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UNH Exhibit Features Rare Books on Angling

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By Leah Gladu
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DURHAM, N.H. -- Fly fishing, an ancient but still popular sport, is featured in an exhibit at the University of New Hampshire's Milne Special Collections at Dimond Library. "Words on the Waters: The Literature and Landscape of 18th Century Angling," which contains more than 40 rare volumes on angling, and runs through June 10.

Bill Ross, special collections librarian, set up the exhibit, relying largely on 18th century books from the library's Milne Angling Collection. Many came from the personal collection of Douglas and Helena Milne, who donated their angling books to UNH Special Collections during the 1970s and 1980s.

Displayed in glass cases, the books are open to show various illustrations of men and women of the period dressed in fishing gear, standing on the banks of rivers and streams pursuing the sport.

"I think the actuality and the representation of angling as a part of 18th century culture is what interested me," Ross says. "We often think of fishing as the act of going out and getting fish," when actually, it tends to mean a whole lot more to anglers, he explains.

Among the leather-bound books are replicas of flies used during the 18th century, made mostly from brightly colored feathers -- eye-catching greens, yellows and blues, also darker blacks and browns. Some of the flies were made to look like real-life insects, while others were simply made to be attractive to fish in the water.

Besides the donation of their personal collection of books, the Milnes also established an endowment. Ross

buys when he can find a good book for a good deal, he said, because there are many "tremendous writers throughout the centuries who exemplify the love of nature and the outdoors."

It is a challenge to find older and rarer editions, he says, "but I don't think there's another sport for which there's such a body of literature."

Fellow fly fisherman Bill Cass, assistant director of UNH Career Services, says the Milne collection is "probably one of the most extensive collections in the country," with about 3,500 volumes.

Ross tries to make sure the collection is up-to-date and available for public use. He also tries to keep the Milnes in mind when he purchases new additions. "We try to live up to their interests as much as we can."

The Milne Special Collections is housed on the ground floor of Dimond Library, and is open to the public. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Saturday, 1-5 p.m.

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