

Brown, Sally Math Exercise Book

Sally Brown Math Exercise Book

1786-1787

Title Statement

Brown, Sally Math Exercise BookSally Brown Math Exercise Book finding aid MSS 16911

Author: Joseph Azizi, Archivist; Justice Menzel, Archival Intern

Publication Statement

Publisher: Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library
P.O. Box 400110
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22904-4110
URL: <https://small.library.virginia.edu/>

7/22/2025

This record is made available under an Universal 1.0 Public Domain Dedication Creative Commons license.

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2026-03-11 11:01:54 +0000.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MSS 16911

Unit ID

[Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

/repositories/3/resources/1797

Unit Date

1786-1787

Mixed Materials

BW 60 (box)

Container

1 (folder)

Language

English

Extent

0.04 Cubic Feet 1 volume in 1 folder

Condition Description

Fair. Brittle pages. Handle with care.

Repository

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research use.

Conditions Governing Use

The Library believes that all or nearly all material in this collection is likely to be in the public domain, free of copyright restrictions. Visit our Permissions and Publishing page (<https://www.library.virginia.edu/special-collections/services/publishing>) for more information about use of Special Collections materials. The library can provide copyright information upon request, but users are responsible for making their own determination about lawful use of collections materials.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased with the Robert and Virginia Tunstall Trust Fund, 2023/2024. Acquired by Krystal Appiah, 18 July 2023.

Preferred Citation

MSS 16911, Sally Brown Math Exercise Book, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia

Biographical / Historical

Sally Brown attended a schoolhouse or Dame School presumably located in either Philadelphia or New York City between 1786 and 1787. While attending, she developed an Exercise or Cypher Book, which accumulated her mathematics work throughout the academic year. Details of Sally Brown's life, along with that of her instructor, before and after the creation of the Exercise Book are not currently known.

Although the circumstances of Sally Brown's education are unclear, it is possible that she was preparing for skills relevant to the commercial world of the time. The Exercise Book's emphasis on the practical uses of mathematics, like measuring alcohol, silver, and grain, demonstrates an essential knowledge base young people needed to participate in the mercantile economies of early American cities.

Reverend Thomas Dilworth's *The Schoolmaster's Assistant*, which Brown's instructor used to create word problems and explain mathematical processes in her Exercise Book, was among the most popular teaching texts in America from its first American printing in 1769 until around 1850. As Dilworth's book was British in origin, many of his word problems, along with topics of measurement and currency, relied on British systems such as the Pound Sterling, Troy Weight, Avoirdupois Weight, and Winchester Measure. In 1786 and 1787, America had begun legislation that would culminate in the minting of a central currency, but coins would not come to market until at least 1792, leaving Americans to use predominantly foreign ones such as the Pound Sterling, Spanish Dollar, and French Livre.

In 18th century America, formal education for girls was relatively rare outside of upper-class families, where instruction predominantly covered subjects like philosophy, foreign languages, and household management. Larger towns often had schoolhouses with separate classrooms or designated hours of instruction for female students. However, Dame schools—primary education institutions taught by older women or retired soldiers in the instructor's home—were among the only options available to middle-class boys and girls to learn basic skills like arithmetic and spelling.

The paper cover wrapper's watermark, a Dutch emblem with the words *Pro Patria*, a lion, and the "Maid of Dort," indicates that the exercise book's paper may have been imported or based on Dutch designs. *Pro Patria*, which translates to "For the Fatherland" in Latin, frequently appeared alongside the "Maid of Dort," a national symbol connected to Dordrecht, the oldest city in Holland. Some American paper mills reproduced the Dutch *Pro Patria* imprint after the American Revolutionary War, exemplified by letter paper produced at a mill in Richmond, Virginia, and used by Thomas Jefferson.

Resource List:

Barrett, Timothy. "Early European Papers: Contemporary Conservation and Craft Use." *The Book and Paper Group Annual* 16 (1997). Accessed July 15, 2025.
<https://cool.culturalheritage.org/coolaic/sg/bpg/annual/v16/bp16-13.html>.

Dilworth, Thomas. (1783). *The Schoolmasters Assistant: Being a Compendium of Arithmetic, Both Practical and Theoretical. In Five Parts ... To Which Is Prefixed, an Essay On the Education of Youth*. London: Printed and sold by R. and H. Causton.

Harris, Emily Anne. (2023, March). *A quiet revolution: Exploring eighteenth-century women's education through Sally Franklin and Polly Stevenson*. Benjamin Franklin House. Accessed July 10, 2025.
<https://benjaminfranklinhouse.org/a-quiet-revolution-exploring-eighteenth-century-womens-education-through-sally-franklin-and-polly-stevenson/>.

"Gravell Watermark Archive Record #2273." Memory of Paper, Bernstein Consortium. Accessed July 15, 2025. <https://memoryofpaper.eu/gravell/record.php?action=GET&RECID=2273>.

Karpinski, Louis Charles, & Shenton, Walter Francis. (1940). Bibliography of mathematical works printed in America through 1850. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

"Listings – Watermark and Countermark Library." National Gallery of Australia. Accessed July 15, 2025. <https://nga.gov.au/art-artists/conservation/whistlers-watermarks/listings-watermark-and-countermark-library/>.

Madigan, Jennifer C. (2009). The education of women and girls in the United States: A historical perspective. *Advances in Gender and Education*, 1, 11-13.

Palmer, Amy Susan. (2017). If Not for Her Sex: The Mysterious Education of American Women, 1750-1850 (Master's thesis). University of Minnesota.

"Patterns in Paper: An Introduction to Watermarks Found within Record Office Collections." NYCRO Blog, March 14, 2023. <https://nycroblog.com/2023/03/14/patterns-in-paper-an-introduction-to-watermarks-found-within-record-office-collections/>.

The Artistry of Learning Math: The Ellerton & Clements Cyphering-Book Collection. (2022, April). Manuscripts, Library of Congress Blogs. Accessed July 10, 2025. <https://blogs.loc.gov/manuscripts/2022/04/the-artistry-of-learning-math-the-ellerton-clements-cyphering-book-collection/>.

U.S. Currency Education Program. "History of U.S. Currency." U.S. Currency Education Program. Accessed July 15, 2025. <https://www.uscurrency.gov/history>.

Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library. (n.d.). Exercise and cyphering books. Digital Collections. Accessed July 10, 2025. https://digitalcollections.winterthur.org/collections/exercise-and-cyphering-books?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson Papers. Library of Congress, 1780. Box 3, #1198 V5-10.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains one Exercise or Cypher Book created by Sally Brown for a classroom environment in the United States of America between 1786 and 1787. It demonstrates basic mathematical and measurement disciplines specifically geared toward a future of work in a mercantile economy. Various 18th century mathematical procedures and some proofs are showcased throughout the Exercise Book.

Exercise Books were common tools for instruction in the 18th and early 19th centuries. They served as workbooks and personal mathematical records, typically showcasing the student's penmanship and understanding of arithmetic. Exercise Books were often kept into adulthood as references for everyday tasks requiring mathematics, spelling, or other subjects, especially for those without access to personal libraries.

Brown's instructor, who is not named in the document, developed instruction and mathematical problems for the Exercise Book that were copied largely from Reverend Thomas Dilworth's "The Schoolmaster's Assistant," though some are their original creation. For example, word problems engaging the student to measure how many buckles could be made of an amount of silver do not appear in Dilworth's original text. On the other hand, the subtraction problem, "King Charles was beheaded in the year 1648. How many years is it since?", was paraphrased from his work.

Its topic headings and descriptions are copied in order directly from Dilworth, and include Compound Addition, Money, Apothecary Weight, Avoirdupois Weight, Apothecaries Weight, Long Measure, Cloth Measure, Land Measure, Liquid Measure, Wine Measure, Winchester Measure, Dry Measure, as well as Subtraction, Multiplication, Division, Reduction, and the Single Rule of Three Direct, among others.

A section on the "Exchange of Mony" indicates that the Exercise Book was created in either New York or Philadelphia. The Exercise Book specifically illustrates problems defining exchange rates between "Lawful Money," "York Currency," "Sterling," "New York Money," and "Philadelphia Mony." A Dutch-style watermark on the back leaf of the cover wrapper suggests that its paper had been either imported or molded after European examples.

Sally Brown's name and signature appear three times in the item, though only one personal annotation was made; beside a division proof she writes, "...it proves I have not time to get a damn proof[.] I mean that."

Resource List:

Dilworth, Thomas. (1783). *The Schoolmasters Assistant: Being a Compendium of Arithmetic, Both Practical and Theoretical. In Five Parts ... To Which Is Prefixed, an Essay On the Education of Youth*. London: Printed and sold by R. and H. Causton.

"Gravell Watermark Archive Record #2273." *Memory of Paper, Bernstein Consortium*. Accessed July 15, 2025. <https://memoryofpaper.eu/gravell/record.php?action=GET&RECID=2273>.

Keywords

Women -- Education

Mathematics

Arithmetic -- History -- 18th century

Units of measurement

handbooks