
William Maclure as Publisher in the New Harmony Reform Tradition

*Ian MacPhail and Marjorie Sutton**

William Maclure came to New Harmony early in 1826 because he thought that Robert Owen's community would provide fertile soil for his own Pestalozzian education programs.¹ He soon found that Owen's educational views did not agree with his own, and he made efforts to separate his programs. The essential point of difference was that Owen thought adults could be reeducated to overcome the biases of their upbringing, while Maclure believed that education started necessarily with children. They also disagreed about methods, but that was of secondary importance.

Aided by his Pestalozzian teachers, Joseph and Eloisa Neef, William S. Piquetpal, and Marie Duclos Fretageot, Maclure established a school at New Harmony, which most of the community children attended. Nevertheless, he did not abandon adults as lost and beyond hope. His radical views, nurtured by the French Revolution, maintained that the common people, "the industrious producers" as he invariably called them, could be empowered by reading scientific works, much as Denis Diderot thought when he published his *Encyclopedia*. Maclure decided to use his money to make such works available at cheap prices to the working poor. To that end he bought a printing press from New Orleans in 1827 soon after he came to New Harmony. He took a great interest not only in advances in printing technology but also in the current ways of reproducing images, engraving and lithography, and he acquired presses for both of these techniques. As early as November 9, 1824, while still in Paris, Maclure sent a letter to his friend Reuben Haines in Germantown near Philadelphia,² in which he wrote, "When I return home I have some intention of a cheap imprinting to distil books and give the useful without the verbiage thereby reducing them to 1/100 of the expense volume and

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¹Maclure met Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the Swiss education reformer (1746–1827), at his school at Yverdon in 1805. He was so impressed by what he saw of the work that he promoted the Pestalozzian system by subsidizing schools, teachers, and publications in Paris, Spain, and Philadelphia as well as in New Harmony.

²Reuben Haines (1785–1831) was a wealthy, liberal Philadelphia Quaker interested in education.

weight and by the improvement making in the steam engine & making paper with straw it is possible to reduce the expense to 1/10 of that so that the useful facts of all books may be given to the public for 1/1000 part of their present prices."³

An interesting piece of arithmetic! Maclure returned to this theme again and again throughout his life: to print more economically than the professionals. His estimates of cheapness varied considerably. This one, "1/1000 part of their present prices," was the most wildly optimistic, and of course it was never achieved. His idea of "distilling books," a precursor of the *Readers Digest Condensed Books* series perhaps, was not carried out either. His plan to use straw to make paper was also not accomplished, although an attempt was made in Europe; the plan was impractical because the fibers did not hold together as well as they did with linen rags. In the end, although he continued to talk about it for a long time, he never owned a paper mill at all.

He was inspired by what he called the "penny press" in England, a series of cheap radical journals to which he subscribed for years after he came to New Harmony. In Philadelphia he had owned a small printing press on which the naturalists at the Academy of Natural Sciences printed some early volumes of that society's journal.

Some of these naturalists—Thomas Say,⁴ Gerard Troost,⁵ and Charles-Alexandre Lesueur⁶—joined him in New Harmony, where Maclure undertook to print and publish their works. The identification of the new iron press that he sent upriver from New Orleans remains uncertain, but from Maclure's descriptions of it in correspondence, it was probably either a sort of Washington press or perhaps a self-inking Albion press.⁷ In another letter to Reuben Haines on November 24, 1826, he wrote, "Say, Lesueur and Troost are setting up a press for scientific communications to be wrought, the types set and all by the boys who are progressing rapidly in every art and science."⁸

³William Maclure to Reuben Haines, November 9, 1824, Wyck Papers (Wyck House, Germantown, Pennsylvania).

⁴Thomas Say (1787–1834), the Philadelphia zoologist, completed two volumes of his *American Entomology* before he went to New Harmony. He prepared the third volume there, but it was published in Philadelphia.

⁵Gerald Troost (1776–1850) was born and educated in the Netherlands. A geologist, mineralogist, and chemist, he was the first president of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. He left New Harmony in 1827 to teach at the University of Nashville and served as the state geologist of Tennessee.

⁶Charles-Alexandre Lesueur (1778–1846), the artist and naturalist, was born in France and left New Harmony to return there in 1837. Though his *American Ichthyology* was never completed, he published twenty-nine pioneering papers on fish, mostly in the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences*.

⁷The authors are indebted to Jan L. Baderstadt, The Printing Museum, Calumet, Michigan, for this information.

⁸William Maclure to Reuben Haines, November 24, 1826, Wyck Papers.

The "boys," of course, were the schoolboys whom Maclure wished to educate in practical subjects, not in the subjects of the classical education that he had received and ever afterward denounced. The press presented some difficulties at first; but once the boys discovered how to work it properly, all went smoothly, and over the following years some remarkable works emerged from it.

One of the first practical uses of Maclure's printing press was the production of a local journal. There was already a village newspaper, the *New Harmony Gazette*, printed on a Stansbury press that Robert Owen had purchased, but the *Gazette* concerned itself with local, national, and international news and only occasionally published scientific papers by the resident scientists. From the full title of his journal, the *Disseminator of Useful Knowledge; Containing Hints to the Youth of the United States—From the "School of Industry,"* it is apparent that Maclure had something different in mind. At its masthead the journal bore the motto, "Ignorance is the fruitful cause of Human Misery." A prefatory statement in the first number, signed by Maclure, declared, "These sheets will contain observations on the possibility of improving practical education, by separating the useful from the ornamental, and thereby reducing the labor and fatigue of instructing youth, and we will endeavour to prove that children can educate, clothe and feed themselves by their own labor when judiciously applied to articles of real value." The *Disseminator* first appeared on January 16, 1828, and continued until April 8, 1841. It did not live up to its avowed purpose, but over the course of the years it published several of Thomas Say's scientific papers and many essays by Maclure himself after he went to Mexico. After the removal of the *New Harmony Gazette* to New York on January 28, 1829, under its new name, the *Free Enquirer*, the *Disseminator* took over some of the *Gazette's* functions of national and international news and social indoctrination.

Maclure's true services as a publisher, however, appear in the scientific monographs that he published at New Harmony. The first of the scientific treatises that he proposed for publication was a work on American fishes, *American Ichthyology*, by Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, a zoologist and artist. As a young man, Lesueur had accompanied a French voyage to Australia under Captain Baudin.⁹ This voyage was a considerable success in bringing back a larger number of zoological and botanical specimens than any previous voyage had done. Lesueur contributed in a major way to that success, and for some time after his return to Paris he was employed to work on the collections and on his own drawings and paintings, some of which were included in the official report of the voyage. The advent of strait-

⁹See Jacqueline Bonnemains, Elliott Forsyth, and Bernard Smith, eds., *Baudin in Australian Waters: The Artwork of the French Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands, 1800–1804* (Melbourne, 1988).

ened economic circumstances in France, however, made it difficult for him to find a job.¹⁰

William Maclure met Lesueur in Paris, possibly introduced by Georges Cuvier, the leading light of the Natural History Museum. In 1816 Maclure invited Lesueur to join him as his artist and collector on a trip he wanted to make to the United States by way of England and the West Indies. At the end of his two-year contract, when Maclure returned to Europe, Lesueur settled in Philadelphia and made a living teaching drawing and painting to young ladies while making engravings for his colleagues at the Academy of Natural Sciences to accompany their papers in the *Journal*.

Lesueur conceived the idea of doing a major work on the fishes of North America in the manner of Alexander Wilson's work on birds¹¹ and Thomas Say's work on insects. When Lesueur followed his patron Maclure to New Harmony in 1826, he had already begun this work and made some engravings for it. A prospectus for the work was issued at the beginning of August 1827, composed by Maclure:

For publishing by subscription, a work on the FISH OF NORTH AMERICA, with plates, drawn and colored from Nature, by C. A. Lesueur. This work will be published at New Harmony, Indiana, in Numbers, with four colored plates in each, and the necessary letterpress containing the descriptions of the species represented. Twelve numbers will constitute a volume. Messrs. Tiebout¹² and other artists from Philadelphia, who were there occupied on the "American Entomology" are engaged for this work. Books with colored plates, are generally beyond the reach of persons of limited means; but it is intended, that the present work shall be adapted to the circumstances of all. The price to subscribers will therefore be Forty Cents each number. The scientific and graphic skill of Mr Lesueur are so well known that any recommendation is superfluous. It must however appear to all persons interested in natural history very desirable to obtain faithful copies from nature, with accurate descriptions for so small a sum, as the expense of colored engravings are beyond the reach of all, except the wealthy. The present work would have cost six times as much in France, and eight times as much in England.¹³

¹⁰By the second Treaty of Paris (November 20, 1815) imposed by the victorious allies, Napoleon was exiled to St. Helena. France was reduced to its 1790 boundaries, thereby losing 500,000 citizens, and an indemnity of 700,000 francs was imposed. Moreover an occupying army of 150,000 had to be supported. The French botanist François-André Michaux wrote to Benjamin Smith Barton, the American botanist, on November 7, 1815, "Our political situation is always bad and perhaps growing worse on account of our finances—we have twenty-five thousands [*sic*] Englishmen to keep all right." *Miscellaneous Collections*, American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia). Lesueur, always a loyal Bonapartist and a supporter of the Revolution, was not alone in his unhappiness with the Restoration. Michaux had heard that 20,000 people had applied for passports to leave France.

¹¹Alexander Wilson (1766–1813) published seven volumes of the *American Ornithology* between 1808 and his death. Volumes 8 and 9 were completed by George Ord, and four additional volumes were supplied by Charles Lucien Bonaparte. All were published in Philadelphia.

¹²Cornelius Tiebout (1777–1832), American engraver, studied in England, worked in New York, Philadelphia, and, for the last seven years of his life, in New Harmony.

¹³"Prospectus," Wyck Papers.

Although the first two parts, which consisted of sixteen pages and nine engravings, emerged from the press, Lesueur never finished it. It is not known what happened to the copies sent to subscribers. Maclure said bluntly that they were "pillaged in the post" and reiterated elsewhere that they were "pilfered in the post." Pillaged or pilfered, none of the copies sent to subscribers has ever been found in the United States. Lesueur took two copies back with him when he returned to France. They are now in the Natural History Museum in Le Havre. Two copies sent by Lesueur to Georges Cuvier can be found in the Natural History Museum in Paris.

Thomas Say had more luck with his New Harmony work, although it too remained unfinished. It was a work on American shells, the *American Conchology*, announced in the New Harmony Gazette on October 12, 1827:

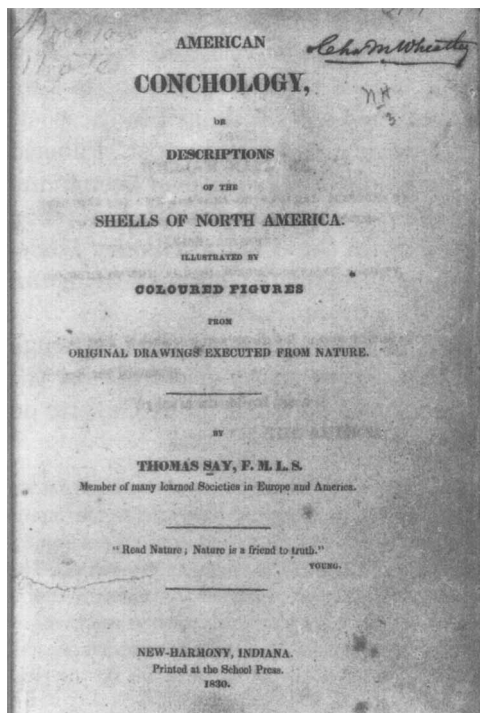
Publishing by subscription a work on the Shells of North America, with plates drawn and colored from nature, by Thomas Say. This work will be published at New Harmony, Indiana, under the title of American Conchology. It will be issued in numbers together with the necessary letterpress for the descriptions of the species represented. The object of this work is to fix the species of our Molluscos Animals, by accurate delineations in their appropriate colours, so that they may be readily recognized even by those who have not extensive cabinets for comparison. The price to subscribers will be One Dollar for each number, with the right to withdraw their names on the publication of the fourth number.

Six parts were printed on Maclure's press with sixty engravings, most of them from drawings by Say's wife, Lucy Sistare Say. A seventh part was completed after Say's death in 1834 by Lucy Say and T. A. Conrad and published in Philadelphia.¹⁴ Several years ago the authors completed a census of known copies of the *American Conchology* and found a total of only sixty-five.¹⁵ There were probably at least two hundred copies published. What happened to the others? The Workingmen's Institute at New Harmony holds one bound copy and portions of another. Historic New Harmony Archives also hold two copies. In a bibliography of the natural history works published at New Harmony on the School Press, as it was called, there are eighteen items.¹⁶ Besides the works noted by Lesueur and Say and some other minor works by Say mainly on insects, there are several by Maclure himself on geology: *Essay on the Formation of Rocks or an Inquiry into the Probable Origin of their Present Form and Structure* published in 1832, and *Observations on the Geology of the West India*

¹⁴Timothy Abbott Conrad (1803–1877) met Thomas Say when they were students together at Westtown Quaker School, Pennsylvania. Conrad became an outstanding authority on both paleontology and malacology.

¹⁵Ian MacPhail and Marjorie Sutton, "A Census of Copies of Thomas Say's American Conchology, New Harmony, 1830–1834 (Philadelphia 1837)," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, XCI (March, 1997), 51–64.

¹⁶Ian MacPhail and Marjorie Sutton, "A Bibliography of the Natural History Works Printed at New Harmony, Indiana, 1827–1843," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, LXXXIX (September, 1995), 299–315.



TITLE PAGE OF THOMAS SAY'S
AMERICAN CONCHOLOGY

New Harmony Workingmen's Institute,
New Harmony, Indiana.

Islands from Barbadoes to Santa Cruz, Inclusive from the same year. There are two pieces by David Dale Owen, the youngest son of Robert Owen, who became a distinguished geologist: *Catalogue of Mineralogical and Geological Specimens, at New Harmony, Indiana Collected . . . by William Maclure, esq., Late President of the Academy of [Natural] Sciences, Philadelphia, 1840, and Catalogue of Geological Specimens Illustrating the Formations of the Ohio Valley, 1843.*

The most remarkable work published on Maclure's press was by a French botanist and plant collector, François-André Michaux, whom France sent to the United States at the turn of the century with his father, André, primarily to find trees that could be grown in France. André Michaux wrote the first flora of the new republic, and François wrote the first major silva (a work describing the woody plants). François left America permanently in 1808 and settled in Paris where he worked on the manuscript of his great work. It is entitled the *North American Sylva* and was originally published in Paris in French in three volumes in 1810–1813, then translated and published in its English version, again in Paris in 1819. William Maclure met Michaux in Paris on one of his trips and wrote to his friend, Benjamin Silliman, the founder of the American Geological Society, when he arrived in New York in July, 1825:

I have sent to your brother here a small packet for the American Geological Society containing 2 volumes of Michaux's *Silva Americana* with 156 colored plates. It was to have been sold to an English Bookseller by Mr. Michaux when I bought the whole edi-

tion with the copperplates and brought them with me as considering it a stock book that ought to remain in our country, it being so expensive as to prevent republication and containing a good description of many of the forest trees that will be extinct when our country is all cultivated and may then only be known by their description. It is therefore a fit book for public schools, societies and public establishments amongst whom I intend to distribute it.¹⁷

Since Maclure had bought the original copperplates made from paintings by Pierre-Joseph Redouté and Pancrace Bessa as he states, it meant that no further edition could be issued in France. It was his intention to publish a new American edition. A prospectus was issued as early as 1828: proposals for publishing Michaux's *Sylva Americana*, (a Latin title that never appeared on any title page). The text repeated what Maclure had already told Silliman but added the information that it was his intention not merely to distribute the copies that he had bought from Michaux but to bring out a new edition:

Being in possession of all the copper plates, capable of printing thousands of copies, it is proposed to publish a new edition by subscription, in Nos of 5 plates, coloured after nature at one dollar per no. It is further intended, to add a number of trees, omitted by Michaux, to make the work more complete, and to begin the publication when one hundred subscribers shall be obtained.¹⁸

Maclure's gloomy prognostication of the extinction of native trees of North America was completely wrong although, from his own observation of the daily cutting down of trees for agriculture and construction, the situation must have looked dark indeed. The fact is that not a single American species of tree described by Michaux has suffered extinction, and all are still to be found in the wild except for *Franklinia*, which Michaux himself never saw except in gardens.

The *North American Sylva* was a much more complicated and a larger and longer book than the other works printed at New Harmony, but it was attractive as an early candidate for printing because the text was complete, and the plates were all engraved and had only to be printed off. In a letter to Maclure, who had now withdrawn to Mexico (he did not care much for the climate of southwestern Indiana), Marie Duclos Fretageot, his agent, described the early preparations for printing the *Sylva* in a letter of January 2, 1829:

Mr. Tiebout [the engraver] is now occupied printing twelve of each plate of Michaux on our drawing paper. He has already printed 13 [plates] of each which are now coloured by our scholars. They really do it very well. This is as much for their improvement and to prepare them for the work as well as for the trying of the plates which succeeds quite well. 12 each will amount to 1872. The greatest part of them will serve for the first numbers when it will be published. As the colouring will require a great deal of time it is well to begin beforehand.¹⁹

¹⁷William Maclure to Benjamin Silliman, July 14, 1825, Wyck Papers (Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia).

¹⁸*Disseminator of Useful Knowledge*, June 8, 1828.

¹⁹Marie Duclos Fretageot to William Maclure, January 2, 1829, Series IM, Maclure-Fretageot Correspondence (Workingmen's Institute Library, New

Seven months later she wrote again to Maclure, "For the printing business we will soon begin with the *Sylva* and the Shells of Say and for that I shall be obliged to hire a printer because our young people could not do the whole and also as it is of some difficulty it requires one that understands the business thoroughly."²⁰

While they managed to print the *Conchology* without outside help, it soon became clear that the *Sylva* exceeded their skill, and it was not until the arrival of an Englishman, William Amphlett, who joined the community in 1836, that the possibility of printing it became a reality. Amphlett had to find suitable paper, a good pressman to work off the copperplates, and someone more skilled than the scholars to color the finished illustrations. The small size of the press, which had been adequate for Say's and Lesueur's works, presented difficulties, and a new chase (the frame within which the types were arranged) was required. The progress of the printing of the *Sylva* is described in the correspondence between Amphlett and Maclure during the years 1838 and 1839. On March 9, 1839, Amphlett wrote to Maclure:

The letterpress, the paper and the engravings you would wish to have as good as the past edition, and I shall take great pride in having the text as uniformly perfect as possible. It would be most vexatious indeed to have this (which may probably be the last printed bequest you may leave the world) in any way lacking that care and perfection which the fame of the author, and the intrinsic value of the work demands, particularly as it will find its way no doubt into every public library in every civilized country and therefore I should be doubly anxious for it to be seen what can be done at your New Harmony press, and that works of science may issue even from the back woods of the far West.²¹

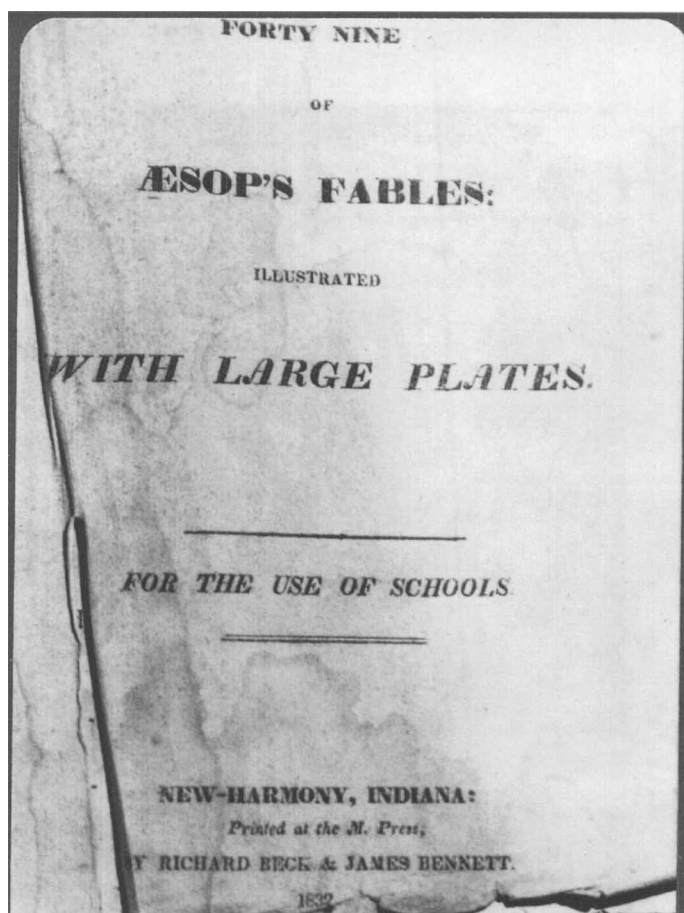
To produce an edition as good as the previous Paris edition was far beyond the means of Maclure's little frontier press, but the wonder is not that it failed to compare with the Paris edition but that it was completed at all. Amphlett's pride in his work succeeded in bringing off a *tour de force* against great odds.

The last letter in the correspondence is dated September 26, 1839, and with it Amphlett sent the first printed sheet of the *Sylva* for Maclure's approval. Maclure had been quite ill in 1839, but despite his illness he determined to make a visit to the United States and specifically to New Harmony at the beginning of 1840. He actually began the journey but died in Mexico enroute in March of that year. Maclure's brother, Alexander, who still lived in New Harmony, was the executor of Maclure's estate, and it was with him that Amphlett

Harmony, Indiana). Since this paper was given, the Maclure-Fretegeot Correspondence has been edited by Josephine Mirabella Elliott and published as *Partnership for Posterity: The Correspondence of William Maclure and Marie Duclos Fretegeot, 1820-1833* (Indianapolis, 1994).

²⁰Fretegeot to Maclure, January 2, 1829, Maclure-Fretegeot Correspondence.

²¹William Amphlett to William Maclure, March 9, 1839, Series I, New Harmony Correspondence (Workingmen's Institute Library).



TITLE PAGE OF AESOP'S *FABLES*

New Harmony Workingmen's Institute,
New Harmony, Indiana.

then dealt. Since Alexander was there and the press was in his house, there were no further written records detailing the progress of the printing.

The work proceeded slowly, and the first of the two volumes was completed in 1841 and the second in 1842, according to the existing title page dates. Some copies were sent to Judah Dobson, the Philadelphia bookseller. The title page of the New Harmony edition announces a supplement to the work with additions of western trees by Thomas Nuttall, the English plant explorer, but in fact none of Nuttall's work appears in the New Harmony edition. The unbound sheets, enough for 381 copies, were stored in Alexander Maclure's house in New Harmony and there on the night of January 21, 1844, they were destroyed by fire. As a result, the New Harmony edition of Michaux's *Sylva* is a very rare work indeed, and only a few copies survive in American libraries. There are copies at the American Philo-

FABLE XII. THE FOX AND THE GOAT.

If thou dealst with a Fox, think of his tricks.

A Fox having tumbled by chance into a well, had been calling about a long while, to no purpose, how he should get out again; when, at last, a Goat came to the place, and wanting to drink, asked Reynard whether the water was good: "good," says he: "ay, so sweet that I am afraid that I have forgotten my-

self, I have drunk so abundantly." The Goat upon this, without any more ado, leaped in; and the Fox, taking the advantage of his horns, by the assistance of them as nimbly leapt out, leaving the poor Goat at the bottom of the well to shift for himself.

THE APPLICATION.

The doctrine taught us by this Fable is no more, than this, that we ought to consider who it is that advises us, before we follow the advice. For, how ever plausible the counsel may seem, if the person that gives it is a crafty knave, we may be assured that he intends to serve himself in it, more than us, if not to erect something to his own advantage out of our ruin.

The little, poor country attorney, ready to starve, and sunk to the lowest depth of poverty, for want of employment, by such arts as these, draws his neighbor into the gulph of the law; until, laying hold on the branches of his revenue, he lifts himself out of obscurity, and leaves the other immured in the bottom of a mortgage.



sophical Society, Philadelphia; the Gray Herbarium in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis; the Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana; and the New York Botanical Garden. Three copies are known to be in private hands. Thus a total of eight. No copies have ever been found abroad.

Maclure bequeathed many of his books and collections to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia where he had been president for life. Among these collections, it can be surmised, were the copperplates of the *Sylva*. Even before the New Harmony edition had come out, there was talk of transferring the copperplates to Philadelphia for an edition to be printed there. The authors have seen no correspondence that bears on the eventual acquisition of the plates by the academy, but they must have rested in the academy for a few years at least. Then they were lent or perhaps sold to a Philadelphia publisher, Robert P. Smith, so that he could bring out a new edition, which he did in 1850–1851. That edition was reissued six times in the course of which a new publisher, A. N. Hart, took over. Then, with a colleague, D. Rice, Hart brought out a third American edition in 1857, which was reissued three times, once under the imprint of Rice and Hart, once under Rice, Rutter and Co., and finally under William Rutter & Co., in 1871, the last printing of this great work. None of these several editions and issues could have been printed if Maclure had not brought the original copperplates to America. What happened to the copperplates? Were they melted down for reuse as so often happened, or are they resting still in some publisher's or printer's stockroom or perhaps on some library's shelves, gathering dust, unrecognized for what they are?

Not all the work of Maclure's press is about natural history of course. Maclure offered other subjects as well. For example, he produced an edition of Aesop's *Fables* in 1832, of which the only known copy is in the Workingmen's Institute Library at New Harmony; Benjamin Franklin's *The Chronicles of the Kings of England, from the Reign of William the Conqueror, First King of England, Down to His Present Majesty George the Third*; and Franklin's *Way to Wealth*, all in the same year. Alexander Maclure proposed an English translation of the *Code Napoléon* but found it had already been printed elsewhere. A major undertaking was Maclure's own *Opinions on Various Subjects Dedicated to the Industrious Producers* collected in three volumes from 1831 to 1838. This work is an explicit statement of his radical social philosophy, a philosophy underlying his view that knowledge is power. It was to help achieve this power that he set up his school, but when his program eventually failed, he continued to provide the means of education through his printing press. Ironically, not many of the works he published ended up in the hands of the "industrious producers," but he certainly made a major contribution to natural history in North America.