

Embossed Materials for the Blind: History, Preservation Concerns and Special Projects

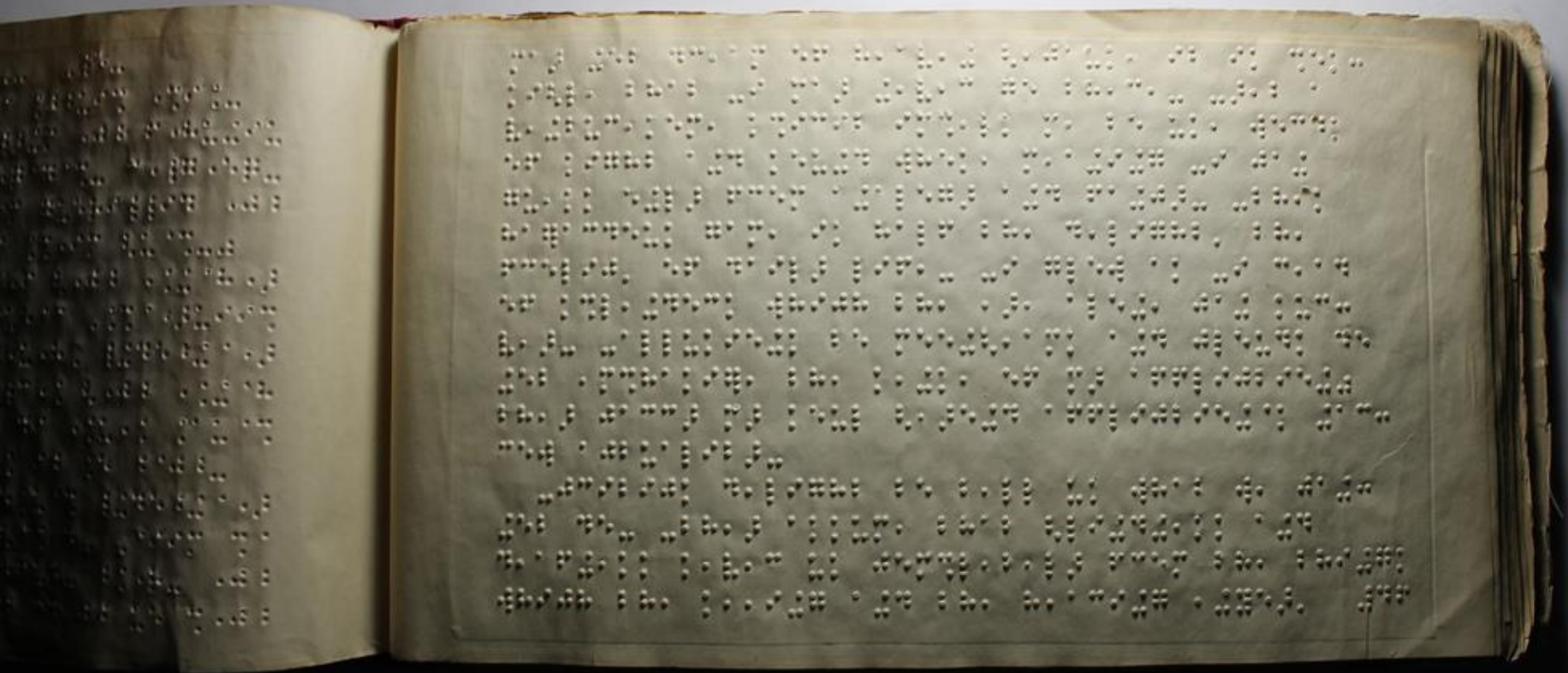
Molly Stothert-Maurer, Archivist

Perkins School for the Blind Archives · Samuel P. Hayes Research Library



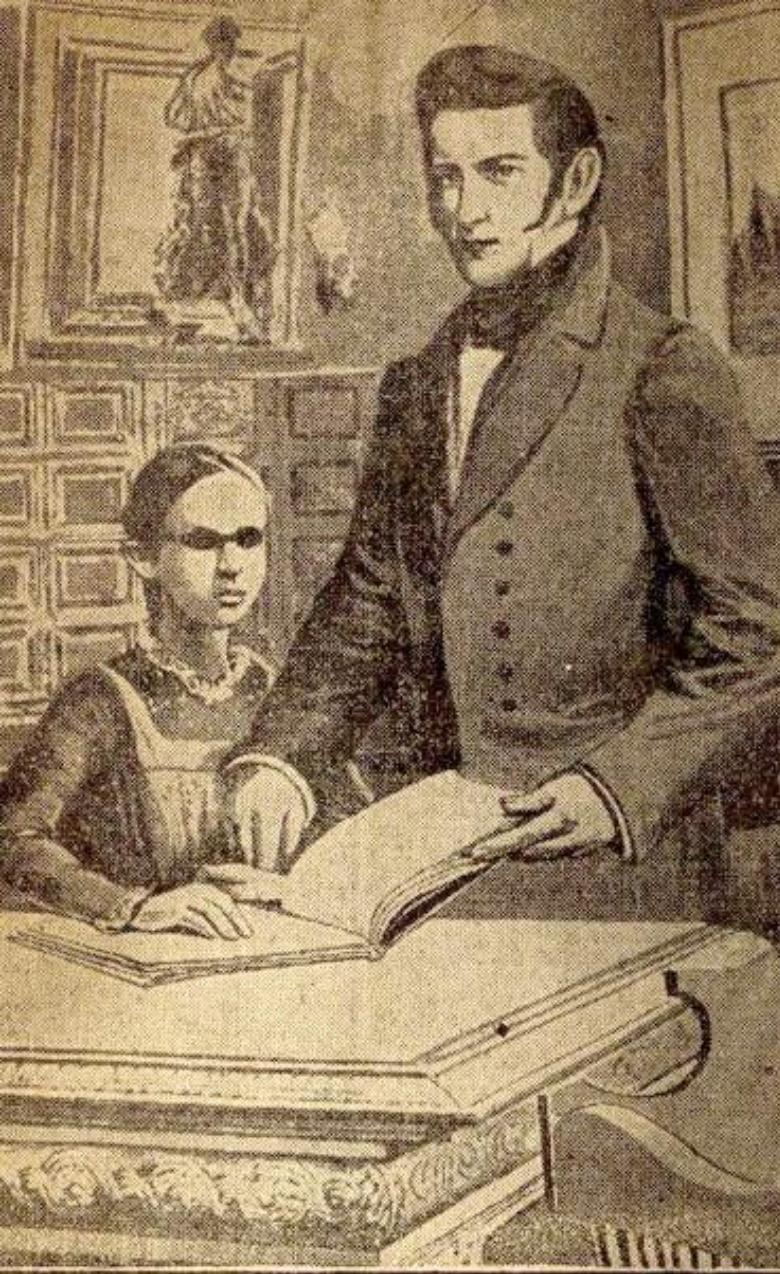
Contents:

- School History and Archives
- First Embossed Book/Pre-braille materials
- Preservation Challenges
- Outreach/Digital Projects



Perkins and the Archives

- First school for the blind in the United States, incorporated 1829 in Boston
- Watertown, MA campus since 1912
- Pioneer in education of the blind and deafblind
- Home to the Braille and Talking Book Library which is a lending library that services all of New England
- One of the largest collections on the non-medical aspects of blindness. Research Librarian since 1880.
- Archives contain institutional history, collections related to the history of blindness and deafblindness and contain a large library of embossed books



DR. HOWE TEACHING
LAURA BRIDGMAN
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Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan



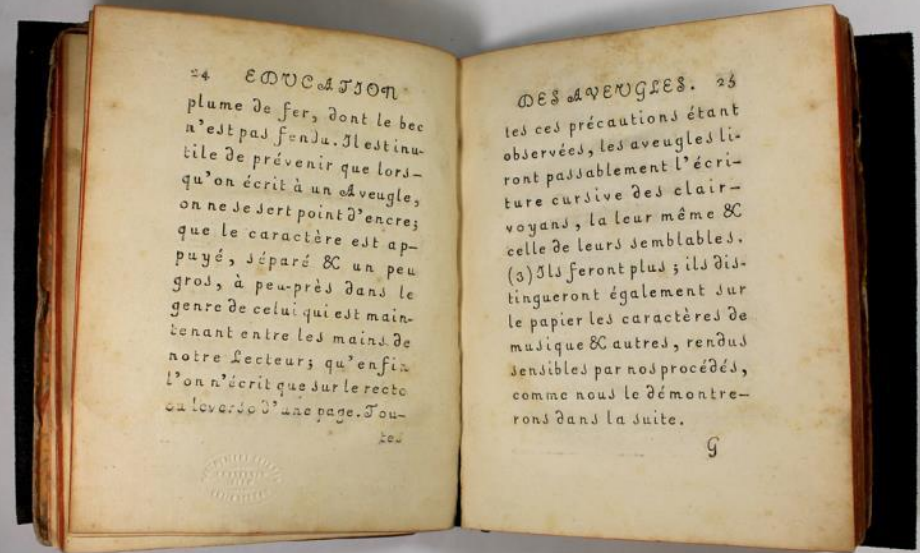
The most popular collections are those related to Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan including photographs, correspondence, clippings, artifacts and memorabilia, and research materials, especially Sullivan's biographer Nella Braddy Henney.

Remember, these materials are experienced by *touch*...



Helen Keller reading tactile map, Lebanon, 1952

First embossed book for the Blind



Essai Sur L'Education des Aveugles, by Valentin Haüy, 1786

Printed at the **Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles**, (*National Institute for Blind Children or Royal Institution for Blind Youth*), in Paris

*Book was significantly damaged during the binding process- pressure collapsed embossing.

Paris, 1817

relatifs à l'instruction, que la société avait payés, dans l'espoir que les produits des travaux des travaux des aveugles valdraient à recouvrer ses avances, comme on le lui avait fait espérer. L'expérience ne vérifia point ce calcul; au contraire les moyens de l'établissement s'affaiblissaient tellement, qu'en 1791, il ne pou- plus se soutenir par ses propres forces. Ses élèves manquaient des choses les plus nécessaires à la vie. C'en était fait de l'institution et des espérances qu'on avait conçues d'améliorer la triste situation des aveugles en les

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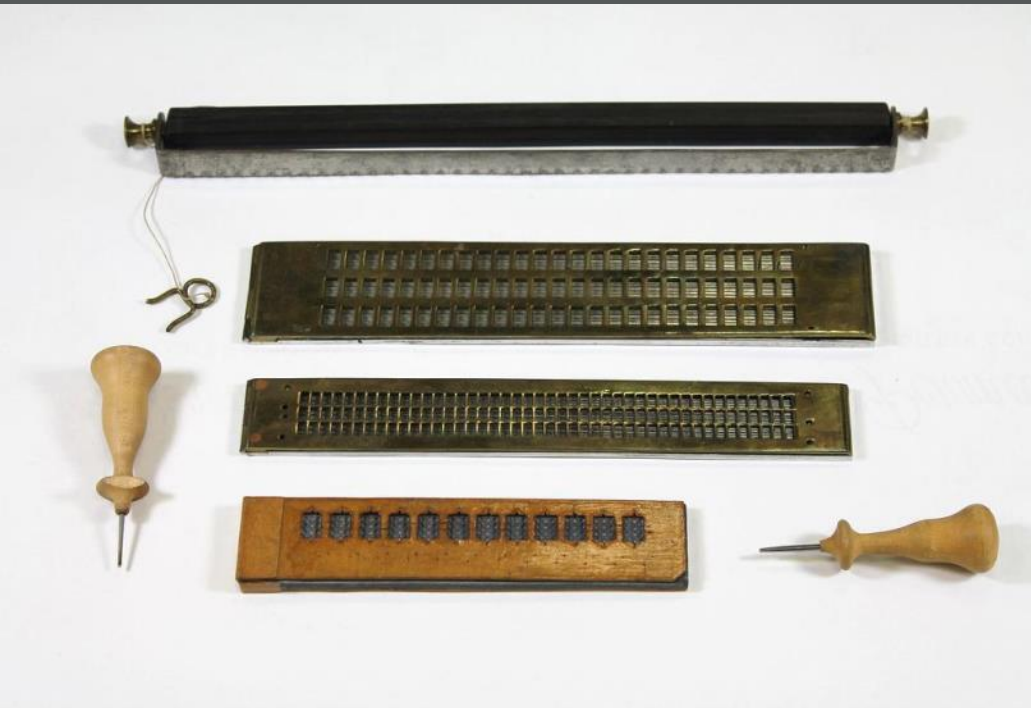
In 1830s Boston: No bookstore for blind... must create from scratch

Howe became Director in 1831 and after touring the schools of Europe he hired a printer, Steven Preston Ruggles, to help him build a library. The font face was modified from European books to contain fewer unnecessary flourishes. The first book in Boston Line Type was printed in 1835.



The Blind Child's Spelling Book, New England Institution for the Education of the Blind, 1835

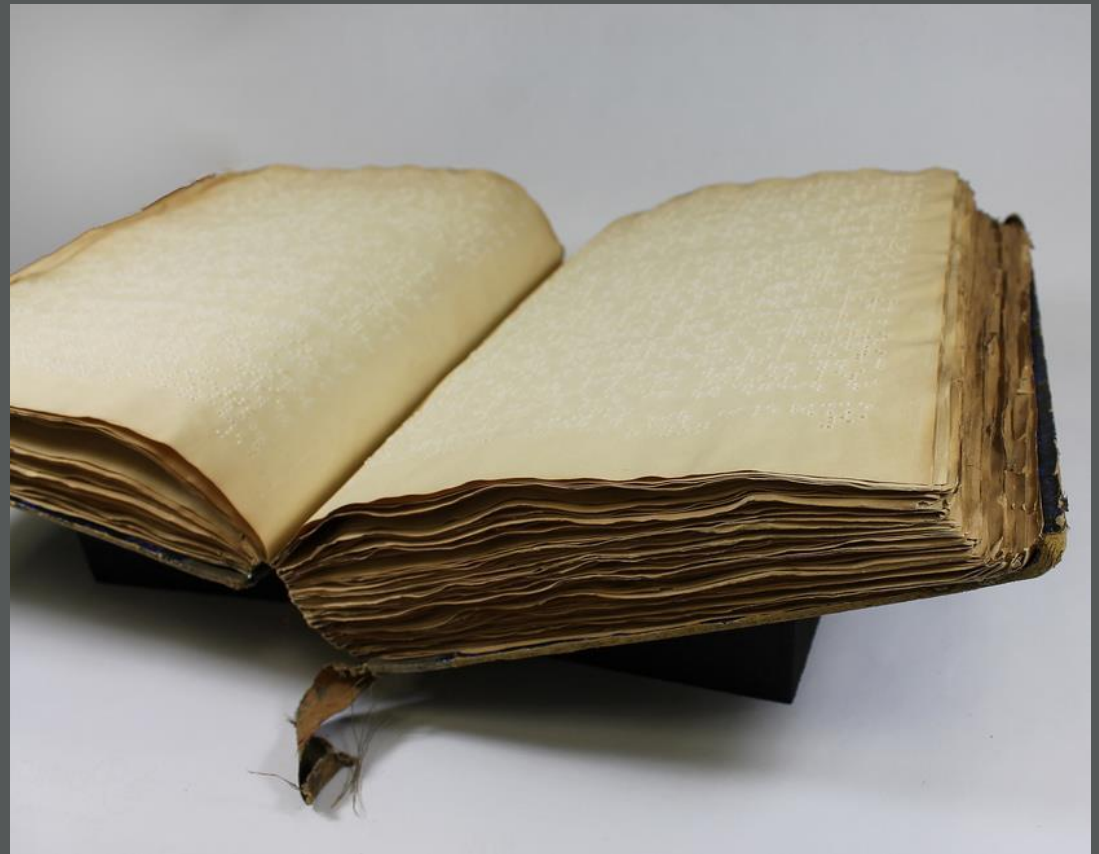
Embossed Roman alphabets impossible to write!
Braille easy to write as well as read.



Preservation Challenges: Books for the Blind are... **BIG**



Competing needs: text block- pages want to be vertical, binding wants to lie down.



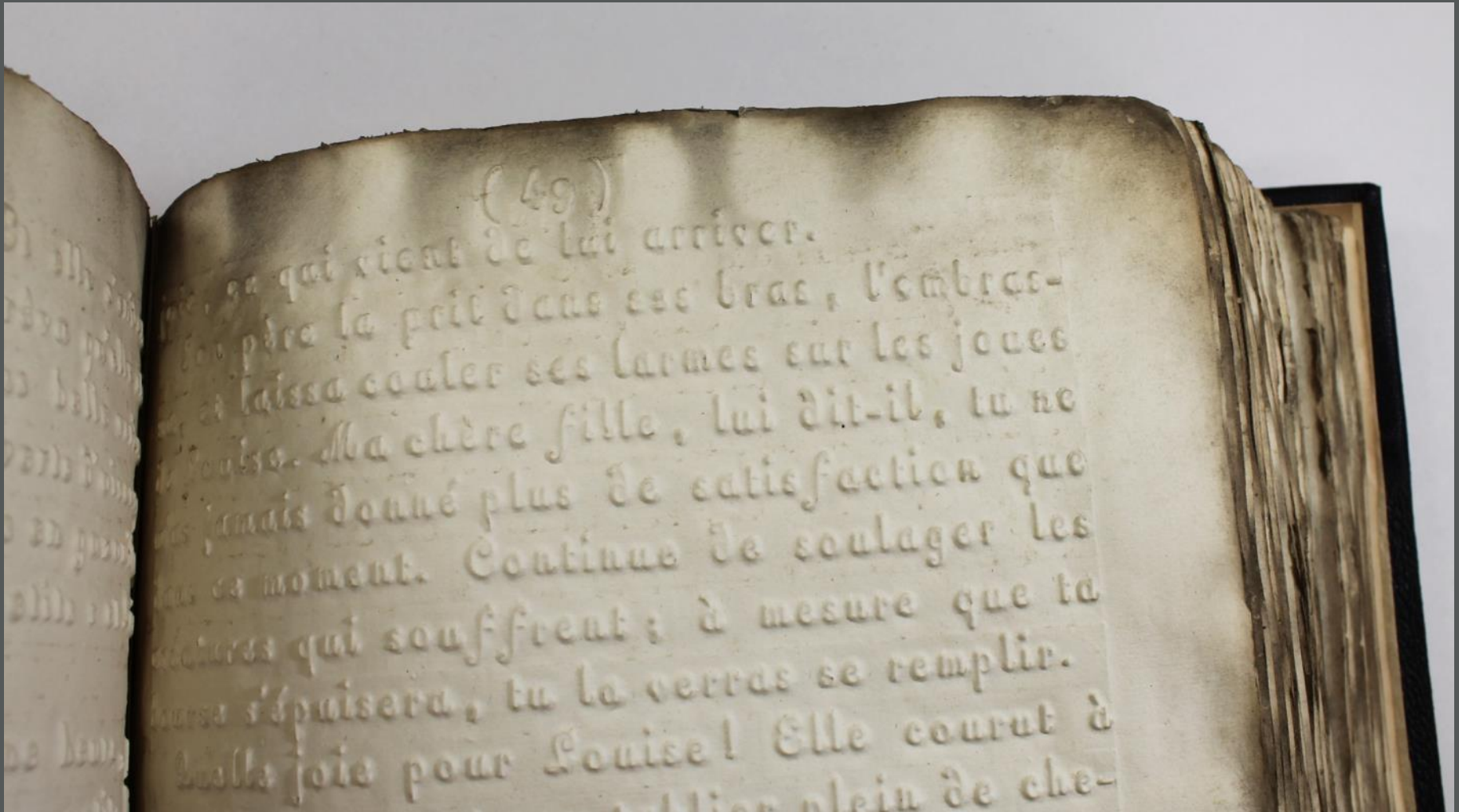
Weight of text block pulling, sinking



No immobilized pages.
No pressing the oxygen out.
Dirt and dust filter in.



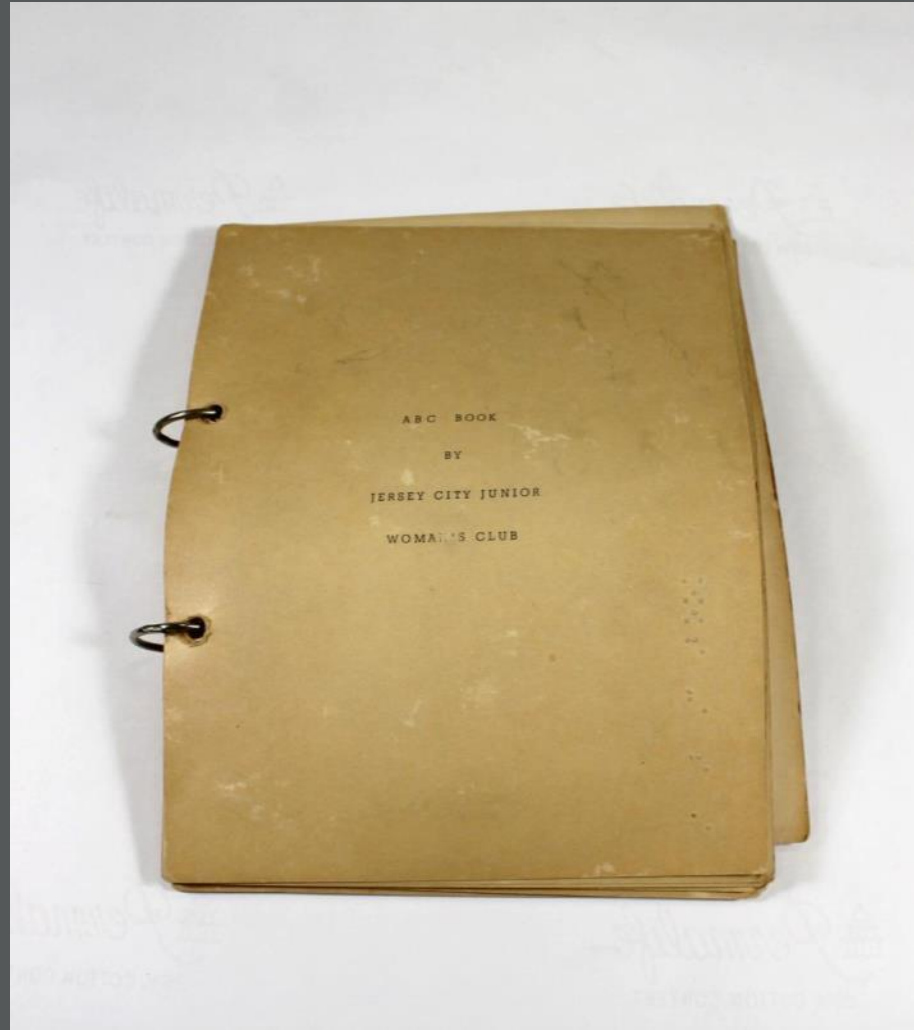
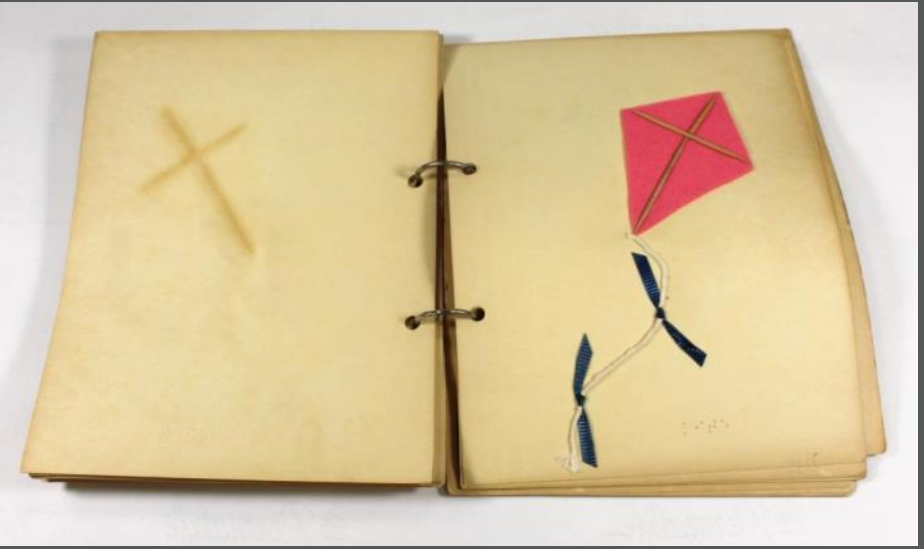
the dirt gets in



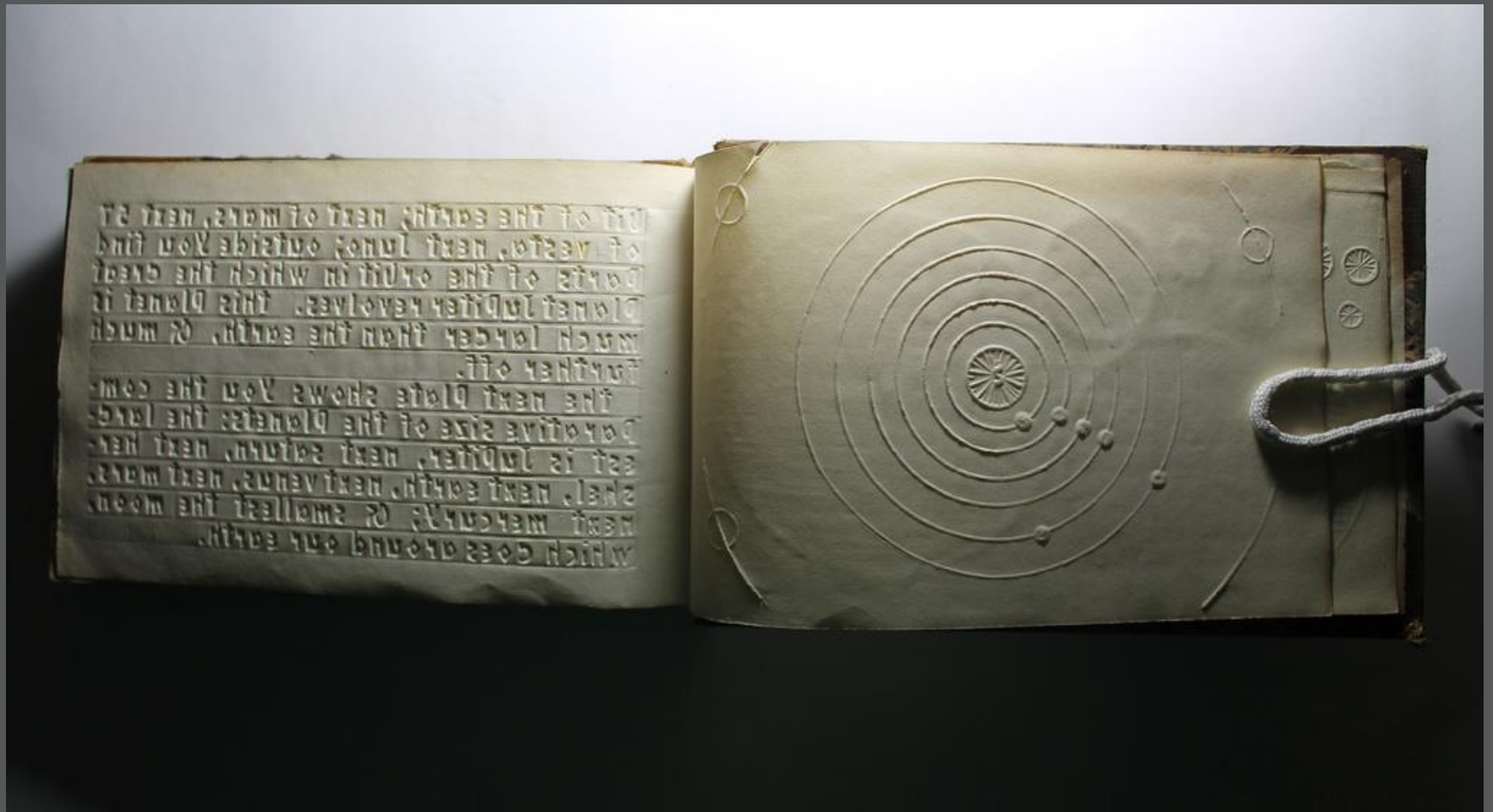
(49)

qui vient de lui arriver.
Son père la prit dans ses bras, l'embras-
sa et laissa couler ses larmes sur les joues
de Louise. Ma chère fille, lui dit-il, tu ne
m'as jamais donné plus de satisfaction que
en ce moment. Continue de soulager les
malheureux qui souffrent; à mesure que ta
bourse s'épuisera, tu la verras se remplir.
Quelle joie pour Louise! Elle courut à
son lit et se mit à pleurer de che-

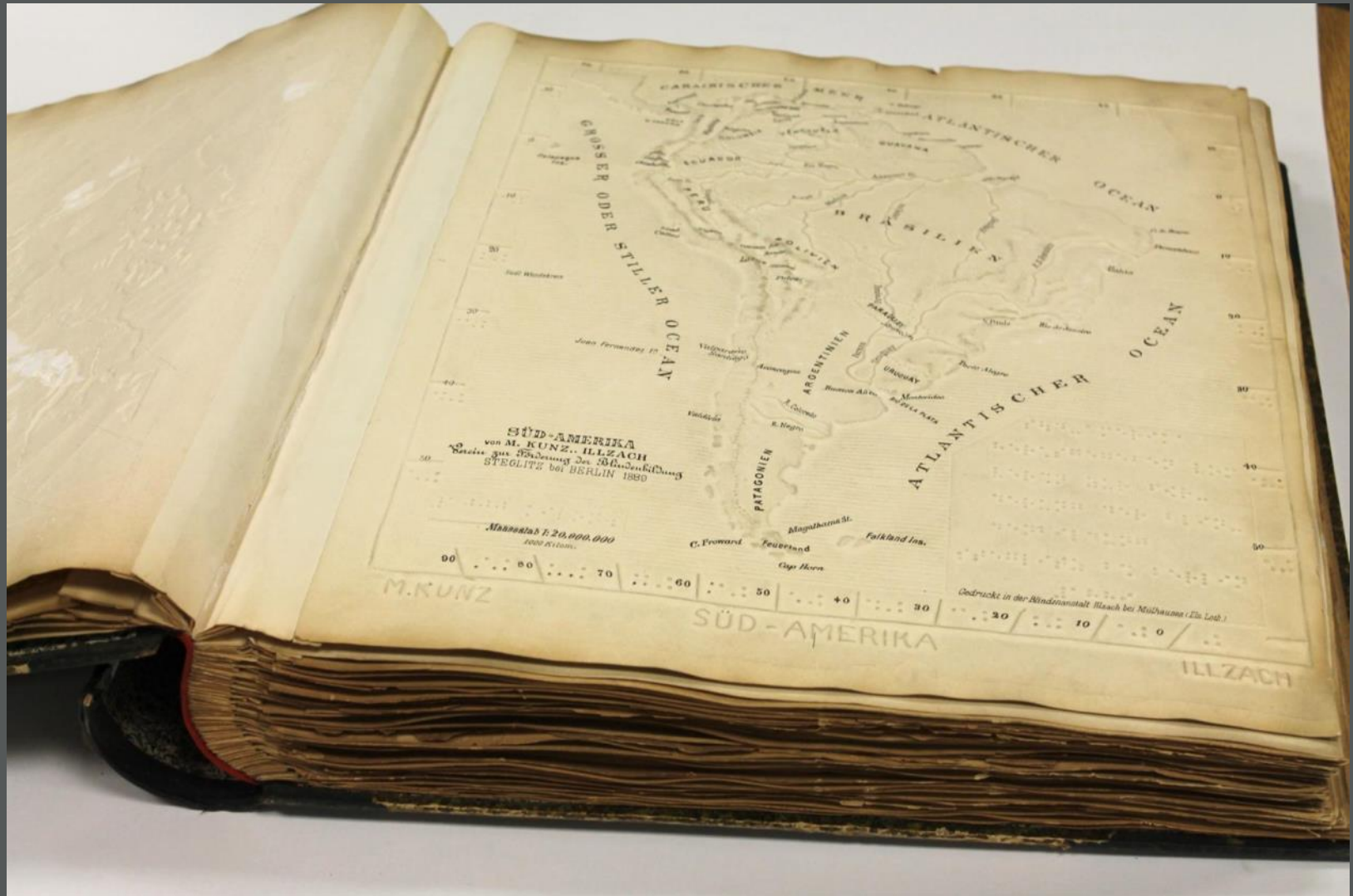
Children's books = Scrapbooks



Tactile Graphics

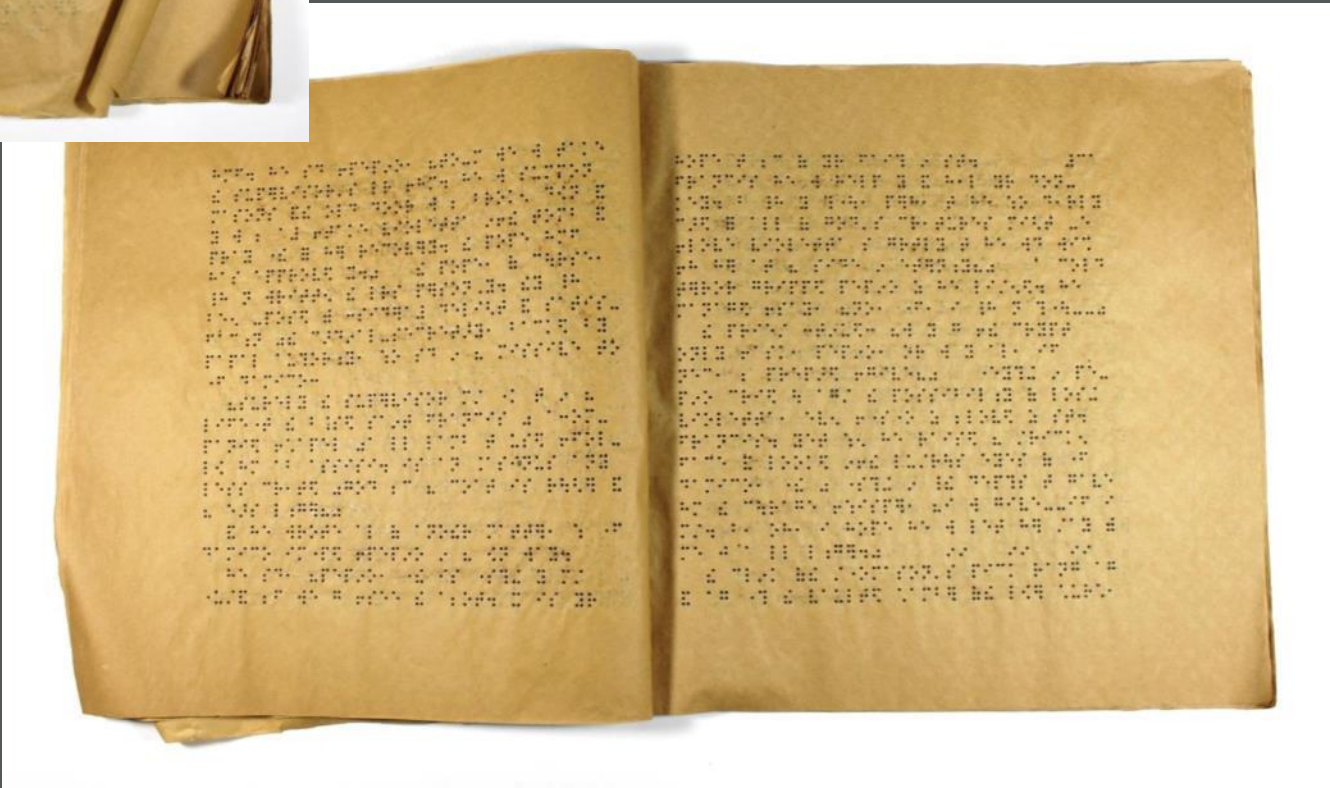
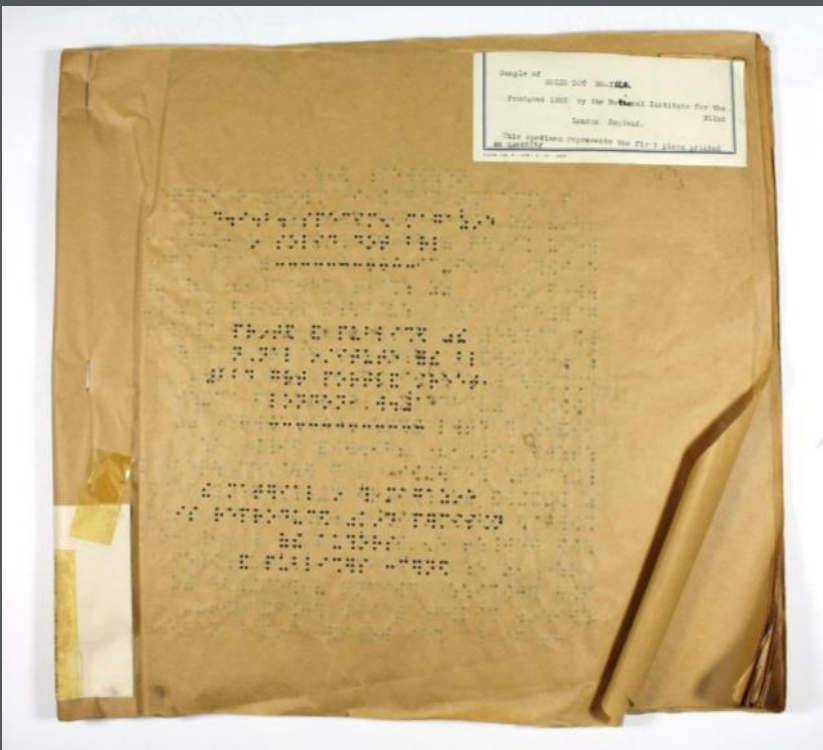


Geography



Sample of
SOLID DOT BRAILLE
Produced 1983 by the National Institute for the
Deaf and Blind
This specimen represents the Braille code printed
on 10/10/83

Solid Dot Braille (the dots come off)



Pages so thick they don't bend!



Thermoform and other plastics



Digitization and Outreach

Perkins School for the Blind Archive > Collections



Writing Systems for the Blind Used by Helen Keller

[Edit mosaic for this collection](#)

Helen Keller was educated at a time when many competing systems for reading and writing for the blind were being used, invented, reinvented, and eventually standardized. These systems included embossed Roman alphabets, namely Boston Line Type, dot systems including English Braille, American Braille, and New York Point, and a system that utilized abstracted Roman letter forms called Moon Type. Keller was born in 1880 and it wasn't until 1918 that Standard Braille was adopted as the official system in the United States. Within that time, Keller became the first person who was deafblind to earn a Bachelor's degree, and she had to read fluently in all of these systems for her studies.

The difficulty created by these competing systems cannot be understated. In a letter to William Wade written in 1901, Keller remarks: "There is nothing more absurd, I think, than to have five or six different prints for the blind..." (from her book *The Story of My Life*, 1905). The



Boston Line Type

66 photos | [Edit](#)



Moon Type

22 photos | [Edit](#)



New York Point

37 photos | [Edit](#)



English Braille

55 photos | [Edit](#)



American Braille

55 photos | [Edit](#)



Opinions of Blind Teachers...

5 photos | [Edit](#)

Before the adoption of standard braille:

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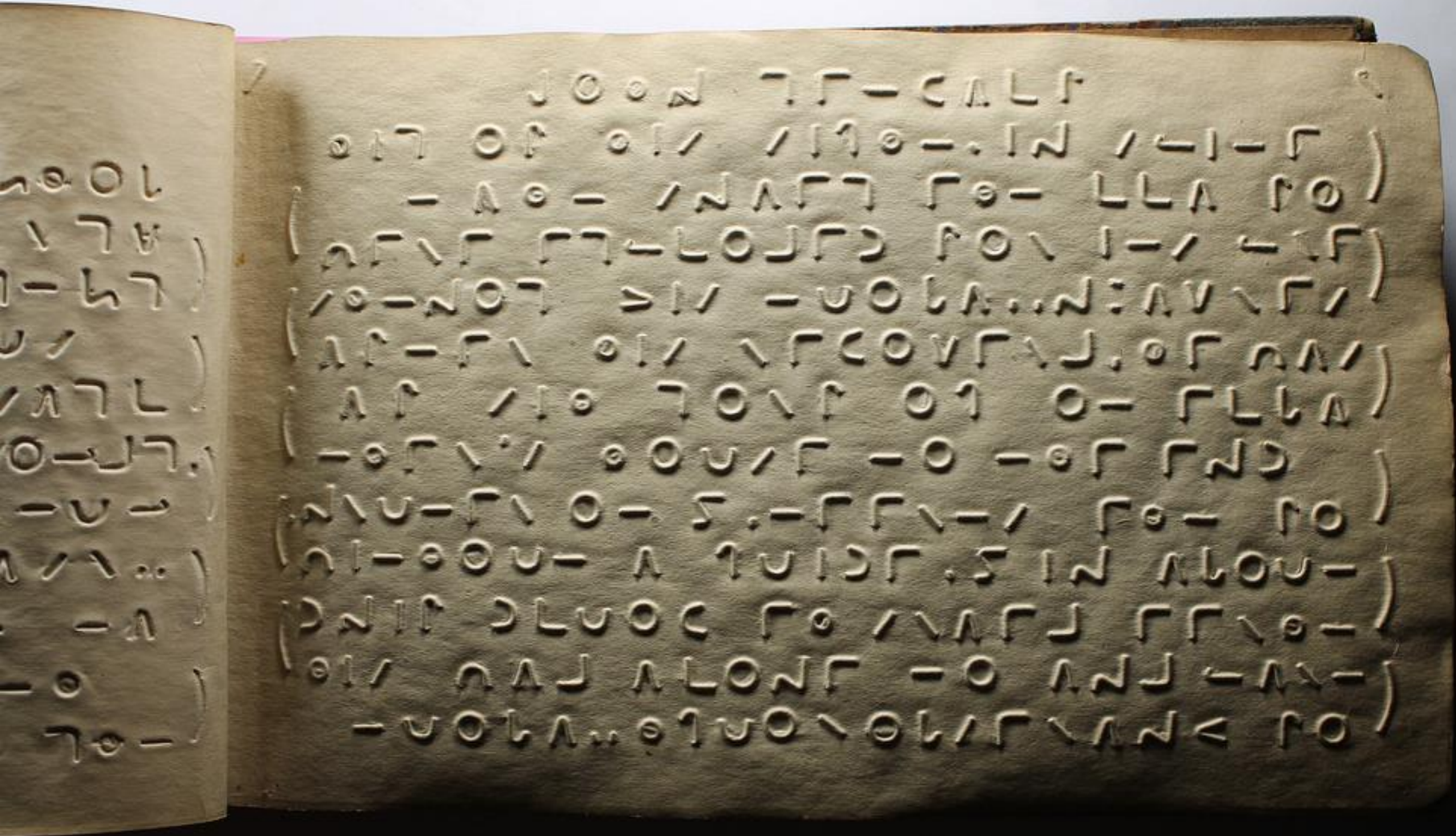
The seminal work on the history of reading systems for the blind in the United States, tellingly titled *The War of the Dots*, introduces the subject with the following quote:

“The conflict was acrimonious in the extreme. The bitterness can hardly be imagined” -Dr. Olin H. Burritt, Principal, Overbrook School for the Blind.

Virtual Bookshelf



Sample pages



Moon Type, 1840

www.PerkinsArchives.org



Questions?