Book Reviews

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Donald C. O'Brien. *The Engraving Trade in Early Cincinnati*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013. ix, 194 p. ISBN 978-0821420140. \$29.14

Donald C. O'Brien's *The Engraving Trade in Early Cincinnati* is the first published survey of individuals and businesses engaged in engraving, lithographing, and printing in early Cincinnati, Ohio. Mr. O'Brien, a retired public educator, is a past president of the American Historical Print Society and a member of the American Antiquarian Society. This title highlights the work of early engravers and printers in Cincinnati in the wider context of American engraving and illustration, while also giving an overview of notable items and titles produced by these firms. O'Brien gives a roughly chronological look at the firms and their work in eight chapters.

O'Brien's preface and introduction detail his initial interest in, and research of, this body of work. The preface describes his interest and scholarship of early Cincinnati printing, and the introduction sets the tone and arrangement for the following eight chapters. The narrative and chapters are arranged chronologically, interweaving businesses, commerce, and printing around the timeline O'Brien sets.

To fit this chronological arrangement, the chapters of the book follow two different general themes. Chapters 2 and 3 focus primarily on firms. Chapters 4 through 7 focus on genres, or the products of these and other firms. Though the chronological nature of the narrative is helpful in structuring the timeline of Cincinnati engraving, the text could be confusing to all but the most determined of readers.

Indeed, use of passive voice throughout moves this title from wider readership to the province of scholars of printing. Beyond its use of passive voice are the frequently used phrases “might have,” “very likely did,” and “perhaps knew,” leaving the reader to either take these assertions at face value, or take their own initiative to trace where O’Brien’s assertions originated.

The ample illustrations in the book supply visual examples of items discussed in the text. Indeed, the book contains 132 illustrations in its 194 pages. The illustrations reproduce some unusual and rare items for the first time, and these reproductions are generally well done. Of further help to the reader, these illustrations generally appear near where the item illustrated is mentioned in the text. However, some of the illustrations exhibit moiré, making these illustrations of a lower quality than the otherwise excellent reproductions and images in the book.

With the book being this well illustrated, an index or listing of illustrations would be helpful for the reader. Though the book is not presented as an exhaustive listing of work by early Cincinnati engravers and lithographers, many titles are mentioned in the text, which would serve users better in a formal list, with references and a listing of extant copies. Furthermore, an index to the illustrations would be more helpful to the reader than the current state of the reproductions.

The references and bibliography are an excellent assembly of resources on printing in Cincinnati, in addition to survey books on engraving and lithography in the wider United States. Surprisingly, as the book discusses lithography and color lithography, there are key titles missing from the references and bibliography, including Whitman Bennett’s *A Practical Guide to American Nineteenth Century Color Plate Books* and Daniel McGrath’s *American Colorplate Books, 1800–1900*. However, several good resources and references to where one can find primary research materials, including Peter Marzio’s *Democratic Art*, are present. The references and resources, then, are best suited to the scholar of printing in Cincinnati and the surrounding area.

O’Brien’s work is an excellent beginning to a closer examination of engraving and lithography in 19th century Cincinnati. Indeed, this title is the first scholarly overview of these printed works, but merits more in-depth study. This book is of value to libraries that hold a sizable collection of works produced by these firms, as well as scholars interested in the symbiotic development of printing and commerce in 19th century Cincinnati.—Jason W. Dean, Assistant Librarian, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.