Chiswick Press until 1862, when they were published as *Historical Nuggets: Bibliotheca Americana or a Descriptive Account of My Collection of Rare Books Relating to America*.⁶⁰ The introduction, in the form of a note "To the Diligent Biblioscooper," repeats the explanation given in *Stevens's American Bibliographer* nearly verbatim, calling the *Nuggets* "a mere stepping-stone to a larger and better work." Stevens further explains that his title—"more forceful, perhaps, than elegant"—was chosen intentionally so that "this comparatively private and very imperfect edition" could not "hereafter be mistaken for, and confounded with, the *Bibliotheca Americana*."⁶¹

From the priced proof sheets printed in the late 1850s, Stevens had attempted to sell the entire collection described in the *Nuggets* to one of his wealthy clients, but, Reese explains, he was unsuccessful: "each in turn dragged his feet or bargained for lower prices."⁶² At the outbreak of the Civil War, Stevens's best American clients stopped buying in response to the uncertainty, and Stevens found himself deep in debt with little income. In 1861, he auctioned off the *Nuggets* stock through London auction house Puttick & Simpson. The auction catalogue explained that the books inside were collected by Stevens "as material to be used in the completion of his yet unfinished Work upon American Bibliography. Having made such use of the Books as was necessary for this purpose, he described them, with collations, and prices for sale affixed, in a Catalogue, printed about four years ago, entitled *American Nuggets*." Because their circulation was delayed until other volumes in the series could be completed, however, the printed prices had become outdated, so they were no longer appropriate as sales catalogues. Therefore, the whole collection was put up for auction. Puttick & Simpson noted that they had

60. Henry Stevens, *Historical Nuggets: Bibliotheca Americana or a Descriptive Account of My Collection of Rare Books Relating to America*, 2 vols. (London: Whittingham and Wilkins, 1862). On the publication history of the *Nuggets*, see Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, 236, 317.

61. Henry Stevens, *Historical Nuggets*, 1:x–xi.

62. Reese, *Collectors, Booksellers, and Libraries*, 72.

borrowed from the *Nuggets* to assemble the catalogue.⁶³ In fact, the 1861 Puttick & Simpson auction was a desperate attempt to raise cash, and the publication of the *Nuggets* the following year was a further attempt to realize funds by selling the catalogue itself as a commodity.

Stevens's eventual *Bibliographia Americana* was to include sales prices when possible, but they were to be retrospective, after the model of French bookseller Jacques-Charles Brunet's *Manuel du libraire et de l'amateur de livres*, which quoted actual sales prices realized or offered an estimate of the current market value.⁶⁴ While the purpose of prices in *Stevens's Bibliographia Americana* was to offer an estimate of value in the same manner as Brunet, the prices in the *Nuggets* are the prices at which Stevens is offering the stock described for sale. The *Nuggets* are therefore more similar to one of the priced catalogues of Obadiah Rich than to *Stevens's American Bibliographer*, which was for this reason not legible to Brown.

We see in Stevens's publications from the 1850s and 1860s a constant repurposing of material, along with convoluted explanatory notes that attempt to explain the relationships among the various catalogues, as well as between these catalogues and Stevens's long-promised *Bibliographia Americana*. The introduction to *Stevens's Bibliotheca Historica* (1870) offers a particularly revealing glimpse of Stevens's own understanding of his rather miscellaneous output:

Having in the course of many years of bibliographical study and research picked up various isolated grains of knowledge respecting the early history, geography, and bibliography of this Western Hemisphere which he has not found it convenient hitherto to book in appropriate places, the writer has thought it well to pigeon-hole the facts here by inserting notes short and long in the Catalogue.⁶⁵

The verb "book," which had been used sixteen years earlier to describe the purpose of *Stevens's American Bibliographer*, here reappears as an explanation of Stevens's bibliographical practice. While in the earlier introduction

63. Henry Stevens, *Bibliotheca Americana: A Catalogue of Books Relating to the History and Literature of America* (London: Puttick & Simpson, 1861), v.

64. Taylor, *Book Catalogues*, 44.

65. Henry Stevens, *Bibliotheca Historica: Or, A Catalogue of 5000 Volumes of Books and Manuscripts Relating Chiefly to the History and Literature of North and South America* (Boston: H. O. Houghton, 1870), iv.

the use of the verb “book” conveys a forward momentum, a purposeful accumulation and perfection of material into a unified whole, here it sounds scattershot and random, a matter of “pigeon-hol[ing]” mere “isolated grains of knowledge.” As Tanselle has noted, once such grains are “pigeon-holed” in a catalogue, they may never re-emerge: “many bibliographical facts, though announced in print, have lain undetected, only to be laboriously rediscovered and reannounced years later.” The difficulty is often the lack of unifying finding aids. Ann Blair notes that the alphabetically organized dictionary is a “self-indexing” reference format, which likely explains booksellers’ preference for alphabetical catalogues. However, this self-indexing function only works if all entries are unified under a single alphabet. Stevens’s method of “booking” entries, by contrast, meant that he started over with each new iteration.⁶⁶

Stevens himself acknowledged the limitations of his discrete catalogues. The Nuggets, he explained, encompassed “not a selection, but only such books as the author happened to possess at that time. It was intended to supply the deficiencies by additional volumes, but these have never appeared, and probably never will in this form.”⁶⁷ Thus, by 1870, at which point Harris and Bartlett had published their own catalogues and Joseph Sabin had begun his monumental *Dictionary of Books Relating to America*, Stevens seems to have been resigned to the fact that all of his laboriously-booked material would never be unified into a *Bibliographia Americana*.

And, in fact, no part of Stevens’s *Bibliographia Americana* ever appeared, because the Smithsonian stipulated that the full manuscript had to be submitted and accepted for the work to be printed. The rest of Stevens’s output has been almost completely disregarded, not just by later bibliographers like Wroth and Adams, but also by his contemporaries. Harris, whose 1866 *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* is widely held to mark the beginning of the “modern” bibliography of Americana, neglected to mention Stevens by name in his extensive introductory essay on previous bibliographies of Americana. Dismissing “lists prepared by booksellers, or catalogues of sale,” Harris refers to Stevens only as “a

66. Tanselle, “Some Thoughts on Catalogues,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 102, no. 4 (2008): 574; Blair, Too Much, 121.

67. Stevens, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 175.

New England bookseller settled in London,” whose work is met with the faint praise that it is “printed with remarkable accuracy.”⁶⁸

STEVENS AS PURELY “RESTRICTED” BIBLIOGRAPHER

Stevens’s career makes the imbrication of bibliography and bookselling so nakedly obvious that it is impossible to ignore, which is why he has often been cast solely as a wheeler-dealer while his contemporaries—either more decorous or, as was often the case, less reliant on the marketplace through the largesse of a wealthy patron—were able to avoid drawing direct attention to the commodity status of the works they described. While Bartlett and Harris accessed works once they had landed in private libraries, Stevens’s point of access was in the transition between buying the works and selling them to these very collectors.

Beyond this structural difference, Stevens also purposely drew attention to his books’ status as commodities. The epigraph of the *Nuggets*, from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, proclaimed “I’ll buy with you, sell with you,” and the work’s title likened rare books to precious metals. Elsewhere Stevens expanded the analogy by casting himself as their “prospector.”⁶⁹ Cole tells us that Stevens, “if not directly responsible for the term ‘nuggets,’” as it applies to rare books, “so far popularized the expression as to make it more closely associated with his name than with that of any other.” Cole interprets the term as, at least in part, an admission of commodity status: “Books are like gems, and, literally so in many cases, as in these latter days, many a book has been sold for far more than its actual weight in gold.”⁷⁰ Stevens continued to use the term “nuggets” throughout career: the *Schedule of 2000 American Historical Nuggets Taken from the Stevens Diggings* (1870) listed its publisher as “Stevens’s Bibliographical Nuggetory.”⁷¹ As he

68. Harris, *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima*, xli.

69. It is this period, both the field of early American history and the archives and sources relating to it were often conceptualized as gold mines, and documentary compilers and historians framed as prospectors. However, this usage was most common when discussing scholars and writers, who could realize a profit by “refining the ore” into the “bullion” of publication, but generally were not able to sell the sources themselves as commodities.

70. Cole, “Book-Collectors as Benefactors,” 76.

71. Henry Stevens, *Schedule of Two Thousand American Historical Nuggets Taken from the Stevens Diggings* (London: Stevens’s Bibliographical Nuggetory [Chiswick Press], 1870).

explained to Brown, he meant the term to suggest “a place where *Nuggets* are kept, or taken.”⁷²

At the same time, Stevens also wanted to be taken seriously as a scholar, and he presented himself very differently in other publication genres. In 1854, for instance, he published a series of six Spanish manuscripts by Columbus, Cortés, Las Casas, and others, which he had acquired in 1852 as part of a collection formerly belonging to Spanish historian and documentary compiler Martín Fernández de Navarrete. They were printed uniformly by Chiswick Press in a revived black letter type—an antiquarian aesthetic then becoming fashionable for historical reprints—and featured dedications to various luminaries. Stevens dedicated the reprint of a unique autograph manuscript of Cortés to Leopold von Ranke, the pre-eminent historian of the day, as a memento of the recent visit Ranke and fellow historian Reinhold Pauli had paid to his shop. The dedication is a fairly transparent bid to show that, in the era of primary sources Ranke had ushered in, the bookseller’s shop could be as crucial a site for accessing the materials of history as the archive. Stevens reminds Ranke that, during this visit, he had been shown all of the extant *relaciones* of Cortés, which, Stevens emphasizes, “you said you had never before had the opportunity to read together.” While he did not expect so soon after this to have acquired an original manuscript letter—a source, he informs Ranke, “of very considerable historical importance”—he points to the adage that “sooner or later they say everything historical turns up for sale in London.” He has had it “thrown it into type,” Stevens concludes, “partly for the honour and pleasure of sending it to you as a souvenir of the morning I enjoyed having your feet under my library table.”⁷³ Rather brilliantly,

72. Stevens to Brown, 29 December 1870, Box 2, Folder 5, Brown Family Records Re: Library, Correspondence, John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. Hereafter cited as BFRL-JCB. Stevens’s jocular tone may have been fitted to the intended audience of these privately printed proof sheets. The *Schedule of Nuggets* was essentially a private communication to Brown; shortly after the publication of the final volume of the first edition of Bartlett’s catalogue, Stevens drew up a kind of reverse desiderata list of titles not in the catalogue and offered them for sale. As we have seen, in his dealings with his bookseller Brown was uninterested in books that did not have a price attached. In jokingly calling attention to the commodity status of Americana, Stevens was perhaps speaking his patron’s language.

73. Henry Stevens, ed., *Carta de Hernando Cortes* (London: C. Whittingham, Chiswick Press, 1854), iii.

Stevens here manages to use a unique, singular text to accrue both financial and social capital: he sells the autograph original to one of his wealthy clients, but not before using it as copy for a beautifully printed gift for the most important historian of the day.

Self-promotion aside, Stevens did make materials available to scholars, both “as they passed through his hands,” and in the form of the facsimiles he produced and issued in *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* and subsequent works. In his history of the Spanish conquest, Sir Arthur Helps acknowledged Stevens’s contribution to scholarship in making “some of the most rare works relating to Spanish America” available “whenever they have come into his possession.”⁷⁴ Helps reproduced Stevens’s facsimile map of Mexico City in the same work, and Justin Winsor later drew on a number of Stevens facsimiles in his *Narrative History of America*. Beyond his historical reprints, Stevens also produced a number of more scholarly works that were based on his stock or materials in the British Museum, but were not directly bibliographical in nature.

While Stevens’s jesting tone made his catalogues more entertaining than those of his contemporaries—Justin Winsor found them, “in parts at least, interesting reading, through a quality of his annotations which combines amusement with instruction”⁷⁵—it also made it difficult to take him seriously as a bibliographer. Nevertheless, a retrospective evaluation of Stevens’s published output in an 1899 issue of *American Book-Lore* concluded that, while Stevens’s catalogues may be tinged with his “eccentricities” and “whimsicalities,” they remained highly sought-after for their “thoroughness and accuracy,” and the notes “embody a vast fund of information not elsewhere obtainable.”⁷⁶ As we have seen, however, this “vast fund of information” was “pigeon-holed” into various entries scattered across his more ephemeral bibliographical productions. What happens if we revisit these fragments with the understanding that they are, as Stevens always insisted, material “booked” for the “fullest, best & most carefully made catalogue that was ever published”? In the case of at least one work, Stevens’s bibliographical description remained the standard for nearly a decade and a

74. Sir Arthur Helps, *The Spanish Conquest in America*, 4 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856–75), 2:42.

75. Winsor, “Americana,” 325.

76. “Gleanings from Old Catalogues 2,” 94–96.

half; when finally matched, it was by a bibliographer who had access to Stevens's earlier work.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL LEGACIES

Our case study is the "specimen" Stevens chose to include in his 1853 circular announcing *Stevens's American Bibliographer*, which was drawn from the March 1853 proof sheets and would reappear in *Stevens's American Bibliographer* in 1854 (see fig. 5).⁷⁷ It is an entry for the second edition of Cortés's fourth letter, published in Valencia in 1526.⁷⁸ This was the only copy known to exist at the time, and Stevens clearly considered his description exemplary, probably because his access to it as a bookseller meant that he was the only bibliographer to have described it thoroughly. When the appearances of this work are traced through a series of bibliographies that begins with Stevens's 1853 proof sheets and ends with Henry Harisse's *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* (1866), the resulting trajectory demonstrates that Stevens's more ephemeral publications were quietly central to the development of what Adams calls the "modern" *Bibliotheca Americana*. In some cases they may even have served as the unacknowledged raw material for the bibliographies of his better-known contemporaries.⁷⁹

77. This "specimen" entry is identical to the corresponding entries in the both the March 1853 proof sheets and *Stevens's American Bibliographer*. See "Stevens's American Bibliographer," dated 30 November 1853, enclosure in Stevens to Lenox, 6 January 1854, Box 4, Folder 3, JLP-NYPL; proof sheets dated 10 March 1853, 85, Z1207 .S84 copy 2, JCBL; *SAB* 1.2, 85, Z1207 .S84, JCBL.

78. Hernán Cortés, *Quarta relacio que Fernando Cortes*, 2nd ed. (Valencia: George Costilla, 1526). This copy was sold to John Carter Brown in 1852 and remains in the John Carter Brown Library under the shelfmark 1-SIZE B526 .C828q. Several additional copies surfaced after the period in question and are now held by the New York Public Library, the Huntington and Newberry Libraries, and others. See John Alden and Dennis C. Landis, eds., *European Americana: A Chronological Guide to Works Printed in Europe Relating to the Americas, 1493-1776*, vol. 1 (New York: Readex Books, 1980), entry no. 526.2; and Alexander S. Wilkinson, *Iberian Books: Books published in Spanish or Portuguese or on the Iberian Peninsula before 1601* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), entry no. 4045, for additional details regarding holdings and bibliographical citations.

79. The following is meant to be suggestive, not comprehensive. It does not aim to perform an in-depth analysis of the transmission of bibliographical details but rather to sketch out the basic contours of a trajectory that suggests both the importance of Stevens's "booked" descriptions of unique and difficult to access works and their relative invisibility.

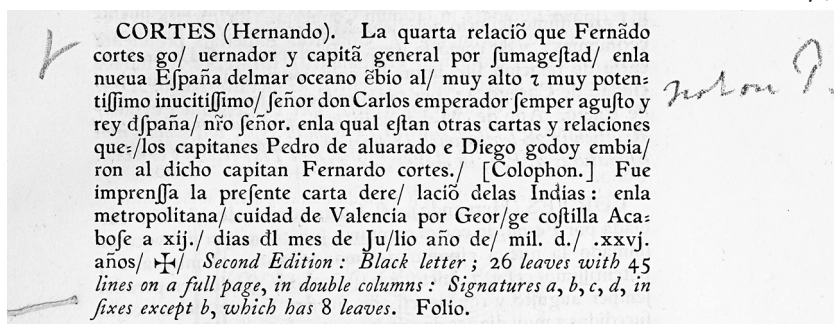


Fig. 5: Entry for Hernán Cortés, *Quarta relacio*, 2nd ed. (Valencia, 1526) in 1853 proof sheets (see fig. 3), 85. Z1207 .S84 copy 2, JCBL. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Stevens had acquired the Valencia Cortés in March 1852, writing to Brown: "I have just ordered at a very high price a 2nd Edition of the 4th letter of Cortés printed in folio in Valencia in 1526. It would seem to be a unique copy. I am all impatience to see it. It will be here next week. It will be put aside for you —."⁸⁰ Brown visited Stevens in London that summer, and he purchased the Cortés on 7 July 1852.⁸¹ Once received in Providence, it was duly written in to Brown's interleaved copy of Ternaux-Compans.⁸²

That spring and summer, the unique Valencia Cortés, as well as an autograph Cortés manuscript purchased as part of a collection formerly belonging to the Spanish documentary compiler Fernando de Navarrete, seem to have led Stevens to pick Cortés as the subject of his first full mock-up of *Bibliographia Americana*. As he worked on preliminary proof sheets based on his stock, he was also preparing more focused, scholarly, and elaborate proof sheets dedicated to the "life & works" of Cortés. A full set of these proof sheets, in a presentation copy titled *Steven's Life and Bibliography of Cortes* dated 1852 shows the extent of Stevens's vision. True to Stevens's 1848 proposal, it included a narrative resume of Cortés's life, a full bibliographical accounting of his works, and detailed copy-specific information

80. Stevens to Brown, London, 26 March 1852, Letterbook vol. 9, HSP-WCL.

81. It was kept in London for binding, however, and did not arrive in Providence until July 1853. See invoice, 7 July 1852, Box 1, Folder 15, BFRL-JCBL.

82. Henri Ternaux-Compans, *Bibliothèque américaine*. John Carter Brown interleaved copy with manuscript annotations in the hand of Brown and John Russell Bartlett, verso of added leaf between pages 6 and 7, 1-SIZE Z1203 .T32, JCBL.

about ownership and location, as well as numerous woodcuts and the same fold-out map of Mexico City that later appeared in Stevens's *American Bibliographer*.⁸³ It is perhaps the closest Stevens ever came to the realization of the *Bibliographia Americana*; in a letter to Lenox describing this "specimen," he wrote, "[w]hen you get this you will have my ideas in full."⁸⁴

Stevens's Life and Bibliography of Cortes offers a fully realized description of the Valencia Cortés. (see fig. 6). While the entry does not depart from the shorter version in the 1853 proof sheets and *Stevens's American Bibliographer* in any major bibliographical detail, it includes not only an exact transcription of the title page and colophon, a collation, and an expanded, more discursive note describing physical details, but also a translation of the colophon into English and information about ownership. "Mr. Brown" is listed as the owner of the sole copy, but his name is followed by a semicolon, suggesting that Stevens did not want to foreclose the possibility that another might turn up.

The Valencia Cortés next appears in a list of desiderata that Lenox had privately printed in 1854 under the title *Livres Curieux* (see fig. 7).⁸⁵ It seems to be based on the entry in *Stevens's American Bibliographer*, but truncates the title and omits line breaks. Unlike Stevens's exact transcriptions, the entry in *Livres Curieux* also modernizes and regularizes spelling and punctuation. The next bibliographical appearance of the work, in a revised edition of French bookseller Brunet's *Manuel du libraire* published in 1861, also appears to derive from Stevens's original description by way of Lenox (see fig. 8). While Brunet cites *Livres Curieux* elsewhere in the section, in the entry for the Valencia Cortés he attributes his information to "M. Lenox, de New-York."⁸⁶ There is no record of Lenox offering information about this work to Brunet directly, but if he did it was likely similar to the entry in *Livres Curieux* because Brunet's entry seems to follow its logic. However, Brunet further shortens the title, alters spelling and punctuation, and introduces several errors, the most glaring of which is the rendering of

83. Henry Stevens, *Steven's Life and Bibliography of Cortes* (London: Chiswick Press, ca. 1852), uncorrected proofs, cut and mounted, in presentation copy to Samuel L. Barlow, *KF 1852, RBD-NYPL.

84. Stevens to Lenox, London, 19 November 1852, Box 4, Folder 1, JLP-NYPL.

85. Garrigue & Christern, *Livres Curieux* (New York: G.B. Teubner, 1854), 27.

86. Jacques-Charles Brunet, *Manuel Du Libraire et de l'amateur de Livres*, 6 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, fils et Cie., 1860), 2: col. 311-12.

Reports made to Cortes by his Captains Pedro de Alvarado and Diego Godoy.

Copies. Mr. Brown; Mr. Lenox; British Museum, two copies, (C. $\frac{20}{3}$ e.) and (G. L. $\frac{6815}{4}$).

In this Fourth Relation Cortes details minutely the occurrences from the 15th of May, 1522, to the 15th of October, 1524.

.7. La quarta relaciõ que Fernãdo cortes go/
uernador y capitã general por sumagestad/ enla
nueua España delmar oceano ãbio al/ muy alto 7
muy potentissimo inucitissimo/ señor don Carlos
emperador semper agusto y rey dñpaña/ nño señor.
enla qual estan otras cartas y relaciones quez/ los
capitanes Pedro de aluarado e Diego godoy embia/
ron al dicho capitán Fernando cortes./ [Colophon.]
Fue imprenssa la presente carta dere/ laciõ delas
Indias: enla metropolitana/ ciudad de Valencia
por Geor/ geostilcla Acabose a xij./ dias dl mes de
Ju/lio año de/ mil. d./ .xxvj. años/ †/

[Colophon.] The present letter of relation about the Indies was printed in the metropolitan city of Valencia by George Castilla, and finished on the 12th day of the month of July a. 1526.

Folio, Valencia, 1526, black letter. Second edition, twenty-six leaves of forty-five lines to a page, in double columns, without catchwords or pagination; Signatures a, b, c, d, in sixes except b which has eight leaves. The text begins on the reverse of the title and ends on the reverse of the twenty-sixth leaf with the twenty-sixth line, under which is the Colophon. The title is surrounded by a narrow border, and surmounted by a wood-cut about five and a half inches square representing the Imperial Arms.

Copies. Mr. Brown;

Fig. 6: Entry for Cortés, *Quarta relacio*, 2nd ed. (Valencia, 1526), in Henry Stevens, *Steven's Life and Bibliography of Cortes* (London: Chiswick Press, ca. 1852), n.p.
*KF 1852, Rare Book Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, Tilden Foundations.

129. Cortes. La quarta relacion que Fernando cortes, governador & capitán general por su majestad—embio al muy alto &c. [Colophon.] Fue impressa la presente carta de relacion de las Indias : en la metropolitana ciudad de Valencia por George costilla. Acabose a xij dias del mes de Julio año de mil. d. xxvj. años. folio. 2 de ed. (26 feuillets à 45 lignes par pleine page) à doubles colonnes. Sig. a in 6s. b in 8s. c & d in 6s.

Fig. 7: Entry for Cortés, *Quarta relacio*, 2nd ed., in Garrigue & Christern, *Livres Curieux* (New York: G. B. Teubner, 1854), 27. Rare Book Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, Tilden Foundations.

the name “Cortes” as “Cortese.” This may have been a mistaken interpolation of the Italian spelling of Cortés, which appears in several entries on the following page.

In 1865, the work appears again, this time in the catalogue of John Carter Brown’s collection created by Brown’s former bookseller and de facto librarian John Russell Bartlett (see fig. 9).⁸⁷ While Bartlett presumably had access to the work itself, his description appears to be derived from Brunet’s; it too renders “Cortes” as “Cortese.” Although Brunet is cited frequently throughout the catalogue, Bartlett does not appear to have had access to *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* or the *Livres Curieux* entry derived from it. Stevens is also conspicuously absent from Bartlett’s own retrospective account of his main sources, which he described as “all accessible bibliographies treating of books on America, Brunet, Ternaux-Compans, Rich, Graesse, Harris and others.”⁸⁸ It is somewhat puzzling that the “Cortese” error was not caught through consultation of the work itself, which clearly displays the name “Cortes” on its title page. However, the first volume of the catalogue was known to contain many inaccuracies, and Brown had most remaining copies destroyed before it was superseded by a second edition in 1875.⁸⁹

87. John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Bibliotheca Americana: A Catalogue of Books Relating to North and South America in the Library of John Carter Brown*, vol. 1 (Providence: John Carter Brown Library, 1865), 14.

88. John Duncan Haskell, Jr., *John Russell Bartlett (1805–1886): Bookman* (PhD diss., George Washington University, 1977), 213.

89. Carl L. Cannon, *American Book Collectors and Collecting from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: The H. W. Wilson company, 1941), 71.

**LA QUARTA relacion que Fernando Cortese, go-
vernador & capitan general por su magestad... em-
bio al muy altro... (à la fin) : Fue impressa la
presente carta de relacion de las Indias: en la me-
tropolitana ciudad de Valencia por George cos-
tilla. Acabose a xij dias del mes de Julio año de
mil. d. xxvj. años, pet. in-fol. (ou in-4.) goth. de
26 ff. à 2 col. de 45 lignes, sign. a par 6, b par 8, c
et d par 6. (Communiqué par M. Lenox, de New-
York.)**

Fig. 8: Entry for Cortés, *Quarta relacio*, 2nd ed., in Jacques-Charles Brunet, *Manuel Du Libraire et de l'amateur de Livres*, 6 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, fils et Cie., 1860), 2: cols. 311–12. Image courtesy of the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

The Valencia Cortés next appears in HARRISSE's *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* (1866) (see fig. 10).⁹⁰ When he began compiling the work in January 1864, HARRISSE had written Bartlett to solicit information and collations for items in Brown's collection, and they appear to have exchanged proof sheets of their respective works-in-progress in summer 1864.⁹¹ Shortly after Bartlett's catalogue appeared in early autumn 1865, HARRISSE sent him a list of corrections.⁹² While HARRISSE does not seem to have prevented the error in Bartlett's entry for the Valencia Cortés he did not repeat it in his own work. HARRISSE's entry offers the fullest description of the Valencia Cortés since Stevens's 1852 proof sheets for *Steven's Life and Bibliography of Cortes*. Like Stevens's, it includes an exact transcription of the title page and colophon, collation, note with physical details, colophon translation, and ownership information. However, it also goes beyond Stevens's 1852 effort to realize some of the features Stevens had envisioned, including the use of distinct typefaces in a range of sizes to offer a sense of the original title pages and delineate each distinct part of the entry. HARRISSE's entry cites as references Bartlett's catalogue, *Stevens's American Bibliographer*, and Brunet, in that order. As we have seen, however, Brunet appears to have based

90. HARRISSE, *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima*, 254.

91. HASKELL, *John Russell Bartlett*, 212, 220.

92. HARRISSE to Bartlett, 10 October 1865, cited in HASKELL, *John Russell Bartlett*,

⁴⁷ CORTES.] LA QUARTA RELACION que Fernando Cortese, gouernador & capitan general por su majestad en la nueva España del mar Oceano embio al muy alto y potentissimo inuic-tissimo señor Don Carlos emperador etc. (*Colophon* :) Fue impressa la presente carta de relacion de las Indias: en la metropolitana ciudad de Valencia por George Costilla. Acabose a xii dias del mes de Julio año de mil. D. xxvi. años. (1526.)

Folio. 26 unpag'd leaves, double columns. Gothic Letter.

The second edition of the fourth letter.

Fig. 9: Entry for Cortés, *Quarta relacio*, 2nd ed., in John Russell Bartlett, *Bibliotheca Americana: A Catalogue of Books Relating to North and South America in the Library of John Carter Brown*, vol. 1 (Providence, 1865). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

his description on Stevens, and Bartlett is drawing at least in part from Brunet. Bartlett is listed first, because his description is presumed to be authoritative based on his access to the only known copy. But Stevens had had access to the work a decade earlier, and had produced a fuller representation. Ultimately, in the revised second edition of Bartlett's catalogue, published in 1875, the Cortés entry was corrected and expanded, with the final "e" removed from Cortés's name and a full but not entirely exact title transcription and colophon added. It still lacks a collation. Bartlett's catalogue cites Sabin, HARRISSE, and Brunet, but Stevens is nowhere to be found.⁹³

As we have seen, HARRISSE dismissed Stevens as a mere bookseller, presumably unable to attain the "abnegation practiced by true scholars," which for HARRISSE is "the test of scholastic worth and loyalty."⁹⁴ While HARRISSE had cited *Stevens's American Bibliographer* in several entries in the *BAV*, Stevens thought HARRISSE had failed to properly acknowledge the extent of his dependence on Stevens's work. In a scathing public letter on HARRISSE's work in the London *Athenaeum* in October 1866, Stevens gives his "credentials" as "twenty-five years' hard service in the study of the bibliography of American history and literature," during which time he has "not

93. John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Bibliotheca Americana: A Catalogue of Books Relating to North and South America in the Library of John Carter Brown*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Providence, RI: H. O. Houghton, 1875–82), 1:93.

94. HARRISSE, *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima*, xli, i.

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Bibliotheca Americana.

1526.*

138. CORTES (FERNANDO)—Within a narrow border, and below a large escutcheon of Spain, filling one half of the page:

La quarta relació que Fernãdo cortes go || uer-
nador y capitã general por sumagestad || enla nueua
España delmar oceano ebio al || muy alto y muy
potentissimo inuictissimo || señor don Carlos em-
perador semper agusto y rey dspana || ño señor,
enla qual estan otras cartas y relaciones que- ||
los capitanes Pedro de aluaredo e Diego godoy
embia || ron al dicho capitan Fernardno cortes. ||

Colophon:

Fue impressa la presente carta dere || laciõ delas
Indias: enla metropolitana || ciudad de Valencia
por Geor || ge costilla Acabose a xij. || dias dl mes
de Ju || lio año de || mil. d.xxbj. ✠ años.†

* * Folio, twenty-six unnumbered leaves, including the title, on the verso of which the text begins; double columns; b in eights.

(Providence Private Library. Only copy known.)

Second edition of D (No. 135).

Direct references: { *Bibliotheca Browniana*, page 14, No. 47.
Stevens' *American Bibliographer*, page 85.
BRUNET, Vol. II, col. 312.

* We find in GRAESSE (Vol. III, p. 93) on the authority of one of the Butsch catalogues, "Glareanus, Hen. Loritus—De geographia liber I. Basil. 1526. in 4°." This edition of 1526 is not mentioned in any other work, nor have we yet succeeded in finding it in any collection. The edition of 1527 (*infra*) is considered the first; Kloss calls (Catalogue No. 1727) that of

1528 (*infra*) "Ed. II," while the *Athenae Rauricae* (p. 251) says of a Franckfort edition of 1533 "ab ipso auctore tertio recognitus."

† *Anglicè*: The present Epistolary Relation about the Indies was printed in the metropolitan city of Valencia by George Costilla, and finished July 12th, 1526. The rest as in D.

Fig. 10: Entry for Cortés, *Quarta relacio* 2nd ed., in Henry Harrisse, *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima: A Description of Works Relating to America Published between the Years 1492 and 1551* (New York: Philes, 1866), 254. Image source archive.org.

hesitated to do what every one must do who wishes to reach the bottom of this subject": "I pulled off my gloves and coat and descended into trade." What is more, Stevens continues, through his efforts in the trade "probably nine-tenths of the rare books in the three best libraries described by M. HARRISSE were collected, described and supplied to their present possessors by me."⁹⁵ Having defended his occupation, Stevens turns a critical eye towards HARRISSE's ideal of "abnegation," declaring that it seems to consist in "a total denial of any merit in his predecessors or fellow-labourers, especially if they be booksellers."⁹⁶ After this opening salvo, Stevens turns to the deficiencies in HARRISSE's work itself. While "the book at bottom is not a bad one," Stevens allows, "M. HARRISSE quotes largely at second-hand, and omits to mention the books most used. His general and particular scholarship is lamentably deficient, his pedantry and plagiarism manifest, his want of courtesy to predecessors and fellow-laborers . . . apparent throughout."⁹⁷

Privately, Stevens explained to Lenox that he was particularly upset not only by HARRISSE's general lack of acknowledgement but also by what he suspected was direct plagiarism of the privately printed bibliography of Cortés prepared in 1852, which Stevens had lent to HARRISSE's patron Samuel L. Barlow. Stevens wrote: "He omits me entirely in his index & seems to spite me as much as he has stolen from me. I lent to Mr. Barlow my privately printed notes on Cortes & HARRISSE seems to have stolen (without any allusion to the favor from me) almost all that is good for any thing in his Cortes."⁹⁸ Stevens copyrighted his next major catalogue, the 1870 *Bibliotheca Historica*, explaining in the introduction that he did so "that he may not be guilty any longer of the indiscretion of planting his corn where the crows will pull it up."⁹⁹

95. Henry Stevens, "American Bibliography," *The Athenaeum* no. 2032 (6 October 1866): 434-35, 434.

96. Stevens, "American Bibliography," 434.

97. Stevens, "American Bibliography," 435.

98. Stevens to Lenox, London, 20 October 1866, Box 4, Folder 20, JLP-NYPL. It is beyond the scope of this article to determine the validity of Stevens's claims. At least in the case of the entry under consideration here, Stevens's accusations of plagiarism seem unfounded. As we have seen, there are no major differences between the Valencia Cortés entry in Stevens's *Life and Bibliography of Cortes* and the entry in Stevens's *American Bibliographer*, which HARRISSE had credited.

99. Stevens, *Bibliotheca Historica*, iv.

A "BIBLIOTECTURAL" BOOKSELLER

While, in a bibliographical sense, Stevens's legacy has been uncertain, from the perspective of library formation it is significant. Justin Winsor recognized booksellers who had made "special exertions in the amassing of Americana" as a "class of practical bibliographers whose labors every student is bound to acknowledge." First in this class—and "most conspicuous"—he placed Henry Stevens, whose "vigilance" helped the British Museum amass its "magnificent store of Americana" and aided in the "creation of the great American private libraries in this department."¹⁰⁰

Stevens himself often framed his life's work as the formation of great libraries. In his dedicatory note to John Carter Brown in the 1870 *Schedule of Nuggets*, Stevens coined the remarkable term "bibliotectural"—after "architectural," with the original Greek *tecton* meaning builder or mason—to describe himself. Imagining future visitors to Brown's "beautiful library," or readers of "Mr Bartlett's excellent catalogue of it," Stevens trusts that, "should it be asked what has this bibliotectural GMB [Green Mountain Boy, a reference to Steven's home state of Vermont] done?", the answer will be, "circumspice"—look around you. Stevens then encapsulates the relationship between bookseller and collector—between his life's work and Brown's library—in a single evocative line: "In this labour of love, this journey of life, his tracks often became your tracts, his labours your works, his libri your liberi."¹⁰¹

Stevens framed his relationship to Lenox's library in similar terms. He dedicated the first edition of *Recollections of James Lenox*—a tribute to Lenox after his death, and a memoir of the decades Stevens spent as his bookseller—to George H. Moore, an old acquaintance who had become the librarian of the Lenox Library when it became a public institution. Reflecting on their introduction many years earlier by Stevens's first major client, Peter Force, Stevens finds it fitting that "[n]ow he is in charge of many thousands of the rare books that passed through my hands as told in this volume." He concludes: "LONG MAY HE HAVE CHARGE OF THEM."¹⁰²

While Stevens's livelihood—and much of his accomplishment in transferring the material history of the Americas from the Old World to the

100. Winsor, "Americana," 325.

101. Stevens, *Schedule of Two Thousand American Historical Nuggets*, ii.

102. Stevens, *Recollections of James Lenox*, xxxiv.

New—depended in large part on wealthy collectors like Lenox and Brown, he was from the beginning of his career also a strong advocate for the creation of public libraries, both in the United States and in Britain. In 1849, he was invited to testify before a Parliamentary committee on the establishment of public libraries in Britain, and his testimony contributed to the passing of the 1850 “Public Libraries Act.”¹⁰³ He often framed his commercial activities as ultimately directed towards the establishment of public institutions. In the 1861 auction catalogue based on his *Historical Nuggets*, speaking as a resident of London, Stevens expressed his hope that the collection might “help to fill many chasms in the shelves of more than one of our own public Libraries.”¹⁰⁴

He frequently expressed the same sentiment about libraries in the United States. In his *Bibliotheca Historica*, an 1870 auction catalogue of a rather “miscellaneous” collection, Stevens insists that it is “just the collection by its dispersion to help fill important gaps in public and private libraries.” “Incomplete in itself,” he explains, “it will go far toward completing others.”¹⁰⁵ He ends this explanatory note with a familiar jeremiad for better public libraries in the United States, a refrain repeated incessantly throughout the nineteenth century. While historians are now forced to “procure for themselves these thousand-and-one expensive out-of-the-way helps,” early and rare sources relating to American history “should belong to the public, and should be collected rather than the common every-day ones, if all cannot be had.”¹⁰⁶

Ultimately, Stevens’s legacy is a “bibliotectural” one. In his summation of Stevens’s importance to the mid-century trade, Reese points to two things: “he did more than anyone to transform the market in Americana into one dominated for a time by wealthy collectors, and he swelled the trans-Atlantic trickle of material to a steady stream.”¹⁰⁷ The conjunction of the two is crucial, because it gestures towards another insight: it was the first transformation that enabled the second. Obadiah Rich had seen this quite clearly in the years after the first great sale brokered by Stevens; at a moment

103. Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, 132–33.

104. Stevens, *Bibliotheca Americana*, vi.

105. Stevens, *Bibliotheca Historica*, ix, x.

106. Stevens, *Bibliotheca Historica*, x, xi.

107. Reese, *Collectors, Booksellers, and Libraries*, 71.

in which public institutions could not compete with wealthy private collectors, Brown and Lenox had enabled him to dispense with a collection he had built over decades while keeping it largely intact. In an 1848 letter to Brown, Rich explained:

As my whole life has been devoted to collecting books relating to America, and always with the view of promoting the formation of one or more complete collections in the United States, I shall have much pleasure in using my best efforts to make yours one of them.¹⁰⁸

Stevens harnessed the purchasing power of collectors like Lenox and Brown and used it to form “complete” collections. And by the final decades of the nineteenth century, both of these private libraries had become public institutions with the establishment of the Lenox Library in 1870 and the John Carter Brown Library in 1901.¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

Stevens’s place in the *Bibliotheca Americana* tradition is perhaps best encapsulated in the distinctive headpiece that appears in the proof sheets that would become *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* (see fig. 11). Unlike the more conventional decorative headpiece and initial featured in the work’s introduction, which were likely from Chiswick Press’s regular stock, the first page of the “Catalogue” proper features a distinctive headpiece that is clearly custom-designed. Stevens had become acquainted with Charles Whittingham of the Chiswick Press at the First International Exhibition in London in 1851, and the press printed his account of the event later the same year. Many of his subsequent publications, including most of those discussed here, were also privately printed at Chiswick.¹¹⁰ An early proponent of the fine printing revival, Chiswick revived traditional typefaces and

108. Rich to JCB, London, 10 January 1848, Box 1, Folder 13, BFRL-JCBL.

109. See Harry Miller Lydenberg, *History of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1923), and Lawrence C. Wroth, *The First Century of the John Carter Brown Library* (Providence, RI: The Associates of the John Carter Brown Library, 1946).

110. Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, 92, 140; George Manville Fenn, *Memoir of Benjamin Franklin Stevens* (London: Printed at the Chiswick Press for private distribution, 1903), 68. Stevens’s brother, Benjamin Franklin Stevens, would go on to marry Charles Whittingham’s daughter and become a partner in the press in 1865.

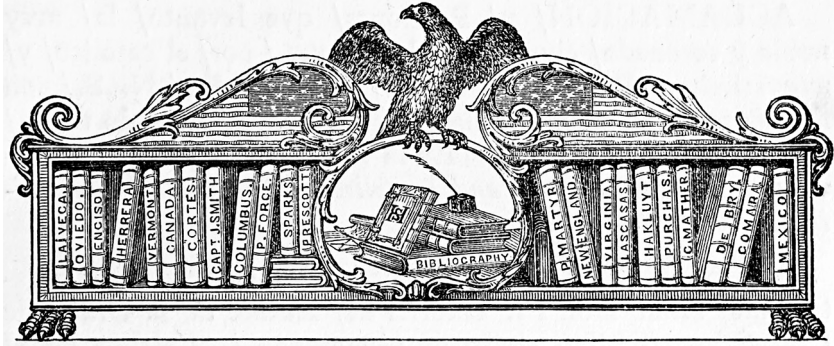


Fig. 11: Detail, “Bibliography” headpiece, from first page of *Stevens’s American Bibliographer* 1, no. 1, Z1207 .S84, JCBL. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

had an extensive stock of ornaments and initials based on designs from the early days of printing.¹¹¹ Stevens employed these ornaments and initials widely in his various works, and privately published a series of reprints in a revived black letter type in the mid-1850s.¹¹² The many iterations of proof sheets Stevens was producing in 1852–54 were all printed at Chiswick, and the “Bibliography” headpiece first appears in the revised and bound proof sheets presented to Brown and Lenox in March 1853. It seems likely that during this early period of association with Chiswick, as Stevens began to draw on their general stock of ornaments, initials, and typefaces, and to produce his own facsimile reproductions, he custom designed this very specific headpiece for his eventual *Bibliographia Americana*.

In it, we see a cabinet, a *Bibliotheca*, which is marked as a US library with the flag and eagle. Its contents further mark it as a collection formed by an American, since it includes the typical range of works sought by collectors in the United States: canonical early works of discovery and exploration, including Columbus, Cortés, Las Casas; annals of North American colonies and eventual states, such as Vermont, Virginia, and New England; and nineteenth-century compilers and historians, like Peter Force, Jared

111. See Janet Ing, “A London Shop of the 1850s: The Chiswick Press,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 80, no. 2 (1986): 153–78, 162.

112. See Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, 170–73, 312.

Sparks, and William Hickling Prescott, who used all these sources to re-write New World history as the prehistory of the United States. In the middle of this *Bibliotheca* sits Bibliography, the force that organizes and gives meaning to these miscellaneous, jumbled works; and upon the foundation of bibliography sits a particular work marked with Stevens's initials, in an overlapping monogram he used frequently in his invoices. This cabinet encapsulates the three simultaneous meanings of *bibliotheca*: the collection of books, the physical space that houses them, and the bibliography or catalogue that structures them and gives them meaning.

In the central panel, a pen sits at the ready, and beyond the initialed book is what appears to be a scroll, and, closer to hand, an envelope. The envelope recalls Stevens's extensive correspondence, most of which was conducted in his role as a bookseller. However, this correspondence was also a site of bibliographical exchange and scholarship. The envelope thus suggests Stevens's positioning as a bibliographer in—and of—the world, gesturing towards the material process of bibliographical production.

In his 1870 *Bibliotheca Historica*, Stevens articulated a quasi-mystical vision of the effect of a finally complete American library for the understanding of history: "Bring all these books, maps, and languages together, and the sun will rise. We shall then ascertain our historical bearings, and know whither and how far we have drifted these four hundred years."¹¹³ The cabinet suggests the potential for such a unity, for the convergence of a nation's identity, its history, its great libraries, and its bibliography, and Stevens's own life work sits at this nexus.

But in Stevens's headpiece, this work is far from complete. There are many gaps between the books in the cabinet, suggesting that there is still much to be done to form a complete library. And the books that are present have not been put into any kind of discernable order. The dual effort needed to complete the *Bibliotheca*, then, is to fill the gaps, and to order the books to make them usable. The central panel explicitly focuses on the second task, Bibliography, but the envelope in the background perhaps recalls Stevens's simultaneous contributions to the first effort, of completing an American library that could then serve as the basis of a truly comprehensive bibliography.

113. Stevens, *Bibliotheca Historica*, xii.

It was Joseph Sabin who finally realized the vision of a monumental Americanist bibliography. In May 1859, Sabin had issued a prospectus for an "American Bibliographer's Manual," or "A Bibliographical Dictionary of All Books Relating to America," in the *Historical Magazine*.¹¹⁴ In nearly every particular, it corresponded to the work Stevens had proposed a decade earlier. The first part of the *Dictionary of Books Relating to America* was issued in January 1867; not only did it borrow from the conceptual framework of Stevens's *Bibliographia Americana*, but it also seems to have borrowed from its visual logic. The paper wrapper of the first part of Sabin's *Dictionary* features a strikingly similar headpiece (see fig. 12).¹¹⁵

It also takes the shape of a cabinet, albeit a more abstract one, and reproduces the flag panels flanking an eagle. Sabin substitutes an armorial device he also used as a publisher's ornament and book trade insignia; it depicts a figure planting a tree and the motto "Spe et Labore," or "faith and labor." The most significant departure, however, is that the books are gone—the cabinet has instead become an empty space to be filled with running part numbers and alphabetical ranges for each successive issue. While in Stevens's headpiece, the gap between the bottom of the cabinet and the horizontal line upon which it rests suggests a floor, lending a sense of realism to the design, Sabin's headpiece makes this gap more abstract, a blank space to hold text. It is here that he places the overarching title of the work: "BIBLIOTHECA AMERICANA."

While Sabin's headpiece is an emblem of a work and serves as a container for the changing contents of each part, Stevens does not include the title of the *Bibliographia Americana* in his headpiece. The more general "Bibliography" is the central unifying term and mission statement, perhaps because, for Stevens, the nature of the books that surround it is self-evident. Stevens's headpiece is at once more general and more specific than Sabin's. It represents not a single work, but a life's work; at the same time, it depicts this work in concrete detail.

114. Joseph Sabin, "Prospectus of an American Bibliographer's Manual," *The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America* 3, no. 5 (May 1859): n.p.

115. Joseph Sabin, *Bibliotheca Americana: Dictionary of Books Relating to America*, Part I (New York: Joseph Sabin, 1867).

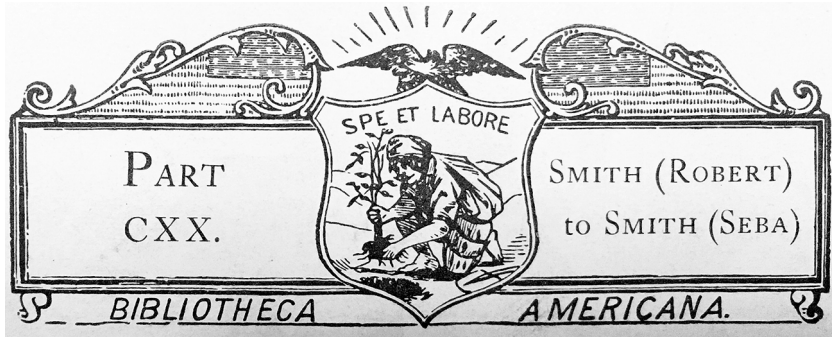


Fig. 12: Detail, "Bibliotheca Americana" headpiece. Beginning in 1867, it appeared on the front paper wrappers of each part of Joseph Sabin's *Bibliotheca Americana: Dictionary of Books Relating to America*. Here, the number and alphabetical range correspond to part 120, issued in 1928 under the direction of Wilberforce Eames. Wilberforce Eames papers, Box 9, Folder 3, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, Tilden Foundations.

While the *Bibliographia Americana* was never completed, Stevens continued to use the headpiece periodically over the next three decades. It appeared in his *Schedule of Nuggets* (1870), and finally, the year before his death, at the head of his *Catalogue of the Historical and Bibliographical Works of Mr. Henry Stevens of Vermont* (1885).¹¹⁶ The same year, Stevens and his son announced that they were beginning a second series of the *Historical Nuggets* and issued two parts. The introduction to the first presents it as "one more attempt to gratify our surviving love of accuracy and fulness in scientific bibliography, in this department, but without any pretensions to a complete registration of *all* the books relating to America."¹¹⁷ Here, Stevens seems to have let go of the totalizing vision of a bibliography that could instantiate a national library, history, and identity. The headpiece that symbolized that vision, however, was the ornament chosen to sit atop the *Catalogue of the Historical and Bibliographical Works*, a twelve-page summary of Stevens's life work in the form of twenty-seven

116. Henry Stevens & Son, Catalogue no. 1, new series, *Catalogue of the Historical and Bibliographical Works of Mr. Henry Stevens of Vermont* (London, 1885).

117. Henry Stevens and Henry Newton Stevens, introduction, *Historical Nuggets* Second Series vol. 1 (London, 1885), vi.

enumerated publications. If the headpiece above signifies his life's ambition, the works below can be seen as its true realization: not pure bibliography, the monumental *Bibliographia Americana*, but the ongoing process of answering letters and making catalogues and filling shelves that enabled the development of the *Bibliotheca Americana*.¹¹⁸

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