



THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM *News Release*

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For Immediate Release

BOSTON ATHENÆUM TO DIGITIZE CELEBRATED CONFEDERATE IMPRINTS COLLECTION, A PRIMARY SOURCE FOR STUDYING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

(Boston, Massachusetts, August 16, 2011): Thanks to a generous gift from Trustee Emeritus Caleb Loring, Jr., the Boston Athenæum will conserve, catalogue, photograph, digitize, and release on the Internet important selections from its world-renowned Confederate Imprints Collection.

The collection, with more than 12,000 items, is one of the largest and most important of its kind in existence. It includes books, pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, stamps, paper currency, government bonds, and maps printed in the Confederate States of American (CSA) during the American Civil War.

“The Confederate Imprints Collection is a great example of the kind of primary source collection the Athenæum was able to create when others did not,” commented Paula D. Matthews, Stanford Calderwood Director and Librarian.

“Thanks to the remarkable foresight of our Librarian and members a century and a half ago, these rare and perishable printed items have survived to the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. They have long been a key resource for scholars. Now, new technology and this wonderful gift will make a

significant portion of the collection available as never before.”

“The Confederate Imprints Project is a great example of how the internet makes new kinds of access to special or hidden resources available to everyone, world-wide,” said James Reid-Cunningham, Associate Director for Preservation and Digitization. “It is also a leading first project for our ‘seamless method’ of collection preservation and access, which begins with the physical object and unites conservation, cataloguing, digitization, and distribution in a single, continuous process.”

The Athenæum began to assemble its Confederate Imprints Collection immediately following the end of hostilities in 1865.

Francis Parkman, the famous historian and an Athenæum Trustee, traveled the war-ravaged southern states with Athenæum funds to purchase Confederate printed material before it was lost to history. Athenæum Librarian William F. Poole continued the search by actively advertising in the region and buying heavily. His goal was to acquire “everything printed in the South during the war that goes to illustrate the state and action of the Southern mind”

The original collection was enlarged in 1944, with the purchase of 1500 additional Confederate imprints from Judge Raymond S. Wilkins. In 1969, the Honorable George W. Ball, former U.S. Undersecretary of State and Ambassador to the United Nations, and his son, Douglas Ball, gave the Athenæum an extraordinary collection of Confederate currency, including about 6,200 examples of paper money and 500 CSA bonds and treasury certificates to the Athenæum.

The Ball gift contained many rarities and fine examples of the various types of engraved and lithographed designs used for bills issued by the individual states and the government. Like much of the rest of the collection, it has never been completely catalogued and is consequently largely unavailable, even to scholars.

The Loring gift will allow the Athenæum to hire a full-time rare materials cataloguer to work with the Confederate materials for a year, in addition to the Athenæum staff working on the project. The gift will also cover conservation and digitization of significant selections of the collection.

As an independent library, not a government agency or part of a university or college, the Boston Athenæum developed its collections to suit the needs and interests of its own members, often acquiring items, like the Confederate material, long before their significance became clear to others. Thus many of its holdings are especially rare or unique examples of their kind.

The Athenæum recently set up a new webpage, “Digital Collections at the Boston Athenæum,” <http://cdm.bostonathenaeum.org/cdm>, as a public access point for its digital collections via the internet. In 2012, digitized portions of the Confederate Imprints Collection will join them.

Founded in 1807, the Boston Athenæum is Boston’s first cultural institution. It combines an art museum, with a public exhibition gallery and collections of paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, photographs, and decorative arts; a leading research and membership library; and a civic forum including lectures, readings, panel discussions, and other events. An innovator and catalyst for more than two centuries, the Athenæum was one of the three founders of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the inspiration for the Boston Public Library, the first municipally supported library in North America.

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