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Moment in Time

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Moment in Time

Abstract

Contextual essay about an image of librarians cataloging books in 1948 at Penn Libraries.

Keywords

Libraries, Book History, Cataloging

Disciplines

History

Comments

Fraas, Mitch. "Moment in Time" Unique at Penn (Posted 14 March 2013):

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Nothing can more effectually contribute to the Cultivation & Improvement of a Country, the Wisdom, Riches, & Strength, Virtue and Piety, the Welfare & Happiness of a People, than a proper Education of Youth, by forming their Manners, imbuing

14 *Moment in Time*

Thursday
MAR 2013

POSTED BY MITCH FRAAS IN POSTS

≈ 3 COMMENTS

Just a brief post this week inspired by the [University Archives Digital Photo Collection](#) hosted by the Penn Libraries. I could get lost for hours browsing through some of the 7,000+ photos from Penn's history available online, finding images of everything from [Zane Grey in his Penn baseball uniform, 1896](#) to the [women who programmed one of the world's first computers](#). Working at the Penn Libraries though I was fascinated by this photo taken around 1948:

Tags

GV 1580 D248 v.14
[3039396]



— University Library Staff, Technical Processing (ca. 1948). In what is now Fisher Fine Arts Library. [UARC20071217006]

I like the clutter and commotion of the card catalog drawers, the books ready for processing, and the eerily-lit ambiance. On a lark I thought I would dig up one of the books waiting for processing that day in 1948. One of the goals of a library is to hold knowledge and enable its easy retrieval so I figured it would be a fitting example of the ways libraries stand the test of time.

WELCOME

Welcome to Unique at Penn, part of the family of University of Pennsylvania Libraries blogs. Every week this space will feature descriptions and contextualization of items from the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. The site focuses on those materials held by Penn which are in some sense "unique" - drawn from both our special and circulating collections, whether a one-of-a-kind medieval manuscript or a twentieth-century popular novel with generations of student notes penciled inside.

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Despite all the books in the picture I was only able to spot one with a legible title (position indicated above).



— Detail of the 1948 photograph (rotated 180 degrees)

On further examination, after rotating the image, the title looked like "Dance Observer" and I headed to the online catalog to see if we still had it in the stacks. The **first hit in the catalog**, the Dance Observer turns out to have been a periodical published between 1934 and 1964, more importantly the issues were here in the library only a few floors above me. Figuring the issue in question would have been published in or before 1948 I went browsing through covers to see if one matched. Only a few minutes later, there it was:

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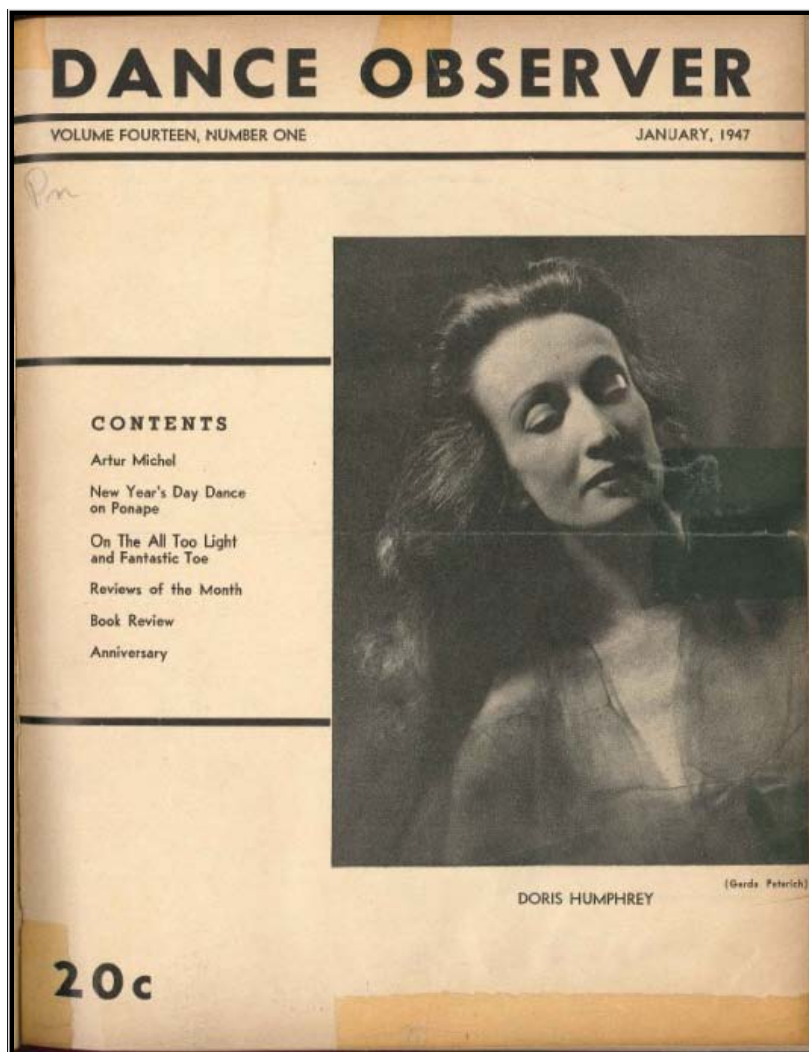
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- Penn's Apps on Tap
- Penn's Rare Books Cataloging Blog
- Penn Libraries Catalog (New Franklin)
- Penn's Rare Book and Manuscript Library
- DigitalPenn
- Penn in Hand
- Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts

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– Dance Observer 14.1 (January 1947). Penn GV 1580 D248 v.14

Easy to identify because of the striking photo of [Doris Humphrey](#) on the cover, this issue is today on the 5th floor of the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center. It's traveled over the years though, when it first came out in January 1947 it went to the [Maria Hosmer Penniman Education Library](#) at Penn which served as the departmental library of the School of Education. According to a small pencil mark inside the cover it was transferred on January 8, 1948 to the Furness building, which was once the main Penn library, and bound with other 1947 issues of the magazine. In the 1960s it then of course made the move over to the new Van Pelt library which celebrated its [50th birthday](#) last year. It's nice to see this magazine of dance reviews and news still right where it should be, thanks to the constant work of catalogers and library staff from the photo 65 years ago to today.

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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.

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THOUGHTS ON "MOMENT IN TIME"



Leslie Delauter *said:*

March 14, 2013 at 9:17 pm

Who knew that Zane Grey went to Penn! (Obviously not me.)

REPLY



B P Camden *said:*

March 15, 2013 at 1:37 pm

Looks like bindery prep.–batches of issues tied with string. Glad we have better lighting and work spaces now!

REPLY

Pingback: [Blogs at Penn Libraries | The Thread](#)

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