

CIVIL WAR TREASURES: Beautiful Necessity: Wallpaper and Confederate Imprints

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Feature Essay

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Lacher-Feldman, Jessica *CIVIL WAR TREASURES:Beautiful Necessity: Wallpaper and Confederate Imprints.*

Materials published during the Civil War in the Confederate states are known as Confederate imprints. Exhaustive bibliographies and guides to these materials have been written over the years, the most widely known being *Confederate Imprints: A Bibliography of Southern Publications from Secession to Surrender* by T. Michael Parrish and Robert M. Willingham, published in 1987, and Marjorie Crandall's *Confederate Imprints, 1861-1865*. By reviewing these comprehensive bibliographies, we gain important insights into literary tastes of the time and the intellectual, creative, and practical output of a very specific time and place. The bibliographies also give us an increased understanding of what was being printed and used in terms of written material during the Civil War in the South. While many of the materials published relate to the war itself, and to the operation of the Confederate government including acts and orders as well as other political documents, a need for printed matter beyond military and political publications certainly did exist. Literature, music, newspapers, and school books all had their place in the corpus of Confederate-era publishing.

What bibliographies do not tell us can really only be discovered through spending time with the material and some of the surprises it yields. One remarkable byproduct of the scarcity of goods during this period are the few rare items we find that are printed on scraps of wallpaper. The wallpaper, some as fresh as it was over 150 years ago, gives us a taste of hidden beauty and is a welcome surprise.

LSU Libraries Special Collections holds a few wonderful examples of materials printed on wallpaper during the Confederacy. One item, an historical novel by Luise Mühlbach entitled *Henry VIII and his Court*, was published by the Mobile, Alabama printer Sigmund H. Goetzel. While Goetzel only published twenty-eight items in his years of operation between 1854 and 1865, several of

the books that he did have remnants of wallpaper included. The printing was done on the blank surface on the verso of the wallpaper. The two-volume Mühlbach novel has two different wallpaper examples, both included on the inside of the book.

We know from Mobile city directories and advertisements that Goetzel sold wallpaper as well as stationery and other paper goods in his shop. Though we would like to think that the choice of using wallpaper was an aesthetic decision, it was more a matter of necessity. Paper and other goods had become increasingly scarce and wealthy Southerners were doing their best to survive so rather than choosing new wallpapers for their homes, the material was used for printing. Goetzel himself is a bit of a mystery. A native of Austria, his life after the Civil War remains unknown. Some scholars claim that he moved to New Orleans, while others state that there is evidence that he emigrated to Brazil along with more than 10,000 Confederate Americans – the future “Confederados”.

Another interesting wallpaper example is a page from the July 2, 1863 issue of the Vicksburg, Mississippi *Daily Citizen*, part of the Eggleston-Roach Papers (Mss. 832). A surrogate copy of this newspaper fragment was recently included in our exhibit entitled *The Summer of 1863: Gettysburg, Vicksburg & Port Hudson*. Again because of the lack of paper, the last issue of the Daily Citizen published before the surrender was printed on wallpaper. It carries news of a woman, Mrs. Cisco, being killed during the bombardment and notes that her husband is serving with Moody’s Artillery in Virginia.

These printed items cannot help but delight and surprise us, not only as historical artifacts and documents, but as culture artifacts and decorative objects. Their rarity and beauty make them fascinating and important treasures indeed.

Jessica Lacher-Feldman joined LSU as the Head of Special Collections in Hill Memorial Library in June of 2013. She comes to LSU from The University of Alabama, where she worked in their special collections division for thirteen years.