

Honoring the 200th anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille

An exhibit on the first floor of Memorial Library honors the bicentenary of the birth of Louis Braille, born in 1809 in Coupvray, near Paris, France, and died in 1852 in Paris. As we learn from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Braille

... developed a system of printing and writing that is extensively used by the blind and that was named for him.

Braille was himself blinded at the age of three in an accident that occurred while he was playing with tools in his father's harness shop.... Upon receiving a scholarship, he went in 1819 to Paris to attend the National Institute for Blind Children, and from 1826 he taught there.

Braille became interested in a system of writing, exhibited at the school by Charles Barbier, in which a message coded in dots symbolizing phonetic sounds was embossed on cardboard. When he was 15, he worked out an adaptation, written with a simple instrument, that met the needs of the sightless....

The exhibit is sponsored by the Eye Research Institute of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. We thank Daniel M. Albert, M.D., past chair of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences and currently Emmett A. Humble Distinguished Director of the Eye Research Institute, for suggesting such an exhibit. Several titles from the riches of the Daniel and Eleanor Albert Collection in the Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, appear in the exhibit. We are also grateful to Micaela Sullivan-Fowler for the loan of works from the Department of Rare Books & Special Collections in Ebling Library of the Health Sciences.

What follows is a list of the works on display.

*Robin Rider
Department of Special Collections
Memorial Library
University of Wisconsin–Madison
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“Our blind pupils perform their typographical labours”

Poems by the late reverend Dr. Thomas Blacklock... Edinburg[h]: Printed by Alexander Chapman and Company; sold by W. Creech, Edinburgh, and T. Cadell, London, 1793. DANIEL AND ELEANOR ALBERT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The publication includes *An essay on the education of the blind* by Valentin Haüy, 1745–1822. Haüy is credited with founding the first school for the blind (in Paris).

Docteur (Sébastien) Guillié, 1780–1865. *Essai sur l’instruction des aveugles, ou Exposé analytique des procédés employés pour les instruire*. Paris: Imprimé par les aveugles, 1817. DANIEL AND ELEANOR ALBERT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

As noted on the title page, this work was “printed by the blind and sold for their benefit.” The Albert Collection also contains an English translation, *An essay on the instruction and amusements of the blind* (1894); another early French edition can be found in Rare Books and Special Collections at Ebling Library.

Example of embossing

Address of the trustees of the New-England Institution for the Education of the Blind to the public. Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, State printers, 1833. Issued as Massachusetts House of Representatives document n°. 25. DANIEL AND ELEANOR ALBERT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The work includes an embossed representation of the Pythagorean theorem in geometry along with the Lord’s Prayer in raised letters.

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Printing for the blind

Eighth annual report of the trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, to the corporation. Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1840. DANIEL AND ELEANOR ALBERT COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Includes a discussion of printing for the blind, as well as a sample of raised-letter type known as Boston line and a tactile map of Nantucket and vicinity.

Products of the New York Institution for the Blind

William Artman and Lansing V. Hall. *Beauties and achievements of the blind.* Auburn, New York: Published for the authors, 1863, ©1854. RARE BOOKS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, EBLING LIBRARY FOR THE HEALTH SCIENCES

The first edition appeared in 1854 and was often reprinted. Some copies (though not this one) include an example of Braille-like printing. Both Artman and Hall were educated at the New York Institution for the Blind.

Standard eye colors

Chart of standard (glass) eye colors, as issued by Queen & Co., Oculists & Opticians in Philadelphia, 1891. Printer's proof sheet. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The Braille system & its variants

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807–1882. *Evangeline*. [1896?] SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Using the Braille variant of 2 x 3 (rather than the standard 3 x 2).

Louis Braille, inventor of the system

Lennard Bickel. *Triumph over darkness: The life of Louis Braille.* Sydney, New South Wales [etc.]: Allen & Unwin Australia, 1988. EBLING LIBRARY FOR THE HEALTH SCIENCES

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Helping the sighted to learn Braille

Mrs. F. H. Plumptre. *The "Braille" system for the blind: Arranged for "seeing" writers*. 2nd ed. London: British and Foreign Blind Association, 1897. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Prescribing the use of black and red dots, said to cause less fatigue for sighted readers who need to learn Braille.

Alternative to the Braille system

Thomas Nelson Page, 1853–1922. *Two little confederates*. Louisville, Kentucky: American Printing-House for the Blind, 1889. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

This book was "stereotyped and printed" in embossed type at the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville. Stereotyping is a method for printing from a solid plate cast from a mold made from the surface of type. We now generally use the term stereotype only in its figurative sense.

History, adaptation, reflection

Zina Weygand. *Vivre sans voir: Les aveugles dans la société française, du Moyen Age au siècle de Louis Braille*. Paris: Créaphis, 2003. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

History of the blind in France.

Constance Frederica Gordon Cumming, 1837–1924. *The inventor of the numeral-type for China by the use of which illiterate Chinese both blind and sighted can very quickly be taught to read and write fluently*. New edition, enlarged. London: Downey & Co., 1899.

The story of Rev. W.H. Murray, who adapted the Braille method for Chinese. Also contains annual reports of the Mission to the Chinese Blind for 1900 and 1901 and a reprint from *The Sphere* (1901) on "The destruction of the schools for the blind by the Chinese in Peking in June 1900."

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Ved Mehta, 1934– . *The ledge between the streams*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1984. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Mehta describes how he learned Braille (as well as English, bicycling, typing, roller skating, and horseback riding).

Marvin Bell. *Rampant: Poems*. Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 2004. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Includes a poem responding to the fact that Braille's body was disinterred and moved to the Panthéon on the centennial of his birth.

Thomas McKenna. *To touch, to see*. Boston: Baker's Plays, 1989. MILLS MUSIC LIBRARY

Libretto for a musical play about Louis Braille, which "can either be played as a musical or as a straight play."

Transcribing, reading, recording

Madeleine Seymour Loomis. *You can learn to read Braille: A course in reading standard English Braille, with the assistance of any sighted reader*. 2nd ed. New York and London: Harper & Brothers, [1939]. Vol. 1 of 3. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Maxine B. Dorf, in collaboration with Barbara H. Tate. *Instruction manual for Braille transcribing*. 3rd ed. Washington: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, 1984. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Barry Hampshire. *Working with Braille: A study of Braille as a medium of communication*. Paris: Unesco [sic] Press, 1981. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

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Examples and studies of other technologies — large-type publications and what we now call audiobooks — for assisting readers with visual limitations, all from the holdings of Memorial Library:

“Making reading a new pleasure”

Books for tired eyes: A list of books in large print. Compiled by Charlotte Matson and Lola Larson. 4th ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 1951.

Interestingly, most of the books listed are in 12-point type, the smallest “large type” defined by the compilers. By the 1960s, the standard for large type for adult readers was appreciably larger.

Funding for persons with visual impairments. Large print edition. San Carlos, CA: Reference Service Press, 1997.

Two lists of large print books held at major public libraries – a 75-page listing in 1968, nearly five times as long eight years later:

Large print books. A bibliography. [New York: New York Public Library, 1968.]

Here too the standard is 18-point type.

Catalog of the large print collection. Boston: Boston Public Library, 1976.

Large print editions

National Aid to Visually Handicapped. *Standards for large print publications.* San Francisco, 1963.

“By following these standards, you will afford the visually handicapped child his opportunity to the right of an adequate education and a self-sufficient, contributing life as an adult” (from the introduction). NAVH volunteers transcribed books using an 18-point typewriter.

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Isabel Allende. *Eva Luna*. Translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990. From the G.K. Hall large print book series.

Ann Rice. *Vittorio the vampire. A novel*. Large print edition. New York: Random House Large Print in association with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1999.

Cuentos hondureños by Arturo Martínez Galindo ... [et al.]. Ed. Leda Chávez Mayorquín. Madrid: Editorial Popular, [2005]. From the series Letra grande.

Talking books

Already in the 1870s, Edison's patent application for his phonograph anticipated the use of "phonograph books" to "speak to blind people without effort on their part." Technological advances and economic crisis eventually led to the talking-book program of the Library of Congress in the 1930s, providing emergency relief to blind and "industrially disabled" workers by employing them in assembling the "talking book reproducers."

Library of Congress. *Books for the adult blind including the Talking-book Machine Activity and Service for the Blind*. From the annual reports 1937–1938. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1939.

Lists of talking books made available through distributing libraries show that the activity continued despite the US entry into World War II. Indeed, the titles supplied ranged from popular fiction and poetry to timely accounts of politics and war, such as the "inside story" (1943) of the first FDR-Churchill meeting and Ernie Pyle's *Here is your war* (1944).

Mandakini Khandekar and Suchitra D. Joshi. *Talking Book Project*. Bombay: Unit for Child and Youth Research, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 1978.

The National Association for the Blind in India undertook a talking book project starting in 1964. This study details income and pattern of readership and assesses costs of such projects (including the need in India for ceiling fans and air-conditioning for talking book facilities).

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Marilyn Lundell Majeska. *Talking books: Pioneering and beyond*. Washington, DC: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, 1988.

Ruth A. Nieland and George F. Thuronyi. *Answering the call: Telephone Pioneer talking-book machine-repair program 1960-1993*. Washington, DC: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, 1994.

Recounting the community service rendered by the Telephone Pioneers of America by repairing more than a million talking-book machines.

Changing technologies

Biography — government and politics: A selected list of books that have appeared in Talking book topics and Braille book review. Washington: Library of Congress, 1980.

Listing titles available in Braille, on cassette, or on disc.

Sources for purchase of cassette players and player-records compatible with recorded materials produced by the National Library Service (NLS). Compiled by Ruth Nussbaum. Washington, DC: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, [2000].

Evidence of the persistence of cassette players even in 2000, some equipped with tactile symbols, braille start-up sheet, and operating instructions on cassette.

Words on cassette. New Providence, NJ: Bowker, [1999].

Books out loud. New Providence, NJ: Bowker, 2004.