

# A Rare Layden Imprint in the Western Reserve Historical Society

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In 1967 Norman Joy Greene, then Governor General of the Society of Mayflower Descendants, came to Cleveland, Ohio, with the express purpose of writing his name in a rare book that was printed over 350 years ago. His visit was sufficiently newsworthy to justify the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* to report the incident and it reprinted a photograph of Mr. Greene signing the book. The story behind the printing of the book, as well as the story of the signing, are deemed to be of sufficient interest to relate.

The book was printed at the press in Choir Alley in Leyden, Holland, in 1618 by William Brewster. Brewster had received part of his education at Cambridge University. He was a member of the small group of Englishmen who had left England for Leyden because of religious principle. He was assisted by Edward Winslow. Both Brewster and Winslow were to leave for America on the *Mayflower* two years later and Brewster would serve as Governor of the Plymouth Colony.

The book was one of an estimated two dozen books printed by Brewster at Leyden. This printing venture for the time represented a considerable undertaking. Most of the books were printed in English or Latin for the English market. Some of the books printed were books which attacked the English government's religious policy or were otherwise prohibited. Such books had no printer's identification and were illegally smuggled into the British Isles.

One of the prohibited books, *Perth Assembly*, was written by David Catherwood. This book described the dramatic meeting at Perth, Scotland, in 1618 in which churchmen of James I tried unsuccessfully to convince the Scottish bishops to conform to English standards of religious worship. Catherwood turned over the controversial manuscript to Brewster who published it in 1619. Some copies were discovered by customs officials as they were being smuggled by boat among cargoes of

wine casks. The books were eventually traced to Brewster's printing shop. James I directed that the English Ambassador at the Hague demand that Brewster be turned over to English authorities for appearance in London. This could well mean death for Brewster who, apprised of the circumstances, slipped quietly back into England where he could hide more successfully.

The book signed by Mr. Greene was a copy of another Brewster publication, *Confutation of the Rhemists*. The Rhemists, as they were commonly called in England, were English Catholic clergy, seminarians, and exiles who had settled in or near the city of Rheims, France. Many had formerly been associated with the universities of Oxford and Cambridge but had been forced to leave England when Queen Elizabeth decided to implement a civil settlement of Catholic faith free from ties with Rome. Their fame mainly rests upon a translation of the New Testament made by a number of these scholarly clerical exiles, published at Rheims in 1582 and then considered the best in its day.

English Protestants, however, reacted critically to the translation. The greatest contemporary English Puritan, Thomas Cartwright, was asked by the Earl of Leicester to respond formally and was advanced £100 by Sir Francis Walsingham. However, when Cartwright's lengthy tome was completed, the Archbishop of Canterbury refused to have it published. He acted in accordance with Queen Elizabeth's policy of discouraging serious religious controversy. When Cartwright died in 1603, the manuscript was still unpublished.

The policy of the English government was to reply neither to the Rhemists' translation of the New Testament nor to the subsequent translation of the Old Testament. Instead, some of the greatest scholars in England were engaged to produce an English translation of such excellence that it would be universally recognized. This translation, when published in 1611, became the authorized King James version of the Bible. Brewster, apparently through his connections at Cambridge, acquired the manuscript of the *Confutation of the Rhemists* as well as other books printed by Brewster in Leyden, with the passage of time

became collectors' items of great interest, particularly among descendants of the passengers who came on the *Mayflower*.

The copy signed by Mr. Greene had belonged to the library of Christ's College, Cambridge, and bears a bookplate. It had subsequently been acquired by C. Pearson of Cleveland. Pearson was a well-known book collector and an active member of the Cleveland Colony of Mayflower Descendants. It was he who discovered the the English ancestry of Mayflower passenger James Chilton, and is so credited by Governor General Francis R Stoddard in his book, *The Truth About the Pilgrims* (1952). For years, Pearson had carefully scrutinized English book and auction catalogues. This particular book represented one of his exciting "finds."

In In the 1940s Pearson conceived the idea of taking this book to the triennial meeting of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants and of asking for former and newly elected Governors General to sign the blank page in the front of the book. By this time however, eight Governors General had died, including the first seven. With these exceptions, Pearson had obtained the signatures of all the Governors General down to the early 1960's. In addition, he obtained the signature of Walter Lester Glenny, elected Secretary General in 1942. Shortly before his death, John Pearson presented this book and other books of interest to the Western Reserve Historical Society.

It seems most desirable to continue the practice of adding signatures of newly elected Governors General. Yet, since the book is now in a library, the idea was conceived to invite the newly elected Governors General to Cleveland. Here, at a formal ceremony, a Governor General would have the

opportunity to sign the book and to address the Cleveland Colony. It was under such circumstances that Governor General Norman Joy Greene came to Cleveland. Members of the Cleveland Colony are considering today the possibility of continuing the practice of inviting Governors General to sign the book.

For documentation and further reading:  
*Dictionary of American Biography* under William Brewster.  
*Dictionary of National Biography* under Cardinal William Allen and Thomas Cartwright.  
*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition, under Bible Harris, James Rendel and Jones, Stephen, *The Pilgrim Press*, (Cambridge 1922).  
Willison, George F., *Saints and Strangers*, (New York 1945).

*Anthony WC. Phelps, Assistant Librarian of the Western Reserve Historical Society made comments of value in the preparation of this article.*

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## Governor General signs Rare Book

At the Western Reserve Historical Society library in Cleveland, Ohio, resides a rare book published by William Brewster at his Choir Alley printing shop in Leyden, Holland. Governor General Robert E. Davis along with Former Governor General Eugene A. Fortine had the honor of signing this 387-year-old book, *Confutation of the Rhemists*. Joining Bob and Gene were Richard Fetzner who organized the event; Joe Dowman, a member of the Cleveland Colony who had witnessed a previous signing; wives Donnie Dowman, Jeanne Davis and Pat Fortine; and two members of the library staff, Kermit Pike and Ann Sindelar. The signings took place on Thursday, May 19, 2005.

Between about 1617 and 1619, Brewster published some 15 to 20 books. The first three were non-confrontational and Brewster's name appears on them in Latin. Most of the rest were controversial and Brewster left his name off, but included an imprint with scrolls surrounding a bear, a play on the words "bruin" and "Brewster."

The printing operation was financed by Thomas Brewer. John Reynolds was brought over from London as master printer with his apprentice, Edward Winslow. In 1618 [the book we signed] was printed (Its full title is *A Conflutation of the Rhemists Translation Glosses and Annotations on the New Testament, so Far as they Containe Manifest Impieties, Heresies, Idolatries, Superstitions, Prophanesse, Treasons, Slanders, Absurdities, (Falsehoods, and other evils)*). It is a translation of the New Testament by a group of English Catholic clergy, seminarians, and exiles done in 1582 and residing in the French city of Rheims. For some reason Brewster thought this translation should be published although James I had assembled a group of scholars and published his own version, which had come out in 1611. It is interesting to know that the Rhemists translation helped bring about the King James version of the Bible, which was a standard in the English language for many years. In

1619 Brewster's most controversial book, *Perth Asssembly* was produced - an attack on James I and his bishops. This led to putting great pressure on the Dutch by the English Crown, which closed the Choir Alley Press and ended Brewster's publishing career.

The book we signed had, at one point, belonged to the library of Christ's College, Cambridge, and bears its bookplate. Years later John C. Pearson of Cleveland purchased the book. Pearson was a well-known collector of rare books and a member of the Cleveland Colony, Ohio Mayflower Society. Sometime in the early 1940s he brought the book to General Congress to have the new governor general and all previous governors general still living sign the book. He then donated the book to the Western Reserve Historical Society with the stipulation that all future governors general could sign it.

To date, the following have signed this book:

Addison Pierce Munroe, Jr. (1924-1930)  
Burnham Standish Colburn (1933-1939)  
Francis Russell Stoddard Jr. (1939-1942)  
Frederick Alvin Van Fleet (1942-1948)  
Walter Merriam Pratt (1948-1954)  
Waldo Morgan Allen (1954-1960)  
Lewis Edwin Neff (1960-1963)  
Norman Joy Greene (1966-1969)  
Elmer Frederick Low (1978-1981),  
William Nash Davis (1984-1987)  
Eugene Arthur Fortine (1999-2002)  
Robert Ellis Davis (2002-2005)

It was a wonderful honor to sign this rare book. It was even more special for Gene as Brewster is his ancestor. "To hold a book that William Brewster held was awesome," said Gene.

We hope this tradition of governors general signing this book will not be lost.

Gene Fortine