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Preserving a Legacy of Literary Lives: Reconnecting Patrons to one of our most Dynamic Digital Collections

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Preserving a Legacy of Literary Lives: Re-connecting Patrons to one of our most Dynamic Digital Collections

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Abstract
This poster describes a project at West Chester University to re-digitize the Philips Autograph Library Collection. Combining the efforts of the Special Collections, Cataloging, and Interlibrary Loan Departments, the goal is to improve and enhance access to this unique and valuable WCU treasure.

Collection Description
The Philips Autograph Library Collection contains over 3,000 autographed books from the 19th and 20th centuries, named after Dr. George Morris Philips, principal of West Chester State Normal School from 1881 to 1920. In 1885, Dr. Philips began purchasing books and sending them to their authors, including returning packages and postage with a letter explaining his purpose and request. In his 35 years of collecting, Dr. Philips obtained autographs from influential writers such as George Bernard Shaw; American Presidents such as Woodrow Wilson; and historical figures Frederick Douglass, Helen Keller, and Susan B. Anthony (to name a few).

Dr. Philips held many positions including founder, director, trustee, and president of various organizations. In terms of education, he was a trustee of Bucknell University, and held membership in the College and University Council of Pennsylvania, the State Committee to revise School Laws, and the State Board of Education. He was a highly demanded lecturer and instructor and wrote several books on topics ranging from Astronomy to Natural Philosophy to Government and Mathematics.

Why Re-digitization?
The original digitization was completed through a grant project around 2007. Unfortunately, the images were all scanned in black and white, at a low resolution, and with inconsistencies in page captures. This resulted in difficult reading and utilizing this resource. The decision to re-digitize came after an influential autograph scholar came to West Chester University to look at the collection and encouraged the library to catalog it, thus making it more accessible to the public.

This inspired library faculty and staff to reassess the collection, its research purpose, and discoverability. The decision was made to create a finding aid in ARCHON instead of creating individual catalog records for each book. The anticipated result will establish intellectual control over the collection as well as make it more accessible to researchers. While working on describing the collection in ARCHON, the opportunity arose to re-digitize the materials, leading to collaboration among different departments and skillsets within the library.

Process
1. Retrieve batch of approximately 200 Philips books. Cataloging department creates excel spreadsheet of titles.
2. Interlibrary Loan department retrieves batch of 30 books from cataloging and scans the cover, autograph page, all title pages, copyright page, any extra ephemera such as letters, newspaper clippings, stamps, envelopes, and postcards.
4. Once scanning is completed, Cataloging or Special Collections staff extracts individual Tiff and JPEG files using InfoView software.
5. Cataloging staff upload images and relevant metadata into CONTENTdm.
6. Sometime after upload into CONTENTdm, book titles, author name, and inscriptions are added to an ARCHON Finding Aid as individual items. A link to the CONTENTdm surrogate is also included in the item-level description; allowing users in ARCHON access to the digital collection.

Noteworthy Inscriptions
- Helen Keller (in her own hand): “Let us be content to do the thing we can and not presume to fret because it’s little.”
- Eden Philpotts (in response to Philips’ request with his name misspelled): “When asking a man for the trifling favor of his autograph, always spell his name correctly. It chills him to see that you are not really interested enough in him to pay him that small compliment. With all good wishes, sincerely yours, Eden Philpotts.”
- George Bernard Shaw (in response to an illegally printed U.S. Copy of his book): “Contraband copy smuggled into the United Kingdom by an enterprising American, who sent it to the author with a request to autograph it and smuggle it out again. America is quite welcome to the book, but to demand autographs into the bargain is not reasonable. Sincerely, George Bernard Shaw.”

Results
- During academic year 2014-2015 over 500 titles were re-scanned.
- In that same year over 300 titles, that had not previously been available digitally, were added to the digital collection.
- More consistent digital surrogates are now available in CONTENTdm.
- Project completion is 2017.
- Interdepartmental communication has been strengthened and a deeper understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the departments involved has been established.
- Greater internal knowledge of Special Collections holdings.

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