

Introduction

The Academy of Philadelphia, which matured later in the eighteenth century into the University of Pennsylvania, was organized in 1749 by a group of prominent Philadelphia businessmen, including Benjamin Franklin, who was elected its first president. The library of the new academy was begun the following year by gifts of books, including Milton's *Paradise Lost* given by trustees, including Lewis Evans and Benjamin Franklin. A 1751 inventory of the books in the College collection lists 97 volumes, and by the end of the eighteenth century, a manuscript catalogue records only a few hundred volumes.

Over the ensuing 250 years, the library has changed from a small collection of texts for faculty use to a research library collection of great depth and richness containing nearly five million volumes, heavily used by a faculty and student population of the first rank. It possesses great strength in professional areas, as well as the humanities and social sciences. Penn's collection is distinguished less by its sheer size than by its focus and concentration on academic areas of great and traditional strength at Penn. The collection of rare books and manuscripts is one of the country's oldest, though it has had formal existence as a distinct library for only a century.

The purpose of this book is to introduce Penn's collections of rare materials in a new way: rather than the illustrated lists with pictures that constitute the traditional "treasures" books celebrating bibliographic birthdays, Michael Ryan, Director of the Annenberg Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts, has recruited a group of faculty and library scholars to contribute essays on significant collections in which they are expert. Dennis Hyde, the Library's Director of Collection Development and Management, caps the book with an essay on collections in the present, giving context to the past—a unique approach. Illustrations are not lacking, and we hope you will learn from, as well as enjoy, the collection of essays that follows.

A work of this kind is a collaboration of minds and wills, and I would like to acknowledge some who have created this fascinating and beautiful book: Michael Ryan and Dennis Hyde, who edited it; Greg Bear, who designed it; and Elizabeth Nelson who knitted it together and refined it as copy editor. Martin Myerson, Penn's distinguished President Emeritus, historian, and President of the Friends of the Library, provided wisdom, knowledge, enlightenment and support for the project. Last, but hardly least, the contributors, who took time from busy schedules to tell the collective story of the University's distinguished collections.

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