Book Traces

When is a marked copy preferable to a clean copy?
Reasons for Collaboration

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- As a shared print consortium, EAST has an interest in determining which copy of a particular title should be retained
- Traditionally, clean copies are preferred as the retained copy of record.
- However, that assumption could lead to the discarding of copies in the circulating collections with unique artifactual qualities
- The Book Traces project focuses on discovering, describing, and preserving marked copies with historical and scholarly value
Scope of the project

Our focus has been on owner marks in pre-1923 monographs in open-stack, circulating collections

- Most of these books came to libraries as donations (before WWII)
- They are likely to have digital surrogates (out of copyright)

Not every mark is equally valuable, and institutions need to set their own criteria
Goals of the Book Traces project

- Identification and preservation of unique artifacts and historical evidence
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- Identification and preservation of unique artifacts and historical evidence
- Recovery of local and institutional history
Local and institutional history

- Donated books contain a “shadow archive” of the institution and of local history
- Marginalia can be reunited with archives to form a more complete picture

Davis sisters (faculty children) and the April Fool’s note they wrote in a shared textbook
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- Identification and preservation of unique artifacts and historical evidence
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- Window onto print collection condition
- Involvement of students and faculty with the print collections
Pedagogical engagement

- Students love the “treasure hunt” and contributing to original research
A Texas A&M student says it all . . .

Book Traces “archaeology in the stacks” host institutions:

- Columbia University
- University of Miami
- Lehigh University
- University of Nebraska
- University of Iowa
- College of the Holy Cross
- University of Nevada-Las Vegas
- Millsaps College
- University of Louisville
- University of South Carolina
- University of Georgia
- University of Victoria
- Texas A&M
- Arizona State University
Pedagogical engagement

- Students love the “treasure hunt” and contributing to original research
- Some have written deep-dive blog posts on books that caught their interest, drawing historical context from Special Collections
One of many blog posts by students

Go to

http://booktraces.library.virginia.edu

and choose “Book Finds” category to see more
Pedagogical engagement

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- Book Traces surveying can be a class project or a highly-desirable student job
Book Traces student workers

Hiring for Book Traces project assistantships has been highly competitive
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- Book Traces surveying can be a class project or a highly desirable student job
- We have launched student workers into library school, LitHub, and research projects
Findings at UVA: CLIR grant project (2015-2017)

- **One in eight** pre-1923 books (12.5%) **in the circulating collection** contain marginalia meeting our threshold for description (~115,000 books examined)
Marginalia and other interventions found at UVA
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- The rate is higher in some subject areas than others
Hit rates by Library of Congress class at UVA
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- High hit rates found in these Library of Congress classes:
  - B (Philosophy. Psychology. Religion)
  - E (History of the Americas)
  - P (Language and Literature)
That’s where you come in

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- EAST libraries operate within a shared-print collective
- Sara Amato has identified EAST Libraries with high populations of pre-1923 imprints in the B, E, and P call number ranges
- EAST Libraries have strong interests in student engagement
- The Mellon Foundation has encouraged a proposal from Book Traces to address its goals in a collaborative, multi-institutional framework
Possibilities for EAST Libraries partnership

- Take samples from collections for comparison with data from UVA
  - Collections in open stacks, on site, are easiest to work with
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- Invite Book Traces to your campus for an engagement event, involving students, faculty, and librarians in the search for unique artifacts
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- Collaborate on a shared descriptive protocol and copy-level data model
- Help us take this initiative to a national level (via Mellon grant collaboration)
Questions and comments?

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