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Cover of the unauthorized 1885 Seaside Library edition of *Alice* that belonged to Lewis Carroll.

Alice's Adventures in America

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This year marks the 150th anniversary of the U.S. publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll's tale of a little girl who falls through a rabbit hole into a world of strange and fantastic characters. The book's publishing and copyright history is nearly as colorful as the story itself.

Alice originated from an impromptu tale Carroll—the pen name of English author Charles Lutwidge Dodgson—told to three children on a boating trip on the River Thames in July 1862. One of the children, Alice Liddell, urged him to write it out for her.

On June 30, 1865, Carroll published 2,000 copies of an enlarged version of the story in London under the imprint of Macmillan and Company. The book featured 42 original illustrations by John Tenniel. Only weeks later, Carroll withdrew the printing from the English market, persuaded by Tenniel, who protested its “disgraceful” quality. Macmillan republished the book in 1866 using a different printer.

The withdrawal of the first edition set Carroll back financially, as he had paid for its printing. To recoup his loss, he sold the unbound rejected sheets of the canceled edition to D. Appleton and Company of New York, which bound them with a new title page bearing its imprint and published the book in 1866. The first U.S. edition is thus the suppressed first English edition.

Carroll's disdain for the American market, combined with his financial interests, probably account for his willingness to distribute what he saw as a shoddy printing in the United States, write Zoe Jacques and Eugene Giddens in their 2013 publishing history of *Alice*. They call the sale to Appleton a “rather impressive commercial venture,” considering that U.S. copyright law at the time did not protect the works of foreign nationals from unauthorized reproduction in the United States. In other words, instead of buying the rejected sheets from Carroll, Appleton could simply have reprinted a copy of the 1866 Macmillan edition once it was published.

Other U.S. publishers had no compunction against unauthorized reprinting. The first instance occurred in a magazine called *Merryman's Monthly*, which published *Alice* in two parts in January and February 1867. The reprinting included all but 21 of Tenniel's illustrations and, inexplicably, the final five paragraphs of the text.

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Among many subsequent unauthorized U.S. editions, the 1884 Seaside Library “pocket edition” published by George Munro stands out for possibly being the first paperback. At the time, Munro was one of the most prolific American publishers of cheap unauthorized reprints. Besides Carroll, the Seaside Library featured works of Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Elliott, Rudyard Kipling, and many other English and European authors.

Munro printed Seaside on cheap paper to keep costs low and assigned issue and volume numbers to works so they could be sent by mail at magazine rates. Issued almost daily during Seaside’s heyday, titles generally sold for between 10 and 25 cents; the 1884 Seaside *Alice* sold for 25 cents.

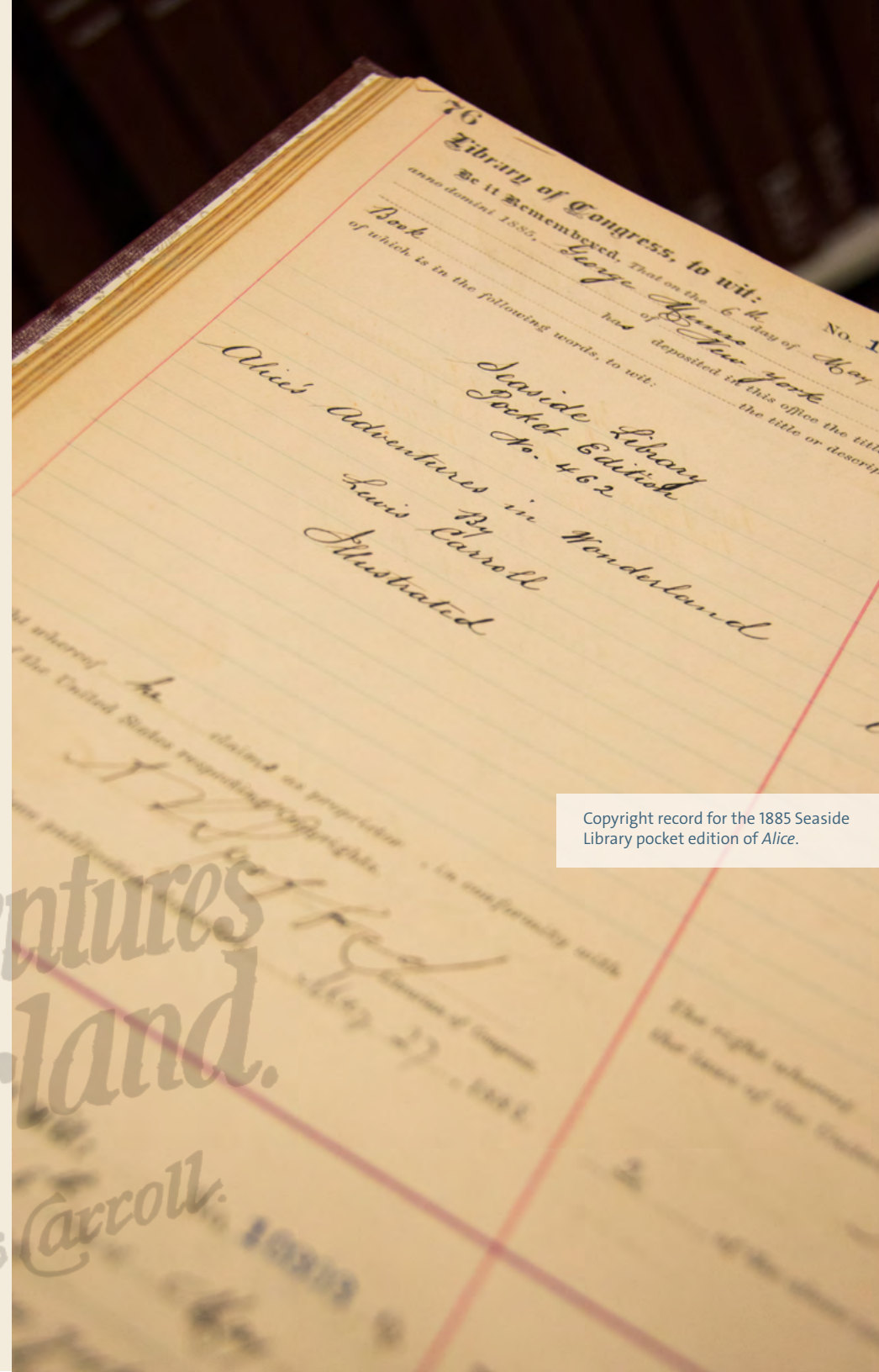
Interestingly, Munro applied to register Seaside titles by foreign authors for U.S. copyright protection. The Seaside Library Pocket Edition no. 462 of *Alice*, published in 1885, was assigned registration number 10301. This particular edition has the

distinction of having been collected by Carroll himself. Despite his dislike of the U.S. market, Carroll “stayed firmly abreast of the developments regarding his work in America,” write Jacques and Giddens.

The era of mass unauthorized reproduction in the United States of foreign fiction came to an end when the United States implemented the International Copyright Act of 1891. Often called the Chace Act, the law authorized U.S. protection of works by foreign nationals under certain conditions.

In the United Kingdom, the copyright to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* expired in 1907, and the work entered the public domain. Ever since, playwrights, filmmakers, authors, and entrepreneurs of all kinds have been inspired by the story of Alice, registering many of their works with the Copyright Office. A search under “Alice in Wonderland” in the Office’s online records, which date from 1978, yields 950 titles, including four registered this year. ©

*Alice’s Adventures
in Wonderland.
By Lewis Carroll.*



Copyright record for the 1885 Seaside Library pocket edition of *Alice*.