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HENRY C. LEA—CITIZEN AND SCHOLAR

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The two main special collections in the Central Library, the Furness and Lea libraries, are peculiarly scholars' libraries, useful to two groups of advanced students and faculty. It is hoped to make these collections more generally known and appreciated. With this in mind an exhibition, "Henry C. Lea, Citizen and Scholar" has been arranged in honor of the publication of Lea's first article, one hundred years ago.

Lea shunned publicity as much as possible, and those who appreciate his work in one field of endeavor often do not know his achievements in other lines. His name means nothing to a great number of otherwise well informed people. The exhibition was arranged, therefore, to bring out his multifold contributions as well as to illustrate the contents of his great library. The publications and letters mentioned here are on display until the end of April, and the comment is largely taken from the descriptive labels used in the exhibition.

Henry C. Lea went to school for less than a year, although he had tutorial guidance. He never taught or had any university connection. He suffered physical breakdowns that incapacitated him for years at a time, and never had real leisure until he was nearly sixty. In his youth he made minor but solid contributions to science and literature. He had many successes as a leader in municipal reform in Philadelphia during the most disgraceful period of its municipal history. He is internationally known as one of a half-dozen or so preeminent American historians.
Lea's first publications were in the field of science. His "Description of some new species of fossils, from the Eocene, at Claiborne, Alabama," was written when he was fourteen, and published in the American Journal of Science (Silliman's Journal) volume 40. This publication has held a leading, if inconspicuous, position among American periodicals since 1818. Wolcott Gibbs, Asa Gray, and Louis Agassiz were all associate editors during this early period.

His "Description of some new fossil shells from the tertiary of Petersburg, Va." was read at the centennial celebration of the American Philosophical Society by an older friend and later published in its Transactions. Lea, at eighteen, was too modest to read it himself before the august assemblage. Before the age of twenty-five Lea had discovered and named 133 species of mollusks and two new genera.

Lea's interest in literature is shown with his "Greek epitaphs and inscriptions," which appeared in the Knickerbocker for August, 1843, also by the series of articles "Remarks on various late poets" in the Southern Literary Messenger (1845-1846) and his only volume of poetry "Translations and other Rhymes" (1882). He had published a dozen or more articles on literary subjects at the age of twenty.

Lea's research in chemistry, botany, and conchology lapsed when he entered his father's business, now Lea & Febiger, at the age of eighteen. Founded in 1785, this is the oldest publishing house in the United States to have a continuous existence. A first American edition of Gray's Anatomy (Philadelphia, Blanchard & Lea, 1859), lent for the exhibition by Lea & Febiger, illustrates Lea's activity in publishing from 1843 to 1880. Under his direction the firm began its specialization in books relating to the medical sciences.

Lea did not systematically save his letter files until late in life. Surviving correspondence with famous men indicates
the breadth of his interests and the high regard in which his opinion was held. An invitation to accept an honorary LL.D. at Harvard's 250th anniversary, signed by President Eliot, was declined. Not shown is the second invitation years later, which was accepted.

A letter from President Garfield, dated July 23, 1880, discusses at length his position on the Civil Service and Spoils issue. It is essentially a polite evasion of this delicate topic. Lea sent the letter on to E. L. Godkin, Editor of the Nation, who returned it with long comments on the character of the Presidential nominee. Godkin was one of the ablest of great nineteenth-century reformers, and his influence for good was out of proportion to the relative obscurity of his present fame. Garfield's reputation has been enhanced by the circumstances of his martyrdom.

Two long letters from Lord Bryce show that most of the information for his chapter "The Philadelphia Gas Ring" in his American Commonwealth was obtained from Lea. A first edition is shown opened at this chapter. The Gas Trust was the early center and breeding-ground for municipal corruption. Its foundation was the water-tight charter that held until its expiration in 1885. In aims and methods it had much in common with New York's well-known Tweed Ring, which Lord Bryce treated in the preceding chapter. Lea wrote many pamphlets on the Gas Trust, and a selection of these is shown.

Lea also brought the public attention to the "Philadelphia cocktail" in his pamphlet "The Water Supply." He complained that many citizens could not get it, much as they wanted it. Earlier this same year (1883) the governor commented on Philadelphia water in his annual message as "distasteful and unwholesome for drinking . . . offensive for bathing." The earliest known printed attack on this subject is that of 1771.
The Citizens Municipal Reform Association was founded in 1870 and Lea was its leader for many years. Many of its publications were really written by him. It was "the first organized attempt to combat political corruption in America subsequent to the [Civil] War." Four of its pamphlet publications, all by Lea, are shown, including two pamphlets on municipal reform. The Constitutional Convention acquiesced to the reform elements by allowing the cities to reform themselves, but the parties in power were slow to avail themselves of the privilege. It was the constant hammering of Lea and his friends which led to the Municipal Commission of 1876, and the final passage of its recommendations. Not until 1887 did Philadelphia gain a relatively modernized form of government.

Lea fought for Civil Service most of his life. His pamphlets "The Third Term" and "Mr. Cleveland and Civil Service Reform" illustrate his opposition to Grant and Cleveland on this issue. One of the most interesting letters in the Lea collection is an early one from Theodore Roosevelt, written before he had held any federal office, on the subject of Civil Service. Roosevelt apparently did not then know Lea personally, but wrote to him as a leader for reform of the Spoils System.

Lea was doubly interested in International Copyright as a publisher and author. A selection of eight pamphlets is shown. This subject stirred America's literary world for many years prior to the passage of the law of 1891, which Lea is credited with writing almost in its entirety.

S. Weir Mitchell was a friend of Lea from boyhood. For many years in middle life he could do no work because of nervous exhaustion and breakdown. Mitchell finally established the routine to avoid this sickness. One letter by each is shown, both discussing prospects for the "new" college
library building, very close to Mitchell's heart. Lea's answer of April, 1879 is a short, formal note. "What occurs to me to propose with regard to the University Library is to subscribe Five Thousand Dollars conditioned on Fifty Thousand being collected for fire-proof building & endowment & further, One Thousand Dollars for every Ten Thousand subscribed over $50,000 & up to $100,000."

To show in some measure the unusual resources of the Lea library and the human interest in its forbidding documents and heavy folios, Lea's History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages is opened at page 493 (vol. I) and the sources mentioned in the footnotes are grouped around in the same case. The page in question discusses reform of prison conditions in the early fourteenth century.

Bernard Gui's Practica is shown with a variant manuscript reading of great importance. The author was Inquisitor of Toulouse and his book is a manual of procedure and practice for inquisitors.

Lea took a story with a modern note, a prison custodian who charged the government for the care of men long since dead, from Les Olim, ou regestres des arrêts rendus par le Cour du Roi... tome III... 1299-1311 (Paris 1846).

Several copies of Doat manuscripts are included in the references. In the seventeenth century Jean de Doat was commissioned to copy archival manuscripts of historical interest in the provinces for the French Royal Library. He copied 258 folio volumes. Many of the originals have since disappeared and the Doat manuscripts form one of the most extensive sources for the history of the Middle Ages. Lea, living in the days before our modern photostats and microfilm, hired copyists to make transcripts of these and other valuable records. Hundreds of boxes of these are now in the Lea library.
Nicholas Eymeric’s *Directorium Inquisitorum* (Venice 1607) expounds the powers of the inquisitors and how to proceed against the heretics. “It was the famous Torquemada who first put into practice the horrible principles of Eymeric.” He had been removed from his office of Inquisitor of Aragon, but was later restored and enjoyed the high favor of succeeding popes. Bernardus Comensis’s *Lucerna Inquisitorum* (1566) completes the list of sources shown.

In his work Lea followed the policy of grouping his references without indicating just what citation was the source for each statement. Volume 3 of his “Inquisition of the Middle Ages” is shown, along with an interleaved copy of the same chapter, in which graduate students worked out the exact citations. Lea’s historical work has been carefully examined for errors by scholars seeking to disprove points of church history. Many of his volumes have been systematically checked and amazingly few errors found. He worked fresh from source material, often purposely avoiding contemporary authorities.

The last case of the exhibition shows a few typical volumes illustrative of the subjects in which the Lea library is strong. Most important and complete are the holdings on the legal and church history of the Middle Ages. Other subjects are French chronicles, magic, witchcraft, patristic writings, torture, and early local history of Italy. Lea followed no preconceived plan in building his library. He collected where his interests led him.

One of the most important items in the collection is the thirteenth-century manuscript *Formulary of the Papal Penitentiary*, which is shown with the printed version, edited by Lea. In the thirteenth century the Church at Rome had a routine for granting pardons and dispensations, often to guilty suppliants who had properly been condemned by local authorities. Exercising this power to pardon was the Papal Penitentiary. The “Formulary,” a record of 358 cases, shows the facts
established and the actions taken. It served as a guide for future action, much as printed court decisions do today.

Migne’s *Patrologiae* is opened at the title page of volume 1, series latina (1844). This set of 368 volumes, complete in the Lea library, covers the writing of the church fathers up to the Renaissance.

Two volumes of Jean de Gerson’s [Opera] (4 vol., 1488-1502) are shown primarily for their fine monastic library bindings, beautifully preserved. Both volumes have hooks indicating they were once chained, wrought iron corners, and are in heavy tooled pigskin.

Wadding’s *Annales minorum . . .* v. 1, (1625) is opened at the fly leaf showing the signature of Robert Southey. This work, running to many volumes, covers the history of the Order of St. Francis (1208-1540). There are many references in Southey’s correspondence to his difficulties in securing this work. When it finally arrived he wrote “I take ‘Wadding’ every night with my whiskey or my black current punch.”

*Rerum italicarum scriptores* (1723-51) v. 23 is opened at an account of Columbus by Antonio Gallo, a fellow citizen of Genoa who lived from 1440 to 1510. Muratori, the editor, printed in this set a tremendous collection of manuscript material relating to early Italian history.

Space in the outer hall is given to Lea’s many historical volumes. These include his *History of the Inquisition of Spain* (4 vols.), *Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies, History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences . . .* (3 vols.), and other historical works.

Also shown is Prof. Sculley Bradley’s “Henry Charles Lea” (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931) which is recommended to our Friends and to all those who take personal pleasure in the story of great, good works, quietly and effectively brought to pass.