

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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American Family Life of the 18TH and 19TH Centuries

Explored in New Exhibit of Household Bibles at MOBIA

NEW YORK October 20, 2011—The Museum of Biblical Art presents *The Book of Life: Family Bibles in America*, a selection of 21 volumes and salesman’s samplers from the Rare Bible Collection @ MOBIA, many of them personalized with family trees, photographs and treasured mementoes. On view from October 28, 2011 to January 14, 2012, this intimate glimpse into family life in the 18th and 19th centuries chronicles the rising popularity of “the Family Bible,” a versatile object that first began appearing in the 1790s and rapidly became a bestselling “go to” reference guide purchased by tens of thousands of consumers.

The Book of Life evokes an era when armies of ambitious door-to-door salesmen roamed across rural regions to persuade customers to purchase high quality editions of the Bible. Able to compete with the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which first appeared in 1788, these new Bibles were highly marketable books, often purchased for display in the parlor of American homes and featuring such “extras” as a mini-encyclopedia, dictionary and illustrations, alongside pages for family records and portraits. Taking their cue from actual families – who

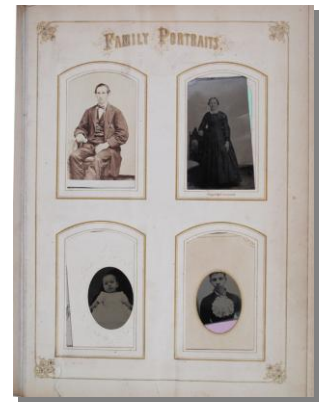


Parallel Bible, 1885

traditionally inscribed marriages, births and deaths on their Bibles’ blank leaves – publishers began providing special editions that encouraged Americans to create their own personalized compendiums. Preserved through centuries, many of these volumes functioned as a living diary and still contain the locks of hair, flowers, dried leaves, embroideries, receipts, and keepsakes their owners kept pressed between the pages.

“We are excited to be able to display what are really some very personal Bibles,” said curator Liana Lupas. “Every handwritten note, pressed flower, and faded daguerreotype photo paints a vivid yet poignant picture of a Christian family’s daily life. Collectively, these volumes are a remarkable cache of treasures from our nation’s early history.”

The innovative inclusion of a family photo album was advertised as “one of the most valuable features ever bound in Family Bibles.” In the 1880s, long before the advent of digital cameras and social media, Americans were already captivated by the idea of documenting themselves and chronicling their lives. Photography was then a novel technology, embraced by the public starting in the mid-19th century. The last decades of the 1800s marked the “golden age” of the Family Bible, which began declining dramatically



Bible with Apocrypha, 1868

by the early 20th century.

The Bibles on view are drawn from the Rare Bible Collection @ MOBIA, a selection of more than 2,200 printed Bibles, including some of the earliest printed editions, and approximately 15 manuscripts. On long-term loan from American Bible Society, it is one of the most comprehensive collections of its kind which documents the history of the printed Bible throughout the ages.

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Exhibition and preservation of the Rare Bible Collection @ MOBIA are made possible, in part, by the generous support of the American Bible Society.

About American Bible Society:

Headquartered in New York City, the mission of the 195-year-old [American Bible Society](http://AmericanBible.org) is to make the Bible available to every person in a language and format each can understand and afford, so that all people may experience its life-changing message. The American Bible Society started collecting Scriptures in 1817, only one year after its founding. Through gifts and an ambitious acquisitions policy, the Library grew throughout the 19th century. Today, the collection includes more than 45,000 volumes and constitutes one of the world's largest collections of printed Bibles. Learn more: AmericanBible.org.

About Museum of Biblical Art:

Located near Lincoln Center at 1865 Broadway at 61st Street, MOBIA presents critically acclaimed art exhibitions while offering an array of affordable arts enrichment programs to visitors of all ages. MOBIA celebrates and interprets art related to the Bible and its cultural legacy in Jewish and Christian traditions through exhibitions, education and scholarship. Past exhibitions have featured highlights from the Rare Bible Collection @ MOBIA and the history of the Bible in the New World. Upcoming exhibitions include *Finding Comfort in Difficult Times: A Selection of Soldiers' Bibles*. Admission to MOBIA's exhibitions is free for members and children under 12 and pay-what-you-wish for adults, with a suggested admission of \$7; Sundays are always free. Museum hours are: Tue., Wed, Fri., Sat., Sun.: 10:00 AM-6:00 PM; Thurs: 10:00 AM-8:00 PM; Mon: Closed. Visit www.mobia.org for more information on current exhibits and public programs.