

The Curious Case of a “Mayflower Bible”

by Carolyn K. Coates

ABSTRACT: A library at a small liberal arts university receives from a donor an old book, which has long been assumed to be a *Mayflower* Bible. A staff librarian who is not accustomed to dealing with rare books reflects on the process of determining the true identity of the volume, its provenance, and the story behind it, with particular interest in the value of this experience to a library whose special collections are limited. Attention to the history of the book and of print culture demonstrate that even the most unlikely library gifts can serve the liberal arts institution through their value both as text and as artifact.

In the early autumn of 2006, a local resident visited the J. Eugene Smith Library of Eastern Connecticut State University, inquiring after an old bible that he had donated a few years before. The staff in the archives, embarrassed, did not recall the donation. The book was finally located in a file cabinet in the library's administrative offices. Sadly, it was in poor condition, lacking a title page and other identifying information (no doubt this was a factor in the book's being ignored and set aside), but it was also outside of the realm of our usual collections, which focus on supporting our undergraduate liberal arts, education, and business programs.

Our donor's particular query on this occasion had to do with two notes that had been tucked between the pages. One was a typewritten message on office letterhead from the late nineteenth century; the other was a penciled note on a small scrap of paper. Both stated that this book was a copy of the original King James Bible, printed in 1611 and brought to North America on the *Mayflower* in 1620. Two observations seemed to lend credence to this claim. One was the antiquity of the volume. This was indeed an old book, made to appear even older through damage and neglect. Second was the fact that the text of the book followed the chapter order of the Protestant bible so that it *looked* like a bible. (Unfortunately, its damage was such that the extant pages only begin with Leviticus.) Could it in fact be a *Mayflower* Bible? If not, then what of these other notes claiming that it was? Clearly the book, whatever its proper title, was a family heirloom of some importance. And what brought it, dilapidated and abandoned, to a small university in eastern Connecticut? Our donor, Mr. Jack Connell, had no specific recollection of where he had obtained the book. Some years before, he had had a business cleaning out attics and garages all over eastern Connecticut and this was something that he had acquired along the way. He had kept it himself for a while and then tried to find it a permanent home. After being turned down by the Connecticut State Library and Plimouth Plantation, he brought it to Eastern. Someone in New Haven (he could not remember who) had told Mr. Connell that the book dated from the early seventeenth century. When the book arrived in the library's technical services department for cataloging a few days after Mr. Connell's visit, I immediately volunteered to investigate. The search took me on a meandering path through Puritan immigration and theological disputes, my first attempts at genealogical research, and into some reflections on print culture and American patriotic myth-making. What did I learn from these investigations?

The first lesson learned: remember to focus on the book in hand, even if other evidence seems to point in the wrong direction.

The several pieces of ephemera tucked between the pages of the book documented some of the history of the volume itself. On March 9, 1896, James L. Gates, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, wrote a letter, addressed to an

Carolyn K. Coates is Acquisitions Librarian at the J. Eugene Smith Library, Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic, Connecticut.

unknown recipient, outlining the provenance of an old book that had come into his family's possession through his second wife, Katherine. He wrote:

“This Bible is the King James Edition, published A.D. 1611. It came over in the *Mayflower* in 1620 and was in the possession of the Winthrops who married into the Hilton family of Newburyport, Mass., who afterwards moved to Newmarket, N. H. The Hiltons married the Meades and this book has been in the Meade family for four or five generations, to-wit:

“From father to son until John G. Meade of Northwood Center, N. H. gave it to his youngest daughter, Mrs. James L. Gates, in the summer of 1893 for exhibition at the World's Fair in Chicago. Previous to 1893 this Bible had been in the same house (still belonging to Mr. Meade) over 175 years, and the house is in a better state of preservation today than the book is.

“This Bible was also used by the John Howland family. The Howland family married into the John Thompson family and the Thompsons into the Meade family....”

“Mr. Gates is not in it.”

James L. Gates put down this summary as a man of accomplishments, well-known and regarded for his logging, banking, and other business enterprises in Neillsville and, later, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Indeed, his written claims regarding the book seemed quite in keeping with his wife's distinguished genealogy, even if he couldn't quite explain how two families, who presumably lived in separate houses, had used the book at the same time. (The full extent to which the Meade family's story had eclipsed the identity of the book itself only became clear to me later.) In his letter the *Mayflower* provenance is all but assumed. Several other notes were tucked inside the book. One, which looks to be of more recent origin, outlines the history of the family of William Hilton, a Plymouth colony settler who immigrated on the *Fortune*, the second ship to arrive at the colony. Did our book arrive on the *Mayflower*, or the *Fortune*? Was it an early King James Bible? The book certainly had the patina of age, and the printing suggests a book of that era, though without a title page or colophon, it was hard to confirm. The first task was to determine exactly what book Mr. Connell had found.

There were reasons to doubt the *Mayflower* connection. Though neither a specialist in English ecclesiastical history nor in the history of biblical translations, I had my doubts about both the King James and Pilgrim connections. Just a year earlier, I had had the chance to examine an authentic King James Bible up close. Unlike the volume in our library (which in its present damaged state measures approximately 29 cm by 22.5 cm by 7 cm) the early printings of the Authorized Version were larger books, intended more for public than for private reading. Secondly, based on my (very) general knowledge of church history, I suspected that the Pilgrims, as Puritan Separatists, were unlikely to have favored a translation authorized by the king and shaped by a religio-political establishment of which they were suspicious. A quick bit of research in Eastern's stacks confirmed that they favored the Geneva Bible, a translation produced by the English Marian exile community in Geneva, which went through numerous editions in the late sixteenth century.¹ I still needed a positive identification for the book, and if it wasn't a King James translation, then what was it? I considered visiting other Connecticut university libraries to compare this

¹ Evelyn B. Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 31-32; cf. John B. Thomas III, “Tales from the Vault: Our Mayflower Bible,” *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 1, no. 3 (April 2001), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/cp/vol-01/no-03/tales/> (accessed April 29, 2007).

book to other seventeenth or eighteenth century bibles in hopes of finding a match, and spent some time browsing bibliographic records for old bibles in local collections in search of likely matches.

Then I remembered *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*, a well-indexed electronic database that includes page images of most books published in English from 1475-1700. At the time, our library did not have access to *EEBO* (or its microfilm antecedent), but I was able to access it through another local library. I started by scanning bibles from the 1600s, looking up Exodus and Leviticus, the earliest surviving sections of the volume in hand. This quickly became tedious: I narrowed down the possibilities, but nothing matched the ruled pattern on the pages or the typography.

The ruled pages were providing a clue that I should have taken more seriously from the start. Something about the text of the book itself was puzzling me. I looked more closely—surely the first chapter of Leviticus was longer than the few lines printed on the page? The text on the pages reproduced the books of the bible in their conventional order, but the chapters seemed too short. Comparing the volume at hand with a modern bible confirmed immediately that this book did not reproduce the entire text of the bible. In the volume in question a heading runs through a ruled rectangle at the top of each page, centered between the page numbers at the margins and the chapter numbers at the gutter: “A Paraphrase upon the / hard texts of . . .” The next time I searched *Early English Books Online* I immediately found a work entitled *A Plaine and Familiar Explication (by way of Paraphrase) of all the Hard Texts of the whole Divine Scripture of the Old and New Testament. By Ios. Exon. London, printed by Miles Flesher, for Nath: Butter, at the Signe of the Pyde Bull at S Austins Gate. . . MDCXXXIII*. Checking several page images in both the Old and New Testaments, I found a perfect match.

This book was not a bible *per se*, but a biblical commentary published in 1633 to aid preachers in their preparations of sermons. I had taken “paraphrase” to mean simply translation, whereas the author of our book had meant it to be an explanatory interpretation, or “explication,” of scriptural difficulties.

I find it interesting that all of us—a succession of previous owners, the donor, and several librarians—had taken the idea that this book was a bible for granted, even as we had our misgivings at the *Mayflower* claim. We had a letter that said it was so, and without the usual chief sources of information, it seemed to be the likeliest scenario. The English language of 1633 may be comparatively “modern” but that 1896 letter was much closer in time, more familiar, and more easily readable than the seventeenth century typography and literary style of the book.

Now that both the author and title were known, it was reasonably easy to place both in their historical contexts. “Ios. Exon.,” better known as Joseph Hall (1574-1656), was a prominent Anglican divine of the seventeenth century who rose from modest beginnings to extraordinary prominence.² He was well known in his day for his literary works and an influential literary style. His literary career began while he was a student at Cambridge, when he published a collection of verse satires; a later satire is thought to have strongly influenced sections of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). After these early endeavors, Hall’s writing focused on devotional works, and on debating the theological issues of the times. He was also devoted to preaching, and served as chaplain to several influential people, including Henry, Prince of Wales (1594-1612), and served as bishop in Exeter and later Norwich.

² This biographical sketch is based on T. F Kinloch, *The Life and Works of Joseph Hall, 1574-1656* (London, New York: Staples Press, 1951) and Ronald Corthell, “Joseph Hall, July 1, 1574-September 8, 1656” in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 151: British Prose Writers of the Early Seventeenth Century*, edited by Clayton D. Lein (The Gale Group, 1995, 174-187) as viewed in the *Gale Literary Databases*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.csulib.ctstate.edu> (accessed April, 23, 2007).

Hall styled himself as one who sought a middle way through the religious controversies of the day. He had a strongly Calvinist upbringing and education, but was no Separatist, believing in the apostolic succession of the bishops and the divine right of kings. In the 1640s, he engaged in a pamphlet war with John Milton (1608-1674), who disparaged both Hall's mannered style and his devotion to the monarchy. One biographer, Ronald Corthell, writes "Hall had begun the controversy by appealing, once again, for both sides to show moderation and reasonableness; but as the attacks on him continued, his replies became clogged with erudition and hair-splitting logic. Milton's pamphlets may be vituperative and obscure, but Hall's are boring."³ In 1641 he was sent to the Tower of London with William Laud and eleven other bishops. Released after five months, he returned to Norwich but was eventually removed from the bishopric by the Act of Sequestration (1643). The book that Mr. Connell brought to us, *A Plaine and Familiar Explication*, is one of Hall's more obscure works but it does exemplify his work as clergy, in that it brings some practical help to others, like him, doing the work of ministry.

The second lesson learned: the book is not merely a text, but also an artifact with its own complex history.

The first mystery had been solved: this book was published a good while after the sailing of *Mayflower* and of the *Fortune*. Yet in other ways, the mystery had only deepened. What of the letter linking this tome to the *Mayflower*? Was that a deliberate attempt to deceive, or did it perhaps describe another book, a real *Mayflower* Bible now lost? If the intrepid Mr. Gates was wrong about this fact, what could we make of the rest of his letter? And if the book was located in Wisconsin in 1896, how did it end up in Connecticut in 2007?

The first step was to uncover the identity of Mrs. James L. Gates, to see if the genealogy in the letter was supported by other documents. Through some Web searching and genealogical sleuthing I learned that Gates married his second wife, Katherine G. Meade, in 1885.⁴ The twelfth U.S. Census of 1900 records the Gates family of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which included James L. Gates, Katherine M. Gates, listed as having been born in New Hampshire in 1859, and their two children, Harrison, born 1889 and Helen M., born 1891. Two servants also lived with the family.

Following this genealogical trail (and feeling more and more like one of the *History Detectives*) I was able to trace the family line back to New Hampshire through Katherine's father. An ancestor is recorded as having signed the Association Test of 1776, signaling his assent to opposing British rule in the colony.⁵ Thus a basic tenet of Gates's genealogical provenance for the book is sound: the Meade family had been associated with southeastern New Hampshire for a number of generations before Katherine was born.

Another tenet of Gates's account lies with the Hilton family. I was also able to trace this line back to early New England, with connections to Edward Hilton (1596-1670/1671), one of the first English settlers in New Hampshire, and through marriage to other prominent early settlers and their families including John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and Thomas Dudley (1576-1653), John Winthrop's deputy governor, compatriot, and occasional adversary whose most famous offspring was Anne Bradstreet, the noted poet.⁶ It is tempting to theorize that our book passed through the hands of one of the Winthrops or Dudleys,

³ Corthell, "Joseph Hall", 181.

⁴ "James L. Gates," Good Old Days column of the *Clark County Press* (Neillsville, Wisconsin), May 28, 1997, 32, as transcribed by Sharon Schulte; http://wvls.lib.wi.us/ClarkCounty/clark/news/OldDays/1997_5_28.htm (accessed March 27, 2007). In the following account I have relied on genealogical listings at <http://www.rootsweb.com> and <http://www.ancestry.com>, (accessed March-April 2007).

⁵ Jay Mack Holbrook, *New Hampshire 1776 Census* (Oxford, MA: Holbrook Research Associates, 1976), 99.

⁶ Entry 403744, "Edward Hilton," at <http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com>, and Robert C. Anderson, "Edward Hilton,"

given that it would be a most appropriate tome for the library of a young minister, perhaps a gift at his ordination, but this would be mere speculation. Despite his views on monarchical absolutism, Joseph Hall's theology and his training at Emmanuel College (a Calvinist stronghold at Cambridge), would have made his theological writings appealing to many in Puritan New England. This supposes, however, that it was passed along as a family heirloom via a daughter, perhaps Ann Dudley, who married into the Hilton family in 1658.⁷

It is noteworthy that in his notes James L. Gates conflated the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony with the founding of Plymouth and the voyage of the *Mayflower*. His wife's descent through these prominent New England families made the history of the colonies a matter of personal importance to him, but perhaps already the details were fading and congealing into a romantically homogenous "Pilgrim" past. More work on Katherine Gates's family history could be useful, but given her many New England ancestors, it is not unlikely that her family did have Plymouth connections. Still, what we know of Mrs. Gates and her family tells us something about the romantic appeal of the past and the alluring prestige of a distinguished pedigree. Clearly this history was a source of pride for the family.

Uncovering the basic lineage of a family seems relatively simple in the age of the Internet, yet even these convenient sources tell us little of the daily lives of the people traced. That is, we can take a plausible guess at what sort of person might have owned *A Plaine and Familiar Explication*, but are still left wondering who purchased it and where? Were there ministers in the family, or simply diligent students of the bible? What sort of schooling was available to them, and what role did literacy play in their lives in early New England? Further research into the history of Congregationalist ministers and into education in New Hampshire might reveal other connections to this family and to this book.

Third lesson learned: the interplay between the "folk history" of a given book and actual contemporary cultural and political events, can take surprising turns.

An unsigned article in the *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison) on Friday, November 26, 1926 is headlined "*Mayflower* Bible Displayed in City."⁸ The article mentions that a bible brought over on the *Mayflower* in 1620 is on exhibit in the window of the Electric Refrigeration Company at 401 State Street, "together with an issue of the Boston Weekly Messenger of 1812, two ancient deeds, and a few pasteboard bills representing 15 shillings in continental money." The author tells us that the bible is the property of James L. Gates of Cambridge [Wisconsin], recounts Mrs. Gates' lineage, and describes some of the book's marginalia (despite his being mentioned in the article, James died in 1911 and Katherine in 1904).

This was the second time that the book, in its guise as a *Mayflower* Bible, had been on public display, the first time being at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, according to the Gates letter. In both instances the book's exhibition seemed to pass unquestioned—its display as a *Mayflower* Bible almost required that

The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England 1620-1633, volume II (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1995), 947-951. See also Charles L. Cohen, "Winthrop, John," in *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://0-www.anb.org.csulib.ctstateu.edu:80/articles/01/01-0095.html> (accessed April 25, 2007) and Francis J. Bremer, "Dudley, Thomas," *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://0-www.anb.org.csulib.ctstateu.edu:80/articles/01/01-00236.html> (accessed April 29, 2007).

⁷ According to <http://trees.ancestry.com/pt/person.aspx?pid=-1872895658&tid=1951465> (accessed March 27, 2007). I have not been able to confirm this in another source.

⁸ <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wlhbba/articleView.asp?pg=1&cid=15350&key=mayflower&cy=> (accessed April 25, 2007).

it remain unread, as an artifact or relic for display only. Interestingly, too, in both cases the book was displayed in an improbable context. In the display in Madison, the attendant articles are of similar age—that is, they all pre-date the present era of progress, pre-date the Civil War, and invoke the idealistic foundations of the nation. At the same time, they are displayed in the window of the Electric Refrigeration Company, a modern and technologically progressive enterprise. Similarly, the book may well have been exhibited at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in close proximity to other artifacts from the American colonial era, but the overall aim of the world's fair was to promote progress and technological change. The historic and the quaint provided a needed contrasting backdrop to the grandiose and the modern. The misty amalgamated past of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colony contributed to this past: ancestors who were heroic and steadfast and who lived lives based solidly on godly principles. They tamed the wilderness, brought God to the savages, and founded a nation. Our book seems to have been on display as something a “prop” for the telling of a story other than its own, one in which a politics of “progress” and national identity rests upon theological—or perhaps simply cultural—assumptions about beginnings and purity of purpose.

In my research I have found reference to one other “*Mayflower* Bible,” a bible and prayer book bound together and displayed as such for many years at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin.⁹ Descriptions of the volume are more forthright in describing its Puritan past:

“Here was a Bible that had not only come over on the *Mayflower* in 1620, but had belonged to some of the most prominent early settlers, according to annotations on its pages. And there was nothing obscure about its claims: arrivals, marriages, births, and deaths were not only recorded, but were illustrated. There was a small full-length portrait of Peregrine White, the first white child born in New England; Indians with bows and arrows; the first houses; and even the *Mayflower* itself—all in pen-and-ink drawings in margins and other blank spaces.”

This bible, like our copy of *A Plaine and Familiar Explication*, could not have traveled on the *Mayflower*. Interestingly, however, both supposed “*Mayflower*” Bibles came to more public attention during the 1890s. The provenance records at the Ransom Center bible note that their bible was “discovered” by a bookseller from Connecticut in 1892 and donated to the library by one of its later buyers in the 1920s. Why then? Perhaps the enormous immigration of that era, along with the increasing importance of the western states in the cultural and economic life of the country, made the Puritan past seem like a simpler time, harking back to a more unified and comprehensible utopia. As the country became more industrialized and moved towards urbanization, the symbolic allure of the colonial increased. The *Mayflower* Society was founded in 1897 and the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1890, “during a time that was marked by a revival in patriotism and intense interest in the beginnings of the United States of America.”¹⁰

Fourth lesson learned: writing notes in books isn't always such a bad thing.

The story of the Ransom Center *Mayflower* Bible ends with this moral to the tale: “look at what’s in front of you.” The tale of the Meade family “*Mayflower* Bible” might end with the same admonition, but what if we do look at

⁹ John B. Thomas III, “Tales from the Vault: Our *Mayflower* Bible,” *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 1, no. 3 (April 2001), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/cp/vol-01/no-03/tales/> (accessed April 29, 2007).

¹⁰ <http://www.dar.org/natsociety/history.cfm> (accessed April 29, 2007).

the book more closely? Can it add to our hypothetical history? What can it tell us of the use of books in American history?

In addition to its ephemera, our copy of Joseph Hall's paraphrase has bits of marginalia scattered through the pages. Most of the marginalia reflects the book's use by its original intended audience, that is, by someone who studies and preaches the Word. A word or two might be repeated from the text, not so much elucidating it as marking a spot to which the student might want to return. Sometimes sermons are noted: "1754 october last sabbath preached on carelessness in Religion ... Last Sabath on famley order Apreal last Sabath." The source of the connection between this book and the *Mayflower* may be a note written on page 384, just above Jeremiah 10:2: "May Flower landed 1620." Rather than recording the event as it happened however, I think it more likely that this may have tied into the writer's reflections on the text of Jeremiah: "And bee not dismaid at the signes of heaven for the heathen are dismaid at them..." Perhaps a sermon was in the works on the providential nature of God vis-à-vis the heathen and the saints.

One of the lengthier and more intriguing marginal notations recounts an unusual weather event that came to be known as the "Dark Day of 1780." Written in black ink with a very fine pen in a neat hand, near the start of Ephesians, we found: "May 19. 1780 A darkness came on about 11 o'clock, and continued till 3, people were obliged to light candles in the house the darkness being so great. Lights might be seen to shine in the houses at a distance as at night. All business out of doors was dropt." This may have been written in what was simply a convenient break in the page layout, or it may have been intentionally placed over Ephesians 1:3, which refers to blessing in heavenly places. "The Dark Day" is conventionally attributed to smoke from fires used to clear land that must have intersected with some unusual weather patterns. Some felt that it portended Doomsday or the Last Judgment, while other felt that work must go on. Gradually the sky cleared and stars became visible later that night.¹¹

Ephemera tucked into the volume offers more fulsome records of eighteenth century events. A duplicate receipt is included, noting the payment of eighteen shilling 10 ½ in excise taxes in Newberry Port (or Newburyport in modern terms), a sign of a significant business transaction, perhaps. Another handwritten note, this one pasted into the book, outlines the raising of a committee, consisting of Mr. Wentworth Cheswick, Mr. Ichabod Hilton, and Mr. James Cram, to procure the men needed to fill the town's quota in the Continental Army in 1781. This note has been pasted directly below Ezekiel 48:19, "And they that serve the city, shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel," a reference to the need for all groups to contribute.

Given its age, the book may have gone through several owners and readers before the first elements of the marginalia were added to the printed text. Some time early on it served as study aid and guide for a preacher preparing sermons and otherwise studying scripture—just as the author intended—and came to serve also as a repository for notes on his sermons and his congregation. Later, more notes were added, as were family names. Although it may have served several functions simultaneously, it seems to have undergone a long, gradual transformation,

¹¹ *The Encyclopedia of New England: The Culture and History of an American Region*, edited by Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters; foreword by Donald Hall (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 548-549, suggests smoke as the reason for the darkness, as does Sidney Perley, *Historic Storms of New England* (Beverly, MA: Memoirs Unlimited, 2001; reprinted from Salem, MA: Salem Press Publishing and Printing Company, 1891), 87-96. Some ash fell with rain, corroborating the theory. Perley reports that the Connecticut State Legislature called for candles to be lit so that deliberations could continue, though some thought that they might better adjourn and prepare themselves for the Judgment.

from theological study guide and biblical commentary to family heirloom and repository of pride in family history. Further study of the relationships between these elements of the book—its text, its marginalia, its attending ephemera—holds possibilities for further study and insights into the American histories of the book and of biblical interpretation.

One question remained: how did so obviously cherished a family heirloom come to be—essentially, if unintentionally—abandoned? A modest bit of ephemera included with the book is a small scrap of yellowing paper, with notes neatly written in pencil in a twentieth century hand. It had been clipped to the pages, and the rust from the paper clip has stained both the note and the pages of the book. On one side it reads “Mr. Gates—Harry M. 3707 W. Scott. Mayflower Bible—printed 1611 came to America 1620 in possession of the Winthrops. Family heirloom.” The other side reads “Inez Emmons, Bay View Bap. —Mr. Eads’ Great grandfather’s Bible.” This note contains a clue as to how the book traveled east, but it is also poignantly suggests how clues of family history easily become lost. In the moment represented by this note, “Meade” has slipped back past a previous spelling of “Mead” to “Eads.” In this slippage, we see the potential for a loss of historical memory. Even so, we do know that Harry Gates, of the note, is Harrison Meade Gates (1889-1974). According to genealogical sources, Harrison married, had four daughters, and divorced sometime prior to 1937.¹² He later married Alma Louise Nichols, and according to an obituary published in the *Willimantic Chronicle* September 16, 1974, moved to Mansfield, Connecticut, near her home town of Windham, in the late 1950s, about a year after his retirement from a company in Milwaukee.¹³ Alma Gates died a few years later.¹⁴ Both Harrison and Alma Gates are buried in the North Windham cemetery, just a few miles from the the library where this book came to rest. It was probably at the Gates home in Mansfield, or somewhere in Willimantic, where Alma was living when she died, that Mr. Connell found the “*Mayflower Bible*” that he donated to Eastern.

CONCLUSIONS

What did we learn? That a broad view of print culture and the book as artifact holds many promises for a liberal arts institution. By accepting, researching, and cataloging this book for our collection, we have acquired a resource for a broad range of liberal arts disciplines.

In most circumstances, Joseph Hall’s work would be considered too specialized for a library like Eastern’s. Our history and literature courses touch on church history but are unlikely to focus on the intricacies of seventeenth century hermeneutics. Even so, my research into the history of this volume brought home the ways in which “print culture”—in the form of a single printed book—interacts with, or depends upon, other forms of literate communication. In this case, much of what we know about this book comes from typed and handwritten notes tucked into the volume, and from marginalia. It also reinforced, to a surprising degree, the ways in which interpretation really does reflect the context and ethos of its time. In the case of this particular book, the assumed historical provenance came, especially around the turn of the twentieth century, to overshadow the text completely. Such a text has many uses in a liberal arts setting. Our copy of *A Plaine and Familiar Explication* rests comfortably

¹² At RootsWeb.com, <http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=3mjb9151&id=I138> (accessed November 11, 2008).

¹³ *The Chronicle* (Willimantic, CT: Chronicle Printing Co.), September 16, 1974, 8. He was survived by Alma and three of his four daughters.

¹⁴ *The Chronicle* (Willimantic, CT: Chronicle Printing Co.), June 4, 1979, 2.

now in our small Special Collections department, awaiting attention from other researchers. The book, with its marginalia and its ephemeral companions, holds promise for other inquiries into the history of American biblical interpretation, civil religion, and the history of the book and of reading—perfect for a liberal arts university library like ours.

