

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens was undoubtedly the most popular English author in nineteenth-century America. Following the success of *Pickwick Papers*, the demands for his writings soared and publishers in major cities vied with one another to be the first to place his works on the market and benefit from large sales. Without international copyright laws, his writings were pirated and printed in daily newspapers, weekly journals, and monthly magazines; some publishers serialized his works in part numbers and then published them complete in bound volumes in paper wrappers, boards, and cloth. Soon his early works appeared in collected editions. Some firms reprinted his works from stereotype or electrotype plates of major publishers or created new editions within days from the text of a work just published by another firm. American engravers redrew illustrations by Dickens's English artists, such as George Cruikshank and H.K. Browne, for inclusion in an American reprint. Agents waited at the docks for the arrival of a steamship from England carrying a new part of a novel so that they could rush it to their publishers for typesetting and publication within a day or two. London agents were employed by some firms to purchase advance sheets of a new work from Dickens or his English publishers and rush them to America in advance of English publication. Agents, too, dispatched published copies to American publishers immediately after their appearance in England. The publishing history of Dickens's works in America, perhaps for more than any other English or American author, indicates his popularity and the fierce competition which pervaded the publishing trade in the nineteenth century.

Yet despite the thousands of copies printed of his first American editions, few survive today in excellent condition and all are scarce. Dickens's works were literally read to pieces. Paper bindings, and those in boards, were fragile and easily damaged after several readings which led owners to discard them. Cheap "editions" were considered by publishers ephemeral products placed on the market as inexpensively as possible to reach a large audience while they were preparing new impressions or editions in more substantial bindings. Careless handling of works in all bindings and the ravages of time and the elements caused the demise of many first editions. Being an English author, many collectors and research institutions sought to obtain and preserve Dickens's English editions and ignored his American ones. Also after a number of years, the practice of many libraries was to discard their fiction, especially if books were damaged. The lack of an early and accurate bibliography probably contributed to a lack of interest in preserving Dickens's first American editions. Even today misleading information has caused collectors to concentrate on preserving certain editions while important ones languish unnoticed. As Richard Loomis, the prominent Victorian bookseller (Sumner and Stillman), stated in his important listing of Dickens's American editions (*Catalogue Thirty-Six*, June 1991, p. 26) "It is no exaggeration that one encounters hundreds of English sets in parts for every single American set of parts." Loomis's experience has also led him to conclude that Dickens's English first-book editions are much more prevalent than their American counterparts.

Dickens's "Mrs. Porter, 'Over the Way,'" which was printed in *The Albion*, a New York journal, on March 29, 1834, was the first piece by the author to appear in America. Other early sketches followed the same year and continued to appear in different outlets until 1839. The Philadelphia firm of Carey, Lea and Blanchard collected thirty of the sketches and published

them in two volumes on June 11, 1836, and had the distinction of publishing Dickens's first book in America. (See Entry 1.)

Carey, Lea and Blanchard (1833-1838), later Lea and Blanchard (1838-1851), was one of Dickens's major early publishers in America. Their geographical proximity to the South, location near the wagon road over the mountains to the West, and advantageous delivery schedules and freight costs, gave them a virtual monopoly over most markets. Besides publishing Dickens's first book to appear in America, they published Part I of the *Pickwick Papers* in November 1836; its phenomenal success encouraged them to publish Dickens's works as rapidly as they could be obtained. Without international copyright laws, works by English authors could be reprinted by American publishers without payment to authors. The firm, however, corresponded with Dickens on friendly terms for about fifteen years. They made payments to Dickens and/or his publisher for some of his works so that they could publish them ahead of their competitors. After the retirement of Isaac Lea in 1851, the firm relinquished its interest in Dickens and sold its stereotype plates, woodcuts, and other holdings to Getz and Buck who published several subeditions from the original typesettings. By then, the Erie Canal had been opened and Philadelphia no longer controlled the rural markets; New York was now becoming the center of American publishing. (Payments and other publishing details by the firm are noted in Entries 1-5.)

Although Lea and Blanchard also published the first American editions of *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Master Humphrey's Clock* (*Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*), some in part numbers, boards (which they called "cheap editions"), cloth, and finally in collected editions or "illustrated editions" on fine paper and handsomely bound in embossed cloth, other publishers quickly produced editions shortly thereafter. In New York, James Turney published *Pickwick* in part numbers and then in cloth in 1838. William Colyer also published an edition of *Pickwick* in 1838. The same two firms published editions of *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1839; U.P. James of Cincinnati also published an early 1839 edition of *Oliver Twist*. By the early 1840s, firms such as George Curry, Robert Bixby and J. Van Amringe of New York began to publish subeditions of Dickens's works from stereotype plates they leased from Lea and Blanchard and James Turney. The Boston firm of Lewis and Sampson published *Pickwick* in 1844. Lea and Blanchard put *Master Humphrey's Clock* on sale in parts, in boards (with labels and usually two plates), and in cloth (with all plates). E. Littell of Philadelphia followed Lea & Blanchard with editions of *Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*. William Colyer published an edition of *Old Curiosity Shop* in 1841 and an edition of *Barnaby Rudge* in 1842. Later subeditions of these two novels were reprinted by Jesper Harding and Getz, Buck. When Dickens arrived at Boston Harbor in January 1842 for his first triumphant tour of America, he was the most popular living author here. His works had been read in households throughout the country and all of them were still available in numerous editions.

Upon his return to England, Dickens published his impressions of America in a two-volume edition called *American Notes* which was a daily record of his visits to various cities and locales. Although he attempted to be truthful with his comments and observations, he did not present an idyllic picture of America or the manners of its tobacco-chewing, spitting public. The work reflected Dickens's disenchantment with America which he tended to idealize before his visit. But his crusade for an international copyright law to protect English authors from American publishers who pirated their works (published them without the authority of, or

payment to, an author) was rejected strongly by publishers, and his comments about abuses in the prison system, hospitals, and other institutions angered the American public. Newspapers soundly condemned the work and vilified Dickens as an ungrateful person who betrayed American generosity. The animadversion leveled at him and sometimes at his works by the press so infuriated Dickens that for the next ten years he refused to make arrangements with any American publisher for his new works as he had done earlier with Carey, Lea and Blanchard. American publishers continued the chaotic piracy.

Before Dickens left for America, a movement for cheap literature had begun by the rise of mammoth weekly newspapers in late 1839. Sometimes as long as four feet and as wide as eleven columns, these papers, notably *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World*, serialized English works, and were strong competitors to traditional publishers because of their cheap prices. *Brother Jonathan* pirated works mostly from English magazines, while the *New World* concentrated on English novels. These New York papers had messengers await the arrival of ships from England and board them before they docked and receive the newest English works and rush them to numerous groups of typesetters who worked around the clock to have a novel set, printed, and on the streets for sale by newsboys in little more than a day. The *New World* serialized novels and attempted to print them ahead of other pirating firms by issuing them as "extras" in closely printed quarto pages. Their prices for these cheap extras were sometimes ten times lower than the prices of regular novels sold by most publishers in book form. In late 1843, *Brother Jonathan* merged with the *New World*. In that year, the cheap novel extras which had been distributed by mail under newspaper postage were subjected to much higher pamphlet postage and were banned in Canada by British copyright regulations. Consequently, the profitability of such publications decreased severely and soon the craze for such works diminished. In 1845, the *New World* ceased publication and order was restored to the publishing world. (See Notes to Entries 4-6.) *Martin Chuzzlewit* was first published in America in paper wrappers (an extra) after being serialized in the *New World*. Harpers quickly followed with the final part number of its edition of the novel and also published it in one volume. Lea and Blanchard serialized it in part numbers, then bound its edition in one-volume, paper wrappers and cloth. Years later T.B. Peterson published the novel in its collected editions.

More firms published editions of *Dombey and Son* than perhaps any other novel by Dickens. Its publication history is quite complex and warrants its own analytical bibliography. The work was extremely popular and some editions appeared in 1848 within a few hours of one another. Others followed within days. Wiley and Putnam produced the first American edition in parts. Lea and Blanchard, the Star Spangled Banner, and Bradbury and Guild also published the novel in parts; serialized numbers by Wiley and Putnam and Lea and Blanchard were gathered and published in accumulated parts, usually ten serialized numbers comprised the first of two parts. The work appeared in one or two volumes in paper and in cloth, and more than one edition was sometimes published by the same firm in 1848. New impressions and issues of a particular edition appeared and subeditions soon followed. Some editions are quite scarce, such as those by the Star Spangled Banner Office and by Burgess, Stringer. (See Entry 7.)

While Lea and Blanchard, Wiley and Putnam were publishing *David Copperfield* in part numbers, W.F. Burgess, a large New York seller of paper-covered volumes, began to set his text and copy plates from the Wiley/Putnam text as they appeared periodically. When the final English parts arrived in New York on November 16, 1850, Burgess hurriedly typeset and printed

the remaining chapters of the novel, and put the first American edition on sale at one o'clock in the afternoon on November 18. He boasted of his coup in the *New York Tribune*. By November 20, ten thousand copies were sold. Lea and Blanchard published their final two parts (19 and 20), along with Part 2 of their accumulated numbers (11-20) and in one volume, on Tuesday afternoon, November 19. The Wiley/Putnam final two numbers appeared on November 20, followed by publication in one and two volumes in cloth, as well as the second part of the last ten serialized numbers, on November 22. Harpers did not print *Dombey and Son* or *David Copperfield* until 1852. Subeditions of *Copperfield* were printed by Getz and Buck and by T.B. Peterson. (See Entry 8.)

By the early 1850s, Harper and Brothers, which by now was one of the world's largest printing establishments, were determined to become Dickens's American publishers. Throughout the 1840s, the firm published Dickens's works such as *American Notes* (their first work by Dickens), *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and the Christmas books. With the launching of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in June 1850, they entered the field of mass-circulation periodical publishing and reprinted many articles from Dickens's English journal *Household Words*. In 1852, beginning with *Bleak House*, Harpers, through their London agent Sampson Low, made arrangements with Dickens for the purchase of advance sheets of his new works and became in a sense his official American publisher which lasted until 1867, when Ticknor & Fields (Boston) contracted with Dickens for that distinction.

To promote their new magazine, the Harper Brothers serialized *Bleak House* in its pages and published the novel in parts and in two volumes. They sold plates and illustrations of the work to T.B. Peterson, a rising Philadelphia firm, which published a subedition. Getz and Buck, another Philadelphia firm which purchased from Lea and Blanchard their plates of Dickens's previous works, also published an edition of *Bleak House*. (See Entry 9.)

The one exception to the firm's monopoly of Dickens's novels was *Hard Times*. T.L. McElrath, who was the publisher of the American edition of *Household Words*, purportedly paid Dickens \$1,500 for the right of advance sheets of the novel, a price Harpers would not pay. The work was published on August 8, 1854, and sold for twenty-five cents a copy. Furious with McElrath's violation of their assumed rights to Dickens's works, Harper Brothers typeset the short novel overnight and published an edition in wrappers the next day at half the price of McElrath's edition and ruined the young publisher. No firm challenged Harper's claim on Dickens again. In December, the firm published a second edition. Peterson published a subedition of the work and Garrett and Company produced an early edition in wrappers. (See Entry 10.)

Although *Little Dorrit* was serialized in *Harper's Monthly*, the firm declined to publish it in book form. The next two novels, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*, were serialized in *Harper's Weekly*, a second venture into periodical publishing which the firm started in January 1857. The plates and illustrations for these three novels were sold to T.B. Peterson who published the first American editions. Harpers concluded that since they had reached the public first in their periodicals with large circulations, the profitability of publishing the novels in book form was marginal. Besides, the public at the time preferred books in uniform collected editions rather than individual books, and Peterson was the leader in publishing collected editions of Dickens's works. (See Entries 11-13.)

Harpers published advance sheets of *Our Mutual Friend* and serialized the novel in its *Monthly Magazine*; however, unlike the previous three novels, the firm decided to publish it in book form. The first impression was published in two issues, both of which preceded its conclusion in the December *Monthly Magazine*. Plates and illustrations were sold to Peterson who published a subedition on the same day the Harper second issue appeared. John Bradburn, a short-lived New York firm (1861-1866), published an early edition of the novel in four volumes from the text of Harper's serialized version. (See Entry 14 and Peter Bracher's excellent article "Harper & Brothers: Publishers of Dickens.")

The Harper/Peterson monopoly of Dickens's works ended after *Our Mutual Friend*. The lucrative relationship in which Harpers bought advance sheets and serialized the novels and sold plates to Peterson for publication in book form was dissolved by James Fields. (Comments about Peterson's first editions and subeditions are found in the appropriate entries and his publishing practices summarized in Entry 11, First Edition, Note 3. See also the *American Literary Gazette and Publishers' Circular* for May 25, 1867.)

In 1867, Dickens's American friend and admirer, James T. Fields, who was a partner in the publishing firm of Ticknor and Fields (later Fields, Osgood and Company), contracted with Dickens to become his authorized American publisher. After acknowledging its contract with Dickens, the firm began to publish his works in several collected editions. Fields serialized *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in his weekly periodical *Every Saturday*, and published the first American edition of the unfinished novel which was also serialized in *Harper's Weekly* and *Appleton's Journal* and published by those firms in book form. (See Entry 15. The References identify some sources which may be consulted for further information about Dickens's publishers and the general history of English works printed in nineteenth-century America.)