

# The One and Only

BY KATHY EWING



One day last fall, Sue Hanson, head of special collections at Case Western Reserve University, welcomed one of Gillian Weiss's classes to her department at the Kelvin Smith Library. Thirteen students of early modern European history sat around a large conference table in the Hatch Reading Room, whose large windows overlook East Boulevard. The students took notes as Prof. Weiss, an assistant history professor, lectured on the scientific revolution in seventeenth-century Europe. As she spoke, the students also passed around a 1699 edition of Galileo's work. Later, Prof. Weiss invited the students to compare two eighteenth-century editions of Bernard de Fontenelle's 1686 *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* to the very modern paperback English translations they had been assigned to read. After class, two students lingered with their professor over the books. Rahul Ravi and Brent Wise discussed those troublesomely similar "s's" and "f's" in old texts ("The f's have a longer horizontal line," Prof. Weiss explained) and commented on the difference between the older and newer versions of their text.

If you can't visit the Department of Special Collections in person and put your hands on early works by Galileo and de Fontenelle, you can visit virtually by clicking on [www.case.edu/UL/SpecColl/speccoll.htm](http://www.case.edu/UL/SpecColl/speccoll.htm). You have immediate access to hundreds of extraordinary documents. You can view a papyrus manuscript of Homer's *Iliad* from the third century, read the Latin from a fourteenth-century Italian Bible, or read up on the history of the Cleveland Rocket Society. There's a wealth of matter to peruse. A scholar anywhere in the world can study this material.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE RICHES IN CASE'S DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, FACULTY AND STUDENTS AGREE: THE MORE YOU LOOK, THE MORE YOU FIND.



At your fingertips: More than 40,000 rare and original books, manuscripts, and works of art can be found in the Department of Special Collections, led by Sue Hanson. Opposite is a Sumerian wage record written, in cuneiform script, on a clay tablet more than 4,000 years ago.

But let's say that you are in the Case neighborhood. You could stop in the Kelvin Smith Library and ring the buzzer outside the Hatch Reading Room. Sue Hanson would invite you in and ask you to read through the brief rules for using the collection. Now, it's all *there*, right at your fingertips. The bibles, Homer—more than 40,000 books, manuscripts, and works of art.

What to look at first? You might ask for some of the 271 graphic works produced by Cleveland artists working for the Works Progress Administration. You might choose a tapestry scroll from the Ming dynasty, given by Roger Hsu (GRS '53, chemistry; LAW '64) in memory of Kelvin Smith. Or, you might be distracted by an edition of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, set out for a visiting English class to use. This Dickens novel is widely available, of course, but, at Case, you are looking at the original pamphlet form, as it was first published in segments in the 1840s. You can leaf through the sturdy pages at your leisure, just as Victorian readers did.

Here sits a first edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. There lie Shakespeare's plays in six volumes, edited in 1723 by the English poet Alexander Pope, and over there a 1765 version, in eight volumes, edited by the redoubtable Samuel Johnson. The more you look, the more you find—old patents, letters from famous literary figures, and works of Renaissance science. Many of the books are adorned with bookplates from famous old Cleveland families—Severance, Hanna, Blossom, Kirtland, and others—who long ago donated their valuable collections.

This is the treasure-trove available to the University community, a resource

used widely by Case faculty and students. Many professor-scholars do their own research with the help of the collection and, even more enthusiastically, turn their students on to the riches there. As Professor Alan Rocke puts it, "It's one thing for a teacher to tell students about a book written in 1820. It's another for them to sit down and hold it in their hands."

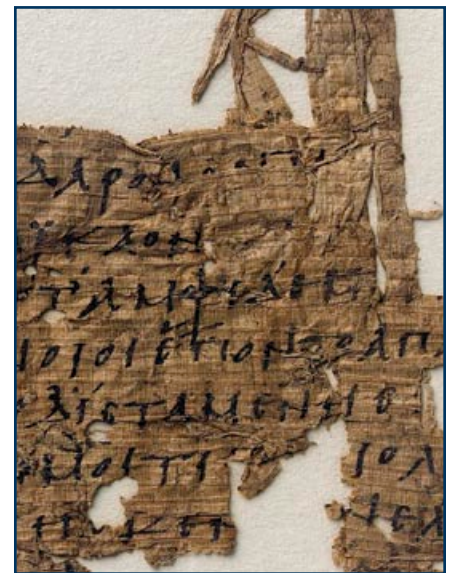
## A Living Collection

Not surprisingly, much of the collection relates to the humanities—literature, history, and languages.

But explorers in other fields also find riches. Dario Gasparini, for example, a historian of engineering, has made use of the papers of Clifford Holland, who designed the Holland Vehicular Tunnel, connecting Manhattan to New Jersey. Holland served as chief engineer on the tunnel, completed in 1927. Prof. Gasparini, professor of civil engineering, says, "Holland is a very prominent early-twentieth-century American civil engineer. His papers form an important collection that has not been studied." He and graduate student Judith Wang have been making up for this neglect, writing and speaking at professional gatherings on Holland, whose papers were donated to the University in the 1960s.

Alan Rocke, the Bourne Professor of History, has also used the collection for his research. Prof. Rocke, whose field is the history of science, says, "I use journals going way back. The articles published in the 1830s and '40s in German and French are an extraordinary collection for a university of this size."

He also makes sure his students get a taste, so to speak, of the library. In a course on the history of food, on which the library owns a number of relevant classic works, Prof. Rocke has shown his students the first treatise on food adulteration, published in 1820. The treatise, he says, "blew the whistle on frauds," such as manufacturers who added corn syrup to maple syrup or red dye to tomatoes. Sue Hanson had requested the work from the Dittrick Museum of Medical History, located in the Allen Memorial Medical Library on the Case campus, specifically for Prof. Rocke's class. "I'm a strong supporter of special collections.



"They're very service-oriented," says Prof. Rocke. "You could take every class you teach there. They love it."

Ross Duffin is similarly enthusiastic, both for his own sake and his students'. In the late 1980s, the Kulas Professor of Music unearthed a set of partbooks—music prepared for sopranos, tenors, and so on—"that no one had looked at much." These leather-bound volumes were donated to the University in 1938 by Elizabeth

Bingham Blossom. The books, says Prof. Duffin, contain “unica”—making them the only source for these motets written by early seventeenth-century English composers Thomas Weelkes and Thomas Tomkins.

He also takes his music notation classes to special collections to study music manuscripts dating from Gregorian chant through the Renaissance. *Touching* these original documents has a profound effect, he believes, on his students. “Facsimiles provide the image, but for students to actually hold the work, see the quality of the parchment and sometimes vividly colored ink that you just can’t see in a facsimile, is inspiring for them,” he says.

“They realize how old these objects are and how well made they were.” These beautiful objects, he says, “give you tremendous respect for the materials and their creators.”

Such objects also inspired Mary Burns. “I came to Case in 1983 to study in the early music program and began working in the library during that time,” she explains. “I became the special collections cataloger in 1991.” Ms. Burns, who designed and still maintains the website, continues to be fascinated by the items she’s cataloging. “It is a thrill to work with older materials,” she explains, “and to wonder who owned them before and what their lives were like a few hundred years ago.”

Many of the items in the collection are literature, and English professors make frequent use of its resources. Tom Bishop, an associate professor, consulted the collection when writing an article on *Macbeth* and regularly holds his graduate classes in Renaissance literature and

Shakespeare in the Hatch Reading Room. The library owns many works contemporary with Shakespeare, including items in Italian and Latin. The listing of works by or relating to Shakespeare numbers twelve pages. A visitor can see a single page from each of the first four folios (some of the earliest publications of Shakespeare’s plays) and a complete Fourth Folio, dating from 1685, less than seventy years after the bard’s death.

Prof. Bishop also gives enthusiastic presentations on the collection to parents and freshmen during orientation. His talks use examples such as a Sumerian wage record written, in ancient cuneiform script, on a clay tablet from 2044 BC. He also introduces his undergrad students to special collections, assigning an Introduction to Literature class to examine such books as early editions of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, a first edition of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and a first-edition Virginia Woolf essay published by her own Hogarth Press. His students, Prof. Bishop reports, “react very positively. They’re happy to get close to the works and look at the original owners’ annotations in the margins.”

## The Thrill of It All

Case faculty unite in praise for the collection’s guardian and advocate, Sue Hanson, head of special collections since earning a degree from the University in academic librarianship in 1980. Ms. Hanson answers queries from local universities and also fields questions from out of state and from other countries. The collection, formerly housed in Freiburger Library, now is located on two floors of the Kelvin Smith Library, completed in

1996. Ms. Hanson is thrilled to share the works. “It’s great to see students get a sense of history to see these things that have survived so much—they’ve lasted through wars and all sorts of natural disasters,” she says. “There are a thousand stories we’ll never know about these books.”

Aside from the thrill of handling old materials, Case students get an important lesson in research when they visit. Examining these items sometimes reveals details about them that can’t be seen in modern editions. When you look at originals, or early editions, Ross Duffin points out, “You see things not obvious in printing or microfilm. Serious scholarship requires originals for this reason. This is the beginning of that lesson for students.”

Prof. Weiss frequently brings her classes to the collection. “I enjoy the material aspects of working in archives,” explains the professor. “I think touching old books is fun,” she says, and now she passes that experience along to her young scholars.

The old-book bug has bitten a number of Case students. Like Sue Hanson, Mary Burns, and others before her, Olga Ponomareva works in special collections, spending four hours a week there. Perusing a 1905 patent for a syringe, the first-year student comments on the feeling that close contact with old and original materials provides. What does she think about as she handles this document? “I realize I’m not the first person to touch this,” she explains. “Someone else touched it one hundred years ago.”

*Cleveland-area writer Kathy Ewing is a regular contributor to Case Magazine.*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BARNEY TAXEL

War story: a fragment of Homer’s *Iliad*, on papyrus, from the third century