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Fifteen Years of Collection Building

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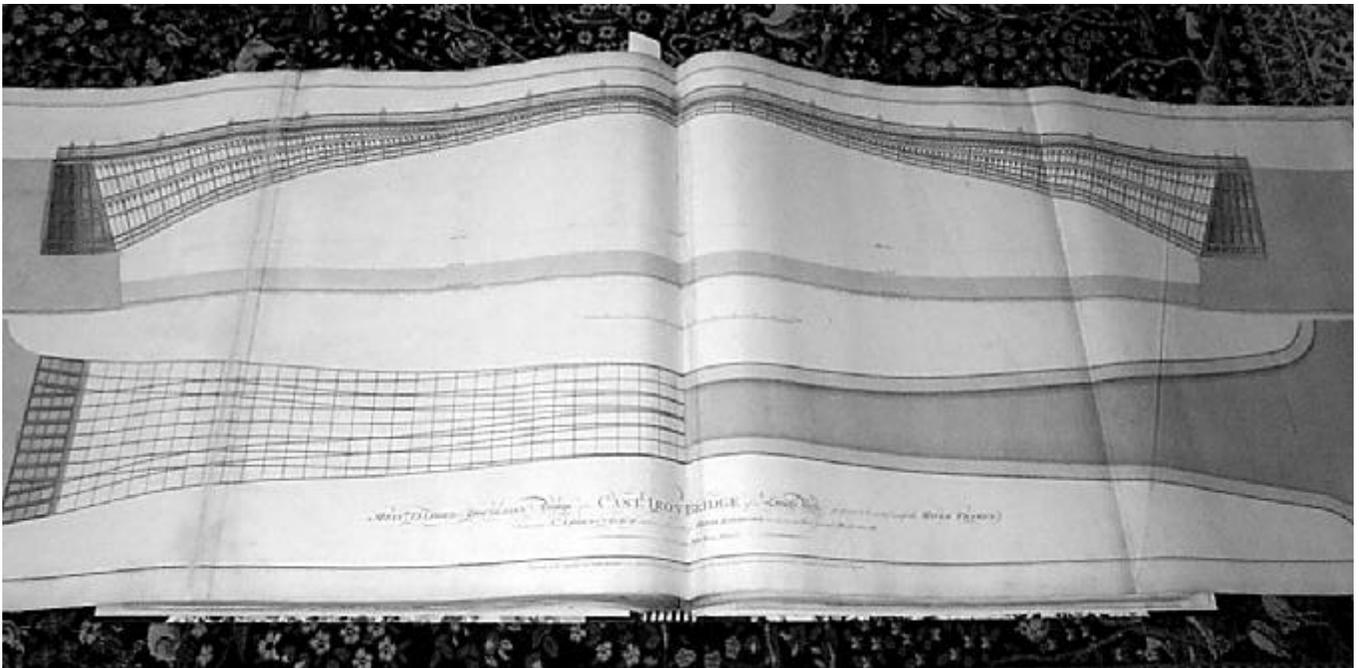
Special Collections *Flyer*

FIFTEEN YEARS OF COLLECTION BUILDING

Lehigh's Special Collections program was profoundly changed in 1985 by the opening in Linderman Library of the Bayer Galleria of Rare Books and the Bayer Family Room, gifts of the Curtis '35 and Rachel Bayer family. These magnificently renovated spaces have made possible a much more dynamic and creative program, in terms of both public service and collection building.

Indeed over these past fifteen years the collection has been used extensively by Lehigh faculty in the course of their teaching and research. Flyers 5, 10 and 13 describe some uses of the collection. Also, in this period the collection has been built in very diverse ways. "From Zachariah Allen to Vittorio Zonca: 15 Years of Collecting," a new exhibition in the Galleria and Reading Room at Linderman Library, contains a selection of these recent acquisitions that seek to link the collection closely to the evolving needs of the curriculum.

I'm often asked how Special Collections acquires new material for its collections. The only accurate answer, although certainly a facetious one, is "Every way, short of robbery, fraud, and mayhem, that it can." The purpose of this *Special Collections Flyer*, extended to four pages, is to flesh out that answer with examples and stories from the last fifteen years of Special Collections acquisitions, and at the same time



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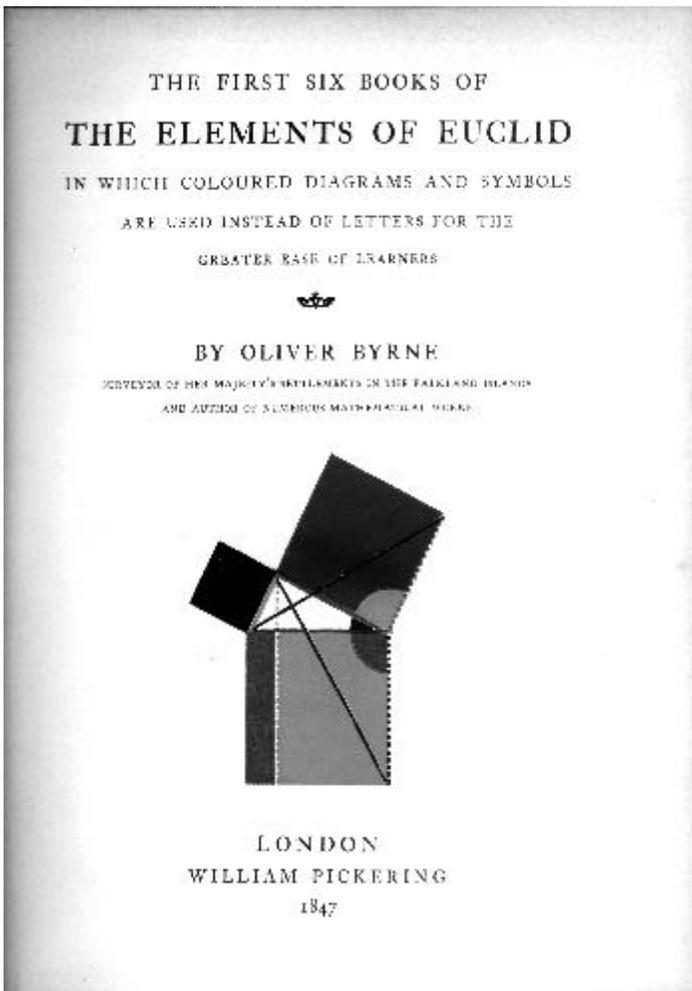
to shed some light on all that falls under the phrase "every way."

Of course, there are two fundamental ways that books and other material can be acquired: gift and purchase. Gifts can be extensive, such as the Birkinbine engineering firm papers (described in issue

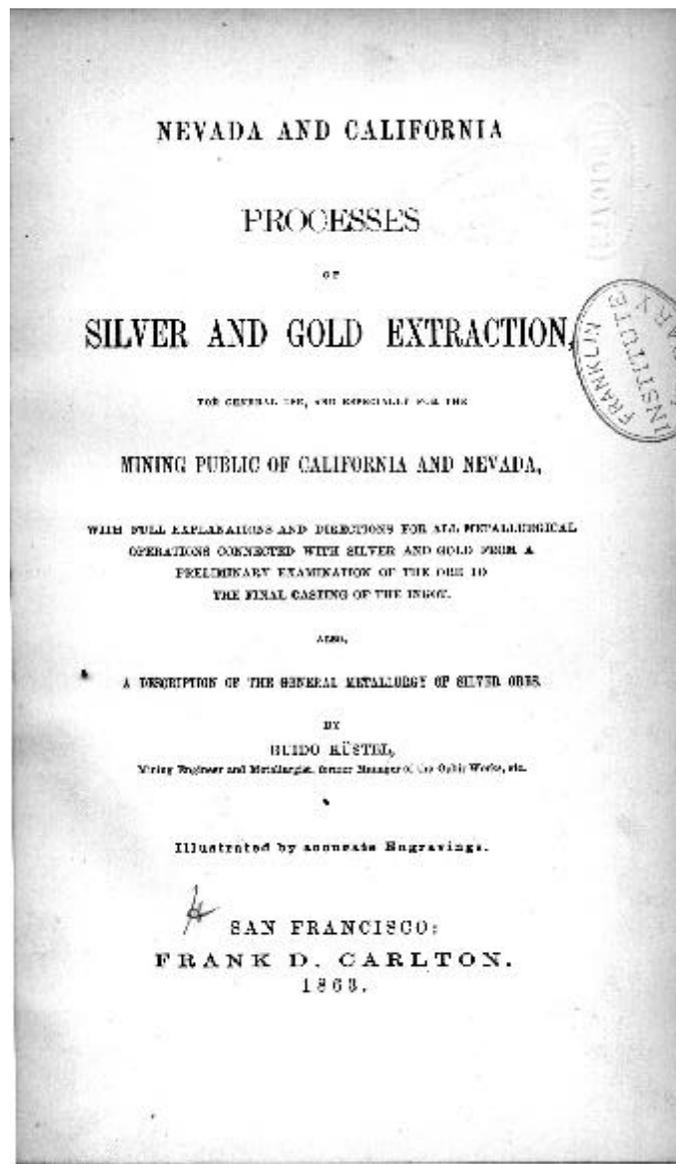
number one of this publication), or as small as one early postcard view of Lehigh or a photograph of a campus scene.

In a real sense, the library itself is a donor. Books bought a hundred or more years ago, and still on the open shelves, may acquire attributes over time which may make them suitable transfers to Special Collections. A high monetary value developed over time, recognition as a seminal work in a collecting field of interest to Lehigh, or the realization that the book was printed in very small number, are just three of the reasons a work might be transferred. To date over 2600 volumes have in fact been transferred. The process was described in issue 11 of the *F lyer*.

In addition, the traditional ways of finding and purchasing books and other materials continue to be essential. Booksellers catalogs, particularly from those dealers who specialize in areas in which we have an interest, continue to be of value. So do visits to antiquarian book fairs both national and regional, and visits to individual booksellers.



With the arrival of the Internet and the world wide web, the ways in which books could be purchased expanded significantly. Nonetheless, relations with

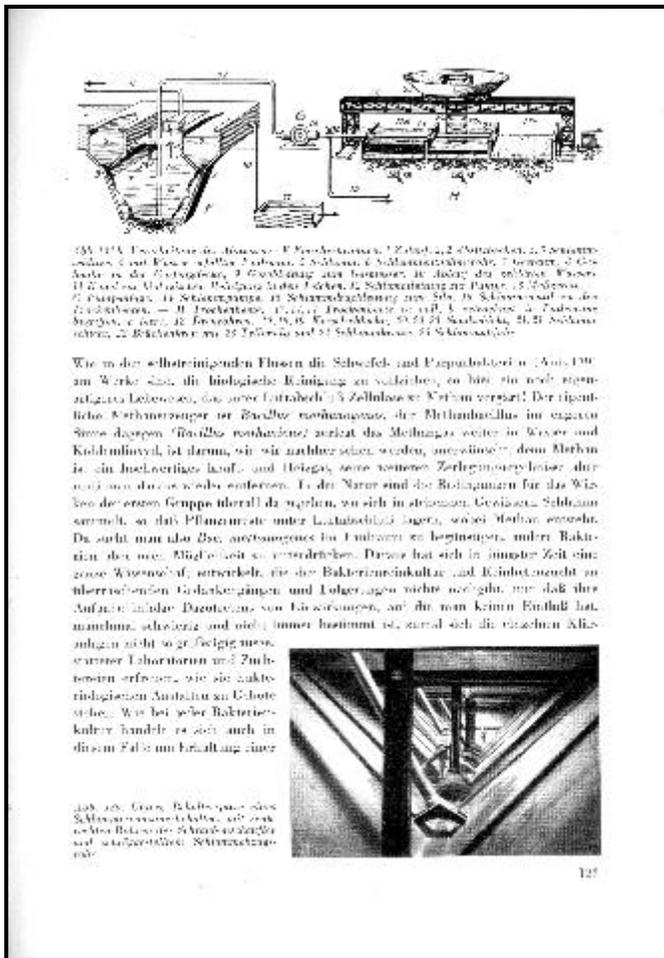


specialist booksellers, and the constant effort to make contact with new sources, is crucial to locating high-value and very rare material.

For that reason every trip I take, for whatever reason, also has as a component visits to booksellers. In addition to looking at their stock I also talk about Lehigh's collecting interests. They may not have anything at the moment, but when they do, I want to be the first to hear.

Last year, for example, during a visit to Sacramento, Calif., among my bookseller stops in the region was an antiquarian dealer in Berkeley. A month after my visit he offered Lehigh a large collection of folio plates relating to British Parliamentary reports between 1796 and 1808. These plates depict proposals to reconstruct the London docks, and include spectacular depictions of bridges that were proposed as part of this work. This collection of plates is, as far as I can determine, unique in being together in one volume.

(One plate is depicted on the first page of this *F. Iyer.*)
 In another case, attendance at a conference found me



In this case the world wide web provided to be the resource of the hour, enabling acquisition of a wide range of material – from county atlases to locally published town histories – very quickly. Used and antiquarian book dealers have been quick to take advantage of the digital age to make their stock available to anyone in the world who can search one of several databases established for the purpose. What would have previously taken years to find now can take only months.

Auctions play an occasional role in acquisitions. My first experience with a high-end book auction was the February after I arrived at Lehigh. Normally a librarian engages a bookseller to bid at auction on behalf of a library; the process can be much more objective, and a bookseller's advice can help with the evaluation of the book and the proper price.

But wanting the direct experience of an auction, I took advantage of the presence at a Sotheby's sale of a work on chemistry by Robert Boyle, who was already represented in the collection to make a trip to New York to see if I could acquire the volume for a reasonable sum, and I did. In the process I gained much more insight into the ambiance of an auction house.

Nonetheless, when about ten years later the great Renaissance work on machinery by Vittorio Zonca came up for sale, an experienced bookseller bid for Lehigh. The library acquired this important volume for an excellent price, due in no small part to the fact that the author's last name begins with "Z." This fact made it the last lot in the auction; everyone else, it seemed, was out of money or too tired to bid.

Another important part of looking for, and finding, important books for a collection is the book fair. These range from regional fairs, such as one held in Fort Washington, Pa., twice a year, or the New York Antiquarian Book Fair every April. At the former, five and ten dollar books are not uncommon. At the latter, anything under five hundred is a surprise.

Book fairs give an opportunity to see at least part of the stock of a large number of dealers, and possibly to acquire something useful. That's where Byrne's *The Elements of Euclid* caught my eye. But more important than that, they provide an opportunity to talk to booksellers and explain in person what is being sought. Very often this results at some later time in a telephone call or letter from one of these booksellers who has found something of interest.

On one visit to the Fort Washington fair I had occasion to talk to a general used and antiquarian bookseller in a northern suburb of Philadelphia. He knew of a large collection of pamphlets and other material relating to the development of a public water supply in Philadelphia in the early part of the 19th century. It eventually came to Lehigh without ever

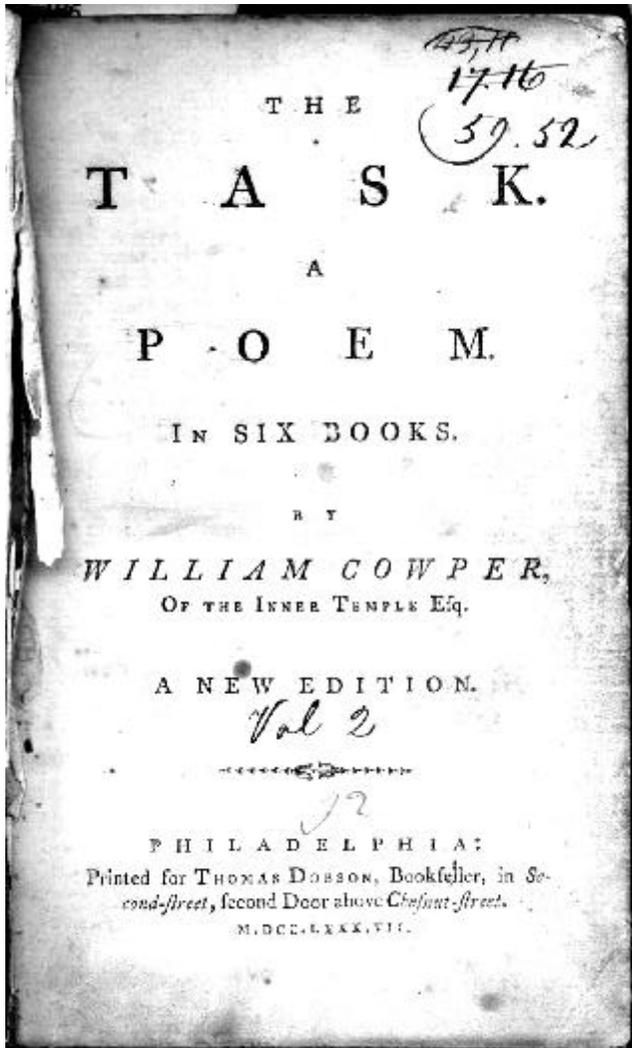
sitting next to an independent bookseller who quickly found out about Lehigh's interests. Some time later Lehigh was offered, and I eagerly purchased, an album published by the Phoenix Bridge Co. in Philadelphia depicting their work in constructing what was then the highest trestle bridge in the world. It bridged the Pecos river in west Texas for the Southern Pacific Railroad. The 30 photographs show the process of construction from start to finish. Lehigh's copy is one of two recorded in the world.

The focus of collection-building efforts is suggested by these examples: bridges and associated civil engineering issues. This topic builds on strengths already in Lehigh's library, strengths which date from the beginnings of Lehigh in the latter part of the 19th century. What was once current has become historical.

However, this is not the only topic which has been developed. Recently Lehigh purchased a good deal of material relating to local and regional history in the 19th century, using funds provided by a thoughtful alumnus.

having gone on the open market.

Occasionally it is necessary to take quick advantage of unusual circumstances. In the mid 1980s the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia decided to divest itself of its technical library, which had been in existence since the 18th century. The collection was



divided into lots by subject and offered for sale by means of a silent auction. Written bids were sent in, and the highest bid for each lot became the purchaser. Through this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, Lehigh was able to acquire a fine collection of works on 19th century mining and metallurgy.

All this would not be possible without the funds to make acquisitions. Special Collections' resources come from another gift, a bequest actually, of a substantial Sherlock Holmes collection, formed over a lifetime by a Lehigh alumnus, and left to his alma mater. Since this material, ranging from pristine first editions to a box of match covers depicting the great detective, did not fit within Lehigh's collecting interests, it was sold, and the proceeds have strengthened Lehigh's library resources over the years, and will continue to do so.



The most recent purchase is a modest volume, located in an antiquarian shop in Berlin, Germany. Its title, *Technik der Stadt* (see p. 3), suggests its comprehensiveness in looking at the technology of city building as it was understood in the late 1930s.

The most recent gift arrived a few weeks, a collection of editions of the late 18th century English poet William Cowper. The donors were Dr. William B. Todd, Lehigh '40, and his wife Ann Bowden. The gift, consisting of about 300 volumes, adds yet another scholarly dimension to Special Collections' holdings, holdings which have expanded considerably over the last 15 years.

— P.A.M.

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Special Collections materials are available for research and consultation without restriction. For further information contact Philip A. Metzger, Curator of Special Collections, or Ilhan Citak, Special Collections Assistant. Reading room hours are Monday through Friday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment. Telephone: (610) 758-4506; fax (610) 758-6091; e-mail: inspc@lehigh.edu