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The Graphic Arts Department: An Experiment in Specialization

THE Department of Printing and Graphic Arts of the Harvard College Library was established in 1938 as an experiment in specialization. At that time there was no collection of books notable for fine printing, illustration, and binding from earliest times to the present day that embraced all countries, and especially none which had been integrated with a publishing and teaching program.

The basis of the Department's activity is naturally the book themselves. Chronologically, the collection begins with a group of Western European illuminated manuscripts which have been carefully chosen for interest and variety but which are necessarily few in number, since the world supply is today so limited. Additions to this section are made as opportunity offers, in keeping with the criteria established.

From this selective point of view the fifteenth-century imprints are representative and important. They are also considerably greater in number than the manuscripts, although not equal in this respect to the incunabula at the Library of Congress, the New York Public, and the Morgan Libraries. But the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century illustrated books of European countries are the best on this continent. Scholars and readers who have an interest in the arts and social life of these centuries will find a wide range of material.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sections of books are strong,

especially for Italy, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe including Russia. The twentieth century is adequate but not too extensive—through policy rather than through lack of interest—because the Library will certainly receive many modern books by gift as time passes.

Collateral material relating to the book arts is eagerly gathered. There is a very fine collection of type specimen books and writing books, of which the new Harvard-Newberry calligraphic series under the editorship of Stanley Morison of the *London Times* is intended to take advantage, together with the still greater holdings in Chicago's leading research library. There are many drawings for book illustration, as well as woodblocks, copper plates, and some lithographic stones. The Department has presses on which demonstrations are made from time to time, showing the technique of these processes to students of the University. There is a collection of end-papers, of posters advertising books, of binders' and engravers' tools, of paper, broadsides, and other ephemera. Thus the whole range of the book arts can be explored from almost any angle—all within reasonable compass.

The Department does not aspire to be larger than perhaps 25,000 carefully chosen volumes, with proportionate supporting material. An emphasis on quality and selectivity inevitably involves personal choice. No doubt some visitors and students will

not find either what they need or what they themselves might have chosen. But eight years is a very short time. In the next decade it is hoped that most of the present omissions will be filled, particularly in the earlier periods.

The collection alone would only be of historical interest to scholars and aesthetic interest to the casual visitor if it were not made currently and educationally useful as well within the framework of the University. Before 1942 there was an active teaching program. This is now being resumed as the University returns to its full curriculum. Besides courses, occasional seminars for advanced students are given by visiting scholars. A seminar on the relationship of the author Aretino, the artist Titian, and the printer Marcolini has very recently been held under the guidance of Professor Edgar Wind of Smith College. Earlier in 1947 three formal lectures on the 'Spread of the Renaissance by Means of the Book' were given by E. P. Goldschmidt of London, a visiting scholar and authority in that field. These were open to outside students and to friends of the Library, as well as to members of the University. Exhibitions are held from time to time in the main Houghton Library exhibition room, supplemented by smaller specialized exhibitions in the Department's own study.

Last but not least important is the effect which the collection may have on current book design and on the present-day study of the Book Arts. To this end there has been a publish-

ing program since 1939. In all, eight books have appeared under the Department's aegis, and three more are projected for the near future, including the first of the Harvard-Newberry Library *Calligraphic Studies*, which should be ready at the same time as this number of the BULLETIN.¹ These publications all have to do with some phase of the Book Arts in the broadest sense of these words. The Department has also published a series of colored reproductions. Some of these are historical Harvard views, others are made from material in the Department's collection, and from modern water colors. Cards, broadsides, and leaflets are also produced, some of the latter with the help of students and of the Harvard University Printing Office, where a printing shop has been set up under joint sponsorship.

Persons outside the University are encouraged to make use of the facilities of the Department. The number who have done so, while still small, is gratifying. If the experiment of a specialized collection in this field is to be a true success, it must relate to different phases of modern life. It is hoped that as the collection grows and its services expand, so too will its value as a center for investigation into many of the significant aspects of our cultural tradition. Investigation into these aspects cannot fail of importance in the understanding and expression of our own times.

PHILIP HOFER

¹ For a more detailed account of this new series and its first publication see below, under 'News of the Libraries,' p. 262.

List of Contributors

- KEYES D. METCALF, Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Harvard
Harvard University Library, and Librarian of Harvard College
- AGNES MONGAN, Keeper of Drawings in the William Hayes Fogg Museum of
Art, Harvard University
- CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON, Custodian of the Harvard University Archives;
Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society
- HAMILTON VAUGHAN BAIL, Deputy Treasurer of the Franklin Institute,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- REGINALD FITZ, Lecturer on the History of Medicine, University Marshal, and
Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Harvard University
- ROBERT W. LOVETT, Assistant in the Harvard University Archives
- WILLIAM A. JACKSON, Professor of Bibliography and Assistant Librarian of the
Harvard College Library in charge of the Houghton Library
- ADRIANA R. SALEM, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Harvard
College Library
- EVA FLEISCHNER, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts
- LOUISE B. GRAVES, Boston, Massachusetts
- PHILIP HOFER, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College
Library
- PHILIP J. McNIFF, Superintendent of the Reading Room in the Harvard College
Library
- FRANK N. JONES, Administrative Assistant in the Harvard College Library