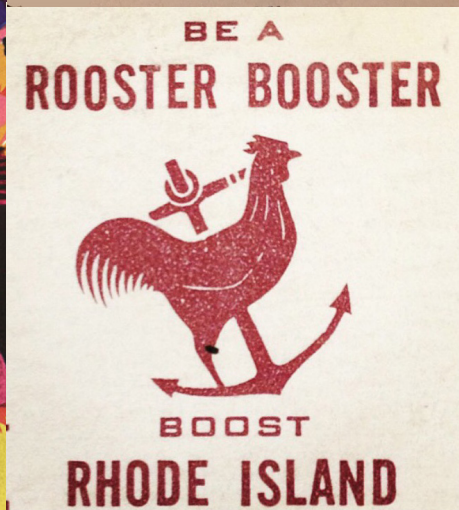




# PROVIDENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY'S SPECIAL COLLECTIONS







## Who We Are & What We Do

Thanks to a century and a half of collecting and the kindness of donors, the Library is home to almost two miles of shelves filled with books, manuscripts, photographs, ephemera, maps and other artifacts representing more than 4,000 years of human history and culture from around the world. We believe that these collections can enrich anyone's life and our mission is to make sure everyone has a chance to access them.

We provide access to these materials in a number of ways including:

- Open hours and research visits
- Personalized classes and tours
- Programs and lectures
- Exhibitions
- Digital access via [provlibdigital.org](http://provlibdigital.org)

We actively encourage our community to interpret, analyze, and use our materials to participate in and understand history. We provide opportunities including:

- Creative Fellowship
- Updike Prize for Type Design
- Community archives consulting



# History of Printing

*"My idea of the collection at Providence Public Library has been entirely different. It would be that the collection was not for scholars, but to make scholars.... My idea of the collection at Public Library would be that it should be the best collection that can be made on printing, but it should be distinctly a democratic collection."*

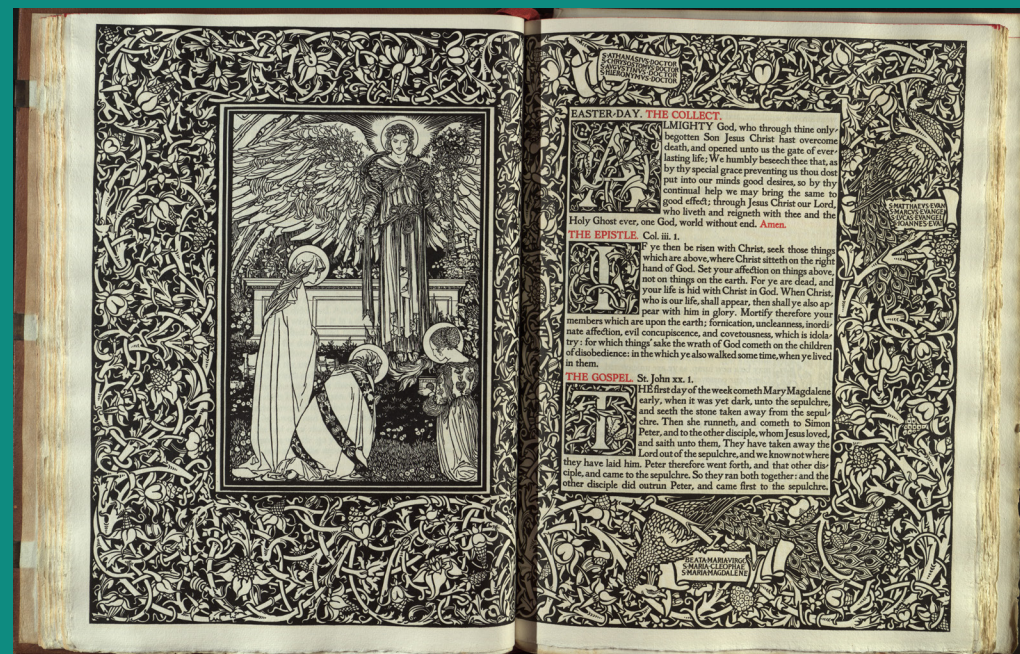
*- Daniel Berkeley Updike in a letter to the library (18 April 1912)*

Early printing manuals and type specimens form the core of the **Updike Collection on the History of Printing**, named in honor of celebrated printer Daniel Berkeley Updike and opened to the public in 1937. The Library had been collecting materials on printing for decades before Updike's

donation, notably from the 1911 sale of "duplicates" from the St. Bride Library in London. This purchase, coupled with Updike's generosity to the Library during his lifetime and continued additions throughout the years, make this one of the best public library collections on printing in the country. Entailing over 8,000 volumes as well as manuscripts and printing ephemera, the collection includes the works of great printers from the 15th

century to the 21st, including Updike's own Merrymount Press, as well as one of the finest collections of typographic specimen books in the country. The collection also includes Daniel Berkeley's personal correspondence.

Current collecting focuses on type and lettering from Eastern Europe and Asia. This collection will be of interest to artists, sign painters, poster artists, type designers, graphic designers, and anyone looking for unusual lettering or even tattoo inspiration.

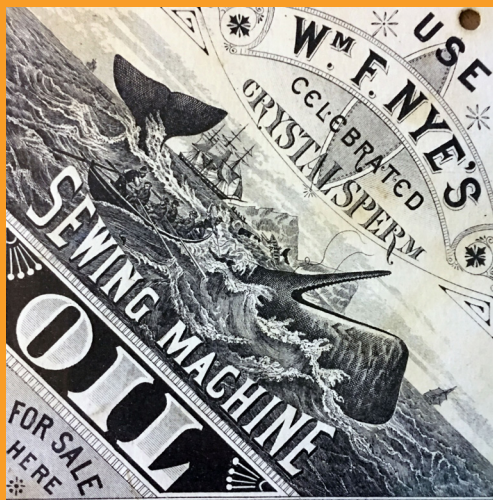




## Whaling & Maritime History

*Farewell old journal I love you well  
Because of by gone days you tell  
And I love you for other reasons too  
One is because you always gave me something to do.  
- From the journal of the Columbus, 15 October 1852*

The **Nicholson Whaling Collection** is one of the nation's most important resources for whaling research. At the heart of the collection is the world's second largest collection of whaling logbooks, recording over 1,000 voyages. Within their pages, the logbooks hold records of whales captured and lost; accounts of shipwrecks, mutinies and other nautical misfortunes; poetry and paintings made by crewmembers in their spare time; and a wealth of data for researchers. The collection was donated to the Library in 1956 by Paul C. Nicholson, son of the founder of the Nicholson



File Company, and it now includes more than 15,000 items, ranging from prints, photographs, scrimshaw and other artifacts to an extensive collection of manuscripts and account books. The earliest materials date from the 1700s and include a contract in



which a Native American whaler agrees to be part of the crew of a 1723 whaling voyage. Hundreds of logbooks document the 19th-century high point of the whaling trade, among them Henry DeForrest's journal of a voyage aboard the ship *William Rotch*. DeForrest was an enthusiastic reader who recorded his and the crew's response to books like the recently-published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This important collection continues to grow, thanks to an endowment provided by the Nicholson family.

Other books about naval architecture and maritime history can be found in the **Brownell Collection**, donated by the widow of Alfred Brownell of Providence, one of the finest ship model builders in America. In order to document the various types of Atlantic coast fishing vessels, Brownell and his students made models of them, and he gave 11 to the Library, beginning in 1947. The models are on display in the Library's Ship Room.





## Rhode Island Collections



The **Rhode Island Collections** are a set of research collections and materials by, for and about Rhode Island and its people. The collection is the largest of PPL's special collections and includes published items

documenting the history and current state of Rhode Island as well as unique archival records and visual materials such as maps, photographs and prints with a focus on the social and cultural history of the City of Providence.

We encourage community members to use Rhode Island Collections materials in creative and scholarly ways to interpret local history and tell new stories about our state.

Within the collections, you'll find published materials that document the full geographic scope, historiography and contemporary state of Rhode Island. These include over 17,000 monographs and pamphlets, maps, atlases and nautical charts, research and government reports, directories, newspapers, magazines and zines, and reference materials.



There are also archival records, manuscript and visual materials with a focus on the social and cultural history of the City of Providence from the 19th to 21st centuries. The strength of these collections includes more than 15,000 photographs and prints; organizational records of activist and community organizations; documentation of the arts community, such as the **AS220 Archives**; records of architectural and urban development; family and neighborhood history; and history of ethnic and immigrant communities.

Many images from the Rhode Island Collections are digitized and available for free on [provlibdigital.org](http://provlibdigital.org).





## Children's Books



Children's books can tell us about childhood through the centuries, but they also showcase some of the most inventive, colorful and creative artistry in book design, and express deeply-held beliefs about topics like race and gender.

Newport socialite Edith Wetmore donated her exceptional collection of 1,850 children's books to the Library in 1955. From medieval manuscripts to first editions of modern classics like *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *The Wizard of Oz*, as well as richly-illustrated children's books from around the world, the **Wetmore Collection** includes some of the most amazing works ever created for young readers. Some, such as a German first edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, are signed by their authors; others are one-of-a-kind works of art, like the hand-illustrated manuscript Walter Crane created for his son, or a hieroglyphic Bible created in the 1400s.

In addition to Wetmore's donation, Special Collections is home to historic illustrated children's books and ephemera that have been transferred from our early circulating collections or received through purchase and donation in later years. One notable area of the collection is books illustrated by **Arthur Rackham**, a collection supported by the generosity of Martha Sherman.



## Art and Architecture

Our art and architecture collections contain beautiful bindings and stunning prints, and a wealth of items that can serve as inspiration, information and source material for creative researchers. The **Nickerson Art and Architecture Collection** is particularly strong in 18th- and 19th-century books on architecture and illustrated books on travel, jewelry, poster design, decorative ornaments, formal and religious architecture. Color lovers will be drawn to pochoir prints in saturated gouache and books showcasing traditional clothing from around the world. Our **Textile Collection** features manuals and directories documenting the textile industries, fabric samples, weaving pattern books and more.



The **Wetmore Illustrated Collection** (our second collection from donor Edith Wetmore) features some of the Library's finest examples of the book arts, including fine printing and binding. Most of the books in the collection are in French and English and date from the turn of the 20th century through the 1930s.

One of our most active recent collecting areas is the art of tattoo. Printed materials date back to 1653, but the focus of the collection is the early age of machine tattooing in the 1890s and early 1900s. Visitors can view colorful tattoo design books and sheets of tattoo flash, black-and-white photographs and marketing ephemera, tattoo design manuscripts from Myanmar, and artifacts like an early tattoo machine in the **Eddie Pofert Collection**.

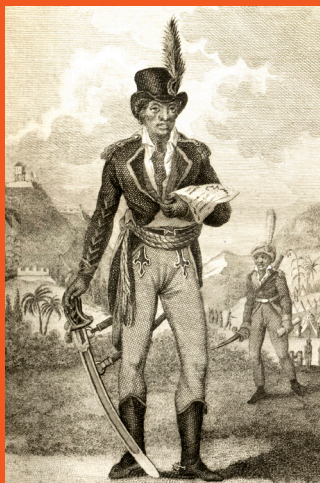






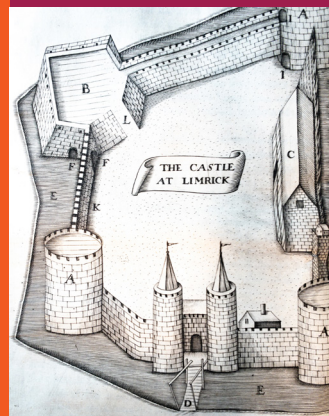
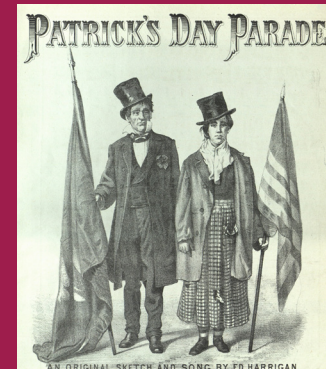
## Civil War & Slavery

Purchased in 1884 from the estate of Providence businessman Caleb Fiske Harris, the **Caleb Fiske Harris Collection on the Civil War & Slavery** contains more than 10,000 books, newspapers, manuscripts, sheet music, photographs and artifacts documenting the institution of slavery around the world, from the 18th century through the American Civil War. The collection includes manuscript letters from Rhode Island soldiers, early biographies of Abraham Lincoln, narratives of enslaved people, thousands of pamphlets, both pro- and anti-slavery, and numerous editions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from around the world.



## Irish History & Culture

The two chief benefactors of our **Potter & Williams Memorial Collection on Irish Culture** — Alfred Williams & George Potter — were both editors at *The Providence Journal*, and both had an abiding interest in Irish history, culture, literature and the struggle for independence. Williams, who was a Library Trustee and a member of the committee that planned the current library building, began collecting books and ephemera during his visits to Ireland in the late 19th century. When he donated his collection to the Library in 1896, it



included hundreds of street ballads printed in Dublin and Cobh. George Potter took an interest in the Irish collection in the 1940s and began writing about it in the *Providence Journal*. He later was instrumental in the Library's acquisition of a number of valuable books, pamphlets and broadsides for the collection including a 1916 Easter Rising broadside titled "Poblacht na h Eireann," often referred to as Ireland's

Declaration of Independence. The PPL copy is one of only three to be found outside of Ireland.





## Games & Magic

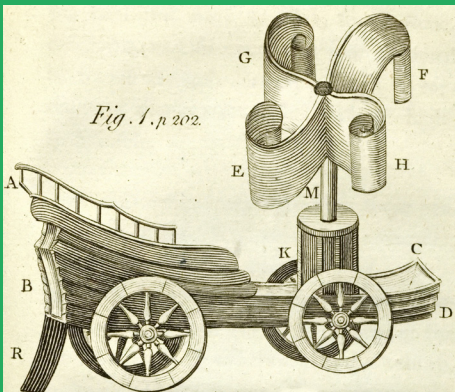
The Library's collection of 1,200 books, periodicals, photographs and ephemera on the topic of stage magic was donated by East Providence native John H. Percival, who was an amateur magician from childhood until his death at the age of 86. Containing secrets to well-known and esoteric magic tricks, magicians' promotional materials, books on mentalism and spiritualism, guides to card tricks, and materials from national magicians' organizations and conferences, the **Percival Collection** offers a fascinating window into mid-century American entertainment and stage



culture. A number of books in the collection are inscribed by their authors, including famous magicians like Houdini and Harry Blackstone.

The Library's **Barney Collection on Whist** and **Hanes Collection on Checkers** are among the only ones of their kind in the country. Walter Hammond Barney's interest in

whist led him to assemble over 500 volumes documenting the game, which was wildly popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. Edward Hanes participated in checkers tournaments and was a regular user of the Library. His collection of books about checkers includes examples from as early as 1572, and a number that were published in Spanish, Italian, Russian, Turkish and many other languages.



## Digital Collections & More

Selected materials from our collections are digitized and made available for free online at [provlbldigital.org](http://provlbldigital.org). We are continually adding to this digital repository. We encourage sharing and use of these digitized items.

PPL Special Collections includes much more in addition to our primary collecting areas! Other topical areas of interest include:

### General Collection

The books in this catch-all collection have come from a variety of places – within the Library, given by donors or purchased for general interest. Major themes include American history, voyages and travel, exploration, natural history, religion and theology, and American and English literature.

### World War I and II Propaganda

This collection includes pamphlets, photographs, posters and other ephemera related to both World War I and World War II. Many of the posters are from the collection of Louis C. Huntoon.

### Updike Pamphlet Collection

Daniel Berkeley Updike began donating material to the library long before the history of printing collection came into being. Most of the books in this collection came from his family's library in Smith's Castle, Wickford.

### Updike Autograph Collection

This miscellaneous collection of manuscripts ranges in date from the 1630s to the middle of the 20th century and includes manuscripts and documents from American presidents (John Adams, James Garfield, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt), figures of the American Revolution (Nathanael Greene, Benedict Arnold, Alexander Hamilton, Marquis de Lafayette) and other historical periods.

### William Arnold Autograph Collection

This collection includes approximately 150 miscellaneous manuscript items relating to Rhode Island history. They include letters and legal documents dating from the 1600s to the 1900s, and the entire collection is available online at [provlbldigital.org](http://provlbldigital.org).

### William H. Edwards Collection on Legal History

This collection, amassed by the former head of Providence law firm Edwards and Angell, focuses heavily on biographies of well-known judges and precedent-setting legal cases.



We encourage you to visit our Special Collections, whether you're researching for personal interest, a class, or creative or scholarly work. Everyone is welcome during our regular open hours or at other times by appointment; if you have a topic in mind, please contact us in advance and we will have materials ready for you when you arrive. For information about open hours, visit [prov.pub/visit-spc](http://prov.pub/visit-spc) or contact us using the information below.

**General Contact Info:**

**(401) 455-8021**

**[special\\_collections@provlb.org](mailto:special_collections@provlb.org)**

**Social Media:**

**Instagram - [@rhodeislandcollection](https://www.instagram.com/rhodeislandcollection)**

**Twitter - [@TheSpecialest](https://twitter.com/TheSpecialest)**

**Blog - [pplspcoll.wordpress.com](http://pplspcoll.wordpress.com)**

For areas of specific interest, you're welcome to contact Special Collections staff directly.

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