

# *Into the Unknown in 1955— AAS and Readex*

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THE PRINCIPALS IN THE PARTNERSHIP that became the AAS–Readex project to issue all possible early American books, pamphlets, and broadsides in microform—the Early American Imprints Project—seemingly were a mismatched pair. Clifford Kenyon (Ted) Shipton was a nineteenth-century Yankee. A Harvard graduate with a Ph.D. in colonial history, he was a protégé of Samuel Eliot Morison. Ted was a highly disciplined scholar and was the biographer of hundreds of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Harvard men published in fourteen, crimson volumes known as *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*. He was, one day a week, the Harvard University archivist. During the other four work days, coevally, Shipton held the office of the Antiquarian Society's librarian, from 1940 to 1959, and director thereafter until 1967. Shipton was an active advocate of AAS as the center for the study of early American bibliography and history

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In addition to the footnote citations, my sources include knowledge based on my own experience at AAS; correspondence between Clifford K. Shipton and Readex from the 1950s found in AAS archives; a letter from James E. Mooney of September 4, 2005, and his article, 'Clifford K. Shipton and the Early American Imprints Project,' in *Sibley's Heir: A Volume in Memory of Clifford Kenyon Shipton* (Boston: Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982) 59: 9–16; Shipton, reports of the librarian, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 64 (October 1954): 261–72; 65 (October 1955): 152–60; and 66 (October 1966): 90–102; personal conversation with Stanley Shapiro, September 2005.

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and zealously defended our primary place in collecting the resources for that long-held mission. To that end he completed the final volume of Charles Evans's *American Bibliography*.<sup>1</sup>

Ten years Shipton's senior, Albert Boni—the other principal in the AAS-Readex pairing—was small in stature, with piercing eyes under black eyebrows. A native New Yorker, a sometime Harvard student, an ardent Socialist and reformer, he was extremely intelligent, ambitious, and an imaginative publisher. With his brother Charles, Albert established The Little Leather Library in 1915. Issuing orthodox sure-sellers, distributed through unorthodox venues, it was a huge success. Two years later, they and Horace Liveright inaugurated the innovative Modern Library series that continues to appear today under the Random House imprint. Albert and Charles Boni daringly published 'new' and subsequently leading authors during the 1920s. A decade later the Depression caught up with them.

In the 1930s Albert Boni developed a serious, personal interest in scientific photographic literature. Characteristically, he developed a great collection on that topic that, thirty years later, resulted in *Photographic Literature, An International Bibliographic Guide*. In 1972 the first volume was followed by a much larger supplement covering the years 1960 to 1970.<sup>2</sup> Boni was assisted in his bibliographical work by Hubbard Ballou, the nationally known, expert head of the microform department at Butler Library of Columbia University. He not only helped Boni compile

1. Evans compiled and published volumes one through twelve himself between 1901 and 1934. Charles Evans, *American Bibliography: A Chronological Dictionary of All Books, Pamphlets, and Periodical Publications Printed in the United States of America from the Genesis of Printing in 1639 Down to and Including the Year 1820*, vols. 1-12 (Chicago: privately printed, 1903-59). Volume 13, edited by Clifford K. Shipton, and volume 14, the index prepared by Roger P. Bristol, were published by the American Antiquarian Society.

2. The first volume contains over twelve thousand entries and references to almost one hundred further items. It was first published in 1962, and reprinted in 1992 with a supplement for 1960-1970. Albert Boni, *Photographic Literature, an International Bibliographic Guide to General and Specialized Literature on Photographic Processes; Techniques; Theory; Chemistry; Physics; Apparatus; Materials and Applications; Industry; History; Biography; Aesthetics* (1962; reprint, Hastings-on-Hudson, N. Y.: Morgan and Morgan, 1972).



his bibliography, but (here I am guessing) he may well have helped him develop the Microprint process.<sup>3</sup>

These efforts were related to Boni's determination to establish an economical means to produce photographic micro-reproductions of texts. In the 1930s he and Keyes Metcalf of the New York Public Library made an unsuccessful attempt to reproduce the enormous card catalogue of that great library. But, just as World War II broke out, Boni's Microprint Corporation began to issue the session papers of the British Parliament. Microprint is a proprietary, lithographic process that, for success, depends upon an unblemished and absolutely stable printing surface. Upon that surface the image of a text (reversed for printing) is imposed from its original, negative, photographic image. Printing is accomplished on coated, five and seven-eighths by nine inch card stock—one hundred micro-images per face. (See figs. 3 & 4, pp. 270-71 above.) Boni's production facilities are located in a former funeral parlor at Chester, Vermont. With sharp microfilm images, when perfectly printed from them, and with an effective microform reader, a readable product can result. But, in the 1950s, the process often outran available technology.

To the best of my knowledge, relations between AAS and the Readex Corporation began in 1952 when G. William Bergquist, one-time thief detector of the New York Public Library and the Readex editor, requested films of AAS holdings for their series *Three Centuries of English and American Plays*.<sup>4</sup> This surely would have piqued Shipton's interest because he had argued for some years that better bibliographical control and the presence in research libraries of source materials of early American history would advance teaching and scholarship in the field. In August 1954 Shipton first noticed the existence of Clarence R. 'Skip'

3. Ballou was a native of Chester, Vermont, and was a protégé (along with other worthies such as David Weber of Stanford and Richard De Gennaro of Harvard) of Keyes D. Metcalf, Harvard's librarian, and a Councillor of AAS.

4. G. William Bergquist. See his article in *Library Journal* (April 1956): 893-94.

Graham, the innovative, energetic librarian of the Louisville, Kentucky, Public Library and sometime president of the American Library Association. As an example of Graham's inventiveness, he operated a public, FM radio station at his library. In 1954 he and Eugene Power of University Microfilms in Ann Arbor announced their Microcard edition of early American imprints selected from the collections of the Library of Congress. They planned to publish, by subscription, micro-images of texts photographically printed on three-by-five-inch cards. The cards were to be interfiled in library catalogue card cases in alphabetical order under main entries. Their Microcard system had been endorsed by the board of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), an organization of the nation's major university and research libraries.

WHOA! This was forbidden territory! This means of publication had already been staked out by both AAS and Readex! I do not know who telephoned whom, but Albert Boni personally and promptly visited Shipton at AAS. They had not known each other previous to this meeting—subsequent, written correspondence began: 'Dear Mr. Boni'; then, 'Dear Boni'; finally, 'Dear Albert'—but by mid-September 1954 they had reached an understanding. AAS and Readex Microprint Corporation would co-sponsor a facsimile edition in Microprint of extant American books, pamphlets, and broadsides published from 1640 to 1800, a body of material that AAS had been recording and collecting since 1812; indeed by Isaiah Thomas previous to the Society's founding. The key to the facsimile edition was to be based upon Charles Evans's *American Bibliography*. The men agreed that AAS, in the person of Shipton, would edit the corpus. That meant while improving Evans's outdated work, he would solicit the borrowing (if possible), or the filming in place of, about thirteen thousand items not located at AAS. He would supervise the photographing of the AAS collection of about twenty-five thousand items, and would review every roll of microfilm produced by the project before forwarding it to the Readex printing operation in Chester. Shipton's editing of Evans, so blithely



Figure 1. Clifford Kenyon (Ted) Shipton spent twenty-seven years at the American Antiquarian Society as librarian (1940 to 1959) and director (1959 to 1967). He is shown seated in front of a Readex machine with a Micro-opaque card in his hand, emblematic of his association with *American Bibliography* (of which he completed the final volume from the letter N in 1799 through 1800) and *Early American Imprints: First Series, 1640-1800* (Evans). In 1955, the year he completed the Evans bibliography, the filming project in collaboration with Albert Boni of the Readex Microprint Corporation began. Collection of Readex, a Division of Newsbank, inc.



agreed upon, involved the elimination of 'ghosts'—that is, the deletion of some three thousand entries to items of which proofs could not then be found to their actual printing; the establishment of correct and uniform entries; and the preparation of a main-entry card for each entry to precede the corresponding facsimile. For its part, Readex would pay all production and distribution costs, pay all project expenses incurred by AAS, and pay AAS an annual editorial fee of five thousand dollars. In his annual report to the membership of the Society in October 1954, Shipton enthusiastically announced the inauguration of the American Antiquarian Society-Readex Microprint Corporation American Imprint Series, 1640-1800. More easily said than done!

Meanwhile, in September 1954, Boni fired the first shot in the Microcard-Microprint 'war'—an attempt to dissuade the librarians of the Association of Research Libraries who had subscribed to the Microcard set. He sent a letter to Robert Miller, librarian of Indiana University, the executive secretary of ARL. Boni analyzed the cost-effectiveness of Microprint over Microcard and contrasted AAS-Readex editorial procedures against Louisville's lack thereof. Shipton, who was well connected in the learned community, also went into action to quiet the 'upstarts' from Louisville and Ann Arbor. To that end—and I am sure it was his first and only time—Shipton went to the January 1955, mid-winter meeting of the American Library Association to argue the case. He must have been successful because by March both the Library of Congress and the Henry E. Huntington Library had subscribed to the Microprint set. In April they had twelve written orders, with twenty-three pending, and by November ninety subscribers were on board.

But it was not all smooth sailing. In spite of offers from Readex to indemnify Graham and the Louisville public library for costs incurred in launching their product, Skip Graham refused to budge. Their Microcard edition was still on the market. Then in May, John Cook Wyllie, the highly regarded librarian of the University of Virginia, indicated support of the more limited Louisville project. He based his criticism of the AAS-Readex project on

the aged, bibliographical inadequacies of Evans. In fact, the Virginians had filed a counterclaim in the field of early American bibliography. Roger P. Bristol of the University of Virginia library staff was working on Evans, preparing his *Index* to the original volumes for publication as volume fourteen.<sup>5</sup> While Shipton was filming American imprints, Bristol worked on his *Supplement* to Evans. When it was published in 1970<sup>6</sup> Bristol had added more than eleven thousand items to the previous corpus of thirty-nine thousand recorded American imprints issued by the year 1800. To counteract the criticism of Wyllie and that of Lawrence C. Wroth of the John Carter Brown Library (who feared facsimiles would reduce the number of scholars in his reading room), in June 1955 Shipton wrote to Miller at Indiana to describe in detail his editorial process and the means of intellectual access to the AAS-Readex set. Also in that month Shipton finally received a written agreement from Boni specifying the relationship between AAS and Readex—as above, plus a free set of the Microprint set and a reader for the Society. AAS agreed to provide space for Readex personnel at work on filming. (Fifty years later new generations of cameramen following in the footsteps of John Eugenio, the first photographer, remain in that dark dungeon, once called our 'Duplicate Room.')

Shortly afterward, the project obtained the endorsement of the American Historical Association's Committee on Documentary Reproduction and the project was underway.

The first sets of cards were shipped to subscribing libraries in January 1956. It was a disaster! The outcry of disappointment and anger was immediate. Shipton issued the first of many complaints to Boni decrying the unacceptable quality of the images, while apologizing to Charles Gosnell at the University of Michigan for production problems and delivery of illegible cards.

5. Roger P. Bristol, *The American Bibliography of Charles Evans Volume 14-Index* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1959).

6. Roger P. Bristol, *Supplement to Charles Evans' American Bibliography* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of America and the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1970).



Shipton promised to make good. Boni, ever the honorable man, also promised to make good and he did, but it took some time to achieve it. Troubles continued. Readex proved to be slow to pay AAS. Shipton, who depended upon the cooperation of libraries for the supply of good microfilm of materials not located at AAS, often had to reorder film to replace the faulty reels. This did not please the people in the interlibrary loan or photo departments of major libraries already overloaded with their own work. Nell (Mrs. Albert) Boni of Readex and Hope Gibson, and later, Jean Spence of AAS bore an enormous burden of correspondence, while AAS's Mary Brown tracked down every early American imprint on our shelves, plus doing a good deal of sleuthing to identify obscure Evans titles. All this involved a huge amount of detailed coordination between Readex and AAS and between AAS and cooperating libraries. Even so, by October 1956, eight thousand titles had been shipped, six thousand of which represented titles printed between 1640 and 1740. It was a major achievement.

As a sign of confidence in the project, in January 1957 the Library of Congress sent to AAS its original records of the WPA (Works Progress Administration) American Imprint Inventory. In the early summer of 1957, however, Shipton sent William Dix, librarian of Princeton, and then executive secretary of ARL, a long, detailed explanation on the continuing troubles with quality control. Fortunately, the subscribers stayed the course. Ironically, the ARL librarians then proposed the micro-reproduction of newspapers, *via* AAS-Readex Microprint, an idea greeted here with interest but with concern over difficulties of issuing a useable product, *vide* Boni's opinion that quality of originals would prohibit a good result. Eventually, control over the quality of microfilming and printing improved, while Readex continued to work on the effectiveness of its microform readers. Progress in the quality of filming was due in considerable measure to the presence of Nathan Cohen, a photographer trained at the Franklin Technical Institute in Boston, who had joined the staff in 1959.



Shipton worked steadfastly—correcting inaccurate entries in the bibliography, eliminating Evans ‘ghosts,’ reading film, cajoling other libraries to film their rarities or to film them again. Typically he charged ahead, outpacing Roger Bristol’s work in Virginia of recording additional early American imprints. This caused friction between Charlottesville and Worcester and made it difficult to incorporate new material into the already distributed files of Microprint. Further, an acrimonious dispute erupted over the method of numbering Bristol’s added entries.

In 1961 Alden Johnson of Barre Publishers, Ebenezer Gay, and Nat Cohen organized the Micro-Research Company for the purpose of filming and publishing newspapers in microform. The company began with the *Boston News-Letter* of 1704, but in the end their efforts were unsuccessful. Gay, who was a handy chap on the staff of the Boston Athenæum, built a prototype reader, a beautifully crafted machine. Cohen tried to develop various media as printing surfaces, including etched glass. Neither effort proved to be successful. Cohen, who had remained with Readex, hired Stanley Shapiro (also a trained photographer) as Readex assistant. When Readex bought out Micro-Research in 1963, it took over the nascent newspaper project, and Shapiro became its editor, improving Clarence Brigham’s bibliographical records, tracking down issues, borrowing and transporting newspaper files. Cohen took on additional responsibilities at Readex—in Worcester, at the Chester printing plant, and at the New York City offices. Also, he set up satellite offices in London, Boston, and in Norman, Oklahoma, before dying of a heart attack in 1970 at age 44. Shapiro remained with the Readex newspaper project for more than forty years, leaving only in 2005.

When Shipton retired from AAS in August 1967, James E. Mooney joined the AAS staff as editor of publications, relieving me of that task while absorbing Shipton’s work on the Readex project. Jim finished the first series of Early American Imprints in 1968 and moved right on to the second series, 1801 though 1820. In fact, while waiting for Bristol’s work to be completed,

Shipton had already begun the second series and had finished 1801 through 1805. He and Mooney used the bibliography of American imprints compiled by Ralph Shaw and Richard Shoemaker as the key to the series. Also, Mooney edited and proof-read the entries Shipton had prepared as target cards for the Microprint version of each imprint from 1640 through 1800. That work resulted in 1969 as the two-volume *National Index of American Imprints through 1800: The Short-Title Evans*,<sup>7</sup> familiarly known in the trade as 'Shipton-Mooney.'

By the end, Ted Shipton and Albert Boni, with myriad helpers, had built the AAS-Readex Microprint edition of some fifty thousand early American imprints. It has been distributed to research libraries around the entire scholarly world. Members of the AAS staff have now catalogued those and thousands more North American imprints in machine-readable files. The files are available not only to researchers in Worcester but also on a national database, the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), leading scholars to locations of new and old materials once all but lost. In his Librarian's Report to the Society in October 1956, an ebullient Shipton wrote, 'Never before has this Library been nearer the center of the mainstream of American historical activity than it is today. It is an exhilarating experience to have a part in this work.'<sup>8</sup> That spirit pervaded the efforts of Shipton and Boni and their successors, partners in this great work, which transformed the scholarship and the teaching of early American history. Bravo!

7. Clifford K. Shipton and James E. Mooney, eds., *The National Index of American Imprints through 1800: The Short-Title Evans*, 2 vols. (Worcester and Barre: American Antiquarian Society and Barre Publishers, 1969). The 49,197 entries include Bristol's additions to Evans.

8. Shipton, 'Report of the Librarian,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 66 (October 1956): 102.



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