



The mystery of Beaumont Library's 400-year-old Bible

By Library Director Luren Dickinson

Winston Churchill famously coined the phrase “a riddle wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.”

It's a perfect description of a perplexing question facing our hometown library.

How did a four-hundred-year-old Bible from the time of the Pilgrims somehow end up in our Library's Local History collection?

Our own Library records don't say who gave us this most mysterious treasure.

Clues to the past

The tattered Good Book offers up few clues as you gently turn its brittle, yellowed pages. The ravages of time have destroyed the front cover and stripped away some original chapters from Genesis, but certain facts can be discerned from what remains of the Scriptures.

It's a Geneva Bible published in 1610, one of the most historically significant translations of the Bible into English, named for the city where it was first published. It became the favorite of 16th and 17th century Protestants.

Most notably, when the Pilgrims landed in the New World in 1620, they carried Geneva Bibles rather than the King James Version of the Bible.

The settlers rejected the King James Bible and the idea of state-sponsored religion imposed by the government and the Church of England. The King James Bible was published in England nearly a decade before the Pilgrims arrived in America.



Photo by Alexandra Mathews-Woodcock

In the modern era, the Geneva Bible is all but forgotten, even though 150 editions were published between 1560 and 1644.

Some “apocryphal” books of doubtful authenticity such as Maccabees and Esdras, which were written after the Old Testament but before the New Testament, are found in the Geneva Bible — unlike most Protestant Bibles published after 1650.

But a first edition Geneva Bible in good condition today is a very valuable commodity, worth about \$40,000.

Our Library’s literary treasure is probably worth far less because of its condition, perhaps only a few hundred dollars, unless individual pages were able to be sold at high prices.

Connection to The Pass

A pencil calculation in the back of the book subtracts the year “1610” from the year “1882” suggesting that the Bible may have come to the Pass area in the early 1880’s with the first settlers, thirty years before Beaumont became a city!

In 1883, just a year *after* the calculation in the Bible, pioneer settler Reznor Perry Stewart started homesteading and eventually bought 2,200-acres for a thriving ranch.

Another even older inscription in the Geneva Bible looks to be written with quill and ink, mentioning a “Mrs. Mitchell” who seems to have “Arrived. . .on ye New Quay.” England and Wales both have towns with that place name.

Other words either can’t be deciphered or are missing along with parts of the page.

If you have any information about how this Bible ended up in our hometown library, please contact the Beaumont Library, 125 E. Eighth St., Beaumont, CA, 92223. You can phone us at 951-845-1357 or use our info@bld.lib.ca.us address.