

**ENCYCLOPEDIA
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VOLUME 9

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VOLUME 9

**Fore-Edge Painting
to Germany**

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FORE-EDGE PAINTING

A fore-edge painting may be defined as a painting or decoration on the fore-edge of the book, but it commonly refers to a water-color painting on the fore-edge which is visible when the leaves are fanned and disappears when the book is closed. The painting is most often concealed under the gilt or marbled edges of the leaves, although the leaves may be stained a color such as maroon or left untreated. Fore-edge paintings are single, double, or two-way. A single painting becomes visible when the leaves are fanned in one direction, most often to the right. In a double fore-edge painting one painting is visible when the leaves are fanned to the right, another when they are fanned to the left. In a two-way fore-edge painting one painting is visible when the leaves are fanned to the middle on the left, another when they are fanned to the middle on the right. This kind of painting is very unusual, only one being mentioned among the large number of fore-edge paintings examined by Carl Weber (1, p. 104). Although most paintings are horizontal on the leaves, some are vertical.

Since the art of fore-edge painting has been developed by book-binders and their artists, it is best described in books on bookbinding. J. A. Arnett's *Bibliopagia* (2) explains the technique but points out that the work is so time-consuming and expensive that it is not often done. Further information is found in J. B. Nicholson's *A Manual of the Art of Bookbinding* (3), J. W. Zaehnsdorf's *The Art of Bookbinding* (4), and H. L. A. Blanchon's *L'Art et la Pratique en Reliure* (5). More recent sources are Cyril Davenport's *The Book, Its History and Development* (6) and Edith Diehl's *Bookbinding, Its Background and Technique* (7). The basic steps are: scrape the leaves of the fore-edge with a plough (a wooden implement with a knife which cuts edges of a book when in a press) and smooth the surface; then fan the leaves and clamp them tightly into position between wooden boards or other satisfactory holder and paint the scene or design on the fore-edge, holding the brush at a right-angle and using paint thick enough not to run sideways on the leaves. Allow the painting to dry thoroughly before removing the clamps. The secret is to hold the pages so tight that paint doesn't get into the leaves, and not to paint the white areas, thereby avoiding crumbling white powder later. If the painting is to be concealed under gilt, care must be taken that there is sufficient gilt to hide the painting but not so much that it dulls it. Gilding is an art so different from that of painting that one person rarely does both. The fore-edge of the book is burnished while the book is held between gilding boards in the gilding press. The leaves must be tightly clamped to prevent the glair, (or sizing), from running onto the painting.

How to mix the sizing and how to apply the gilt successfully are described in books on bookbinding. Edith Diehl gives information on marbling and notes that Le Gascon introduced marbled edges under gilt (7). Most twentieth century artists use an old book which has already been gilded because of the superiority of the rag paper and of the gilding; today gold leaf is so expensive that it is often applied too

sparingly to cover the painting. The fore-edges of many old books are painted by twentieth century artists and sold as paintings contemporary with the book.

Vera Dutter in "The Ancient Art of Fore-edge Painting" suggests fanning out the gilt edge and holding it tightly in position with screws or clamps, then using a brush as dry as possible on the surface so exposed (8). When the painting is dry, remove the clamps and close the book; remove the paint which has run with a piece of damp cotton. The artist should be skilled in painting miniatures. In a double fore-edge painting the artist has to take advantage of some of the color in the first painting and work it into the second, a very delicate task. If the book has already been gilded, the artist must use a book with heavier paper and paint with a very dry brush; any color which comes through on the second painting must be camouflaged.

Book-edge decoration was used in the tenth century in Europe and developed from the practice of lettering the title of bulky manuscript folio volumes on the fore-edge, the horizontal shelving making such identification desirable. When books became smaller, the title was transferred to the spine, leaving the fore-edge available for the owner's name or coat of arms or geometric and floral designs. In England a fourteenth century psalter of Anne de Felbrigge, the earliest embroidered book known, has the Felbrigge arms on the edges. By the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries book decoration was common and the early practice of decorating the top and lower as well as the fore-edge continued. Gauffering, a practice of crimping or fluting, was done in France in the fifteenth century, and in the middle of the sixteenth color was added to the gauffered edges; this was especially popular in Germany and England. Gauffered gilt edges were used at a later period to conceal fore-edge paintings.

Designs long in use on the Continent were introduced into England by Thomas Berthelet, printer to King Henry VIII; colored heraldic designs, for example, had been used on the Continent since the Crusades. Berthelet used decoration to denote royal ownership and often lettered such sentences on the bindings and the fore-edge as "Rex in Aeternum Vive." He is responsible for one of the most beautifully decorated books of the early sixteenth century, a Bible printed in Zurich in 1543 and owned by Henry VIII (the book is now in the British Museum). The top and bottom edges as well as the fore-edge are elaborately painted in gold and colors with figures, arabesques, flowers, and scrolls which are visible only when the book is closed.

There is disagreement among authorities on bookbinding about the inventor of the art of concealing a fore-edge painting on a book. The earliest signed and dated concealed painting is on a Bible printed in 1651 by the Stationers Company, London; beneath a painting of the Booth or Leigh family's coat of arms (with flowers and animals and the first owner's motto "Via Verbū. Patria Coelum") is the monogram "ST" followed by "Lewis Fecit. Anno Dom. 1653" (book in the New York Public Library's Spencer Collection) (see Figure 1).

Although many writers on fore-edge painting mention the 1651 Bible, they draw differing conclusions about the artist. Charles William Kellaway surmises that not



FIGURE 1. *From The Holy Bible, London, 1651, in the Spencer Collection, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, New York Public Library.*

one man but two brothers, Stephen and Thomas Lewis, did the first concealed fore-edge painting and that the "S.T." is a monogram, since one letter is superimposed on the other (9). The brothers, who were bookbinders in London, evidently did fore-edge paintings individually also, for there is one in the Edinburgh University Library signed Thomas Lewis and another in the Guildhall Library signed Stephen Lewis. Of the nine examples of their work extant, six are signed and three are dated. Carl J. Weber agrees with Kellaway that Stephen and Thomas Lewis invented the art of the disappearing fore-edge painting (1) but Howard M. Nixon points out that the signature of the Lewis brothers is that of the bookbinders, not of the artist, and that other signatures like those of Fletcher and Mearne belong to binders or booksellers (10).

Vera Dutter credits the invention to Samuel Mearne, Royal Bookbinder to Charles II from 1660–1683, who was noted for his elaborate fore-edge decorations (8). Edith Diehl refers to the Mearne binder rather than specifying Samuel Mearne himself as the originator (7). The binding of the 1651 Bible is in Mearne's cottage style, but that does not mean that Lewis worked for Mearne.

Cyril Davenport thinks Samuel Mearne conceived the plan of concealing a painting on the fore-edge but an artist named Fletcher did the actual work (6). He bases the evidence on three volumes of John Fox's *Acts and Monuments*, London, 1641, which have the cipher and portraits of Charles II on the fore-edge with floral designs painted vertically in red, blue, green, and gold and signed "Fletcher compinxit." The portraits were probably painted in 1660 or later. The problem of assigning a date to the paintings and the name of the artist or bookbinder for whom he worked has left the debate on the inventor of concealed fore-edge paintings unsettled, although the Lewis brothers, on the basis of present evidence, seem the most likely originators.

The second half of the seventeenth century is noted for elaborate fore-edge paintings and is considered the golden age by Nixon (10). It is a period well-

documented by studies of famous binders and collectors. One of the famous paintings is on a Book of Common Prayer, printed in 1662, with five vertical pictures showing from bottom to top the agony, betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (painted for Charles II and now in the British Museum). For Weber the golden era is the period in which the firm of Edwards of Halifax was active, approximately 1774–1834 (1).

Not only is there disagreement about the inventor of the art of the concealed fore-edge painting, but there is also speculation about what happened after Mearne's death. Some writers maintain that the art died and was revived in the eighteenth century by William Edwards [according to Vera Dutter (8)], by James Edwards [according to Edith Diehl (7), Eugenia Raymond (12), and Cyril Davenport (6)], or by Charles Kalthoeber [according to H. P. Horne (13)]. The art was not lost; in fact, two of the most famous fore-edge paintings appear on John Pine's edition of *Horace* which was published in 1733, the date of the paintings being fairly certain because the arms of the Spanish Prince of the Asturias (with floral scrolls and different designs) were on each of the two volumes (now in Columbia University Library). In the first half of the eighteenth century armorial fore-edge paintings were done for John Brindley, bookbinder to Caroline of Ansbach, consort of George II.

The art of fore-edge painting was developed to its highest point in the eighteenth century by the Edwards of Halifax firm. William Edwards (1723–1808) founded a bookbindery in Halifax which was noted not only for its "Etruscan" calf and transparent vellum bindings but also for the beauty of its fore-edge paintings. The early paintings done for the firm were monochromes, often in gray or brown. The floral designs, scrolls, or Biblical scenes were concealed under marbled edges. Great interest in the picturesque had been aroused by William Gilpin's *An Essay upon Prints*, published in London in 1768, and William Edwards profited from this interest by having his artists paint landscapes, often with country seats or ruins, on the fore-edges of his books, thereby revolutionizing the subject matter of the art. The brightness of the colors and the skillful use of detail have never been surpassed.

Several of William Edwards's sons entered the book business but only Thomas Edwards (1762–1834) became a binder. To Thomas Edwards and to Bartholomew Frye, who worked for the Edwards firm and later became independent, belongs the credit for the production of most of the fore-edge paintings which were not done under the direction of William Edwards. The only clue to the artist who worked for them is a pencilled note on the flyleaf of Thomson's *Seasons* (London, 1821) stating that "the drawing on the edge (is) by I. Herbert" (a painting of King's College Chapel, Cambridge).

Did Thomas Edwards invent the double fore-edge painting as Carl J. Weber thinks (1), or was it first done about 1890 or even later as Howard M. Nixon maintains (10)? Mr. Nixon has examined famous private English libraries of 1800–1830, such as those of the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Spencer, George III, Thomas Grenville, and Francis Douce, and not found one book printed between 1800 and 1825 with a concealed fore-edge painting. Those with such paintings were bound

by Fletcher, Samuel Mearne, John Brindley, and Edwards of Halifax. Far fewer fore-edge paintings were done for William Edwards than has been supposed, and many attributed to him are twentieth century fakes. There were few rivals of the Edwards firm, although fore-edge paintings do appear on books bound by Charles Kalthoeber, R. & J. Faulder, John Whitaker, Taylor and Hessey, Walther, Stagge-meier & Welcher, Charles Hering, and Dawson and Lewis. Probably few of the paintings are contemporary with the book.

The art of the concealed fore-edge painting certainly originated in England and reached its highest development there, but in the nineteenth century it was also practiced in the United States. American tourists and American writers living in England (such as Emerson, Longfellow, and Holmes) had bought books with fore-edge paintings and brought them back to the States. The English began to cater to American tourists by painting scenes of American cities, frequently copied from albums of views, on the fore-edges, and eventually this concentration on the tourist trade and on scenes likely to appeal to American tourists led to shoddy work and no relationship between the subject of the book and that of the painting. In spite of the declining quality of the fore-edge paintings so much interest was evidenced in the technique that in 1856 Nicholson gave directions on how to paint a fore-edge in his *A Manual of the Art of Bookbinding* (3). John T. Beer of England decorated many books in his own library, preferring the sixteenth century titles, but didn't conceal them under gilt or marbling, a task left to buyers of his books. He did not hesitate to give the source of the work he copied: on William Tyndall's *The Whole Workes of W. Tyndall*, London, 1573, he painted the picture of Tyndall's martyrdom from Fox's *Book of Martyrs* (now in the Folger Shakespeare Library). By the end of the nineteenth century the art of fore-edge painting was being marred by commercialism and careless work.

Disagreement about twentieth century fore-edge painting is as marked as that about its origin and its revival. Vera Dutter in "The Ancient Art of Fore-edge Painting" says that the art began to die in 1850 and that today few artists do it (8). Carl J. Weber thinks that artists are fairly active today but considers the greatest period of production the first 30 years of the nineteenth century (1). Howard Nixon, on the other hand, believes that about 90% of the fore-edge paintings under gold were done in the twentieth century, a great many of them by amateurs commissioned by London and American booksellers (10).

Unlike many twentieth century fore-edge painters who remain anonymous, Miss C. B. Currie signed and numbered her paintings. She was employed by Messrs. Henry Sotheran & Co. in London to paint miniatures for their Cosway bindings and to paint the edges of the books, mostly nineteenth century, with a wide variety of subjects in bright colors. She worked from the latter part of the nineteenth century until well into the twentieth and did about two hundred fore-edge paintings, the earliest being listed in Sotheran catalog no. 788 for 1923. Other artists doing fore-edge paintings in the twentieth century are Kenneth Hobson, Sydney Richmond Burleigh, Alfred De Sauty, Vera Dutter, Frederick R. Cross, and Sue Buckingham Moulton.

Amateur artists quite often sign their paintings; many artists copy from other artists or from illustrated books. Vera Dutter is a professional painter who does originals on the fore-edge and can do a simple fore-edge painting in one day. Many booksellers who specialize in fore-edge paintings have amateurs like housewives and clerks and some full-time artists adding paintings to the fore-edges of their older books. This is a legitimate practice if the books are not sold as having contemporary fore-edge paintings.

It is rather surprising to find fore-edge paintings done in China. Mr. Pettus, an American teacher at the University of Peiping, took a book with a fore-edge painting to China, confident that the Chinese could figure out how it was done. Between 1936 and 1942 many books so decorated were sold in the United States, usually depicting Biblical scenes or oriental landscapes. Many Chinese fore-edge paintings are vertical on the leaves and many are not gilded. Modern books, old English, Chinese, and Japanese books are frequently chosen for decoration, but most of the painting is inferior to that of the outstanding English artists.

Subjects used in fore-edge paintings have varied. The earliest were heraldic shields, coats of arms, monograms, family mottos, floral designs, and scrolls, some to denote ownership of the book, some purely decorative. In the middle of the sixteenth century German binders were fond of using color on gauffered edges. When the concealed fore-edge painting became popular many Biblical scenes were used, the Last Supper being a favorite. William Edwards of Halifax introduced the use of landscapes, especially those considered picturesque. Sporting scenes became popular. The style of painting with a portrait in the compartment on the left and a house or scene comprising the other three-fourths of the painting was thought typical of the Edwards of Halifax era but is now said to have been invented by an English woman who has painted well over a thousand fore-edges since 1927.

The best artists have attempted to relate the subject of the painting to the book, although they rarely created the painting but most often copied it from other artists. Certain types of books have appealed to painters of fore-edges far more than others: English poetry, the Bible, prayer-books and psalters, Greek and Latin classics, and travel books have been frequently decorated.

Forgeries are common and are hard to detect. The date of the view of a city can be checked or the portrait of a famous person compared with other portraits done during the same period to establish the approximate date of the painting. Bookseller's catalogs for a given period are most useful in listing the fore-edge paintings then available and in describing the subjects which were popular. There is much skepticism about the genuineness of many fore-edge paintings offered for sale today, especially those attributed to Edwards of Halifax—but when an Edwards of Halifax fore-edge painting is placed beside a forgery, it is clearly superior in the use of color and clarity of detail.

Fore-edge paintings are fragile and must be treated with care. Dr. Charles Olsen of Chicago, according to *Hobbies* for October 1948 (p. 132), kept two of his fore-edge paintings in his office for visitors to see: one was a nature scene on *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers* by William Edmondstoune Aytoun; the other was a picture

of Abraham Lincoln painted on the fore-edge by a twentieth century artist (title of the book not mentioned but it was bound by Donnelly). If the story is true, it relates a most unusual situation of unusual generosity.

Many libraries do not list fore-edge paintings in the card catalog because they do not want to create a demand for them. The books should be treated as rare, with controlled temperature and humidity in the rooms where they are stored, and they should not be touched or exposed to light more than necessary. To view a fore-edge painting put the book on a hard surface, open it, and press the left board down firmly; leaves will fan to reveal the painting. The book may be held and the leaves fanned carefully, but the viewer must be careful not to touch the painting.

The largest collection of fore-edge paintings in the United States is the Doheny Collection, St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, California. There are examples in many other libraries, such as the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Thorne Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, the New York Public Library, the Albert H. Wiggin Collection of Prints at the Boston Public Library, the Frazer Memorial Library at McNeese State College, the Huntington Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, Cincinnati Art Museum, Grosse Pointe Public Library, University of Rochester Library, the British Museum, and other libraries in England. The British Museum has a good collection and is building a twentieth century section of signed fore-edge paintings, many of them on old books. The Library of Congress has a small collection and is not actively pursuing a policy of acquiring more. There are some good collections in private hands. Doubles are scarce; even the large collections do not have a great number. With continued activity of twentieth century artists these collections will surely grow.

Fore-edge paintings bring pleasure to the viewers and will be sought by the collector. But let the buyer and the reader beware of all they hear about this surprising art!

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The publications of Forest Press, Inc. consist solely of the *Dewey Decimal Classification* (DDC) (q.v.). The press is a New York State nonprofit corporation, governed by its own Board of Directors, who serve without compensation. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation.

The name Forest Press first appeared in an imprint of the *Dewey Decimal Classification* in 1911 in Edition 7. The first edition of the classification, which was devised by Melvil Dewey (q.v.) while a student at Amherst College, was published at Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1876 with no publisher in the imprint. The second to sixth editions, 1885-1899, and the first abridged edition, 1894, were published in Boston by Library Bureau, which Dewey had created and which he controlled.

In 1906 Dewey resigned from his position as librarian of the New York State Library in Albany and moved to the Lake Placid Club at Lake Placid, New York, a private organization that he had been instrumental in forming. Since that time the principal office of the Dewey Decimal Classification has been at the Lake Placid Club.

The name "Forest Press" was adopted around 1910 when the club enlarged its print shop with a view to doing somewhat more ambitious printing than menus and leaflets. The name "Forest" has also been applied to the main building at the club, Forest Clubhouse, and to the library in that building, Forest Library.

For over 20 years the name was merely an imprint on various club publications, the DDC, and a few other publications, and the name in which the business of the DDC was conducted. Organization was formalized October 31, 1933, by incorporation, under the name Forest Press, Inc. An amendment to the certificate of incorporation filed July 27, 1951, limited the activities of the press to functions relating to the Dewey Decimal Classification.

The earlier editions of the classification, through 1921, were copyrighted in the names of Melvil Dewey, Library Bureau, and Forest Press, Forest Press being used for the second and third abridged editions, 1912 and 1921, respectively, and for the *Outline Decimal Classification* published in 1921. However, all copyrights from the very first edition had actually been owned by Melvil Dewey.

On January 31, 1922, Melvil Dewey assigned all copyrights in the Decimal Classification to the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation. This foundation had been chartered January 26, 1922, by the University of the State of New York, for the promotion and management of educational activities, including specifically "instituting, organizing or fostering . . . movements to advance public welfare through education by means of the Foundation press."

The nonprofit status of Forest Press, Inc. derives from Melvil Dewey's "deed of gift" of October 31, 1924. In a document of that date Dewey provided further aid to the Lake Placid Education Foundation for carrying out the purposes for which its charter was granted. The deed of gift included certain conditions which Dewey imposed to guard against having the foundation drift away from the purposes for which it was founded. By the following clause (in his simplified spelling) Dewey effectively and at one stroke both limited the use of the income from the Decimal Classification and insured the perpetuation of the system:

All receipts or royalties from the sales of the various editions of the Decimal Classification hereinabove referd to shal be spent under direction of the Foundation Executiv Board for editing, revising, bringing out needed special editions and making them known, thus making the sistem more widely useful without allowing it ever to be a source of *personal profit* beyond necessary expenses and reasonable salaries for actual work.

The purpose of incorporation after Dewey's death in 1931 was to segregate the active business and related affairs of the Decimal Classification and thus facilitate the carrying out of the injunctive provisions of Dewey's "deed of gift," and to put the authority for the operations of the Decimal Classification in the hands of a separate board of directors smaller in number and more directly interested in library affairs than the full board of foundation trustees. Forest Press, Inc. issued all its authorized stock to Lake Placid Club Education Foundation; the foundation transferred all assets and liabilities related to the Decimal Classification to the newly created Forest Press, Inc.

By an Internal Revenue Service ruling of July 3, 1953, Forest Press, Inc. became entitled to exemption from federal income tax under the provisions of Section 101(6) of the Code, beginning July 27, 1951. This tax-exempt status is based on the fact that the press is organized and operated exclusively for educational purposes and as a nonprofit corporation.

In the early years Melvil Dewey himself took the responsibility for the business of publishing the Decimal Classification. Later, the management was vested in a committee of the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation. Since the incorporation of Forest Press in 1933 there has been a separate Board of Directors, elected by the foundation. At first this board consisted entirely of men from the foundation. Gradually representation of the book and library world has been added until now the entire board is comprised of men representing various library interests, a majority of whom are also trustees of the foundation. The first of a series of distinguished librarians on the Board of Directors was Milton J. Ferguson, who served from 1945 until his death in 1954. Following is a list of the library-oriented members preceding the present board; a list of other members who have been closely associated with the press over a long period; and the current (1971) members with the dates of their complete terms:

Library-oriented

Milton J. Ferguson (1945–1954)
Brooklyn Public Library

Walter A. Hafner (1950–1965)
Stechert Hafner, Inc.

Howard Haycraft (1951–1968)
H. W. Wilson Co.

Verner W. Clapp (1954–)
Council on Library Resources, Inc.

Jack Dalton (1961–1967)
Columbia University School of Library Service

Others

Deo B. Colburn (1933–1947; 1951–)
Forest Press, Inc. (to 1969)

Godfrey Dewey (1950–1961)
Lake Placid Club, New York

Current Members

Verner W. Clapp (1954–1974)
Consultant, Council on Library Resources, Inc.

Deo B. Colburn (1933–1947; 1951–1972)
Lake Placid, New York