

Quarto (283 by 285), letterpress title pasted to inside upper cover and 11 leaves of text, light toning, folding lithographed table, entitled “Analytical table of mechanical movements,” tipped to inside lower cover, original cloth, worn and rebacked, together with a separate double-sided volvelle (283 by 285mm) engraved by George G. Smith, mounted on heavy cardboard, containing “Fuller’s Time Telegraph” on one side and “Palmer’s Computing Scale” on the other, plus a separate broadsheet advertisement and list of subscribers for “Fuller’s Telegraph Computer, for Readily Solving Business Questions. An application of American Genius to a British Principle”

A VERY EARLY EXAMPLE OF THE WORD “COMPUTER” TO REFER TO A CALCULATING INSTRUMENT AND “AN APPLICATION OF AMERICAN GENIUS TO A BRITISH PRINCIPAL”

Fuller’s computing telegraph [cover title]. ... Telegraphic computer, a most wonderful and extraordinary instrument, by which business questions, of every possible variety, are instantly performed... [pasted to inside upper cover].

Author
FULLER, John Emory.

Publication date
1852

Publisher

Publication place
New York,

Physical description
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folding lithographed table, entitled “Analytical table of mechanical movements,” tipped to inside lower cover, original cloth, worn and rebacked, together with a separate double-sided volvelle (283 by 285mm) engraved by George G. Smith, mounted on heavy cardboard, containing “Fuller’s Time Telegraph” on one side and “Palmer’s Computing Scale” on the other, plus a separate broadsheet advertisement and list of subscribers for “Fuller’s Telegraph Computer, for Readily Solving Business Questions. An application of American Genius to a British Principle”

Dimensions

Notes
Fuller’s ‘telegraphic Computer’ represents a very early example of the word “computer” to refer to a calculating instrument (rather than a person of exceptional mathematical facility). Until the invention of electronic computers in 1945, the term “computer” usually referred to a person who compiled mathematical tables with or without mechanical assistance. Sometimes the term referred to “lightning calculators” who performed remarkably fast computations in their heads. During the first decade of electronic computing, the term was apparently used interchangeably for people and machines. By about 1960 the word was generally applied only to machines.

The invocation of telegraphy in the title refers to the notion of instant communication associated with telegraphy, which had recently captured the public imagination. The computer is more properly referred to by the name of its original inventor Aaron Palmer: ‘Palmer’s Computing Scale’ having been patented by him in 1843, and improved and produced in several versions by J.E. Fuller from 1847. This model is printed from the attractive and intricate original Palmer plate, with Fuller’s name and own patent added to the engraving, printed by George C. Smith, 186 Washington St., Boston. The reverse side, ‘Fuller’s time telegraph’, was patented in 1845. The invention was exhibited with some success at the great exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851, as referred to in the preliminary advertisement.

‘Palmer’s Computing Scale’, essentially an early and ingenious slide-rule, was used to calculate square measures, cubic measures, timber measures, grain measures, liquid measures and interest rates from 3 percent to 10 percent on a daily and monthly basis. The ‘time telegraph’ on the reverse was used to calculate time lapse in days or weeks between any two given dates.

Bibliography
Baxandall 1975, no. 147; Karpinski 1940, 471-72; Origins of Cyberspace 302.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 2159

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