



Who Uses Rare Books and What For

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SINCE 1927, THE YEAR that the Rare Book Division in the Library of Congress first opened its doors to the public, the number of readers tallied by the end of June 1956 amounted to 155,392. This figure, roughly approximating the total population of a city the size of Bridgeport, Connecticut, is impressive, but while it answers the question of "how many" it does not tell who these readers are, or where they came from. To answer this last question, it has been the practice for the past several years to include in the division's annual reports an analysis of the residences of the readers revealing in striking fashion that the division serves a nation-wide, even a world-wide, clientele. Last year the more than 5,000 readers who made use of the collections came from all but one of the United States, and from twenty-eight foreign countries or territories. As is naturally to be expected residents of the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland account for the majority of the readers, but the fact that 1,329 readers registered from other states indicates the extent of the national character of the service. Readers from foreign lands last year accounted for 139 additional readers.

The following list of topics reflects in partial fashion the subjects of research listed by readers in the division during the last two weeks of June 1956: juvenile literature, early Supreme Court in periodical literature, Gen. Daniel Morgan, American literature, George Pope Morris, William H. Harrison, John Gay, Tom and Jerry—characters in American drama, Edwin M. Stanton, street cries, Sade and Dostoevsky, German history, Congressional committee (84th Congress), St. Cyprian, accounting, church history, George Mason, sexual customs, chess, U. S. Navy, Christian Science, writing, War of 1812, history of mathematics, Spanish literature, penology, genealogy, gambling, logistics, English writers of California history, Shakers, psychology, District of Columbia, Richard Hovey, Western New York (1825),

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Hans Christian Andersen, Joseph Michaud, city directories, U. S. financial history, Isaac Backus, Jacobus de Cessolis, early South Carolina topics, Catholic Irish (1820-60), George Wither, Thomas Chittenden, Christina Rossetti, Southern Literary Messenger, marriage counseling, eighteenth-century newspapers, George Crowninshield, old instrument makers, cartoons of T. Nast, commodity outputs, 17th-18th century music, Jefferson's library, McGuffey readers, Central America, Russian history, Tayloe family, American Revolution, Ezra Pound, Chinese slavery, Alabama history, origin of Point Fosdick, David Belasco, population theory, the Elzeviers, Irish clan history, Girolamo Cardano, T. S. Eliot, bibliography, taxation, New Hampshire history, pathology, Goddard family, military history, first Congress, Lafitau, early Mexican imprints, and finance.

This list could be expanded indefinitely, for the readers who consult material in this division are aware of its diversity and frequently of its specialties. June was a particularly busy month for several candidates for the degree of Ph.D. One person, interested in juvenile literature during the years 1840-1870, examined nearly a thousand volumes in connection with the dissertation he is preparing for the University of Rochester on the sociological content of this literature. The Shaker movement in Tennessee is the subject of another Ph.D candidate who has been a frequent reader in the division while he has been stationed with the Army in Washington. Another young graduate student engaged in preparing his doctoral dissertation from Bangor, Pennsylvania, concluded a visit of several months after having made an exhaustive search of early colonial newspapers for source material relating to commercial interchanges among the original thirteen colonies.

An advanced group of professionals included the numerous professors who, if not residing in the neighborhood, utilized research materials available here during academic holidays. Among recent investigators there were an associate professor from Washington University interested in transcripts of Spanish archives relating to Texas history, a local professor preparing a bibliography devoted to colonial women for a text book he is preparing, and a visiting professor from Manila who was devoting his research to the history of the Jesuit fathers in the Philippines. Other academicians include seminarians and theological students; graduate students, including those attending library schools; college students handling specific research assignments in many fields, but particularly in political science, history, and literature; and lower down on the academic scale, younger students who

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are being exposed to both the pleasures and disappointments of original research. Within this classification should be grouped the individual scholars who are not strictly speaking academicians, but who are devoting their research to pursuits leading eventually to the preparation of scholarly studies and treatises on a wide variety of subjects for publication either independently or in professional journals. Such an investigator is the reader who has been scrutinizing the sheet music of the period 1865-1870 to determine how it reflected the theme of Lincoln's assassination. He has found the Illinois copyright records, and the sheet music on this subject in the Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana to be of considerable help in this study.

For want of a better label another category of reader comes under the heading of advanced investigator. Within this category are grouped other rare book librarians, the collectors themselves, and the dealers, whose motto "*Amor librorum nos unit*" is equally applicable to all three classes. Colleagues in the profession are always welcomed since librarians learn from each other through sharing both the common and more especially the uncommon experience, through the lively exchange of technical knowledge, and through learning about individual books and collections in the custody of one another. The collector is usually a specialist, and his enthusiasm for his subject invariably arouses a sympathetic reaction on the part of the rare book curator, who, eager as he might be, must be pardoned if he doesn't know quite as much as the collector himself about all editions of a given author. The collector is invariably only too willing to inform him or to be informed himself, and this interchange can be provocatively helpful. Through the generous assistance of a local collector, a large number of valuable color-plate books in the library's general collections were called to the attention of the staff, and this has resulted in the transfer to the safer custody of the Rare Book Division's vault-like stacks a large number of desirable and beautifully illustrated volumes which now will enjoy a renewed life of usefulness under conditions more ideally suited to their protection and preservation.

The pride that a collector takes in the condition of the books he has assembled frequently leads him to make comparisons with copies in other collections; textual content, illustrations, points of issue, binding variants, and provenance are just a few of the matters which collectors sometimes wish to verify. This connoisseurship can and frequently does lead to mutually beneficial results. The bookseller, too, is a connoisseur interested not only in the books he has available for sale, but also in finding out the strengths and the weaknesses of specific collections

so that he may be able more effectively to aid rare book curators in formulating meaningful acquisition policies. The dealer, like the collector, also is concerned about condition and the other points which distinguish individual copies of a given book.

Within this category of advanced investigator the bibliographer occupies an important position, for he can survive only if he is surrounded and absorbed by the material which he would submit to his discipline and study. For the bibliographers of American authors and American books generally, the Library of Congress occupies a position of particular helpfulness through the possession of the extensive files of the original copyright records and frequently the materials themselves that were deposited pursuant to the provisions of the copyright laws.

Other advanced investigators are the established novelists, the biographers, and the scholar-historians who could not, or certainly not as accurately or effectively, do their work without access to a great research library. Working as they frequently do in periods remote from the contemporary scene they must consult the older and frequently the hard-to-find materials, which have been preserved in specialized collections and depositories. One sometimes wonders how often their obligation to preceding generations of collectors and librarians alike is recognized and acknowledged. Lawyers on case work must on occasion avail themselves of the resources of a rare book library in preparing for forthcoming trials or in writing their briefs. The tidelands oil question brought here legal specialists representing both sides of the controversy. They consulted books and tracts which while not strictly legal in character had a definite relationship to the subject. Federal judges on numerous occasions have found it necessary to consult "rare" books in order to understand more clearly the cases before them or to write a decision at the conclusion of a case. Since the Library of Congress is the major federal library, it is used constantly by research workers employed by the government. One such individual, employed by the Department of Agriculture, has devoted considerable research recently to the study of statistics of wealth and income in this country during the early nineteenth century.

The journalist and reporter also is included with professional investigators whether he is affiliated with an established journal or newspaper or whether he is a free-lance writer. Probably no group is more demanding, for they frequently face dead-lines and must produce copy under pressure. In a very true sense the rare book library effectively

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assists in at least the partial support of the staff of many of America's pictorial weeklies.

Other advanced investigators who have not been mentioned are the technical specialists devoted to particular subjects of research which avoid general classification. As an illustration there are the students of the history of paper, printing, and binding, the principal characteristics of books and their production and reproduction. Appropriate reference should be made here to the occasional use by publishers in preparing facsimile editions of rare and desirable books. Copies in the L. J. Rosenwald collection of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* were lent a year or two ago to The Trianon Press in Paris, which has reproduced them in fine color facsimile.

A third type of patron can be broadly classified as the casual reader. Into this group fall the one-visit reader who, possibly wishing to verify a reference, calls for only one or two books; the genealogist who spends a few hours either identifying his coat of arms or examining a single genealogy appropriate to his family; the wholesale copyist who fills note books with his seemingly aimless transcriptions; and the visitor who has a book, usually a Bible, that he wishes to have identified or appraised. Just because this kind of reader is classified as casual, it does not necessarily mean that he is an idle reader. One such visitor spent the afternoon copying sketches from *Godey's Lady's Book*; the name appearing on his reader sheet was that of one of America's leading dress designers. What influence this had on the dresses he subsequently designed cannot be ascertained, but there can be no denying that he transcribed with great care innumerable details from the plates to be found in this once fashionable periodical.

The final group of readers, and by no means the most inconsiderable, are members of the library staff whose duties frequently require that they do research in this division. Most numerous are the searchers from the library's Photoduplication Service who frequently spend several hours a day here calling for material in order that estimates of the costs of photostats, microfilm, or photographs may be prepared. Most of these estimates subsequently become orders for photoreproduction, and the material itself is sent to the Laboratory for appropriate handling. This, like the reference service handled through an extensive correspondence, constitutes merely an extension of reader services, and the correspondents may be categorized in much the same way as the three major groups that have previously been mentioned. In a sense, however, this extension of services does not take into account the

following projects which in the past few years have made heavy demands for material in the division. There were no less than 1,818 requests last year for material to be reproduced in its entirety or in part. This represented an increase of sixty-six per cent above the figure for the previous year and is to be explained in large measure by the activity of the currently produced Microprint edition of Evans' titles (American books printed before 1801), and the Louisville Microcard project which last year reproduced nearly 400 volumes from the library of Thomas Jefferson.

Another extension service is provided to the Exhibits Office of the Library of Congress. It borrows during the course of the year many important books, broadsides, and pamphlets for inclusion in library exhibits. Sometimes, when adequate insurance and other fairly strict safeguards are provided, material from the Rare Book Division is sent out on loan to other libraries through arrangements made by the exhibits officer in collaboration with other library officials. Just a few weeks ago an important seventeenth-century French musical manuscript from the L. J. Rosenwald collection was returned from an exhibit in San Diego. A few weeks later nine books from the Rosenwald collection in company with ten or more others from this division were forwarded to the Toledo Art Museum for inclusion in an exhibit devoted to the history of musical notation, which opened there in January 1957.

On occasion material is lent to other divisions in the library for exhibit; during the October 1956 Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation Musical Festival four volumes from the division were included in an exhibit devoted to the score of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore*. It will come as no surprise to know that the books borrowed were all illustrated. Another instance of similar cooperation relates to the Hispanic Foundation's arrangements for blow-ups of photographs of important early title-pages or printed leaves representing important developments in typography; these are to be used as background material for the "Primer Festival del Libro de America," sponsored by the Universidad Central de Venezuela. The Library's Exchange and Gift Division, the Order Division, the Processing Department, which is responsible for the cataloging and labeling of the rare books, and other divisions within the Library to a lesser degree also make use of rare books as they relate to the particular responsibilities of these offices.

In considering the question of "Who Uses Rare Books and What For," the author chose to treat the subject directly from the point of view of the reader. This is not, however, the only way the subject

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can be approached, for the question could also have been phrased "What Rare Books are Used For." In other words the approach could be through the collections themselves and then, indirectly to the reader.

A few years ago when this division issued a checklist of *Fifteenth Century Books in the Library of Congress*, this writer prepared a short preface which answered the question: what use is made of such a collection? What follows is in no way a complete answer, but it will indicate how the collection which represents a very considerable investment is utilized. As the oldest printed books in the western world, they are perforce usually the scarcest and in many instances the most costly. The eminent and respectable age of these volumes is of itself important. Typographically the earliest printed books are diverse and in their very diversity they possess an absorbing interest; their various bindings will always be of interest to the student of biblioepy; collectors will delight in the manifold stories of provenance, tracing a given volume from generation to generation; bibliographers will be alternately perplexed and delighted in solving the riddles surrounding the production of many of these volumes; but first and last incunabula are nothing more nor less than books, and books which above all else are interesting because of what they contain.

Just as a matter of interest the Rare Book Division recently kept a record of the number of demands that were made on the several collections. These provide the valid answer to those uninformed critics who feel that such collections constitute so much dead wood. A correspondent in Wisconsin recently ordered photostats of the accounts of the life of St. Dominic and St. Francis of Assisi as these were related in the library's copy of the *Flos sanctorum*, printed at Santiago in 1485, the only copy available in America. An official at the British Museum requested bibliographical details concerning the library's copy of the 1491 edition of *Las obras de Seneca*. A student in Ottawa ordered a microfilm copy of the Rosenwald copy of the illustrated 1484 edition of Johannes de Turrecremata's *Meditationes*; similarly an investigator in Baltimore secured a microfilm of the unique Rosenwald copy of Johannes de Capua's *Exemplario contra engaños*. Two incunabula were consulted by a student interested in all of the early missals containing examples of early liturgical printed music. Another one of the early missals, and one of the rarest, the *Missale Romanum* (1483), printed entirely in Slavonic, so interested another investigator that after several days of study he decided to order photostats of many of the leaves.

One reader spent several days seeking early references to the life of

Mary Magdalene. The several incunabula requested included Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum doctrinale* and Caxton's edition of *The Golden Legend*. Early legal texts have been examined by the library's consultant in the history of Canon Law and by one of the officials at the Pierpont Morgan Library interested in determining the correct arrangement of an incomplete manuscript text in the collections of that institution.

Mention has been made only of the individual requests that have been made. Some emphasis should also be placed on the numerous visitations of groups anxious to see the collections in the stacks. One especially interesting visit was paid by a number of Johns Hopkins University students interested in early cartography. It was satisfying to be able to show them the earliest editions of Strabo's *Geographia*, a fine representation of the early Ptolemy's, and two copies of Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti's *Isolario*, the first maritime atlas.

The early bindings have interested a troop of Girl Scouts, a gentleman from the Public Records Office in London, and a lady from Hartford, who has made a detailed study of many of the panel stamps found on the original coverings of the library's incunabula. In brief summary, from the point of view of individual research, from group visitation, and for purposes of exhibition these early editions continue to play an important part in the service which the Library of Congress offers to its public; and just as long as the library endures these ancient volumes will continue to inform, to instruct, and to entertain.

Similar investigations of the uses made of the other collections in the division would also reveal the myriad ways rare books and the related materials which constitute a rare book collection are read and exploited. These books in the last analysis are read not because they necessarily are rare, but because they are important to someone's research—continually shedding light on new problems or explaining old ones. What better purpose can any library serve?

General References

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