

## Great Bookcase

The termination of Edwards's Northampton ministry in 1750 cast Edwards and his "numerous and chargeable family" adrift.<sup>1</sup> Despite offers of positions in churches on both sides of the Atlantic and from Virginia to Connecticut, Edwards chose to leave the conventional ministry and headed for the Indian mission outpost of Stockbridge, perhaps inspired by the vision of David Brainerd he had recently created in his edition of the deceased missionary's diary.<sup>2</sup> When he made a trial visit to the Indians during the winter and early spring of 1751, he wrote some new sermons for delivery to them. Interestingly, he returned to the pre-1727 octavo sermon pamphlet format and wrote out his sermons completely. However, he apparently soon learned that the necessity for translation precluded a great deal of nuance, so he returned to outlining statements in his now unstitched (i.e., temporary use) octavo papers. As for the small English-speaking congregation of twelve families that resided in Stockbridge, he had a rich supply of Northampton sermons. And so Jonathan Edwards ceased to be a serious writer of sermons after 1750, even if he could, and did, preach well enough when it was required.

Edwards's study was finally moved to Stockbridge, along with his family and all his worldly possessions, in the fall of 1751. He purchased his predecessor John Sergeant's original house, built in 1737 before Sergeant built a new one for his bride, Abigail Williams, three years later. There on the first floor, in the southwest room and its two small anterooms, or closets, flanking the gable-end fireplace, the study was reassembled, containing Edwards's newly signed and dated books, his manuscript notebooks and sermon hoard, and his furnishings.<sup>3</sup> Much of Edwards's time was soon occupied by a running skirmish over the conduct of the Indian mission and schools that embroiled him in seemingly endless correspondence with patrons and government officials, not to mention the difficult personal relations with those whose roles in the mission he wished to limit or eliminate. But his last years in Northampton had provided some evidence that Edwards had a remarkable ability to compartmentalize his activities, and his first years in Stockbridge would only enhance this

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards to John Erskine, July 5, 1750, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 347–56 (quotation, 355).

<sup>2</sup> David Brainerd, who worked among the Indians in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, died in 1747 of tuberculosis at Edwards's home and, because of Edwards's publication of his diary the following year, became a self-sacrificial model for future missionaries. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 7, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, Conn., 1985).

<sup>3</sup> The Stockbridge house, though altered, was still standing in 1871, when N. H. Eggleston described it as situated on the main street of the village, facing south. "The room on the left hand, as one enters the door-way, is pointed to as the library, perhaps serving also as parlor. On either side of the ample chimney there was, until quite lately, a closet, in dimensions about four feet by six. Tradition had it that the closet in the southwest corner of this room, with its one little window looking toward the west, was Edwards's study—his intellectual workshop." Eggleston, "A New England Village," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, November 1871, 815–30 (quotation, 822). This tentative identification of Edwards's use of the "closet" in the southwest corner of the house is supported by an entry in his "'Catalogue' of Reading" not dating before early 1753 and regarding John Gillies's *Historical collections relating to remarkable periods of the success of the Gospel* . . . , 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1754), in which he reminds himself to "see the proposals for printing in a shelf of the Closet next the Street." "Catalogue," entry no. [633], in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 26, *Catalogues of Books*, ed. Peter J. Thuesen (New Haven, Conn., 2008), 287. We can conjecture that Edwards equipped one or both of the closets with a table as an auxiliary writing space off the library, or as a storage area mounted with shelves, or both. Another less likely possibility is that the "closet" Edwards referred to was a cupboard, "press," or wardrobe, a freestanding set of shelves, possibly divided into compartments and covered by a door or doors. If this were the case, his specification of the closet "next the Street" would mean that he had more than one in his study. Many of the surviving books from Edwards's library with his signature in them are dated by him "1751," which indicates not when he acquired them but when he moved to Stockbridge.

impression. Letters to John Erskine, his primary Scottish correspondent beginning in the summer of 1748, clearly delineate his inclination to undertake a major critique of the eighteenth-century movement best exemplified in New England by Jonathan Mayhew, the reverend of Boston's new, affluent West Church—"rational Christianity," or as Edwards labeled it, Arminianism.<sup>4</sup> Of course, Edwards was not going to pick a provincial fight with Mayhew or even with his Old Light opponent from the revivals, Charles Chauncy. Rather, since Erskine had kept him abreast of the trends in England and Scotland, he directed the fire of his first volley "downtown" at significant authors published in London, even if it meant attacking one of his first English literary patrons, Isaac Watts.<sup>5</sup> In the perspective of his life, Edwards was now turning from his Northampton saga and his tracts on the awakenings analyzing religious experience such as *Misrepresentations Corrected, And Truth vindicated* to the major works of his great writing period, *Freedom of Will*, *God's End in the Creation*, *The Nature of True Virtue*, and *Original Sin*.

He was doubtless happy enough to once again immerse himself in his sanctuary in this remote outpost where visitors and committee meetings would be less frequent; however, his study may have begun to seem a little smaller as books accumulated and his writing projects expanded. During the Stockbridge years, Edwards apparently found, despite his frontier situation, that his library was growing at a faster pace than previously. He was increasingly in contact with pastor-scholars and literati in England and Scotland, particularly Erskine. Over the years, the oilcloth-covered packages from Scotland included long letters as well as a total of at least fifty-four books and pamphlets. So, Edwards's book collection had a significant—and cost-free—inlet courtesy of his correspondents. Also, the number of titles he recorded in his "'Catalogue' of Reading," is weighted toward the postdismissal period at Northampton and the Stockbridge years. During the 1730s he entered approximately one hundred titles into the notebook, and during the 1740s, about sixty-five; however, in the 1750s (which for him effectually ended in late 1757), he recorded more than two hundred.<sup>6</sup> If he was coming into possession of even just a fraction of these, along with books not listed in the "Catalogue" or received from Erskine, it is small wonder he would have needed another, more capacious, set of shelves.

Serendipitously, when he had first visited Stockbridge in January of 1751, Edwards had paid a social visit to Abigail Williams Sergeant in her stylish mansion on the hill, and there he had apparently seen an intriguing piece of furniture. It is still in what is now called the Mission House: a walnut-stained pine chest of drawers, or dresser, resting on small bun feet. It is not like most dressers, however, in that it is only fourteen inches in depth and has two cupboards with four paired,

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<sup>4</sup> *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500)*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 14 (quotation). Three letters to Erskine, written in 1748, 1750, and 1753, allude to the interruptions that delayed his project and finally resulted in the publication of his treatise on *Freedom of the Will*. See Edwards to Erskine, Oct. 14, 1748, in *Works*, 16: 259–65, esp. 16: 265; Edwards to Erskine, July 5, 1750, *ibid.*, 16: 347–56, esp. 16: 355; Edwards to Erskine, Apr. 14, 1753, *ibid.*, 16: 594–95, esp. 16: 594.

<sup>5</sup> On Isaac Watts and Edwards, see *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn., 1957), 96–99. Watts was one of Edwards's targets in the treatise.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Edwards distinguishes between "books" and "pamphlets" in his itemized acknowledgements to Erskine, showing that the majority of the items he received were unbound, which complicates the assumption that the majority of the pamphlets in his library were locally printed and therefore demonstrate a provincial orientation. See, for example, Edwards to Erskine, June 28, 1751, in *Works*, 16: 375–80, esp. 16: 375–76; Edwards to Erskine, July 7, 1752, *ibid.*, 16: 489–93, esp. 16: 489, 16: 493; Edwards to Erskine, Nov. 23, 1752, *ibid.*, 16: 537–42, esp. 16: 537, 16: 539; and Edwards to Erskine, April 15, 1755, *ibid.*, 16: 661–66, esp. 16: 661–62. On the breakdown of Edwards's book acquisitions, see "Table 2. Dating of Select 'Catalogue' Entries (Based on Internal References and Book Publication Dates)," in *Works*, 26: III. Based on dating landmarks in the "'Catalogue' of Reading," the entry ranges for the decades, while not exact, break down to the following: 1730s: nos. [335]–[435]; 1740s: nos. [436]–[505]; 1750s: nos. [506]–[719].

fielded, paneled doors on the lower level and a set of six drawers above, arranged as three pairs. Three of the drawers are divided inside into four sections, one is divided into two sections, and two are undivided. But most unusual, for a dresser, is the tier of four dovetailed, boxlike shelves on its top, each a little smaller than the one below and each equipped with two doors that slide in grooves and are opened by handholds created by a small circular sinkage on one end and a strip of double half-round molding at the other. These long boxes are not fastened to one another or to the dresser. It seems evident that while this piece is not a desk, it was intended for the storage of books and papers of various sizes and formats. It also stood in the room that John Sergeant used for consultations with Indians and members of his congregation.<sup>7</sup>

After the interview, Abigail Sergeant wrote to her friend Ezra Stiles that Edwards was “learned, polite, and free in conversation, and more catholic [i.e., broad-minded] than I had supposed.”<sup>8</sup> Is it possible that, after complimenting her on her fine mansion and admiring her cultivated taste, Edwards inquired about the making of that fine cabinet in the office? It is very likely that the same cabinetmaker who worked for the Sergeants also set about amplifying the resources of Edwards’s desk.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is probable that the job was done within weeks of the desk’s arrival in Stockbridge in October 1751. It was a busy time for Edwards, but he would not have had to give up his original desk for more than a day or two inasmuch as the expansion surrounds the original desk rather than modifying it physically.

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<sup>7</sup> The authors wish to thank the Trustees of Reservations of Massachusetts, for allowing them to measure and photograph the Sergeant chest, and Mark Wilson, director of the Trustees of Reservations’ Research Center, and Tammis Coffin, Mission House Education Coordinator, for their kind assistance.

<sup>8</sup> Abigail Sergeant to Ezra Stiles, Feb. 15, 1751, Ezra Stiles Papers, General Manuscripts, Correspondence, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. See also, George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, Conn., 2003), 380.

<sup>9</sup> A carpenter who worked in Stockbridge was Japheth Bush, who was hired to build the Indian girls’ school; since little is known about him, we can only speculate that he was the artisan that built the bookcases. See *Works*, 16: 511.