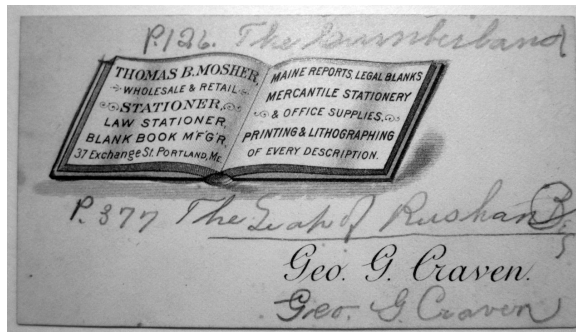


A Little Bit can go a Long Way

The antecedents to the belles lettres publishing program (1891-1923) of Thomas Bird Mosher are several and varied, but they all come down to four elements: the building of his exposure to and appreciation of British fine literature; his exposure to finely printed books, mostly from England; his immersion into the details and minutia surrounding the design, preparation, printing and binding of paper and books; and of course his ability to make it a viable business venture. An important yet unpublished work in the Mosher Press Collection is that written by Biddeford town historian and librarian, Dane Yorke, who took it upon himself to research what Mosher did before he published his first literary book, George Meredith's *Modern Love*, in 1891. Along with Yorke's amassed notes and typescript for his proposed *That Man Mosher* (unpublished) there is also a good deal of correspondence with Flora Macdonald Lamb (Mosher's erstwhile assistant from 1897 until 1923) and with Carl Purington Rollins, the typographer, printer, publisher of Yale University Press fame. I have continued to acquire material related to Mosher's pre-Mosher Press days and along with many of his own unpublished writings I have secured a few of his published books as well as business correspondence when he was involved as one of the principals with the McLellan, Mosher & Co. (1882-1889) and as the owner of its immediate successor, the Thomas B. Mosher [company], which operated from 1889 until 1895. Both companies were wholesale stationers, lithographers, law booksellers and manufacturers, and both operated out of 37 Exchange St. in Portland, Maine. Their letters, both hand-written and form letter notices, were printed on letterhead stationary employing a large left-hand bright red ledger anchoring the horizontal remainder of the letterhead involving a banner and some red on black lettering all covering the upper 3 1/2" x 8 1/4" portion of a page. The manufacture of stationary, law and blank books proved to be an important training ground for Mosher's ability to spatially lay out pages, and to work with local typesetters, printers, and binders to achieve certain results. His own venture into the world of belles lettres publishing would overlap with his stationary and law book business for five years after which time he felt confident enough to sell the business to turn his attention to exclusively printing works of literature which would eventually lead to a permanent and lasting reputation in the annals of American publishing.

Now, ramping up to the present, I had always assumed that after the firm McLellan, Mosher & Co. went bankrupt, the newly formed (but obvious continuation) of the Thomas B. Mosher [company] was strictly a one person business. In other words, the owner was stock orderer, clerk, book publisher, and salesman all rolled into one. That's how I thought of it

until, that is, a little something attracted my eye on eBay. Understand, I've been around for over twenty years collecting this stuff, but I never once alighted upon a business card (2 1/8" by 3 3/4") showing an open book with the following information on the left page:



THOMAS B. MOSHER.
WHOLESALE & RETAIL
STATIONER
LAW STATIONER
BLANK BOOK M'F'G'R.
37 Exchange St. Portland , ME.

and on the adjoining right hand page of the image:

MAINE REPORTS, LEGAL BLANKS
MERCANTILE STATIONERY
& OFFICE SUPPLIES.
PRINTING & LITHOGRAPHING
OF EVERY DESCRIPTION.

Not only had I never, ever seen this business card, but just as importantly there appears the script-printed name of Geo. G. Craven toward the lower right hand corner. This was Craven's business card representing himself as a seller of material for the firm of Thomas B. Mosher. Craven's obituary (and picture) appeared in *The American Stationer* of Nov. 30, 1912. The obituary was fairly short: "Word has reached *The Stationer* from Mrs. Alice Brazier Craven that her husband, George G. Craven, who has been ill for two years, passed away at Salem, Mass., last week. General paresis was the cause of his death. Mr. Craven was very well known to the trade throughout the country, having traveled extensively for many years for some of the leading stationery houses. The deceased was forty-three years of age." (p. 18). *Walden's Stationer and Printer* (Feb. 10, 1910, p. 22) ran a column on George G. Craven's address on "Photogravure" before the Philadelphia Stationers' Association and listed him as being in the employ of the Charles H. Elliott Company of Philadelphia. In that same year he switched over to Edward Stern & Co., manufacturers of "high-class stationers' specialties" in Philadelphia (*The Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer*, May 1, 1910, p. 30) and further indicates that "Mr. Craven has been connected with the stationary trade for many years, has traveled extensively, and has a wide circle of acquaintances among the dealers in this line." Given the dates during which Mosher operated out of Portland under the firm name of Thomas B. Mosher [company] from 1889 until 1895. Mr. George G. Craven would have been in Mosher's employ during some part of that time, making Craven in his early to mid-20's when he worked for Mosher.

The nice thing about this is that from a little piece of ephemera a great deal of information can be gleaned. Is the business card rare? You bet your booties it is. Is it valuable? Not particularly since it highlights just a small part of the Mosher story and one has to be steeped in that story to both care about it and to recognize it when something that comes along like this has some significance. It does show us that even in these early pre-Mosher Books years that Mosher had a stationary representative in his employ. So the business card now gets filed away with the early Mosher stationary, all a supportive, tangible record of what Mosher did prior to his becoming a full-time belles letter publisher.

Phil Bishop
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