

Miss Wilcox's Book Emporium

There were many bookstores that handled ~~The Mosher Books~~ for resale, especially marketing their holdings around the holiday season. Larger and/or well known establishments as far apart as Brentano's and Lord & Taylor of New York City, and Hatchards of Picadilly (London) were part of Mosher's retail network, as were other establishments in Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Memphis, Chicago and Minneapolis. Smaller outlets like William Doxey's Bookshop (at the sign of *The Lark*) in San Francisco offered Mosher's wares, and even Paul Elder of the same city, as one of Mosher's West Coast agents--along with W. Irving Way of Los Angeles--, included the Mosher Books in his jewelry cases reserved for finer Arts & Crafts material.⁽¹⁾ Now a new shop in one of the most unexpected places has come to light, in the rough and tumble coal mining-country of Scranton, Pennsylvania of all places.

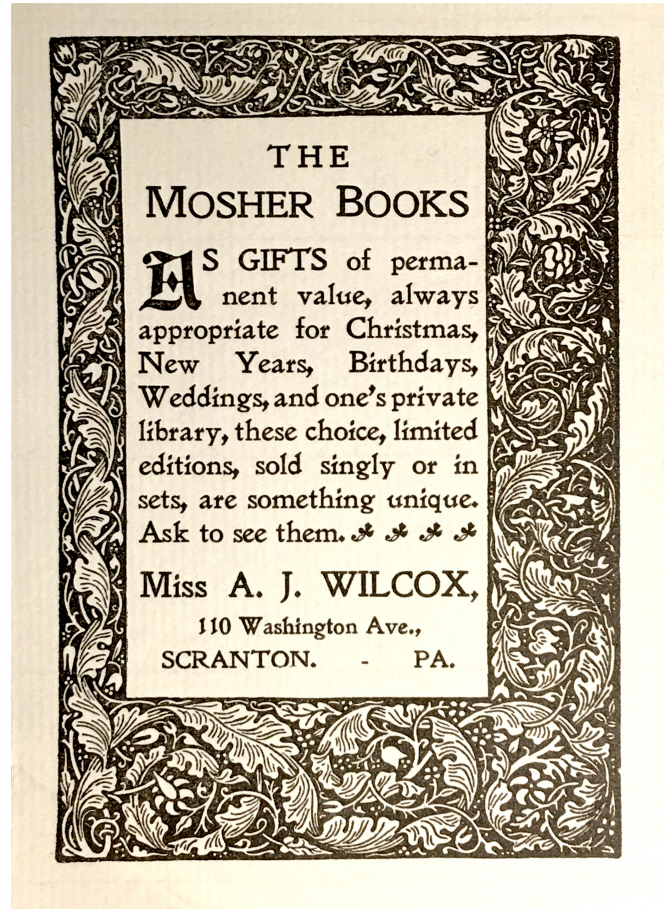
How I found out about this is an interesting tale of acquisition in its own right. I had been corresponding with Bruce Garland in New Jersey, a collector of George Gissing among other things. We used to exchange phone calls and emails, but Bruce and I had not written to one another for several years. I had been on the Internet in October 2015 and noticed a book with a letter from Thomas Bird Mosher loosely laid into Bliss Perry's revised second edition of *Walt Whitman--His Life and Work* (Boston & New York, Houghton, Mifflin, 1906). I immediately contacted the dealer, David Aronovitz of the Fine Book Company in Rochester, MI, to order the book and letter but couldn't believe my ears. It had already been SOLD, even though I had just received the newly listed notification. I asked Aronovitz if he would kindly forward an email from me to the buyer thereby protecting the his buyer's confidentiality, but hoping that at least I'd get a letter transcription from the buyer. Then I waited, and received a responding email from none other than Bruce Garland. What goes around comes around. He had the book with its March 19, 1909 letter and was willing to work on a trade if I wanted the material for the collection. He asked if by chance I had a copy of *Books and the Quiet Life* (Mosher, 1914). I had two Van Gelder copies, but what he wanted even more was a copy of Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Mosher, 1921), one of 25 printed on Japan vellum which also included a signed card by Mosher. To the pile I added a Mosher catalogue quoting George Gissing, and asked him to consider a trade. He did, and we each sent one another a package that very day. Both were pleased with our respective treasures.

The Perry book on Whitman was stuffed with critiques of the book, as well as a letter from Horace Wentworth to Gustav Percival Wiksell about Perry's book and delighting in Traubel's criticism. The other enclosed letter from Mosher was to Horace Traubel (with original mailing envelope) is quite frank in its criticism, including a remark about Perry trying to show that Walt Whitman's style was stolen from a "poor bitch of a book-maker" and discusses "false analogies that self constituted and constipated critics point out: this [Perry's book] being one of them!" All great congruent and to have received for the Mosher collection. You may ask, however, what's all this to do with the Miss Wilcox of this essay's title? Well I was getting to that. You see, it was this reintroduction between us two collectors that lead to yet another pleasurable exchange which ended up again replenishing our respective collections. In the end, Bruce got yet another Mosher catalogue he wanted, a Van Gelder copy of the *Henry Ryecroft*, and a nice copy of the *Books and the Quiet Life*, only this time #25 of 25 printed on Japan vellum for which I charged Bruce a nominal fee. And what did I receive in return? A small grouping of material from Miss A. J. Wilcox of Scranton PA. So now we have finally taken the domino-falling trip down to the real subject of this essay, the Wilcox ephemeral material.

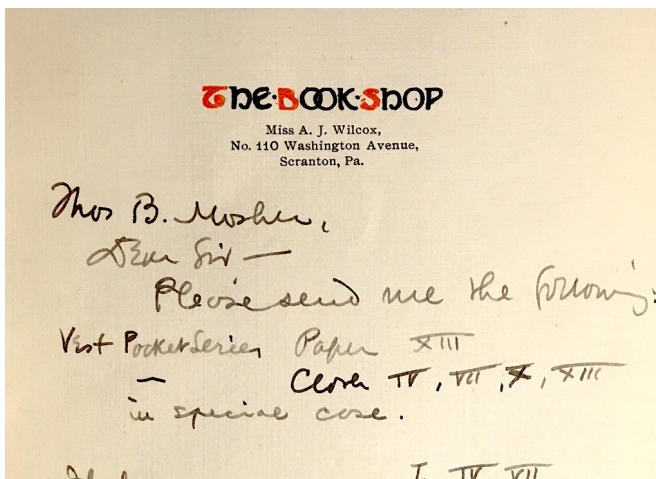
Scranton of the early part of the twentieth century was a part rugged, part affluent place. Located in the great northern anthracite coal mining field of Pennsylvania, the largest reserve in the then known world, Scranton grew with accompanying railroads built to move that coal and supported industries like the Lackawanna Steel Company. So along with the influx of immigrants, a well-to-do class of people emerged. According to the U. S. Census, by 1900 Scranton's population was just over 102,000, and

beautiful homes of Victorian architecture arose in two of the city's sections. It was in this milieu that Miss Amanda J. Wilcox set up her book store. Starting on the third floor of the Commonwealth Building, in 1906 she moved to a ground floor shop at 110 Washington Avenue.⁽²⁾ She sold standard and choice books, art books, limited editions, gift books, current fiction, seasonal greeting cards, calendars, and Arts & Crafts novelties—creating a book emporium if you will. In March 1905 she started to send out a monthly list of new books that came into the shop. In an ad for *The Scranton Republican* (Sept. 25, 1905, p. 25) an article entitled “THE BOOK SHOP” about her first location reads:

A stranger judging a city's literary attainments would naturally visit the principal book store of that city and be helped in his estimate by what he found there. Such an experience tried here could not fail to reflect credit on the residents of Scranton. Located at 314 and 315 Commonwealth building, over the Sanderson Pharmacy is a book store of the highest class, conducted by Miss A. J. Wilcox. A choice line of books, fine binding and best editions are shown. Standard authors, poets, novelists, histories, biographies, etc., are kept in stock with many specialties, the latest fiction and current books the stock being large and diversified. Miss Wilcox is a bright young lady, well read, and adapted to this business. The Book Shop was opened by her at the above number in October, 1904, and it has already developed a large trade, and stands high in book supplying circles.

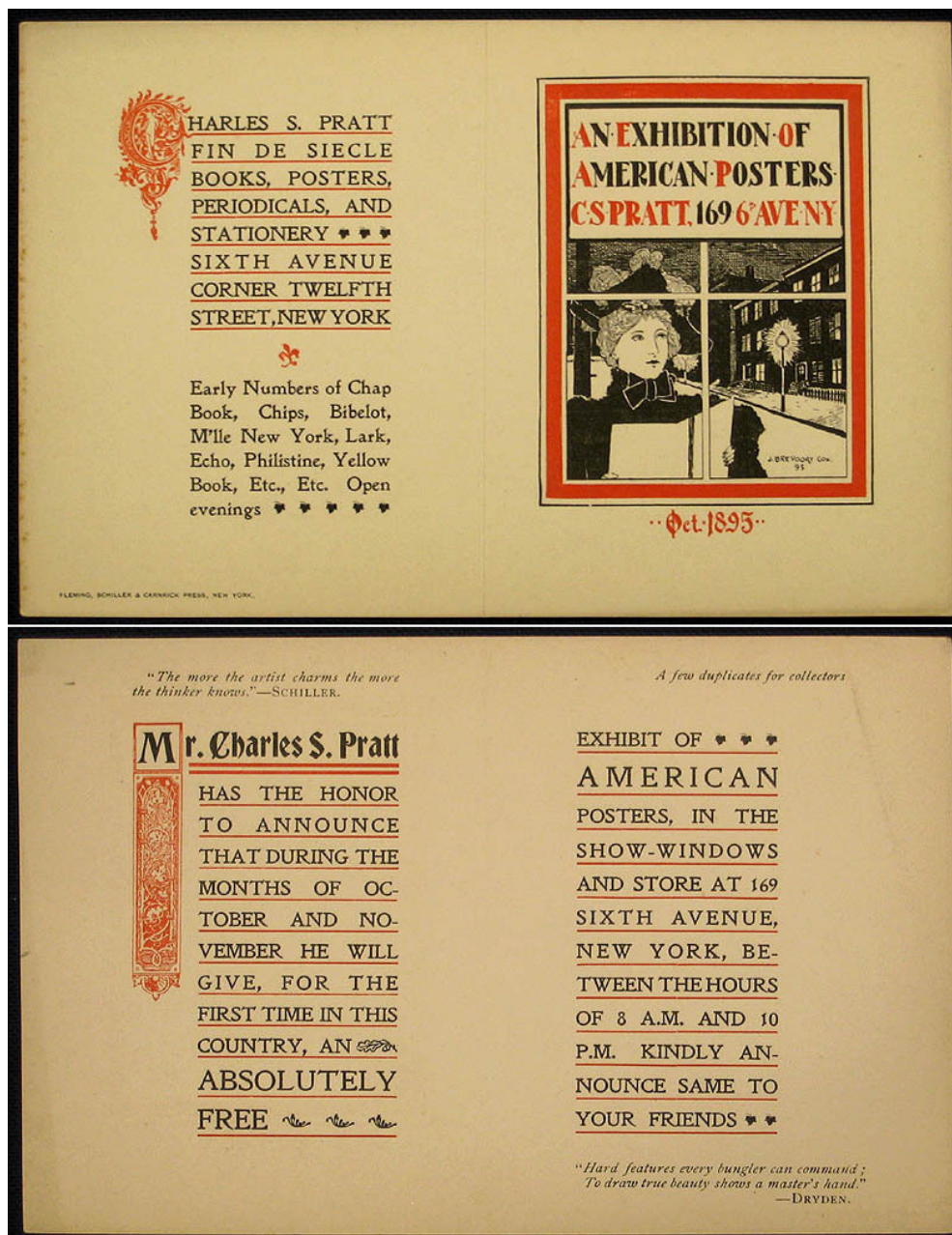


In a few years she moved from Washington Ave to Linden Street (*The Scranton Republican*, Sept, 25, 1912, p. 7). An ad in *The Scranton Truth* (Dec. 18, 1909, p. 5) stated “BOOKS Never So Attractive / Never before have we had so attractive books as now. We cordially invite all our old customers and all who appreciate good books to inspect our stock. THE BOOK SHOP / Carter Bldg. Old Linden Street.” so she was at Linden Street at least from 1909 onward.



The Mosher Books were included with her offerings. Mosher would print and distribute holiday announcements for his retail outlet customers, and included in the Bruce Garland offering was one of these 3 1/4" x 4 1/2" ads (see above) which Miss Wilcox certainly slipped into her mailed lists to her customers. There is also a 1907 catalogue of *The Mosher Books*, the back cover of which is peppered with her penciled notes on what to order, and then last, but not least, a brief order on THE BOOK SHOP letterhead to Thos. B. Mosher requesting numerous publications to be

sent. It is not known if this order was for her own self, or for other customers, and although there is no date, analysis of the order conforms with Mosher's Oct. 1907 offerings. The only other bookstore orders I've ever managed to acquire involves a much more extensive archive of nine letters from Mosher to the Sixth Avenue, New York City publisher/bookseller, Charles S. Pratt, regarding his orders of Mosher's books for resale. These letters were discussed in the September 2006 issue of *Endpapers*, but what wasn't covered, is the now newly acquired 1895 poster exhibition card issued by Pratt, on which he also indicates that he has for sale, "Early Numbers of Chap Book, Chips, Bibelot, M'lle New York, Lark, Echo, Philistine, Yellow Books, Etc., Etc." The card advertisement in pristine condition appears below:



Footnotes

- (1) Gordon, Ruth I. Paul Elder: Bookseller-Publisher (1897-1917): A Bay Area Reflection. Unpublished dissertation. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, 1977, p.36.
- (2) *Geyer's Stationer*. A Weekly Devoted to the Interests of the Stationary, Fancy Goods and Notion Trades (New York & Chicago. August 30, 1906, p. 5, and in *Publisher's Weekly* for August 25, 1906, p. 410. Also see the *International Directory of Booksellers and Bibliophile's Manual...* edited by James Clegg, 1906, p. 192.

Philip R. Bishop
11 January 2016