Collecting Early American Librettos

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The librettos printed for American productions of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas provide a special challenge and interest for collectors. First, they document the tremendous popularity of the operas, and record many of the specific productions for which the librettos were used. Secondly, many contain variant lyrics and text not found in the British librettos. It was Gilbert's custom to make important textual changes up until the last minute, and to revise his operas during the few days following the London premiers. Early American librettos therefore may contain prepublication material, as well as deleted material, since his corrections were delayed in the trip across the Atlantic. Finally, it is of interest to note the Americanisation which crept into some of the librettos, as well as illustrations, advertisements and other material which provide insights into American productions and social history.

The following listing for collectors is not a bibliography, but represents an overview of the variant nineteenth century American libretto editions. To simplify the complexities involved in preparing this list, a number of ground rules have been used. I have excluded parody or foreign language librettos; those printed in vocal scores; librettos printed in collected editions; and Chappell librettos distributed by an American agent. In other words, the editions described are meant to be the librettos printed to be sold or given to audiences at performances. Undated librettos which typographically had the "look" of the twentieth century were, with few exceptions, eliminated. The order of the list is arbitrarily based on importance of the production for which the libretto was published, with precedence given to the first major production. Librettos for regional professional or amateur productions are secondarily listed. Libretto sizes are approximately 7.5 x 5 inches, unless otherwise noted. Cast lists are noted, when present. The popularity of the operas, together with long runs and multiple productions, necessitated reprinting of librettos with variant features. In many cases, the libretto price, address of publisher, or specific advertisements are clues to the earlier editions.

While I have noted the variant lyrics and text, which provide some of the most interesting aspects of these librettos, I have chosen not to reproduce them if they are printed elsewhere. The reader is directed to the references provided for details.

Finally, I recognize that this listing is unlikely to be complete. The data were obtained from my own and others' collections, and I acknowledge with gratitude the help, patience and good will of Fredric Woodbridge Wilson (formerly of The Pierpont Morgan Library), David Stone, Ralph MacPhail Jr., J. Donald Smith, Bill Mahoney, Marc Shepherd, Billie Aul (New York State Archives) and Samuel T. Huang (Northern Illinois University Libraries).
CONTENTS

TRIAL BY JURY
HER MAJESTY'S SHIP PINAFORE
THE SORcerer
THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE
PATIENCE
IOLANTHE
PRINCESS IDA
THE MIKADO
RUDDYGORE
THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD
THE GONDOLIERS
THE GRAND DUKE
REFERENCES
TRIAL BY JURY

TJ 1 New York: Richardson & Foos [printers], 1875. Printed for the first American production at the Eagle Theatre (NY) with cast list. Salmon wrappers. 16 pp. In this libretto, the second and subsequent verses of the Judge's Song have been Americanised:

At primary meetings I now was seen
   Where I treated the boys to whisky
At ten cents a drink — for I couldn't be mean,
   Besides which it might have been risky.
My name got known at each ward election,
   Good fortune came when I sought her
For in order to show my circumspection
   I married a rich man's daughter.

My father-in-law, he paid each bill,
   Which was much more than I expected,
Then he said if to be a Judge you will,
   By the jingoes I'll have you elected.
So father-in-law he called the boys,
   For he swore he'd do as he stated,
There were torch-light processions and lots of noise
   And by Jove — I was nominated.

Now election day came round at last,
   The boys they all stuck by me;
The other side saw I was running so fast,
   They'd have given their heads to buy me.
I couldn't be bought — my price was too high,
   (For virtue must be respected);
I made "Free Whisky" my party cry
   And you bet I got elected.

At length I became as rich as the Astors —
   The voters all thought it funny,
That when they supposed they'd be my masters —
   I got all of their money.
The citizens then my character high
   Tried vainly to disparage —
And now, if you please, I'm ready to try
   This Breach of Promise of Marriage.

Two other textual variants are noted. The Defendant's recitative has been changed to "Is this the Court and that the Jury?.....Oh, why these looks of fury?" Also the Judge's couplet, "Gentle simple-minded Usher....." has been omitted.

TJ 2 New York: A.S. Seer [printer], 1879. Tan wrappers. 13 pp. No Americanised verses in Judge's Song. The Defendant's' recitative has been changed to "Is this the Court of the Exchequer?.....If this is the Exchequer, Your evil star's in the ascendant!"

HER MAJESTY'S SHIP PINAFORE

Of all the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, Pinafore is unmatched in the variety of American librettos printed. The wild success of the piece ("Pinafore-mania") is well
described (Prestige, Kanthor). Additional information about the New York productions for which librettos were printed can be found in Odell. Librettos contain unauthorized minor text variations which simplified Gilbert's dialogue for American audiences.

PF 1 Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, Printers, 1878. Published for the first American production at the Boston Museum with cast list. Grey or blue wrappers with illustration of the Boston Museum on front cover. 31 pp.


a. A variant printing with tan wrappers deletes cast list, includes "and other cities where it was presented under the direction of Chas. E. Ford", and reprints a January 1879 editorial from The Philadelphia Ledger.


The following three librettos have no identifying printer, but are similar enough to PF 1 to surmise that they were printed by Mudge.


PF 1.3 N.p.: n.p., 1879. Published for the Park Garden production ("performed on a real ship on the water"), Providence, R.I., with cast list. Grey wrappers. 31 pp.


a. A variant with wrapper dated 1879; title page dated 1878. Wrapper colors include grey, blue and tan.

b. Similar to a. with cast list for the production at the Boston Theatre.

Subsequent later reprintings exist, undated.


A number of variants of this libretto are noted:

a. Wrapper notes production at the Standard Theatre. No cast list.

b. Printed for Rice's Opera Bouffe Extravaganza Combination at the Lyceum Theatre, Jan. 23, 1879, with cast list, and indications in text for insertion of interpolated numbers.

c. Printed for production at Columbia College, April 28-29, 1879, with cast list.

d. Redesigned wrapper dated 1880; title page dated 1879.

e. Wrapper imprinted Wheeling: Daily Intelligencer Steam Book & Job Printer,
1879. Advertisements for Wheeling businesses. Title page retains A.S. Seer imprint.

PF 5 New York: Richardson & Foos [printer], 1879. Published for production at the Standard Theatre. No cast list. Wrapper colors include grey and tan. 28 pp.


PF 7 New York: George Munro, 1879. Tan wrappers. 41 pp.


PF 16 San Francisco: Bacon & Co, 1879. Wrapper colors include pink, blue, tan. 31 pp. Advertisements for Nicoll the Tailor on all four wrappers.

A number of wrapper variants are noted:

a. Advertisements for Haverly's Theatre (Chicago), Haverly's Lyceum Theatre (New York), and Bush St. Theatre (San Francisco) replace those for Nicoll the Tailor.

c. "Given free to patrons of Tivoli Garden." Advertisements on three wrappers.

d. Printed for use at the Standard Theatre.


THE SORCELER

Although The Sorcerer preceded H.M.S. Pinafore chronologically, it was widely produced in America only after Pinafore proved successful. The early American librettos correspond to the unrevised (pre-1884) version (see Allen, 1958).


Two variants of the front wrapper are noted:

a. No text border. Same typeface.


THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

For this and the subsequent three operas, Gilbert and Sullivan sold the libretto publishing rights to J.M. Stoddart. A box in the Stoddart librettos sets forth the hope that such exclusive rights would prevent the unauthorized publication of their work.

American librettos contain textual variants not found in the British librettos, including a different second act finale and the given names of the Pirate King (Richard) and Sergeant of Police (Edward). The intricacies of the various libretto printings are described by Allen (1958). The details which distinguish the first and second editions of the Stoddart libretto have yet to be fully described, and are beyond the scope of this list.

include pink, blue, grey and tan. 39 pp. Advertisements on wrappers may distinguish earlier from later printings.

A number of variants of this libretto are noted, all with authorization and copyright date printed on wrapper:


b. 38 pp. only. Typesetting condenses text on p. 21. No cast list.

c. Printed for the Boston Ideal Opera Co., with specific cast list. No price on wrapper.

d. Wrappers for Oliver Ditson & Co. Remainder of libretto as 1, including Stoddart title page. No price on wrapper or title page.

e. Wrappers for Ditson as in ld with price on wrapper and title page.


a. Green wrapper with ornamental device and no double border. Smaller format 7.75 x 5.25 inches. Price 15 cents


PATIENCE

The publishing rights for Patience were purchased again by J.M. Stoddart, whose librettos are distinctive for the unusual use of separate page numbers for the head and tail of pages, and footnotes on pp. [headed] 38 and 40, which provide a glossary for American readers. The textual variants in PC 3, remarkable remnants from the British license copy, are reprinted in Bradley (1984). Stedman provides additional background for the earliest Gilbert draft lyrics.

PC 1  Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart, n.d. Stoddart copyright 1881. Authorization box. Green or blue wrappers with characteristic ornamental device. 42 pp. Textual variants characteristic of an early printing include the absence of footnotes, Grosvenor's given name Algernon, a second verse to "Long years ago," Colonel's recitative before act 2 finale, and the addition of "We hear the soft note" following the usual act 2 finale.

a. Wrappers for Oliver Ditson Co. Remainder of libretto as PC 1.

b. An intermediate state with all variant points in PC 1 except Grosvenor's given name of Archibald.


a. Wrappers for Oliver Ditson Co. Remainder of libretto as PC 1.1 except for minor phraseology variants (e.g. 1.1: “despair drooping.” 1.1a: “droop despairingly.”)


b. Variant printing for the Boston Ideals. Orange and gilt decorated cover printed by Alfred Mudge, Boston. Title page uses the illustrated front cover of PC 1.3. Illustrations and music as in 1.3.
c. Variant printing for the Boston Ideals. Blue nd gilt decorated covers printed by Alfred Mudge with minor design variation from b. Lacks illustrations, authorization box and music. Title page as in PC 1.


PC 3 San Francisco: Francis, Valentine & Co [printers], 1881. Printed for Melville Opera Co. White decorative wrappers. 47 pp. Textual variants characteristic of a very early printing include Grosvenor's given name Algernon, a second verse to Long years ago"; the first verse only of a new duet for Patience and Grosvenor ("Love me with a love enduring"); Duke's song (act 1); Marionette Trio limited to one verse; Colonel's recitative and Duke's solo (act 2); and use of "We hear the soft note" followed by "For we're Waterloo-House young men" as the act 2 finale.


IOLANTHE

All of the early American librettos, like the British first edition libretto to, printed the two subsequently deleted songs, "Fold Your Flapping Wings" and "DeBelville Was Regarded" (see Allen, 1958). The earliest printings carry a notice announcing the publication delay of the vocal score until December (1882).


a. [47 pp]. Similar to IO 1, with omission of pagination (but not text) for p. 14. Florence Bemister replaces Kate Forster as Leila in printed cast list.


a. Similar to IO 1.1 with wrapper printed for Rice's Standard Opera Company, [Bijou Theatre, Boston]. Cast list as in IO 1.1.

b. Wrapper printed for the Barton Comic Opera Company. No cast listed.

A number of variants of this libretto are noted:

a. Stoddart wrapper printed for Barton Comic Opera Company.
b. Stoddart wrapper printed "To be produced at the Lyceum Monday Ev'ng, December 4th"
c. Stoddart wrapper printed for Chas. E. Ford's English Opera Co.


PRINCESS IDA

The earliest American libretto is unique in its preservation of six sets of variant lyrics, including two complete songs ("If we discharged our duty clear" and "Whene'er we go") which Gilbert rewrote prior to the London premier. These are reprinted by Randall, who does not mention the additional changes in the dramatis personae listing: The earliest edition describes Lady Psyche as Professor of Experimental Science and Lady Blanche as Professor of Abstract Philosophy. In the second edition, these titles become consistent with the first British edition. The earlier edition also omits Sacharissa, Chloe and Ada from the d.p. listing, as well as the description of the setting. Again, these are restored in the second edition.


b. Wrappers printed for Ditson, but smaller format, 7 ½ x 4 ¾ in. Stoddart copyright on both front wrapper and title page. D.p. page on verso of title page.

c. Wrappers printed for Wm. A. Pond & Co. [New York].

PI 1.1 Second edition. Similar to 1a without the variant lyrics. Wrappers printed for Oliver Ditson & Co. (and possibly others).

THE MIKADO

The earliest American productions of The Mikado are described by Allen (1985), and provide an informative background for the librettos printed for them. Variant texts in the British librettos are discussed by Allen (1958).

American librettos are distinguished by a number of textual variations. The Pond, Bancroft, Pugh and Tams librettos print "The Sun Whose Rays" in both acts, and along with some other librettos, delete portions of the "Kissing Duet" and Act 2 Finale.


A number of typographically variant front wrappers exist:

a. Front wrapper as 2.1 with overprint for McCaull Opera Comique Co., Philadelphia.

b. Front wrapper with no border. Price and address as in 2.1.


MK 3  New York: Caulon [printer], 1885. Tan pictorial wrappers illustrated with scenes from the opera. Title page identifies separate set designers for each act (Hughson Hawley, Joseph Clare), does not list Gilbert and Sullivan, and indicates "first produced at the Standard Theatre, New York....August 19th, 1885 (sic)." 46 pp. followed by 11 pp. music.

a. Title page variant. Gilbert and Sullivan listed, but no identification of set designers and no statement regarding first production. No printer identified.


a. 40 pp, with additional 4 pp. music.

b. Wrapper printed "As performed by the McCaull Opera Co."


A number of printing variants of this libretto are noted:


b. 46 pp. includes 4 pp. music. Wrapper colours include orange, blue and pink.

c. Similar to b. A later printing adds John C. Haynes & Co. to list of distributors on wrapper and omits "The End" in text.

MK 10  Cincinnati: A.H. Pugh Printing Co., n.d. Advertisements for the Denver and Rio Grande Railway with four engraved scenes along the railway interspersed with text. Wrapper colours include tan and green. 48 pp. Libretto printed for regional productions include:

  a. Printed for Chicago Juvenile Opera Co. No cast list.
  b. Printed for Thompson Opera Company with cast list that shows minor variations from MK 9.


MK 12  Salt Lake City: J. Parker [printer], 1885. Printed for the Careless Amateur Opera Co. with cast list. Grey wrappers. 43 pp. Textually similar to 2.1


  a. Variant wrapper design printed for Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Co. A later printing with no publisher or city identified and a variant cast list.
  b. Libretto printed for the Alfa Norman English Opera Company with cover portrait. Larger format but libretto is otherwise the same. No publisher or city identified.

RUDDYGORE

Textual variants and Americanisation distinguishing the American and British first and early editions are detailed by Clayton. American librettos, except for RG 1 and 1a, substitute "Buffalo" and "Baltimore" for "Basingstoke" and "Birmingham."


  a. Variant printing omits cast list.


THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD

Early American librettos correspond to the first British edition (see Allen 1958).


Pond issued a later edition in pale yellow wrappers (n.d., 48 pp., same cast list) without the wrapper stamp or performing rights notice. Facsimile of Mikado cover on back wrapper.


THE GONDOLIERS

The first American edition, printed for D'Oyly Carte's original 1889 New York production, is unique in that it contains additional early lyrics for two songs ("Thy Wintry Scorn" and "Till Time Shall Choose"). The latter, as well as additional dialogue, were never published in its British counterpart, nor ever performed. Randall describes these in detail. The second edition omits both these songs and dialogue, but includes rewritten dialogue containing a number of interesting Americanisation.

Prestige describes the response by the D'Oyly Carte organization to the unfavourable reviews and poor receipts garnered by this first production. After being partially re-cast, and radically restaged, The Gondoliers re-opened at a different theater one month later. Bradley (1982, p. 376, 428) attributes the Americanisation in the second edition libretto to Helen D'Oyly Carte, and one surmises that they were part of the overall attempt to make the opera more palatable to American tastes.


a. Variant printing. Title on wrapper set in fancy type, and The King of Barataria printed larger than The Gondoliers.


THE GRAND DUKE

The Grand Duke was not seen in America until well into the twentieth century. However an early American libretto provides an insight into Gilbert’s earliest draft and retains Hesse Halbpfennig, Elsa and Wilhelm, which Gilbert subsequently changed to Pfennig Halbpfennig, Lisa and Rudolf in the British first night edition. This libretto also contains variant lyrics and additional songs which were cut prior to the London first night.


REFERENCES

A libretto (lit. "booklet") is the text used in, or intended for, an extended musical work such as an opera, operetta, masque, oratorio, cantata or musical. The term libretto is also sometimes used to refer to the text of major liturgical works, such as the Mass, requiem and sacred cantata, or the story line of a ballet. Libretto (pronounced [liˈbretto]; plural libretti [liˈbretti]), from Italian, is the diminutive of the word libro ("book"). Sometimes other-language equivalents are used for libretti.