

25 years at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library

By Alexandra Mason

Special Collections at the University of Kansas

The collecting of rare books and manuscripts at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, began within twenty years of the university's founding with the purchase by J.S. Crew & Co. in June 1881 of Raleigh's *History of the World in 5 Books* (London, 1687)—for \$3.87—along with Johnson's *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (London, 1781)—4 volumes at 63 cents each—and 30 other 18th-century English imprints. By August 1886, donations of rare books had begun with the gift of Pliny's *Naturae historiarum libri xxxvii* (Hagenoae, 1518) from William A. Phillips, a Scottish expatriate who had come to Kansas in 1855 as a special correspondent for the New York *Tribune* and stayed to found the city of Salina.

These early acquisitions—all of them except one of the 18th-century titles are still in the library despite having been in the general stacks for nearly 80 years—eventually became the nucleus of a rare books collection with natural history and the English 18th century as two of its strongest specialties.

Growth of the rare books collection proceeded slowly over the next three-quarters of a century. Impetus for the appointment of specialized staff and the provision of separate

quarters finally came in 1945 with the bequest by Ralph N. Ellis of his extraordinary collection of ornithological books and manuscripts. In 1953 the Department of Special Collections was established and its first curator, Joseph Rubinstein, was appointed to develop and care for the University's rare books and manuscripts.

Over the next 15 years the department far outgrew its first minimal quarters (a walled-off area of the stacks shared by collections, staff, and readers) and two other locations to which it moved in the main university library. Its staff increased from one to four, one of whom succeeded Rubinstein as head of the department in 1963. The collections grew to nearly 90,000 volumes. Through generous support from the university and donations of books, manuscripts, and funds from friends, the department continued to develop its special strengths while expanding into other areas.

The Ellis Collection (ornithology, other zoological history, exploration, and scientific expeditions) was joined by the Fitzpatrick botanical collection and a specialty in medicinal botany was established. A premier Linnaeus collection was formed from strong holdings in the Ellis and Fitzpatrick collections. With the establishment of the Summerfield Collection of early modern European printing (15th–17th centuries), the department was able to pursue collecting in the natural history of both the Old and New Worlds; develop



This is part of a document signed in 1559 by Elizabeth I and contained in the Spencer Library's collections.

Alexandra Mason is head of special collections at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence; e-mail: amason@ukanvm

Plug into Congress

...With Washington Alert, the premier service for tracking congressional and state legislative and regulatory activity, created by Congressional Quarterly.

With more than 20 searchable databases including the full text of CQ publications, Washington Alert offers a remarkably detailed picture of Congress — ideal for a variety of groups at your institution, from government affairs administrators to students of political science.

There's no better way to track the issues — whether you're following the latest developments surrounding a bill or downloading a complete legislative chronology. No other one-stop resource offers such complete access to this fast-changing information.

Plus, Washington Alert is accessible via the Internet and offers a choice of flexible subscription plans.



To find out more about Washington Alert and learn how you can obtain a free trial, contact Waldo Tibbetts at 1 (800) 432-2250 ext. 350. (In D.C., phone 887-6350), or internet WTIBBETTS@CQALERT.COM.

son, to collect Kansas imprints and the history of Kansas. By the mid-1960s the Kansas Collection was a very strong local history collection, with such rarities as Jotham Meeker imprints and ephemeral publications from across the state. It had been named an official Kansas state publications depository and was acting as an unofficial University Archives. The collection was heavily used by students and local residents, and shared all the housing problems of the Department of Special Collections.

The Kansas Collection now contains regional history materials from roughly 1850 to the present, reflecting the economic, cultural, social, and political history of Kansas and the Kansas region, including the Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements begun as a collection of 1960s Kansas radical publication

but now expanded to document left- and right-wing activity nationwide. The departmental holdings include over 100,000 printed volumes, nearly 10,000 linear feet of manuscript materials, a million and a half historical photographs, large numbers of maps, architectural drawings, and material in other media.

University Archives

University Archives—originally part of the Kansas Collection and officially established as a separate entity in 1969—houses official and unofficial records of the university, with another million photographs, including one of the largest American archives of sports photographs.

The building of collections is the basic responsibility of a library like ours but it is not the only one. Service to researchers, internationally famous scholars, or young students just beginning their intellectual lives takes precedence over everything else in the day-to-day work of our staff. The students and researchers are, after all, the reason the collections exist.

Service to the library's patrons

Our subject specialists teach classes and give lectures in the same subject areas which they develop through our acquisitions program; they select books and manuscripts for faculty to use in their courses and provide assistance with research. Our curator of manuscripts helps researchers with manuscripts and teaches students to read the handwriting of the past. Our conservator advises enquirers on the care of their own books and helps them deal with damaged books. We teach a course in the history of the book and act as a museum of the book, teaching our students to understand the meaning of books and, through our exhibition program, illustrating and publicizing our resources. To make our collections known far outside our own campus, we contribute records of our cataloging to national and international bibliographical databases.

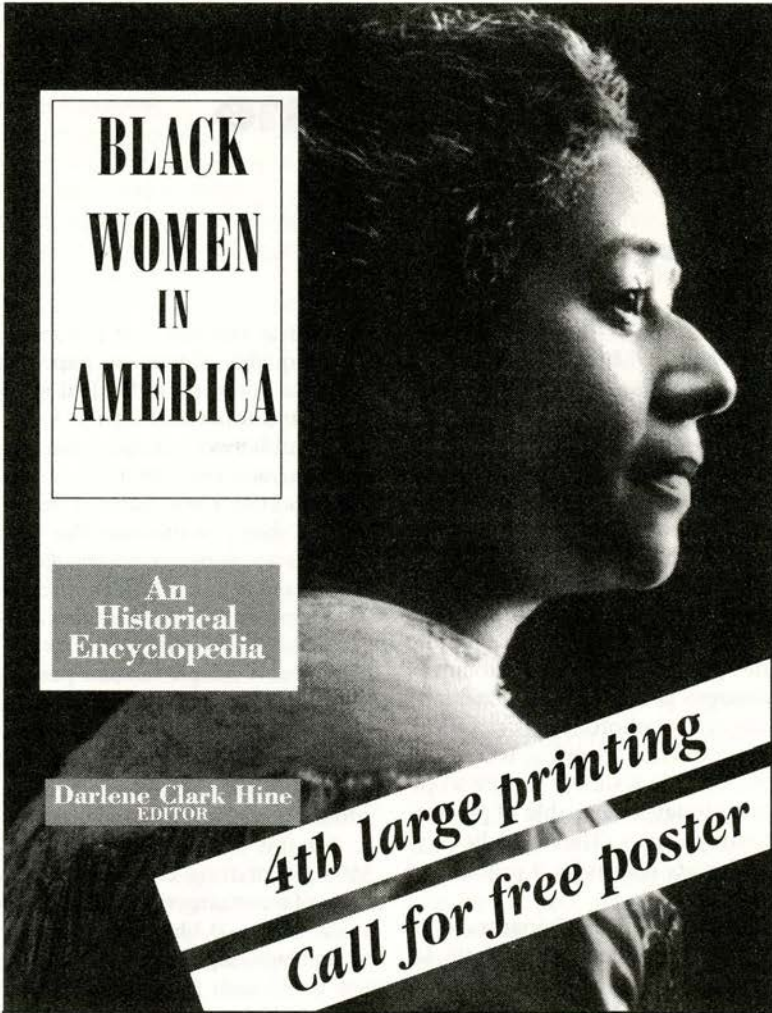
The development of such a resource library here in Kansas has been made possible by the encouragement and gifts of the university and its friends. We are confident that, with the help of generous friends, the challenges of the future—new research interests, new methods, new forms of evidence—will be met as the Kenneth Spencer Research Library continues its mission of support to humanistic research and teaching and the discovery and interpretation of the past. ■

Anniversary celebrations

The Kenneth Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas (KU), Lawrence, will observe the 25th anniversary of its opening with a triple exhibition. Each of the three departments of the library will mount an exhibition devoted to showing its own particular strengths and activities. The University Archives will display university records concerned with the establishment of the library itself. The Kansas Collection will showcase its activities in preserving, both by collection and by conservation, the heritage of Kansas. The Department of Special Collections exhibition, "Finders & Keepers," will honor the donors, booksellers, collectors, scholars, librarians, and others who have built, supported, cared for, and used the collections. Each book or manuscript shown will be related to the "finders" and "keepers" in its history. An illustrated catalog will be published.

The formal celebration will take place in the spring of 1994. The exhibitions will be opened with a reception in the afternoon on April 15 and John T. Casteen, president of the University of Virginia, will speak at a gala dinner hosted by the KU Friends of the Library that evening.

In connection with the anniversary, a fund drive is being undertaken for the purpose of supporting future exhibitions and publications.



**BLACK
WOMEN
IN
AMERICA**

An
Historical
Encyclopedia

Darlene Clark Hine
EDITOR

4th large printing
Call for free poster

“. . . a standard reference source for years to come. Highly recommended for all libraries.”

Choice

For information about discounts and to request a splendid

FREE POSTER

call toll-free **1-800-336-7460**

or write **CARLSON PUBLISHING, INC.;**
P.O. Box 023350; Brooklyn, New York 11202