The Acquisition of the First Sixteenth-Century Books for the Grand Valley State University Library

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Among the first books purchased for what was to become the Grand Valley State University Library were fourteen that were printed between 1502 and 1587, relatively early dates in the history of printing from moveable type. Where they came from and how they were acquired provides an interesting historical footnote to the establishment of Grand Valley as a four-year liberal arts college and its library.2

The goal that Grand Valley’s first president, James H. Zumberge, had set for the college library was to have in place and cataloged some 10,000 volumes by the official opening of the institution in September 1963.3 One of the first staff hired by Zumberge in July 1962 was Stephen Ford, who as Library Director, was given the task of meeting this goal and approximately one year in which to accomplish it. Identifying the books necessary for a new college library in its first year of operation is not especially problematic because there are many bibliographies, catalogues, and professional literature that provide advice and specific guidelines for library development. More difficult can be the actual acquisition of

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1 This is a revised and expanded version of “Sixteenth Century Books in the University Library,” Grand Valley Review, 6 (Spring 1991), 12-27.

2 Stephen Ford (1924-1999), Librarian Emeritus, provided invaluable assistance with his recollections concerning the purchase of the Reeves library. In addition, Thomas Greenslade, archivist at Kenyon College, was able to supply some relevant biographical information on William Peters Reeves.

3 In its first year Grand Valley offered only freshman-level courses to its 226 enrollees; the second year both freshman and sophomore courses were on the schedule, and so on.
the books themselves, because what are considered standard works for some reason may not be available either from publishers or even from the antiquarian book trade for reasonable prices.

Three weeks after his appointment as Grand Valley’s Library Director, Ford received a letter from Frances J. Brewer, Curator of Rare Books at the Detroit Public Library:

… We have been offered for sale the attached list of books which was the library of Mr. [William Peters] Reeves, forty years English Professor of Kenyon College. The list of books contains so many duplicate titles for the Detroit Public Library that it does not seem reasonable for us to purchase these books. However, for a college library just starting, the titles seemed extremely useful, especially since the library [i.e. Reeves’] includes so many standard sets….4

The letter went on to indicate that the widow of Professor Reeves, Florence Beckwith Reeves, hoped to sell her husband’s books that numbered approximately 650 titles in 1000 volumes for $1500. The list of books showed a scholar’s library strong in the liberal arts, not only in the expected areas of language and literature, but also in fine arts, philosophy, religion, and the political and social sciences. To be able to obtain a substantial collection of standard authors and reference materials at one stroke was a very attractive proposition, even more so since the per-volume price was quite low, even in 1962 dollars. Negotiations for the purchase of the Reeves library began at once.

The books had originally been offered to the Detroit Public Library by Arthur G. Reeves, a prominent Detroit banker and nephew of Florence Reeves, who was acting as her agent and personal representative. Ultimately arrangements were made for Ford to inspect the entire collection at the Reeves home in Gambier, Ohio in October 1962.

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During the visit to Gambier it became evident that the Reeves library indeed would make a fine beginning to the Grand Valley library; but at the same time Ford realized that a good part of it contained books of such specialized and esoteric natures that seemed to have no logical place in Allendale “at the present stage in the development of our library.” Consequently, Ford offered to purchase only those works of standard authors and criticism that would be of immediate use to the new college, which comprised only about half of the Reeves library. Florence Reeves, however, was insistent that her husband’s books be sold en bloc and in response, the college offered $1150 to her for the entire collection. It was accepted.

Upon their arrival at Grand Valley, the books were sorted and the preferred standard authors and sets were processed, cataloged, and shelved; they duly became the nucleus of the 10,000-volume opening day collection. The remainder of the Reeves library was added to the library over a period of time as the college and its curriculum grew and the sixteenth-century books that were part of it became the college library’s first rare book collection.

William Peters Reeves (1865-1945) was born in Richmond, Indiana to Simeon and Lucretia Reeves. He attended Earlham College in Richmond before transferring to Johns Hopkins University where he received his A.B. degree in 1889 and Ph.D. in 1893, his dissertation entitled, *A Study in the Language of Scottish Prose Before 1600*. He taught at Union College and Iowa State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts (now Iowa State University) before his arrival at Kenyon College as professor of English and chair of the department in 1900. He held both positions continuously until his retirement in 1935. Between 1910 and 1911 he married Florence M. Beckwith (1879-1970), a teacher of music who lived only a block from him in Gambier.

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5 Stephen Ford, letter to Florence Reeves, 16 October 1962.

Besides his love of scholarship, Reeves’ interests and talents were many. He was the founder of the Ohio Athletic Conference in 1902, and took active interest in it; he played the violin and enjoyed producing dramatic presentations; and he reputedly was a marksman with both rifle and pistol. Reeves was highly regarded as a teacher by both students and faculty. His personal library reflected his wide interests, and memorial tributes at the time of his death made pointed references to these books. He was such an eminently respected figure on campus that a reading room in the Kenyon College Library was named in his honor at a special ceremony in 1936, shortly after his retirement. The dedicatory plaque proclaims that William Peters Reeves, “who for more than a third of a century has kindled the love of books in the hearts of Kenyon men.”

7 Thomas Boardman Greenslade, Kenyon College, Its Third Half Century (Gambier, Ohio: The College, 1975), 33.

8 “Reeves Room Dedicated as New Library Reading Room.” Kenyon Collegian (10 Mar. 1936), 1.
Catalogue of the Sixteenth-Century Books in the Reeves Collection

Of the fourteen books that comprise this part of the Reeves collection, more than half deal with Italian Renaissance literature and history, one of the scholarly interests of their former owner. Some of the rest are various commentaries on Aristotle and works dealing with medicine and religion. Most of the books appear to have been purchased during European travels of Reeves.

The following catalogue lists the books by date of printing, followed by standard bibliographical information with additional notes where appropriate.

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1502

**Dante Alighieri** (1256-1321).

Collation: Octavo. a-z⁸ A-G⁸ H⁴ (244 f).
Notes: Leaf f8 supplied in manuscript. Binding: Early 19th century half leather-covered pasteboard; spine stamped in gold: DANTE / INF.PUR.PAR. / - / ED. ALDI / 1502. Leaf size: 154 x 95 mm.
Provenance: Ink inscription on H3v: “P. Carime / Paris 1848.”
References: Adams D-83. Aldine Press 52.5. BMST-I 209.
Shelf mark: RARE PQ 4302 .B02

1505

**Avicenna** (980-1037).

*Liber Canonis Avicenne revicenne revisus & ab omni errore mandaque purgatus summa quam cum diligentia impressus*. Venice: Octavianus Scotus for Bonetus Locatellus, 1505.
Colophon: Anno salutis M.CCCCCV. die 24 Januarii.
Provenance: Purchased by Reeves in Rome from C.E. Rappaport in 1929 for $52. Reeves bookplate.
References: Durling 378.
Shelf mark: RARE RA 128.3 .A94 1505

1506

Council of Constance (1414-1418).
Acta scitu dignissima docteq[ue] concinnata Constantie[n]sis
Colophon: Anno domini millesimo quingentesimo-sexto die vero. xii. mensis maii.
Collation: Octavo. [a] 8 b-x 8 2x 4 (172 l).
Notes: Manuscript waste on front pastedown. Binding: Original(?) vellum covered boards with later repairs to spine; spine labeled in black ink: “Acta / Concilii / Constantiensis.” Leaf size: 136 x 96 mm.
Provenance: Unknown.
References: BMSTC-F 121.
Shelf mark: RARE BX 830 1414 .A2 1506

1516

Thomas, Aquinas, Saint (1225?-1274).
Interpretamenta sanctissimi doctoris Thome Aquinatis in libros de
commentorum Averroys: que in alii voluminibus alias impressis
minime habentur: in marginibus ornate: ac cum additionibus
Petri alverniiatis. Textus Aristotelicus cum duplici translatione:
antiqua videlicet [et] Joannis Argyropyli: que in alii voluminibus
minime habetur. Fratris Hieronymi Savonarole Ferrariensis
tractatus: in quo dividuntur of[nn]es sc[enti]e nuperrime in lucem
editis. Tabula ordinatissima: que continet omnes questiones q[ua]s
Collation: Folio. A-L 8 M 8 (100 f); signatures K3 and K4 reversed.
Notes: Woodcut initials, diagrams, and printer’s device. Binding: 19th century paste-paper covered boards. Leaf size: 306 x 213 mm.
References: Other copies only at Claremont Colleges (California) and University of Oxford.
Shelf mark: RARE QB 41 .A7 T5 1516
1543

Jean, de Jandun (1285?-1328).
Joannis Janduni philosophi peripatetici questiones in libris de caelo & mundo Aristotelis Stagiritae, nuper emendatissime lucubrate.
Jacobus Philippus de Pellibus Nigris Troianus artium & medicinæ doctor: moralemque philosophiam Patavii ordinarie legens nuper a Nicoleto Vernia theatino, emendatum exoravit. Venice:
Octavianus Scotus, di Amadei, 1543.
Collation: Folio. Aa-ee⁶ (30 f.).
Notes: Woodcut initials and printer’s devices. Binding: 19th century paste-paper covered boards. Leaf size: 316 x 221 mm.
Provenance: Purchased by Reeves in Rome from Alberto Bocca in April 1930 for £60. Reeves bookplate.
References: Only other copy at University of Manchester.
Shelf mark: RARE QB 41 .A7 J6 1543

1553

Petrarca, Francesco (1304-1374).
Collation: Quarto. aa-bb⁶ cc⁶ A² B-Z⁶ Y⁶ AA-VV⁸ XX⁴ a-i⁸ (438 f.).
Notes: Woodcuts, woodcut initials and printer’s device. Binding: 18th century(? ) calf with spine stamped in gold, “PETRARCHA / POSITIONE / DI / GESUALDO” stamped in gold. Leaf size: 207 x 149 mm.
References: BMSTC-I 505.
Shelf mark: RARE PQ 4476 .B53

1554

Petrarca, Francesco (1304-1374).
Francisci Petrarchae Florentini ... Opera que extant omnia. Haec quidem omnia nunc iterum summa diligentia à mendis repurgata atque innumerabilibus in locis, genuinae integritati restituta, & in Tomos quatuor distincta ... Insigniorvm atqve doctissimorvm in re literaria uirorum, de hoc autore testimonia in Praefatione habes. Basel: Henricus Petrus, 1554. 4 vols. in 2.
Collation: Folio. v.1: t⁴ t⁶ t⁶+ t⁴ A-Z⁸ aa-pp⁸ qq⁴¹⁰; v.2-4: Aa-Zz⁸ AA-OO⁸ PP⁶ QQ⁸ AAa-HHh⁸ AAA-DDD⁸ EEE¹⁰
Jean, de Jandun (1285?-1328).
*Quaestiones super Parvis naturalibus, cum Marci Antonii Zimarae De movente et moto, ad Aristotelis & Averrois intentionem, absolutissima quaestione, ac variis marginis scholiis hinc inde ornatae.* Venice: Hieronymus Scotus, 1557.

Collation: Folio. π² A-X⁵ Y⁶ (92 ff.).


References: Only other copy at University of Oxford.

Shelf mark: RARE B 444 .J6 1557

1559

Villani, Giovanni (d. 1348).
*La prima [-seconda] parte delle Historie universali se suoi tempi di Giovan Villani cidadino fiorentino, nuovamente ristampata con tavole necessarie e postille in margin delle cose notabili, fatte per m. Remigio fiorentino.* Venice: Giunti di Fiorenza, 1559.

Collation: Quarto. *8 **10 A-Z⁸ a-o⁸ p⁸; *6 Aa-Pp⁸ ([18], 588, [12], [6], 232, [8] p.).

Notes: Woodcut initials and printer’s devices. Binding: 18th century(?) ¾ calf over marbled boards with “G. VILLANI/HISTORIE/1559” stamped in gold on spine. Leaf size: 207 x 149 mm.

Provenance: Engraved armorial bookplate of Count Dmitri Petrovich Boutourlin (1763-1829). Reeves bookplate.

References: BMSC-I 726.

Shelf mark: RARE DG 737 .A2 V4 1559
Bruni, Leonardo (1369-1444). 
*La historia universale de suoi tempi di M. Lionardo Aretino. Nella qual si contengono tutte le guerre fatte tra principi in Italia, & spetialmente da fiorentini in diversi tempi fino al MCCCCIII; con la giunta delle cose fatte da quel tempo fino all'anno MD LX. Et con l'annotationi poste in margine a suoi luoghi.* Venice: Francesco Sansovino, 1561.

1561

Provenance: Signature in ink: “Wm Peters Reeves / Gambier, Ohio.”
Shelf mark: RARE DG 737 .A2 B819 1561

Seneca, Lucius Annaeus (ca. 4 BCE-65 CE). 

1573

Collation: Folio. *α6 a-z6 A-Z6 AA-Cc6 Dd8 (~a2-3); ([16], 582, [22] p.).
Notes: Woodcut initials and printer’s devices. Binding: 19th century(?) ½ vellum over pasteboard with remnant of red leather label on spine: “L. ANNAEI / SENECAE / PHILOSOPHI” stamped in gold. Leaf size: 327 x 220 mm.
References: Adams S-887. BMSTC-G 809.
Shelf mark: RARE PA 6661 .A2 1573

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321).
*Dante con l’espositioni di Christoforo Landino et d’Alessandro Vellutello sopra la sua comedìa dell’ Inferno, del Purgatorio, & del Paradiso: con tavole argomenti, & allegorie, & riformato,*
riveduto, & ridotto alla sua vera lettura, per Francesco Sansovino, fiorentino. Venice: Giovanni Battista Sessa. 1578.
Collation: Folio. a8 b6 c4 d10 A-V8 X-Z8 AA-ZZ8 AAA-CCC8; ([28], 163, [4], 164-392 f).
Notes: This book was never catalogued and is missing from the collection; it may not have been part of the final purchase.
Provenance: Unknown.
Shelf mark: None

1584

Petrarca, Francesco (1304-1374).
Notes: Woodcut initials and printer’s device. Binding: 17th century(?)
limp vellum with boards with “Petrarcha” in black ink on spine. Leaf size: 153 x 102 mm.
References: BMSTC-I 506.
Shelf mark: RARE PQ 4495 .D4 N2 1584

1587

Medici, Sebastiano (d. 1595).
Collation: Folio. 4* A-Q8; 2A6 3A-N8 O10; 2*2 4A-I8 K6; *4 5A-E8 F4
([4], 136, [6], 115, [3], 78, [4], 44 f).
Notes: Woodcut initials and printer’s devices. Binding: 17th century(?)
vellum over thick paper boards with illegible title words in black ink on spine. Leaf size: 308 x 207 mm.
Provenance: Reeves bookplate.
References: Adams M-981.
Shelf mark: RARE BV 4626 .M42 1587
References


BMSTC-G *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in the German-Speaking Countries and German Books Printed in Other Countries from 1455 to 1600 Now in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1962).

BMSTC-I *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in Italy and of Italian Books Printed in Other Countries from 1465 to 1600 Now in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1958).
