



## Collecting Collections

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EVERY RESEARCH LIBRARY in America has acquired by gift or purchase a collection of books or manuscripts during the past one hundred years. If one delves into remote library history, examples of bulk acquisitions can be found in the activities of certain libraries of note in ancient and medieval times. The practice of collecting collections, then, is not singularly characteristic at the present time. What is exceptional today, particularly of libraries in the United States, is the increase in the number of collections going into libraries and the great number of libraries actively (some say frantically) seeking to increase their resources by aggregate acquisitions.

The "News From the Field. Acquisitions, Gifts, Collections" section of *College and Research Libraries* from January, 1955, through November, 1959, recorded 195 announcements of diversified collections that had been purchased or received as gifts by American libraries. This figure by no means represented the total flow of collections into libraries but only those considered newsworthy by the recipients.

The variety and richness of the collections acquired in the last few years may be attested by news releases or the annual library reports from such institutions as Yale, Texas, Harvard, Illinois, Kansas, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Chicago, Cornell, Columbia, and University of California (UCB, UCLA), to mention only a few (but perhaps currently the most active) universities engaged in collecting collections. Many of the collections acquired possess great subject unity (the Hanley collection of literary manuscripts, Texas; Dylan Thomas manuscripts, Harvard; Santayana manuscripts, Columbia; the Baskette collection on freedom of expression, Illinois; Poole collection on development of typography, Indiana). Others are historical and relate to the activities of a career man (John Jay collection, Columbia; Frank E. Gannett papers, Cornell; John Hay papers, Brown). Some deal with learned disciplines in broad and peripheral aspect (Ogden collection,

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California). Science in its many branches is well represented (Max Born collection, Maryland; Trent collection, Duke; Hugh Sinclair collection, Wisconsin). Music is not neglected (Sigmund Romberg and Manfred Bukofzer collections, University of California, Berkeley; Olin Downes collection, Florida State University). Regional history is desired (Streeter Texas collection, Texas; Yonge Library of Florida history, University of Florida). The list might be extended to include collections on every subject that has occupied the thoughts of civilized man and recorded by him in some written form. The aim is to demonstrate that American research libraries are, seemingly, unappeasable in their quest for collections that will measurably increase their scholarly resources.

This traffic in collections can be explained. The growth of our newer universities into graduate and research-centered schools, and curricular expansion in the older institutions of higher learning, create need for an ever growing corpus of research materials. These demands for increased library resources, providing urgently needed materials to strengthen existing collections or to give a substantive start in a new area of educational emphasis, are frequently met by the acquisition of collections.

Research need alone, however, does not wholly explain this transfer of collections from private ownership into libraries. Library promotion, a greater number of collectors with institutional loyalties, and a federal income tax law which encourages gifts, or less-than value sales, lends impetus to the movement. Local financial considerations also play a more than minor role. Budgetary and administrative officers in some universities frequently make non-budgetary funds available for en bloc purchases, perhaps persuaded both by the prestige that derives from possession of a dramatic or well-known collection and the opportunity of adding statistically and qualitatively to library holdings at the same time. The widely held belief that library resources and academic respectability are related and the conviction that good libraries attract and keep good scholars is a persuasive force on the administrative mind, particularly in these days of competition for teachers, foundation grants, and research contracts.

The antiquarian book trade performs a vital function in this commerce in collections. Perhaps the least known, or appreciated, was that of intelligent adviser to the collector in his formative years long before the collection was acquired by a library. A more obvious duty is commission agent between collector and purchaser or as

direct seller of a collection acquired with an institutional buyer in mind.

A few booksellers, with adequate working capital and prudent forethought, assemble attractive collections over a period of years from their own stocks and dispose of them when market conditions are favorable. There are a few instances when the bookseller has gathered a special collection at the request of a librarian who hopes to obtain special funds for its purchase or has an institutional friend in mind who may be persuaded to become a donor.

There is no published source that reveals the number of collections sold to libraries as a result of activity from the antiquarian book trade. Libraries do purchase collections directly from owners or collectors whenever opportunity exists. How extensive this practice is could only be determined by laborious inquiry.

As appraiser of gift collections the antiquarian bookseller renders a real service to the library world, as J. S. Keabian discusses in a later chapter. Keenly aware of current prices in his own specialty, he may be expected to appraise a collection at its true market value, thus giving the donor all tax deduction to which he is legally entitled. Library literature is strangely silent on methods of appraising gift collections. It is rumored that some collections are appraised by library staff members. The ethics of staff appraisal may be questioned as well as the capability. Quite aside from competency and the legal aspects, appraisal is a legitimate function of the bookseller and it is a part of the antiquarian book business to which he is entitled.

No serious objections have been voiced against this common practice of acquiring collections. It permits libraries to add, in a single operation, books which might take years to acquire if purchased individually (if and when they come on the market). Collection purchases reduce paper work in the acquisition departments. The item cost of books in a collection is somewhat lower than it would be if the books were purchased one at a time from different sources. The library that purchases a collection, receives at little or no cost the thousands of man hours and the skill that were required to assemble it. It is safe to assume that American research libraries will continue to buy and receive collections as gifts as long as funds and friends exist.