VOL. 1, NO. 2

THE CLEMENTS LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

SEPTEMBER, 1994

"STARTLING AND THRILLING NARRATIVES OF DARK AND TERRIBLE DEEDS"

Horrid massacres. Human sacrifice. Licentiousness and sin. Piratical barbarity. Dying confessions. Gallows speeches. All this and more, featuring the gaudiest of purple prose and lurid illustration—within the dignified walls of the William L. Clements Library? Yes, it's true; lurking within our collections are some shadowy realms, and one which is about to come boldly to light is the Medler Collection.

In the summer of 1992 Clements Map Curator David Bosse spent a hot afternoon toting heavy boxes from a third-floor Brooklyn walk-up down to a waiting, double-parked van. The cargo, heading for its new home at the Clements Library, consisted of hundreds of pamphlets, books, and broadsides, painstakingly collected over a period of 30-plus years by James Vincent Medler, who had decided with some reluctance to part with over 90 percent of his beloved collection. Medler, retired from the printing and lithography trade, had long been fascinated with crime literature, particularly coverage of actual events, and had himself published some examples of the genre under a pseudonym in Ellery Queen Magazine. Establishing close contacts with a few dealers, he had carefully and quietly built a magnificent collection of American crime literature dating from the mideighteenth century up to the early 1900s. When it came on the market, Clements Director John Dann immediately recognized the breadth and quality

of materials and went for them on the

spot. He had collected item by item in this subject area for years, and now saw a chance, with one purchase, to make the Brooklyn, New York, to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Nine hundred or so items take a long time to assess, repair, catalog, and shelve. After much staff effort, that job is now complete and the Medler Collection awaits recognition as a treasure trove of social history by scholars who will begin the task of historical analysis and interpretation. What does a historian find in such seamy material? A slice of life from the past, replete with all the fascinating, gamey details of society's darker side. Obvious areas of study would be crimes and criminals, law enforcement, and legal and social treatment of criminals. But beyond this lies the whole invisible world of what a culture's literature expresses between the lines about social values and rules, spoken and unspoken-ethnic, racial, sexual, and religious attitudes, changing forces of social control and attitudes toward authority, popular cultural tastes and fascinations, as well as the simple, forgotten details of everyday life in the past.

The use of criminal collections for such avenues of research has been infrequent to date, and there are few prominent works which mine the literature.

Thomas McDade's *Annals of Murder*, an annotated bibliography covering the period from ca. 1675 to 1900, provides an

invaluable list and description of individual items and identifies multiple accounts of the same crimes. In addition, career FBI-man McDade



Barclay and Co., at their most lurid, bring the reader into the scene as "Charles Freeman, the 'second adventist,' imagining himself another Abraham, slays his little daughter, offering up his darling child as a human sacrifice." The pamphlet was published in 1879.

Clements one of the three or four leading repositories for crime literature in the United States. And so, a vanload of murder and mayhem headed from





From the prolific pen of the great moralizer Parson Weems, he of the infamous cherry tree yarn, comes this instructive little tale of "God's revenge against adultery," with its elegantly peculiar drawing of "the accomplished Dr. Theodore Wilson, who for seducing Mrs. Nancy Wiley, had his brains blown out by her husband." Dr. Wilson appears to be more depressed than startled by his perilous situation.

includes a brief review of the legal process from commission of the crime through arrest, trial, imprisonment, and execution.

A more focused work is historian Daniel Cohen's 1993 Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace, a scholarly study of shifts in social authority and attitudes toward authority in New England as demonstrated by changes in crime literature from the 1670s to the mid-1800s. Cohen follows crime publicity from the formal, clergy-controlled execution sermon through the loosening of such control as the popular press undertook to print crime accounts and trial proceedings. Gradually lawyers and judges became "arbiters of social authority," and a culture of "legal romanticism" was expressed in emotional, sentimentalized, sexually charged crime accounts.

Studies like Cohen's reveal that American crime literature has evolved through a series of characteristic forms meant, consciously or unconsciously, to fulfill particular purposes. From the solemn, admonitory sermons of the seventeenth and early eighteenth

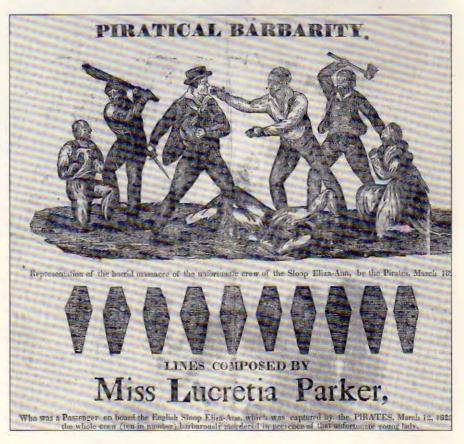
This illustration from an 1825 broadside is unusual in its ambitious, dramatically-posed tableau of the massacre with victim's coffins lined up underneath. It is unclear from the action whether the black man at right center front is pirate or crewman, but his prominent position in the scene underscores the racial consciousness so often found in crime literature of this era.

centuries through the lurid, graphically illustrated penny pamphlets of the mid-to-late 1800s, to the "true crime" police and detective stories of the twentieth century, the various genres represent widely-held attitudes toward crime and, over time, depict a gradual loosening of moral and social authority. Post-sermon popular crime accounts often include a solemn moralization from the author,

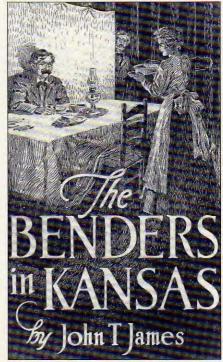
conveying a word to the wise and a warning to the would-be feckless, but this eventually became a mere formality as titillization overpowered education. Illustrations, too, evolved in a direction of increasing excess. Early pamphlets and broadsides feature primitive, highly stylized depictions of coffins and gallows scenes; then come garish, almost ludicrously overripe drawings of mid-nineteenth century popular crime accounts, and later, the more realistic style typical of recent books and pamphlets.

The Medler Collection includes these genres, formats, and illustration styles in all of their variety, and provides many examples of multiple accounts of the same crime. Benjamin Colman's execution sermon preached "to some miserable pirates" on July 10, 1726, in Boston, and Rev. Henry Channing's remarks concerning "God admonishing his people of their duty, as parents and masters," on the occasion of the 1786 hanging of 12-year-old mulatto girl Hannah Ocuish in New London, Connecticut, typify the use of crime to provide moral and religious instruction by an authoritarian clergy. Their somber focus is on repentence and redemption, not on tantalizing details.

Specimens of early criminal accounts put out by commercial printers







Same criminal case, nineteenth (left) and twentieth century (right) versions. The Benders evidently murdered a succession of guests, over a period of years, at their hotel in Kansas. The 1874 Old Franklin Publishing House account presents them as "the five fiends," and depicts three comely women, knives raised, overpowering a hapless Frenchman. John James' much more sedate "The Benders in Kansas," published in 1913, shows a matronly woman in an apron serving a guest while a man hovers, partly hidden, behind a screen. The earlier version, probably taking a good deal of liberty with facts, certainly dished up a more generous helping of sex and violence.

and publishers include "The American bloody register: Containing a true and complete history of the lives, last words, and dying confessions of three of the most noted criminals that have ever made their exit from a stage in America," published by E. Russell of Boston on the occasion of the 1784 execution of two notorious "high way robbers" and a "murderer and pirate." J. Wilkey's 1822 pamphlet on the exploits of murderess Harriot Wilson manages to capture the prurient appeal of sexual misconduct, the emotional pathos of a child's death, and the moral justice of penitence and death in one breathless title: "The Victim of seduction! Some interesting particulars of the life and untimely fate of Miss Harriot Wilson: Who was publicly executed in the state of Pennsylvania in the year 1802, for the murder of her infant child: annexed is an account of her penitence and becoming behavior while under the awful sentence of death."

Printed trial proceedings would seem to make for dry reading, but many of these accounts are spiced with more colorful information on the crime and criminal. Typical is the treatment of the 1806 case of Jesse Wood of Poughkeepsie, N.Y. for the murder of his son, INTERESTING PARTICULARS
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which includes, along with trial description and the sentence pronounced against him by the Hon. David Brooks, "a short account of his life and the state of his mind since his condemnation." More

sensational are the numerous printed presentations of the notorious Tirrell-Bickford case of 1845, which featured a beautiful "fallen woman," sexual enthrallment, throat-slitting, arson — and somnambulism. Albert Tirrell's talented lawyer managed to win acquittal with the argument that his client committed the crimes while walking in his sleep.

The Medler Collection features many examples of the graphically illustrated pamphlets put out by E.E. Barclay of Philadelphia, later of Cincinnati, from ca. 1841 to 1888. Barclay's crime accounts, generally

- continued on back page

Left: One of the most bizarre illustrations to be found in the Medler Collection is this primitively gruesome sketch of the murdered Ellen Jewett, flung upon her bed, legs and breasts exposed, as shadows of flames flicker against the wall and a cloaked figure exits the room. The murderer, however, is presented in well-groomed, neatly-dressed respectability. The fascination with "fallen women" and women as victims of violence and seduction is perhaps the most pervasive theme in all of nineteenth-century crime literature. This example dates from ca. 1836.



"TRADITION FADES, BUT THE WRITTEN RECORD REMAINS EVER FRESH"

Were William L. Clements able to look down from the gallery of his Library in the summer of 1994 he would be appalled. The magnificent main room is still as he had envisioned it and architect Albert Kahn designed it; vaulted, ornamented ceiling, sumptuous wood panelling, tall, elegant windows - all of these delight the eye, as he had intended. But what would take his breath away is the view of the floor below, where, painstakingly crammed into nearly every inch of available space, lie books and boxes and prints, row upon row, stack upon stack, the whole fitted around and between couches and chairs and display cases like some giant, intricate puzzle. Draped in protective plastic sheeting, the scene brings to mind a haunted house waiting to come to life when lights are dimmed. And at night, all is eerily peaceful. But by day chaos reigns — noise and disarray, workmen digging and drilling, running wire and assembling shelving, as staff and readers fit in among it all as best they can, patiently awaiting the day when work is done and life returns to "normal." Of course, construction

means chaos; Clements knew that from his work as an engineer as well as from his long service as University Regent responsible for building much of the central campus. But for his Library, chaos was supposed to end in 1923, and from that dedication summer onward all at the Clements Library was to be calm and order, as befits the dignified pursuit of historical scholarship and the preservation of the heritage of early America.

Born in 1861 in Ann Arbor, William L. Clements graduated from the University of Michigan in 1882 with a degree in engineering. By 1896 he was president of the Bay City industrial firm he had joined upon graduation, and in 1910 was elected to the University Board of Regents, where his knowledge of engineering and business made him a key player in the rebuilding of central campus. Meanwhile, as his personal fortune grew, he cultivated a passion for history and collecting rare books.

When Clements decided that his collection should be housed at his alma mater, in a building specifically designed and constructed for the purpose, he was helping to shape the grand tradition of the American rare books library. Others,

like James Lennox (1870) and John Carter Brown (1900) had come before him, and others, notably J.P. Morgan and Henry L. Huntington, had far more wealth at their disposal. But Clements' gift to the University of Michigan was unique in its location at a great public university of the Midwest — a democratization of the rare books library, with its connotation of old, Eastern money and social exclusivity.

Not that Clements or the first director of his Library, Randolph G. Adams, would open its doors and its priceless collections to any and all who might venture in. As Adams put it, prospective readers had no rights, only privileges, and his job was "one of mediating between being hospitable and being careful. As long as I remain here," he added, "I intend to make my mistakes in the matter of hospitality rather than in the matter of care." Yet both Clements and Adams, a professionally trained historian, saw the collection, however precious, as a resource to be used by scholars who would appreciate its value and understand its importance. If qualified scholars would have access, Clements was far less sure about

students. In a letter to University
President Clarence Burton in 1923 he
expressed doubts about the disturbing
commitment of his friend, History
professor C.H. Van Tyne, to teaching and
to students: "That this building should
be a teaching rendezvous for any but the
last stages of student life is in my
opinion undesirable." The balance
between preservation and access would
be a delicate one.

The Clements Library was to be unique, not only for its location in the Midwest, but for its combination of independence and university affiliation. Originally, Clements had planned for the institution to be incorporated into the University library system; but on the advice of George Winship, who had headed the John Carter Brown Library, he decided to follow the model of that repository. Thus, the Clements Library was to be governed by a five-member Committee of Management, interlocking with the University administration yet distinct from it, and with a separate budgetary status. The University would pay staff salaries, maintain the building, and provide an annual appropriation for acquisitions.

To create a building worthy of housing his precious collection of Americana, Clements turned to Albert Kahn, architect of Clements' own house in Bay City. Kahn was no stranger to the University. In 1920, President Burton had appointed him Supervising Architect for developing the central campus; he had designed the Engineering Building, the University Hospital, the University Library, and Hill Auditorium. He was also no stranger to the world at large, for mansions and public structures of his design, including the Fisher Building, General Motors Building, and the Ford Rotunda, were to be found throughout greater Detroit, and his innovative industrial architecture had won notice and acclaim from professional peers. Kahn's work reflected both the solid. pragmatic orientation of the engineer and the love of historicism and eclecticism typical of the beaux-arts architectural taste and training of the early twentieth century, with its reliance on models from classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance.

For the Clements commission, Kahn found inspiration in a ca. 1587 casino he had seen in the gardens of the Villa Farnese, near Viterbo north of

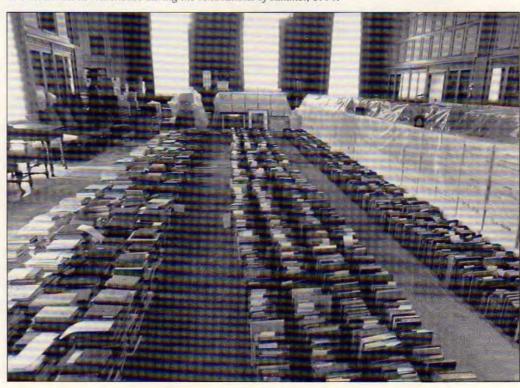
Rome, as well as in buildings of a similar style by the New York architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White, whose work he greatly admired. They had recently designed a comparable library building for J.P. Morgan in New York City. The Clements Library was to be Kahn's personal favorite among all of his University of Michigan commissions. The elegant, finely proportioned limestone structure with triple-arched portico and flanking bays is entered through great bronze doors leading into a two-story main hall which extends the length of the building. Arched, colorfully-detailed ceiling and oak-panelled walls with carved classical ornament enclose a central exhibit area and side alcoves with glass-doored bookcases. Massive library tables and an overhanging balcony of book alcoves complete the balanced, dramatic effect.

Behind and below this great public space lay the functional areas of the library. Opposite the entrance, opening off the main room, was the so-called "Treasure Room" (now known as the Rare Book Room)—actually a massive vault of reinforced concrete with steel-shuttered windows and doors which conceal tempered steel plates. Off to its side lay the office of the "Custodian," as the Director was first called, and just

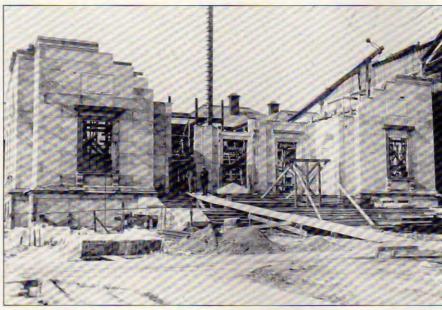
beyond his office was the small readingroom, where readers might be kept under watchful eye. At the other end of the building, in the northwest corners of the main and second floors, the two professors of American History at the University were assigned office space. Also on the second floor were combined staff work room and bibliographical materials. The basement housed newspapers, photostats, and janitorial space. Collections were protected from damage through the use of fire-proof construction combined with the transmission of steam through a tunnel from the University power plant, eliminating the need for a dangerous heating unit within the Library itself. So, in the beginning, all was simple: one reading room, one staff work room, two professorial offices, all concealed by the imposing main room which occupies almost the entire building.

Since 1923 a great deal has changed. Under the Directors who succeeded Randolph Adams, Howard Peckham in 1952 and then John Dann in 1977, service to the University as well as international scholars has become first priority. New kinds of readers, beyond the established historian envisioned by Clements — undergraduates researching an honors thesis or even a term paper,

The main hall as warehouse during the renovations of summer, 1994.









Above: Architect Albert Kahn (1869-1942) at his drawing board and on site, inspecting the construction work. Photos courtesy of Albert Kahn Associates and the Bentley Library.

Left: Albert Kahn's architectural rendering of the Clements Library, which was to be his favorite among all the buildings he designed for the University of Michigan.

teachers bent on exposing their classes to the excitement of using original documents, local history buffs and genealogists, military history reenactment groups and restorers of old forts and villages - all have been welcomed as the great bronze doors have opened wider. And new kinds of materials, beyond the rare, exquisitely bound books in pristine condition so rightly prized by Clements, have attracted interest among scholars, collectors, and the public alike. These include prints and broadsides, popular sheet music, letters and diaries of ordinary Americans, "ephemera" of every description - exciting stuff all, but adding to the acute problems of space and service for the Library.

The expansion of the collection and its division into separate departments —

books, manuscripts, maps, and printsgradually led to a splitting up of curatorial space and reader accommodations. The strictly limited space available for work and storage behind and below the great room has been rearranged to meet these problems, again and again. Offices for American History professors, whose numbers grew from two to ten or twelve, were a luxury soon sacrificed, although graduate seminars still occasionally convene in the building. Manuscripts and their readers moved to the second floor, while users of books, maps, and newspapers descended to the basement; a new study and storage room for the growing print collection replaced the old "reading room" next to the Director's office. This patched-together, piecemeal division of activities has become unwieldy over the

years, creating problems for both staff and readers, and making security a real worry. Squeezing out every inch of available space for the storage of new materials has pushed vital staff work, especially cataloging and conservation, into nooks and corners where adequate protection became very difficult. With more people using the Library, precious items might not be properly attended, nor visiting readers properly supervised, by a professional staff whose numbers are as limited as Library space.

Events occurring outside of the Library in recent years have further raised fears for security. Thefts from museums and special collections around the world have given good reason to wonder if internal alterations had not weakened the Library's ability to protect its collections against professional predators. In 1991, University Provost Gilbert Whitaker raised the topic of improved security as a campus-wide issue, but specifically singled out the Clements Library, whose holdings have appreciated astronomically in value over

the last fifty years. Responding to Whitaker's initiative, a review of Library security was completed in 1992, and most of its recommendations were accepted.

All of these proposed changes actually lead back to the days of Clements and Adams, when readers were centralized and closely supervised and all materials well protected from casual traffic. But it is new technology which permits a return to old simplicity. "Compact shelving," steel shelves moving on teflon rollers, installed in the basement, will easily double the storage capacity of that area, freeing space elsewhere. The great front door will still be open to those visiting the main exhibit area, but researchers and other Library users will enter, less grandly, via the rear door, through a guard station, and will be directed to the central basement reading room, where all staff curatorial offices will also be united.

Supervising and servicing readers in this larger, central location would be impossible without a full-service elevator, an item struck from the original plans as too costly, and replaced by a primitive dumb waiter with which materials were moved from floor to floor. Meanwhile, readers, whatever

their physical condition, have had to make their way up and down the marble staircases. As might be expected, elevator construction is by far the largest item in the-budget for Library renovations, and the University's urgent need to bring the building into full compliance with Federal law concerning access for the physically handicapped doubtless helped win approval for the whole plan. Now, materials will move quickly from secure storage centers to and from the reading room, and a completely rewired building will facilitate easy internal communication as well as a greatly improved computer environment and a state-of-the-art electronic security

"Improved computer environment."
"State-of-the-art electronic security
system." "Expanded access." What
would William L. Clements say? "Full speed ahead," we would like to believe,
for all of this change, this new technology, serves very old ambitions and
ideals. The distinguished scholar
relishes an opportunity to work with an
authentic Benedict Arnold letter from the
Clinton Papers. An impressionable
undergraduate is thrilled to see, touch,
read a document written by Frederick
Douglass. That is still what really

counts. Mr. Clements cherished rare books and manuscripts, and sought to inspire an appreciation for them in others; that is why this Library exists. We think he would be pleased with the directions in which it is moving, as it remains loyal both to tradition and to the written record, incorporating change into the great legacy of the rare books library.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 11, Clements Library Associates Board Meeting, twelve noon, at the Gandy Dancer Restraurant, Depot Street, Ann Arbor.

October 21-22, The 4th Annual North American Symposium on Ephemera Studies: The American Spirit of Transportation.

October 21-November 25, Exhibit, Moving America: Transportation History in Clements Library Collections.

December 8, Holiday Open House. An address, "George Parker Winship, Randolph G. Adams and the Beginnings of the William L. Clements Library" by Thomas R. Adams, John Hay Professor of Bibliography and Librarian Emeritus, John Carter Brown Library, at 3:30 pm. Reception and Viewing of Library Rennovations.

January 16, Martin Luther King Day Observance at the Clements Library sponsored jointly with the Department of History, program to be announced.

January 9-March 31, Exhibit, Ninetheenth century photographs of Americans at work.

April 10-June 30, Exhibit, America in 1795.

May 2, Clements Library Associates Board Meeting, 3 pm at the Library.

June 2-4, The Institute of Early American History and Culture First Annual Conference.

The timeless grandeur of the main exhibit gallery circa 1941.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

FALL SCHEDULE

The library's schedule will continue to be disrupted in September and October as building renovations are completed and collections are installed. Readers planning to use the library are urged to call ahead regarding the accessibility of material. The main exhibit room will remain closed to visitors.

On October 17, the library will resume its regular schedule with extended reading room hours, weekdays 9:00 am to 12:00 noon, 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm. The exhibit room will be open to visitors weekdays, 12:00 noon to 2:30 pm.

EPHEMERA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SYMPOSIUM

American Transportation History is the theme of the Ephemera Society of America's 1994 Symposium to be held at the Clements Library, October 21-22. Symposium papers will explore a variety of subjects, including transportation images in American and European caricature, and the use of printed

ephemera to promote trans-Mississippi immigration. Tours will be given of transportation history collections in the Hatcher and Clements Libraries. On Saturday the symposium will travel to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, for a luncheon at Lovett Hall, and tours of the Research Center and the permanent transportation exhibittion, The Automobile in American Life. Curators will discuss the use of printed ephemera in museum exhibits. Clements Library Associates are welcome to attend the symposium. For information on registration and accommodations please call the Clements Library, (313) 764-2347.

PRICE VISITING RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS

The Jacob M. Price Visiting Research Fellowships are offered to facilitate research in the Clements Library's collections. Two grants of \$500 are available for 1995 to graduate students and non-tenured faculty whose work would benefit from using the Library's

resources. Inquiries should be directed to the Head of Reader Services, Clements Library, 909 S. University St., Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1190.

CONFERENCE ON EARLY AMERICAN STUDIES

The Institute of Early American History and Culture's first annual conference will be held on June 2-4, 1995, at the University of Michigan. The Clements Library will participate with an exhibit and tours, and will host a reception. This conference is intended to provide a forum for the creative diversity of scholarship characterizing early American studies. It will be broadly inclusive in terms of regions, topics, and disciplinary orientations and include scholars at all stages of their careers. Proposals for papers, not to exceed three pages, should be sent in triplicate to Professor Carol Karlsen, Chair, IEAHC Annual Conference, Department of History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045. A one-page vita should accompany proposals.



Clements Library Director John C. Dann

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Clements Library Associates share an interest in American history and a desire to ensure the continued growth of the Library's collections. Funds received from Associate memberships are used exclusively to purchase historical materials. Annual membership is \$25.

Published by the Clements Library, University of Michigan, 909 S. University Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1190, phone (313) 764-2347. Arlene Shy, Editor; Susan Swasta, Assistant Editor; Kathleen Horn, Graphic Designer; Paul Jaronski, Photographer.

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— continued from page 3

more fiction than fact, were eagerly devoured by the masses and might be considered the mid-nineteenth-century version of today's supermarket tabloids with their Elvis-sightings and celebrity scandals. Unlike modern writers, however, Barclay tended toward more ornate prose. "The Great Wrongs of the Shop Girls. The Life and Persecutions of Miss Beatrice Claflin, How Miss Claflin became the White Slave in the Gilded Dry Goods Palace of a Merchant Prince" is a particularly enticing specimen. While Barclay had his competitors, most notably former employee Charles Alexander and his Old Franklin Publishing Company, his press produced more titles over a longer period than any other representative of the genre.

The collection contains many twentieth century crime materials, some in the detective-story mode popularized in magazines, some written from the point of view of policemen or investigators. Examples are a series of books highlighting murders in various cities published in the 1940's, featuring multiple authors and a "hard-boiled" Mickey Spillane style, and Charles Woolridge's 1906 "Hands up! in the world of crime, or, 12 years a detective," which purports to give the reader an insider's view of crime and

criminals. In addition to murder, the Medler Collection covers assassinations, well-known robberies, Indian captivities, activities of "subversive groups" such as the Molly Maguires and the Haymarket rioters, and the occasional novelty such as the 1817 trial of Frederick Eberle for "illegally conspiring" to prevent the introduction of the English language into German Lutheran church services in Philadelphia, and the case of Elijah Goodridge of Newbury, Massachusetts, who in 1816 allegedly committed robbery "on his own person" and then had Ebenezer Pearson arrested for the crime.

This brief characterization barely begins to reveal the complexity and depth of the James Vincent Medler Collection, which now stands cataloged and classified in all of its topical variety and multitude of physical formats. With the purchase of the Medler Collection, the Clements Library now owns 40% of the titltes listed in the McDade bibliography. In addition, the Library has numerous variant printings and titles which do not appear in McDade. The Clements Library takes pride in this fascinating, comprehensive collection. We welcome the historians who will transform these tales of fiends and victims, brigands and captives, into depictions of the society mirrored in their nefarious deeds and in the tales which were told and retold long after the deeds themselves.