

**A BRIEF CATALOGUE OF BOOKS  
ILLUSTRATED WITH  
ENGRAVINGS, WITH A  
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE  
ARTIST**

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A Brief Catalogue of Books Illustrated with Engravings, with a biographical sketch of the artist  
by Alexander Anderson

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**ALEXANDER ANDERSON**

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CATALOGUE OF BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED WITH  
ENGRAVINGS BY DR. ALEXANDER ANDERSON

WITH A  
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH  
OF  
THE ARTIST



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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH  
OF  
DR. ALEXANDER ANDERSON  
WITH A NOTE BY  
BENSON J. LOSSING, LL.D.

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On the evening of the 4th of October, 1870, Mr. Lossing read, before the New York Historical Society, a paper on the late Dr. Alexander Anderson and the Art of Wood-Engraving. Dr. Anderson was the first engraver on wood in this country, and was an honorary member of the Historical Society. Anderson was born in the city of New York on the 21st day of April, 1775. His father, a Scotchman, was then a printer and publisher, and a political associate with the popular leaders of the ante-revolutionary period, known as the "Sons of Liberty." When the British entered the city in the autumn of 1776, he fled with his family and effects to Connecticut, where he remained until near the close of the war, when he returned to New York.

Young Anderson evinced a love for art at a very early age. During his school days he amused himself by copying engravings with India-ink. At twelve years of age he tried his hand in the engraver's art upon plates made of cents rolled out, and with a graver made of the back-spring of a

pocket-knife. He soon cut small ships and other objects upon type-metal, and sold them to the newspaper publishers.

At the age of fourteen years he was apprenticed to Dr. Young, a physician of some eminence, who had been a surgeon in the Continental army. He remained with him as a student for five years. Meanwhile he employed in engraving every moment that he could spare from the duties of his professional studies and labors. He became so expert that, while he was yet a medical student, he was employed by all the publishers in New York, and by Dr. Mitchill; Phillip Freneau, the poet of the Revolution; Hugh Gaine, the veteran newspaper publisher, and others. His earliest employers as an illustrator of books were William Durell and Evert Duyckinck.

Anderson was licensed to practice medicine in the spring of 1795. Dr. Young offered him a partnership in his business, but the offer was not accepted. At the close of the summer of that year the yellow fever prevailed in New York as an epidemic, and young Anderson was employed by the Commissioners of Health, composed of leading citizens, as resident physician of Bellevue Hospital, on the East River. For three months he performed his duties there with great skill, and was then offered the post of physician to the Dispensary, which he declined.

Anderson's extreme conscientiousness and his love of art impelled him to abandon the practice of medicine. He pursued it, however, until late in 1798, when the yellow fever again prevailed in New York. He was again, for a short time, resident physician at Bellevue. During the epidemic



he lost his wife, child, father, mother, brother, mother-in-law and sister-in-law. From the effects of this terrible calamity he sought relief by a voyage to the West Indies, where he spent three months with his paternal uncle, Dr. Alexander Anderson, King's Botanist in the island of St. Vincent. Then he returned to New York, and made engraving his business. He sought and obtained employment for a while with an artist named Roberts, who came from Scotland—a "universal genius," and as wayward as such men often are. He obtained, while with him, what he desired—namely, a better knowledge of his art—but Roberts's habits became so irregular, that Anderson soon dropped his acquaintance.

It was in 1793, when he was eighteen years of age, that Anderson first learned the fact, from Bewick's Works, that box-wood was used for engraving. He found it so much more kindly than type-metal, that he employed it almost entirely afterward for pictures to be printed as type-metal ones were. And so it was that he became the first engraver on wood in America.

Anderson used both copper and wood, as occasion required, until about the year 1812, when he abandoned metal-engraving. His last important picture of that kind was of the "Last Supper," after Holbein, for a quarto Bible. Up to that time he had no competitor as a wood-engraver, and his initials or full-name appear upon the pictures of almost every illustrated book published in New York during the preceding twelve or fifteen years. Then Abel Bowen began the practice of wood-engraving in Boston. Afterward, A. J. Mason, a skillful engraver, came from England, and

remained as a practitioner of the art several years. Anderson instructed three pupils—Lansing, Morgan and Hall—and about the year 1826, J. A. Adams, a self-taught artist, appeared.

Anderson was never tempted to depart from Bewick's general style of execution, which is the legitimate style of wood-engraving. Within a very few years it has been revived after a display of a vicious imitation of metal-engraving by elaborate cross-hatching. Fine specimens of Anderson's style may be seen in an edition of Shakspeare's plays published by Cooledge & Brother. They were engraved by Anderson when he was in the seventy-seventh year of his age. He continued the daily practice of his art skilfully until he was in his ninety-fifth year—a period from the beginning of his art-life of almost eighty-three years.

Dr. Anderson moved to Jersey City after a residence in New York of more than ninety years. There, at 135 Wayne Street, the residence of Dr. Edwin Lewis, his son-in-law, he died, on the 17th of January, 1870, when about ninety-five years of age. His funeral services were held in Trinity Church, New York, and his body was laid in Greenwood Cemetery.

Mr. Lossing remarked in his paper that when he himself engaged in the business of engraving in New York—about the year 1838—there were not twenty professional wood-engravers in the United States. When the father of the art in America died, January, 1870, they numbered about four hundred. Of these, two publishing establishments in the city of New York employed about one-fourth. They were the

houses of Frank Leslie and Harper & Brothers. The former, he observed, gave steady employment to about sixty engravers, and the latter to about thirty-five. In 1869 no less than eighteen thousand wood-engravings, prepared for Mr. Leslie's papers, passed through the hands of the chief of his art department, for which \$180,000 were paid. Where, thirty years before, twenty engravings were done in a given time, twice twenty thousand were produced when Anderson laid aside the implements of his art for ever.

Mr. Lossing described Mr. Anderson's person as of less than medium height, compactly built, with mild and beautiful dark gray eyes, and a face ever-beaming with kindly feeling and serenity of spirit. Through life he was remarkable for the regularity and temperance of his habits.

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#### NOTE.

Mr. Duyckinck, the Compiler of this Catalogue, was one of the most erudite, genial and lovable of men. As a historian and biographer, he was always impartial, lucid and accurate. As a critic, he was always clear-visioned, broad-minded and just. As a compiler of literary productions, in either prose or poetry, he had no superior in industry, taste and judgment. Quiet, unassuming and dignified in deportment, he exercised a benign influence in the realm of literature. His life-career was a blessing to his fellow men.

B. J. L.

The Ridge,  
November, 1885.