Cover Treasure

The Adventures of a Margaret Armstrong Collector
Contents

• My personal adventure as a collector
• The discovery of the “Golden Age” of decorated cloth book covers
• Some highlights in Margaret Armstrong’s career
• What I admire about Margaret Armstrong’s work
• The Armstrong family
• Some references and acknowledgements
Margaret Armstrong book cover that no one has ever seen

Me (conceptually)→
It all began right about here
What I found...

(No, not a Margaret Armstrong)
What had I found?

Was I collecting landscapes designed into book covers....?
So I discovered more landscapes.....
And not just landscapes…

...but no Margaret Armstrongs yet
I had discovered...

The Golden Age of Decorated Cloth Book Covers
Then I began to discover the monograms.....
Early sources about decorated covers....
Sarah Whitman
Alice C. Morse


And many other designers...

Amy Sacker
George Wharton Edwards
Griselda McClure
Will Bradley
Blanche McManus
Thomas Watson Ball
Bertha Stuart
Frank Hazenplug
...including Margaret Armstrong
Why did I decide to focus on Margaret Armstrong?

• She was the best-known designer and underappreciated
• I already had collected some of her covers
• I wanted to see if the collection could be completed
• It gave my collecting a sense of purpose
• My DNA apparently includes the “collecting gene”
My collecting has been unordered from 1975 to the present

An early find (1975?)

Years later (1995?)

Still later (2014)

Recently (2020)
Where did I find them?
Cost?

- 75 cents
- $5
- $200 with dustjacket
- $1250 (rare!)
Random Thoughts on Collecting Margaret Armstrong

• The fun of it: It’s both a mosaic and a jigsaw puzzle
• Condition is everything: Aim for “Fine” or better
• With a limited budget: Favor one beautiful book over ten ordinary ones
• Patience is required
• Not everything has been discovered
Three of My Favorite Finds: #1

Paul Leicester Ford. *Wanted – A Matchmaker*. Dodd Mead, 1900
Three of My Favorite Finds: #2

Elizabeth Barrett Browning. *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Putnam, 1902
Three of My Favorite Finds: #3
Helen’s bookplate, also in 1903
Quantifying the Collection

• 520 MA books including design variations
• It includes 306 of the 314 designs listed in G&E
• 51 dust jackets (three from 1894)
• A number of limited editions
• At any given time, the collection includes about 35 covers that cannot be found for sale online in any condition
Odd Facts about the Collection

• 45% of MA’s covers were done for Scribner (per G&E)
• She designed for 22 different publishers (per G&E)
• 37% of books in this collection show signs of ownership
• 15% contain gift inscriptions (over half for Christmas)
• 7.5% have bookplates
• The 18 bookstore labels are from 18 different bookstores
How Decorated Covers Were Made

• The artist made preliminary drawings for the publisher to approve or choose from
• The artist made a finished mock-up of the cover, using painting media and specifying the actual cloth
• From the mock-up a brass die (stamp or block) would be engraved, one die for each ink or gold color in the design
• The case binding (separate from the text block) would be stamped (or “blocked”) with each different brass die
• The case binding would be attached to the text block

Alice C. Morse sketch for a cover, 1899 (gouache on brown paper)

The Colts Armory press was used for stamping
Margaret Armstrong: 1887-1894
(Studying the Possibilities)
The first two covers – 1887 – (she was 19)

Thomas Nelson Page. *In Ole Virginia*. Scribner, 1887.

First Covers for McClurg

Marguerite Bouvet. *Sweet William*. McClurg, 1890

Marguerite Bouvet. *Little Marjorie’s Love Story*. McClurg, 1891

Marguerite Bouvet. *Prince Tip-Top*. McClurg, 1892
Two great covers from 1892


Three great covers from 1893


Four similar covers for Scribner in 1894

George W. Cable. *John March, Southerner*. Scribner, 1894


A personal favorite

Preserved in the original 1894 dust jacket!

Alice Morse Earle. *Costume of Colonial Time*. Scribner, 1894
A Big Best-Seller
In 1894

Margaret Armstrong: 1895-1900
(Arrival of the Monogram)
Margaret Armstrong’s Three Lettering Styles: Fancy Script

Thomas Hardy. A Group of Noble Dames. Scribner, 1891

Lillian Bell. The Love Affairs of an Old Maid. Harper, 1893

Robert Grant. The Art of Living. Scribner, 1895
Margaret Armstrong’s Three Lettering Styles:
Eccentric Colonial

Agnes Caldwell Way (ed.). *A Shakespeare Calendar*. Crowell, 1908


Richard Brinsley Sheridan. *The Rivals*. Crowell, c1907
Margaret Armstrong’s Three Lettering Styles:
Elegant with the Rakish R

Demetrios Bikelas. *Tales from the Aegean*. McClurg, 1894

Myrtle Reed. * Threads of Grey and Gold*. Putnam, 1913

Ethelbert Nevin. *Songs from Vineacre*. Church, c1899
Her Famous Rs

Trilby, 1895

The Fortunes of Fifi, 1903

The Quest of the Dream, 1913
Washington Irving. *Bracebridge Hall*. 2 vols. , Putnam, 1895 – Published in cream cloth with green and gold and in blue cloth with gold
Also published with gold on dark red buckram.
The Washington Irving Books

The Tent on the Beach

John Greenleaf Whittier. The Tent on the Beach. Houghton Mifflin, 1899
Margaret Armstrong: 1900-1915
(Master of Her Medium)
Robert Browning. *Pippa Passes*. Dodd Mead, 1900
Dante Alighieri. *Ad Astra, Being Selections from the Divine Comedy of Dante*. R. H. Russell, 1902
Illustrations by Margaret and Helen Maitland Armstrong
Alfred, Lord Tennyson. *Idylls of the King*. Putnam, n.d. [1902]
Dodd Mead, 1900
Mounting the steps, to say a last word.
but the car swept her away with the sentence half spoken; and with a wear
of dignity that was not casuistry in her, she staggered to the seat. Then as she
sensed a dollar bill to the conductor, she returned to herself.—
“Now, that’s a man I’d like for a friend, if only he wouldn’t be foolish.”

At eleven on the following morning, Miss Darum’s carriage once more stopped
at the hospital doors; and, bearing a bur-
den of flowers, and followed by the
footman carrying a large basket,
Centrace entered the ward, and made her
way to the woman’s bedside.
“Good-morning,” she said to Dr. Armstrong, who stood beside the next
patient. “How is our invalid doing?”
“Good-morning,” responded the doc-
tor, raising the hand she held out. “I
think—”

“We’re in a liffe,” said Miss Darum, “and it’s wet
we’re.”

It was a very different face the girl
found, for soap and water had washed
wounders with it, and the scissors and
brush had reduced the tangled shag of
hair to order. Yet the forest eyes and
the alert, over-sharp expression were
unchanged.

“I’ve bought you some flowers and
goodies,” said Miss Darum. “I don’t
know how much of it will be good for
her,” she went on to the doctor, apolo-
getically, “but I hope some will do.”
Pulling the flowers on the box, from
the basket she produced in succession
two bottles of port, a moal of wine
jelly, a box of orange marmalade, a box
of wafers, and a dish of grapes, apples,
and bananas.
Paul Leicester Ford. *Wanted – A Chaperon*. Dodd Mead, 1902
hurry to escape into the street, even though her foot gear consisted of slippers and warmed overcoats, and her gown and wraps were absolutely unfit for the storm. As it was, she closed the door, and stood waiting the return of the sun, with the courage of ignorance and unaccord.

The first development was not of a character to lessen her anxiety.

"What do you mean, Richards, by getting into this state?" demanded a great masculine voice, angrily.

No reply reached the ears. streaming so angrily to bear, but one was evidently essayed, for, after a slight pause, the same voice continued:

"Nonsense! You are not in a fit condition to do your duties, and you needn’t try to hide it. You’ve taken advantage of my leftlessness and my trusting to trust the keys to you."

Once more the angry voice ceased, and a moment’s silence ensued; then it began again:

"If you are not tipsy, why can’t you tell me what it is you are trying to explain?"

The longest time at apparent silence followed, terminated finally by the same speaker, who, in a far louder but no less angry voice, called:

"Well, who ever is out there please come in here?"

Lydia faltered and flushed and paled before she could screw her courage to
Decorating Love: Paul Leicester Ford

Paul Leicester Ford. *Love Finds the Way*. Dodd Mead, 1904 (white version from Copp, Clark, 1904)
Love Finds the Way

"Close to the window by which he had entered was a door, and, as his eye chanced, Dick softly opened it and slipped through, to find himself in a closet reeking of lavender.

"Is that you, McCoy?" again demanded the voice.

"What the deuce is the man?" asked a second voice, crestily.

"I thought I heard some one in the room, man.

"It was your own informal morning, I'll be.

Paul Leicester Ford. Love Finds the Way. Dodd Mead, 1904
Sonnets from the Portuguese

Title page, dedication, and decoration from *Sonnets from the Portuguese*
T

HILL four times that the sun rose on time each.
To love me, I looked forward to the moon.
To cherish all those herbs which seemed too weak
And quickly tried to make a lasting youth.
Quick-flowing heart, I thought, may quickly loose;)
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such strong love—more like an out-of-town
When sick, a good singer would be worth.
To spoil his song with, and which, matched in botes;
In laid down at the first lift sounding more.
I did not wrong myself, but I glanced
A wrong on thee. For perfect strains may last.
'Seeth master hands from instruments deforet;—
And great seeds, at one stave, may do and that.
I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
Who passed a little near the prison-wall
To heed my music in its tender parts
For they went onward, each one to the next's
Or temple's occupancies, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my velvet slum and yell
When the web took life, thy dirgest Art's
O'er instrument did drop down at thy foot,
To hearken what I said between my tears,—
Instruct me here to thank thee! Oh, to think
My soul's fall mourning into future years,
That they should read it unknown, and exult
Love that returns, from life that disappears!
Paul Lawrence Dunbar. *Candle Lightin’ Time*. Dodd Mead, 1901
Paul Lawrence Dunbar. *When Malindy Sings*. Dodd Mead, 1903
The Paul Lawrence Dunbar Series

Paul Lawrence Dunbar. *Li’l’ Gal*. Dodd Mead, 1904
Gates and Grapevines

Elizabeth Luther Cary. *William Morris*. Putnam, 1902. The same design was reused for the same author’s *The Rossettis* (1900), *Emerson* (1904) and later printings of Tennyson (1901).
Myrtle Reed’s Lavender Cover Series

In the original pale grey cloth and in a later printing with lavender cloth.
Myrtle Reed’s Lavender Cover Series

Myrtle Reed. *Lavender and Old Lace*. Putnam, 1902
Myrtle Reed’s Lavender Cover Series

Myrtle Reed. *The Master’s Violin*. Putnam, 1904
Myrtle Reed’s Lavender Cover Series

Myrtle Reed. *Flower of the Dusk*. Putnam, 1908

Myrtle Reed. *Old Rose and Silver*. Putnam, 1909
Myrtle Reed’s Lavender Cover Series

Myrtle Reed. *Master of the Vineyard.* Putnam, 1910

Myrtle Reed. *A Weaver of Dreams.* Putnam, 1911
Myrtle Reed’s Lavender Cover Series

Myrtle Reed. *The White Shield*. Putnam, 1912
Myrtle Reed’s Lavender Cover Series

Myrtle Reed. *Threads of Grey and Gold*. Putnam, 1913 in cloth and suede
The Henry Van Dyke Blue Cover Series

Henry Van Dyke. *The Blue Flower*. Scribner, 1902
The Henry Van Dyke Blue Cover Series

Henry Van Dyke. *Fisherman’s Luck*. Scribner, 1905
The Henry Van Dyke Blue Cover Series

Henry Van Dyke. *Days Off*. Scribner, 1907 (the same copy in different light)
The Henry Van Dyke Blue Cover Series

Henry Van Dyke. *Out of Doors in the Holy Land*. Scribner, 1908
The Henry Van Dyke Blue Cover Series

The Henry David Thoreau Series

Two Views of *The Quest of the Dream*

Two Late Travel Books

E. H. Blichfeldt. *A Mexican Journey.* Crowell, c1912

H. W. Van Dyke. *Through South America.* Crowell, 1912
Meanwhile, out West....

Margaret...”would appear with a flower in her mouth....carefully making her way down......and begin drawing the flower.” Elsie Littell (1909, 1912-1914)

Descent into the Grand Canyon

Hiking on a glacier
Margaret Armstrong’s Second Career: Writer

1930

1938

1940
...and Woman of Mysteries
What Art Do We See in Margaret Armstrong’s Art?
Broad Influences on Her Art

Augustus Pugin, Reviver of Gothic and advocate of domestic beauty

The ideas of John Ruskin

Aestheticism

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement

The organic emphasis in Art Nouveau

Underlying these influences: The wealth and new middle class created by the Industrial Revolution spread from Europe to America together with a reactive rediscovery of nature and handcraft.
Specific Influences

- Botanical drawing by her grandmother
- Stained glass art
- John La Farge, Elihu Vedder, Candace Wheeler (the prevailing art scene)
- Walter Crane
- Helen in their studio
Her art: A sense of suspended motion
A great range of ideas
Her use of color and gold
Have All the Margarets Been Found?

Thomas Nelson Page. *In Ole Virginia*. Scribner, 1887. Margaret states that she designed this one.

Have All the Margarets Been Found?


The Armstrong Family
Some Distinguished Forebears

- Statue of Peter Stuyvesant, Director-General of New Amsterdam
- Hartley family portrait by Henry Benbridge, about 1787
- Hamilton Fish, Governor of New York and Secretary of State under Lincoln
The Immediate Family: Father David Maitland

In about 1866 (age 29)

On “Warrenton”

Dressed for a costume ball

At work in his studio
The Immediate Family: Mother Helen Neilson

In 1868 (age 23)
At a costume ball in Rome

On the lawn at Danskammer

On her 50th wedding anniversary (1916)
The Immediate Family: Margaret Neilson

At 3

At 4 or 5

At 16?

1940?

30s?
Immediate Family:

- Helen Mailand

Photos:
- At 3 or 4
- At about 16
- In costume
- In the studio
- With Edward at 17?
The Family (about 1900)

Standing: Noel, Helen Nielson, Marion, Robert, his wife Gwendolyn
Sitting: Maitland, Helen Maitland, Hamilton, and Margaret
North Hatley, Quebec (1910)

Left to right: Helen, Margaret, Hamilton, two unidentified friends
The House at 58 West Tenth Street

58 is on the right; the second house is behind it

Maitland designed the window

NYU writing student entering the building
Interior Details
Christ Church in Marlboro, New York

Christ Church (front)

By Maitland (opalescent), after 1891

By Helen (painted glass), 1896
Online Resources about Margaret Armstrong


A virtual tour at the New York Society Library, *The Book Beautiful: Margaret Armstrong and Her Bindings* (on YouTube)

A Facebook group, *The Book Art of Margaret Armstrong* www.com/groups/167882237853047/

A gallery talk from the Metropolitan Museum, *Margaret Armstrong’s Botanical Watercolors at the Met* (on YouTube)
Recommended Reading (Armstrong Family)

- Margaret Armstrong. *Five Generations*. 1930
- Marion Edey. *Early in the Morning*. 1954
Recommended Reading (Decorated Covers)

• Richard Minsky. *The Art of American Book Covers – 1875-1915* (and see other books at Minsky.com)
• Mindell Dubansky. *The Proper Decoration of Book Covers: The Life and Works of Alice C. Morse*
• Eric Holzenberg. *For Art’s Sake – The Aesthetic Movement in Print and Beyond - 1870 - 1930*
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From Love Finds the Way