

Collecting Stories: 35 Years of the Bentley Rare Book Museum



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All images are courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

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Curator's Statement

In the July 27, 2009, issue of *The New Yorker*, Nicholson Baker wrote a review of the Kindle 2 e-reader produced by Amazon. In Baker's review, he featured quotes from Kindle 2 users who chose to share their personal reviews on Amazon's site. One user expressed her appreciation for the Kindle's cleanliness. "I've always been creeped out by library books and used books," she wrote. "You never know where they've been!"

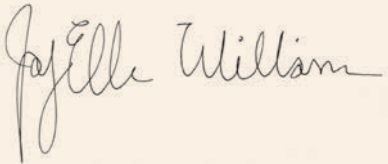
What this reviewer failed to realize, however, is that books do tell us where they have been. They reveal clues about their production through watermarked pages, elaborate colophons, hidden chain lines, or publisher's advertisements. They boast provenance through inscriptions, ownership signatures, bookplates, and library stamps. Books even tell us how they have been used, perhaps through the faint scent of a kerosene lamp emitting from its pages or the perfectly circular tea stain from a bibliophile's favorite mug. When we collect books, we collect stories of their production, dissemination, and use that become intertwined into the life and materiality of the book itself.

For thirty-five years, the Bentley Rare Book Museum (BRBM) has collected books and the stories behind them. Along the way, the BRBM has accrued its own set of stories that now contribute to history of every book in the collection. *Collecting Stories: 35 Years of the Bentley Rare Book Museum*, addresses the "how?" the "why?" and the "what?!" of book collecting, paying homage to the journey of acquiring books that is often forgotten or overlooked. This exhibition also celebrates the BRBM's unwavering commitment to community. As the sole rare book museum in the state of Georgia,

the BRBM embraces its responsibility to provide diverse patrons with tangible and memorable experiences with rare books.

At the BRBM, we collect books; we collect stories; we collect experiences. As curator of this exhibition, it is my hope that you become inspired to begin or to continue book-collecting efforts, stopping along the way to appreciate the journey each book has taken before reaching your hands.

JoyEllen Williams

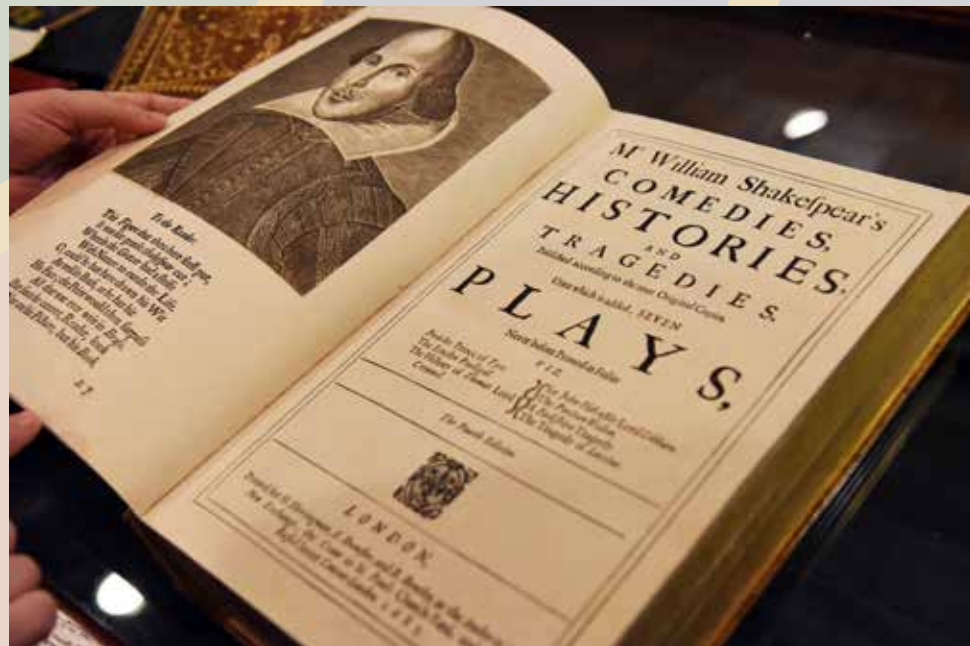
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "JoyEllen Williams". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned below the printed name.

Curator, Bentley Rare Book Museum

The Art of Book Collecting



Book press featured in the Bentley Rare Book Museum.



Frontispiece and title page of 1685 Fourth Folio of Shakespeare.

“I never knew a world without books.”

– Robert B. Williams, Curator Emeritus of the Bentley Rare Book Museum

Since the emergence of the written word, people have valued books. Nicknamed bibliophiles, book hunters, book nerds, or even “the gently mad,” lovers and collectors of books, much like their collectibles, are too numerous to count. Although the practice of collecting books has ancient origins, the modern rare book market is largely a nineteenth-century concept in the United States and Europe. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, books were still relatively scarce and generally reserved for the wealthy. The Industrial Revolution forever altered this reality through the production of cheaper, more accessible books intended for the general public. Along with increased access to books, the nineteenth century book trade witnessed other important changes, including the demarcation of the literary canon, rising interest in antiquities, and the recognition of high-value books like the First Folio of Shakespeare. By the late nineteenth century, the “Golden Age of Book Collecting” had begun.

Heightened interest in book collecting, combined with the development of modern research universities, encouraged institutions of higher education to develop rare book libraries. Private, prestigious universities like Oxford, Yale, and Harvard led the way in this endeavor and started designating rooms and buildings to house special collections and rare books. Younger institutions continued this trend, often engaging in aggressive collecting efforts to augment collections. At the same time, private collectors like J.P. Morgan and Henry and Emily Folger were amassing unmatched collections of rare books which formed institutions named in their honor. Other collectors gifted their books to public universities desiring seed collections. Such was the case at Kennesaw College in the mid-1980s.

The Time is Now



Mr. Fred Bentley Sr. [left] and Dr. Betty L. Siegel [right] seated in the Bentley Rare Book Gallery, circa 1990.

“When I teach Introduction to English Studies, I always bring my students to the Bentley. They always get excited when they have an opportunity to handle and analyze rare books—it’s one of my favorite days every semester!”

– Dr. Miriam Brown Spiers, KSU Assistant Professor of English and American Studies

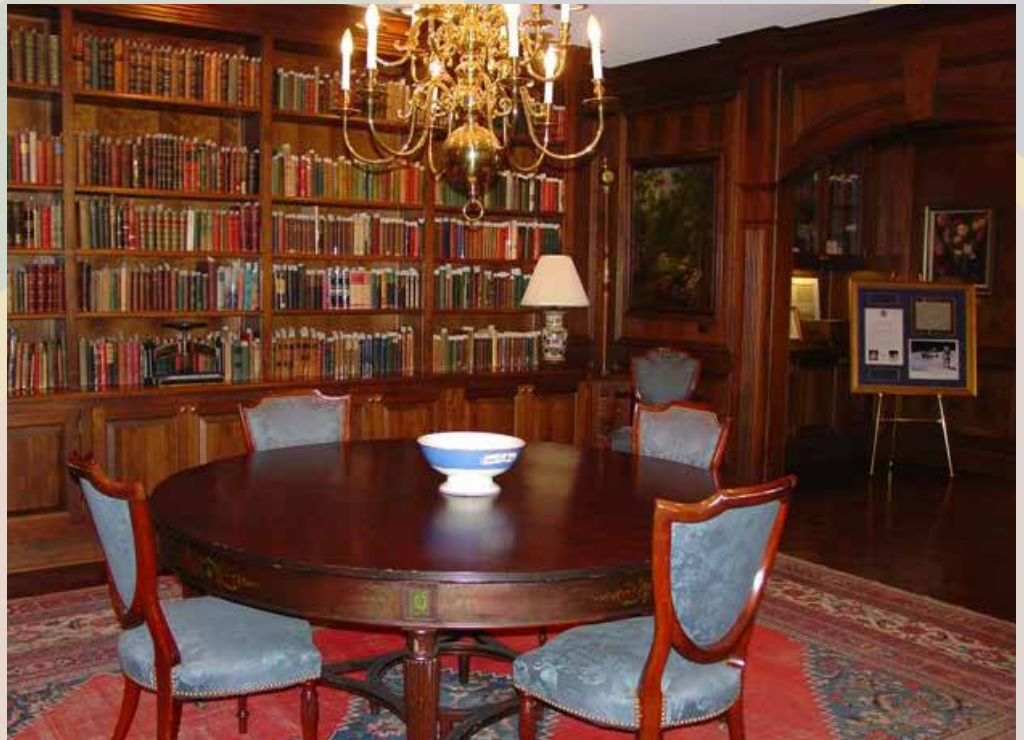
The year 1986 was a critical one for the rapidly growing Kennesaw College. Not only did this date mark twenty years since the school’s opening, but it also brought record-breaking enrollment with 7,296 students attending in the fall quarter. The newly minted president, Dr. Betty Siegel, had recently implemented her View of the Future plan that heightened Kennesaw College’s academic rigor and on-campus opportunities. It was also that year that Robert Greene, the school’s first library director, announced his retirement and paved the way for Robert B. Williams to assume this role – one he would keep for the next twenty years.

During a gathering at President Siegel’s home, Robert Williams met lawyer and avid book collector, Fred Bentley Sr., who served on the Kennesaw College Foundation Trustee Board. Both men agreed that Kennesaw College needed a rare book collection to mark the school as a destination for scholarship and research. A vision for the rare book room was born. Williams and Bentley agreed to repurpose an old faculty lounge located in the basement of the Horace W. Sturgis Library as the new rare book gallery. With seed money from Mr. Bentley and the KSU Foundation in hand, the transformation commenced.

Fashioning the Space



Mr. Fred Bentley Sr. standing in the unfinished Bentley Rare Book Gallery, 1987.



Bentley Rare Book Gallery, circa 1988.

“Mr. Williams and the Bentley Rare Book Room created a spark in me that has remained alight for over 20 years as I strive to bring that same appreciation and passion for local history to our community today.”

– Amy Reed, Director of the Marietta Museum of History; KSU student 1998-2002

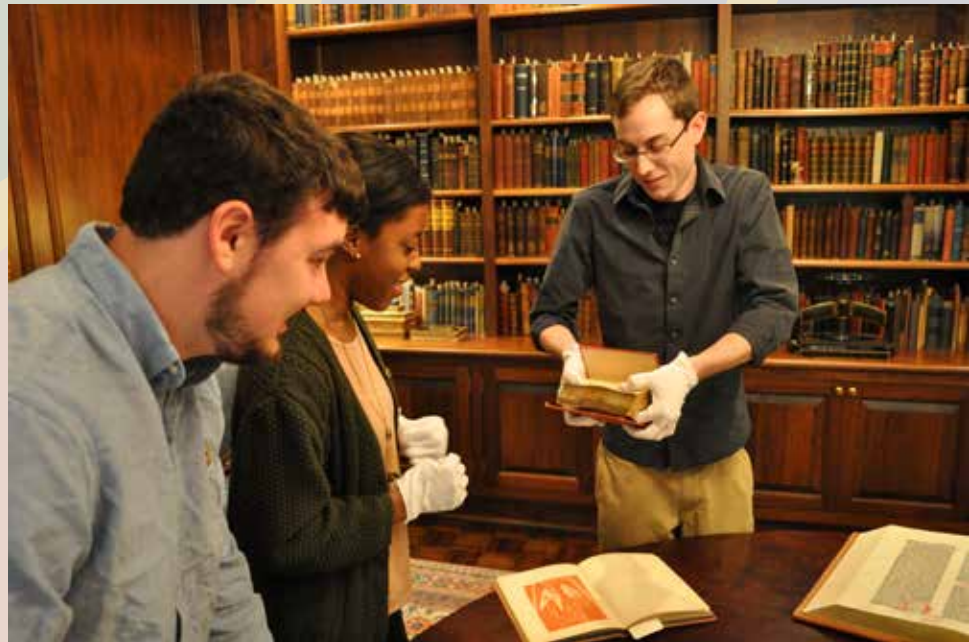
Williams and Bentley decided to fashion the rare book room after a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century gentleman’s library. To do so, all aspects of the room, including its construction, had to reflect the era. They hired local contractors John and Steve Frey to design and construct the room along with guidance from historic preservationists. The room was built with walnut paneling, parquet flooring, and a special varnish for the walls. One memorable event took place when Williams and the construction staff cooked the varnish from scratch in the library. The varnish recipe was taken from a 1772 English cookbook that called for boiled ox hide in the mixture. The cooked varnish created a stench that was so terrible, the library and two nearby buildings had to be evacuated.

The furnishings were another unique aspect of the room. Through a high-end antique dealer, Williams and Bentley acquired a mid-eighteenth-century desk and lowboy and a beautiful Regency-era table. The room was also adorned with two portraits – one neoclassic and the other Romantic – representing the fusion of two time periods within the room. Curtains, a chandelier, and a two-hundred-year-old carpet gave the space a formal ambience. The Bentley Rare Book Gallery, named in honor of Mr. Fred and Mrs. Sara Bentley, opened to the public with a dedication and reception on Sunday, April 17, 1988. The gallery’s opening received news coverage from media outlets including the *Marietta Daily Journal* and the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*.

Activating the Collection



Curator Rita Impey-Imes presenting to students in the Bentley Rare Book Gallery, September 2009.



Student fanning a fore-edge painting on a book, February 2012.

“There is something for everyone in the Bentley.”

– Camilla Stegall, KSU '22

The Bentley Rare Book Gallery’s seed collection came from the library of Mr. Fred Bentley Sr. and his wife, Sara Bentley. This initial collection of roughly 2,500 books specialized in nineteenth- and twentieth-century first edition works by writers such as Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. It was the vision of Robert Williams to expand the collection and represent the full history of the book. Over the next three decades, the collection swelled to more than 10,000 items, including two 4,000-year-old Sumerian clay tablets, the Fourth Folio of Shakespeare, medieval and early Renaissance manuscript leaves, and a Lunar Bible.

The Bentley Rare Book Gallery’s collection grew simultaneously with the university in numbers and prestige. Curators hosted numerous classes in the space, providing students with hands-on experiences with rare texts and an opportunity to engage in book history. Community groups requested tours, book collecting workshops, and show-and-tell sessions, which increased the gallery’s popularity within the state of Georgia and beyond. After Robert Williams’s retirement in 2009, Archives Director Dr. Tamara Livingston assumed leadership of the Bentley Rare Book Gallery.

Curating for the Future



[left to right] Dr. Tamara Livingston, Mr. Fred Bentley Sr., and Mr. Robert Williams at the opening of the Bentley Rare Book Museum, April 2017.



Mr. Robert Williams presenting a rare book to curator JoyEllen Williams and students, March 2020.

“Books from the Bentley collection gave perspective to many of the topics in my classes at KSU. I have no doubt that my work with the Bentley collection has prepared me for my current Ph.D. program as well as my future as an academic.”

– Chris Rogers, PhD candidate at the University of Tennessee; KSU '19

On April 22, 2017, twenty-nine years after the Bentley Rare Book Gallery first opened to the public, the Department of Museums, Archives and Rare Books unveiled the Bentley Rare Book Museum. The transition to a museum space ushered in a new era for the rare book program. No longer limited by the availability of curators, patrons can enjoy full-scale exhibitions in a self-guided format. Additionally, the museum continues to offer traditional curator-led public programs, instruction sessions, and research appointments.

In 1988, Robert Williams described the Bentley Rare Book Gallery collection as “world class” and predicted it would “draw international attention.” His statements were prescient. The Bentley Rare Book Museum has become a destination for rare book engagement and scholarly research, and its reach continues to grow. Digital learning modules and exhibits, videos, and virtual program offerings now augment the museum’s outreach programs. Additionally, new collection development efforts have expanded traditional views of book history by highlighting written and printed contributions of historically marginalized groups.

In 1986, the goal was to bring rare books to Kennesaw College. Thirty-five years later, the goal is to share Kennesaw State University’s rare books with the world, ensuring that everyone who engages with the Bentley Rare Book Museum has a remarkable encounter with the printed word.


Rarity



Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The workes, newlye printed, wyth dyuers workes which were neuer in print before*. London: Printed by W. Bonham, 1542.



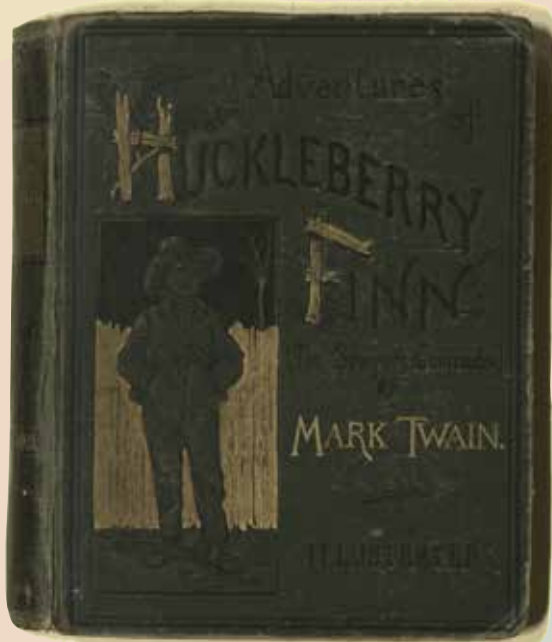
Lunar Bible, 1971.



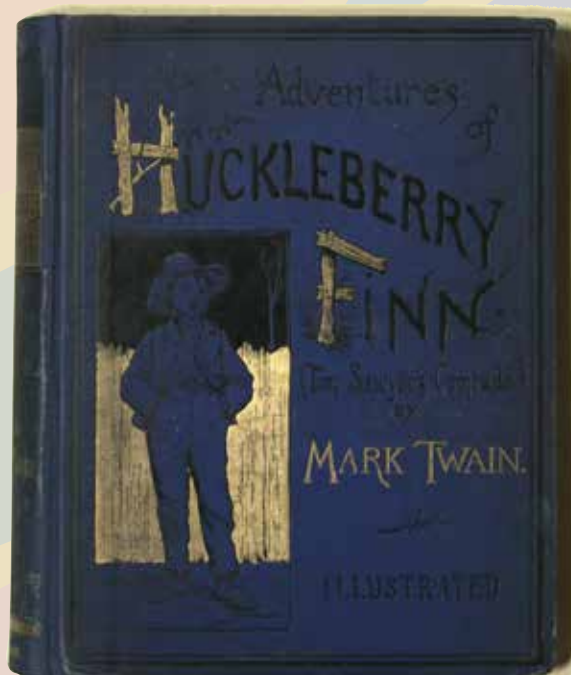
Rarity is a term heavily discussed in the antiquarian book trade. In the most basic sense, a rare book is one where demand exceeds supply; or, as Robert H. Taylor so aptly describes, “a book I want badly and can’t find.” The book may be desirable because of its age, edition, physical characteristics, historical context, previous ownership, inscriptions, errors, etc. These criteria apply to diverse printed and written

materials beyond published books, such as manuscripts, broadsides, and other collectible ephemera. The Bentley Rare Book Museum has many examples of rare books and manuscripts, but a few stand out beyond the rest. One such piece is a 1542 compilation of Geoffrey Chaucer’s works held by roughly five institutions in the world. Another example is the Bentley Museum’s Lunar Bible that traveled to the moon during the 1971 Apollo 14 mission.

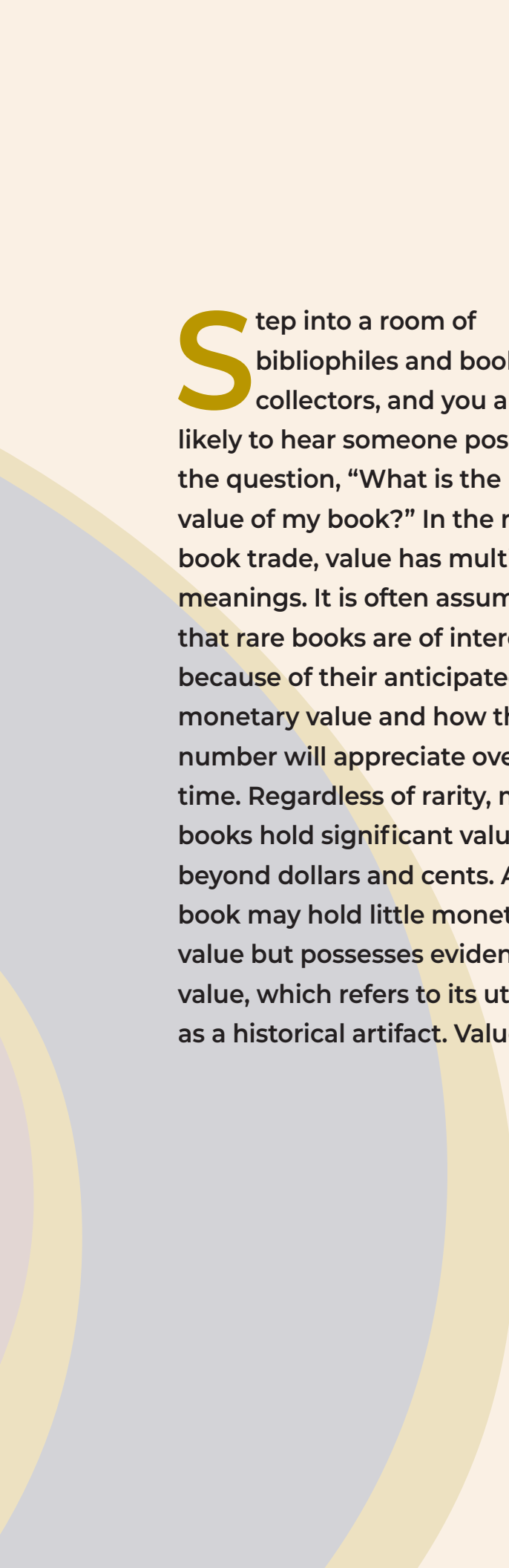
Value



Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1885.



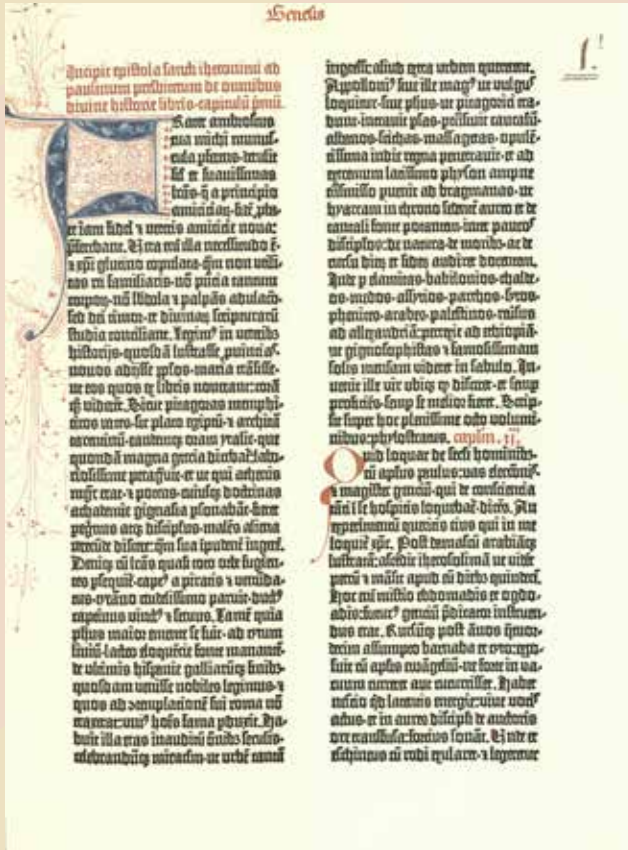
Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1885.



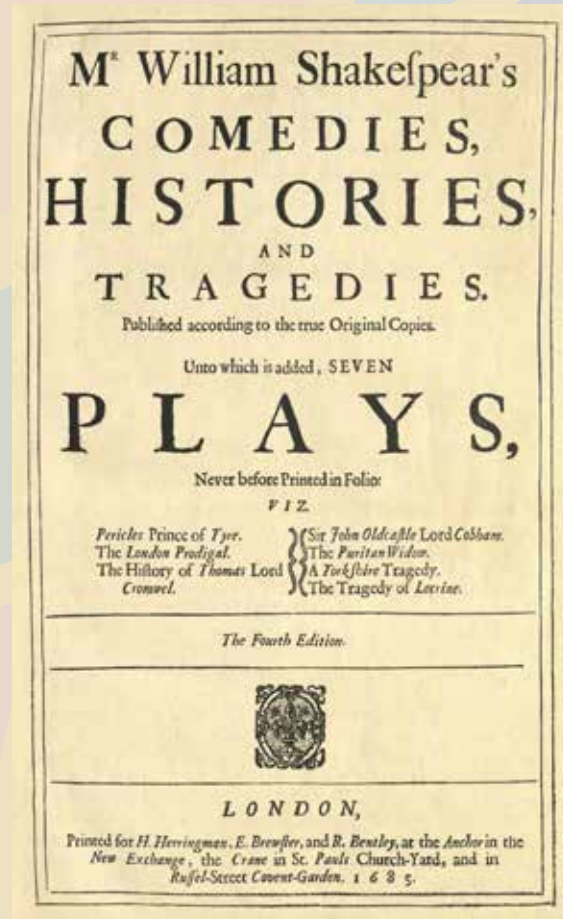
Step into a room of bibliophiles and book collectors, and you are likely to hear someone pose the question, “What is the value of my book?” In the rare book trade, value has multiple meanings. It is often assumed that rare books are of interest because of their anticipated monetary value and how this number will appreciate over time. Regardless of rarity, many books hold significant value beyond dollars and cents. A book may hold little monetary value but possesses evidential value, which refers to its utility as a historical artifact. Value

can also be highly personal, especially for collectors. A book may be valuable to a collector simply because it intrigues them. Or, they may feel a personal connection to the book. Books that hold personal value are often the most memorable, like the blue, cloth-bound first edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that Mr. Robert Williams spotted in a bookstore sixty years ago. While this book still holds the same personal value to Mr. Williams as it did in 1961, it holds evidentiary, exhibition, and monetary value for the Bentley Rare Book Museum in 2021.

Serendipity



The Gutenberg Bible. 1455. Facsimile of the first printing on paper. Paris: Éditions Les Incunables, 1985.

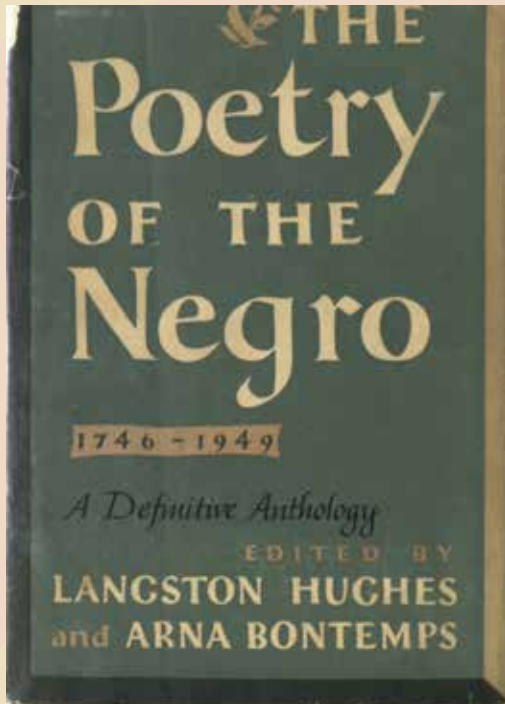


Title page of the Fourth Folio of Shakespeare, 1685.

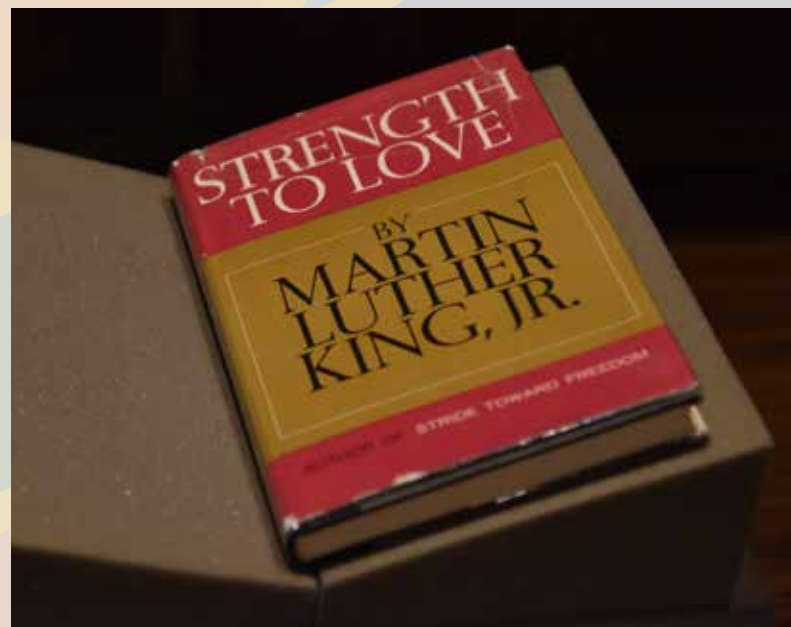
Any great book collector will admit that serendipity plays a role in collecting books. Being in the right place at the right time is an age-old concept that led to two of the Bentley Rare Book Museum's most valuable acquisitions - the Fourth Folio of Shakespeare and a hand-press facsimile of the Gutenberg Bible. Former Sturgis Library Director Mr. Robert B. Williams acquired the Fourth Folio of Shakespeare through a miraculous experience at a Sotheby's auction in the 1990s. The piece was anticipated to sell for at least \$100,000 dollars, but Mr. Williams only had \$2,500 to

bid. Although there were three six-figure bids placed on the piece, none of the bidders could retrieve the necessary funds by the deadline. Mr. Williams wired the funds immediately and acquired the piece. In the case of the Gutenberg Bible facsimile, Mr. Williams acquired this book at a raffle during an American Library Association conference that he did not even attend. In his absence, Mr. Williams asked a colleague to enter his business card in the raffle. A few days later, Mr. Williams received a call from the publisher of the Gutenberg Bible facsimile informing him that he won the raffle.

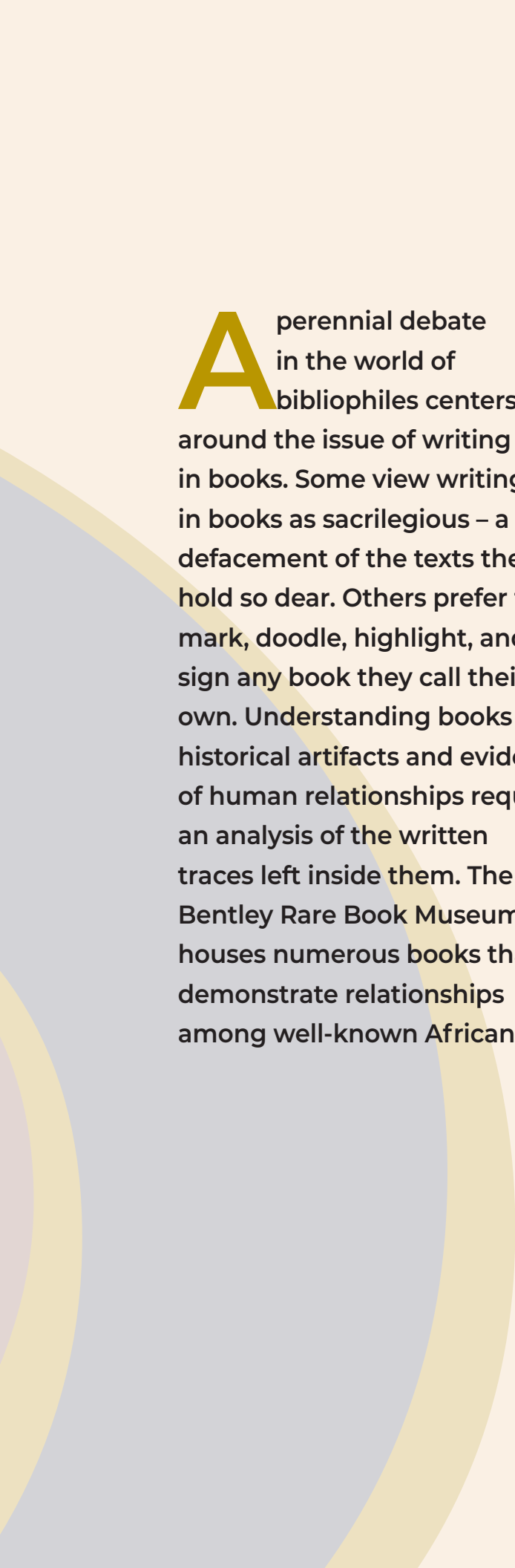
Relationships



Hughes, Langston and Arna Bontemps, eds. *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746 - 1949*. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1949.



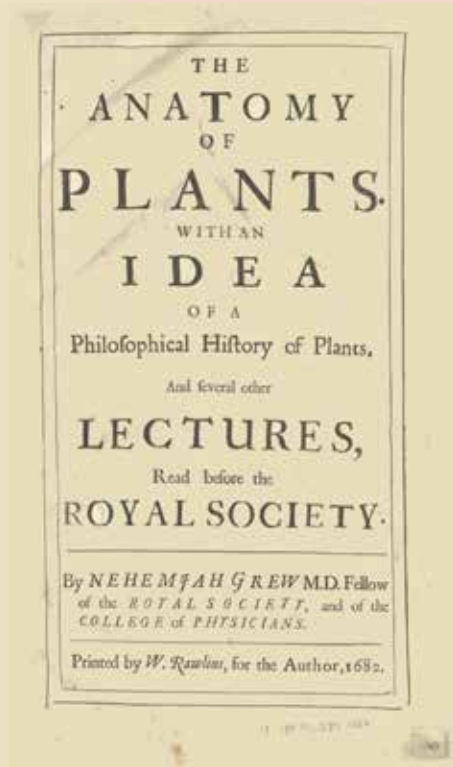
King Jr., Martin Luther. *Strength to Love*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.



A perennial debate in the world of bibliophiles centers around the issue of writing in books. Some view writing in books as sacrilegious – a defacement of the texts they hold so dear. Others prefer to mark, doodle, highlight, and sign any book they call their own. Understanding books as historical artifacts and evidence of human relationships requires an analysis of the written traces left inside them. The Bentley Rare Book Museum houses numerous books that demonstrate relationships among well-known African

American writers and activists. Generally known as association copies, these books provide intimate and personal windows into history that may not exist elsewhere. The museum's first edition copy of *Strength to Love* contains a touching inscription from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to his mother, Alberta Williams King, during the heart of the Civil Rights Movement. Langston Hughes's inscription to artist, poet, and activist Amy Spingarn in *The Poetry of the Negro* demonstrates a connection between poetry and social activism in the mid-twentieth century.

Curiosity



Grew, Nehemiah. *The Anatomy of Plants: With an Idea of a Philosophical History of Plants, and Several Other Lectures, Read before the Royal Society*, 1682.



Wood engraving from *The Anatomy of Plants*, 1682.

Some of the most remarkable encounters with rare books begin with a question. In the case of KSU biology student Chris Rogers ('19), the question arose where his textbooks left off. Rogers found that current biology textbooks lacked discussions of biological taxonomy prior to the groundbreaking work of Carl Linnaeus (1707 – 1778). Rogers asked, “How did scientists classify plants and animals prior to Linnaeus?” Using early scientific and natural history works from the Bentley

Rare Book Museum, including a 1524 printing of Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia*, a 1583 Dodoen herbal leaf, and a first edition of Nehemiah Grew’s *The Anatomy of Plants* published in 1682, Rogers surveyed the landscape of obsolete biological classification theories and compared them to the widely adopted work of Linnaeus. Rogers’s award-winning research demonstrates how rare books can resurrect dismissed areas of scholarship and shed light on the evolution of science and other fields.

Student Engagement

Book collecting journeys begin with a single book. Peruse our free collection of books curated by Read 4 Unity, and see if one catches your eye. Take this book with you to keep. It may initiate a lifelong journey of book collecting on a writer, theme, genre, time period, paratextual element, or another area of interest. Consider jumpstarting someone else's book-collecting journey by donating a book to this free community resource.



Student engagement with rare books is critical to the mission of the Bentley Rare Book Museum. Our collection of over 10,000 rare books and manuscripts spans a variety of subjects and formats ranging from ancient cuneiform tablets to contemporary graphic novels. In this exhibit case, we highlight students who have completed exceptional work with materials from the Bentley Rare Book Museum.



Morgan Bendzinski, BS in Anthropology (Spring 2021)

KSU senior Morgan Bendzinski utilized her background in Anthropology to analyze the Bentley Rare Book Museum's collection of early medical texts and printed materials on the Cherokee Nation. Morgan's research went beyond the textual content of these materials and explored social issues surrounding their creation.



Abigail Mead, BA in Art History and minor in Chemistry (Summer 2021)

Abigail Mead came to the Bentley Rare Book Museum with interests in art history and conservation. During the spring 2021 semester, Abigail conducted a survey of books from the hand-press period. She analyzed elements including paper quality, printing and binding practices, types of parchment, evidence of use, and preservation techniques. Through her analysis, Abigail developed an exhibition proposal framing each text as a case study in pre-nineteenth-century printing.



“While working with the Bentley collection, each book served as a window into a life from the past, and I was constantly transported to another time.”

– Abigail Mead

Acknowledgements

Collecting Stories: 35 Years of the Bentley Rare Book Museum celebrates the realization and growth of an audacious vision. First and foremost, I would like to thank Mr. Robert B. Williams and the family of the late Mr. Fred Bentley Sr. for establishing the Bentley Rare Book Gallery in 1986 and placing Kennesaw State University on the map with a world-class rare book collection. *Collecting Stories* is a product of the collaborative work of the Department of Museums, Archives and Rare Books (MARB) at Kennesaw State University. I would like to personally thank Dr. Catherine Lewis and Dr. Tamara Livingston for their empowering leadership of MARB and intrepid, hands-on assistance with exhibit curation. I would like to thank MARB staff members Zoila Torres, Tony Howell, Stefanie Green, Amber Smith, and Christian Kelly for helping to make this exhibition and the opening come to fruition. I profusely thank all MARB staff members who provided feedback in any form during the curation process.

I extend a huge thank-you to the Bentley Rare Book Museum's local partners, Read 4 Unity and Black Coffee. I appreciate your enthusiastic support of the Bentley Rare Book Museum's mission and programs. Finally, I thank our university's interim president Dr. Kathy Schwaig and interim provost Dr. Ivan Pulinkala for their strong leadership of Kennesaw State University and continued support of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

JoyEllen Williams



Curator, Bentley Rare Book Museum

**Pleasures and Treasures
of the
Rare Book
Collection**

The
History
of the Book
Exhibition

Kennnesaw State University • October 1997 - May 1998

Collection Highlights

The Bentley Rare Book Gallery is a dynamic, growing collection focused on materials that illustrate the history of the book, including:

- A teaching collection of more than 25 medieval manuscript leaves, including fragments of liturgical books and works by Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard.
- Early editions of Geoffrey Chaucer's collected works printed in 1542, 1561, 1598, and 1687.
- The "Fourth Folio" of William Shakespeare's works (1608) and several sections of the "Second Folio" (1632).
- Modern fine press books, including William Morris's *Earthly Paradise* and *Sire Degenerant*, and several leaves from the *Kelmscott Chaucer*.
- A large collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and British authors, including Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. Dickens' novels *Bleak House* and *Nickelby* are held in their original, unaltered parts.

Kennnesaw State University
Museum, Archives and Rare Books
rarebooks@kennesaw.edu | 770-423-6259

Bentley Rare Book Gallery

Established in 1995, the Bentley Rare Book Gallery at Kennesaw State University collects books and manuscripts that represent the history of the book, with a focus on the English-speaking world. The Rare Book Gallery holds a collection of approximately 8,000 items, ranging from American clay tablets and medieval manuscript leaves to modern fine press books and literary first editions. The collection is fully searchable through the KSU online catalog.

The Rare Books staff supports the teaching of the history of the book through instruction sessions for university courses and community groups. Likewise, we welcome individual researchers and the creator gladly provides research assistance to any interested student, faculty, or community member.

The Bentley Rare Book Gallery
Ground Floor
Sturgis Library, Building 17
1000 Chastain Road, MD #1704
Kennesaw, GA 30144

By Appointment Only
Monday - Friday, 9 - 5 pm

For more information, please contact us at
rarebooks@kennesaw.edu or 770-423-6259.

**A MIRROR
ON THE MILLENNIUM
1000 YEARS OF PAPER AND INK
AT THE BENTLEY RARE BOOK GALLERY**

OCTOBER 27 - DECEMBER 20, 2005
STURGIS ART GALLERY
LOWER LEVEL OF THE HORACE W. STURGIS LIBRARY

Exhibition Hours
Monday - Thursday 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Exhibition will not be open on Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 24

Wednesday & Thursday
7:00 - 9:00 PM
No evening hours November 23-24 and December 14-15

Saturday 1:00 - 4:00 PM
No Saturday hours December 17
Closed Fridays & Sundays

For additional information or reservations for group tours call the Sturgis Library at 770-423-6535 or 770-423-6186

Sponsored by the Kennesaw State University Press and the Horace W. Sturgis Library

Bentley Rare Book Gallery

The Bentley Rare Book Gallery, named in honor of Fred and Sarah Bentley, brings together a world-class collection of more than 15,000 items that spans the history of the written word in the Western World. This collection provides undergraduate students the opportunity to study original works firsthand. Recent additions to this collection includes a Fourth Folio of Shakespeare dated 1685, and a first edition of the complete works of Chaucer dated 1542. The Rare Book Gallery, designed to replicate an eighteenth century library, is located on the lower level of the Horace W. Sturgis Library.

For more detailed information about the Bentley Rare Book Gallery, please visit the Sturgis Library website at: <http://www.kennesaw.edu/library>.

Guided tours are available on the following days and times:

Monday-Thursday
11 am and 12:10 pm

Wednesday evening
8 pm

Saturday 1:30 pm

Special guided tours for KSU classes and for other interested groups may be scheduled by contacting Rita Impcym-Innes at rimpcym@kennesaw.edu or (770) 423-6535.

Archival materials documenting the Bentley Rare Book Gallery, 1997 - 2007.





**KENNESAW STATE
UNIVERSITY**

MUSEUMS, ARCHIVES AND RARE BOOKS
University Archives and Special Collections