

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

Why I Love the Library by Jane Donohue Eberwein

I may be one of the few people hired in Oakland's early years on the strength of its library collection. By the time I showed up for my campus interview in the winter of 1969, I'd been through interviews with other English departments and had always gotten evasive responses when I asked whether they could provide access to the *Early American Imprints* microcard collection. While doing graduate work at Brown University, I had relied heavily on that resource, which made it possible to read any book printed in what became the original United States that had been published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – at least if one were willing to risk eyestrain from constantly shifting focus and to devote hours to hand-copying salient portions of documents. Imagine my surprise, then, when – at an interview lunch with Professors Robert Hoopes and Gertrude White of the Department of English and Charles Akers, then chairing History, Charlie leaned across the table and confided, "You will be pleased to learn, Miss Donahue, that we have the entire collection of *Early American Imprints*." In subsequent years, I came to appreciate even more the care Charlie had taken in building the Kresge Library's collections in areas that proved enormously helpful to me for teaching, editing, and research.



In my first semester teaching, I sent all my Early American Literature students to the library to make use of those microcards. I recall their discovering Increase Mather's sermon against "profane and promiscuous dancing" among other revelations of Puritan culture. It turned out that the Kresge Library actually improved on Brown's in one respect: it had a copying machine that allowed researchers to reproduce pages without resorting to pencils. It also had Jenny Cross as the librarian who made my students and me welcome with the kind of generous help that I have found characteristic of our library staff. Over the years, though, the copying machine gave out and could not be replaced, microcards came to seem burdensome by comparison with newer research tools, the budget didn't allow for replacement of that collection with its microfiche upgrade, and enrollments in Early American Literature grew so large that it was no longer feasible to require all those students to compete for the one remaining reading machine.

Even so, the Kresge Library came through for me and my students. I think especially of the class sessions Mildred Merz planned year after year to demonstrate the most useful research tools for papers on Indian captivity narratives, sentimental fiction, and other topics. And I discovered, with a sort of awe, that our Special Collections holds a first edition of Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*. Meanwhile, the collection of Emily Dickinson materials kept pace with my other literary passion.

Now, in retirement, I still benefit from our library collections and services. An especially exciting development this past year has been on-line access to the *Early American Imprints* electronic database. I can browse at home through the *Bay Psalm Book*, John Eliot's Algonquin translation of the Bible, Anne Bradstreet's *The Tenth Muse*, and eighteenth-century American printings of Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man." This benefit didn't just happen; it came about because our library faculty and administrators have kept the *Early American Imprints* collection in mind through four decades, and they know that faculty successors to Charlie and me still want this reading opportunity for their students. Thank you, friends at the Kresge Library!

SUMMARY

Distinguished Professor Emerita Jane Eberwein shares with readers of The Fountain the sources of her deep and abiding love for this library in particular, whose very existence helped woo her to Oakland university at the beginning of her long and illustrious career.

Created by Frank Lepkowski (lepkowski@oakland.edu) on Wednesday, March 3, 2010
Modified by Frank Lepkowski (lepkowski@oakland.edu) on Friday, March 12, 2010
Article Start Date: Wednesday, March 3, 2010