Movable Books at the Newberry

Introduction

The Newberry holds several hundred books with movable and interactive components ranging from the fifteenth to the twenty-first centuries. These diagrams with dials, flaps, and components to be cut out and constructed taught, lectured, and even entertained their readers. They were produced for a variety of audiences, in Latin and many vernaculars, for the old, and eventually, the young.

The Edward E. Ayer Collection is particularly rich in navigational and cosmographical texts that include movable teaching mechanisms, usually dials. The German mathematician Peter Apian’s 1524 *Cosmographius Liber*, which includes five such woodcut volvelles, was a hugely popular textbook. Due to the work’s mention of the Americas, Ayer includes it in four languages and twenty different copies spanning eighty-five years. In contrast, another Ayer item, Sir Robert Dudley’s 1646 *Dell’Arcano del mare*, contains dozens of engraved, folio-sized volvelles. Other texts tempt gamers into using a lottery dial instead of dice to tell fortunes. Before-and-after views adapt flaps for devotion, anatomical inquiry, and fantasy architecture. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century children’s books with lift-the-flap and pop-up components make up another substantial group equal in number to the Renaissance and Baroque examples.

While the Newberry’s movable book collections are mainly printed, there are also two manuscripts with hand-drawn dials, such as an early fifteenth-century devotional work in Latin with a rotating wheel on a string that was used as a line-specific bookmark (VAULT folio Case MS 37.5), and a seventeenth-century Hebrew Pardes Rimonim manuscript (Hebrew MS 3) including three pages of colorful volvelles geared to help interpret the Kabbalah.

You can use this research guide for information on Searching the Catalog, Highlights from the Newberry Library Collections, Digitized Movable Books at the Newberry, Bibliography, and Collections at Other Institutions.

Searching the Catalog

The main types of interactive components were ones that turned, or ones that extended or lifted. While there is no single search term that will identify all of these books, here are some keywords and subject searches that can help. Ordering the results by date will also provide a helpful chronology:

Keywords: Volvelles, or Dials; Flaps

Keyword phrase: “Movable Books”

Beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, interactive books were published increasingly for children. The search terms reflect this shift. The Library of Congress discusses this terminology here:
Subject: “Toy and movable books” or “Toy and movable books – Specimens”

**Highlights from the Newberry Library Collections**

**Volvelles and Dials**


**Flaps**


Daudet, Jean-Louis. *[Altar Cards.] Lyon, to mid eighteenth century*. Location: Special Collections 4th floor. Call number: Case oversize BX2230 .A48 1700z. Triptych prints for priests and private devotion following a fifteenth-century aide-memoire format.


Globes and Cut-Out Instruments

Regiomontanus. [*Calendarium*]. Venice: Erhard Ratdolt, 1483. Location: Special Collections 4th floor. Call number: Inc. 4390.5. Metal sundial arm is present, but no volvelle survives in any Newberry examples.


**Digitized Movable Books at the Newberry**


**Bibliography**


**Collections at Other Institutions**

*Cotsen Children’s Library* at Princeton University Library: collection includes magic lantern and other optical devices relating to toy and movable book effects

*Children’s Literature Research Collections* at the University of Minnesota

*The Movable Book Society*