Tales abound of the colorful techniques Jonathan Edwards supposedly employed to capture and preserve his thoughts. Upon returning home from riding over the countryside or walking in the fields for recreation, he had to be unpinned; that is, scraps of paper (either brief notes or mere mnemonic blank slips significant for their position only) had to be removed from sleeve and skirt before his coat could be taken away and hung up. It is also said that at night he kept candle, pen, and paper on a table near his bed so that he might record thoughts that came to him during the night on pieces of paper he then pinned to the bed hangings to be retrieved in the morning.[1] It is certain that his voluminous manuscripts contained additions pinned to them—at least until officious librarians removed the rusted pins—though most of these additions were amplifications rather than nuggets of thought composed in field or bed. Moreover, he never entered the pulpit without a manuscript sermon, even in his later years when he increasingly outlined routine portions of his ordinary sermons.

Whether or not the details of the more colorful anecdotes can be confirmed, the picture of Edwards as a creature of ink and paper is accurate. The only biographer who knew and worked intimately with Edwards, New Divinity minister and reformer Samuel Hopkins, confirms that his "Mentor" carried ink and pen with him on his rural rides "to note any Thought that should be suggested, which he chose to retain and pursue, as what promised some Light on any important Subject," though Hopkins does not hint at the way Edwards preserved the notes.[2] Edwards's creative process is most succinctly characterized in another passage from Hopkins's memoir, which asserts that Edwards actually *thought* "with his Pen in his Hand."[3] Edwards himself said so at the end of his career in his response to an invitation from the trustees of the college at Princeton to become its president:

> My method of study, from my first beginning the work of the ministry, has been very much by writing; applying myself in this way, to improve every important hint; pursuing the clue to my utmost, when anything in reading, meditation or conversation, has been suggested to my mind, that seemed to promise light in any weighty point. Thus penning what appeared to me my best thoughts, on innumerable subjects for my own benefit. The longer I prosecuted my studies in this method, the more habitual it became, and the more pleasant and profitable I found it. The further I traveled in this way, the more and wider the field opened, which has occasioned my laying out many things, in my mind, to do in this manner.[4]

Pursuing a life of the mind in this way obviously required a setting more friendly to ink and

---

[1] S[ereno] E. Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards* (New York, 1830), 111; William Edwards Park, "Edwardean," Jonathan Edwards Papers, Gen. Mss. 151, fol. 1668, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

[2] [Samuel Hopkins], *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College at New-Jersey* . . . (Boston, 1765), 40 ("to note"). On "Mentor," which is what Edwards's disciples called him behind his back (from Archbishop of Cambrai François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque* [*The Adventures of Telemachus*], first published in 1699), see for example Hopkins to Joseph Bellamy, Jan. 19, 1758, letter C141a, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online* (*WJEO*), vol. 32, http://edwards.yale.edu/research/browse.

[3] [Hopkins], *Life and Character*, 41 (quotation).

[4] Jonathan Edwards to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, Oct. 19, 1757, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 725–30 (quotation, 726–27).

William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 69, no. 4, October 2012
http://jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.69.4.0683

paper than open fields and bedrooms, and thus it is hardly surprising to read Hopkins's attestation that Edwards had a study and that, when other duties permitted, he would spend up to thirteen hours a day in it.[5]

Focusing on pieces of furniture in Edwards's study, this exhibit attempts to reconstruct the evolution of the study in which he spent so much time, particularly its changing physical makeup and contents. In turn, each object is examined for the intellectual activity that involved it: Edwards's study habits, the processes by which he worked, and other outward aspects of his mental world. The reader will have an opportunity to peer into Edwards's private spaces in order to understand how the physical components and organization of his study were a product of how he sought to achieve maximum efficiency and order in his compositional and authorial activities.

The objects in his study, in conjunction with other material factors and public events in Edwards's life, tell a story nearly archetypal for its time and place: a story of an intellectually ambitious youth from the colonies who dreamed of literary fame in London, who initially realized those ambitions for international notoriety by defining a pastorate distinguished by religious revivals at Northampton, Massachusetts, and then by becoming the Sage of Stockbridge, arguably one of the greatest American philosophers. In tracing the material dimensions of his creative process, from sermon to sermon-series to treatise, one sees Edwards's gradually expanding view of his audience, from the perspective of a parish minister to that of a participant in the transatlantic republic of letters, as he became a major intellectual force for a pan-Protestant community. Taken as a case study, Edwards's endeavor embodies and documents the turbulent period of impassioned speech and polemical prose that encompassed both the Great Awakening and the American Revolution, a time when other figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson designed new pieces of furniture for their studies as well as a new nation for their people, a time when national religious leaders preached in fields to mobs of listeners and national political leaders recommended setting bonfires and shooting off fireworks to confirm and celebrate the fledgling nation. It was a period when even the greatest figures believed small domestic arrangements worthy of their creative effort, since all enterprise was cottage initiated though it might eventually become international in scope. For intellectuals and aspiring authors, especially, the provinces of America were cultural fields in need of clearing and settlement, places where towers of learning and expression might someday arise, though only after cultural tools and materials from distant centers were adapted to local needs.[6]

---

[5] [Hopkins], *Life and Character*, 40. Although there is no extant reference to Edwards calling the room his "study," the characteristically precise Hopkins does use that term, so it is likely that that was Edwards's usage (ibid., 40, 43, 50). *Study*, a place for books, is a word that goes back to the time of Geoffrey Chaucer and was coming into common usage by the mid-eighteenth century. In Renaissance and early modern European culture, this term, along with *cabinet*, identified a private room, often off a bedroom, in which a person kept books and other curiosities. Edwards also used *closet* in his sermons to refer to his parishioners' places for secret prayer, Bible reading, and the like. *Closet* had specific religious connotations as a place not only of study but of devotion and meditation; thus the room was a place that combined intellectual and spiritual work. On the writing closet as an architectural feature of early eighteenth-century homes in British North America, see Robert Blair St. George, "Reading Spaces in Eighteenth-Century New England," in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700–1830*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven, Conn., 2006), 81–105; Bernard L. Hermann, "On Being German in British America: The Materiality of Identity Aesthetics," (unpublished paper, 2010), 17–18.

[6] On the cover of his notebook titled "Natural Philosophy," Edwards wrote in shorthand a series of rules on style, including the following: "Before I venture to publish in London, to make some experiment in my own country; to play at small games first, that I may gain some experience in writing. First to write letters to some in England, and to try

William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 69, no. 4, October 2012
http://jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.69.4.0683

At least since the time of the Renaissance humanists, a scholar's study—as opposed to a library or other social room—has tended to take on the character of its owner in profound and sometimes picturesque ways, and if the owner virtually lives in the study one might expect it to be even more of an embodiment of the person, a material correlative of personal tastes, habits and foibles. Hopkins, having led his reader, as it were, to the study door of his mentor, chooses not to gossip about the interior. No other accounts describe how Edwards worked, but the surviving study materials themselves offer many clues. Happily, a significant body of Edwards's manuscripts survives, and what seem to have been the key pieces of his study furniture are still extant, though dispersed. Though his beloved books have been yet more widely dispersed, an estate inventory, his personal "'Catalogue' of Reading" (a list of titles he had read or wanted to read), and references in his manuscript and published writings give specific evidence about the size and composition of his working library.[7]

Edwards's slips of paper and other brief notes were soon copied into larger papers for safekeeping and study. At first he seems to have had little notion of the vast proportions his writing would assume over time, thus in 1722 he began collecting miscellaneous theological notations in a series of loose, folded folio sheets. Eventually he accumulated enough to bind them into a homemade, paperbound notebook. Still, when he decided to assign identifying tags to his notations, he simply used the alphabet, as if he intended to write twenty-six or fewer entries. Only after he had exhausted the first system and a second system organized by a double alphabet did he start using numbers. The last proved to be the best strategy, inasmuch as his primary series of theological entries, the "Miscellanies," eventually grew to more than fourteen hundred entries, many of them substantial essays and some virtual books, in nine bound volumes. Significantly, the last volume contains a large amount of blank paper—greater than that left at the back of any of the previous volumes—suggesting that Edwards's scholarly enterprise remained vigorous right up to the point of his sudden death in 1758.[8]

The "Miscellanies" constituted the spine of Edwards's manuscript workbook corpus, but other specialized notebooks followed in quick succession. More limited projects also had their own books of notes, some substantial. Edwards had begun preaching in 1720, writing out his sermons fully for many years, and by his death he had accumulated more than twelve hundred small, stitched sermon booklets that he also used as repositories of intellectual substance. His corpus of working

---

my [hand at] lesser matters before I venture in great." See "Natural Philosophy" cover-leaf memoranda, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 6, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven, Conn., 1980), 192–95 (quotation, 194). See also *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 10, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 180–85 (quotation, 185). Prominent biographies include Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York, 1949); George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, Conn., 2003); Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (New York, 2005).

[7] Virtually the entire extant manuscript corpus can be found in the Jonathan Edwards Papers, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, and in the Jonathan Edwards Manuscripts, Franklin Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Mass.

[8] The "Miscellanies" are printed in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500)*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, Conn., 1994); *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. 501–832)*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, Conn., 2000); *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *"The Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. 833–1152)*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven, Conn., 2002); *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 23, *"The Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. 1153–1360)*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, Conn., 2004); and *WJEO*, vol. 30.

William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 69, no. 4, October 2012
http://jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.69.4.0683

papers became so substantial that he had to prepare indexes and tables of various sorts; moreover, he created a few notebooks just to regulate his studies: a "Catalogue" of books to read, notebooks of ideas for sermons, and more than one book listing concepts and areas of intellectual controversy to be investigated.[9]

This vast corpus of notes and papers, not to mention a growing epistolary intercourse, required considerable discipline on the part of anyone who would exploit its full potential. Edwards's "Diary" and his personal "Resolutions" attest to his pursuit of rigorous efficiency in all his activities, and various notes in his working papers confirm that this rigorous discipline was extended to all aspects of his life in the study. By the time of his death, Edwards's Stockbridge study had evolved into a center of indomitable productivity as he conducted an intense epistolary political campaign on behalf of his Indian mission, sustained a vigorous presence in the transatlantic republic of letters, and composed and published most of the works that have defined his reputation as a philosophical theologian. The study occupied a small part of a large and busy household on the frontier of the French and Indian wars. Behind fortified walls Edwards pursued abstruse speculations concerning the ultimate realities of the human condition; that is, until the call of duty drove him to depart for the College of New Jersey, and he was forced to leave his study behind until it could be packed up and moved the following summer.[10]

Edwards's death in March 1758, a few weeks after his arrival in Princeton, necessarily resulted in the death of his study as well. Fortunately, his manuscripts were properly valued by his wife and family, who secured their future as a coherent corpus more effectively than descendants often do.[11] The estate inventory enumerates furniture consisting of a "Desk and Book Case," a "Small Book Case," a "Book Table," and a "Writing Table," together valued in 1759 at a rather pitiful three pounds, twelve shillings.[12] As for books, the estate inventory lists 38 folios, 34 quartos, 99 octavos, 130 duodecimos, and 536 pamphlets. Twelve maps are also listed.[13] Apparently, these few items of

[9] A notebook containing Edwards's speculations on natural science actually preceded the "Miscellanies," though it remained comparatively small since he ceased making entries by 1727. See "Natural Philosophy" in *Works*, 6: 171–310. The most ambitious of these indexes and tables is his table to the "Miscellanies," which comprises a separate notebook; it is printed in *Works*, 13: 125–50. Individual, lengthy "Miscellanies" entries that warranted their own tables or indexes include nos. 1067 and 1068, in *WJEO*, vol. 30, and nos. 1349, 1350, and 1351, in *Works*, 23: 429–32, 459–61, 480–81. Thematic notebooks such as "Images of Divine Things" were also given subject and scriptural indexes. See *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 11, *Typological Writings*, ed. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance Jr., with David H. Watters (New Haven:, Conn., 1993), 136–42. For the "'Catalogue' of Reading," see *Works*, 26: 117–318; for sermon notebooks, see *WJEO*, vol. 36; and for theological agendas, see "Subjects of Inquiry," in *WJEO*, vol. 28.

[10] For Edwards's personal correspondence, see *Works*, vol. 16; *WJEO*, vol. 32. The latter also contains correspondence to and about Edwards. For Edwards's "Resolutions," see *Works*, 16: 753–59; for the "Diary," see ibid., 16: 759–89. Edwards's home in Northampton was "forted in" in August 1746 against French and Indian attacks immediately after the publication of *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, and his Stockbridge home was fortified and quartered with soldiers in the summer of 1754, while he was writing *Freedom of Will*.

[11] See for example the manuscript bequeathment of Mar. 27, 1767, in which Edwards's children assigned one of their number, Jonathan Jr., the role of guardian of their father's manuscripts, and the manuscript agreement of Oct. 7, 1890, arranging for the deposit of Edwards's manuscripts at Yale, signed by more than two dozen of his great-grandchildren from across the United States (Edwards Papers, Gen. Mss. 151, fols. 1666–67, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library).

[12] E[dwards] A[masa] P[ark], ed., "Jonathan Edwards's Last Will, and the Inventory of his Estate," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1876, 438—47, esp. 445–46 (quotations, 445).

[13] Ibid. The following reproduces Edwards's study furniture and library from the inventory, with the values

William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 69, no. 4, October 2012
http://jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.69.4.0683

furniture and the books of a fairly large library (for the time and place) provided the essential support for Edwards's remarkable writing life.

What we can learn from Edwards's study, and Edwards *in* his study, is that as a member of the clergy and its ancient tradition of Puritan intellectual leadership, he was not abandoning his role but rather seeking ways to shore up the authority of the Christian religion as he saw it and of the ministers who propagated it, even as the midcentury revivals, which he did so much to encourage, undermined both the message and the messengers. As he matured, and particularly once he became a cultural outlier at Stockbridge, he embraced writing as the way to remain a cultural arbiter and maintain his role as an intellectual and spiritual leader. What is more, his literary organization and output, as reflected in the design, fabrication, and use of his desk, tables, bookcases, and other pieces he assembled as his center of operations, enabled him to realize his youthful social aspiration of becoming a participant in the international exchange of scientific and religious thought and winning a place in the transatlantic republic of letters.

---

in pounds, shillings, and pence (ibid., 445–46):

Desk and Book Case	2	0	0
Small Book Case	1	0	0
Book Table		6	0
Writing Table		6	0
. . .			
Library			
Of Folios 38 Volls	26	3	0
Quartos 34 Volls	8	11	9
Octavos 99 V^{es}	26	16	6
Duodecimos 130 V^{es}	8	15	3
Books published by the Owner lately deceased, 25 V^{es}	4	16	7
Pamphlets 536	4	13	0
Manuscripts			
Folios 15 V^{es}			
Quartos 15 V^{es}	6	0	0
Sermons 1074 V^{es}			
Maps			
Four at 6s	1	4	0
Seven at 1s		7	0
One at 6s		6	0

"Edwardian relics" were commonly sought after in nineteenth-century New England. In 1833 the Reverend Dr. Thomas Robbins, founder of the Connecticut Historical Society, travelled to northwestern Connecticut, but "was not able to procure any of the study furniture of Pres. Edwards, as I hoped." The editor of Robbins's diary, writing in 1887, states in a note to this entry that he had "seen in Stockbridge Pres. Edwards's writing-desk, which is probably still there," referring most likely to the lazy Susan table. See Increase N. Tarbox, ed., *Diary of Thomas Robbins, D.D., 1796–1854* (Boston, 1887), 2: 319 n. 7 ("Edwardian relics" and "seen"), 2: 319 ("was not able").

William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 69, no. 4, October 2012
http://jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.69.4.0683