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Library Notes: Recent Acquisitions [v. 9, no. 2]

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Kentuckiana

The libraries have recently acquired several interesting broadsides from the early nineteenth century. One announces the sale of an estate in 1847. Items listed for auction include "HEMP in the shock, ready for the break," horses, cattle, a year's crops, an ox cart, a barouche and harness, and 75,000 bricks.

A second broadside is part of a group of materials relating to the Winchester and Lexington Turnpike Road company. This private organization was formed on 1 October 1834 and dissolved on 17 January 1901, when the Clark County Fiscal Court purchased the Winchester portion of the right-of-way and the Fayette County Fiscal Court purchased the Lexington portion. A minute book details the work of the company in examining bridges and tollgates and carrying out other maintenance activity. An 1853 broadside inserted in the minutes lists the rates of toll for horse and rider (5 cents), pleasure buggies, one horse (10 cents), stage coach, four horses (50 cents), and, improbably, an elephant (25 cents). Early stockholders in the turnpike company include, among others, Jacob Hughes, Benjamin Gratz, Leslie Combs, Robert Wickliffe, B. W. Dudley, Charles Wilkins Short, and John Tilford.

Another recent acquisition is the typed letter dated 16 September 1893 of Congressman W.C.P. Breckinridge on letterhead of the U. S. House of Representatives. Breckinridge replies to Col. Cicero Coleman, of Chilesburg, about a postmaster's appointment. "I have never permitted myself," he writes, "to use my Representative duty of recommendation as a means of building up my personal fortunes. I have tried in good faith to recommend men who were competent for the discharge of the duties of the office, who were good Democrats, and who were my friends. . . ." Also by W.C.P. Breckinridge is a recently acquired pamphlet, The Confederate Dead: Two Addresses (Louisville: John P. Morton, 1887); this contains the text of speeches given at Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville in 1879 and at the dedication of a monument in Hopkinsville in 1887.
Chase Family Papers
Kentucky writer James Still, of Hindman, has made a gift to the libraries of two groups of correspondence of the Chase family of Ohio. There are over a hundred items in the total collection, including letters, documents, and photographs, dating from 1816 to 1909. The letters relate mostly to everyday life. There is one letter, 9 April 1890, signed by Rutherford B. Hayes, politely declining to recommend Nettie Chase for a civil service appointment; a document, signed by Salmon P. Chase as governor of Ohio, certifies the election of Philip W. Noel (husband of Sophia Chase) as Treasurer of Scioto County. Another letter in the Chase Collection, written by a lady in Alexandria, Virginia on 8 July 1864, declines an offer of marriage: “... for many reasons I feel satisfied you will think sometime hereafter as I now do viz: that I am not as well calculated to make you happy as some other.”

A series of letters in the Chase material relates to a scheme, in 1873, to secure a share of the “Chase fortune.” Probably a scam, the situation involves a law suit to win an inheritance from a forgotten English line of the family. American “heirs” are encouraged to send money to assist in prosecuting the case.

There are also several letters of the Civil War period. One, written from Beverly, Virginia in August of 1862, states that “... citizens what there is in this place have some of them proved treacherous by making our movements known to the rebels quite a number have been arrested and put in jail.” He also ridicules the local women who “either chew tobacco or snuff or smoke cigars” and are attracted to “the Southern devils.”

The Chase papers represent an attractive group of materials about an early western family and its activities.

Writings of Victor Hammer
Two volumes have appeared recently containing writings by the artist, printer, and type designer Victor Hammer. Born in Vienna in 1882, Hammer worked in Europe until the Second World War. He then moved to the United States, teaching first at Wellsley College in Aurora, New York and, at the end of his career, at Transylvania University in Lexington.

In addition to his accomplishments as an artist, Hammer left, as well, a record as a philosopher of the arts in his essays, dialogues,
and correspondence. Hammer’s writings, where they constitute the text of his rare and splendid private press books, are, except to a few fortunate collectors, almost totally inaccessible. Victor Hammer: An Artist’s Testament, printed in 1988 in Verona, Italy by the Stamperia Valdonega, now brings together the canon of Hammer’s significant writings, for the most part in English translation. Here will be found “Memory and Her Nine Daughters, the Muses,” “Concern for the Art of Civilized Man,” “On Classic Art,” and other expository writings. In addition to these are key passages by his friends, as well, commenting on Hammer’s ideas and experiences. Those whose observations are included are Edgar Kaufman, Jr., Rudolf Koch, John Rothenstein, Harry Duncan, Lewis Mumford, John Dreuyfus, Thomas Merton, and Raymond McLain.

The text of Those Visible Marks: The Forms of Our Letters, a lecture given at Transylvania in 1955, came to light after the contents for An Artist’s Testament were assembled. It has recently been printed by Carolyn Hammer and Paul Holbrook in an edition of fifty copies on paper made for Victor Hammer in Peschia, Italy. Its conclusion, in reacting to the industrialization of modern life, expresses an idea central to Hammer’s whole outlook: “Only life generates life; that is why the typefaces of the great seventeenth and eighteenth-century type-cutters, on whose work modern printing relies so heavily, are still alive. The machine cannot do what the hand of man and the eye of man, moved by devotion, are able to do.”

Wheelwright Collection

The Wheelwright Collection, an extensive archive documenting the history of Wheelwright, Kentucky is now open and available for public research in the Department of Special Collections and Archives. Wheelwright, located in eastern Kentucky’s Floyd County, is a town created by the coal industry. Elk Horn Coal Corporation developed Wheelwright as a coal camp in 1911—the same year the railroad line into town was completed.

In 1930, the Inland Steel Company bought Wheelwright because the coal seams there were rich with metallurgical coal necessary for making steel, and for the next 35 years Inland Steel mined coal and developed the town into what many have called a “model” company town. By 1966, when Inland sold Wheelwright to Island Creek Coal Company, the town properties were showing signs of
physical deterioration. Within eleven months Island Creek, keeping the mines, sold the town to Mountain Investment Company.

The cohesiveness of the Wheelwright community was severely tested during the Mountain Investment years. The buildings and grounds further deteriorated during that company’s ownership. In addition, Island Creek shut down its mining operation in the early 1970s, leaving Wheelwright with a severe unemployment crisis. In 1979 Mountain Investment sold the town to the Kentucky Housing Corporation, a state agency, whose aim was to revive the town and transfer ownership to the residents.

The Wheelwright Collection contains records from the last three companies who owned Wheelwright: Inland Steel, Island Creek, and Mountain Investment. These documents create a vivid picture of company town life from the company’s perspective. Containing everything from blueprints to photographs and building maintenance records to office files, the Wheelwright Collection is a valuable resource for a wide range of scholars who specialize in social, economic, labor, architectural, and business history. Researchers in Appalachian studies and community studies will find the collection rich in details of coal town life. More importantly, the residents of Wheelwright, past and present, will have an archival collection which documents a part of their history and is a testament to their endurance as a community.

— James D. Birchfield and Katherine Black