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## THE FIRST PRINTED RUTGERS LIBRARY CATALOGUE: A SESQUICENTENNIAL REPRINT

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THE Covenant of 1825—for such was the term for reorganization at that time—between the Board of Trustees of Queen's College and the General Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church, began a new chapter in Rutgers history. Undergraduate instruction, in abeyance since 1816, was restarted, the Rev. Dr. Philip Milledoler was elected President, and the College was renamed in honor of Colonel Henry Rutgers. Professor John De Witt of the Theological Seminary received from the College the resounding title of Professor of Belles Lettres, Elements of Criticism and Logic, a hopeful augury for the future, and the congregations were again asked for contributions for the support of the library, which since 1810, when the Rev. Dr. John H. Livingston assumed the presidency of the College and inaugurated theological instruction in New Brunswick, had served both the Seminary and the College.

From the very earliest days of the College the *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod* refer constantly to the need for books. Even so, according to a June 1814 report, the library could only muster "upwards of 200 volumes" at that time. A donation by Mrs. Margaret Chinn in 1821, at the instance of the Rev. John De Witt,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> De Witt was appointed to the Seminary in 1823. He was greatly admired for the breadth of his literary culture, and he was a keen amateur botanist as well. For a sympathetic

added some 130 books in theology, and the 1825 fund raising effort produced \$375.25, which provided another 130 volumes, among them a complete Calvin, Hales's *Chronology* and Quick's *Synodicon*, together with some bookcases for the library room in the college building. Under the supervision of a seminary student, the library, situated then on the west side of the second floor at the rear of Old Queen's, was opened for an hour on Friday mornings, according to the 1825 *Statutes*. The niggardly hour opening remained in effect for the next ten years.

Enquiries into the possible purchase of the library of Professor Selah Strong Woodhull (1786-1826), were unproductive. There were more donations in 1830 (among them some public documents from Washington), and in 1831 the Synod decided to buy "at a fair and liberal price" the library of Professor De Witt, who had died the previous October, leaving a widow and a large family "in circumstances claiming the sympathies of the churches." The collection, with two bookcases, was appraised at \$2104.59 and, exclusive of 200 volumes of Dutch books, the listing of it, heavily theological, comprised some 420 titles in 701 volumes. It was duly purchased and transferred to the College library. Despite De Witt's reputation as "being extravagantly fond of the old poets and pure writers of the English language," their representation in his library was meagre. There was little more than a ten-volume Shakespeare, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Macpherson's *Ossian* and apparently no novels. He had an *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* and fourteen volumes of *The Quarterly Review*. His attachment to John Walker, whose books he favored in his instruction, is shown by his ownership of the *Logic*, the *Elocution* and the *Dictionary*, with some other grammars and works on rhetoric. De Witt also had Arnott's *Physics*, some botanical works, and a selection from Bernardin de Saint Pierre's popular *Studies of Nature*.

If all the De Witt books were included in the first *Catalogue*, as seems to have been the case, the College library before their accession would have comprised only some 870 titles in 1676 volumes. Thus De Witt's library was almost half the size of the College

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biographical sketch see *Centennial of the Theological Seminary* . . . 1885. Corwin's *Manual* gives further references.

collection, and it was doubtless this sizeable addition which led to the publication of the first printed catalogue.

Rutgers was dilatory in comparison with the other colonial colleges in this respect. Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Brown had all produced catalogues before 1800, and they were by no means exceptional by 1832, but the Rutgers one has hitherto escaped recording and has remained almost unknown except locally. A surprisingly large number of the early books remain extant, since Rutgers was spared the disastrous fires which periodically devastated the earliest libraries.

*The Catalogue of Books in the Library of Rutgers College*, dated so precisely July 7th, 1832, records some 1290 titles in 2377 volumes, classified under twenty-nine headings, of which thirteen have to do with theology and Biblical literature. The single largest category—Sermons and Minor Theological and Moral Works—comprises 230 titles and the total of all thirteen, together with appropriate titles drawn from the two miscellaneous sections, amounts to 830. Similarly history, ecclesiastical and profane (with chronology) accounts for 96, the Greek and Latin classics have 97, while Poetry and English classics together total 41 titles. Rhetoric accounts for another 41 and Science totals 42.

Though the standard texts used in the curriculum are found in the 1832 *Catalogue*,<sup>2</sup> often in multiple copies, the collection as a whole cannot, with the best will in the world, be taken as indicating that the library was regarded as central to the teaching process, despite the traditional lip-service given to the importance of books. Nor can the contents of the library be taken as a reflection of the intellectual interests and activities of the college community, for the collection had been accumulated mainly by gifts and rather fitful purchasing. One suspects that the three separately listed copies of Thomson's *Seasons* (one of which was De Witt's), were present more by accident than design. The twenty-five copies of a work entitled *Assembly's Digest* for example (p. 9) pertain to the Presbyterian Church and are present because they were given in 1828 to the Synod of the Reformed Church. Sweet's *Hot-house and Green-*

<sup>2</sup> Pages 14-16 may be compared with the 1833 *Catalogue of . . . Rutgers College*, where the course of instruction is laid out. See also McCormick, R.P. *Rutgers: a Bicentennial History*, N.B., 1966, pp. 42-5.

*house Manual*, 1828 (p. 34), came with the De Witt purchase and had no curricular implications. Henry F. Burder's *Mental Discipline; or hints on the cultivation of intellectual and moral habits addressed particularly to students in theology and young preachers*, 1827 (p. 10), did have some circulation, though the reasons for its presence in twenty-four copies can only be conjectured.

What the *Catalogue* does show is what the student of the 1830's at Rutgers had available to him and also what he did not have. The circulation records, which exist from 1825 and which await analysis, tell what the students actually read or intended to read. The figures for the year 1833-4, for example, show that of the twenty-six graduates of the class of 1835, nineteen borrowed books, withdrawing 116 volumes, one reader accounting for twenty-one of them. Twenty-seven of the loans were theological. Of the non-religious authors Shakespeare and Swift were the most read, with five circulations each and Beattie, Goldsmith and Dugald Stewart followed with four each. Professors' use of the library from 1825 was limited, with the exception of De Witt, an active borrower almost up to his death.

Thus, with almost 65% of the augmented collection being directly related to Biblical and theological matters, one of President Livingston's goals of 1810—the purchase of a library for the use of the students in theology—was achieved. The library served two closely related institutions, the College—or “literary department”—under the jurisdiction of the Trustees of Rutgers College, and the Seminary—or “theological department”—under the control of the Synod. Both shared the use of Queen's building and much of the instruction in the College was given by professors whose principal appointment was in the Seminary. Of course in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the term “literary” had far more extensive connotations than the more intensive meaning attached to it later. At Rutgers effectively all fields of instruction other than theology fell within the purview of the literary department. But whatever progress the library of the College may have made towards meeting the needs of the theological department as a result of the De Witt purchase,<sup>3</sup> the needs of the literary department were manifestly of secondary importance, for its mission, as frequently ex-

<sup>3</sup> The theology titles in the 1832 *Catalogue* await analysis and comment.

pressed by the Synod previously and repeated in June 1829, was that "it would prove a nursery to the Theological Department." It was the libraries of the two student societies, Peithessophian and Philoclean, which provided some sorely needed nurture to the literary department.

The appearance of the 1832 *Catalogue*, relatively late as it was, could be construed as a sign that at last the library was becoming a matter of concern to the Trustees. The same year, when there was another discussion of the desirability of severing the connection between College and Seminary, the literary institution was reported to be more flourishing than the Seminary.<sup>4</sup> In July 1835 a new set of regulations for the library was adopted. But if anything they were more restrictive than those in force, which had remained almost unchanged since 1825. The library had to be open for at least half an hour a week, and new rules to protect the books were made. The librarian was henceforward to be appointed by the faculty instead of by the President. A charge was instituted for the use of the library (two dollars a year, but reduced in October to one), and rearrangement and classification of the collection was recommended.

The first faculty holder of the office of librarian, Professor Alexander McClelland, either out of modesty or unwillingness "consented to discharge it at least for the present." In a long and plaintive report considered by the Trustees in January 1836 he observed that "the state of the library was bad and needed a radical reformation." The books were out of order—"Owen on Communion with God was found with Tristram Shandy on the one side and Woodbridge's Geography on the other." Circulation practices were slipshod and 135 titles recorded in the recent *Catalogue* were missing in whole or in part.

But the connection between Seminary and College was maintained, which must have continued the inhibiting effect on the way in which the library's collection developed in support of the literary institution. McClelland's report is concerned only with managerial matters and nowhere mentions the quality of the collection. Significant change in it could hardly come about without change in the curriculum and methods of instruction.

<sup>4</sup> *History of Rutgers College: or an Account of the Union of Rutgers College and the Theological Seminary . . .* by a Trustee, N.Y., 1833, p. 23.

The next catalogue was to be published in 1854. It recorded about 2126 titles in some 3775 volumes (of which about 546 were government documents), the result of twenty-two years of slow growth. Its title—*Catalogue of the Theological Seminary and the Rutgers College Libraries*—is indicative in foreshadowing the division of the library between Seminary and College which came about in 1859. But it was only after this, the transformation of the College after the Civil War and the annulling of the past covenants with the Synod, that the new concerns of the College could be expected to have some effect on the library. The process was a slow one.