The Earliest Extant Australian Imprint, with Distinguished Provenance

ELAINE HOAG

Australia's first printing press and type landed at Sydney Cove in New South Wales in 1788 with the First Fleet of convicts and naval officers under the command of Arthur Phillip. Yet the fledgling penal colony lacked a printer until November 1795 when Governor Hunter (1737–1821) directed convict George Hughes to set up shop behind Government House in Sydney to print official orders. Judge-Advocate of the colony, David Collins (1756–1810), noted in his account:

A small printing-press, which had been brought into the settlement by Mr Phillip, and had remained from that time unemployed, was now found very useful; a very decent young man, one George Hughes, of some abilities in the printing line, having been found equal to conducting the whole business of the press. All orders were now printed, and a number thrown off sufficient to ensure a more general publication of them than had hitherto been accomplished.

Hughes is said to have printed some two hundred government orders between November 1795 and November 1800, yet not one copy has ever been located. In fact, until September 2007, the earliest extant imprints from the press were believed to be “Instructions for the Constables of the Country Districts” and “Instructions to the Watchmen of the Town Divisions,” both dated November 1796, and two playbills dated 8 March 1800 and 8 April 1800 respectively. Theatricals had been held in Sydney before 1800, and a playbill of 23 July 1796 is rumoured to exist, but no copy of this early imprint has ever been found.

3 Australian Dictionary of Biography, s.v. “George Hughes.” The estimated number of these government orders is derived from the number reprinted in The Historical Records of New South Wales, 7 vols. in 8 (Sydney, 1892–1901), while the assumption that the orders were printed rather than issued in manuscript is based on Collins's statement that “All orders were now printed [following Hughes's appointment as printer in November 1795].” For further biographical information on Hughes, consult: Robert Jordan, The Convict Theatres of Early Australia 1788–1840 (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2003), 223–24.
4 John Alexander Ferguson, Bibliography of Australia (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941–69), 1:94–95, 120–21, nos. 245–46, 319–20. Ferguson includes reproductions of the playbills and the “Instructions for the Constables.” No imprints earlier than these four are listed in his Bibliography of Australia: Addenda 1784–1850, Volumes I to IV (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1986). The two broadsides are held at the State Records Authority, New South Wales. The two playbills are held at the Mitchell Library, in the State Library of New South Wales.
Then, in June 2007, in the rare book collection at Library and Archives Canada, an extraordinary discovery was made. Preserved in a scrapbook was a playbill from Hughes’s press dated 30 July 1796—the earliest extant Australian imprint, in a unique copy totally unknown to scholars and collectors. This article describes the playbill and tracks its circumnavigation of the globe as it passed from the hands of its printer, George Hughes, through the various individuals and institutions in Britain and Canada who collected and preserved it, back to its birthplace in Australia.

Tracing the provenance of an obscure piece of ephemera over the course of two centuries poses a significant challenge. Uncertainty remains. But, given some latitude in the dates, the basic line of descent is firm:

George Hughes, printer, Sydney, New South Wales (July 1796)
Philip Gidley King, then Lieutenant-Governor of Norfolk Island (October 1796–97)
George Chalmers, British antiquary and collector, and his estate (1797–1841)
Joseph Lilly, antiquarian book dealer, London (1841)
Dawson Turner, antiquary and collector, Yarmouth, Norfolk, England (1842–53)
George Willis, antiquarian book dealer, London (1853–55)
Library of Parliament, Ottawa, Canada (1855–1973)

George Hughes

George Hughes printed the bill on a small wooden screw press using the same Caslon fount that appears in his other imprints. Its layout is almost identical to that of the playbills of 1800. Measuring 195 x 115 mm, it is printed on the smooth (or "felt") side of a sheet of handmade laid paper, and would have occupied approximately one-eighth of a sheet of foolscap or pinched post, and in either case would have occupied approximately one-eighth of the sheet. The right-hand edge of the playbill exhibits a deckle; the top and bottom edges are neatly torn; the left-hand edge is sharp and appears to have been cut with a blade, possibly by a subsequent owner before mounting. Chainlines are vertical, spaced 27 mm apart. Turning the bill over to

The playbill of 23 July 1796 was reprinted in numerous British magazines, and one of these reprintings is reproduced in: Jordan, The Convict Theatres, fig. 2.

6 E. J. Labarre, Dictionary and Encyclopaedia of Paper and Paper-Making, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 110, 202, 269. Labarre gives the most common size of printing foolscap as 433 x 347 mm (17 x 13.25 inches) while pinched post is 470 x 370 mm (18.5 x 14.5 inches). The playbill measures 195 x 115 mm (7.5 x 4.5 inches).
look at the verso (here, the "mould" side from which watermarks are meant to be read), a portion of the countermark is visible in the lower right-hand corner. It reads "CURTEIS 17." In the full sheet, the first line of the mark almost certainly read "CURTEIS & SONS," a mark used by the Curteis family mill, which manufactured paper in Surrey, England, from the late 1780s until the early 1800s. The "CURTEIS & SONS" countermark appears above the date "1794" when reproduced by Alfred Shorter and above the date "1795" when reproduced by Thomas Gravell. The fact that Curteis paper was exported to New England in the 1790s and 1800s suggests that it could easily have found its way to New South Wales as well.

George Hughes may not have had as much printing experience as George Howe, who would become government printer for New South Wales in November 1800, yet he shows sensitivity in his use of three sizes of type, in the centering of his text, and in the spacing of his large caps. He is familiar enough with his typecase and with printing conventions to use ligatures (such as "fl" in "Hastings" and "fb" in "Catefly" in the cast list). And he makes none of the errors typical of complete amateurs (for example, setting an "n" upside down for the letter "u," and vice versa, substituting the letter "l" for the numeral "1," or confusing and mis-setting "b," "p," "d," and "q").

The playbill of 30 July 1796 is the earliest extant Australian imprint, but it may not have been the first playbill George Hughes printed in New South Wales, for Sydney's first theatre had opened over six months earlier, on 16 January 1796. No playbill for this landmark event has been discovered, nor for the performance held on 4 February of that year. The actors were convicts, the costumes improvised, and admission prices flexible! David Collins noted that tickets cost 1s., or, "in lieu of a shilling, as much flour, or as much meat or spirits, as the manager would take for that sum." The entertainment presented on 30 July featured The Tragedy of Jane Shore (1714) by English dramatist Nicholas Rowe (1674–1718), followed by The Miraculous Cure, a farce written in 1771 by Brownlow Forde based upon Colley Cibber's The Double Gallant (1707). Between the two plays, a comic dance known as The Wapping Landlady was performed, displaying the capers of a fat barmaid and a pair of gullible sailors. George Hughes took the part of one of the sailors.

The newly-discovered playbill offers few surprises to readers familiar with Robert Jordan's landmark study The Convict Theatres of Early Australia 1788–1840 (2003).

8 Ibid., fig. 33.
10 Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1:448. The information on early Australian theatre is from Jordan, The Convict Theatres.
11 Ibid., 1:454.
12 Ibid., 1:448.
13 The dance is the subject of a drawing by English painter Francis Hayman (1708–76) and of a sketch by George Cruikshank (1791–1878) dated 1832.
All the actors who performed on 30 July 1796 are listed in Jordan's work and are known to have been active in the theatre at that time. The performance was held on a Saturday, the favoured date for such events, according to Jordan's research, and the performance followed that of 23 July by a single week, suggesting a frequent performance schedule. Only one class of box seat was offered on 30 July 1796, because the Sydney theatre had not yet been refurbished to include both front and side boxes, as advertised in the two playbills of 1800. Most importantly, the newly-discovered playbill reinforces Jordan's statement that a gap in the documentary evidence of theatre in Sydney does not mean that theatre was suspended during that period, but "represents nothing more than the fragmentary and chance nature of the sources."\(^\text{14}\) It is actually the verso of the playbill rather than its recto that supplies new information about the history of theatre in Australia.

**Philip Gidley King**

Once it left the press of George Hughes, the playbill came into the possession of an officer stationed in the penal colony. The verso of the playbill bears signed annotations in the hand of none other than Philip Gidley King (1758–1808),\(^\text{15}\) who was to serve as third Governor of New South Wales between 1800 and 1806. King's annotations read:

\[
\begin{align*}
1^\text{st} \text{ Play acted at Port Jackson} \\
\text{June 4th 1789} & \quad \text{The Recruiting Officer} \\
1^\text{st} \text{ Play performed at Norfolk Island} \\
\text{December 1793} & \quad \text{Richard 3rd Poor Soldier} \\
\text{PGKing} \\
\text{To George Chalmers Esq}\text{?}
\end{align*}
\]

King's notes confirm a well-known fact: the first dramatic performance in Sydney was of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), on 4 June 1789. His comments on Norfolk Island theatricals, however, supply hitherto unknown information that may serve (temporarily perhaps) to complicate rather than clarify the history of theatre on that island. King's official and personal journals had led Robert Jordan to believe that plays were acted on Norfolk Island by September 1793 and possibly as early as August 1793.\(^\text{14}\) Yet King's notes on the verso of the playbill state that the first performance was not held until December 1793. It is difficult to interpret these


\(^{15}\) Manuscript specialists at the National Library of Australia have verified that these signed annotations are definitely in the hand of Governor King.

The Earliest Extant Australian Imprint

Figure 1. 1796 playbill, verso
three conflicting pieces of information, all from King's own hand. After offering the date of December 1793, King declares that the first plays presented on Norfolk Island were William Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *The Poor Soldier* (1783), an after-piece by John O'Keefe and William Shield.\textsuperscript{17} No play titles had been named in other sources, although Jordan notes that King "in both versions of the journal, writes of the company performing twice in its first month of operation,"\textsuperscript{18} and in a letter of 10 March 1794 King states that performances "only happened once a month & on Publick days."\textsuperscript{19} December would have served as such a month, with Christmas being a public holiday. However, since *Richard III* is a tragedy and *The Poor Soldier* is a comic opera, the two may have been offered the same evening on a double bill. As Jordan notes, such pairings were typical of British and Australian theatre at this time.\textsuperscript{20}

King had probably carried the playbill back to England with him in October 1796, when because of ill health he returned for a brief respite. He certainly recognised the value of the printing press in the colony. While on leave in England, not yet promoted to Governor but still in his position as Lieutenant-Governor of the sub-colony of Norfolk Island, he asked the Home Office for permission to take a press back with him to the island:

> As I can procure a small printing press for six guineas, which will be useful for the quick despatch of necessary orders, etc. (there being one at Port Jackson), I shall be much obliged by the indulgence being extended to Norfolk Island.\textsuperscript{21}

King was also clearly conversant with the theatrical ambitions of the colonists. It is uncertain which of these factors—or both, or neither—was meant to appeal to the intended recipient of the playbill, George Chalmers.

**George Chalmers**

From 1786 until his death, British antiquary and political writer George Chalmers (1742–1825) served as Chief Clerk to the Committee of the Privy Council for the Consideration of All Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations. A fellow of the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries, he published prolifically on a broad range of topics, from politics and economics through literature and history. His extensive collection of books and manuscripts reflected these wide-ranging interests and contained a respectable amount of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drama,

\textsuperscript{17} Shakespeare's *Richard III* may have been presented in Colley Cibber's adaptation, which premiered in 1700.
\textsuperscript{18} Jordan, *The Convict Theatres*, 263.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 38, 103.
\textsuperscript{21} Ferguson, *The Howeis and Their Press*, 19. Ferguson adds that no press appears to have accompanied King back to New South Wales.
along with a large bulk lot of ephemera when it came up for auction in 1841.\textsuperscript{22} However, beyond becoming embroiled in the controversy surrounding William Henry Ireland's Shakespeare forgeries (1797–1800),\textsuperscript{23} Chalmers's writings reveal no special interest in the theatre, and his work on the Committee for Trade and Foreign Plantations focused on America and the Bahamas rather than Australia. He was notorious for soliciting information and material from all sources to document his numerous publications, and he had a reputation for scrupulously consulting primary sources,\textsuperscript{24} but his particular interest in the Australian playbill—an interest of which King seemed confident—remains a mystery.

However, Chalmers was not the only collector in England to whom King sent such material. On 5 March 1803, King wrote to Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1830) transmitting some early Australian imprints to a lady in the Banks household:

The enclosed was neglected to be put up with the Box of despatches. I send it by a private Hand. I hear one of the Ladies wants one of our Printed Notes &c. I have discovered a Collection to be inclosed. We no longer have plays or play bills.\textsuperscript{25}

The "Lady" was Joseph Banks's sister, Sarah Sophia (1744–1818), a passionate collector of contemporary ephemera including broadsheets, visiting cards, engravings, advertisements and playbills. Sarah Sophia bequeathed her collection to her sister-in-law, Dorothea Banks (1758–1828), who in turn donated it to the British Museum.\textsuperscript{26}

It is interesting to note that George Chalmers was himself a lifelong associate of Joseph Banks, particularly through the Privy Council's Committee for Trade and Foreign Plantations—Chalmers being Chief Clerk to the Committee and Banks a

\textsuperscript{22} Catalogue of the Very Curious, Valuable and Extensive Library of the Late George Chalmers ... which will be Sold by Auction by Messrs. Evans (London: Evans, 1841–42).

\textsuperscript{23} Chalmers published An Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers which were Exhibited in Norfolk Street (1797), A Supplemental Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers (1799), and An Appendix to the Supplemental Apology for the Believers in the Suppositious Shakespeare-Papers (1800).


\textsuperscript{25} Philip Gidley King to Sir Joseph Banks, 5 March 1803, "Letter received by Banks from Philip Gidley King," 16 March 1803 (Series 39.074), in Papers of Sir Joseph Banks, http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/banks/series_39/39_074.cfm (accessed 13 November 2007). King's note is difficult to decipher, and the final sentence is especially problematic, although the words "plays" and "play bills" are clear. I am grateful to Paul Brunton, Senior Curator at the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, for help in deciphering the note and for identifying the "Lady."

member of the Privy Council between 1797 and 1803.\textsuperscript{27} Even before that period, the two men had together edited Philip Gidley King's Norfolk Island journal along with that of Governor (then Captain) John Hunter for publication by the London firm of Stockdale in 1793.\textsuperscript{28}

When Chalmers died in 1825, he bequeathed his collection to his nephew, James Chalmers. When the nephew himself died in 1841, his relatives put the collection up for auction.\textsuperscript{29} The sale was divided into three parts, lasted twenty-three days and included 5,772 lots. Lot 1,496 of the second part of the auction catalogue was described as "A most extensive collection of fugitive pieces, chiefly single leaves; believed to be about eleven hundred; in 3 vols." This was the only lot of unidentified ephemera in the sale, and it was purchased by London bookseller Joseph Lilly for 7s 6d.\textsuperscript{30} The playbill was most likely part of the bargain. It was at this sale, then, that the playbill passed from Chalmers's collection into the hands of a book dealer, who would later sell it to the avid ephemera collector and autograph hunter Dawson Turner.\textsuperscript{31}

**Dawson Turner**

Dawson Turner (1775–1858) belonged to a wealthy Norfolk banking family, a fact that financed a range of collecting interests even broader than those of his contemporary and brother Royal Society fellow, George Chalmers. Beyond his professionally-inspired preoccupation with commerce, banking and insurance,


\textsuperscript{28} An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and at Sea 1787–1792 by Captain John Hunter, Commander H.M.S. Sirius: With Further Accounts by Governor Arthur Phillip, Lieutenant P. G. King, and Lieutenant H. L. Ball: Originally Published 1793, ed. John Bach (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1968), vi–xx, quoting a letter from Chalmers to Banks concerning the editing of King's journal. See George Chalmers to Sir Joseph Banks, 22 October 1792, "Letter received from Banks to George Chalmers", 22 October 1792 (Series 72.015), in *Papers of Sir Joseph Banks*, http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/banks/series_72/72_015.cfm (accessed 13 November 2007). The journals were originally published under the title *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island, with the Discoveries which have been made in New South Wales and in the Southern Ocean, since the Publication of Phillip's Voyage: Compiled from the Official Papers, Including the Journals of Governors Phillip and King, and of ... the Voyages from the First Sailing of the Sirius in 1787, to the Return of that Ship's Company to England in 1792, by John Hunter* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1793).

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 212–13.

\textsuperscript{30} Catalogue of the Very Curious, Valuable and Extensive Library of the Late George Chalmers ... Part the Second ... which will be Sold by Auction by Messrs. Evans ... on Monday, March 7 and Five Following Days, 1842 (London: Evans, 1842). The copy microfilmed in the "Goldsmiths-Kress Library of Economic Literature" series is annotated with prices realised and names of buyers, although it is not consistently annotated throughout.

\textsuperscript{31} Naturally there are other possibilities. At the sale, or afterwards in a bookshop, Turner may have purchased a book from Chalmers's library in which the playbill was laid. It is unlikely that Chalmers gave the playbill to Turner before he died in 1825, because Turner had it bound in a volume with a date-span "chiefly of 1842–1845" that contained ephemera he had collected during those years.
Turner avidly pursued botany, art and architecture, local history and palaeography. In addition to books and manuscripts, he collected ephemera of all kinds—much of it contemporary—and had it bound into scrapbooks. As one astonishing example: living in Yarmouth, he had arranged with two printers from that town to send him a copy of every piece of job printing they executed.\(^32\) Such a marked interest in contemporary ephemera in the early nineteenth century was unusual.

Soon after the Australian playbill became part of Turner's collection, he bound it up in a scrapbook, which he labelled "Miscellanies Chiefly of 1842–1845." Indeed, most of the scrapbook items date from the early 1840s, and none is later than 1845, but many of the pieces (like the Australian playbill) bear an eighteenth-century imprint. Evidently the 1842–45 date-range describes the date of acquisition, and, by default, often an imprint date as well, given Turner's mania for collecting contemporary ephemera. The Australian playbill became part of the 1842–45 volume because it was acquired at, or soon after, the 1841 Chalmers sale.

Turner certainly possessed other material from Chalmers's collection, because it is listed as lots 82–89 in the catalogue of the posthumous sale of Turner's own manuscripts.\(^33\) In fact, there is one other curious piece of Chalmers ephemera in the 1842–45 scrapbook itself. It is a morsel of paper (115 x 165 mm) bearing the printed date "September 25, 1798, Parish Clerk's Hall, Wood Street." The text reads:

Sir, you are desired to search your registers for the baptism of Edmond or Edward Spenser, whose mother's name was Elizabeth, from the year 1540 to 1560, and on producing a certificate of the same within one month from the date hereof, shall receive a reward of five pounds to be paid by Mr Chalmers, no. 29, Green Street, Grosvenor Square. [Signed] William Davis, Clerk of the Company.

From the spring of 1787 until 1807, George Chalmers's London address was 29 Green Street, Grosvenor Square.\(^34\) Why was Chalmers so interested in the precise birth date of Edmund Spenser? And why did Dawson Turner carefully retain this apparently inconsequential piece of ephemera? If nothing else, this scrap reveals the immense value these antiquaries placed on documentary evidence, and it is to this personal quality that we owe the preservation of a document whose importance we do recognise: the Australian playbill of 30 July 1796.

However, it is likely that Turner valued the Sydney playbill not only as a historical document and an interesting piece of ephemera, but also because it bore P. G. King's signed notes on the verso. One of Turner's earliest and lifelong interests was autograph-collecting. Having just added Sir Henry Spelman's extraordinary


\(^{33}\) Catalogue of the Manuscript Library of Dawson Turner ..., Formerly of Yarmouth ... Comprising the Matchless Collection of Upwards of Forty Thousand Autograph Letters ... which will be Sold by Auction by Messrs Pettick and Simpson ... on Monday, June 7, 1859 and Four Following Day (London, 1859). The British Museum purchased lots 82 and 83.

\(^{34}\) Cockcroft, The Public Life of George Chalmers, 177.
collection of autographs to his own assemblage, Turner wrote in a letter dated 12 May 1821:

The possession of the Spelman MSS. including an infinity of letters of people of eminence has made me turn my mind towards publishing facsimiles of the autographs of 1000 persons of distinction in England, of all eras: with brief accounts of their birth and death and their principal transactions.35

Unfortunately, the work was never completed. Upon his death, Turner’s manuscript collection contained 34,500 autograph letters bound in 104 volumes.36

In 1853, six years before he died, Turner auctioned off half of his book collection through Sotheby and Wilkinson.37 Containing 3,238 lots, the sale was held over a span of thirteen days. The scrapbook containing the Australian playbill was listed as lot 2,009:

Miscellaneous papers. A similar volume [to lot 2,008], comprising pieces printed between 1842 and 1845: and sundries containing some curious play bills, some original assignats of the period of the French Revolution, &c. &c.

The lot was purchased for fifteen shillings by antiquarian book dealer George Willis. The book would not remain long in his inventory.

Library of Parliament, Canada


Pamphlets, &c., on the same subjects; collected by the same. Folio. 2 vols.

Parliamentary Librarian Alpheus Todd had purchased the volumes from two London

36 Ibid., 55.
37 *Catalogue of the Principal Part of the Library of Dawson Turner ... Removed from Yarmouth & Which will be Sold by Auction, by Messrs. S. Leigh Sotheby & John Wilkinson Auctioneers ... March 7th, 1853, & Five Following days and ... March 17th, & Six Following Days* (London, 1853). The copy at the University of Western Ontario bears annotations recording purchasers and purchase prices.
The three scrapbooks are not listed in a single line because Todd bought them from two different antiquarian book dealers: George Willis had picked up “1842–1845” (lot 2,009) at the Dawson sale for fifteen shillings; Pickering had acquired “1820–1830” (lot 2,010) for seventeen shillings, as well as “1837–1841” (lot 2,013) for fourteen shillings. If the purchase prices are correct, it looks as if Todd got a bargain!

Dawson Turner had had each scrapbook bound in marbled paper over boards, with a green cloth spine lettered in gold “Miscellanies Chiefly of” above a date-range: “1820–1830,” “1837–1841,” and “1842–1845.” As mentioned previously, the range of years describes an imprint date and/or a date of acquisition. After purchasing the scrapbooks, the Library of Parliament stamped its oval ownership mark in gold at the foot of each spine. Each volume has a descriptive manuscript title-page contemporary with the binding, and the material in each scrapbook is grouped into categories such as “Banks,” “Insurance companies, Trade,” “Arts & Artistes,” “Scientific & Medical,” “Antiquarian, Historical,” and “Handbills, Notices &c.”

The scrapbooks contain folded leaflets, single sheets, letters (chiefly addressed to Dawson Turner), specimen bank notes, paper samples, and a few pamphlets. The Australian playbill was laid loose in the scrapbook dated 1842–45, but a strip of paper affixed to its left-hand side attested that it had once been tipped onto a guard sheet and bound in with other ephemera in the section labelled “Handbills, Notices, &c.” Other playbills in that section of the 1842–45 scrapbook include one dated 7

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39 Library of Parliament, Ottawa, Canada [manuscript]: “List of Works Purchased in England and France by Mr. Alpheus Todd in the Year 1855,” 35.


41 The title-page for the volume dated 1842–45 reads: Miscellanies Chiefly of the Years 1842–1845 Arranged under their Respective Heads & Including among other Objects of Interest a Table of Fluctuations in Corn, Currency, Consols, Exports, Imports, Revenue & Expenditure; Early Playbills; French Assignats & a Draft Report on Tobacco Trade Proposed by Joseph Hume Esq. Together with Many Parliamentary Papers Referring to Him &c &c &c. The title-page for the volume dated 1837–41 reads: Miscellanies, Chiefly of the Years 1837–1841, Arranged under their Respective Heads and Including among other Objects of Interest, a Manuscript Account of Queen Catherine Parr and of the Opening of Her Tomb in 1782, Dr. Lindley’s Report on The Royal Gardens at Kew, Rowland Hill’s Post Office Arrangements & Specimens of Photography &c &c &c. The title-page for the volume dated 1820–30 reads: Miscellanies Chiefly of the Years 1820–1830 Including Papers Connected with Banking & Insurance Offices and other Societies; Athenaeum Reports, 1829–30; Quaker Yearly Meeting Epistles 1803–1829; Plates From Fox’s Martyrs; Preface to my Projected Autograph Publication; Advertisements; Memoirs of Lord Trafalgar & Thomas Taylor; Handbills & Newspapers &c &c &c.
January 1768 for a performance of Nicholas Rowe's *Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714) that took place at London's Academy in Broad Street—the very same play performed in Sydney's Theatre on 30 July 1796. Remarkably, the British playbill is accompanied by a ticket for the performance, printed in red. Also included are playbills for theatricals that took place in the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, on 13 and 29 March 1769 (the latter playbill with a ticket). Among all the letters, circulars and advertisements, no other Australiana was found. The Library of Parliament clearly valued most highly the portions of the scrapbooks relating to trade and commerce, and so emphasised this feature in its catalogue entry.

**National Library of Canada / Library and Archives Canada**

When a building to house the National Library of Canada was erected in 1967, the Library of Parliament began to transfer large portions of its collection to that institution because of a changed mandate and space constraints. On 7 November 1973, the National Library's Acquisitions Department recorded receipt of the scrapbooks, as gifts from the Library of Parliament, and sent them directly to its rare book collection to await cataloguing. Because the scrapbooks contained no Australiana, and because the rare book staff members were unwilling to dismantle the books—yet were at a loss to describe their full nature otherwise—they remained in storage. The need to vacate the storage vault brought the scrapbooks to light and revealed that some items, laid loose, were in danger of being lost. One of these items was the playbill of 30 July 1796. Not lost, in fact, but found!

In June 2007, when bibliographical investigation uncovered the significance of the imprint, it was brought to the attention of Canada's National Librarian and Archivist, Ian E. Wilson, who immediately recognised the value of the playbill and its rightful home. He initiated the process of returning the document to its birthplace as a repatriation of cultural property and as a gesture of international cooperation between cultural institutions.

**National Library of Australia**

On 11 September 2007, at Parliament House in Canberra, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper, presented the playbill to Australian Prime Minister, John Howard. The playbill has now become part of the collection of the National Library of

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42 F. Dolores Donnelly, *The National Library of Canada: A Historical Analysis of the Forces Which Contributed to its Establishment and to the Identification of its Role and Responsibilities* (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1973), 51, 93, 112. Similar transfers took place in the 1950s and 1960s. The National Library of Canada was established in 1953 to collect, preserve and promote the printed heritage of Canada. Until that time, these functions had been performed by Canada's Library of Parliament, which also had a mandate to serve the needs of Parliament. After 1967, the Library of Parliament was able to focus solely on the latter mandate.
Australia, where it will be exhibited in the new Treasures Gallery, due to open in 2009. How gratifying to a nation to discover that its earliest extant imprint is no longer official instructions to control convicts, but instead evidence of blossoming artistic interests among the colonists!

The playbill looks today much as it did when it came off the press in 1796. Only one of its edges has been tampered with, probably when Dawson Turner trimmed it slightly in order to attach it to the scrapbook guard sheet. The guard sheet stub was easily removed in the Library and Archives Canada conservation labs. During the conservation treatment process, paper conservator Betty Jaquish detected that, sometime before its insertion in the scrapbook, the bill had been folded at least twice parallel to the short side of the sheet and once parallel to the long side. This is not an uncommon fate for ephemera: many of the pieces in Turner’s scrapbook exhibit evidence of previous folding. Jaquish also discovered that the playbill had been washed and flattened at some time in the past, and that, despite this washing, a line of glue and traces of paper fibres remained on the recto of the playbill a centimetre from its upper edge. Had the adhesive been liberally applied on the verso, one might have conjectured that it was used to affix the broadside to a wall in Sydney to announce the forthcoming performance. Given that the glue is on the recto, however, and that it contains traces of other paper fibres and is so close to the edge of the sheet, it seems more likely that this evidence reveals the manner in which George Chalmers preserved the playbill. We know from the 1841 auction catalogue that his single-sheet ephemera were bound into book form. The pieces of ephemera may well have been tipped onto sheets of paper using glue, and a subsequent owner (either the book dealer Joseph Lilly or Dawson Turner) immersed the sheet in water to dissolve the glue and release the attached ephemera. Whatever its original purpose, Jaquish allowed the traces of glue to remain on the playbill, as a witness to its past.

Postscript

In 2002, the Massachusetts Historical Society generously returned to Canada its earliest extant imprint—the first issue of The Halifax Gazette, dated 23 March 1752. Today that newspaper issue occupies an honoured place in the rare book collection of Library and Archives Canada (LAC). With the repatriation of the Australian playbill, LAC has had the good fortune to be both recipient and donor in the repatriation process, setting an example of generosity and cooperation between nations and recognising the value of printed heritage.

Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa
Appendix

Bibliographical Description

By Permission of His Excellency. | FOR THE BENEFIT OF J. BUTLER | AND W. BRYANT. | At the THEATRE, SYDNEY, | On Saturday, July 30, 1796. will be Performed | JANE SHORE. |

| Haftings      | I. Sparrow. |
| Belmour       | R. Evans   |
| Cateby        | H. Lavell. |
| Ratcliffe     | L. Jones.  |
| Gloster       | W. Chapman|
| And Shore     | H. Green.  |
| Alicia        | Mrs. Davis.|
| And Jane Shore| Mrs. Greville. |

| After the Play | The Wapping Landlady. | Sailors Hughes and Evans. | And Mother Doublechalk W. Fokes. | To which will be added | THE MIRACULOUS CURE. | Front Boxes 3s. 6d. Pit 2s. 6d. Gallery 1s. | Doors to be opened at Half past Five, begin at Six. | Tickets to be had of Mrs Greville, of W. Bryant | and a [sic] Saturday at the House adjoining the Theatre |

Collation: 1/8" (195 x 115 mm), 1 leaf.
Contents: 24 lines of text on recto; verso blank.
Paper: White handmade laid marked "CURTE | 17"; chainlines vertical, 27 mm apart. Edges (viewed from the recto): deckle edge at right-hand margin; neatly torn edges at top and bottom; left-hand edge cut sharp. The countermark (viewed from the verso) runs along the bottom edge in the right-hand corner.

Typography: Caslon great primer, double pica, and English roman.
Typepage: 155 x 101 mm.
Notes: Sole surviving copy of the earliest extant Australian imprint. Printed in Sydney, New South Wales, by George Hughes.
By Permission of His Excellency:

FOR THE BENEFIT OF J. BUTLER
AND W. BRYANT.

At the THEATRE, SYDNEY,

On Saturday, July 30, 1795. will be Performed

JANE SHORE.

Hastings I. Sparrow.
Belmou R. Evans
Catesby H. Lavel.
Ratcliffe L. Jones.
Gloster W. Chapman
And Shore H. Green.
Alicia Mrs. Davis.
And Jane Shore Mrs. Greville.

After the Play

The Wapping Landlady.

Sailors Hughes and Evans.
And Mother Doublechek W. Fokes.

To which will be added

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and a Saturday at the House adjoining the Theatre.

Figure 2. 1796 playbill, recto