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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CHRONICLE • LXVII • NO. 2 • WINTER 2006

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VOLUME LXVII 2005–2006



# PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CHRONICLE



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## Brand Books in the Princeton Collections of Western Americana

WILLIAM S. REESE

LEGEND has it that the founder of the Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Philip Ashton Rollins (Class of 1889), once told an antiquarian bookseller that he wanted “any damn thing that mentions a cowboy.”<sup>1</sup> Although not to be taken literally, there was reason in his request. What Rollins meant, and pursued in addition to his larger collecting of material on western discovery and exploration, was a broad range of printed materials—books, pamphlets, broadsides, and ephemeral works—having to do with the glory days of the range cattle business in the American West. He was interested in the peculiar printed offshoots engendered by utility and necessity in that place and time. One of the most interesting of these subgenres is the brand book, an unusual type of printed work that can be both substantial and ephemeral at the same time, and one that reached its greatest fruition in the frontier American West after the Civil War.

A brand book is a printed register of brands used by individuals and companies to identify their livestock. Generally intended as a portable and utilitarian object, the typical brand book of the American West was often carried by working cowboys on the range. This usage meant that most early examples were worn to pieces, with corresponding rarity today. Rollins, as a ranch owner and the author of a well-written book on cowboys,<sup>2</sup> would have been quite familiar with the working aspects of the brand book, and he certainly had such exotic pieces in mind when he uttered his “any damn thing” line. Alfred Bush, in his tenure as curator of the Western Americana Collection, built on and expanded Rollins’s original holdings of this

<sup>1</sup> See Charles P. Everitt, *The Adventures of a Treasure Hunter: A Rare Bookman in Search of American History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), 167.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Ashton Rollins, *The Cowboy: His Characteristics, His Equipment, and His Part in the Development of the West* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1922).

fascinating genre in and beyond the West, incorporating examples from the sixteenth-century beginnings of the form, to the earliest known instance printed in the United States, the “Deseret Brand Book” of 1850, and beyond to the modern West.

Branding livestock for identification purposes is an ancient practice, one of the only practical solutions to recognizing individually owned stock in communal herds. Even in societies where livestock was separately pastured, it became a standard way to mark ownership. These brands were typically burned with a red-hot iron on the skin of the animal, the mark consisting of some unique symbol or combination of letters that would serve as ready identification. The location of the mark (right hip, left shoulder, for example) was often as important as the brand. Likewise, the owner might apply a unique set of disfigurements, such as a notch in the right ear, or a cut in the dewlap. Such marks, once made, could not be removed (although brands could potentially be altered), and thus established a permanent record of ownership. In the open range days of the West, cattle would often be rebranded if sold, and sometimes additionally marked if part of a trail herd. The side of a cow could become a billboard of stock transactions readable by those who knew the brands.

Long before the day of the cowboy, the first printed brand books were published to record not cattle but horse brands, and they were issued in Renaissance Italy, not the American West. The earliest example known is the *Libro de marchi de caualli* . . . (Venice, 1569), a copy of which is in the Princeton collection. Although the plates are elegant examples of Venetian engraving, the format of the book anticipates later developments in its duodecimo size, intended for pocket-sized portability in the field, and its clear presentation of the branded patterns. Entirely devoted to horses, it always illustrates a primary brand, and often a secondary one to be found on the opposite flank or some other part of the horse. Most of the brands seem to be modified versions of family symbols, or in some cases simplified versions of coats of arms. A few of the letters or patterns anticipate ones later popular in the West, such as the letter “W” in lazy loops, what would later be called a “running W.” The eighty-six plates record brands from all of Italy, primarily those of great magnates and princes. Its use may have been more for identifying post or war horses than commercial purposes, but in this little volume the idea of the brand book achieved its basic form.





First plate of brands in *Libro de marchi de caualli con li nomi de tutti li principi et priuati signori che hanno razza di caualli* (Venice: Nicolo Nelli, 1569). Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Library.

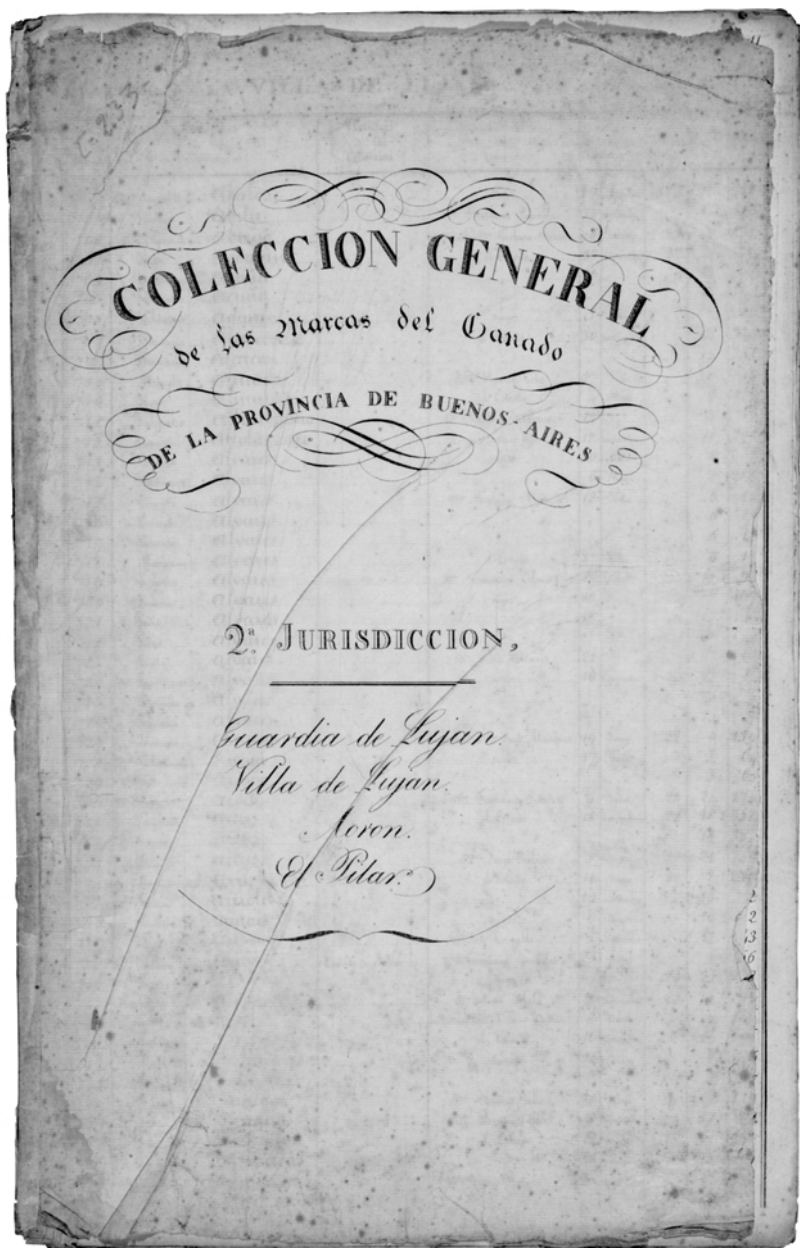
Before the nineteenth century, the printed brand book seems to have remained confined to Italy and horses. Princeton has four other examples, all published in Venice between 1588 and 1770.<sup>3</sup> All follow the same format of a handy duodecimo size and a series of pages with a single plate per page identifying the primary brand and any

<sup>3</sup> *Libro de marchi de cavalli* ... (Venice: B. Giunti, 1588); Annania Zen, *Il cavallo di razza* ... (Venice: B. Federici, 1658); Giacomo Di Grandi, *Merchi delle razze de' cavalli* ... (Venice: n.p., 1724); *Marchi delle razze de' cavalli dello Stato Veneto, Lombardia e dello Stato Pontificio* ... (Venice: F. Locatelli a S. Bartolommeo, 1770).

secondary marks. The main difference in the later books is that they are much more localized, the final one covering the Veneto, Lombardy, and the Papal States. Princes and great noblemen still figure among the owners, but the records also take in merely wealthy gentlemen. These brand books were never intended as tiny emblem books; they were always practical in their use and application. The format was fitted entirely to use in the field and stable.

By the time the last of these horse brand books had been published, the practice of formal registration of brands with a government was widespread throughout the Old and New Worlds. Some of the earliest published laws in New England deal with the recording of brands and other marks, and the keeping of such records became commonplace in colonial North America as well as in the Spanish colonies. Indeed, so standard was the practice of branding that it is surprising that no American brand books appeared before they finally did in the West. Presumably, in the smaller and more static eastern communities, local brands or livestock were well known, and there was no necessity or market for a printed guide. In any case, no such thing was published for a state east of the Mississippi until the concept had become a commonplace in the West. There are numerous instances of manuscript records of brands from this early period, generally kept by local officials, and several examples are in the collection.

The open range was far more of a reality in Old and New Spain than it was in colonial New England or Italy. It was in the Hispanic world that cattle brand books, in company with horse brands, first began to be published on a widespread basis. Interestingly, the early Hispanic examples in the collection are large books printed in expansive formats that could not possibly have served the pocket reference function of the Italian horse brand books. An extraordinary instance is the *Coleccion general de las marcas del ganado de la provincia de Buenos Aires*, published there in nine segments in the 1840s. The large folio sheets of the four parts in the Princeton collection are sufficient to list more than 8,500 brands, and the entire work, arranged by local jurisdictions, must list more than twice as many. This mammoth effort would seem to be the earliest published brand book in the New World. Another work, *El Descifrador de marcas*, organized by Carlos Enrique Pellegrini according to his own system, was published in Buenos Aires in 1858 (Imprenta de "La Revista") and covered all of Argentina, with some 5,400 brands.




Title page of part 2 of *Coleccion general de las marcas del ganado de la provincia de Buenos Aires* (n.p., ca. 1840). The Library's volume includes parts 2 (Guardia de Lujan, Villa de Lujan, Moron, El Pilar), 5 (San Nicolas, Rojas, Pergamino), 6 (Monsalvo y Dolores), and 9 (San Vicente, Cañuelas). Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of William H. Scheide, Class of 1956.

In Spain itself, brand books continued in the more genteel tradition of identifying gentlemen horse breeders. Princeton possesses two handsome examples of this sort. The first, *Libro de los hierros . . .*, by Juan Zabala, was published in Cordoba in 1860 in a small folio format. It is a striking example of typography, with deeply bitten impressions of the elegantly cut brands, generally based on initials or letters. In these we see patterns typical of later ranching brands in the United States, with stylized symbols incorporating initials, letters lying on their sides (“sleepy”) or leaning (“lazy”), and other such variations. The Princeton copy is from the celebrated collection of Henry Huth, a bibliophile who no doubt appreciated it more for its abstract appearance than for its horse brands. And, from the viewpoint of design and execution, it is one of the most satisfying of any of the works in this often utilitarian genre. Zabala’s work covers all of Spain, arranged by province, and describes more than 3,200 brands. The second Spanish example, Juan Cotarelo y Garastazu’s *La cria caballar en España . . .* (Madrid: Imprenta y Litografía Militar del Atlas . . ., 1861), is also devoted entirely to horse brands. On a very large folio format, it has a more military function, and the plates are a supplement to the extensive printed text rather than integral to the design.

The history of the printed brand book in the United States begins in Utah in 1850, concurrent with the founding of the Mormon colony at Great Salt Lake and the establishment of a printing press there. This work—known as the “Deseret Brand Book,” although there is no title page and only a caption title reading, “List of Recorded Brands”—is one of the first Utah imprints and one of the great rarities of Western Americana. The Princeton example, one of four known copies to survive, was acquired in 1970, the gift of J. Lionberger Davis of the Class of 1900.<sup>4</sup>

The Mormon emigration to Utah began in the spring of 1847, but it was not until two years later, in the summer of 1849, that a printing press arrived at Salt Lake City. Prior to its arrival, some primitive printing on a hand press had taken place, issuing very small pieces of currency scrip, known as “Valley Notes,” to ease the transactions of the cash-starved economy. The first significant work from the regular press was the *Second General Epistle of the Presidency of the Church of Jesus*

<sup>4</sup>Princeton’s copy is signed “Hosea Stout” on page 17. Stout’s entry appears on page 14.

Montoro...	D. Diego Medina. . . . .		
	D. Antonio Enrique Gomez . . . . .		
	D. Juan Urbano. . . . .		
Carpio.....	D. Rafael Labastida. . . . .		
	D. Joaquin Candan. . . . .		
	D. Juan Herrera. . . . .		
	D. Rodrigo Fernandez de Mesa. . . . .		
	D. Rafael Aguilar. . . . .		
Pedro Abad	D. Rafael Barbudo. . . . .		
	Sr. Duque de Alba. . . . .		
	D. Andrés Perez Almiron. . . . .		
	D. Francisco Porras y Ayllon. . . . .		
	D.ª Manuela Pulido. . . . .		
Aldea del Río.....	D. Ildefonso Porras Melero. . . . .		
	D. Francisco Alcántara. . . . .		
	D. Francisco Porras Gaitan. . . . .		
	Sra. Viuda de D. Pedro Leon. . . . .		
	D. José Gomez. . . . .		
	D. José Maria Jimenez. . . . .		

Juan Zabala, *Libro de los hierros ó marcas que usán los criadores para sus ganados caballares* ... (Cordoba: D. Rafael Arroyo, 1860), 82. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of William S. Reese.

*Christ . . .*, printed on October 20, 1849 (the Princeton collection also holds a copy of this work, one of four to survive). Aside from a few blank forms, which are known from the printer's records but of which no copies survive, the next imprint is the "Deseret Brand Book."

The Mormon colony, which had grown by leaps and bounds in its first two years, herded its cattle in a communal pasture south of Salt Lake City. Not only did the herds prosper, but 1849 brought an influx of overland Gold Rush travelers, who wanted to purchase (or potentially steal) cattle on their way to California. A system to record ownership was needed, and on December 19, 1849, the General Assembly enacted a bill establishing a registry for animal marks and brands. The bill also made the recorder of the brands responsible for producing a printed copy once one hundred brands had been filed, and to continue to issue printed lists with each additional hundred. William Clayton, the registrar, was thus charged with producing what amounted to a brand book.

The "Deseret Brand Book," as it now survives, is composed of five small folio sheets, each consisting of a single sheet folded once to make four pages, or twenty in all. These were clearly printed at separate times, as continued registration of brands required additional sheets. The first folio begins with the first brands recorded, from December 29, 1849, and ends with February 11, 1850; the sheet was presumably printed almost immediately thereafter, and includes almost exactly one hundred brands. The second sheet backtracked to the end of 1849, and went through March 18, 1850. The third sheet covered brands registered March 18 to May 27; the fourth, May 28 to August 10; and the fifth, August 16 to November 4, 1850.

Each of these sheets was almost certainly issued serially, as each additional one hundred owners registered brands, through the course of 1850. In fact, the printer's records describe four more folios issued from 1851 to 1854, but no copies of these later folios survive. The Princeton copy is identical to the three other surviving sets of the first five folios, at Brigham Young University, the University of Utah, and the Historical Department Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The "Deseret Brand Book" is unlike any of the brand books that follow it in the American West. Its physical characteristics, as a small folio in sheets, made it impractical for use in the field. The vast



•

BRAND  
W R  
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S  
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D J  
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J D  
T  
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Y  
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C F  
F  
F  
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P N

First page of the "Deseret Brand Book" ([Salt Lake City: William Clayton, recorder, 1850]). Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of J. Lionberger Davis, Class of 1900.

majority of the brands consist of initials or variations thereof, sometimes as simple as a single initial; in only a few instances do they display the variations on letter forms that later became typical. Unlike other brand recorders, the registrar paid great attention to the size of the brand, with exact length and breadth given. This concern is a little odd, as the information is not particularly useful; young cattle will continue to grow after branding. Great care is taken as well to specify where the brand is placed (left shoulder, right hip, and so on). In later brand books this position was often shown on a woodcut outline of a cow. Finally, the date of recording and the address of the owner are given. Several individuals also registered horse brands, and one—Brigham Young—registered a sheep brand as well. Most of the individuals registering brands lived in Salt Lake City, although in the later parts an individual as far off as the famed mountain man Jim Bridger (at Fort Bridger, Wyoming) appears. The “Deseret Brand Book” is a unique artifact in the print culture of the early West and Mormonism. It is certainly one of the most important items in the Princeton collection.

The “Deseret Brand Book” is the only such published work issued in the United States prior to the Civil War. It was not until 1865 that the next such work, *The Texas Stock Directory*, was published in San Antonio (extremely rare, it is in the Princeton collection in reprint format). Over the next fifteen years only a few other such publications appeared, none of which are at Princeton. However, the collection does have a remarkable manuscript brand book given in honor of Alfred Bush on his retirement, a record of brands in Hill County, Texas, compiled between the Civil War and 1881.

The Hill County brand book is a very tall folio ledger, with printed headlines showing that it was clearly manufactured for the purpose of recording brands. The headline reads: “Revised Mark and Brand Record, [blank] County.” The solid, ledgerlike binding of leather over boards is stamped on the spine: “Mark and Brand Record.” The manuscript records go back to brands registered as early as 1853, although only a few date from before the Civil War.

Hill County, in central Texas, halfway between Waco and Dallas, was still on the frontier in the 1850s and not safe from Indian depredations until after the Civil War. Ledger entries with registration dates up to 1874 seem to be written out in a uniform hand, suggesting that year as the point when the brand record was begun, incorporat-



# REVISED MARK AND BRAND

NO.	BRAND.	MARK.	NAME OF OWNER.	RESIDENCE	PLACE OF BRAND.
105		BLL	J. S. Spencer,	Georgetown, Texas	left hip
106			Mrs. D. S. Holman	Willsboro, Tex.	left hip
107			W. H. Valasingame	Wilford, Ellis County	hip & side c.
108		15	John Beazley	Hillbail, Tex.	left side c.
109		7B	Boon J. Mc	Hill County	left side c.
110		7	Carrie May Booth	" "	left side c.
111		BR	J. L. Burgess	Oceola "	left side c.
112		W = W	H. B. Allen	Willsboro	left side c.
113		BT	J. S. Roman	Monterey	left side c.
114		B3	J. N. Burnett	Woodberry, Tex.	left side c.

Entries 105-14 in the "Mark and Brand Book for Hill County, Texas" (1853-1881). Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of William S. Reese.

ing all brands before that date. After 1874, entries are written in different hands and pens, probably as new registrations were made. These new entries continue with great regularity through July 1, 1881, when recording ceased. Most of the brands relate to Hill County, although there are occasional outlying records for Johnson and Ellis Counties, the two counties to the north. The only two post-1881 entries are for Leo and Aylmer McNeese in August 1909 and April 1910, suggesting that they may have owned the brand ledger at that point.

The formats of Hill County brands in the 1870s are much more varied than those found in the "Deseret Brand Book." Although initials are still popular, many more brands use some variation, such as letters in circles, on a rocker, lying on sides, and the like, or employ more abstract symbols, such as a heart, a cross, or a diamond. The brand position and ear marks are also indicated. In all, nearly 2,700 brands are recorded. The ledger provides a detailed, almost census-like record of who was raising cattle in this part of central Texas over

a thirty-year span before, during, and after the Civil War. Many of these cattle would have been marketed by herding them north to the railroad heads in southern Kansas—the classic image of the cattle drive. The brands seen here would have been on their sides. By 1881, rail lines had reached Texas, the range cattle industry had become widespread across the Great Plains, and the business of raising cattle in the West had moved into its classic phase.

The genre of the brand book came into its own in the 1880s. The advance of the railroads, the end of the Indian wars, and the opening of the Plains and the Rockies to settlement fostered a massive boom in the cattle business. The speculative atmosphere was further fueled by enthusiastic promotion and an influx of foreign capital. The number of ranches, and of cattle on the range, exploded. This expansion in turn led to an increased need for printed guides to identification of brands. At the same time, many newly formed stock growers' associations undertook to compile the brands of their members. Beginning in 1881, there was a surge of published brand books.

The Princeton collection holds two notable examples from this optimistic era. The first, compiled by the colorfully named Wilmot Proviso Brush (evidently the son of abolitionist parents), was *Brand Book Containing the Brands of the Cherokee Strip ... Also, the Brands of the South-western Cattle-Grower's Association ...* (Kansas City, 1882). This guide to the brands of the south-central part of Kansas along the Oklahoma border south of Wichita is a classic example of the fully evolved western brand book. A woodcut profile of a cow shows the brand in its proper location on the animal, and added text describes other marks and gives the name and address of the owner. The small duodecimo size is designed to be carried in a pocket or saddlebag, and the simple leather binding is utilitarian. The brands are now a mixture of letters and symbols, sometimes providing the name for the ranching outfit (for example, the 101 brand of the 101 Ranch).

Another brand book of this period, the *Brand Book, of the Kansas Frontier Stock Association, of Western Kansas ...* (Garden City, Kans., 1885), covers much of the empty country west of Dodge City to the Colorado border. Its organization is similar to that of the Cherokee Strip book—a small, portable volume with woodcut, address, name of the foreman if any, and other marks. Not surprisingly, very few copies survive of brand books such as this. They covered a relatively small number of ranches, even if the range stretched over whole counties,

**POWELL BROS. & ARNOLD.**

Post-office address,  
Pond Creek, I. T.

Range, on Coldwater, Ind. Ter. Horse brand, 101 on left shoulder.

Other brands, 101 on right side and rail on left.

**JOHN COOPER,**

Post-office address,  
Pond Creek, I. T.

Range, on head of Wild Horse.

Cattle branded as above on either side hip or loin.

Horse brand same as cattle, on left shoulder.

**J. H. GREENLEE.**

Post-office address,  
Winfield, Kas.

Range, Red Rock, I. T. Other brands,

—| O on left side.

**WM. WYKES.**

Post-office address,  
Caldwell, Kas.

Horse brand, same as cattle, on right or left shoulder.

Wilmot Proviso Brush, *Brand Book Containing the Brands of the Cherokee Strip, Authorized by Stock-men's Convention* ... (Kansas City: I. P. Moore, 1882), 28. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of Philip Ashton Rollins, Class of 1889.

BRAND BOOK,  
—OF THE—  
KANSAS FRONTIER  
STOCK ASSOCIATION,  
—OF—  
WESTERN KANSAS,

ORGANIZED AT

LAKIN, KANSAS, SEPTEMBER 10, 1883.

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1885.  
IRRIGATOR JOB PRINT.  
GARDEN CITY, KAS.

Title page of the *Brand Book, of the Kansas Frontier Stock Association, of Western Kansas* ... (Garden City, Kans.: Irrigator Job Print., 1885). The cover is inscribed, "Ed Myers Nickerson Kansas." Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

and were literally used to pieces. These, and other late-nineteenth-century brand books in the Princeton collection, are uniformly quite rare.

The heyday of the brand book in the American West was from 1881 through the first decade of the twentieth century. By the end of this era, the open range was largely fenced with barbed wire. For the most part, states had taken over the responsibility for publishing brands, and the picturesque works of the late nineteenth century were supplanted by fewer, fatter, and less exotic publications. Princeton has a number of these later efforts, of which the most appealing is certainly the first such for Alaska, *Official Brand Book of the State of Alaska* ... (Palmer, Ala.: The Division, 1965). It contains all 107 brands registered in the state at the time, in a crude mimeographed format, the look of the modern frontier.



Brand books are an excellent example of the kinds of material one hopes to find in a great research library—an esoteric and little-known genre with great potential riches for a researcher, odd and peculiar works with unexpected rewards. As Herman Melville said of another class of such publications, they pretend to little but abound in much.