Among Harvard's Libraries: An update on the Houghton Library

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Among Harvard's Libraries

An Update on the Houghton Library

Richard Wendorf Assumes Director Post

Richard Wendorf has now been Librarian of the Houghton Library for somewhat longer than a year, since September 1989. For him, moving over to the library side of the academic world is the fulfillment of a dream, one sufficiently cherished to induce him to give up a tenured post as Professor of English and Art History at Northwestern University. Editor and author of two books relating to the eighteenth-century poet William Collins, Mr. Wendorf published The Elements of Life: Biography and Portrait-Painting in Stuart and Georgian England (Oxford, Clarendon Press) only months after moving to Houghton, and he is now well into a critical study of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Soft-spoken, good at listening, someone whose private as well as public communication is in full and graceful sentences, Richard Wendorf exudes sureness of purpose and the strength to carry out whatever goals he sets. One of them seems clear—and predictable for a former Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education—that Houghton should support as fully as it can both the teaching and research programs of the university. One form this commitment has taken is Mr. Wendorf's own direction of a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar for College Teachers on the subject of "Portraiture: Biography, Portrait Painting, and the Representation of Historical Character."

Mr. Wendorf has also begun to build even closer ties between the library and members of the Harvard faculty: through consulting with them about possible acquisitions, encouraging them to use the library's collections in their courses, and fostering joint sponsorship of lectures by both visiting and local scholars. His renewed emphasis on the research mission of the library has internal as well as external aspects: increased space and facilities for scholarship by the curatorial staff, and, for scholars elsewhere, a program of endowed visiting fellowships that will be formally announced in the spring. Much of the first year, he confides, was spent on mundane, albeit important projects, such as major renovation of the library's climate-control system; it dates back to the opening of Houghton in 1942.

Much of Mr. Wendorf's time this year is being devoted to the strategic planning process that has recently been initiated by Richard De Gennaro, the new Librarian of Harvard College. He is also engaged in preparing for Houghton's fiftieth anniversary, which will be celebrated during the 1991-92 academic year. It should provide an ideal point for an articulation of goals and a rededication of effort. In the meantime, change, growth, and strengthening have not been held in abeyance. The following reports on only a small portion of what has been taking place.

Houghton Library Acquires John Cheever's Journals

Timothy Hanke, Publications Coordinator in the University Library, writes about the Cheever journals in the staff newsletter, Library Notes:

"After years of on-and-off negotiations, Rodney Dennis, Curator of Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library, was able on July 26, 1990, to complete the purchase, on behalf of Houghton Library, of the complete journals of the author John Cheever. "In a separate arrangement between Cheever's children Susan and Ben and The New Yorker, excerpts from the journals were published in The New Yorker on August 6 and 13, 1990. The New Yorker plans to publish further excerpts."
“According to Mr. Dennis, ‘Many people, reading Cheever’s journals, will be discouraged from writing any more in their own journals. It’s beautiful stuff.’

“The story of how John Cheever’s journals came to Harvard has many starts and stops. It began in 1978, when Cheever received an honorary degree from the University. On that occasion, Daniel Aaron, Victor S. Thomas Professor of English and American Literature (now emeritus) escorted the author down the aisle between the crowded rows of chairs in Tercentenary Theater to receive his degree. Cheever, thoroughly enjoying himself, expressed to Professor Aaron a desire to give his papers to Harvard.

“Soon afterward, Professor Aaron contacted Rodney Dennis in Houghton Library with the good news.

“Mr. Dennis telephoned the author, who explained that he was offering not his papers, but his journals to Harvard. This was a significant offering. The journals consisted of some 30 volumes of single-spaced typewritten pages, composed over the course of Cheever’s adult life, recording a wealth of personal experience and private thoughts.

“Soon after this phone conversation, Cheever changed his mind. He realized that the journals were worth money, and decided that they had to be sold. He would mail two volumes to Houghton for Rodney Dennis to examine, and Harvard would have to make an offer.

“The two volumes arrived in due course. Right away, Mr. Dennis saw that they were important work. ‘Cheever used his journals as a sourcebook for his fiction,’ said Mr. Dennis recently. ‘They contained his responses to the landscape and the weather, interspersed with reflections on his inner life and his relationships with his wife and children and friends. Cheever was being genuinely confessional about sexual, family, and other very personal matters.’

“However, Mr. Dennis told Cheever that Harvard could not afford to offer more than ‘a pittance.’ This was at a time when Knopf, Cheever’s publisher, was offering the author a $500,000 advance on his next novel. John Cheever then sent a short letter to Mr. Dennis, saying in effect, ‘Your offer is not serious. Kindly return the journals.’ And negotiations stopped there.

“Cheever died in 1982. Mr. Dennis was still very interested in the journals. When the bookdealer Glenn Horowitz offered his services as a go-between with the family, Mr. Dennis urged him to see what he could do.

“Nothing happened for six years.

“In 1988, Susan Cheever, the author’s daughter, called Mr. Dennis. She had heard of Harvard’s inquiries about the journals. Was Harvard still interested?

“Harvard was still interested, and Mr. Dennis raised his offer to what he thought was the lowest possible figure that might be taken seriously. Susan Cheever said that she was interested, and would get back to Mr. Dennis.

“More time passed.

“In the spring of 1990, Ben Cheever, the author’s son, called Mr. Dennis. ‘Are you still interested in the journals?’ he asked. ‘Yes!’ said Mr. Dennis. Ben Cheever said that he would get back to Mr. Dennis after checking with his mother Mary.

“Mary Cheever approved the deal. And so, on July 26, 1990, Mr. Dennis met Susan and Ben Cheever—very attractive and funny young people,’ he reported—at the Hotel Carlyle in New York. They had tea and a charming conversation, and under the table was a great leather suitcase containing all the journals. On the suitcase was the monogram BS for Ben Sonnenberg, the poet and friend of the Cheever family. Ben Cheever and Rodney Dennis together could hardly carry the heavy suitcase out to Mr. Dennis’s car. Two more journals were later mailed to Houghton; presumably they wouldn’t fit in the suitcase.

“Now the journals are secure in Houghton Library, where they are sealed for 10 years. And Ben Sonnenberg wants his suitcase back.”

HOUGHTON LIBRARY ACQUIRES THE VICTORIA OCAMPO PAPERS

Another major acquisition this past year is the papers of Victoria Ocampo, editor of the Argentinian periodical Sur. Fascinated with formal experimentation in the arts, she produced one of the important avant-garde literary periodicals of the century. Although the papers were bequeathed in 1980 to the Harvard Library, the executors of the estate also wished to carry out the provision of the will that called for establishing a foundation to further other goals of Ms. Ocampo. To do that, they wanted
money from Harvard. The library could stand on principle and receive no manuscripts, or it could offer some money in the hopes of acquiring an important body of research material. Pragmatism won out. After a number of years, the executors agreed to Mr. Dennis’s sum, and the papers have now arrived. They constitute the richest international correspondence to come to the library since William A. Jackson purchased the papers of Sir William Rothenstein in 1960.

Ms. Ocampo’s correspondence is rich with letters from luminaries throughout the world, particularly those who were politically on the right. Here is a partial list from the hundreds of correspondents (the number of letters is sometimes given in parentheses): Álvarez, Ansermet (69), Breton, Borges, Camus (24), Cocteau, Di Sica, T. S. Eliot, Eluard, Figueroa, Fuentes, De Gaulle, Gide, Gropius, Graham Greene (117), Aldous Huxley (54), Isherwood, Klee, Koestler, Le Corbusier, Malraux, Thomas Merton, Milhaud, Jean Marais, Maurois, Neruda, Pasolini, Paz, Jean Renoir, G. B. Shaw, Edith Sitwell, Stravinsky (49), Sackville West, Tagore, Virgil Thompson, Unamuno, Valéry (23), Virginia Woolf (23), Yourcenar, Zweig.

**Music Manuscript Acquisition**

In recent years the Houghton Library, together with Professor Christoph Wolff of the Music Department and with
considerable assistance from two directors of the University Library, has mounted a major campaign to increase the library's holdings in twentieth-century music manuscripts. This effort has brought in a very large number of American manuscripts from the celebrated collection of the late Hans Moldenhauer, plus papers of the violinists Rudolph Kolisch and Louis Krasner. The Kolisch and Krasner collections are so rich in materials relating to Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and other members of the Second Viennese School that in 1988 the Houghton Library was able to join with the Bavarian State Library in an exhibition entitled "Sources for 20th Century Music History." It was shown both in Munich and Cambridge.

Recently the library was able to strengthen its holdings of an earlier period with the purchase of a manuscript that Mr. Dennis enthusiastically calls "the most beautiful manuscript I have ever seen." It consists of polyphonic settings of movements from the ordinary of the Mass, arranged for organ and notated in German organ tablature, with architectural initials by Lucas Kilian. Executed in Augsburg between 1600 and 1610, the manuscript is unusual—both from a musical as well as artistic standpoint—and Houghton's Curator of Manuscripts says that he has seen nothing like it. Of added interest is its provenance: Hector Berlioz wrote on a flyleaf in 1850 pencil annotations revealing his attempts at deciphering the tablature. Since the compositions have not been identified, this manuscript represents an instance of an acquisition being important precisely because part of its significance remains to be fully revealed. It was purchased by the Friends of the Harvard College Library, together with a gift from Professor John Ward of the Music Department.

**THE THEATRE COLLECTION'S DANCE YEAR**

Another part, administratively though not physically, of the Houghton Library, the Harvard Theatre Collection, has also received extraordinary materials that solidify its position as one of the greatest international collections on the dance. The bequests coincide with major support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation expressly for making the Theatre Collection's dance holdings more accessible. That these developments coincide in time is accidental, albeit fortuitous, for dance in this country is at a crucial point. The legendary American dancers—Martha Graham, Agnes De Mille, Hanya Holm, George Balanchine, Fred Astaire, Robert Joffrey—are either advanced in years or no longer living, and AIDS has cut its vicious swath through the dance world. Given both the expected and unexpected attrition, we must now document this art form that has generally been passed on only from dancer to dancer, or we will forever be unable to do so.

One of the bequests is from a longtime supporter of the Theatre Collection, in fact its first Honorary Curator of Ballet, Edwin Binney, 3rd. '46. Mr. Binney died in the summer of 1986, and probate is now complete. The holder of a Harvard Ph.D. in romance languages, Mr. Binney wrote his dissertation on the ballet criticism of Théophile Gautier, which led him into the history of the Romantic ballet, an art form that, he argued, brought together the various strands making up the Romantic movement. While at work on his dissertation, he was induced by Helen Willard, then curator of the Theatre Collection, to catalog its extensive collection of dance engravings. That experience helped him further to train his eye to see with such detail and clarity that the image became imbedded in his mind. Thereafter, wherever he traveled—and everywhere he traveled he bought prints—he rarely had to rely on his inventory. Ed Binney knew what he had, even as the collection grew to more than 10,000 prints and 5,000 other objects. The Binney Collection, covering the dance up to recent years, is the greatest ever held in private hands. For country after country, its holdings are the strongest that exist outside that country. Such international strength allowed Binney to do seminal work on the transformation that images underwent as they migrated from one culture to another, and the multiple prints depicting the same dancer enabled him to write on the relationship between the print and the performance (Longing for the Ideal: Images of Marie Taglioni in the Romantic Ballet, Harvard Theatre Collection, 1984). Future scholars will certainly now find that their creativity is not limited by frustrating gaps in the material at hand.

Ed Binney, who contributed to the pages of this journal, was well known in
the Harvard community. If you happened into the Theatre Collection during a Binney visit, you also knew unmistakably that he was in town; and if you cared to learn of such matters, it was no secret that the Binney Collection was going to come to Harvard.

The donor of the other major gift, one of the most distinguished collections on the Diaghilev Ballets Russes, was seemingly a mirror opposite. Shy and soft-spoken, Howard D. Rothschild used to enter the Theatre Collection unannounced, saying "Oh, don't tell her I'm here." He never wrote about his collection, never displayed it, never spoke of its eventual disposition. Particularly since Mr. Rothschild himself had no Harvard connection, there was no reason to think that it would come here. To be sure, the Theatre Collection's curator, Jeanne Newlin, always did learn of Mr. Rothschild's presence, but their conversations, their viewing of recent acquisitions, seemed only to be an expression of the mutual delight that two connoisseurs take in each other's company. Harvard curators like to show (off) their holdings to the appreciative. Both they and the guests have fun, and both learn. A warm thank-you note often follows.

Mr. Rothschild did more. Along with a major increase to the endowment, which will subsequently arrive, Mr. Rothschild bequeathed his life work—his fabled collection. Exceptional in quality, it includes correspondence and various manuscript documents, as well as stage, costume, and other designs, stimulated by the Russian artists brought to Paris by Serge Diaghilev. They include Nijinsky, Karsavina, Bakst, Goncharova, and Larionov, as well as Stravinsky and Balanchine. Among the drawings and prints, numbering more than 1,000, is one by Picasso, which symbolizes...
the importance of the collection: these are art works as well as theatre research documents.

A third body of material on dance is also being turned over to the Harvard Theatre Collection: the holdings of the private non-profit foundation of Parmenia Miguel Ekstrom, the second Honorary Curator of Ballet. These materials, also on Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, consist of extensive research files, along with a large number of designs, posters, photographs, and books.

Such is the background against which the grant of $82,500 made by the Mellon Foundation should be seen. The grant is “towards the cost of cataloging, conservation, a collection analysis of its dance materials, and of upgraded systems for public access.” Along with covering for one year the salary of a full-time cataloger of dance materials, a part-time specialist in conservation, and a part-time staff person for clerical support, the grant enables the Theatre Collection to add two new computers and install a local-area network.

The Mellon Foundation, in its effort to preserve records of the dance, has also made a grant to the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library. The Foundation has also engaged specialists to determine to what extent the dance is documented and preserved in this country. After what is expected to be a preliminary stage, the Foundation intends to draw conclusions about the ways in which libraries, dance companies, funding agencies, and others can work together toward a common goal. The Harvard Theatre Collection is likely to be a major participant in what may come to be a model for cooperative activity in other fields.

ROGER STODDARD’S ACTIVITIES

Roger Stoddard maintains his highly sophisticated buying of printed books for the library, but he has had to spend recently far too much time on a far less happy activity: assisting the FBI in building its case against Stephen J. Blumberg, who is facing trial in Iowa for theft of antiques and books. (Although no Houghton books are known to be missing, Mr. Stoddard is the Harvard University Library’s official security officer, albeit unbadged and non-uniformed.) The task requires every possible bit of knowledge about Harvard books and all the detective skill that a bibliographer has acquired over the years, for the books have had their markings altered, removed, substituted, all in ways that prevent straightforward identification of their origins.

In recent years the Harvard library has suffered from on-going depredations of several individuals, including one person who, along with committing destructive acts, wrote threatening notes. The loss cannot be measured by giving a count of the number of items or their monetary value. Scholarship and teaching suffer. For instance, books are recorded in catalogs and in reference works or databases as being in a particular library, and the absence of books on the shelves means fruitless searching, perhaps even a wasted study assignment or research trip. Mr. Stoddard’s thoughts about the nature of our losses—already broached in a summer lecture for the Columbia Rare Book School—might one day be developed in print.

Perhaps stimulated by his work as security officer, Roger Stoddard has been instrumental in fostering more staff attention to the physical care of Houghton’s books and manuscripts. The Be Kind to Books program will result in a review of policies and practices concerning staff training; the rules for use of collections in the reading rooms, seminar rooms, and exhibition areas; standards for everything from bookplates to booktrucks to copiers; a new look at loan forms; and a review of the decision making concerning repairs and filming or other copying.

WINDING UP THE AFFAIRS OF THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Another among Mr. Stoddard’s activities is not stimulated by loss but by successful accomplishment. The last volume of the Bibliography of American Literature, begun by Jacob Blanck, is at the printer, and Roger Stoddard is winding up the affairs of the project. He is doing so, officially, as chair of the committee of the Bibliographical Society of America that has exercised the Society’s oversight of the project. In another sense he is doing so as a tribute to a mentor.

BAL’s 281 authors are now all covered bibliographically. To be sure, the corri-
genda and addenda are not now being prepared for the press, but it is expected that the notes will be available. Along with handling the disposition of some of Jacob Blanck's remaining books, Mr. Stoddard has been transforming the BAL office into a research workroom for present and retired Houghton staff members. The traditional oak office desk is being replaced with Justin Winsor's desk from the office of the Librarian of Harvard College.

The BAL office, just off the Keats Room, along with serving as a lunchroom for staff members and anyone else who showed up, was also the scene of countless informal bibliographical seminars. "What do you make of this book, Jake?" "How do you explain these variants?" Sometimes the result would be new information for BAL. Always, learning took place. That is no doubt what William Jackson had in mind when he invited Jacob Blanck to occupy the office in Houghton. The presence of BAL and Jackson's own project on English books before 1641 meant that two of the greatest bibliographies in the English-speaking world were headquartered in Houghton. By a twist of fate, both are ending at approximately the same time, for Katharine F. Panter, who has been completing the Short-Title Catalogue, has published the main volumes and is now finishing the index.

Part of winding up the affairs of BAL is planning a celebration of its completion, one that points to the future. What needs to be done is, of course, shaped by what has been done. BAL, along with identifying the writings of its authors—those deceased before 1930 who were deemed by a committee of the Bibliographical Society to be the most important—identifies and describes the first printings and issues, along with those that might be taken for the first. BAL also contains notes on the early publishing history of the books, gleaned from copyright entries, book trade journals, and publishers' records here and in England. It also records texts of the authors in anthologies and other books, whether those are first appearances or reprints.

Conceived by Jacob Blanck, who had long approached books from the standpoint of the bookseller and first-edition collector, BAL was brought into the realm of scholarship by William Jackson, who required signature collations. These turned out—which was not obvious at the time—to be an important means of differentiating concealed printings. BAL is an extraordinarily accurate and detailed work that solves a host of historical problems and provides a bibliographical basis for understanding the history of publishing in the United States. No other country has a work like it.

Mr. Stoddard's goal for the celebration is that it help bibliographical scholarship to build on BAL. Possible future directions are numerous. Should an attempt be made to do further BAL-type bibliographies, albeit on authors who have died since 1930? Are there categories of authors not covered by BAL? Women? BAL, with a committee made up of librarians and collectors, actually did extremely well in the proportion of women included vis-à-vis men. The list contains 18 percent women, whereas Joanna Russ, in her well-known How to Suppress Women's Writing (1983) points out that anthologies and reading lists customarily include only 6 to 8 percent women. (A researcher in Widener points out, however, another way of looking at the question—not the proportion of women to men, but the proportion of women to women writing. She says that one could cover about 300 women and still include only first-rate writers.) What of Afro-Americans? Writers in languages other than English? Or should the work already done be built upon by going beyond the first printing to others?

Mr. Stoddard's planning is also concerned with execution and funding. Might some possible directions be funded in their entirety? Or does it make sense to seek funding for, say, the work of extracting information on publishing history from book trade sources, while relying on cooperative effort for description? Does the possibility of rapidly communicating and exchanging data create opportunities for projects we were inhibited from even dreaming about before?

The Department of Printing and Graphic Arts

Endings and beginnings also occurred in the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts. Eleanor M. Garvey, the first Philip Hofer Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Houghton Library, retired after 37 years at Harvard. Tributes have been
numerous, the establishment of four endowed funds—an extraordinary number—being among the ways in which Ms. Garvey’s work has been honored. It is also fitting that Ms. Garvey has been recognized outside the immediate Harvard family. Wellesley College awarding her in 1988 its Alumnae Achievement Award. The citation described her as “a foremost authority on the book as an art form,” a reputation that Elli Garvey’s current project will further enhance. Whereas her generosity with her time slowed down work on a catalog of eighteenth-century Italian book illustration in the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, progress is now rapid, if one can judge by the early hours at which she is glimpsed on paths in the Yard.

Chosen to succeed Ms. Garvey was a former colleague, Anne Anninger. She had been for six years a rare book cataloger for the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts before joining the Wellesley Library in 1982 as Special Collections Librarian. That is a position in which one teaches. Ms. Anninger also continued her commitment to scholarship, and she is currently finishing a dissertation on “Parisian Book Illustration, 1530-1560” in the Fine Arts Department at Harvard. The author of Spanish and Portuguese 16th Century Books (1985), based on the collection in the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, she has also published widely (as well as in the Harvard Library Bulletin) on French, Spanish, and Portuguese books and art. The Department’s tradition is safe: leadership by a scholar and connoisseur who is able at once to build the collections while at the same time aiding students and maintaining an active publications program.

Kenneth E. Carpenter

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue of the Harvard Library Bulletin is entirely devoted to the proceedings of a symposium held at Houghton Library on 25 February 1988 in conjunction with an exhibition on “The Bible in the Twelfth Century.” The inspiration and initiative for both the symposium and the exhibition came from Houghton’s Curator of Manuscripts, Rodney G. Dennis. I had the honor of presiding on that occasion, and I am delighted to introduce the published version of the symposium as well.

The setting for our festivities was a magnificent display of some forty manuscript books and fragments drawn entirely from the Houghton collection and relating in various ways to the preservation and study of the Bible in the twelfth century. In addition to copies of the Old and New Testaments—rare and precious objects at the time—the exhibition illustrated the wide range of texts used in the Middle Ages for the reading and study of scripture: liturgical books such as missals, lectionaries, and books of hours, collections of homilies, and commentaries on individual books of the Bible spanning eight centuries, from Augustine and Jerome to Petrus Comestor and Peter of Poitiers. No other library in this country, and few anywhere, could have put together from its own resources such a selection of stunningly beautiful and significant books. Their presence at Harvard attests to the generosity of many friends and benefactors; among these it is appropriate to mention in particular the late Philip Hofer, whose gifts to Houghton over forty years included more than half the books in the exhibition. The items for display were expertly chosen and arranged by Houghton’s cataloger of Latin manuscripts, Laura Light, who was also responsible for the splendid catalog of the exhibition published simultaneously by the Harvard College Library. The exhibition and the catalog are by-products of an ambitious program to catalog all of Houghton’s medieval and Renaissance manuscripts according to modern scholarly standards; the first volumes, containing a description of manuscripts with the shelf-mark “MS Lat.,” will soon be ready for the press.

To celebrate the opening of the exhibition three of this country’s most distinguished medievalists spoke on aspects of cultural life in the twelfth century: written versions of their papers make up the contents of the current issue. Richard Rouse, Professor of History at the University of California at Los Angeles—and, incidentally, the teacher of Laura Light—made an