A Taste of Recent Acquisitions

Arthur Mitchell Fraas

University of Pennsylvania, fraas@upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/uniqueatpenn

Part of the History Commons

http://repository.upenn.edu/uniqueatpenn/12

Fraas, Mitch. "Mussolini's Downfall" Unique at Penn (Posted 1 October 2013):
http://uniqueatpenn.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/a-taste-of-recent-acquisitions/

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/uniqueatpenn/12
For more information, please contact libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu.
A Taste of Recent Acquisitions

Abstract
Contextual essay about items in the exhibition of recent acquisitions at the Penn Libraries, Fall 2013.

Keywords
Book History

Disciplines
History

Comments
Fraas, Mitch. "Mussolini's Downfall" Unique at Penn (Posted 1 October 2013):
http://uniqueatpenn.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/a-taste-of-recent-acquisitions/

This working paper is available at ScholarlyCommons: http://repository.upenn.edu/uniqueatpenn/12
Every day the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the Penn Libraries acquires new and exciting material from around the globe. To help bring these items to the attention of a wide audience, Rare Book and Manuscript Library Director David McKnight and a team of curators and exhibit specialists have put together a fantastic exhibit showcasing some of their acquisitions over the past five years. For the next three months these items will be on display in the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center on the sixth and first floors. Some of these collections and materials have been highlighted here on the blog in the past, including the Fez collection of Lithographs and the Asylum for Orphan Girls Records. To encourage people to take a closer look at the exhibit I thought I would do a quick rundown of some of my other favorites now on display.

Upon entering the exhibit it’s hard to miss the item above which hangs on the back wall of the Goldstein gallery. An original 1926 tent revival banner measuring more than 10 feet across and four feet high, it was produced by Clarence Larkin, a baptist minister and former professional draftsman with a knack for integrating his millenialist theology with his design background. This particular banner, used in Harrisburg, Pa., depicts Larkin’s vision of salvation history and provides a sense of how visual and oratorical cultures
combined in the world of the tent revival.


Another favorite from the exhibition is this wonderful seventeenth-century uncut sheet of 52 playing cards with each suit representing a different continent (Europe: hearts, Asia: diamonds, Africa: spades, and the Americas: clubs). The cards contain facts about locations on the continent as well as portraits of leaders and other figures. Below are several uncut cards from clubs including the three (Florida), five (New Mexico), and Queen ['"D" for Dame] (Virginia). The idea of Elizabeth I representing the “Queen” of the Americas is particularly striking, especially for a game produced in France.

The Penn Libraries have a strong collecting interest in the history of reading and the book. The new acquisitions gallery is full of...
great items in this vein but one of my favorites is this collection of circulating library labels. The bookplates and labels on the left come from circulating libraries in Reading, Liverpool, Manchester, and Dover, and are just a small sample of a striking collection of 219 such labels acquired by Penn in 2011 with the assistance of the Allan G. Chester and Florence K. Chester fund. Circulating libraries sprang up in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to serve a growing populace of avid readers and these labels help document the spread of the libraries and their clientele. Some of the labels include detailed rules for borrowing and provide warnings against “tearing out Leaves, Prints, &c.”

--- Label from the Pitt Street Library in Liverpool (c.1800).

As is the case with book labels, the most interesting aspect of a book might not be its textual content but its material form. Perhaps my favorite example of this amongst the new acquisitions on display is a copy of an eighteenth-century printing of a classic of canon law

--- Examen Juris Canonici Juxta V libros decretalium (Vienna: Georg
What sets this volume apart of course is the contemporary recessed compartment provided for a pair of spectacles! This item came to Penn recently as part of the fascinating Dr. Daniel and Eleanor Albert Medical Ephemera Collection which has a special focus on ophthalmology and the human eye.

The photograph on the right is one of many items from one of the most substantial new acquisitions here at Penn, the records of the Vermont Marble Company. This collection contains hundreds of linear feet of documents, drawings, photographs, and other records from the 1870s to the 1970s. On display in the gallery are pay records and company store ledgers from the 1870s, advertisements for marble and its uses, and mesmerizing photographs of quarrying work as shown here. The Vermont Marble Company supplied stone to countless building projects across the world with a special focus on monumental architecture. The National Gallery of Art, Lincoln Memorial, and United Nations Building, among others, all used marble provided by the company.

Finally, no visit to the new acquisitions exhibit would be complete without seeing the colorful and physically impressive 15th-century Genealogical Chronicle of the Kings of England purchased by the Penn Libraries in 2007. The roll is 37 feet long in its entirety and provides a detailed if often fanciful genealogy of the English kings leading back to Adam and Eve. If you can’t make it to Penn to see the roll in Lehman, 1728).
person, scholars here at the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies (SIMS) have made it available online in several different formats. A full facsimile of the manuscript is available both with and without annotation describing each illustration and name on the roll. In addition, SIMS has filmed a video guide to the manuscript that helps explain it in more detail.

Ed. Note: This post would not be possible without the assistance of Andrea Gottschalk and her team of exhibit specialists who mounted the exhibit and provided many of the images used here.

Come visit the exhibition which is on display in the Goldstein Family Gallery (sixth floor) (closes December 13th) and the Kamin Gallery (first floor) (closes January 24)
Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center
3420 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA
Goldstein Gallery hours: Monday-Friday, 10am-5pm; Wednesday, 10am-8pm (after 6pm email rbml@pobox.upenn.edu for guest pass)
Kamin Gallery hours: Monday-Friday, 9am-6pm

About Mitch Fraas
Mitch Fraas is the Scholar in Residence at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. He is also the interim director of the Penn digital humanities forum. At Penn, Mitch works on a variety of projects cutting across general and special collections, with a special focus on digital humanities. He holds doctoral and master’s degrees in history from Duke University and earned his bachelor’s degree at Boston College. His doctoral dissertation examined the legal culture of British India in the 17th and 18th centuries, arguing for the existence of a unified early modern British imperial legal culture whether in Philadelphia, Bombay, or London.

View all posts by Mitch Fraas »

THOUGHTS ON “A TASTE OF RECENT ACQUISITIONS”

Suzanna Barucco said: October 30, 2013 at 2:01 pm

Thank you for this post—the first I've read from the Penn Libraries Blog (via Penn News Today). The wider university community should know more about the Library’s collection and acquisitions.

REPLY

Mark Mandel said: October 30, 2013 at 3:40 pm

Fascinating! I'll make a point of seeing this exhibit.

Regarding Elizabeth I as the “Queen” of the Americas: I was struck by the region that the creator of the deck chose for her to represent. On the other cards shown, Florida (3) “is of 3 types” and New Mexico (5) “has 5 regions”. Elizabeth was known as “the virgin queen”, so it's hardly surprising for her to represent Virginia.

REPLY

Mitch Fraas said: October 30, 2013 at 4:09 pm

Thanks so much – it’s a fantastic exhibit. Mark – I had also puzzled over the breakdowns of regions on the cards too. What surprised me about Elizabeth wasn’t so much placing her with Virginia but that a 17thc. French card maker would have elevated an English monarch to the status of Queen of the americas. Would have expected a bit more nationalism there!

REPLY

Catharine Findiesen Hays said: October 30, 2013 at 11:30 pm

As a born and raised Vermonter, I knew Vermont Marble as a proud part of our state’s economy and legacy throughout the US and the world, I was happy to learn of this acquisition and hope that the rich history of this American cultural treasure is brought to life in its new home.

REPLY

LEAVE A REPLY
The conclusions and views presented on posts within “Unique at Penn” reflect those of their writers and do not represent the official position of the University of Pennsylvania or the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.