

Aspects of Marketing the Miniature Samuel Johnson Dictionaries: Examples in the Cordell Collection

David E. Vancil

Cordell Collection of Dictionaries, Indiana State University

Shortly after Samuel Johnson's death in 1784, a different kind of Johnson dictionary began to appear, one which was dependent on previous Johnson dictionaries, particularly the 1755 folio edition, only in so far as his vocabulary served as a guide for the words included. In fact, this "new" type of dictionary, with which Johnson had nothing to do personally, was intended primarily for school children, and the various publishers who appropriated Johnson's name as part of the dictionary title or referred to him as their inspiration in the front matter of these pocket-sized dictionaries were following a tradition that had begun with Cawdrey's 1604 *A Table Alphabeticall*. A word deemed to be difficult, or hard, precedes explanatory words or phrases. The definitions are little more than synonyms.

As J. D. Fleeman indicates in his masterful two-volume bibliography of Johnson, pocket, or miniature, dictionary editions were "usually mere word-lists with brief glossarial equivalents descending at some distance from Johnson's own work" (2000: 556). By and large, these works have not been deemed particularly significant, and few scholars have spent much time on them. Nonetheless, these hand-sized dictionaries were plentiful, frequently reissued, and represented themselves, in their titles or front matter, as we will see, as closely related to the 1755 dictionary or, in one instance, to the Todd-Johnson revision.

The rich holdings of the Cordell Collection of Dictionaries, Word Books, and Philological Texts, located in the library of Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana, afford researchers an opportunity to compare and contrast these dictionaries not only with larger, fuller dictionary predecessors but with each other. What are some of the elements, one may ask, that makes the Johnson miniature dictionaries stand out and succeed in the marketplace as so many of them did? In an attempt to highlight some aspects of the marketing of the miniature Johnson dictionaries, I will briefly introduce these dictionaries and their varied content as well as delineate some of the known background of identifiable individual editors or compilers of different versions of the Johnson miniature dictionaries. It is my contention that having an authoritative figure carry on the lexicographical tradition inculcated in the 1755 dictionary would have been a calculated decision on the part of publishers of the miniature dictionaries, since it would have added expense to do so. Given these parameters, I feel that providing information about the editors, whose activities would have added to the stature of the little dictionaries, to be a useful exercise in developing an understanding and perhaps an appreciation for how one marketing approach added, depending on the particular dictionary in question, to the success, or life, of these books.

The term "miniature," it may be noted, is found in the title of many of these dictionaries, resulting in the common way in which these books are referred to as a group. More important than the reduction in the page size of the book is the brevity of the content which was reduced to the bare essentials. As one might expect, while overall the miniature dictionaries are markedly similar to one another in their organization and their parts, some titles were more successful than others, reappearing in several to numerous subsequent editions, not only in England but in other locations in which the English language was dominant.

Fleeman lists 309 recorded examples of the miniature dictionary located in various academic libraries. He provides examples from an unspecified time after Johnson's death in 1784 to a final entry, *The Smallest English Dictionary in the World*, a tiny dictionary held by the Cordell Collection requiring the use of a magnifying glass to read any of the content, which was published in Glasgow by David Bryce and Son, c. 1883. No record of a miniature published earlier than 1784 has been found, while I have found an online catalog record for a miniature Johnson dictionary published as late as 1900 by Routledge.

Including a German-English miniature discovered to have been edited by Johann Harnisch, there are 124 dictionaries designated as “miniature Johnson” dictionaries in the Cordell Collection, including 18 copies. After subtracting the duplicates, the resulting number of unique miniatures is 106 titles, published from 1793 to around 1876, as listed in the main Cordell Collection database. From the substantial sample of miniatures located in the Cordell Collection, therefore, I believe we should have confidence that our observations on the nature and various aspects of these dictionaries are based on enough examples.

Depending on the publisher, various added sections, or parts, which provided handy but limited information on various matters, including scripture names, gods and goddesses of mythology, the names of boroughs and towns, and similar matters were included in the dictionaries. Many of the parts are repeated from edition to edition and publisher to publisher. In addition to the added sections already mentioned, a number of them include a treatment of grammar.¹

A thesis of Janet Sorensen in *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* is that there was an understood need to standardize English during the eighteenth century and beyond, particularly in locations located far from London which exhibited what were felt to be non-standard or even renegade traditions. While the standards inculcated in the *Dictionary* might be more manufactured rather than in actual use in many instances, that Samuel Johnson embraced them as ideals in his attempt to perpetrate that which was deemed proper usage was an evocation of a desire to nationalize all the peoples of England and, by extension, Ireland. Sorensen convincingly portrays the school movement in Scotland to eliminate native speech and replace it with a standard form of English (63-103). Interestingly, many of the editors of the school, or miniature, Johnsons were Scottish as were the publishers of many of the editions. In a study Fleeman made of a miniature Johnson dictionary edited by George Fulton, he noted that from 1821 to 1883, the “Scottish market for pocket dictionaries during this period was over a quarter of a million” (1993: 169).

Wallace Kirsop provides details on the sale in Australia and New Zealand of both large and miniature Johnsons which were being imported throughout the period in which Fulton’s books appeared (173). While there is no evidence that a miniature Johnson dictionary was published in these locations, versions of the miniature dictionary were published in many others throughout much of the non-Asiatic English-speaking world, including Baltimore, Belfast, Boston, Chiswick, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Halifax, Lansingburgh & Troy (NY), London, Montreal, Montrose, New York, and Philadelphia.²

As Fleeman notes, stereotyping accounted for an appreciable rise in publishing activity which allowed for successful books to be reprinted easily and fairly cheaply. George Fulton’s version of the miniature dictionary, on which Fleeman conducted extensive research, went through 33 impressions, for example, concluding in 1866 (1993: 163). The Fulton editions were produced by one company, Oliver & Boyd, while many others, as has already been suggested, were published by conglomerates or syndicates. It was common practice, Weedon (2003: 24) indicates, for publishers to reduce risk by sharing the cost of ventures with other publishers. There can easily be as many as a dozen different publishers in several different locales with publishers being added or dropped from partnerships from edition to edition.³

A way in which the small lexicons added to their allure was to appeal to a noble purpose. To this end, many of the various miniature dictionaries have prefaces or advertisements that set out an ideal

¹ In a previous article, “Some Observations about the Samuel Johnson Miniature Dictionaries,” *Textus* 19 (2006), pp. 167-178, I discuss the debt of the miniature Johnson to previously published school dictionaries, grammars, and similar works.

² This information, as other data about dictionaries held in Cordell Collection, is derived from a database maintained in the Special Collections Department in Indiana State University Library. While publishers and places have been transcribed for all the miniatures, the data reported in this listing has been taken from the first named location only. The online version of the pre-1901 Cordell Collection database is searchable at the following URL: <http://library.indstate.edu/about/units/rsbc/databases/cordell>.

³ Weedon’s work (2003) contains a treatment of publishing practices beyond the scope of this paper and is strongly recommended to individuals interested in business practices, including the dissolution of partnerships and resulting legal entanglements.

for these small dictionaries. Here is the text of the preface from Thomas Rees's 1838 edition published in Philadelphia, which, except for being taken from the Todd's redaction of Johnson's original dictionary rather than supposedly being inspired by or derived directly from the original 1755 edition, is markedly similar in its content and tone to statements found in other miniature dictionaries throughout their publication history:

Notwithstanding the number of English Dictionaries already before the public, a new one of the pocket or cabinet size, combing accuracy of execution with neatness and copiousness, seemed to be still a desideratum. The Editor, in compiling the present work, has endeavoured to furnish such an epitome of Mr. Todd's enlarged and valuable edition of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary as would enable the generality of persons to understand the most approved English and American authors, and to write and speak the language with propriety and elegance. The most correct definitions have been given in condensed form; and especial care has been taken to indicate in a simpler manner the fashionable and classical pronunciation of every word.

The Editor has appended copious alphabetical lists of scriptural proper names, which have been accurately divided into syllables and accentuated for pronunciation. In this part of his undertaking he has freely availed himself of the labours of preceding writers who are considered the best authorities in this department.

As this volume is to form part of a series of works, which it is hoped will find favour with all persons, who on the outset of life, are forming the basis of a really useful library, every attention has been paid to its accuracy and completeness; and it is believe that no other work of the same size and class will be found to surpass it in these important characteristics of a Dictionary.

As noted in previous remarks, a significant number of the dictionaries went to the trouble and expense of including editors or compilers. Of the 105 English-only examples in the Cordell Collection, 44 have the names of editors or compilers associated with them. These editors, by virtue of their activity not only with the Johnson dictionary but other works that I sometimes found they had written or edited, suggest that they are very much a part of a movement to inculcate the world with a sense of the greatness of England as evidenced in the majesty of the proper use and understanding of English. As already indicated, Thomas Rees is one among many dictionary editors who seeks the betterment of young people.

The first example of a miniature dictionary in the Cordell Collection is from 1793, published by Jarvis in London and titled *A Dictionary of the English Language to Which is Added, an Alphabetical Account of the Heathen Gods and Goddesses, and Other Fabulous Persons of Antiquity. With a List of the Cities, Towns, Boroughs, and Remarkable Villages in England and Wales*. According to the bibliographer Robin Alston, it was pirated from a W. Peacock edition of 1785, published shortly after the great man's passing. Only with the 1803 sixth edition of this dictionary was "compiled from Dr. Johnson" added to the title after the words "English Language."

Yet, somewhat earlier in 1798 an edited miniature dictionary referring directly to Johnson in its title and held by the Cordell Collection was compiled by the Reverend Joseph Hamilton, M.A., master of the Academy at Hemel Hemsted. Drawing on the luster of Johnson's reputation, this work, *Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language in Miniature*, is the ninth edition.⁴ With fully 20 separate editions held in the Cordell Collection of Hamilton's miniatures, his version of the dictionary may be viewed as having been highly popular and to have probably been produced in robust print runs. This 1798 edition was published in London by a conglomerate or syndicate of more than a dozen publishers, including T. N. Longman, B. Law, C. Dilly, J. Johnson, G. G. and J. Robinson, to name only the first four publishers in this alliance. This edition includes an added part not found in miniature dictionaries compiled by other editors: *A Concise Epitome of the Most Remarkable Events During the French Revolution*. Neither does this part appear consistently throughout Hamilton's own

⁴ It should be noted that not all of the miniature dictionaries under discussion have survived in all editions due no doubt to hard use and the tendency for such works to be discarded. See J. D. Fleeman (2000) for the most extensive listing of known extant editions or issues.

miniature dictionary series; it is notably absent, for instance, from editions published in the United States. The first American edition, appearing in 1804 and published in Boston, was taken from the fourteenth English edition. The final holding in the Cordell Collection of a Hamilton dictionary was published in the state of New York in 1824. Why was the epitome excluded from the American edition? A close reading of it as it appears in British editions or study of the educational system in places where the dictionary was used by American students may suggest reasons why the book was marketed differently in the United States.⁵ Whatever the actual reasons, the decision to exclude the section on the French Revolution seems to have been one chosen specifically for Americans, where it appeared in many successive printings or editions.

Another early compiler was William Perry, himself the author of works on grammar and a French and an English pronouncing dictionary. His *Royal Standard English Dictionary* appeared in many editions both before and after his *Dr. Johnson's General Dictionary of the English Language; Enlarged by the Addition of Several Thousand Words, Selected from the Most Approved Authors: To Which is Prefixed a Comprehensive Grammar*, which was published by a single publisher, John Stockdale of London, in 1806. Notable in this edition is the promise of several thousand additional words presumably not found in the great 1755 *Dictionary*. It is hard to be certain why there is only one edition in the collection by such a well-known maker of dictionaries as Perry, but competition from his own publications might have been a factor. For example, in 1806 there was a fully revised edition of Perry's *The Royal Standard English Dictionary* issued by another publisher which might have affected the success of the Johnson work. Research is needed to find out more about Perry's successes and failures.

The earliest example the Cordell Collection possesses by William Maver was published in 1816. A Scotsman, his *Johnson's English Dictionary* contained the usual added parts. The collection possesses three editions of Maver's treatment. The 1816 version was printed for Maver, while the fourth edition of 1831 was published simultaneously in Glasgow, Dublin, and London by three different publishers. The last edition found in the Cordell Collection and compiled by Maver is the tenth edition from 1836, published by a single publisher, Blackie & Son in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London.

A schoolteacher like Hamilton, George Fulton's name is associated with 33 editions, as detailed by J. D. Fleeman in an article which has been cited previously. The collection has a copy of the second edition from 1822, the fourth edition from 1824, and the sixteenth edition from 1836. Fulton had already published his own dictionary when approached to bring out a miniature Johnson. His *Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language* from 1822, published in Edinburgh, contains not only spelling instructions but the usual classical names with a collection of quotations from Latin and other languages, a chronology of remarkable events, and a list of important men. As already observed, Oliver & Boyd made an excellent investment in Fulton, as this dictionary was popular and profitable for 44 years.

Cecil Hartley, who had an M.A. degree, was the author in 1820 of *British Genius Exemplified in the Lives of Men Who, by Their Industry, or by Scientific Inventions and Discoveries, &c., Have Raised Themselves to Opulence and Distinction*. He seems the perfect choice for *Johnson's Royal Pearl Dictionary*, published by John Bumpus of London, of which the collection has copies from 1825, 1828, and 1829. These three dictionaries are among the smallest in the collection, at around 12 or 13 centimeters in height. They appear designed particularly for small hands or perhaps a lady's purse.

Whether the previously mentioned Thomas Rees was commissioned to or proposed himself to miniaturize Todd's revision of Johnson is unknown at this point, but in the Cordell Collection beginning in 1826 are seven editions of *Todd's Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language* by Rees, LL. D., F. S. A. Obviously qualified by his credentials, his epitome of Todd's revision of Johnson was published by various combinations of publishers both in Great Britain and the United

⁵ No effort has been made to differentiate between printings and editions in this paper. With the use of stereotyping, the introduction of new material or corrections would be infrequent in subsequent "editions." In many instances, the changes between editions would have been cosmetic, e.g., a new title page. A separate study is required to discern changes between various printings and so-called editions.

States. The last edition by Thomas Rees held in the Cordell Collection is from 1847, suggesting a highly successful publishing history for Rees's creation.

The Cordell Collection possesses only one example by William Angus published in 1841. Angus, possibly Scottish, was responsible for adding the section on Greek, Latin, and scripture proper names of the *Miniature Edition of Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language*, which was published simultaneously in Edinburgh, London, and Dublin by a syndicate of publishers. The publication statement also indicates that the book was sold by "all Booksellers in the United Kingdom." The lack of additional editions is somewhat puzzling, suggesting many possibilities, including legal entanglements among the various publishers. In this instance, little is known, and given the scarcity of information about some book publishers from this era, it may prove impossible to discover why this and many other books with the potential for success failed to be republished.

Townsend Young, LL.D, in 1863 compiled *Johnson's Pocket Dictionary of the English Language*, an edition "Containing All the Useful Words Recently Introduced," which was published in Halifax. Young was the author of *Outlines of the History of Ireland, For Schools*. In addition to the Johnson dictionary, he worked extensively on editions of John Walker's *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language* in the late 1840s through the 1850s, updating the vocabulary by adding thousands of words. Along with the 1863 edition of the Johnson dictionary, the collection possesses another edition from 1864.

The collection has only one example of a work by Alex. Charles Ewald, F. S. A., author of *A Reference Book of English History and Our Constitution*, published in 1867 as *Johnson's Dictionary Modernized, with Numerous Additions from the Latest Lexicographers*. He appears to have been a prolific author of schoolbooks, who produced another dictionary a year later, *Warne's Bijou Dictionary of the English Language*, published in London, which became *Nuttall's Bijou Dictionary* in a later incarnation and was published c. 1890-99.⁶

P. Austin Nuttall's 1871 edition, entitled *An Illustrated Dictionary of the English Language, for the Use of Schools and General Students*, was published by George Routledge and Sons in London. It is among the few miniatures to identify explicitly an intended audience in the title. The only indication that Nuttall compiled the work is from the front cover of the binding, where his name and role have been embossed. Nuttall's name does not appear in the book itself. In fact, Dr. Johnson is identified as sole author. A variant of this dictionary in the Cordell Collection omits mention of Nuttall on the cover, so it is only by association with the other copy that Nuttall can be identified. While many of Nuttall's lexicographical works were prepared for Routledge, another edition of this same title not found in the Cordell Collection was published in New York by T. O'Kane in the 1870s, A series of dictionaries titled *Johnson's Dictionary of the English, for the Use of Schools and General Students* was published by Routledge in 1857 as a "new edition," according to an online record in OCLC. As of today, the Cordell Collection does not have a copy, but it's conceivable that it might resemble very closely or even be identical to the 1871 edition which the Cordell Collection does contain. Nuttall was a prolific compiler of dictionaries issued through various publishers. In addition, Nuttall possessed expertise on Medievalia, the families of Britain, and Latin writers, some of whose works he translated.

The final editor found has the most widely known family name among English lexicographers, Murray. Titled *Johnson's Dictionary, with Numerous Additions from the Most Eminent Authorities*, the copies held in the Cordell Collection were published in 1874 and sometime after 1876, with the covers adding *Johnson's Dictionary Containing 36000 Words*. The editor's name appears on the title page as James Henry Murray. Based on OCLC and online British Library Catalogue records, it is apparent that Murray worked closely with Nuttall and then assumed editorship of work under the editorship of the presumably older man.

As of this writing, however, nothing substantive has been discovered about James Henry Murray. Searching in the online union catalogs of WorldCat, COPAC, and the British Library Catalogue on "James Murray," yields some results in which James Henry Murray is presumed to be one and the same as James Augustus Henry Murray, principal editor of the *New English Dictionary*, but without

⁶ Ewald died in 1891, according to the WorldCat record for this dictionary. This and citations to other dictionaries not held in the collection are from OCLC's WorldCat or other online bibliographic sources, e.g., the British Library Catalogue or COPAC.

authority work creating an incontrovertible link between the two names, it cannot be concluded beyond a doubt that these men are the same individual.

It is noteworthy, however, that the name “James Henry Murray” appears only in records associated with dictionaries and other word books, among them, the Johnson miniatures. Could James Henry Murray be J. A. H. Murray’s *nom de plume* for “lesser” works? Certainly, it is a possibility. More research both on James Henry Murray and James Augustus Henry Murray and their writing lives needs to be undertaken. This may be tremendously difficult, as a recent inquiry to the parent firm of Routledge resulted in a response that it was unlikely company records about authors from this era were extant.

The last cataloged edition of a miniature Johnson dictionary under James Henry Murray’s name was published in its tenth edition by Routledge in 1900, according to online records. This appears to have concluded James Henry Murray’s work on the miniature Johnsons, although he continued for some time to produce other dictionaries for the publisher, such as *A Companion Dictionary of the English Language: Comprising Words in Ordinary Use, Terms in Medicine, Surgery, the Arts and Sciences*, which appeared in 1903.

Excluding facsimiles and topical selections, the Johnson dictionary, in its various forms, lasted 145 years in the marketplace. Perhaps it may be viewed as remarkable by some individuals that Johnson’s reputation as a lexicographer endured for so many decades even as various lexicographers tried to replace him as the acknowledged expert on the English language. Yet as Gertrude Noyes notes,

Lexicographers, grammarians, and other students of the language [...] paid Johnson the tribute of use during many years, while they supplemented his labors in various ways. While each contributed his real or supposed corrective [...] Johnson’s *Dictionary* continued to be consulted as an oracle and its statements to be weighed judicially, even when the follower finally had the temerity to defy its authority. It is indeed almost an added proof of the genuineness of an oracle that it stimulates as much rebellion in some breasts as piety in others. (191)

The miniature Johnson dictionary, it is noteworthy, lasted 115 years, almost as many as its parent, and in fact it appears to have surpassed it briefly as a viable commodity in the last days of the nineteenth century. Doubtlessly, the larger versions of the dictionary must have benefited from having a smaller derivative, even if there was little connection between them. While it is obvious that the diminutive Johnson dictionaries capitalized on the reputation of Samuel Johnson, they also persisted in their own right as useful reference works for young gentlemen and young ladies. Yet, assuming that generally in and of themselves these dictionaries added little overall to the understanding of the English language, they remain fascinating for their role in education, the enhancement or perpetuation of Johnson’s reputation, and the spread of British culture.

References

- Alston, Robin C.. 1966. *A Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800, Volume Five: The English Dictionary*. For the Author: Leeds.
- Fleeman, J. D.. 1993. Johnson in the Schoolroom: George Fulton’s Miniature Dictionary (1821). In R. Harvey et al., eds. 163-171.
- . 2000. *A Bibliography of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Treating His Published Works from the Beginning to 1884*. Vol. 1. OUP: New York.
- Harvey, R., W. Kirsop, and B. J. McMullin, eds. 1993. *An Index of Civilisation, Studies of Printing and Publishing History in Honour of Keith Maslen*. Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, Monash University: Clayton, Victoria.
- Kirsop, Wallace. 1993. A Note on Johnson’s Dictionary in Nineteenth-Century Australia and New Zealand. In R. Harvey et al., eds. 172-174.
- Noyes, Gertrude E. 1955. “The Critical Reception of Johnson’s Dictionary in the Latter Eighteenth Century.” *Modern Philology* 52, 175-191.

- Sorensen, Janet. 2000. *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Todd's Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language, in Miniature*. 1838. Thomas Rees, ed. Philadelphia: Cowperthwait, 1838.
- Weedon, Alexis. 2003. *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836–1916*. Ashgate: Aldershot, England.

Online Databases Consulted

- British Library Catalogue*. January through February 2008 <<http://catalogue.bl.uk>>.
- COPAC National Academic and National Library Catalogue*. October 4, 2008 <<http://copac.ac.uk>>.
- Dictionary of American Biography (Biography Resource Center)*. October 5, 2008 (non-public, i.e., restricted access).
- Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford)*. October 5, 2008 (non-public, i.e., restricted access).
- WorldCat via OCLC*. October 4, 2008 <<http://www.oclc.org/us/en/worldcat/default.htm>>.

Selected Proceedings of the 2008 Symposium on New Approaches in English Historical Lexis (HEL-LEX 2)

edited by R. W. McConchie,
Alpo Honkapohja, and Jukka Tyrkkö

Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA 2009

Copyright information

Selected Proceedings of the 2008 Symposium on New Approaches in English Historical Lexis (HEL-LEX 2)
© 2009 Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville, MA. All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-57473-430-0 library binding

A copyright notice for each paper is located at the bottom of the first page of the paper.
Reprints for course packs can be authorized by Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Ordering information

Orders for the library binding edition are handled by Cascadilla Press.
To place an order, go to www.lingref.com or contact:

Cascadilla Press, P.O. Box 440355, Somerville, MA 02144, USA
phone: 1-617-776-2370, fax: 1-617-776-2271, e-mail: sales@cascadilla.com

Web access and citation information

This entire proceedings can also be viewed on the web at www.lingref.com. Each paper has a unique document # which can be added to citations to facilitate access. The document # should not replace the full citation.

This paper can be cited as:

Vancil, David E. 2009. Aspects of Marketing the Miniature Samuel Johnson Dictionaries: Examples in the Cordell Collection. In *Selected Proceedings of the 2008 Symposium on New Approaches in English Historical Lexis (HEL-LEX 2)*, ed. R. W. McConchie, Alpo Honkapohja, and Jukka Tyrkkö, 188-194. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

or:

Vancil, David E. 2009. Aspects of Marketing the Miniature Samuel Johnson Dictionaries: Examples in the Cordell Collection. In *Selected Proceedings of the 2008 Symposium on New Approaches in English Historical Lexis (HEL-LEX 2)*, ed. R. W. McConchie, Alpo Honkapohja, and Jukka Tyrkkö, 188-194. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. www.lingref.com, document #2176.