

Guest Curator



Guest Curator Dr. Phillip Shriver is President Emeritus of Miami University (from 1965 to 1981), and has degrees from Yale, Harvard, and Columbia, and honorary degrees from ten other universities. He taught at Kent State University for 18 years, serving as Professor of History and Dean of the College of Arts & Science, and continued to teach after coming to Miami as President from 1965-1981. Dr. Shriver lives in Oxford, Ohio, and the William Holmes McGuffey Museum is blessed by his continued support of our enterprise. Dr. Shriver selected the eight-sided desk of William Holmes McGuffey as his favorite thing in the Museum.

Eight-Sided Desk of William Holmes McGuffey



Currently, McGuffey's Desk is located in the library in the McGuffey Museum



McGuffey's Desk in Miami University's Library in Harrison Hall, ca 1910
(6F2n. 1 1)

Dr. Shriver writes:

"A National Historic Landmark, the McGuffey Museum on Spring Street in Oxford, Ohio, in the heart of the Miami University campus, contains a wealth of historic treasures. One of the principal of these is the eight-sided desk on which William Holmes McGuffey, called the "Schoolmaster to the Nation," prepared the first edition of the celebrated *McGuffey Readers* from 1834 to 1836. The most widely used school books in American History were initially prepared by McGuffey at the specially created desk crafted from cherry wood by a local carpenter at the behest of McGuffey.

On display at the home of William and Harriet Spining McGuffey, which is maintained today as a museum, the desk is mounted on a central pedestal which enabled McGuffey to sit in a chair and rotate the eight sides before him. Long before the technological developments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the rotating octagonal desk, with accompanying drawers and cubicles, enabled McGuffey to organize the materials needed for the individual stories and lessons embodied in his *Readers*.

Originally covered with a dark green cloth-like material, the top of the desk was recently recovered with a wool baize fabric consistent with its original appearance. Measuring 57 inches in diameter from side to side, the top of the desk is 23 inches from the floor, while the top of the wooden pedestal is 15 inches in diameter. Each of the octagonal sides is 22 inches wide at the outer edge.

For more than forty years I have visited the McGuffey home and each time my attention has been drawn to the eight-sided desk and the ingenuity it displays in enabling those working at it to organize their thoughts and materials without having to get up and walk about the room. Each time I have seen it I have thought to myself how remarkable an aid it must have been to the Schoolmaster to the Nation whose *Readers* are still in print in 2006, 170 years and more than 120 million copies after having first been prepared on that amazing octagonal desk!"

Object Information

Accession No. 1991.250, made of cherry, poplar, pine with felt top.
Created by Murell, A.M., Oxford, Ohio, ca. 1830.

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