Angelica Singleton Van Buren, 1817-1877

ARCHIVED ONLINE EXHIBIT

The exhibit was curated for the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections by Jennifer Talley, a graduate student in the joint MA-MLIS program in English and Library & Information Science.

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Edited by Patrick Scott.

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Angelica Singleton Van Buren, from a portrait that hangs in the Red Room of the White House

The books displayed here belonged to Angelica Singleton Van Buren (1816-1877), the South Carolina-born daughter-in-law who was President Martin Van Buren's hostess at the White House. They are among a larger group of books, from the Barnwell and Singleton families, that were for many years in the home of Miss Malinda Barnwell of Florence, S.C. The collection has recently been donated to the University by Mr. and Mrs. David Phillips of Florence.

Angelica Singleton, daughter of South Carolina planter Richard Singleton and Rebecca Travis (Coles) Singleton, was raised at the family plantation Home Place, in Sumter, South Carolina. During the late 1820's and early 1830's she attended Madame Grelaud's Seminary in Philadelphia along with her older sister Marion; such seminaries offered young ladies instruction in subjects such as grammar, languages, deportment, history, and music.

After leaving school, Angelica spent time in Washington, D.C. with the family of a distant relative, Senator William Campbell Preston. Her mother's cousin, Dolley Madison, the widow of President James Madison, introduced her to Washington society, and in November 1838 Angelica married Abraham (Abram) Van Buren, the President's oldest son and personal secretary, whom she had met at a White House dinner earlier that year. The President reportedly approved of the marriage and the ties it brought between the White House and the powerful Southern aristocracy.

After an extended European honeymoon, Angelica returned in 1839 with her husband to live in the White House and to serve as its hostess for Van Buren's remaining years in office. According to contemporary reports, Angelica was "universally admired" in Washington, and the French minister Adolphe Fourier de Bacourt, generally critical of Americans, remarked that "in any country" Angelica would "pass for an amiable woman of graceful and distinguished manners and appearance."

When President Van Buren left office in 1841, Angelica and Abram first visited with Angelica's family in Sumter, where Angelica gave birth to their first son, Singleton. (A daughter born during her residency in the White House had lived only a few hours.) The family eventually settled at Van Buren's estate, Lindenwald, in Kinderhook, New York. The
Van Buren's continued to winter in South Carolina, and she later inherited Home Place. In 1848 the Van Buren's moved to New York City, where Angelica was known for her charitable work.

**ANGELICA SINGLETON**

Engraving of Angelica Singleton
From *Munsey's Magazine* 38 (March 1907).

**The Keepsake for MDCCXXX**
Ed. F. M. Reynolds
London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1830.
*Inscribed "To Angelica from a Friend."*

Illustrated literary annuals and gift books, designed to be given away rather than read, were highly popular during the 1820's and 1830's, especially as gifts to and between young women aspiring to taste and sophistication. This volume of *The Keepsake*, one of the best-known British literary annuals, dates from Angelica's schooldays in Philadelphia and includes works by popular authors and poets of the time such as Sir Walter Scott, Mary Shelley, Lady Caroline Lamb, Coleridge, and Byron.

**The Atlantic Souvenir for 1830**
*Inscribed "From Marion to her sister Angelica."*

**The Atlantic Souvenir**, published from 1826 to 1832, was one of the first literary annuals produced in the United States. As this example
shows, such books often included elaborate engraved nameplates for the gift inscription. This volume includes engravings, short stories, and poems, generally unsigned and in the moral, patriotic, and sentimental genres.

Angelica Singleton's Autograph Album

This manuscript volume is from 1831, one of Angelica's final years at Madame Grelaud's Seminary in Philadelphia. It includes inscriptions, poems, and sketches in various hands, both signed and unsigned, from school friends and teachers. The largest section commemorates Angelica's role as "Queen of May" in 1831; it includes "Address spoken by Miss A. L. Pearson to the Queen of May Miss Sarah Angelica Singleton, May 1 '31" and Angelica's "Reply," written by Edward Clayson, English master at Madame Grelaud's. These poems feature humorous descriptions of the students, by name, and satiric thoughts on love and marriage. The "Reply" asserts that "Queen Angelique / Is not so weak / As some folks please to think," and that "Men don't wed girls / For eyes or curls / But court them for their Cash." The title page, also hand-written, reads "Autograph book for 1831," and is signed "Angelica Singleton"; the decorative leather binding is stamped in gold, with "ALBUM" on the spine, and the pastel pages are gilt-edged.

John Aikin, 1747-1822, ed.
Select Works of the British Poets
Signed "Angelique Singleton 1834."

Nineteenth-century anthologies, like their modern successors, were intended to introduce readers to the standard works of literature. This volume includes the "biographical and critical prefaces" still a mainstay of literary textbooks and contains major poetical works by Jonson, Milton (including all of Paradise Lost), Pope, Swift, Gray, and others. The editor, though a physician, was better known as an editor of London periodicals and as the younger brother of the poet and children's author Anna Laetitia Barbauld. The publisher, Thomas Wardle, was the principal importer of English books into the U.S. in the early nineteenth century. Pencil markings can be seen occasionally throughout the volume. Angelica's inscription here is the only occurrence of this name-form in the collection outside the autograph book.

George Combe, 1788-1858
A System of Phrenology
Boston: Marsh Capen & Lyon, 1835.
Inscribed "Angelica Singleton from R. M. Deveaux 1835."
A gift from Angelica's brother-in-law, this is a work on the "science" of phrenology, popular in the mid-1800s, by its leading British proponent. Combe claimed that various physical, emotional, and mental traits could be diagnosed by examining the shape of a patient's head. This volume includes diagrams of the various "intellectual" and "affective" areas of the head. In addition to the inscription, the flyleaf is signed "A. S. Van Buren."

Mrs. Dolley Madison

From *Munsey's Magazine* ?? (?? ??).

It was Mrs. Madison who chaperoned Angelica Singleton to the White House dinner in March 1838 where she met her future husband, the president's son Abram Van Buren. Despite the hardships of being twice widowed and having a profligate son who had dissipated her late husband's estate through mismanagement, Mrs. Madison was nonetheless still renowned as one of the most gracious members of Washington's social elite.

An American [James Fenimore Cooper, 1789-1851]

*Gleanings in Europe*

Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1837.

*Signed "A. Van Buren."

Of particular interest among Miss Barnwell's books was this first edition, in the original binding, of a pseudonymous book by America's first major novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, better known for such frontier adventure stories as *The Last of the Mohicans*. It is one of five travel books Cooper wrote during the 1830's, when, disillusioned at the reception of several novels with European settings, he stopped writing fiction for several years. It is presented in the form of letters to friends from the author's travels, commenting obliquely on the danger to America of imitating Europe.

Thomas Gray, 1716-1771

*The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray*


*Signed "A. S. Van Buren 1842."

Gray is now best known for his poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," with such much-quoted lines on village virtue as "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife," or "Full many a rose is born to blush unseen." This volume is part of the publisher Pickering's series, the Aldine Edition of British Poets, and includes a life of the poet. Pickering was the first British publisher to introduce cloth binding for books in 1823,
leading to a wider availability at lower prices. This series was available in both the cheaper cloth and a more expensive morocco leather binding, as shown here. Though Pickering was a British publisher, both this volume and the Burns shown next bear the label of an American bookseller, Lockwood’s, of 411 Broadway, New York.

Robert Burns, 1759-1796
The Poetical Works of Robert Burns
Volumes 1 and 2 signed "A. S. Van Buren 1842."

Famous for his songs and poems in Scottish dialect, Burns' nationalism and rebelliousness held natural appeal for readers in antebellum America. This three-volume set is the second edition of Burns in Pickering's Aldine Edition of British Poets. To ensure its success, Pickering claimed to have acquired two hundred original manuscripts and letters of Burns on which to base the new edition. Like the Gray volume, this book includes a memoir of the poet and his complete works.

Richard Monckton Milnes (later Lord Houghton), 1809-1885
The Poems of Richard Monckton Milnes
London: Edward Moxon, 1838.
Volume 2 only; signed "Angelica Van Buren London 1839."

Popular poetry of the mid-1800's often took its themes from travel and historical subjects, as in this collection of poems inspired by the author's Grand Tour of Europe. Milnes was an eclectic writer with a variety of interests. He wrote and lectured on contemporary political issues, prepared the pioneering life of Keats, was a friend of both Tennyson and Swinburne, and was the first to publish Ralph Waldo Emerson in England. Significantly, this volume was published by Moxon, also Tennyson's publisher. The inscription indicates that it was bought on Angelica's European honeymoon.

Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, 1803-1848
The Life of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry
Both vols. signed "A. Van Buren."

Commodore Perry, the naval officer and hero of the Battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812, is best known for his wartime report that "We have met the enemy and they are ours." This biography is part of Harper's Family Library series, the first such series published in the United States. The series ran from 1830-1845 with 187 volumes in all, mostly by British authors. The volumes were entirely non-fiction, including biography, travel and history. At a mere 45 cents per volume, the Family Library was much cheaper than its
imported British rivals and helped make Harper's the largest U.S. book publisher of the period.

LITERATURE OF SOCIAL ISSUES

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, 1785-1867
Letters from Abroad to Kindred At Home
Signed "A. Van Buren."

The prolific Sedgwick was the first of the "literary domestics," American women novelists of the mid-nineteenth century who also included Fanny Fern, Lydia Maria Child, and Maria Susanna Cummins. Their works were hugely popular and known for their sentimentality and devotion to home and family, featuring heroines who struggle through domestic difficulties, improve their characters, and find true love and the inevitable happy ending. These were the writers who prompted Nathaniel Hawthorne's notorious comment, in an 1855 letter to his publisher that "America is now wholly given over to a d----d mob of scribbling women." Despite her success, Sedgwick had a fear of public attention and published anonymously throughout her career. This volume, an epistolary work which, like Cooper's, includes observations on travels in the Alps and in Italy, was published as "by the author of 'Hope Leslie,' 'The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man,' 'Live and Let Live,' etc."

Grace Aguilar, 1816-1847
The Mother's Recompense
Signed "Angelica Van Buren 46 East 21st Str."

Perhaps Angelica's taste in fiction, or reading tastes generally, grew more moralistic in mid-century. This is one of Angelica's later books, dating after the move to New York. Aguilar was the most well-known Jewish woman writer of the Victorian era. Most of her novels were written in the 1830's but not published till after her death. They included Jewish historical romances and short fiction, a Scottish romance in imitation of Walter Scott, and two popular domestic novels about mothers and daughters, Home Influence and this sequel The Mother's Recompense, intended primarily for a Christian readership. It illustrates, in Aguilar's words, "the cares, anxieties, and ultimate reward of maternal love," aiding "the education of the Heart" and pointing young women towards "the paths of rectitude and virtue." An apologetic preface by the author's mother explains that her "long and fatal illness" prevented the revision and correction of the work.

Charles Dickens, 1812-1870, ed.
Household Words, A Weekly Journal
London: Bradbury and Evans, 1855.  
Signed "Angelica Van Buren Geneva 1856."

Dickens, widely considered the greatest Victorian novelist and certainly the most popular, was also active in other publishing fields. Known for his literary attacks on social evils, his reform mentality found an outlet in this extremely popular British weekly, intended in part to "replace with wholesome fare the 'villainous' periodical literature" of the time. Household Words was known for espousing the causes of the poor and working class, and regularly contained works on a variety of subjects for instruction and information, as well as topical social issues and material for entertainment. This volume complies issues nos. 268-301 (May 12-Dec. 29 1855) and includes short stories, poetry, essays, serials, generally unsigned. Also in the collection is an individual weekly issue, marked for delivery to the Van Buren household.

Saba Smith, Lady Holland, d. 1866  
A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith  
Both volumes signed "Angelica Singleton Van Buren 46 East 21st Str."

While this item might seem to reflect the religious leanings of books available to women at the time, it probably indicates instead Angelica's wide interest in politics and literature. The Rev. Sydney Smith (1771-1845), one of the founders of the Edinburgh Review, was an essayist and bon viveur with high social connections who was famous for his witty challenges to political, social, and religious orthodoxies. This biography, by Smith's daughter, includes excerpts from lectures, sermons, speeches, and letters.

Charles Kingsley, 1819-1875  
Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography  

This volume, purchased during Angelica's later years in New York, indicates her growing interest in social issues and charitable work. The "Christian Socialist" clergyman Charles Kingsley often focused his work on political and religious concerns; this novel uses the form of a workingman's autobiography to address issues of religious and moral development, political reform, the effects of imprisonment, and the proper kind of poetry a moral poet should write. The effect was so realistic for the time that many readers took it for a genuine autobiography rather than fiction.
By the author of 'Things by Their Right Names,' 'Plain Sense,' &c.
Rhoda: A Novel.
London: Henry Colburn, 1816.
Each volume signed "Angelica Van Buren 46 East 21st Str."

Angelica Singleton was typical of her period in her liking for fiction, especially by women writers. Though women could make a living as authors, it was still not considered an entirely respectable female occupation, and women's writings were often published anonymously, as here. This work also provides a prime example of the moral values such novels had to illustrate to be considered acceptable women's reading. It tells the moral tale of an orphan girl who learns "that vanity is not a venial frailty, nor self-confidence and love of distinction safe counselors, -- that nothing but a preferable love for the husband can sanctify the marriage bond, -- and that chastity alone will not make a good wife." Published by Henry Colburn, who would become one of the most prolific fiction publishers in London, this novel is in the fashionable "three-decker" format, and labels indicate it was an ex-library copy from one of the equally fashionable "circulating libraries."

Memoires du Duc de Sully
Paris: Chez Etienne Ledoux, 1827.

Memoires du Cardinal de Retz, de Guy-Joli et de la duchesse de Nemours
Paris: Chez Ledoux & Fevre, 1817.

These two works reflect Angelica's interest in European culture and history as well as her fashionable education and ability to read substantial works in French. The first volume is from the six-volume autobiography of the chief advisor to Henri IV (1559-1641). The second is from a six-volume text that prints the lives of three French notables during the time of Louis XIV. The form of the inscriptions indicates that, although the books were published much earlier, they were in Angelica's later home, in New York.

Sir Henry Taylor, 1800-1876
Notes from Life in Six Essays
Taylor, an early post-Romantic poet once well-known for his verse-drama Philip Van Artevelde, uses "maxims and reflections" to present "the immediate results of an attentive observation of life." His six essays are on money, humility and independence, choice in marriage, wisdom, children, and "the life poetic."

Edward J. Trelawny, 1792-1881
Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron
Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1859.
Signed "Angelica S. Van Buren 46 E. 21st Str."

Angelica's early literary education had focused on pre-Romantic poetry, but her tastes widened. Part memory and part exaggeration and invention, this book made its author a celebrity figure. Trelawny was the last living link to the larger-than-life second generation English Romantic poets. His firsthand account, based partly on "notes taken and letters written at the time the events occurred, and partly from memory," narrates his experiences in Europe with Shelley and Byron and their circle in 1822-1823. It was Trelawny who had cremated Shelley's body on the beach at Viareggio and who had taken the poet's heart from the flames. The plain brown cloth binding, with gold stamping, is characteristic of the prominent Boston-based literary publishing firm, Ticknor and Fields.
Books belonging to Mary Carter Singleton (1837-1863) and other family members

Literary taste in the generation after Angelica is represented by her niece, Mary Carter Singleton. Twenty years on, the upbringing of a young lady in South Carolina remained remarkably similar to Angelica’s own, including attending a finishing school, yet Mary Singleton’s books show also a significant new interest in works by women authors and about women’s issues. In 1858, Mary married Rev. Robert Barnwell, thereby providing the link between the Singletons and the Barnwell family, through whom this collection descended. Also displayed in this case are books from the Phillips’ gift from other members of the family, including her two sons, along with some unsigned items from the collection that round out the picture it gives of women’s reading in the mid-nineteenth century.

Caroline Gilman, 1794-1888

The Sibyl, or New Oracles From the Poets
New York: George P. Putnam 1849.
Inscribed “To Mary from her father Dec. 28th 1849.”

Caroline Gilman was a leading female Southern writer who edited juvenile and family weeklies and wrote stories and poems for children as well as domestic novels for women. She published several volumes of “oracles,” or literary extracts, as “drawing-room diversions” with an educational benefit so that “the young may become familiar with something in an attractive form from the whole range of Poetry.” This volume culls quotations from Catullus and Virgil up through Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Byron, Browning, and Longfellow, as well as lesser known writers. These were used to play a fortune-telling parlor game; a series of questions are followed by numbered quotations as answers. The person whose fortune was to be told picked a number and the corresponding answer was read aloud; some answers were serious, some meant to be humorous. A young woman who asked for a description of her future lover might get as an answer Shakespeare’s “A sad face, a reverend carriage, a slow tongue,” and so forth. A young man might hear that the character of his “lady love” was that of which Browning wrote “A heart too soon made glad, too easily impressed.” Other topics include home, destiny, “state of your feelings,” likes and desires, and profession or occupation of “he who loves you.” A game could also be made of guessing the author of each quotation.

The Village in the Mountains; Conversion of Peter Bayssiere; and History of a Bible
Inscribed “To M.C. Singleton from her Aunt Martha.”

Religious reading was considered particularly appropriate for young women, as a natural part of the social and familial role their education and
upbringing was meant to prepare them for. This volume is a religious tract, combining story and sermon, of the type that was widely distributed in the antebellum period. The American Tract Society was the most prolific producer of this type of volume, producing over a million a year by 1850, with the aim of teaching non-denominational evangelical Christianity.

Frederick Rowton, ed.
The Female Poets of Great Britain
Inscribed: "Mr Archer's Academy Premium awarded to Miss M. Singleton for amiable deportment. June 29th 1855."

This anthology reflects the growing interest in and respect for women writers in the Victorian era of the time. Focusing on poetry by women from the fifteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, the editor claims to "supply a want which must have been frequently experienced by every student of our literary annals." The volume was meant to "prove that the Poetical Faculty is not confined to one of the sexes," and the Preface devotes several pages to lamenting the lack of attention for women poets: "In these enlightened days it may certainly be taken for granted that women have souls: and further, that their souls have no small influence upon the world of thought and action." As with much popular poetry of the mid-Victorian era, the audience for which was primarily women, the poems chosen tend toward the romantic and sentimental, with religious, moral, and domestic themes. Included are poems ascribed to Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth I, Lady Mary Wroth, Anne Bradstreet, Aphra Behn, Mary Wortley Montagu, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Felicia Hemans, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, along with nearly 100 others.

Lydia Howard Sigourney, 1791-1865
Water Drops
New York: Robert Carter 1848.
Inscribed "To M.C. Singleton for her composition 1847."

Lydia Sigourney, known to contemporaries as the "sweet singer of Hartford," was perhaps the most popular American poet of the mid 1800's. Though to a modern reader her works may seem "imbued with all the worst traits of 19th century sentimentality, religiosity, and morbidity" (DLB 42, 323), her poems and stories on home and family particularly appealed to young women and their mothers, and she meant her work as a vehicle for moral instruction as well as entertainment. Water Drops, a collection of Sigourney's prose and poetic work, is a temperance tract principally intended to help mothers influence their children against drink.

Heroines of Shakespeare
Inscribed "Mary C. Singleton from her cousin Richard I. Manning Jr. Dec. 31st 1855."

The main focus of this volume is on the elaborate engravings of each featured "heroine," interpretations firmly in the sentimental tradition, intended to "give each exquisite creation a 'local habitation' in the mind's eye." This anthology compiles speeches and dialogues from Shakespeare's heroines, from Juliet and Ophelia to Lady Macbeth, Titania, Cleopatra, and Miranda. Most of the major comedies and tragedies are represented as well as several of the histories. The publisher, Phillips, Sampson & Co., advertised and solicited orders from all over the country and the North American territories, reaching as far as San Francisco.

Sir Walter Scott, 1771-1832

**The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott**
Inscribed "Mary C. Singleton from her cousin Thomas Taylor."

Scott was popular throughout the U.S. during the nineteenth century but particularly in the antebellum South, where his chivalric medievalism and heroic nobility appealed to the aristocratic elite. Mark Twain blamed Scott for a South where, as he wrote in *Life on the Mississippi*, "the genuine and wholesome civilization of the nineteenth century is curiously confused and commingled with the Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization." This volume includes engravings, a memoir of the author, and his major poems including *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion*. Appleton, the publisher, exemplifies the literary boom of the early nineteenth century; Daniel Appleton entered the book trade from the dry goods business after finding the selection of books in his store one of the most profitable aspects of his business. As there were no international copyright laws at the time, Scott's works remained widely available and fairly inexpensive.

Charles Dickens, 1812-1870

**Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son**
New York: 1847.
Signed on cover "Travis C. Van Buren."

In the mid-nineteenth century, British novels were most commonly published in three-volume sets, known as three-deckers, but also were serialized in periodicals and in "part-issue" as separate pamphlets. Although Dickens was one of the few major authors to publish regularly in serial format outside of magazine publication, his popularity, beginning with *Pickwick Papers* in 1836-37, was immense in the United States as well as in Britain. This is part 10 of a novel issued in parts.

George Alfred Lawrence, 1827-1876

**Sword and Gown**
This novel falls into the later nineteenth-century sensational genre which had as a central figure the unconventional, cynical, and slightly amoral anti-hero. Lawrence took as his heroes brooding Byronic types, men of the world, equally adept at the arts of love and war, intellectual but more importantly strong and brave and usually doomed to an early but unquestionably heroic death. This volume, belonging to Angelica's son Martin, is an example of the sort of work women would not have read (or at least were not supposed to read). Published in the series Tinsley's Cheap Novels, this was a "yellowback"; rather like modern paperbacks at the airport, yellowbacks were designed for railway travelers, "sold at the station, read on the train and perhaps left behind at the end of the journey" (Feather 136).

George Eliot's first book

While this exhibit highlights books from the Singleton family, the Phillips' gift also includes books from the Barnwells, a collection especially strong in nineteenth-century theology. Among them was this find, the very first book by the English Victorian novelist "George Eliot" (Marian Evans), her anonymous translation of the ground-breaking modern Life of Jesus by the German scholar David Friedrich Strauss.