

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES— EXHIBITIONS, 1985-1987

Compiled by JANICE A. KRAUS

Ms. Kraus is the Rare Book Librarian and Exhibitions Coordinator for Special Collections & Archives

Exhibitions are a vital part of the activity of a research library. They offer yet another opportunity for the display and interpretation of a library's holdings, especially its rare or unique items, things which, while listed in various bibliographies or itemized on online systems, may still be inadequately known even to a local constituency. Exhibitions are a forum in which one breaks away from the single book or document to cut across divisions of format and to approach an idea of the sum of an author's thought collectively, to inform, delight and entertain.

Special Collections & Archives has always had a strong tradition of such displays. In May 1985 such opportunities were enhanced by the addition of Gallery '50, which greatly increased the space available for exhibitions. Since then, it has been possible, with Gallery '50, the cases in the New Jersey Room (the reading room of Special Collections & Archives) and those in the Alexander Library lobby, to present as many as three different exhibitions simultaneously, using rare books, manuscripts or materials from the University Archives.

In the more than two years since the Special Collections & Archives exhibitions program was renewed, twenty displays, both large and small, have been mounted, covering such topics as student life at Rutgers, the value of "ephemeral" materials as signposts to the preoccupations of an age, the richness of certain areas of the rare book collection, the recurring celebration of Black History Month, the bicentennial of the Constitution, a tribute to a generous donor and several shows mounted by guest curators. It is not possible to describe in detail every exhibition; a chronological listing follows the discursive summary.

The opening exhibition entitled *On the Banks: Student Life at Rutgers, 1766-1985* was a display of photographs and memorabilia which featured a selection of the original pictorial material used in *The Rutgers Picture Book* drawn from the University Archives.

The rare book collection has been explored thematically in several of the exhibitions in order to reveal previously unheralded pockets of strength. The benefits have not only been in terms of display; collection development has also been refined as a result. The most extensive exhibi-

tion in this area was *The Babel in the Tower: Intellectual and Other Adventures in Dictionary Making*, which revealed only a portion of the collection of dictionaries and ancillary texts in Special Collections & Archives.¹ From a page of Gutenberg's *Catholicon* of 1460 to the competing dictionaries of Noah Webster and Joseph Worcester in the mid-19th century, it was possible to trace, though in brief, the development of the dictionary format, first as an interlinear device through the stage of bilingualism to the monolingual. European and American nationalism, either coupled or at odds with attempts to establish governing councils, or academies, to regulate slippery language itself, were also apparent in the various dictionaries which were produced between 1460 and 1860.

The rare book collection also has a small collection of early imprints which, though interesting typographically, were shown as artefacts of their ages. These volumes provided the raw material which supported three exhibitions. One such exhibition, *A Maximis ad minima*, illustrated the popularity of certain works in the age of early printing from those prescribing for activities relating to farming to those falling into the category of the sublime, such as Dante's *Divina commedia* and that standard for understanding the medieval mind, Jacopo da Voragine's *Legenda aurea*. Many of these volumes also provided the basis for another exhibition *Selected Early Printed Books in History & the History of Science*, which had several superb early botanical volumes illustrating the development of direct observation of nature, from the schematized models in one early printed work of Odo of Meung to the lovely, hand-illuminated botany of Otto Brunfels. Of course, it would not be possible to acquire any of these volumes without the continuing support from donors, and *Gifts Well-Timed: the Brower Endowment* was mounted to pay tribute to one such donor, the late Charles H. Brower (R '25).

Black History Month has provided Special Collections & Archives with the opportunity to display items from its collections which relate to the celebration of the Black experience. The first such exhibition was *James Dickson Carr '92: Rutgers' First Black Graduate*. Carr's distinguished career was traced using materials from the University Archives. *Enduring Struggle: Some Experiences of Slavery* was a display of letters and other materials which antedated the Civil War. One such series, in particular, were the letters of Peter Still, an ex-slave

¹ I should mention, with thanks, that President Edward Bloustein and Professor Jerry Rosenberg (Newark) both lent items from their own lexicographical collections for this exhibition.

whose missives trace his indefatigable efforts to ransom the rest of his family.

Collections of ephemera are always interesting inasmuch as they provide the evidence of what were sometimes the temporary concerns or activities of people or they presage what became vital, continuing priorities. *Poets & Pamphleteers: Perspectives on British and American Studies in the Rutgers University Libraries* was one such exhibition illustrated profusely with these so-called ephemeral materials, pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers placed together with what sometimes resulted in the way of important published works of Milton, Cobbett and Defoe, among others. The ephemeral publications are valuable for revealing the state of mind of an author or a people at a given moment. *Pale Reflections: A Different Look at Menus* approached the subject of the ephemeral from another perspective. Even among ephemera, menus have to be one of the most typical kinds of "throwaway" materials. Rutgers is fortunate to have a fairly extensive menu collection, comprising mainly 19th-century menus from which all sorts of data may be gathered. The objects range from high-toned menus for British royal functions to those gracing the tables of railway restaurants, cheaply printed with relevant information for travellers.

New Jersey and the Ratification of the United States Constitution: A Bicentennial Celebration was mounted in conjunction with various other national celebrations of the bicentennial of the Constitution. On display were two (of four) pages of New Jersey's copy of the original ratification document, along with newspapers, letters and portraits from the period. These items illustrated the process involved in New Jersey's speedy acceptance of the federal Constitution and highlighted the strong personalities involved in the discussion, along with accounts and objects which evoked the atmosphere of the age. The New Jersey State Archives contributed documents from its own collection to the exhibition and a part of the exhibition was put on display in Trenton.²

Guest curators have also contributed to the exhibition program of Special Collections & Archives. Twice, the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Museum has lent materials from its collection of children's literature for displays. Ruth M. Patt displayed memorabilia illustrating some of the themes in her book *The Jewish Experience at Rutgers* and Gertrude Dubrovsky lent photographs for an exhibition entitled *New Jersey Jewish Farmers*.

² Copies of the catalogue and the transcription of the ratification document are available on request.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES—
EXHIBITIONS 1985-1987*

- May—August 1985: *On the Banks: Student Life at Rutgers, 1766-1985*. Gallery '50, the New Jersey Room and Alexander Library lobby cases. Curators: Ruth J. Simmons, Patricia Buickerood; installed by members of Special Collections and Archives.
- September 1985: *Rutgers Collection of Children's Literature*. Gallery '50. Guest Curator: Dorothy Verkerk.
- October 1985—January 1986: *Poets and Pamphleteers: Perspectives on British and American Studies in the Rutgers University Libraries*. Gallery '50. Guest Curator: Alice D. Schreyer; installed by members of Special Collections and Archives.
- February—July 1986: *A Maximis ad Minima*. New Jersey Room. Curator: Janice A. Kraus.
- February—April 1986: *Pale Reflections: A Different Look at Menus*. Gallery '50 and the New Jersey Room. Curator: Janice A. Kraus.
- February—April 1986: *James Dickson Carr '92: Rutgers' First Black Graduate*. Alexander Library lobby cases. Curators: Peter Mazzei, Janice Levin.
- May—November 1986: *The Rutgers Picture Book*. Alexander Library lobby cases. Curator: Janice Levin.

* This is the first annual report on exhibitions mounted by Special Collections and Archives in Gallery '50, the New Jersey Room and the Alexander Library lobby cases.

- May 15—17, 1986: *Special Exhibition for Alumni Reunion Weekend: The Works of Clement Marot in the Rutgers University Libraries*. New Jersey Room. Curator: Janice A. Kraus.
- September—October 1986: *Illustrating the Picture Book. Rutgers Collection of Children's Literature. Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum*. Gallery '50. Guest Curator: Dorothy Verkerk; installed by Janice A. Kraus, Ruth J. Simmons. *Selected Children's Books from the Rare Book Collection of Special Collections and Archives*. New Jersey Room. Curator: Janice Levin.
- November 1986—February 1987: *The Babel in the Tower: Intellectual and Other Adventures in Dictionary-Making*. Gallery '50. Curator: Janice A. Kraus.
Selected Early Printed Books in History and the History of Science. New Jersey Room. Curator: Janice A. Kraus.
- December 1986—February 1987: *Alfred Joyce Kilmer, 100th Anniversary, 1886-1986*. Alexander Library lobby cases. Curator: Janice Levin.
- March 1987: *Enduring Struggle: Some Experiences of Slavery*. Alexander Library lobby cases. Curator: Janice A. Kraus.
- March—August 1987: *New Jersey and the Constitution*. Gallery '50. Curator: Maxine N. Lurie; designed and installed by Janice A. Kraus.
- May 1987: *Gifts Well-Timed: the Brower Endowment*. Alexander Library lobby cases. Curator: Janice A. Kraus.

September—October 1987:

THE JOURNAL OF THE

New Jersey Jewish Farmers. Gallery '50. Curator: Gertrude Dubrovsky; installed by Janice A. Kraus.

The Jewish Experience at Rutgers. New Jersey Room. Curator: Ruth M. Patt; installed by Janice Levin.