

‘For the Encouragement of Benefactions’: Library Catalogues and Fundraising in Colonial America

BASIE BALES GITLIN

Graham Pollard began *The Distribution of Books by Catalogue* with a caveat: ‘It is not so easy to distinguish into what category a 17th-century catalogue properly fits.’ Pollard said this was so because a ‘catalogue successfully designed for one purpose was imitated for other uses. In the 17th-century catalogues of public libraries classed by faculty were copied in catalogues of new books offered for sale; and auctioneers’ catalogues influenced the form of the catalogues of antiquarian booksellers’.¹ Book catalogues could vary in function just as they varied in form. Libraries across Europe were of course issuing catalogues of their collections by the 17th century, both systematising and creating new knowledge in the process. It would seem natural that American colleges in the colonial period should have wished to participate in the republic of letters by issuing their own catalogues and sending them overseas – and indeed, Harvard issued the first printed catalogue of its library in 1723, eighty-five years into the college’s existence, and Yale followed suit in 1743, more than forty years after its founding, becoming the first two printed college library catalogues in British North America.²

1. Graham Pollard and Albert Ehrman, *The Distribution of Books by Catalogue from the Invention of Printing to A.D. 1800* (Cambridge: Printed for Presentation to Members of the Roxburgh Club, 1965), p. xxi.

2. *Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Collegij Harvardini Quod est Cantabrigiae in Nova Anglia* (Boston: B. Green, 1723); *A Catalogue of the Library of Yale-College in New-Haven*