

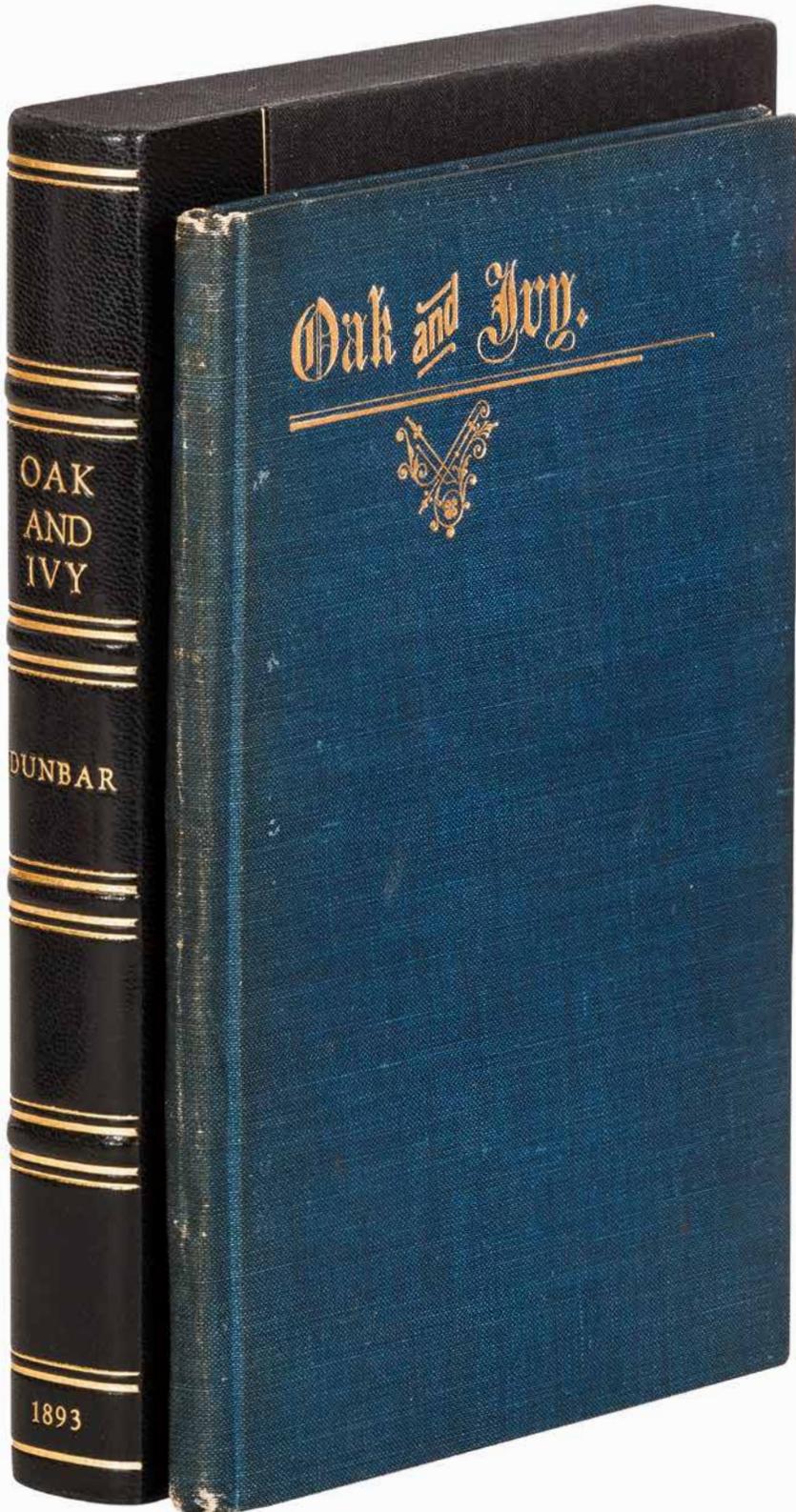
Dunbar's First Book, His Mother's Copy

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Oak and Ivy

Dayton, Ohio: Press of United Brethren Publishing House 1893

\$8500



First edition. Octavo. 62pp. Publisher's blue cloth, title in gilt on front. Light wear to cloth, binding shaken, paper toned, two leaves detached, about very good, the cloth is better than usual. In a custom chemise and quarter morocco slipcase titled in gilt.

An Association copy of the rare first edition of the first book by the young Paul Laurence Dunbar, presented by his mother to the Principal of The Preparatory High School for Colored Youth upon it being renamed Dunbar High School.

Publication of the reported 500 copies was financed by Dunbar, who was working as an elevator operator at the time (the occupation that inspired his poem *Sympathy* with the famous line: "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"). "Oak and Ivy (1893), a slender volume of fifty-six poems ... sold well, particularly after Dunbar, an excellent public speaker, read selections from the book before evening club and church meetings throughout Ohio and Indiana" (*ODNB*).

This copy signed ("Mrs. M. J. Dunbar") on the front free endpaper by the poet's mother, Matilda Jane Burton Dunbar, beneath an inscription (in another hand) reading: "Presented to Mr. & Mrs. Garnet C. Wilkinson on the occasion of the dedication of the Dunbar High School, January 15-19, 1917 by Mrs. Matilda J. Dunbar."

Matilda Dunbar (1845-1934) was born into slavery in Kentucky. She moved to Dayton, Ohio, after the Civil War and worked as a laundress. She married Joshua Dunbar, her second husband, in 1871, and they had two children, Paul and Elizabeth. Matilda, who had little formal education of her own, taught her son to read at an early age. Matilda lived with Paul in Washington, D.C. after his marriage to Alice Moore, and moved to Chicago with him after the couple's separation in 1902.

Mother and son settled in Dayton in 1904, where they lived together until Paul's death from tuberculosis in 1906. "Matilda Dunbar was probably the most important influence on her son's life. In late 1873, when Paul Dunbar was a year and a half old, Matilda and Joshua [the author's father] were separated, and Joshua went to live in the Old Soldiers' Home; in 1875, they were divorced. Paul was thus led to rely upon his mother utterly. From her and her friends he heard many stories of Kentucky plantation life. From her he learned to read. Many times he said that he believed his talent for literature derived from her ..." (The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader, p. 408).

The Preparatory High School for Colored Youth (later M Street High School) in Washington, D.C. was renamed for Dunbar in 1916. Garnet C. Wilkinson was Principal of the school and later the assistant superintendent in charge of the colored schools in Washington, D.C. The dedication ceremonies took place over five days; Matilda Dunbar was introduced to the students and faculty on the first day. *Blockson 101*, #54 ("His first two books of poetry, *Oak and Ivy* and *Majors and Minors* are rare and beyond the reach of most collectors of Afro-Americana").

Long a rare book, *Oak and Ivy* has been much more so over the past decade or two, and association copies are particularly so. [\[BTC#422920\]](#)

Presented to Mr. & Mrs.

Garnet C. Wilkenson

on the occasion of the

dedication of the
Dunbar High School

January 15-19-1917

By

Mrs. Matilda J. Dunbar.

Mrs. W. J. Dunbar

Oak and Ivy.

