

Who's on First, That Is, Who IS First?

JUDITH NIERMAN

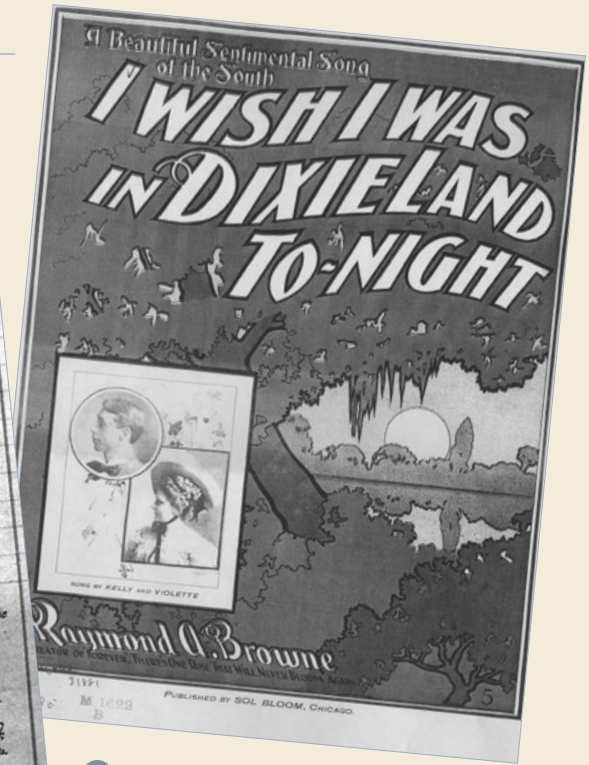
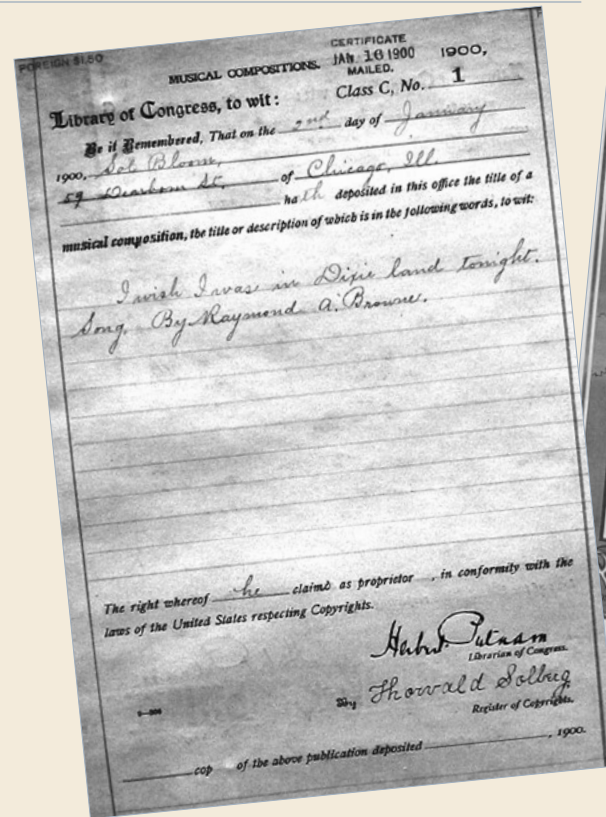
Being the first can be meaningful to some copyright claimants.

(1) Sol Bloom wanted and obtained the first copyright registration issued in the twentieth century. A self-made man with no formal schooling, Bloom (1890–1949) was a theater impresario, publisher, and real estate magnate, and he was elected 13 times to Congress from New York, becoming chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the *New York Times* on November 3, 1948. Bloom was well aware of the benefits of copyright registration. And as a showman and impresario, he knew how to get the attention of the public.

In late December 1899, he hired a team of men to stand in line day and night at the entrance to the Copyright Office, then located in the Jefferson Building, to ensure that he obtained the first copyright registration of the new century. On January 2, 1900, Bloom, who billed himself as a progressive publisher, took out ads stating, “In line with our usual policy of being first, we have secured copyright number one.” He did indeed obtain entry number C–1 in the music class then designated by the letter “C.” The copyright for **Bloom’s sheet music** “I Wish I Was in Dixie Land Tonight” by Raymond A. Browne was “the first work actually received and numbered on the first working day of this [twentieth] century,” reported **Copyright Notices**.

(2) Another copyright claimant who valued being first was Frank Evina, who retired as an information specialist. He obtained the first copyright registration of the third millennium with his Library of Congress Professional Association art show photograph “**Backstairs at the White House.**” His copyright registration was number VAu000481623 issued January 3, 2000.

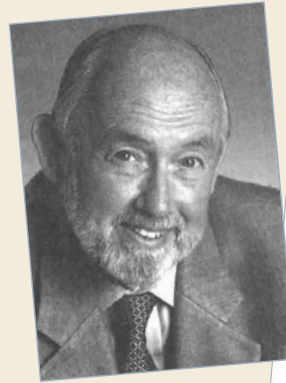
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(3) Yet another person who was keen to have a first was Professor Joseph Beard (1933–2007), who wanted the first copyright registered in the third century of copyright in America. Working with Evina, Beard achieved his goal with his “A Copyrighted Ode to Copyright,” which was assigned registration number TX0002836445. Beard paid his registration fee with check number 1790 from his personal checkbook. The check number equated to the year when Congress first enacted a copyright law.

Possessing a charismatic personality, **Beard was a law professor** at St. John’s University School of Law in New York. He served on the executive committee of the Copyright Society of the U.S.A. and expanded coverage of international issues in its journal, according to the *New York Times* (January 3, 2008). A copyright expert, editor, Naval officer, and electrical engineer, Beard was also a renowned Pickwickian. “Professor Beard was a cheerleader for the Copyright Office,” recalled Evina, who worked with him on numerous occasions. “He had his certificate framed.”



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(4) Copyright Notices recently published a shot of a Lucite paperweight containing a photo of the deposit for the very first copyright registration in the United States, *The Philadelphia Spelling Book*, registered on June 9, 1790, just days after the first copyright law was enacted on May 31, 1790. No one knows if John Barry, who registered the claim in the U.S. District Court of Pennsylvania, took pleasure in being first, but *Copyright Notices* cannot help but suspect that he had a wide grin on his face as he exited the courthouse. ©

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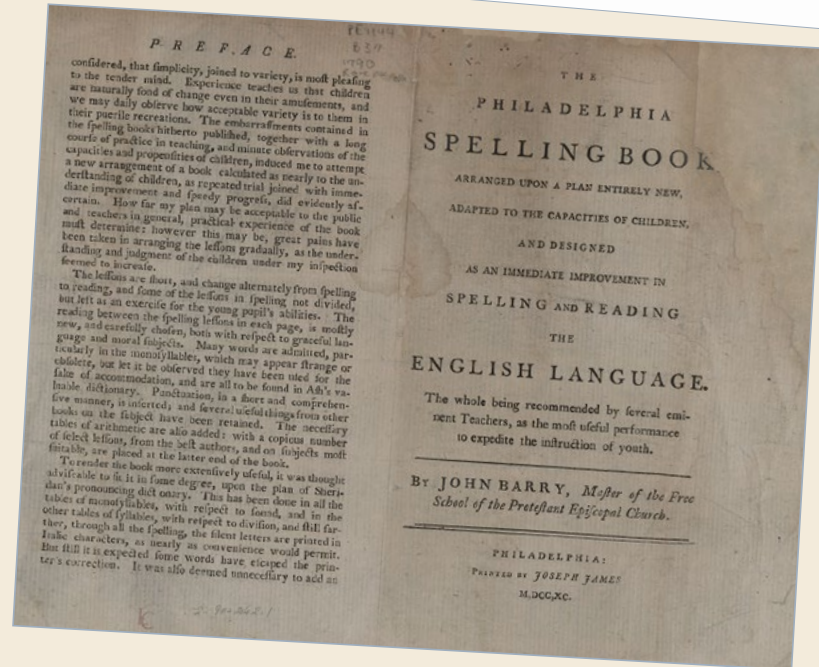
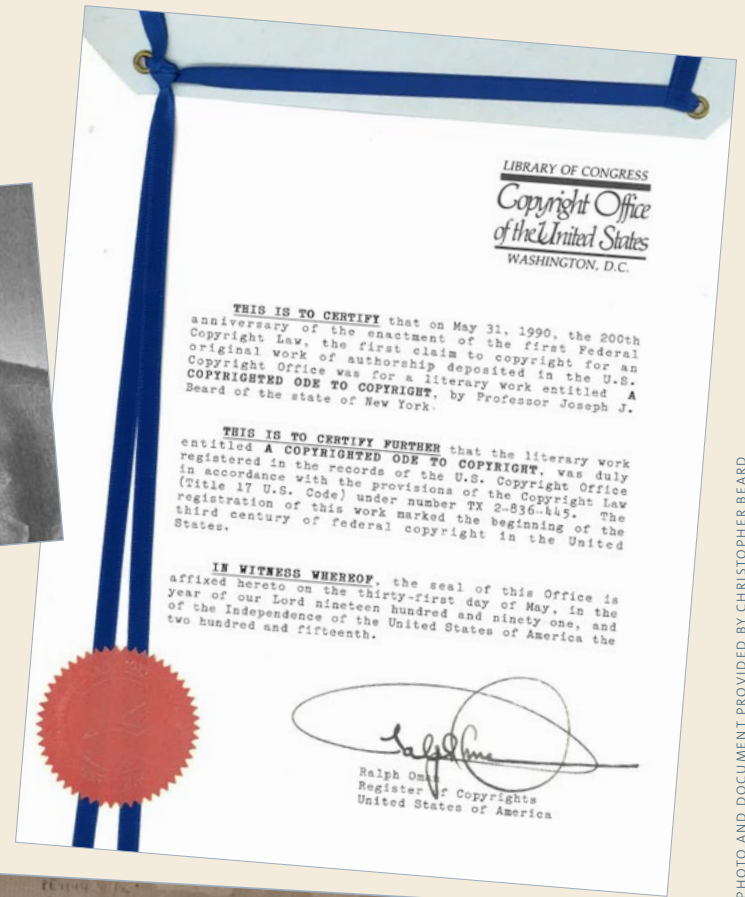


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