

Western Libraries  
Rare Books Collection Policy

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This collections policy aligns with and is best read and understood in relation to other strategy and policy documents created by Western Libraries:

Western Libraries' Collections Strategy: <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/collections/strategy.html>

Western Libraries collection policies by subject area:  
<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/policies/collections.html>

Western Libraries donation policies: <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/collections/donations.html>

Western Libraries' archival and special collections are rich and robust, offering an array of research materials in a diversity of formats that directly support students, faculty, and researchers. Materials are selected, acquired, or access is provided to allow curation and preservation of the information resources required by Western's communities of scholars, educators, students, and practitioners to successfully accomplish their research and teaching.

This policy specifically describes the Rare Book Collection which is part of the **James Alexander and Ellen Rea Benson Special Collections** at Western Libraries and is described on the Archives and Special collections webpage:  
<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/archives/archivesandspecialcollectionsservices.html>.

Western Libraries also has a Medium Rare Book Collection, see a description of this collection in Appendix C.

**Purpose of the Rare Book Collection:** Rare books are acquired and preserved to enable teaching, learning, and research activities by academic and other special interest communities and user groups, via print and digital formats. Rare books are acquired with consideration of both current and anticipated future needs.

**Acquisitions:** The Special Collections Librarian (Rare Books) is responsible for the acquisition of rare books through donation, by purchase, and by transfer from other collections within Western Libraries. The emphasis on acquisitions is for unique or scarce material of enduring historical and cultural value that adds to the current areas of strength in the collection, and directly supports current teaching and research areas of focus. An area of strength is considered to be an area where a particular subject or type of material exists in the collection of a quality or quantity sufficient to offer value to teaching or research in that area. Areas of

strength in the Rare Book Collection are listed in Appendix A. A detailed list of criteria that inform the acquisition or identification of rare books is found in Appendix B.

**Processing and Cataloguing:** Rare books are catalogued using modified procedures to support conservation and safety of the material. No labels, stamps or embosses are affixed to rare books, and identifying information is recorded on an acid free book mark inserted into the book. Western Libraries follows the ACRL guidelines for the cataloguing of rare books and manuscripts (<http://rbms.info/dcrm/>). Rare books are only rebound or altered physically when deemed necessary for preservation, and this is performed by a professional book conservator.

**Storage:** The Rare Book Collection is stored in physically secured, climate-controlled, on-site facilities in the Archives and Research Collections Centre. Books and other items (pamphlets, newspapers, unbound volumes) that are fragile or vulnerable are held within acid free clamshells, folders, or envelopes. Volumes and other items are shelved in various configurations to promote and support their long-term stability, depending on their size, shape, and weight.

**Access:** Rare books are discoverable via the library search tool, Omni, and are available for on-site consultation within the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room. Rare books can be requested for teaching purposes, or for other presentations, events, and exhibits, upon consultation with the Special Collections Librarian (Rare Books) and/or the Head, Archives and Special Collections.

**Deaccessioning:** Removal of items from the Rare Book Collection is not common practice. Occasionally, a book that does not meet the criteria for the selection of a rare book will be moved from the Rare Book Collection to another collection in Western Libraries. Rare books that are deaccessioned due to other reasons (e.g. multiple duplicates with no unique research value) might be offered to another institution with a collection that would be enhanced by the item, or may be sold, with funds raised from the sale used to enhance the Rare Book Collection. Recommendations by the Special Collections Librarian (Rare Books) regarding deaccessioning are documented and approved by the Head, Archives and Special Collections, with consultation where appropriate, and are kept with the administrative records of the unit.

## Appendix A

### Western Libraries Rare Book Collection Areas of Strength

The areas of strength in the Rare Book Collection identify particular subjects or types of materials that exist in a quantity sufficient to be described as a distinct collection unto itself. Areas of strength in the Rare Book Collection may or may not reflect areas of strength in other Western Libraries' collections.

1. History of Medicine
2. History of Science
3. History of Canadian Aviation
4. Canadian Voyages and Travel to 1900
5. Canadian/American Black History
6. Canadian Poetry
7. Canadian Literature
8. Canadian Church History
9. History of London and surrounding region
10. Local London Ontario Authors
11. Milton and Miltoniana
12. Shakespeare and Shakespeariana
13. H. G. Wells
14. T. S. Eliot
15. Walt Whitman
16. Wordsworth-Coleridge
17. Pindar (partially catalogued)
18. Comic Books (partially catalogued)
19. Miniature books
20. English Literature
21. Medieval Manuscripts (partially catalogued)
22. Incunabula
23. Named Collections of note such as: Rufus Hawtin Hathaway; John Davis Barnett; the Ontario Textbook Collection; the Gregory Clark Piscatorial Collection; the Hannah Collection on the History of Science and Medicine.
24. Books with notable physical features such as special and fine bindings, important provenances, examples of early and important illustration and printing.

## Appendix B

### Western Libraries Rare Book Collection

#### Criteria for the selection of Rare Books

Examining books for their potential to be considered special collections and/or rare books is not an exact science, or a process that is easily articulated. A combination of bibliographic expertise, subject knowledge, and academic/historical judgement is required to ascertain significance related to subject area(s) of a volume, authorship, and/or to the history of the book as an artifact.

Not all books identified as rare are special or valuable, not all books that have research value have monetary value, and vice versa. Areas of research interest can peak and wane, depending on the faculty and programs available at the University at any given time. Also, Special Collections materials can have value across many subject areas.

Criteria to consider when determining the special or rare significance of a volume include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Is the volume a first, early, or significant edition, limited edition, or special printing? Is there something unusual about the edition, e.g. fore edge painting, hand coloured illustrations, exceptional artwork or photography, signed binding, scarce fine press, rare map?
2. Was the volume produced by an important publisher, printer, binder, or illustrator?
3. Does the volume contain post-production additions that are significant, including marginalia, dedications, signatures, library shelf marks or bookplates?
4. Does the volume have an important provenance?
5. How old is the volume, is it an incunabulum, does it have paper/watermarks, binding materials or typography that is significant or unusual?
6. Does the date/subject matter make it significant, e.g. 19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier Americana?
7. Would the book be difficult or impossible to replace?
8. How many copies of the exact edition/printing are available in libraries as indicated on WorldCat - a union catalog that itemizes the collections of 17,900 libraries in 123 countries and territories?
9. What is the historical, research, monetary value of the book?
10. Does the book fill a gap or add to the significance of one of Western's Special Collections areas of strength, or is the book relevant to a current Fond, or other area of Archival collections, such as author or organizational material?
11. Does the book add to the significance of a current collection of material by the same author, in the same genre, or is it part of the history of the institution? Does it add to an area of importance that needs preservation for historical or cultural purposes?
12. Does the book belong to an area of importance for collaboration with other major research institutions across Canada, e.g. Canadian Poetry, or internationally. e.g. Black Press, Antislavery, Canadian/American Abolitionist History?

## Appendix C

### Western Libraries Medium Rare Book Collection

Books in the Western Libraries collection that do not meet the criteria of rare books, but have special characteristics important to scholarship, or for other reasons, are designated as Medium Rare books. Western Libraries follows the definition of Medium Rare books as described in Section 5 of the ACRL *Guidelines on the Selection and Transfer of Materials from General Collections to Special Collections* for Medium Rare books:

<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/selctransfer>.

*“Most libraries have materials in their general collections that do not meet the criteria for transfer to special collections but nevertheless warrant a higher level of protection than is afforded by the current setting. Some libraries refer to this category of material as “medium rare” and identify it for transfer to an appropriate location.”*

An example of medium-rare books in Western Libraries’ collection would be a selection of books in the John Davis Barnett Collection. Although the Barnett Collection does contain numerous rare books, it also contains books that do not meet the Western Libraries definition of a rare book, but have significance as part of the Barnett Collection, Western Libraries founding collection. These books are designated as Medium Rare in Western Libraries’ collections.

Books that are categorized as Medium Rare at Western Libraries are housed in library general collections and on-site storage facilities but are treated similarly to the Rare Book Collection with regards to policies and processes. For example, Medium Rare books may not circulate, are not rebound or physically altered, are not removed from the collection without a formal process of deaccessioning, etc. Given the historical nature of Western Libraries’ collections, work is on-going to identify material in our collections that should be classified as medium-rare.