

# THE SHAKESPEARE FOLIO HANDBOOK AND CENSUS

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*Compiled by*  
Harold M. Otness

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## Quotations

"Next to Caxtons, no English books have been coveted for so long by collectors, or so highly prized as some of the editions of Shakespeare...it is the universal appeal of the genius that gave so immortal an expression to the strength and foibles and beauty of human nature...the book represents the greatest single literary and artistic achievement in the annals of English letters." (Julian Boyd)

"It may be safely asserted, without fear of the writer being accused of exaggeration, that the First Folio edition of Shakespeare is the most interesting and valuable book in the whole range of English literature." (J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps)

"...if neither especially rare nor unusually beautiful, the First Folio is none the less one of the most precious of all books." (Charles Hinman)

"The First Folios of Shakespeare, miserably printed, bristling with misprints, and in no way distinguished above tons of other books issuing from Elizabethan presses, are among the two or three most precious literary jewels of the world." (Unsigned article in the Chicago Public Library Book Bulletin, 1917)

"Thousands and thousands of books have been written about Shakespeare, and most of them are mad." (Logan Pearsall Smith)

On conducting a census of First folios in 1902: "I have been baffled more often than I could wish." (Sir Sidney Lee)

"Bibliography is a necessary nuisance and a horrible drudgery...a good bibliographer is a kind of inspired idiot." (Elliott Coues)

# Preface

It takes a fair amount of recklessness to thrust a work on any facet of Shakespeare upon the academic community; for there is a no more contentious, quarrelsome, and divisive gathering of interests, personalities, opinions, passions, and interpretations anywhere, outside, perhaps, the arena of religion. Yet it is this very lack of agreement and its consequent richness of creative academic activity that calls me to the task. There is a need, I perceive, for a reference book on the often cited, but frequently misunderstood, "Shakespeare Folios."

I am a librarian with some bibliographic exposure, a smattering of geographical training, and a fascination with the spatial aspects of the movement of the four great seventeenth century Folio editions of Shakespeare's plays over the last three centuries. It is these books, and how they have traveled over time, where they can be found today, and how they have been valued monetarily that constitute the focus of my study. Only in an abstract and secondhand way do I know why these volumes are so highly regarded today, and I am at a confessed loss to explain with any confidence the detailed true inner meanings of their plays, or how they should be performed and taught. This is probably the first such confession to appear in any of the thousands of books that have been written about Shakespeare. I do, however, have a decade of mixed pleasure and pain rambling about in that vast and boundless wilderness of Shakespeare bibliography. My concern is not with the mountain of bibliographical minutia arising between (and even within) editions. That has been covered elsewhere, and the audience for it is limited. I strive here for a reference book that will satisfy the introductory needs of those having questions concerning the Shakespeare Folios, and I refer them to institutions that hold specific copies, should their interests go further.

My involvement with Shakespeare Folios developed because my library at Southern Oregon State College in Ashland acquired a Second Folio of 1632 and a Fourth Folio of 1685, in 1979 and 1980 respectively; and I was drawn

into those acquisitions by my interests in printing history, rare and fine books, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival which is situated in Ashland, and by my responsibility for The Friends of the Library at Southern Oregon State College, which made those acquisitions possible. When considering the purchase of those Shakespeare Folios, I first wanted to know which other libraries in my state already owned copies. That set me off on a search that has circuitously resulted in this work.

In this day of computer-based bibliographic databanks and networks, interlibrary cooperation, and a growing recognition of the significance and value of the Shakespeare Folios, it is surprising that so little has been known about their institutional ownership. There are partial (and not completely accurate) records of holdings in The National Union Catalog, the Short Title catalogs, various printed single-library catalogs such as those of the Folger Shakespeare Library and the New York Public Library, and in the RLIN and OCLC databases. Various attempts at partial inventories have been conducted over the last hundred years, but, curiously, none in the last fifty years. Yet it has been this last half century that has seen so many changes in the ownership of these books. There is the perception that all books of age and great value have already come to rest permanently in institutions, but in the case of the Shakespeare Folios (as opposed, perhaps, to the Quartos), there is still plenty of movement afoot, and just because an institution holds a Folio now does not mean that its peregrinations are necessarily over.

My aim is to impose order on the where and why of the four seventeenth century Shakespeare Folios in the United States, and my method is to do it in handbook format. This is intended to be a quick reference tool in which needed information can be found without digging through the erudite but bulky tomes that characterize the literature on Shakespeare. Besides, most of this background material on the Folios - how they came about, sources of text, methods of printing - has already been elegantly expressed in a great number of works: the challenge is to find it in an efficient manner. The bibliography at the end cites major studies of the Shakespeare Folios which can supply this kind of information in greater detail.

This study is the extension of earlier work done by several bibliographers. Thomas Frognall Dibdin described 26 First Folios in his Library Companion of 1824. The London bookseller Thomas Rodd the Younger is said to have compiled a list of 80 copies, many of which passed through his hands, but it apparently did not survive his death. Other partial lists of First Folios appeared in Samuel Austin Allibone's Dictionary of English and American Authors (taken from earlier sources) and elsewhere. But the first systematic census was Justin Winsor's 1876 A



Bibliography of the Original Quartos and Folios of Shakespeare With Particular Reference to Copies in America. He located 19 First Folios in America (actually 18 as one copy turned out to be a facsimile), 36 F2s, 19 F3s, and 27 F4s (hereafter these conventional abbreviations will be used to designate the three later editions throughout this work - the First Folio will be spelled out as such). Most of these Folios were then in private hands. Two additional partial lists appeared in the next few years, including William H. Fleming's 1888 census of 13 First Folios in New York City alone. The major work in this field was Sir Sidney Lee's census of First Folios which appeared in 1902. He located and described 156 copies worldwide. Robert Metcalf Smith of Lehigh University carried on this census for the United States into the 1930s, while adding the later three Folio editions. (Full citations for these works are found in the bibliography.) Together Winsor, Lee, and Smith provided a substantial foundation for this work. While I have been able to triple their findings, I could not have come this far without the valuable records they left behind. Bibliographical labor is considerably easier today in this age of technological wonders and increased institutional ownership, and I have much admiration and respect for the accomplishments of those who preceded me.

My methods of locating Shakespeare Folios held by institutions have been the traditional ones of letters of inquiry sent to libraries known to have them from the earlier inventories cited, or suspected of having them; personal visits to libraries; and dogged questioning wherever librarians have gathered. The responses of special collection and rare book librarians have been, almost without exception, generous and knowledgeable. Many of them have gone far beyond mere duty to provide the requested information, which is not always easy to dig out of institutional records; to advise of holdings in other libraries; and to offer advice and encouragement on this project. To name them all would take several pages, but the following must be cited here for their assistance beyond the call of duty: Katherine Pantzer of Harvard University, Francis O. Mattson of the New York Public Library, Mark Dimunation of Stanford University, Lucille Wehner of the Newberry Library, Georgianna Ziegler of the University of Pennsylvania, Alan Jutzi of the Huntington Library, Nati Krivatsy of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Marty Barringer of Georgetown University, John P. Chalmers of the University of Texas, Robert R. Shields of the Library of Congress, and Richard Heinzkill of the University of Oregon. Two librarians from institutions without Shakespeare Folios made errands in my behalf to libraries having them: Lavonne Jacobsen of California State University, San Francisco, and Marjorie Markoff of Millersville University of Pennsylvania.

Over the last decade I have been able to visit approximately half of the American libraries having Folios and have received the hospitality of their librarians.

Here can be named such individuals as Alexandra Mason of the University of Kansas, David E. Schoonover of the University of Iowa, Beverly D. Bishop of Emory University, and Tim Pyatt formerly of the University of Oregon, but there are still more whose names deserve to be here. Special collections and rare book librarians are among the best of the library profession, and it has been a privilege to be involved with them. This handbook and census is the result of the information they have provided, but whatever errors and omissions it contains are, of course, completely my responsibility. In some cases the requested information simply does not exist, and it must also be kept in mind that some of the Shakespeare Folios are "made-up" or composite copies, and they sometimes have a considerable number of leaves from other editions or in facsimile, and therefore defy simple classification.

While this handbook and census represents my best efforts of detection, there may still be institutional copies that I have failed to uncover. It is my hope that this publication will encourage those copies to surface, and, as additional Folios move from private hands to institutions that they too be added to this compilation. With the passage of time we should develop a clearer understanding of how many of the Shakespeare Folios have survived and where they may be found today.

The next obvious step is to extend the census worldwide. Shakespeare Folios are becoming more dispersed with time: at least 70 copies, including at least ten First Folios, are now held by Japanese institutions, and there are Shakespeare Folios in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and most of the European nations as well as in the British Isles. Rough notes on foreign holdings are provided in this compilation, but there is much more to be done. It is hoped that the appearance of this publication will make this next step easier.

While this project has been evolving for a decade, a sabbatical granted by Southern Oregon State College has made it possible to bring it to completion. It is both commendable and encouraging when a regional state college supports the kind of academic activity usually identified with larger and more lofty institutions.

Thanks are also due to Marilyn Brownstein, Editor, Humanities, and Diane Spalding, Assistant Production Editor, both of Greenwood Press. The last acknowledgment is for Loretta Otness who deserves far more credit and appreciation than this line can possibly suggest.

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# Introduction

The First Folio Edition of Shakespeare's Plays... forms the greatest contribution made in a single volume to the secular literature of any age or country. By the English-speaking peoples it must always be regarded as the proudest monument of their literary history. Sidney Lee (1)

Quotes like the above abound in Shakespeare and bibliophilic literature. While there can be no consensus on a list of the greatest books ever created, few "great books" compilations omit the Shakespeare First Folio of 1623. This work is often positioned with the Bible, a parallel that tempted one observer to note that "like the Bible the great plays of Shakespeare are little read." (2)

The extent to which the plays are earnestly read, at least in their early editions, is not the question here, but they are without doubt frequently performed, and taught, worldwide. Legions of scholars continue to wrestle with the text in search of more complete understanding and appreciation. The text of the plays is a matter of central interest in the world of Shakespeare studies. The reasons for this interest arise in part from the great variety of texts that are available and the uncertainty concerning their authenticity and accuracy.

As an artifact, the Shakespeare First Folio - and the three seventeenth century editions that followed it - is not a particularly well-crafted book. It falls short of the criteria for a beautifully printed book, although it is a large and usually impressively bound book. It has only a single illustration, the famous copperplate engraved portrait of Shakespeare on its title page. Nor is it an "early" book in the antiquarian sense: it came about 175 years after the introduction of printing from moveable type in the Western world and about 150 years after this kind of printing was introduced to Britain. Nor is it a particularly scarce book, existing in only a handful of

copies like the far more monetarily valued and artistically accomplished Gutenberg Bible (c1450) or the crudely printed Bay Psalm Book (1640), thought to be the first book printed in Anglo-America. This is not to say that it is a cheap book, readily available, for particularly with Japanese buyers now in the market, a choice Shakespeare First Folio today could fetch upwards of a million dollars, and moderately defective copies of the F4 do bring ten thousand dollars and more. In 1924 Sir Sidney Lee noted that "In terms of hard cash a reasonably perfect copy of the First Folio is to-day the most valuable of all printed books of secular literature." (3) The number of copies of each edition printed is lost, but speculation puts the press runs at several hundred copies each and perhaps as many as fifteen hundred copies (although this top figure seems unrealistic in light of the number of surviving copies). American institutions hold at least 561 copies of the four editions combined, which may constitute as many as half of the extant copies worldwide. And many copies, particularly of the F2 and F4, are still in private hands.

What then makes the Shakespeare Folios valuable, in both cultural and marketplace terms, if they are not particularly old, scarce, or beautifully produced? The answer lies in the text itself. Here we must review some basic facts, or at least what we presume to be facts, for in the case of Shakespeare, facts are in short supply and almost always contestable, at least by someone.

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-on-Avon in 1564. He moved to London sometime around 1585. Between about 1590 and 1611 he wrote plays for a theater company in which he held a share of the ownership, Lord Chamberlain's Players, later known as The King's Men. Just how many plays he wrote and how many he collaborated on with others, and the extent of that collaboration, is one of those questions that persists, but today the canon is generally considered to be 37 plays. To bring this thumbnail biography to a close, Shakespeare retired to Stratford around 1611 and he died in 1616.

At the core of the explanation of the significance of the Folios is the fact that during Shakespeare's lifetime only eighteen of his plays appeared in print and not all of these are thought to be accurate and complete texts. These early printings of the plays are called Quartos because of the format in which they were published: quarto refers to books printed on sheets of paper that were folded twice, thus making each page one-fourth of the original sheet size. Quartos are small format books, then measuring about nine inches high and seven inches wide, and in the case of Shakespeare they were limited to single plays and usually not (then) elaborately bound. They can be thought of as predecessors to the cheap paperbacks of today. The plays for which Quarto editions existed prior to the publication of the First Folio in 1623 are as follows (in the order of their first appearance):

Henry VI, Part II. 1594.  
Taming of the Shrew. 1594. (disputed)  
Titus Andronicus. 1594.  
Henry VI, Part III. 1595.  
Richard II. 1597.  
Richard III. 1597.  
Romeo and Juliet. 1597.  
Henry IV, Part I. 1598.  
Love's Labours Lost. 1598.  
Henry V. 1600.  
Merchant of Venice. 1600.  
Midsummer Night's Dream. 1600.  
Much Ado About Nothing. 1600.  
Merry Wives of Windsor. 1602.  
Hamlet. 1603.  
King Lear. 1608.  
Pericles. 1609.  
Troilus and Cressida. 1609.  
Othello. 1622. (published after Shakespeare's death,  
 but prior to the printing of the First Folio)

Some of these Quarto editions are of questionable merit and were probably done without Shakespeare's cooperation or approval. It is thought that scribes may have recorded the actors' lines during performance and then had them printed unedited, with errors and omissions: thus, the terms "good Quartos" and "bad Quartos." The Quartos were not grand presentation volumes, and relatively few copies survive. A census of them has been done and the more important ones have been reproduced in facsimile. (4)

Folios followed the Quartos. Folio means a large-format book in which the paper is folded only once, thus producing pages roughly twice the size of the quartos. And while the Shakespeare Quartos were single plays per volume, the Folios were the collected plays all in one large volume of over nine hundred pages.

Even in the academic community confusion often reigns when Shakespeare Folios are discussed. One college president bragged that his institution owned a "Shakespeare Portfolio," while no less a lighter of candles in dark places than Jacques Barzun referred to the surviving "seventy-four Folios of Shakespeare." (5) Whether Barzun intended editions or copies is not clear from the context; in either case he was far off the mark.

While the phrase "Shakespeare Folio" can refer to any large-format edition regardless of date, it is generally, as here, used to denote specifically the first four seventeenth century collected editions of the plays. These books contained the plays only and not the sonnets, which were printed separately and at different dates.

The Shakespeare First Folio was issued in 1623, which was seven years following the Bard's death. Thus, while it



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Published according to the True Originall Copies.



L O N D O N  
Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

**Title Page of the First Folio of 1623**