The First Freedom

When Colonel McCosmic happily completes an editorial guaranteed to put the finishing touch on the British Empire, when the somewhat furtive staff of the Daily Worker finishes warping their copy in accordance with the Party Line for that particular day, when the honest small town editor strikes out bluntly against favoritism, graft, or corruption, all of them, whether they realize it or not, owe a heavy debt to John Peter Zenger.

Freedom of speech in the Americas is an old idea. But the particular manifestation of it known as freedom of the press doesn’t go back quite as far. One of the foundation stones of that freedom is The Tryal of John Peter Zenger, of New-York, Printer, Who was Lately Try’d and Acquitted for Printing and Publishing a Libel against the Government, a book just presented by The Clements Library Associates to the Library.

Zenger was a newspaperman whose ideas didn’t entirely agree with the royal government of the colony of New York. As a matter of fact, he was not only a newspaperman, he was the whole working press of New York. When his paper, The New-York Weekly Journal, made a few bitter remarks about the character of the royal governor of the colony and his advisors, Zenger found himself in jail, his paper burned by the public hangman, and his two attorneys disbarred for presuming to speak in his defence.

But a “Philadelphia Lawyer,” Andrew Hamilton, a leader of the colonial bar, came to the aid of the put-upon printer, and in a brilliant series of arguments changed the whole course of American law.

This issue of the Quarto is devoted largely to the group of books presented to the Library at the Spring meeting of The Clements Library Associates.

actually printed the alleged libel. After Hamilton’s argument, the jury took upon itself to judge whether the matter in question was libelous—and juries have been doing the same thing ever since.

The Tryal is Zenger’s own reconstruction of what happened, and if the story is a little “slanted” in his favor, the same thing has been known to happen in the writings of more modern reporters.

A Boston Best-seller

Britannia awoke with something of a start in the year 1763 to the discovery that she was the proprietress of a large and imposing empire—an empire that had been assembled more or less subconsciously, but very effectively.

What probably woke her was a severe pain in the pocketbook. Empire comes high, as many a conqueror has discovered.

In 1763, at the end of the Seven Year’s War, known to the American colonists as the French and Indian War, Britain had ousted the French from the greater part of North America. But with a vastly increased frontier and a whole host of new responsibilities in the way of savage Indian tribes on that same frontier, plus a hostile Spanish viceroyalty a little farther to the west, the British found that a larger and larger army was needed. Instead of being able to relax after the peace that ended the war, the British taxpayer was being called on for more and greater contributions to the cost of government.

The final solution of the British government was a revenue measure, the Stamp Act of 1765, introduced to the Americans in a scarce twenty-two page pamphlet printed in Boston in 1765, and just given to the Clements Library by The Clements Library Associates.

One of John Adams’ most quoted comments is the one in which he observed that the American Revolution was actually complete before the fighting ever began. That is, the thinking of the American colonies had been slowly diverted from a London, King-fixed loyalty, to an American orientation, with colony overranking king, before the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord.

This document, the panacea for the perspiring and protesting British taxpayer, was perhaps the most important single step in the reorientation of American loyalty.

The British Cabinet, seeking for a happy solution of its financial dilemma, turned with considerable reason to the idea that people who are being protected ought to help pay the costs of that protection. Literally, this meant that the British statesmen saw no reason why the colonists, who were being protected by British arms, shouldn’t contribute to the cost of keeping those arms bright, useful, and in the proper geographical location.

George Grenville, first lord of the Treasury, proposed to do this by imposing a tax in the form of stamps required for most official and some other documents.

The colonies set up a yell of protest through their colonial agents, their unofficial ambassadors, who had their headquarters in London and their hands on the pulse of Empire. Grenville, who prided himself on being nothing if not a reasonable man, gave them a whole year to suggest a better plan. No suggestion
turning up, except that old and largely ineffective methods of volunteer contributions be followed, Grenville pushed the famous Stamp Act of 1765 through a Parliament completely unaware of the significance of the act to which it readily assented.

The issue of the act printed in London is fairly common. The Library already had Lord Shelburne’s copy and another bearing the royal arms which marked the books from George III’s own library. But issues printed in America, and especially the one printed in Boston, the heart of the colonial protest movement against the act, are exceedingly rare.

The Stamp Act hit the colonists harder than any previous piece of legislation. Not only was it undisguised taxation by the British Parliament of the American colonies, which gave birth to the famous cry of “No taxation without representation,” but also it was purely and simply a revenue measure. It was designed to raise money. The money was to be spent, true enough, in the support of the military establishment in the colonies where it was raised, but this failed to appease the colonials.

Other acts had hit the colonists. The Sugar Act of 1764 had put a serious crimp in the normal smuggling enterprises of the most respected merchants. Since the very first of the commercial control acts that were a part of the British economic philosophy of the time, one class or another of colonists had been hurt from time to time.

But Grenville had made a serious mistake.

This time he hit the most vocal, most educated, most influential, and most important elements in the American colonies.

The new taxes hit the lawyer. And the lawyer was the leader of the settlements. In the frontier towns, the “judge” was the arbiter of society. In the sophisticated society of the seaboard, the lawyer went to the provincial assembly, he sat upon the courts of the colony, and he led in business and social activity.

This was the first class at which Grenville had leveled the Stamp Act. And it was well drawn, that act. Every type of legal document, from birth to burial, every form of deed, conveyance, writ, assignment, or what have you was carefully singled out and a fixed fee provided. The lawyers of the colonies were doomed to wade in a morass of stamps.

Not satisfied with hamstringing the legal profession, Grenville then moved against the most vocal of all classes, the Fourth Estate. Every newspaper, every pamphlet, every almanac had from then on to bear revenue stamps.

The reading matter of the American colonist was fairly restricted. But no home was complete without an almanac, and in areas where the postal system had penetrated, newspapers were delivered, read carefully, and passed on through an almost indefinite sequence of hand-me-downs. And if any colonist felt really upset about something, he had always cherished the fact that he could publish his views in a pamphlet. In those days that was not especially expensive. Now, he found the British government suddenly in his way.

Naturally, the newspaper proprietors, who were also the principal publishers of the colonies, were against the Stamp Act almost to a man. And they were very noisy about it. If an aggrieved lawyer produced a bitterly anti-British pamphlet, he had no trouble at all in finding an equally aggrieved publisher who was only too willing to print and publish the lawyer’s pamphlet. It was an ideal situation for American authors.

And Grenville made certain the popular detestation of the bill by including in it a seriously large tax on playing cards and on dice. Even in those remote times the Americans had become aware of the fascination of the galloping dominoes, and had evolved assorted interesting ways of squandering their substance with cards.

Ann Arborites have a particularly warm feeling of sympathy for the colonists, since the Stamp Act put an almost impossibly high tariff on diplomas—it cost two pounds to get a degree, and two pounds in those days went a very long way indeed. Higher education was really going to be high, if Grenville had his way about it.

The basic premise of the bill was false, although Grenville was apparently honestly ignorant of the fact. There simply wasn’t enough specie, enough cash money, in the colonies to meet the stamp tax, which had to be paid in specie. The old mercantilist philosophy had operated to drain all coin out of the colonies—until most of the metal currency left was what filtered in through various questionable channels of trade from the Spanish kingdoms to the south. So even if the Americans had wanted to pay—which they didn’t—they couldn’t have continued to pay for any considerable period of time.

Protest rose rapidly to unheard of heights. Previously loyal areas turned patriot overnight. And the Massachusetts legislature, most of whose members doubtless first read the provisions of the Stamp Act in the very edition just given to the Clements Library, issued a call for an inter-colonial Congress, the Stamp Act Congress that foreshadowed the later Continental Congress, and first pointed the way toward an American unity of purpose and action.

The Boston printers, Edes and Gill, who brought out this edition of the Stamp Act tried their best to imitate exactly the appearance of the British royal acts as printed by the London publishers, even to the elaborate border around the title-page. Their supply of type ornaments didn’t quite hold out, and they had to shift varieties midway through their title-page border, but they did manage a very creditable imitation.
Mr Thomas and His Magazine

In a century and three-quarters the taste of the American public hasn't altered much, and The Royal American Magazine proves it.

To the Clements Library's collection of early American periodicals The Clements Library Associates have added a run of this, one of the rarest and most significant of our country's first magazines. It not only proves the enduring quality of the taste of the people—it reflects colonial interests and concerns on the eve of the Revolution.

The Royal American Magazine was the brainchild of a rising star among American publishers in the year 1773. Why, wondered young Isaiah Thomas, wouldn't a discreet mixture of literature, pictures, and poetry sell copies of a magazine? There didn't seem to be any very good reason why not, so he tried it out. Already successful with his anti-British newspaper, The Massachusetts Spy, Thomas paid a great deal of attention to his latest venture and did his best to make it click.

Naturally, he believed in advertising. And since advertising in the columns of his own newspaper was about the cheapest and, he thought, the best available, it's no wonder the Massachusetts Spy reflects all the beginnings of the new magazine.

Politics weren't considered quite the thing for a magazine, so, except in a few cartoons, we look in vain for a direct reflection of the anti-British feeling then so prevalent in Boston, the city where The Royal American appeared. But there was no taboo on sex, and so the "moral" stories of penitent seductees begin with the early issues. Some politics does creep into the occasional fantasies—as when a stalwart young American in "The Dream" finds himself in the court of King Tyranny, an unpleasing monarch with an amazing resemblance to a certain member of the House of Hanover, the third George of his name.

Thomas looked further afield.

He sought to encourage "original" contributions. But the burning fire of American literary genius seems to have been smoking considerably in the Boston of 1774. At any rate, Isaiah had trouble in beating talent out of the underbrush. Less than twenty-five per cent of the material in the issues he published is original. True, Miss Phyllis Wheatley, America's famous Negro poet, sent him two short poems, and numberless New Haven and Cambridge undergraduates were ready, willing, but not very able, to contribute.

And so, like many another American publication before and since, the sundry issues were pretty largely paper hung. The Works of Dr Benjamin Franklin, the most famous of all the colonists, and perhaps the first truly international figure among Americans, gave Mr Thomas a clipped story about waterspouts. The varied writings of Joseph Priestley, among others, were also culled for paragraphs and articles.

There were a few valiant writers who sought to equal the demand. In the field of science Dr Thomas Young of Newport contributed several articles on medical observations of assorted common diseases. Not too often right in his surmises, the doctor was at least laying the groundwork of the scientific method. In the field of agriculture, Bernard Romans, cartographer and engraver, provided Mr Thomas with a piece about the raising of indigo, a crop of very considerable importance to Americans.

The fiction, as has been noted, centered around sentimental seduction scenes, and allegedly "true-to-life" stories. In a sense, here is the ultimate ancestor of True Confessions and True Story, magazines which, although they may not be in the intellectual van of America, are well up in the list of circulation figures. A few Oriental tales gave free rein to the imagination of the New England authors. Most of the other pieces are of the more or less harmless variety. In an almost wholly Protestant milieu, the editor took a few healthy whacks at the Roman Catholic church. Although with a change in his reading public, it's perfectly evident that he would have been quite as willing to crack down on the Protestants. As for slavery, he was "agin it," like Calvin Coolidge and sin. But his "aginess" was sufficiently modulated so as not to disturb the better thought of slave traders among the leaders of Massachusetts society.

In part of the prolonged advertising campaign that Thomas launched, first to announce his magazine, second to encourage the growth of a list of subscribers, and finally in a frantic effort to keep the thing alive, he says that he hopes to make The Royal American "fit to convey to posterity the labors of the learned." Whether he succeeded or not is probably open to debate, but he did manage to bring out a number of issues of the magazine, even though haunted by bad luck, and, finally, to get out from under with more or less grace.

A jinx, perhaps derived from the not overly happy title, came early. The first issue was delayed more than a month, for the arrival of the new type which had been ordered by Thomas was held up by shipwreck and subsequent salvage operations. When it finally came, Thomas sought energetically to catch up with his missing numbers. Actually, he never quite made it.

One significant contribution the magazine did make. That was in the field of illustration. A series of twenty-two plates was done entirely by two American engravers, Paul Revere, more noted for his silver making and his horsemanship, and Joseph Callender. These include assorted semi-classical efforts along with some dynamic political cartoons. Incidentally, in The Royal American appears the first American hunting print, and the first American hunting song, modeled on English magazine archetypes, which Thomas was by no means too proud to imitate.

Finally convinced that the magazine was not going to pay, Thomas disposed of it to Joseph Greenleaf.
President Schoolcraft &
his Algie Society

The Clements Library Associates’ gift of the *Constitution of the Algie Society* (Detroit, 1838), adds a little known item to the rich Michigan collections of the Library, a few of which were described in the recent bulletin of the Library, *One Hundred Michigan Rarities*.

The Algie Society was founded, encouraged, and led by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, a man who today would be called Michigan’s first anthropologist. Author and scientist, Schoolcraft’s great concern in life was the North American Indian, especially the Algonquin branch of the family. In article after article and book after book, he explored the life and language of the Indians. No desk-bound speculator, he knew personally and lived among the peoples he wrote about. The name of the society itself is derived from the word “Algonquin.”

The Algie Society was formed to encourage the sending of missionaries among “the North West tribes.” To Schoolcraft, of course, North West meant the Old Northwest Territory, of which Michigan was a part.

Actually, it wasn’t the missionaries that Schoolcraft was after as much as it was the education which missionaries alone seemed willing to bring to the Indians. Drugged, tricked, cheated, and scorned by the white people of the frontier, the only hope of the Indian was to catch up to the culture of the dominant and dominating civilization. Schoolcraft’s answer as to how to do it was by education.

With the first printing of the Constitution of the Society, done in Detroit by pioneer printers Cleland and Sawyer, was a speech by Schoolcraft, urging the importance of the educational side of mission work. And along with this is the list of members, active and honorary, who were pledged to help along the work. The old army, the “Indian Fighting Army,” beloved of sentimental novelists and the pulp writer, generally, is supposed to have believed in the ancient saw anent the only good Indian being a dead Indian. Proof that this just wasn’t so is in the list of members where officers of the U.S. Army are numerous. The great majority of them were stationed at posts in Michigan, at the Soo, Michillimackinac, or elsewhere in the Territory.

How successful Schoolcraft’s efforts were is open to considerable debate. In the long run, he was unable to save the Indian from the exploiter. Now, almost twelve decades later, the position of the Indian in the state of Michigan is hardly as good as it was when Schoolcraft wrote. At least then the settlers were still worried by them. But the document is indisputable testimony that some of the early men of Michigan were men with ideals and the will to put those ideals into practical effect.

The Red Brother
and The Old South

When the armies of the Confederacy began the long series of uninterrupted triumphs which ended with the reabsorption of the North at Appomattox, as any true Southerner will confirm, one of the Confederate government’s first concerns was to secure the friendship and adherence of the more powerful Indian nations.

On the surface, at least, the program was successful. From The Clements Library Associates comes *The Treaty with the Cherokees*, Richmond, Va., 1862, in which the chiefs of the Cherokee nation entered into a treaty of “perpetual peace and friendship, and an alliance offensive and defensive” with the Commissioners of the Confederacy.

Both sides during the War between the States had plans for using the services of their Indian allies—plans foreshadowed by several provisions of the Treaty. The Confederacy actually called a contingent into action, and the noble redmen came and watched one battle from reserved seats. Bill Nye maintains that the Confederates did “schedule something extra special in the way of scalping and such for after the battle.” The battle turned out to be a vigorous one, in the course of which several of the newfangled explosive cannonballs landed in the general vicinity of the savage spectators.

Almost unanimously the Indians discovered that they hadn’t lost any wars just then and departed en masse.

The Treaty, however, remains to record one of the few “international” successes scored by Confederate diplomacy. Virtually surrounded by the states of the Confederacy, the Cherokees didn’t really have much choice in the matter. Nor did the events of the war much disturb them.

Almost any Confederate printing, printing done in the states of the Confederacy during the period in which that government was in power, is rare, but treaties, because of the few which were ever negotiated, are among the rarissimi.

THE Little Turtle
On Temperance

Most of the leaders of the American Indians have had to depend on the pens of their foemen for their immortality. Only infrequently were the words of a given chief ever preserved. But The Clements Library Associates have given the Library a little pamphlet by one of the greatest of them all, The Little Turtle, chief of the Miami, conqueror of Generals St. Clair and Harmar.

Titled the *Memorial of Evan Thomas*, and published for the Quakers in Baltimore, the work actually is almost entirely devoted to a speech by The Little Turtle in which he points out the terrible ravages being made on all Indian tribes by the use of alcohol—“whiskey to the white man, poison to the Indian.”