

AN UNUSUAL COLLECTION OF UNUSUAL COLLECTIONS

Prologue

The University of Dubuque was begun in late autumn of 1852 by Dutch immigrant Adrian Van Vliet as an informal means of training German-speaking ministers in the Reformed tradition. It has accumulated an unusual collection of manuscripts and books which documents the history of the institution and the Midwestern context of the University. We are preserving and organizing these notable treasures in the Special Collections Section of the Charles C. Myers Library.

Description of the Collections

The University Archives contains meeting minutes, memoranda, letters, and other documents resulting from transactions of the Board, Presidents, Faculty, and other persons or groups associated with the University. The earliest records throw light on immigration into the territory of Iowa (1838) and state of Iowa (1846). Significant documents throw light upon the institution's relationship to the Church. The University Archives contains a complete collection of catalogs, yearbooks, periodical publications of the institution, and substantial files of newspaper clippings, particularly on sports.

The University Archives contains research notes and papers of some members of the Faculty. For example: Joseph Mihelic (1902-1989) was associated with the University, initially as a student; for many years, as a professor; and, during his retirement from teaching, as University Archivist. His papers include important documents on German Presbyterianism and on the history of the University. These papers include little known materials on the Church in Eastern Europe, particularly Yugoslavia, the country in which he was raised.

The German Presbyterian Collection includes archival documents and publications the Synod of the West, a Presbyterian synod based upon the German-speaking constituency rather than upon a group of local churches in a geographical area. The collection includes books and periodicals in German and English produced by the successive publishing interests of the Synod of the West and the University of Dubuque.

The Rare Book Collection consists of approximately 2,000 books, many of which were printed before the year 1800. Many of these books were originally owned by Adrian Van Vliet who appears to have accumulated a personal library of 230 books, a significant number for a pastor/professor on the frontier during the 1850s and 1860s. Other books were owned by other professors during the earliest years. Among the most valuable books are a number of rare Bibles, including a copy of Luther's German Bible (1556) and a second edition of Diodati's translation of the Bible into Italian (1641). Many of the rare books are from the eighteenth century, including the Codex Theodori Bezae Cantabrigiensis (1793), a printed transcription of the text of a fourth century biblical manuscript published by Cambridge University Press, and Encyclopedia Britannica (3rd ed.; 1797).

The Walter F. Peterson Collection consists of books published during the 19th and 20th

centuries. It includes American imprints from the early 19th century; copies of publications by Alumni and Faculty; and notable gifts appropriate to this collection. For example: When Archibald MacLeish was Honorary Rector of the University, he donated first editions of his published poetry to the University and these are retained in Special Collections. Further example: During the summer of 1992, the University received a gift of books from the personal library of the late Charles Platt. Titles from this gift included American imprints from the early 1800s, including Biography of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence (11 of 12 vols. from the early 1820s).

The William J. Petersen Collection on the History of Iowa and the Upper Mississippi Valley was developed around the archival documents, photographs and prints, pamphlets, periodicals, and books from the estate of the late William J. Petersen (1901-1989). It includes a complete collection of the "Rivers of America" in sixty-five volumes for which a bibliography is available. Further information concerning this unusual collection is available in another leaflet and detailed information in a guide available from a Reference Librarian.

There is an extensive collection of The Papers of Donald G. Bloesch, who taught at the Seminary for thirty-five years and, through his many students and prolific writings, was an influential theologian. There is a smaller, but very significant collections of papers and books from Arthur C. Cochrane that include significant documents concerning the theology of Karl Barth.

Personal Manuscript Collections are different from the foregoing collections in the sense that the other collections were developed around a core of library materials already available in the library, but some of these collections are being developed because of a special interest of the University. These collections will consist of the notes, manuscripts, typescripts, and other documents leading to the publication of books as well as the letters and related documents of the authors. The most significant collection available was The Papers of William Vandever (1817-1893), a citizen of Dubuque whose papers are particularly important for documenting his tenure as U.S. Indian Inspector (1873-1878).

Another acquisition is a small, but very significant body of papers, photographs, and books donated by Robert Woodward (of Dubuque) who served as a photographer/journalist for two years during the Vietnam War. This material provides resources for reflecting upon a turbulent period in the twentieth century, and also contains original works of art given by the people of Vietnam to Woodward. The most recent acquisition is Nicholas Palmer, "The Dubuque Symphony Orchestra; A Retrospective: 1960-1996" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa [1994]) which, together with his research notes, is significant because the Dubuque Symphony Orchestra began as the "University Civic Orchestra" (1960-1963), and has earlier roots in the musical tradition of the University of Dubuque.

Epilogue

The breadth and diversity of these collections surely warrants the description "An Unusual Collection of Unusual Collections." In many instances, these collections will directly support the academic programs of the University and, in other instances, the collections will invite the reader to engage in creative work beyond the formal structure of academic programs. We are delighted to invite students, scholars, and laypersons to become acquainted with these notable treasures at the University

of Dubuque.