

## “Princes may compete for, but only Huntingtons can buy”

(Being a sequel to “Take that Mr. Quinn!”)

I’ve returned from what turned out to be a very successful November 2011 book show in Boston. I did extremely well on the selling side, but bought only one book on the buying side—but what a book! I no sooner completed the article on acquiring the 29<sup>th</sup> printed-on-vellum book for the Mosher Collection (*In Praise of Omar*), than once again it happened... the same sort of thing occurred in Boston where the book found me and not the other way around. True, I’m at least positioning myself as a collector in the most advantageous of spots, a large book show—and in this case two shows over the same weekend--, but these stellar Mosher books being offered to me in such a short period is a bit unusual. Maybe the ghosts of T. B. Mosher or Norman Strouse are lending a helping hand.

While setting up at “The Castle” in Boston a dealer shouted out to me that I should go to see dealer so-and-so because there’s a Mosher book there limited to just 10 copies. That usually means just one thing: printed on vellum. I wasn’t disappointed. At first the dealer told me he hadn’t gotten to it yet, but after circling a few times thereafter, the dealer finally uncovered the buried book in one of his boxes and we were off to the races. I bought it in record speed, and thereby brought my Mosher-printed-on-vellum count up to 30. But not only that, typographically this particular book is certainly one of the most beautiful books Mosher produced. Several years ago I was approached by Jerry Kelly, the noted book designer and Grolier Club member, as to which Mosher book stood out in my estimation as being the finest specimen of design. I told him that for me there were two: Calvert’s *Ten Spiritual Designs* (1913) and Whitman’s *Memories of President Lincoln* (1912). The former was placed in Kelly’s & Hutner’s *A Century for the Century*, but the *Memories of President Lincoln* will always remain for me the choicest book of all, not only for its design but for its author and content. During 1865-66 Walt Whitman was profoundly moved by Lincoln’s assassination. Whitman had already brought out several editions of his *Leaves of Grass*, but he penned three new poems that expressed his grief over the death of Lincoln whom he greatly admired, including “When Lilacs in the Dooryard Bloom’d” and “O Captain! My Captain.” As late as the appearance of the 1871-72 Washington D.C. edition of the *Leaves* there appeared this fourth poem, “This Dust was Once a Man,” which concluded the suite of memorial poems which were then finally grouped together as “Memories of President Lincoln” in the Boston edition of 1881-82. These poems became immediate classics and generations of students

recited them across the country, as pointed out in the on-line presentation of “A. Lincoln at 200,” a collaborative exhibition by the Newberry Library, the Chicago Museum of History, the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services. (A page from the Italian paper version of *Memories* can be closely scrutinized by going to their website and under “In Memory of Lincoln” clicking on “Honoring Lincoln”.)

Likewise, Whitman’s poems also affected Thomas Bird Mosher to the point that he not only brought out an edition in his serial publication *The Bibelot* (August 1904), but immediately followed that appearance with a special Japan vellum printing in the same year limited to just 50 copies. A 1906 appearance in his Lyric Garland Series (2<sup>nd</sup> edition in May 1912) didn’t quench the fire though. He wanted to issue the *Memories* in the most luxurious form he could muster, and so united his love for Whitman and Lincoln with his own publishing program--with introductions from some of Mosher’s closest friends, all conjoined in the finest typography of a large quarto volume in September 1912. This was to be a high water mark of the Mosher Press, and so without further adieu, here is the book I carried back with me from the Boston show:

Whitman, Walt. *Memories of President Lincoln and Other Lyrics of the War* (Mosher Press, 1912). Copy No. 5 of 10 printed on Roman vellum, bound in Classic vellum, and each signed by the publisher; printed on recto side only. Produced in his finest format in 1912, this is a splendidly large quarto containing Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” “O Captain! My Captain,” “Hush’d Be the Camps To-day,” and “This Dust was Once the Man.” In addition it contains Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, a foreword by Walt Whitman devotee and chronicler, Horace Traubel, and selections from Frederick W. Lehman, John Burroughs, a passage from Lowell’s “Commemoration Ode” and an appreciation by the St. Louis newspaper man and publisher, William Marion Reedy. Mosher’s 1912 book catalogue mentions that “taken as a whole this may be considered one of Mr. Mosher’s choicest productions” and Norman Strouse called it “an outstanding piece of fine printing, little known today and seldom to be found.” Embellished with a rare photo of Lincoln, and with a variety of designs including a large Morrisian “M” on the title page.

The regular edition of this book was printed on Italian handmade paper bound in green stiff “Fabriano” paper boards, limited to 300 copies, themselves a treat to hold and see. The 50 Japan vellum copies are also bound in Japan vellum boards, but the luxurious vellum copies contain Roman vellum leaves that are unusually thick and creamy white. The book’s title is boldly gilt stamped across the top of its classic vellum binding, and the original green silk ties are all present—in fact were never used. From the outside it looks like a Kelmscott

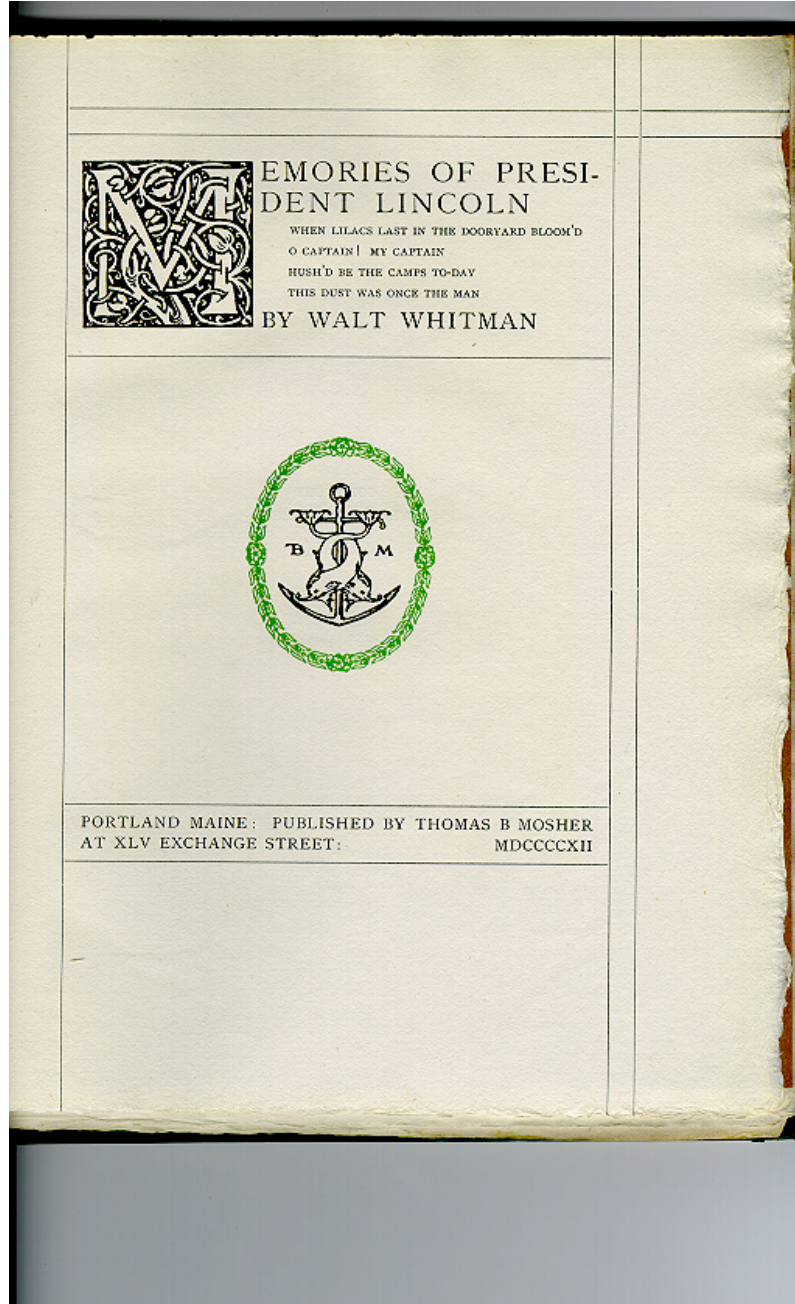
Press or Ashendene production, which is quite fitting and equally handsome as a tour de force production.

This book is a typographical treat. The title page is printed in black and green with a large William Morris initial “M” as was used in the Kelmscott Press edition of the *Defence of Guenevere*. The whole title page is couched within a Chiswick-style network of ruled lines. The book is printed in 14-point old-style Roman type throughout, uses black and green throughout, and each page is printed on the recto side of each leaf. Triangular vine, leaf and bud tail-pieces are of Goudy-like designs, but they also appear in Fletcher’s *English Bookbindings in The British Museum* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1896) clearly suggesting a British origin—quite possibly the design work of Laurence Housman.

The vellum printing of *Memories* is a considerable rarity, e.g., a Boston dealer who specializes in books printed on vellum had never seen a copy until I showed this one. In over thirty years of auction records, *American Book Prices Current* doesn’t even record one copy. Likewise, the extensive Americana Exchange’s records with regard to this title go back to 1945, but none were recorded as being one of the “pure vellum” printings. (I have to interject a word of caution: this large quarto volume is not to be confused with the much smaller one-of-seven vellum copies of *Memories of President Lincoln* aforementioned as published by Mosher in his Lyric Garland Series in 1906.) Henry Poor didn’t have a copy, nor did Gertrude Cowdin, nor Emilie Grigsby, nor did Norman Strouse. These great collectors of the Mosher Books over the years missed having what is perhaps the finest vellum production from the Press. Only John Quinn was recorded as having a copy which appears in his auction catalogue as No. 11024, but mistakenly lists it as “one of 7 copies” which is really the limitation for the 1906 vellum printing [No. 11014 in the auction catalogue]. Note my caution above). Clearly, however, the 1912 edition was the vellum quarto printing. Quinn’s sale by the Anderson Galleries was in 1924, yet in 1925 the American Art Association conducted a sale on May 4 & 5 in which entry No. 397 indicates “ONE OF TEN COPIES PRINTED ON CLASSIC VELLUM” bold-headlined as “**THE FIRST COPY TO APPEAR AT PUBLIC SALE**” which wasn’t the case since the Quinn copy appeared the previous year. No matter though, for it’s probably safe to say that the first two and only two recorded sales were in 1924 and 1925. Although I still have to research the gap from 1925 to 1945 (afterwards from which the Americana Exchange and American Book Prices Current records), I think, given the aforementioned, it’s pretty evident that the 1912 *Memories of President Lincoln* is one really scarce book.

In my opinion, the value of the 1912 large quarto *Memories* is extraordinary, cutting across various collecting interests like fine press, typography, Americana, Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman, books

printed on vellum, and of course the Mosher Press. In his July 15, 1914 letter to the one-time publisher, W. Irving Way (Way & Williams publisher), Mosher himself indicated this is a "piece of Americana that princes may compete for but only Huntingtons can buy."



From my own census records of the books Mosher had printed on vellum, thus far six of the ten copies have been located. Copy No. 1 is at Arizona State University and bears the ownership plate of Anna L. Mosher (Thomas B. Mosher's wife). A copy inscribed to William F.

Gable copy (No. 3) was part of the Vladamire Sokoloff estate. Sokoloff was a faculty member at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and I had a chance to closely overview his collection several years ago. Listed as entry 299 in the William F. Gable Collection auction catalogue, mention is made that this is “one of the most notable volumes ever issued by Thomas Bird Mosher” (Philadelphia: Samuel T. Freeman & Co., May 1932, p. 48). Alas, when I visited Mrs. Sokoloff I neglected to record the contents of the Mosher inscription and her whereabouts are presently unknown to me.

Turning to yet another known copy, copy No. 5 is the Thomas Bell copy. Bell was a noted collector in New York City and his library was sold in 1917. I accessed a copy of his auction catalogue through Meghan Constantinou, the new librarian at The Grolier Club of New York. Together we noted that Thomas Bell assembled an impressive library devoted mostly to Americana (including books on New York) and fine printing, along with books by Burns and Byron, and several on Abraham Lincoln. An important book and manuscript material all relating to Walt Whitman were also among those items offered for sale, and three Japan vellum copies of Old World Series books from the Mosher Press appeared in the catalogues offerings (Anderson Galleries, No. 1305, May 1-4, 1917). Alas, no smoking gun, i.e., no 1912 *Memories of President Lincoln* printed on real vellum appeared in the sale catalogue, but the evidence of Thomas Bell’s bookish predilections all reasonably suggest that this was the collector who once owned copy #5. Bell’s bookplate was designed by Nancy Barnhart, whom I presume was the same American illustrator who did the illustrations to Kenneth Graham's *The Wind and the Willows* (NY: Scribners, 1913) and later some other books like *The Listening Child* (1930), *Betty Lee in Paris* (Doubleday, 1930) and *The Lord is My Shepherd* (Macmillan, 1949). In the case of the vellum *Memories* book, its bookplate carries her signed design showing a young lady seated with a large open book and with a large bell in the background, The motto "Vivo et Servo" appears on a banner just above the woman’s head. Of course, this is the Thomas Bell copy that is now in the Bishop Collection.

What I didn’t say when introducing this newest acquisition is that I already have another copy, that being copy No. 7 which originally was in the Fred J. Board collection. Mr. Board worked in marketing for the Borden Company in New York, eventually becoming vice president of corporate development. As a collector he amassed some 15,000 volumes filling virtually every room in his Stamford, CT house. Board purchased the copy No.7 *Memories* from Frank Glenn of Glenn Books thirty-two years ago (Dec. 13, 1979) when Glenn Books was located at 1227 Baltimore St. in Kansas City, Missouri. Unfortunately no earlier provenance is available and it bears no marks of ownership beyond that of Fred Borad’s note which was confirmed by the present owners

of Glenn Books from the old store's records. I have a couple delightful stories about my two visits to Fred Board's home in Stamford which will remain untold for the present, but only acquired his copy No. 7 from the book dealers who bought the books portion of the Board estate.

Continuing with the known copies, copy No. 8 is at the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan. Copy No. 9 is in the Hanley Collection at the University of Texas--Austin's Harry Ransom Center. So at present the known copies of the ten printed on real vellum are those of Nos. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9. Copies 2, 4, 6, and 10 still remain unlocated. I wonder which "Huntingtons" had those four remaining copies? As for my own holdings, I may just keep both copies, or if the opportunity presents itself, use the Bell copy in trade for one or more vellum Mosher books not currently in the collection. However, should that never come to pass, I have absolutely no problem in exercising the luxury of having both the Board and the Bell copies accompany the Mosher Collection.

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