

Mercer Collections Highlights - Fraktur

The vibrant folk-decorated manuscripts and color drawings known collectively as *Fraktur* were produced nearly everywhere German immigrants settled in America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Most, however, originated in southeastern Pennsylvania. These decorated manuscripts were executed by schoolmasters, itinerant scribes, ministers, and others skilled with pen and brush. The fancy lettering often employed on these documents was known formally as *Frakturschrift*—broken letter writing—or *Fraktur* for short. Depending on purpose and setting, this manuscript-based folk art took a variety of forms: birth and baptismal certificates, student penmanship models, rewards of merit, house blessings, devotional texts, bookplates, and many more.



SL96-2002-001
Drawing of Flowers, 1828
Artist: Isaac Gross, Bucks County, Pa.



SL96-2003-001
Drawing of a Bird, 1800-1820
Artist: David Kulp, Bucks County, Pa.



SL96-2010-001
Birth and Baptismal Certificate for Michael Fackenthal,
1795-1800
Artist: Johannes Spangenberg, Bucks or Northampton County, Pa.

Henry Mercer began collecting Fraktur in 1897, authoring the first monograph on the subject which he titled, “The Survival of the Medieval Art of Illuminative Writing Among Pennsylvania Germans.” He is generally credited with first using the term “fraktur” to describe the entire genre of Germanic folk-decorated manuscripts and color drawings.



SL97-2004-001

Portrait of Commodore Thomas Macdonough, 1800-1850

Unidentified Artist

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

7 x 6 inches

Portrait of a military officer in blue uniform with yellow epaulette and braids, in profile, facing right, rising out of a brown chair-like object with black dots. The two upper arms are branch-like, with round green leaves on small stems, and green triangular leaves at the ends. Between the two lower legs of the brown object, below the portrait, is a red heart with a yellow dot flanked by two yellow circles with black dots, and a green band below. At bottom is an inscription in German script.



SL96-2020-001

Penmanship Model of Joel Cassel, ca. 1841

Artist: Poss. Joel Cassel, Montgomery Co., Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

7 3/4 x 12 1/4 inches

Fraktur religious text. First line in large Fraktur script with very large initial decorated with two checkerboard lozenges and flowers, in red, yellow and green. The whole is within a double rule that is colored yellow on top and sides. Ownership statement and date are within the bottom band.



SL96-2001-001

Drawing of Two Trees, ca 1830

Unidentified Artist, poss. Isaac Gross, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn and colored on wove paper

6 3/8 x 3 7/8 inches

Drawing of two trees with red trunks and green leaves, framed within a border of red and yellow bands.



SL97-2006-001

Religious Text, 1830-1890

Artist: Isaac Gross, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

8 1/4 x 13 1/5 inches

First line in large, highly decorated Fraktur script with floral motifs. Second line in smaller Fraktur script. Below a decorative band are 12 lines of cursive script, and below that two lines of cursive alphabet and numbers. To the right of the cursive script is a bird in profile perched on a flower.



SL96-2013-001

Penmanship Model, c. 1800

School of Johann Adam Eyer, Bucks Co., Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper
8 x 13 1/4 inches

First line in highly decorated Fraktur text, in large letters, then three more lines of smaller Fraktur text, and then a line of musical notes. Below are twelve lines of small cursive text, then two lines of alphabet and numbers. Two red birds in profile appear in the middle of the text. At the left side are eight lines of small Fraktur text in alternating black and red ink.



SL96-2095-001

Bookplate of Eliza Swartz, 1856

Attributed to the S.F. Artist, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper
6 1/4 x 4 1/8 inches

Text in red, within a red heart-shaped border. Two sprays of yellow stems and green leaves emerge from top of heart, and several more sprays sprout from a triangular shape at bottom. Overall rectangular border is yellow, with wavy black lines and dots; red squares in corners.



SL96-2011-001

Penmanship Model of Isaac Gross, ca. 1830

Attributed to Isaac Gross, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on wove paper
8 x 13 inches

First line in large, highly decorated Fraktur script with floral motifs. Second line in smaller Fraktur script. Below a decorative band there are 12 lines of cursive script, and below that two lines of cursive alphabet and numbers. To the right of the cursive script is a bird in profile perched on a flower. Below is a box with the name Isaac Gross.



SL96-2051-001

Baptismal Certificate of Daniel Afflerbach, 1800-1821

Attributed to the Strasburg Artist, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on wove paper
14 3/4 x 12 1/2 inches

Fraktur text in round central medallion. Flaming heart at top center flanked by angels blowing straight trumpets and holding purple flags with crosses and standing on green fish-like creatures. In lower left and right are two brown lions.



SL96-2006-001

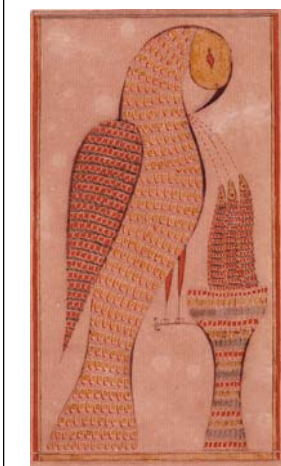
Hymn Text for Jacob Oberholtzer, 1816

Unidentified Artist, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

7 1/4 x 5 3/4 inches

Line of music at top. Fraktur text of a hymn in central panel. Side panels contain an angel with trumpet on each side above tulips growing out of hearts. Date appears in the hearts. Decorative border band on sides and bottom. Calligraphic border at top above music. Colors are black, yellow, green.



SL97-2005-001

Drawing of a Pelican, ca. 1897

Attributed to Henry C. Mercer

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

7 1/4 x 4 inches

Drawing of a large bird in profile, facing right, piercing its breast with its beak to extract blood to feed three nestlings in a goblet-shaped nest. Feathers carefully drawn in red and yellow, with similar designs in the nest in red, yellow and green. An ancient Christian symbol representing sacrifice and devotion.



SL96-2016-001

House Blessing, 1815-1825

Artist: Bernhard Misson, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

8 x 9 1/2 inches

Fraktur text in 10 lines with title 'Haus Segen' above. Text is between two vertical yellow columns with diagonal red stripes. Each column topped by an artichoke-like flower in red, yellow and green. 'Haus Segen' is within a form suggesting the roof of a house, above which are two flowers and a bird.



SL96-2012-001

Religious Text, 1830

Artist: Isaac Gross, Bucks County

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on wove paper

8 1/4 x 10 1/2 inches

Decorated religious manuscript featuring four lines of Fraktur text. At bottom center is the name Isaac Gross and the date Jan. 10, 1830, flanked by pairs of birds in profile facing one another and perched on leafy branches. Colors are dark brown or black, red, yellow, green.



SL96-2052-001

Baptismal Certificate of Henrich Diefenderfer, 1791

Attributed to the Flying Angel Artist, Lehigh County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

13 x 16 inches

Fraktur text in round central medallion, within a green and red circle. Flying angels in upper left and right corners in red, yellow and black. One tall flower stalk on each side of text panel. Three small red and yellow birds, two in lower left and right and one in a semicircular border at top center. Heart at bottom center with additional text.



SL96-2096-001

Bookplate for Jacob Fretz, 1785

Artist: Johannes Moyer, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

6 x 4 1/4 inches

On top is a blue bird with red highlights and a red, yellow and green flower. To left of oval is a flower in red, blue and yellow, and to right a red tulip. Below oval is a vase with handles and a checkerboard pattern, holding two large red and green tulips and another flower and leaves. In the four corners are red spiral patterns. Overall rectangular border is a line with red half-circles on the inside and small red rectangles on the outside, then a border of hatching, then a solid green band.



SL96-2014-001

Penmanship Model for Christian Gross, 1785-1790

Artist: Johann Adam Eyer, Bucks County, Pa.

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

8 1/4 x 13 1/4 inches

Fraktur religious text. First line features large letters with elaborate initial, two birds and flowers. Two more lines of script, then 13 lines of cursive script within a band. Below that, alphabet and numerals (2 lines). Another text enclosed in a band in lower left corner, below large initial, in red and black.



SL96-2094-001

Bookplate of Catharina Ott, 1830-1860

Unidentified Artist

Hand-drawn, lettered and colored on laid paper

7 x 4 1/5 inches

Drawing of a bowl or flower-pot with plain horizontal stripes of yellow, red, and green. In the pot are two stems with leaves and a tulip in red, yellow and green. Between the tulips is a yellow bird with red wings. At bottom is the inscription in red Fraktur script. At left and right are borders of a band alternately red and yellow.