

# The History of The George M. Fox Collection of Early Children's Books

at the San Francisco Public Library

by George King Fox, December 2012



George Marshall Fox, at camp, with fishing hat  
and attached fishing license, circa 1950.

Photo courtesy of George K. Fox.



*Educate! Amuse! And In Colors!*

An Exhibition of

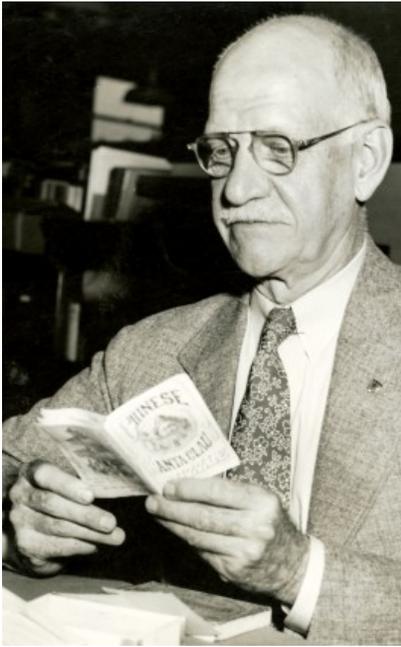
Selections from the George M. Fox Collection of Early Children's Books

December 15, 2012 – March 10, 2013

Skylight Gallery

San Francisco Public Library

Civic Center



George Albert Fox at Milton Bradley Company. Photo courtesy of George King Fox.

## George Albert Fox and the Milton Bradley Company

In 1891, my Grandfather George Albert Fox began his employment as the foreman of the printing department at the Milton Bradley Company, manufacturers and publishers of children's games and school supplies in Springfield, Massachusetts. Rising up through the company to 1917, he was appointed Head of the Game Department, a position he held throughout his life, until his passing in 1946. As a young executive, he maintained constant vigilance over his competitors and closely followed the operations of McLoughlin Brothers publishers in New York City.

McLoughlin began publishing books and games in 1828 and enjoyed prosperity and remarkable growth until the 1907 death of founder John McLoughlin. Following this, the company control fell into the hands of his two sons who were more interested in other investments than running a company, and a few years later the firm was offered for sale. George A. Fox was interested, saw the value of the company and supposedly spearheaded the purchase of the stock, plates, machinery and good will of McLoughlin by Milton Bradley Company in 1920. The materials were brought up to Springfield from Brooklyn and the best of the games were added to the Bradley line. A subsidiary company retaining the McLoughlin name was formed and five Bradley executives were given stock and management responsibilities to oversee the continuation of the publishing business.

In 1923, my father George Marshall Fox joined the Milton Bradley Company, and by this time Bradley was more interested in developing new business and had lost interest in maintaining the old archives of McLoughlin Brothers. In the process of disposition, the collection was divided up between Charles Miller, and my father, George M. Fox; Miller retained much of the original artwork and my Dad retained the books and the original woodcuts. Luckily, a large portion of the artwork found its way into the collection of the American Antiquarian Society in Massachusetts, where it is now preserved for scholarly use.

## The McLoughlin Brothers: The Collecting Begins



George Marshall Fox, circa 1960. Photo courtesy of George King Fox.

Having this collection as a nucleus set my father into the collecting mode, and throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s he added to the collection, largely by purchasing early children's books published prior to the McLoughlin period, as well as some English material, all the while being the good steward of the McLoughlin books.

Copies of invoices here in the San Francisco Public Library's collection show him buying from the major dealers in juvenilia of the day. Among them, Everett Whitlock of New Haven, Charles Tuttle of Vermont and A.S.W. Rosenbach of New York, as well as the many small dealers scattered throughout New England. He became friends with fellow collector Wilbur Macy Stone and miniature book collector James D. Henderson. Their correspondence indicates a certain amount of visitation between them, as well as the occurrence of friendly horse-trading of duplicate material.

During the 1938 New England hurricane and flood, the Connecticut River overflowed its banks and flooded downtown Springfield, and into the basement floor of the Milton Bradley warehouse where the McLoughlin woodcuts were stored in wonderful old dovetailed wooden boxes. The woodcuts floated out like little toy boats and some were destroyed, but fortunately my dad quickly hired a truck with helpers and the majority of the blocks were saved from the floodwaters and removed to the second floor of the garage at our nearby residence on Maple Street.

## The Gift to the Library



George Marshall Fox, circa 1975. Photo courtesy of George King Fox.

In the 1970s, after my father's retirement the book collection and the woodcuts were removed to our Seldom Farm in East Charlemont, Massachusetts, and in the early 1980s the subject was raised about the future of the collection. After considerable discussion it was decided to gift the collection to the San Francisco Public Library, and the New York children's book specialist Justin Schiller was engaged to do the inventory and appraisal. I, of course, was living here in San Francisco, and at that time the Library had recently acquired the Robert Grabhorn Collection on the History Printing and Development of the Book. There was a very active group of people who had started a monthly series of lectures and discussions called The Seminar On The History Of the Printed Book, using the Grabhorn Collection as a focal point for the discussions. Attractive announcements were voluntarily printed by the participants, and it was a wonderful period of conviviality and spirit devoted to the printed book. I realized then that the Fox Collection would make a great addition to the Grabhorn Collection, as it would fill a gap covering the history of color printing in America.

Meanwhile the woodcut collection was sold to dealer Justin Schiller in New York, who pulled proofs of many of the blocks, matched them up with their printed books and sold them largely to institutions. Schiller then sold the remaining part of the collection to Dawson's Book Shop in Los Angeles, and Muir Dawson continued to pull proofs, sell individual blocks and publish a portfolio of these woodcut prints in an edition of thirty, one of which we gave to the Fox Collection.

After the books arrived in San Francisco the library held an exhibition of picture books from the collection with an opening reception on January 24, 1978 in the old Main Library. James Cushman, a librarian at UCLA, presented a lecture on the collection which was followed by a reception. My father passed away in 1985 and in December 1986 the library honored him with an exhibition and a related lecture by James Silverman. Many thanks to Lisa Dunseth and the present curatorial staff for this first retrospective exhibition of the Fox Collection since then.

George King Fox, December 2012