MOSES COIT TYLER COLLECTION

of the
Lydia M. Olson Library

Northern Michigan University
Marquette, MI 49855
oses Coit Tyler (1835-1900) has long been recognized as a pioneer and foremost scholar on the historical development of American literature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Through the foresight of four prominent Marquette residents, Tyler's working library—a collection of 2,000 titles comprising 3,000 volumes on American history, theology, and literature—was purchased for the Northern State Normal School in 1904, five years after its establishment.

Tyler's working library must be rated by any standard as an important collection of the Colonial and early National Periods of American history and literature. Works on history comprise half the collection, and most of these are concerned with the history of the United States. The works on Old World history reflect the antecedents of the American revolution and include the writings of Edmund Burke and reformer William Cobbett. This portion of the history segment also includes writings on European history and accounts of travel in Europe, including that of Tyler himself.

The works on American history cover the early National Period in depth and include editions of the writings of such founding fathers as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Franklin, and Hamilton. The works on the Colonial Period illustrate the movement towards independence and include several tracts such as James Otis' *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (London, 1765) and Thomas Whatley's *The Regulations Lately Made Concerning the Colonies, and the Taxes Imposed upon them Considered* (London, 1765). The Revolution is represented by several document collections, notably *American Archives* (Washington, D.C., 1837-53), which is a collection of papers covering 1774-1776, and *The Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1829-30), as well as by biographies, memoirs, and some secondary accounts. There are comparatively few works covering the period after 1840 other than the general histories of the United States. Two titles which deserve mention are *The American Conflict* by Horace Greeley (Hartford, Conn.,
used as a professor of rhetoric and English literature at the University of Michigan. Classical literature is represented by the texts that Tyler used during his studies at Yale.

The literature portion itself emphasizes American, British, and German writers and consists primarily of complete sets of works together with some works of criticism. The editions are standard nineteenth century editions. The writers represented were primarily poets and essayists. British writers included Chaucer, Shakespeare, Cowper, Dryden, Gray, Pope, Scott, Shelley, Swinburne, and Tennyson. American writers include Aldrich, Brackenridge, Brown, Bryant, Emerson, Hawthorne, Howells, Longfellow, Lowell, and Whittier. The German writers were poets and dramatists—Goethe, Herder, Heine, Lessing, Schiller—whose works Tyler acquired while on a trip to Germany in 1888.

Notable by their absence from the collection are the nineteenth century novels, which were, along with poetry, the major literary form of the century. Aside from a few minor novels and several collections of stories, including Bret Harte’s Luck of Roaring Camp, the only novelist whose works remain in the collection is Lytton. Tyler had an almost complete collection of his novels, including the now infamous Paul Clifford (“It was a dark and stormy night...”). The fate of the other novels which may have been in the collection probably lies in the provision of Tyler’s will which allowed his son Edward to select 200 volumes from the collection. It is likely that Edward selected most of the novels that were in Tyler’s library.

The American literature section features a large number of titles presented to Tyler by their authors. A. G. Riddle of Cleveland, Ohio, apparently sent Tyler a copy of every book he wrote. It is not clear from the inscriptions in the books whether the authors were former students or merely friends and acquaintances. These works were almost entirely poetry and may indicate a special interest in this form on the part of Tyler.

There are few titles that may be called notable in the literature classes. Among these are the first edition of Webster’s dictionary (Hartford, 1806) and Virginian George Sandy’s “Englished” version of Ovid’s
Metamorphosis (London, 1632).

The third major segment of Tyler's library was the books on religion, which comprises about 15 percent of the library. These are strong in practical theology and sermons, as would be expected in the working library of a nineteenth century pastor. The majority of the titles are either Congregational or Episcopal, reflecting Tyler's ordination into the ministries of those two denominations, but there are titles from other Protestant denominations as well.

Tyler's historical and literary interests are shown by the significant amount of American denominational history included among the religion volumes and by the collections of sermons of noted clergymen. The latter group includes works by noted seventeenth century New England clergy, including Cotton Mather's Speedy Repentance Urged (Boston, 1690) and Thomas Hooker's The Soules Humiliation (London, 1640). Eighteenth century works include Jonathan Edwards' A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections (Boston, 1746). Noted nineteenth century clergymen whose sermons Tyler acquired include Henry Ward Beecher, Phillips Brooks, William Ellery Channing, Timothy Dwight, and Henry Parry Lidon. Among the titles on religion is the oldest book in Tyler's library, the first printing of Martin Luther's Ordnung eines geminien Kastens (Wittenberg, 1523).

In addition to the theological and doctrinal works, this part of the collection also includes several liturgical and scriptural works. Chief among these are several editions of the Book of Common Prayer and the second edition of the Book of Mormon (Kirtland, Ohio, 1837). There are also a number of hymnals from various denominations (Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist) both with and without the music.

The remaining titles are scattered in small groups in various subject areas and illustrate Tyler's interest in matters beyond history, literature, and religion. The education titles are focused on higher education and on the education of women, one of the reforms in which Tyler was interested. There is also a small group of titles in physical culture and therapeutics. Science is represented primarily by textbooks, although there are also a few works on natural history, including Darwin's The Descent of Man (New York, 1871). Other topics include painting, gardening, and landscape architecture. An early work on women's rights is Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (Boston, 1792).

Throughout the collection are large numbers of titles which were the gifts of their authors. The titles in history are from the leading historians of the day and testify to Tyler's wide circle of professional relationships and to the regard with which he was held by his colleagues. Gifts also account for several titles in the collection which are totally out of character with the rest of the titles, including works on sewer gas and steam boiler explosions. A substantial number of the gift books have correspondence from the author to Tyler attached to the front lining papers. These notes mention the reason for the gift, but they often discuss other matters as well and thus form part of Tyler's correspondence.

In many of his books, Tyler pencilled on the flyleaf, or sometimes in the margins of the text, valuable annotations on the contents or the author. In George Sandys' "Englished" version of Ovid's Metamorphosis, for example,
Tyler wrote a quotation from Charles Campbell’s *History of Virginia* which notes that the work is “elegantly illustrated” and “rare.” It was the first translation of a classical work done in the colonies.

Moses Coit Tyler was born in Griswold, Connecticut, on August 2, 1835, of an old New England family. When he was a youth, the Tylers moved to Detroit where he attended the public schools. He began studies at the University of Michigan, but left to attend Yale in 1853. After graduating from Yale in 1857, Tyler attended theological seminaries at New Haven and Andover, Massachusetts, and he was ordained into the Congregational ministry in 1859. That same year he married Jeanette Hull Gilbert; they had a daughter and a son. Because of a growing dissatisfaction with church orthodoxy and due to problems of health, he resigned from the ministry in 1862. He then followed up his interest in physical education by making a tour of England in 1863 crusading for physical education and calisthenics. After returning from abroad, he joined the faculty of the University of Michigan as professor of rhetoric and English literature, gaining a reputation as a particularly effective and innovative teacher.

During this period Tyler became interested in various reforms, including the temperance movement, abolition, and women’s rights, and was greatly influenced by Henry Ward Beecher. Thus, although attracted to the study of American history, he decided to enter journalism and, in 1873, became an editor of Beecher’s *The Christian Union* in New York. Then the world’s largest religious weekly, the newspaper actually included a broad range of general subjects of both national and international import. Here Tyler gained considerable influence but quickly discovered that education and not journalism was his field of primary interest. He returned to the faculty at the University of Michigan the following year. In 1881 Cornell University offered Tyler the first chair of American history in the country. He readily accepted and remained there for the rest of his academic career. In 1883 he was ordained into the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church, but he never actively served in a parish.

As a scholar and researcher Tyler approached the development of American literature from the viewpoint of an historian. He saw the mainstream of American life reflected in the writings of the times. To Tyler the bond between literature and life was inseparable. Literary critics of his day considered early American writers to be of little consequence; their works hardly qualified as literature. But Tyler saw in the pioneer American men of letters the seeds of a new and free society. In 1878 he wrote in the first volume of his history of colonial literature:

The first accents of literary speech in the American forests seem not to have been provincial, but free, fearless, natural. Our earliest writers, at any rate, wrote the English language spontaneously, forcefully, like honest men. We shall have to search in some later period of our intellectual history to find, if at all, a race of literary snobs and imitators—writers who in their thin and timid ideas, their nerveless diction, and their slavish simulation of the supposed literary accent of the mother-country, make confession of the inborn weakness and beggarliness of literary provincials. Thus Tyler became the first to recognize the

---

**THE LITERARY HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1763-1783**

By Moses Coit Tyler

Published in New York in 1897. The second part of Tyler’s landmark account of the rise and development of American literature before 1800.
worth and significance of literature that was distinctly American, the product of an American environment rather than an extension of European culture. Historian Richard M. Dorson has called Tyler’s four volume history of colonial and revolutionary literature “...the single landmark of high achievement among nineteenth-century histories of American literature.” In 1878 Tyler published two volumes entitled *A History of American Literature during the Colonial Time, 1607-1765*. Shortly before his death, he completed *The Literary History of the American Revolution, 1763-1783* (1897).

Tyler’s thorough preparation, clear style, and good judgment have made the four volumes the standard account of the first two centuries of American literary development. In his foreword to the 1962 reprint of the colonial literary history, editor Perry Miller noted that “Nobody had yet made the point—the obvious point but the supreme one—so succinctly, and nobody since Tyler phrased it has been able to improve upon it.” Miller also noted that the reviews in 1878 were “universally laudatory” and that “the Republic was grateful” for what was immediately recognized to be a work of an exceptional scholar.

Tyler helped found the American Historical Association in 1884 and later served as a vice-president. He was interested in promoting the movement in historiography which encouraged a more critical and factual (and less patriotic) writing of American history. He also did much to bring together historical and literary scholarship. He considered the written word in all its forms as valuable research material and an accurate reflection of people and their times. Thus he treated with respect the almanacs, folk ballads, dime novels, newspapers, and other sources which were ignored by scholars of his day. They were, according to Dorson, “...depressed by the inferiority of the American achievement,” while Tyler was inspired by “...democracy’s part in American life and culture. To Moses Coit Tyler history was not past politics more than past literature.”

In 1887 Tyler produced *Patrick Henry*, the first modern biography of the champion of the revolutionary cause. His last completed work was *Three Men of Letters* (1895), which was a highly-acclaimed critical biography of George Berkeley, Timothy Dwight, and Joel Barlow. Work on another book was interrupted by his death on December 28, 1900.

Efforts to acquire Tyler’s library were initiated by his nephew, Marquette attorney Albert E. Miller, who had been placed in charge of disposing of Tyler’s books and other library materials by his daughter, Jessica Tyler Austen. Following Tyler’s wishes expressed in his will that the library be kept intact and lodged with “some public institution,” Miller informed his friend, pioneer businessman Peter White, that the collection was available for purchase.

White, who was instrumental in the establishment of a state normal school—now Northern Michigan University—in Marquette and who was financing the construction of the Peter White Public Library at the time, quickly interested banking colleague Nathan M. Kaufman, also a supporter of cultural activities, in assisting with the acquisition of Tyler’s books. Kaufman, in turn, enlisted the support of his stepson, Edward N. Breitung, a mining engineer, in raising the necessary funds. The three men, with Miller’s assistance, exercised their option to purchase the library in the spring of 1904 and presented it to the Northern State Normal School at the 1904 commencement on June 23. In reporting on this presentation, *The Daily Mining Journal* said that Miller noted “Dr. Tyler visited the Upper Peninsula on numerous occasions, and Mr. Miller felt sure that if his wishes could have been consulted he would have signified that there is no part of the country where he would more prefer to have his library retained as a lasting and useful monument to his life works than in Marquette.”

Initially the primary history collection of the library, the Moses Coit Tyler Collection now forms the main portion of Olson Library’s Special Collections. It has been rearranged several times since it was acquired and is now shelved according to the Library of Congress classification system so that it is in harmony with the rest of the Library’s collections.

*Written by Dr. Stephen Peters, Professor, Library Science Olson Library, Northern Michigan University*