BOARD TO PARTICIPATE IN STREETER AUCTIONS

The Streeter Sales

The death of Associate Thomas W. Streeter in Morris-town, New Jersey, has resulted in plans to sell his remarkable collection of Americana at auction. The sales will be held at the Parke-Bernet Galleries in New York starting in the fall of 1966. A series of six sales will be held, six months apart. After the first sale next fall, there will be two in 1967, two in 1968, and one in 1969.

Because these sales will be of the highest importance in the history of book collecting, and because the books have a special appeal to this Library, the Board of Governors has determined upon bold action. This issue of The Quarto is devoted to an explanation of the Streeter collection and the challenge it presents.

We urge you to read each article.

What the Streeter Sale Means

Book dealers and collectors unite in calling the Streeter collection one of the three greatest in this century. The last auction to compare with it was the sale of the Robert Hoe collection in 1911-12. Hoe had gathered thousands of books and manuscripts covering American history, English literature, and European learning including a Gutenberg Bible. There were a series of sales (in which Mr. Clements participated) and they have always been regarded as a landmark in the redistribution of rare books and the "new high prices" that were reached. The total of sales reached $1,932,000.

The only other comparable collection was formed by E. D. Church. It consisted of choice Americana and English literature. About 2000 of the books were bought privately by a collector in 1911 for $1,500,000.

Now the Streeter collection becomes available. It can be described only in superlatives. In the first place it is all Americana, numbering 4100 books. The copies are in unusually fine physical condition. They were assembled over a period of fifty years. He has books that have never been offered for sale elsewhere, and books that have not been sold in decades or generations. Looking around now, we see no private collector in his class or with his means at work building up a private library. When the Streeter books are dispersed, other copies of some of them will not be available again in the foreseeable future, if ever.

Prices are certain to be high. In these times the Streeter collection almost certainly will bring more than either the Hoe or the Church libraries. Since Mr. Streeter let it be known that his books were going to auction, various private collectors and librarians have bided their time. Both recognize that this is a "now or never" time. The appeal of the titles, the advance publicity from the auction house, the bequests to certain institutions, the inflationary and prosperous times all combine to make this a sale for men, not boys.

Quite probably a new plateau of prices for Americana will be established. Ever afterward dealers will quote the price brought for the same book at the Streeter sale and ask as much or more. So there can be no grounds for arguing that later copies will go at a lower price—unless there is a general depression or an inferior copy offered. Therefore, to stay out of the sale in the hope of finding the same books later at lower prices is utterly implausible. We have no choice but to plunge in.

How Much Is Needed?

Our best estimates indicate that the Clements Library could spend half a million dollars for Streeter books we do not have. We have felt obliged, however, to make choices between desirable and most desirable titles. Painfully we have scaled down our urgent wants to a range of about $250,000. We realize that this is a large sum, too.

The Board of Governors carefully considered the need and the possibilities, and has decided
To make every effort to obtain that sum from all available sources—University general appropriations, special gifts through the $55 Million Campaign, and gifts from our Associates. Admittedly this is the greatest undertaking of the Associates in their eighteen years of existence.

Gifts to educational institutions are deductible from income tax, of course, to the extent of 30 per cent of adjusted gross income. The Governors urge that you reckon your remaining gift margin for 1965 and your possibilities in 1966.

High Spots of Streeter Collection

Mr. Streeter’s collection begins with a Columbus letter (1493) reporting his first voyage (a printed pamphlet) and Waldseemüller’s Cosmographiae (1507) in which the name of America was suggested for the New World. The Clements Library has both of these titles. Similarly, many of his accounts of early settlements are on our shelves.

But in regard to New England, Mr. Streeter has such treasures as the Rev. John Cotton’s God’s Promise to His Plantation (1630), the Letter from New-England (1688), Cotton Mather’s Life of Sir William Phipps (1697), John Hale’s enquiry into Massachusetts witchcraft (1702), and the Rev. John Williams’ account of the Indian raid on Deerfield and his capture in The Redeemed Captive (1707). These are basic books which the Clements Library lacks.

Similarly, he has the first book printed in Connecticut (1710), an Indian conference held in Maine (1753), an early sermon in New York City (1700), the famous Mason and Dixon map of the Pennsylvania-Maryland line (1768), the proceedings of a Maryland Convention in 1776, a Daniel Defoe tract on South Carolina (1705), and a description of the campaign against the Cherokees (1762). These are exciting items that we do not have.

There is very little relating to the French and Indian War and the American Revolution which Mr. Streeter owns and we lack. But once he moves west of the Appalachians there are books describing every region which we ought to own and don’t—books on the Ohio Valley and Mississippi Valley, on the Plains and the Rockies, on the Spanish Southwest and the Pacific Northwest.

Some of these books will cost $200 to $800; others will bring $2000 to $5000 and more. Like Mr. Clements, Mr. Streeter sought the earliest books to describe new regions of the country, the eye-witness accounts of struggles with Indians or rival European powers, the reminiscences of first settlers. All of these are the sources from which modern history books are written. They are the stones with which the Clements Library is built.

Who Was Tom Streeter?

Thomas W. Streeter was born in New Hampshire in 1883 and was graduated from Dartmouth College in 1904. He then attended Harvard Law School and earned his degree in 1907. For ten years he practiced law in Boston, then moved to New York City. There he became an officer in the American International Corporation. Later he became chairman of the board of the Simms Petroleum Company. From 1931 to 1935 he was active in the liquidation of the Bank of the United States. He was then elected president of the Mortgage Certificate Loan Company, president of Prudence-Bonds Corporation, and managing partner in the Ungalik Syndicate, Alaska.

Mr. Streeter was able to retire from most business activity in 1939 and devote himself to scholarly interest in building up his remarkable collection of Americana. He had started buying books before World War I and now he concentrated on all regions of the United States, especially Texas and the Southwest. He was concerned primarily with identifying and acquiring source materials.
Pledges Are Acceptable
Since the Streeter sales are to be spread over three years, 1966 to 1969, presumably there will be books of particular interest to this Library in all six sales. However, we anticipate that the most desirable titles from our point of view will appear in the first three or four sales. Any gift which is stretched out over three years would be most helpful and welcome. ——

Divided Family
Few dramatists could capture the intense feelings of expectation and anguish of a reconciliation between two estranged brothers as well as a group of family letters which the Library has just added to its manuscript division. That the Revolution split churches and families right down the middle is not news, but the profoundness of the tragedy is lost when the fact is merely noted as an inevitable result of the conflict. The point at which families experienced what Revolution meant was the clash of conflicting loyalties; it comes alive today only in personal letters.

The tentative advances of Dr. William Lee Perkins, a self-exiled Loyalist in England, to his brother Isaac Perkins, an American Whig in Connecticut, in the decade after the Revolution introduce a tension-fraught correspondence. There are eleven letters from Dr. Perkins, and seven replies. Isaac Perkins indicated the current attitude toward Loyalists and how his brother might expect to be received in postwar America: he to return home. The letters are also full of news of important events and issues, such as Shays' rebellion, the national debt, British control of the forts on the Lakes, and relations with France.

In addition to these letters, the Library acquired 175 others of this same Perkins family running down to 1843.

Nehemiah Howe Captive
In our collection of narratives of white persons captured by Indians, experiences before the French and Indian War are scarce and therefore desirable. Back in King George's War, Nehemiah Howe was captured outside Fort Dummer (Brattleboro, Vermont) in 1745. He was taken up to Crown Point on Lake Champlain, where he was well treated by the French and was visited by Eunice Williams' Indian husband. (She had been taken at Deerfield in 1704 as a young girl.)

Eventually he was taken to Quebec and turned over to the French and imprisoned. There were other English prisoners, and Mr. Howe was elected to lead them in devotions. He mentions many other prisoners by name. During the winter of 1746-47 an epidemic swept through the prison, and many died. In May Mr. Howe fell ill,
was removed to a hospital, and died.

Some friend apparently kept hold of the diary Howe had been writing, and on exchange took it to Boston, where it was published in 1748. In a list of subscribers are several men named Howe, probably relatives. His son Caleb married the beautiful Jemima Phipps, whose first husband had been killed by Indians in 1745. Jemima herself was taken prisoner in 1755, and her intriguing story is another of our captivity stories.

There is no auction record on the Narrative of the Captivity of Nehemiah How (sic). It is known in about eight copies.

Where the Money Went

Several years ago we were able to procure in England the papers of William Henry Lyttelton while he was governor of south Carolina, 1755 to 1760. A second lot of correspondence covering his subsequent governorship of Jamaica was added later. Now, to our surprise, we have obtained Lyttelton’s financial notebook of 167 pages revealing his income, expenditures, and investments for a fifty year period, from 1755 to 1806.

Many of the entries reveal how profitable a governorship could be. First of all, Lyttelton received a salary of £190 each quarter. Then he took a fee for every land deed he signed, and these ran into the hundreds every year. During the war years, he got a generous cut in the sale of enemy vessels and cargoes captured by privateers to which he had issued letters of marque. He also invested in land and such projects as canals in England. Gov. Lyttelton did all right by himself.

The expenditures of a man of his station—rents, liquors, education of his children, horses, portraits, silver, etc.—are also detailed. They personalize an impersonal public official.

Rural Eggheads

In 1820, at least one publisher, David Allinson of Burlington, N.J., held high hopes for his country clientele, judging by the literary content of his magazine, The Rural Visitor, just purchased by a gift from Associate James A. Kidston, Chicago.

At first, the editor also catered to every-day concerns with essays on farm news and management. Later in 1821, he announced that policy was being changed because the farmers were not responding to their true interests by organizing an agricultural society. Perhaps some fruitless efforts on his part prompted his rejection. At any rate, he asserted that hereafter, he would direct his attention to those who “have to live by their wits.”

With that, he turned almost completely to moral essays and poetry, largely contributed by local wits. They were so cooperative, he could not always hold himself to the scheduled eight pages, issued twice a month. Even then, over-production piled up a surplus, and he frequently apologizes and promises future delivery. Readers interested mainly in current events had to wait until the end of the year for a bonus section: “Journal of News,” both “Foreign” and “Domestic,” including obituaries.

After two years, the busy publisher abandoned his journal “in consequence of our attention being occupied by other objects.” He promised to resume publication at some future date.

This was not the first time an attempt had been made to keep such a magazine afloat. A decade earlier, a weekly had been launched with the same title, but in larger format and with livelier tone including fiction and advertisements as well as essays and poetry. After thirty two numbers, on July 29, 1811, he announced that he was under the necessity of dropping it for the present “as we are now making arrangements to undertake a very arduous publication—a critical pronouncing dictionary of the English language.” Not until 1813 did the much heralded dictionary appear.

Modern subscribers, whether they live by their wits or not, can envy the patron of that time in one respect. The dividend offered was indeed attractive: “Permanent subscribers may have their files neatly half bound and lettered, without charge, by sending them to the office.” We are happy to report that the prudent owner of our set did just that.

New Members

Now is the time to find more members for the Associates. We have to rely on you to send us names of your friends, or to speak to those friends yourself. We are always glad to send a sample Quarto and an invitation to join the group.