



Rare Books in University Libraries

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INITIATION OF ACTIVE RARE BOOK PROGRAMS
in most major university libraries in the United States has occurred during the last four decades. It has been a laudable development and in many respects represents a wider perspective, an accent on the qualitative and a more mature respect for the "book" by university administrators.

Other factors however help explain this recent blooming of rare book rooms: the practice of open stack access for students and staff has made it imperative to protect from this great body of users the more expensive, hard to replace, and fragile books, that, by accretion, are in the general collection of all university libraries. Material which may or may not be in the rare class such as broadsides, prints, charts, plans, maps, pictures, etc., does not admit of the standardized treatment given conventional books. These forms sometimes call for individual handling or very special attention and non-standard storage facilities. Segregation for protection, processing, and storage has resulted.

Gifts to a university have often been the incentive that brought a rare book program into existence. Indeed hardly a major collection exists in this country, that does not contain books under the name of a distinguished and discriminating private collector or wealthy donor. When the history of rare book programs in universities is fully explored it likely will be revealed that the collector was the greatest single factor in urging, or even forcing, rare book facilities on libraries.

The age of critical bibliographic and textual studies in the humanistic disciplines and an increasing number of investigators in all fields whose research necessitates access to original sources have led to the acquisition of book and allied material not only of considerable value but of a scarce nature. Investments of this sort could only be entrusted to a division with the twin function of preservation and personalized service as its major objective.

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Emulousness has characterized certain phases of American university development throughout the twentieth century. Where the need has long existed, imitative competition has had some bearing on activating a rare book program: "The General Library this year opened a Rare Books Department. Our peers in the great research libraries of the United States, both public and private, have long had such departments . . . We too are at last now able to furnish students and mature scholars appropriate facilities for employing a collection long hidden from use, only partly cataloged, and in general little known."¹

The divisions that assume responsibility for rare or unusual materials are variously named: department or division of rare books, department of rare books and special collections, or, rare books and manuscripts. In most university libraries rare books and special collections are combined. Some of the material in these special collections may or may not be rare or even expensive, but study is facilitated by having all the books of an author, a subject or a period serviced and shelved together. Quite frequently a division will administer not only rare books and special collections but maps, manuscripts, prints, pictorial material, phonograph records, sound recordings, musical scores, clay tablets, and even coins and stamps.

At the larger universities there are rare books outside the administrative pale of a rare book division, liaison existing through official or informal advisory capacity of the rare book librarian. Many libraries in the departmental system contain subject-related materials that are rare. This is particularly so in law, medicine, architecture, fine arts, and to a lesser extent, business. Special facilities within the departmental libraries are sometimes provided for these rarities. The law libraries at Harvard and Illinois are excellent examples.

Two distinct kinds of physical quarters are provided for rare book divisions. Most commonly the quarters are located in the general or central library building in areas which, with but few exceptions, approach the sumptuous: splendid wood paneling, a liberal use of colorful leather and fabrics, carpeting, drapes, selected furniture—all the appointments that lend an atmosphere of affluence and create an impression in the mind of the visitor that this area of the library system is something very special and might indeed be the library of an illustrious private collector. And it sometimes is!

A few rare book collections are maintained in separate buildings. Houghton, John Carter Brown, Clements, and Clark, were especially designed for well-known collections of rarities. A separate structure was also built for the Browning collection at Baylor. Due to the highly

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specialized nature of the collections and the administrative autonomy of Clark, Clements, and John Carter Brown, departments of special collections are also maintained in the central libraries at U.C.L.A., Michigan, and Brown. Indiana University will begin construction early in 1957 on the Lilly Library, a structure to house all its rare books, special collections, and manuscripts.

Whether in a separate building or within the central building, rare books require protection from fire, water, insects, dust, humidity, excessive temperatures, book thieves, and destructive users. Temperature and humidity control are essential as well as physical quarters adequate for storage, public service functions, work space for staff, photographic, and other facilities.

The Houghton is the most recently constructed and impressive example of what can be done in a building devoted exclusively to rare materials. ". . . the building provides every facility which modern ingenuity has devised for the housing, use, exhibition, and preservation of ancient and sometimes fragile books."² The Lilly Library will have in addition to temperature and humidity control, an electrostatic air filtering system and a bomb and blast proof vault of two stack levels for protection of most expensive books in event of enemy air attack.

Where rare books are housed within the central building the quarters differ in size and convenience of location, vary in accommodations for readers and may or may not permit expansion of facilities. A section, wing, or series of rooms in the building is generally available for the rare book division. Some libraries have been forced by necessity to begin a program with a room or series of rooms that could not be expanded, were inconveniently located and remote from the stacks. Such quarters have become inadequate in a few years. In those universities fortunate enough to get new library buildings or extensive additions to the old buildings in the last decade, or in those possessing buildings that would permit variable renovations, rare book quarters have been planned with great consideration and efficacious results.

The utility of a building housing the rare book collections separate from the general book collections of the university may be questioned, particularly if it is far distant from the central library building. Separation poses operational obstacles as well as problems that affect the scholar. The Clements and Houghton almost abut the central building. Indeed the latter is connected to Widener by a public passage suspended above ground. The Clark is some ten miles from the U.C.L.A. campus. Separation of facilities means duplication of reference and general material and, where acquisitions are centralized, some delay

and perhaps additional footwork in ordering and searching. It also handicaps the user who must inevitably range between two buildings to carry on research. Precedent, however, in the form of departmental libraries, present in all universities, exists for separation of facilities. Operational handicaps have not been completely submerged in the operation of these departmental systems but they have been somewhat minimized.

It cannot be denied that a separate building is more attractive to bookmen, collectors, and non-bookish visitors. Such a building is positive evidence that a university is dedicated to a rare book program and may act as a decisive influence on private collectors looking for a permanent home for their collections.

Some duplication, particularly of reference material, is necessary even though the division is located in the central building. As pointed out in L. B. Wright's article, p. 437, the advantage to the scholar of having the general reference collections and the general subject collections near at hand is great. Some time and motion is lost by the user even though rare books are in the central building, if the library is large and he must shuttle between divisions located on different floors and at opposite ends of the building.

The objections to separation cannot be dismissed as minor matters, particularly if it means seriously handicapping the scholar, the primary user, and the intellectual heir of all rare books. The question has not been widely discussed in the university library profession. Since it would appear that a separate building for rare books represents a trend, librarians will undoubtedly scrutinize this development in the future, but complete unanimity of opinion is unlikely, particularly since local traditions, administrative predilection and opportunism influence even library affairs.

Administratively the rare book divisions present some diversities. There are a few instances where they are administered by the circulation or reference department, and one instance where the program is set up within a division of reference and special services. At Yale the many special collections are in charge of curators with no over-all supervision by a head rare book librarian. The majority of the divisions, however, have full departmental status within the framework of the library system. Over the department is a head, chief, curator, or rare book librarian. The curator may report directly to the chief librarian or to the associate director for public services. The chain of command is unimportant if the rare book librarian has authority to act quickly and independently on acquisitions. Where both policy and purchases must

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be ratified from above, it would seem wise to reduce the length of the chain.

The answer to successful servicing and acquisition rests with a competent staff. The rare book librarian should be an able bookman, at home with research, familiar with the antiquarian book trade and, above all, possess a feeling for people. As T. R. Adams says, p. 433, some of the most successful present-day bookmen had their training in the trade. Others came to rare books directly from academic disciplines or by in-service training in rare book divisions. Some are the combined product of the universities, the trade, and library schools. The head of rare books must be surrounded by competent, keen-minded people who preferably have subject background as well as the bibliographical instinct. Where staffs are large, the department may be subdivided to include a curator of printed materials, curator of graphic materials, curator of historical or literal manuscripts, etc.

Some universities have been successful in eliciting guidance and aid from private collectors and bookish faculty members by making them honorary curators or consultants of collections. The assistance from faculty has been great. There is hardly a university library that does not contain at least one collection that was primarily brought together through the knowledge, influence, and efforts of a member of the faculty. C. B. Tinker, F. J. Child, G. L. Kittredge, H. F. Fletcher, G. N. Ray, and J. R. Moore are names synonymous with well-known collections.

It is impossible to ascertain whether the size of staff is correlated to numbers served, the bulk of the collection, the acquisition program, or is a reflection of the administrative attitudes and recognition of the part that rare books play in the research role of the university. In nineteen universities who replied to a questionnaire, staff size ranged from one to twenty-three full-time employees, without equating part-time help into full-time equivalent. The average size staff would appear to be three employees.

Rare books are acquired by purchase at auction, from dealers and private owners, by gift and, infrequently, by trade from collectors and other institutions. An article recently appearing in this journal was devoted to rare book procurement.³ A prerequisite to the purchasing of rare books is money. Funds come from a variety of sources: operating income, endowments, research and contingency funds, university foundations, expendable trust funds, and cash gifts.

Among the nineteen libraries who replied to the querist only ten budget annually for rare books. But this fact is not significant. The Uni-

versity of Illinois does not budget, yet spent over \$131,000 during fiscal year 1955-56 for rare material including special collections. Funds were derived from the general book appropriation, research funds, the university foundation, and from contingency funds. Oklahoma budgeted a little more than \$5,000 during the same year but purchases totalled over \$47,000. The difference represented cash gifts from friends. No specific amount is budgeted at the University of Michigan for 1956-57, but since rare materials are purchased out of income from endowment funds and expendable trust funds, a sum of over \$31,000 is available for acquisitions. At the University of Virginia about \$18,000 is annually allocated for rare books and manuscripts, but an additional \$2,500 to \$5,000 is spent from the general book fund. Indiana budgeted \$25,000 for purchases during 1956-57 but has already spent \$60,000, the difference coming from general library funds. This sum does not represent the total that will be spent. Departments will purchase rare materials from their allocations and should unusual opportunities arise in the market, funds can be made available from research or university foundation sources. Kansas budgeted \$13,000 for fiscal 1956-57 but can obtain additional sums from the university foundation for special purchases. The Houghton budgeted \$60,000 for purchase during 1956-57. This amount may represent only a small portion of what likely will be spent, judging from fiscal year 1955-56. During that year \$200,000 was "raised" for rare books in addition to the regular budgeted amount.

Some librarians are shocked at the asking prices for rare books. They do not seem to remember that books are commercial commodities subject to some of the economic forces that affect trade in general and that in many areas there is great competition. The consumer has a part in establishing prices. Dealer enthusiasm may cause a book to be priced with the aid of an exponential table, but one is not forced to buy. It is permissible, and is practiced, to inform such a dealer that the price may be out of line and to add that if he is unable to sell the book in question, an offer will be made. Sometimes this procedure brings the book at an earth-bound price, or it may be lost to another and more enthusiastic customer. If a book is wanted and needed at an institution a fair or going price should not be questioned. The antiquarian book dealer has as many personal economic problems as the librarian.

In the nineteen libraries surveyed, orders for rare books are centralized in the general library's order department in all except the Houghton. At most institutions the rare book department does all the bib-

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liographical work necessary to ordering. The central order department merely performs the clerical and routine functions incident to purchasing. If there is reason for speed, orders are phoned, cabled, or telegraphed. It is common practice for books to be sent on approval. It has been suggested that more effective results would obtain if the rare book division initiated and handled its own orders.⁴ This seems an unnecessary burden of routine paper work to place on a rare book department. The objection to centralized ordering such as approval orders and informal dealer relations can all be overcome by granting minor exceptions in the established ordering routine for rare books.

Rare books are cataloged most frequently by the catalog department of the general library, with the work regularly assigned to one or more catalogers. Only Kansas, Pennsylvania, the Houghton, and Indiana, of the nineteen libraries reported on, have their own rare book catalogers. Incunabula is cataloged by the department at Michigan, but all other rare books are processed by the general catalog department. At Yale and Princeton the curators of special collections issue instructions for the cataloging of rare material but the work is performed by the general catalog department. Manuscripts and broadsides are generally cataloged by the staff of the rare book department. Both John Alden and P. S. Dunkin have recommended catalogers within the rare book department.⁵ No comparison of the quality and quantity of the work done in the general department with that done in the rare book department has reached print. The arguments for rare book catalogers seem doctrinaire and basically weak since most universities do not give full cataloging treatment to rare books.

Though cataloging practices vary with the institutions, Library of Congress cards are a mainstay in many divisions. The same entry forms and subject headings are usually employed for both rare and general books. Scholars complain that rare book catalogs are inadequate but cannot agree on the "adequate." Criticisms may be justified. In most libraries a compromise program is practiced that represents something between simplified cataloging and full-dress bibliographical description. The pertinent information is recorded and the book is located.

Realistically viewed it is unlikely that the card catalogs for rare books will be greatly improved. Most administrators admit the shortcoming, but the expense and time involved in full-dress bibliographical cataloging, and the potential use of such a catalog make its merits questionable. Where budgets are limited, acquisitions and other services are concentrated on at the expense of cataloging.

A more responsible attitude about "condition" of the book pervades most rare book rooms. It is a general practice to give rare books special handling and to keep all as nearly as possible in their original physical condition. Ink stamping and perforating are omitted. Ownership is generally indicated by a small label pasted somewhere on the back cover. The call number is inked on this label. Some libraries pencil the call number on the inner margin of the page following the title page. Bookplates and other marks of ownership are left intact. Truly progress has been made since the days when librarians were called enemies of books!

Libraries profess to specialize in their collecting activities. Formal or informal acquisition codes frequently guide purchases. Gifts, local demand brought on by curricular expansion, replacements and additions to the faculty, unique opportunities in the market, and extension of the scope of major holdings make periodic revision of the fields of specialization necessary. No serious proposals for national and exclusive subject specialization in rare books have been discussed. The programs are young and libraries are too eager to build to give more than local attention to cooperative projects. The rate at which gifts flow into university rare books rooms would seem to preclude such arrangements. Will librarian A tell alumnus or friend to give his books to librarian B because he has assumed the national responsibility for a certain category of books?

Books go into the rare book collection because of their price, intrinsic value, probable difficulty of replacement, association value, because they are autographed or contain valuable marginalia, or because they are related to a special collection. Policies that attempt to get all so-called rare books that annually flow through a large university library into the rare book room are arbitrary. William Warner Bishop would have "Books printed in three hundred copies or less go in the rare book room as a matter of routine."⁶ At Yale the following are designated rare: ". . . any book printed before 1551; any English book before 1641; any American book before 1801 whether of North or South America."⁷ At the universities of California an extended code exists to help spot books that may be considered for inclusion in the rare book collections. But the staff is warned that "No rules-of-thumb can be devised which will take the place of personal knowledge, intelligence, and discrimination,"⁸ an admonition that might well be applied nationally. At Indiana all single volumes costing more than \$25 are flagged and held for the decision of the rare book librarian before the book is routed to final destination.

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Great emphasis is placed on "cultivating" the private collector by most universities. The dividends have been high. The value of gift books in many collections is greater than the value of those purchased. If it were not for the generosity of the private collector it is safe to assume that some universities could not have a rare book program. How is the private collector converted into the giver? By the gentle, circuitous art of silent persuasion and by the charming, bold frontal approach that is completely disarming. The process may extend over a period of years and will often require assistance from the president and other administrative officers of the institution.

The most successful "cultivators are unusually modest and reticent about revealing a formula for this type of library operation. Perhaps all that can and should be done in contacts with the collector is to show an honest friendliness for the individual and respect for his books, and to demonstrate by practice that the institution has a deep and abiding interest in rare books and the staff to service and manage them. The collector's confidence in the library, faith in and loyalty to the institution, his ability to give, and the tax structure at the time he is prepared to dispose of his books will all have a bearing on whether they go to an institution or under the auction hammer. If he desires continuity for his books and assurance that they will be used and not dispersed, the universities are the most logical depositories.

Except to the skeptical relativist, the intellectually arrogant and the futurist whose roots go no deeper than the day's awakening, rare books in a university library need no special pleading. The uses for such books in an institution that promotes research and the training of students for the teaching and research professions have been discussed.⁹⁻¹¹ Quite aside from these cogent arguments for rare books, they have an emotional value that is immeasurable but nevertheless of great importance. Some people are not moved or even impressed with the scholarly monographs that are the results of research on rare materials, but there is drama for them in viewing an historic document, the first edition of a literary or scientific classic, an early printed Bible or an association copy indisputably linked with the name of Washington, Lincoln, or Jefferson.

Apart from the research need and the emotional values a university library is justified in preserving rare materials. Indeed, a few centuries hence the rare book rooms may be regarded as having performed a function for learning similar to that of the monastic houses in the Middle Ages.

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