Special Collections

The Special Collections of Western Michigan University contains heterogeneous materials, although one of the most important areas of the collection is medieval manuscripts and early printed books. The heterogeneity in part reflects the fact that the collection has not had a focus, but rather has consisted of items deposited or donated to the library over the years. The variety of pieces includes a clay cuneiform tablet written around 2000 B.C., three twelfth century manuscripts written on parchment, numerous twentieth century art books, and first editions of books by prominent authors.

Many of the items in the Special Collections are gifts from faculty, students and friends of the library. For example, a recent acquisition, The Handmade Papers of the World, is from Marie Combs, former curator of the Space Gallery in Knauss Hall, who is a paper maker and an artist in her own right. This gift is especially appropriate because the University has an excellent department of paper technology. We have another collection of handmade papers, which was also a gift to the University Libraries, from Richard Light.

Another special collection is the Jean E. Lowrie Collection, a gift of the former director of the Department of Librarianship. This fascinating resource contains books in different formats and materials. One book, for example, is written on long rectangular strips of wood with holes at each end of the wood. The book is held together by strings which are laced through holes in the wooden strips.

Former presidents of the University have also enriched the collection. President Waldo, the first president of the University, gave his collection of books on President Abraham Lincoln, and President Miller gave his copy of the play "The Witching Hour" to the library. This book is especially significant for Western Michigan University because the play was not only written by Arnold Johnson, a professor in the English Department, but the paper was also made in the art department, printed at the University, and then bound by Regina Berneis, a former member of the Department of Librarianship.

Books don't have to be expensive, old, or connected with the University to be valuable. Another collection, of German and English World War II books, came from a former Western Michigan University graduate, Lt. Cmdr. Edwin W. Polk, USN retired. Many of these books were published in Germany during World War II and thus are not readily available in the United States.

Some books in Special Collections are important for the contribution they make to learning. An outstanding example is a 1751 edition of Philosophia Botanica, by the great eighteenth-century botanist Caroli von Linne, or Linnaeus, as he is commonly called. This book established the systematic nomenclature for plants in the scientific world and was a gift from a former Western Michigan University chemistry teacher, Esther Woodruff, and her husband, Dr. Eugene H. Woodruff. The Woodruffs hoped that this gift to the library would be the nucleus of a section of rare scientific books displayed so that students could see examples of the work of great scientists of the past. Now, after almost thirty years, the library will have a special area where these rare and unusual books can be displayed.

Another scientific book which will be a joy to display is The Ornithology of Francis Willughby, printed in 1678. This book, a forerunner of Audubon, has wonderful prints of birds from all over the world.

With the remodeling and addition to Waldo Library, at Special Collections will finally have a vault to keep the books, a reading room where they can be consulted, and a Rare Books Room where they can be displayed. With this new facility, we hope that more gifts of rare and unusual books will be donated to the University Libraries.
The security of special collections is a difficult and sensitive matter. Difficult, because with all possible precautions taken, theft may still occur. Sensitive, because patrons may be annoyed or offended by the encumbrances placed upon them. The physical conditions are the ones we most often associate with good security measures, and they are certainly not to be minimized. Special construction, alarms, and motion detectors number among these.

However, many security issues may have more to do with policies and procedures than with the physical condition of the building. Most thefts are of a subtle nature: items are discovered missing long after the actual theft has occurred, what insurance adjustors call “mysterious disappearance.”

The Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America has categorized book thieves as (1) the kleptomaniac, suffering from a compulsion to steal books, (2) the thief who steals books for his own use or possession, (3) the thief who steals in anger and is likely to destroy materials, (4) the casual thief who steals when an opportunity presents itself, and (5) the thief who steals for profit.

Over the past thirty years there has been increasing activity in the last category. Rising prices of books—as with art works—has made this an attractive field. But to gain access to rare books is not an easy matter. Consequently indirect methods are often employed by the thief. It is sad to report that seventy-five per cent of the thefts are believed to be from within. Most of the remaining twenty-five per cent are the result of lax controls. Very rarely have there been forced entries.

There are four ways that we can strengthen internal security: (1) careful selection and observance of staff, (2) patron monitoring, (3) room monitoring, and (4) material protection.

When hiring staff a thorough background check should be made; bonding should be periodically emphasized and reviewed so there is no relaxing of controls, nor a succumbing to temptation.

Patron monitoring is a sensitive issue. Criticism from faculty and administrators who believe that monitoring is too restrictive is a frequent plight of curators. Restricted access seems to invite exceptions and pleas for special privileges. If granted, control is lost. Therefore, uniform application of regulations is crucial for an effective control policy. The appropriate steps to be taken include signing a registration card, reading and signing the policy statement, keeping all personal belongings out of the reading and signing room (except paper, index cards, pencils, and a personal computer, preferably a laptop), and having an interview with the curator. During the latter, the researcher can explain her/his needs and at the same time take advantage of the curator’s knowledge of the collections. Finally, there are also correct ways of handling the materials that should be observed.

Procedures should never be allowed to lapse, especially for long-term users who have become familiar to the staff. The thief may be someone who is least suspected. Fast court cases have shown that thieves took advantage of their trustworthiness to gain access to rare materials. Among them have been scholars, librarians, writers, book dealers, archivists, and even clergymen. In the majority of cases they were people who had developed an inside understanding of libraries and the antiquarian book trade.

Room monitoring is also important. An employee should supervise the reading room at all times. Never should this person leave the room while a researcher is working there. If an item needs to be retrieved from the vault, only an authorized person should be allowed to carry out this task.

It is essential that thorough bibliographic control is exercised for positive establishment of ownership. Identification of stolen items cannot be made if record maintenance is poor. Besides a very accurate and precise description of each item, it is perhaps desirable to mark it as well. The best way to do this is to stamp it with ink. Admittedly, this is not widely practiced, even today, although it has been endorsed by the profession, since it was felt that rare works should not be marked in any way. However, marking has been the policy of the National Archives and the Library of Congress for many years. Performed properly and with the right ink, marking will not detract from the value or create aesthetic harm. If we follow these practices, the chances of theft are greatly minimized and we will never have to face that dreadful moment of the “mysterious disappearance.”

—Hans Engelke, Asst. Dean University Libraries
Retirements

What do librarians do when they retire? If the two most recent are any indication, they travel.

Mary Taylor, who retired in January, has already been on an extended trip to Houston and several short trips in the area. She has always been interested in photography, so it seems natural that she should get a camcorder, with which she has already become expert, creating records of her travels.

Sondra Brunhumer, who retired in February, has the terrible dilemma of trying to decide whether she and her husband will go to the Ozarks or the Smokies in May. Later in the summer they are taking an extended driving trip to the Pacific Northwest. Nice work if you can get it.

Personality

Are you into serious walking? Consider this. Leave the south rim of the Grand Canyon and walk eight miles down to the canyon floor; camp there a couple of days; walk seventeen miles up the north face of the canyon, camping midway; camp a couple of days on the north rim and repeat the process in reverse. Sound formidable? That is what Beatrice Beech and her husband George are doing in May.

Beatrice Hibbard was one of five children raised in the small town of Marcellus. She began her academic career at MSU where she took a degree in English Literature and Philosophy, followed by two years of study abroad: one in Freiburg, Germany and one in Poitiers, France. In the meantime she had become Beatrice Hibbard Beech. When George joined the History Department at WMU, Beatrice started work on a degree in Library Science, completing her MLS in 1963. In 1979 she became the Librarian of the Institute of Cisterian Studies, a position she still holds.

Her scholarly interests have focused on France in the 16th century. Early on she discovered that several women in Paris had taken over printing businesses on the deaths of their husbands and been highly successful. This interest has led to extensive research, most of it in Parisian libraries, and the publishing of a number of significant articles.

With all of this activity, Beatrice has still found time to raise a family, three daughters, one of whom is a librarian. She also has a grandson, Evan.

In addition to serious walking, she enjoys visiting larger cities where she is able to indulge her passion for opera and chamber music.

New Library Resources

The Libraries have received several important new electronic databases within the last year which have improved patron access to research materials.

The Reference Department in Waldo Library has acquired the Modern Language Association Bibliography, a standard resource which annually lists scholarly research in literature, language, linguistics and folklore. The print format is available from 1921 to the present. The new compact disc version indexes a variety of publication types since 1981. Citations from more than 3,000 journals, as well as many books, conference papers and other forms of publication are indexed by author and subject. Patrons may search by authors of literary works, names of researchers, or words describing their subjects.

Waldo Reference has also recently acquired the Social Sciences Index, another standard resource, which annually indexes journal articles in 300 periodicals. Available in the print format under a number of different titles since 1907, the new compact disc version covers social science literature since 1983. A great variety of subjects and disciplines are indexed, including, for example, anthropology, economics, feminist studies, geography, human services, international relations, political science, population studies, psychology, public administration, public health, social work, sociology, and urban studies.

The Documents Department of Waldo Library is also currently receiving a number of compact disc products. From the Bureau of the Census we have received recent compilations of County Business Patterns, the County and City Data Book, censuses of agriculture, and other economic censuses. From Congress we have received the 1985 Congressional Record and from the Environmental Protection Agency the 1987 Toxic Chemical Release Inventory.

The Physical Sciences Library has recently received MathSci Disc, a database containing reviews and citations to research in mathematics, computer science, physics, mathematical economics and mathematical biology. This database is compiled from Mathematical Reviews and Current Mathematical Publications, published by the American Mathematical Society. Coverage begins with January 1981 and continues to the present, with six month updates.

Staff in Reference, Government Documents, and the Physical Sciences Library are available to demonstrate and assist patrons in using these new electronic resources.
We would like to thank you for your interest in participating in the Friends of the University Libraries and for the many positive comments we've received about GATHERINGS. We welcome the opportunity to keep you informed about the collections, services, staff and future plans of the University Libraries.

This is a time of great change as we look forward to a newly expanded and renovated Waldo Library, an integrated library management information system, changing resource formats and formation of the Friends group.

The move into the new library will take place during the spring and summer months. A formal organizational meeting for all Friends will be held in the new library in the fall. We hope you will join us in our new facility at that time.

For information on the Friends, please write or call:

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“What’s In A Name”

When casting about for a name for the Friends newsletter, we wanted something which would suggest the broad spectrum of books from earliest times to our own. Something in book production suggested itself. Early books were printed on handmade paper, usually about 16 x 24 inches. Naturally, sheets this size were folded one or more times. If folded once producing four pages, you got a folio; if folded twice producing eight pages, you got a quarto; if folded three times producing sixteen pages, you got an octavo. Each of these folded groups is called a gathering or quire; many gatherings were sewed together to form a book. Quality books are still produced in this way. Thus, our title: Gatherings.

Fetzer Institute Gift

The Institute of Cistercian Studies Library has received a gift of $5,000 from the John E. Fetzer Institute for the acquisition of rare books and manuscripts in the area of medical or ascetical works concerned with the balance of body, mind and spirit. We are grateful to the Fetzer Institute for this gift since these subjects are especially appropriate for our library.

Publications

We are pleased to recognize the following publication by a member of the University Library staff:


The following University Library staff presented papers at various conferences: David Isaacson, Marcia Kingsley, Maria Perez-Stable, and P.F. Vandermeer.