

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

Close Encounters in the Colonies: Treasures from the David M. Rubenstein Americana Collection

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Selected PR Images

The New-York Historical Society presents Close Encounters in the Colonies: Treasures from the David M. Rubenstein Americana Collection, a special installation that traces the origins and development of central themes of early American life—colonization, natural history, slavery, religion, and politics—through 16 rare books from the 17th and 18th centuries. The showcase reveals the beginnings of American principles that would inform the nation’s founding documents while also showing how many of those principles were either denied to or came at the expense of enslaved and Indigenous peoples.

John Josselyn

New-Englands Rarities Discovered: in Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Serpents, and Plants of that Country

London: Printed for G. Widdowes at the Green
Dragon, 1672

Photograph by Vincent Dilio. Courtesy of David M.
Rubenstein

John Josselyn’s New England’s Rarities was the first book fully devoted to the natural history of New England. It offered detailed descriptions of the land, animal and plant life, and topography of New England. Most importantly, it also related extended descriptions of Native peoples and culture. Its appeal to readers was greatly improved by the inclusion of wood-cut illustrations.

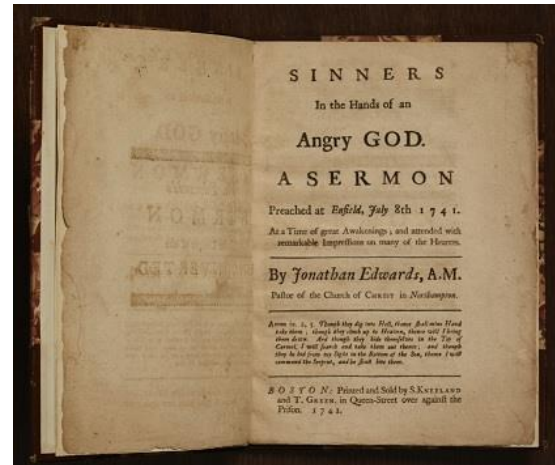


Jonathan Edwards

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon

Boston: Printed and Sold by S. Kneeland and T. Green in Queen-Street over against the Prison, 1741
Photograph by Vincent Dilio. Courtesy of David M. Rubenstein

Jonathan Edwards was one of the most prominent American theologians of the 18th century. In this fiery sermon full of harrowing images, he reminded his readers that salvation came only from the will of God and that hell awaited those who would not repent for their sins.

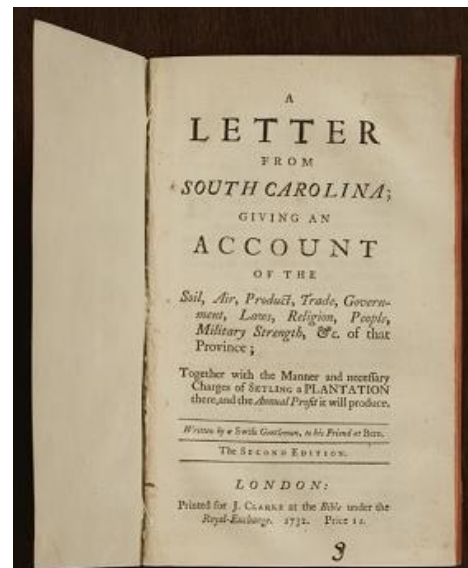


Thomas Nairne

A Letter from South Carolina; Giving an Account [...] of that Province

London: Printed for J. Clarke at the Bible under the Royal-Exchange, 1732
Photograph by Vincent Dilio. Courtesy of David M. Rubenstein

In 1710, Thomas Nairne published this short book, which offers one of the first descriptions of the early development of the colony and served as promotional tool to attract settlers. Slavery was already central to South Carolina's economy and society, and Nairne's book is notable for the way he treats enslaved persons as one of the goods prospective settlers would need to succeed.



Phillis Wheatley

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral

London: Printed for A. Bell [...] and sold by Messrs. Cox and Berry, King-Street, Boston, 1773
New-York Historical Society, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library

Phillis Wheatley was the first prominent African American poet and the first internationally recognized American poet. Enslaved at the age of seven, she learned to read and began to write poetry. Her poems addressed the experience of slavery and the politics of the colonies' imperial crisis with Britain. Poems on Various Subjects brought her a measure of fame in Britain and the colonies that led to her emancipation.



John Peter Zenger

The Tryal of John Peter Zenger, of New-York, Printer, Who was Lately Try'd and Acquitted for Printing and Publishing a Libel against the Government

London: Printed for J. Wilford, 1738

Photograph by Vincent Dilio. Courtesy of David M. Rubenstein

John Peter Zenger was a German-born printer in New York City. In 1734, he was arrested for libel after printing an essay critical of the colonial governor in his newspaper, The New-York Weekly Journal. After nearly a year in prison, Zenger argued at his trial that he was innocent because what he had printed was true. The jury found him not guilty, making truth a defense against libel for the first time. This book offered an account of the highly publicized trial, which has come to be seen as a landmark moment for the freedom of the press in America.

