O n February 18, 33 people dropped in for “Passion and Power: Prints and Text: German Books in the Age of Dürer,” an open house in Special Collections & Archives held in conjunction with the “Passion and Power: German Prints in the Age of Dürer” exhibition at the Davison Art Center. More than 20th- and 16th-century illustrated German books were on display. Among the highlights were a leaf of the Gutenberg Bible (Mainz, ca. 1455), the Nuremberg Chronicle (Nuremberg, 1493), and a very scarce romance by Hermann von Sachsenheim, Die Mörin (“the Moorish woman”) (Strasbourg, 1512). The complete list can be found here: tinyurl.com/SC-A-PP-openhouse.

The exhibition “Signs of A Garden: A Garden of Books” in Special Collections & Archives opened to a March snowfall. From the 1588 edition of Thomas Hill’s The profitable arte of gardening, the earliest gardening book published in England, to Shawn Sheehy’s A pop-up culinary herbal (Paperboy Press, 2013), a great variety of gardening books bloomed in Olm Library. Many of the books in the exhibition were collected by Harriet Baldwin Davison, an avid gardener. The garden books were given to Wesleyan in 1930 by Mrs. Davison and her husband, George Willets Davison (Class of 1892).

In commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, Special Collections & Archives hosted an open house showcasing rare, illustrated, and unusual editions of the Bard on April 21. Among the delights on view were all four folios (1623–1685, the earliest collected editions of the plays), Ireland’s 18th-century forgeries, splendidly designed fine press editions, and irreverent artists’ books. (Full list at tinyurl.com/SCA-SH400.) The event was part of ArtFarm's Shakespeare400 events.

— SUSY TARARA, DIRECTOR, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES —

WESLEYAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT AVAILABLE ON WESSCHOLAR

T welve oral history interviews of Wesleyan community members, including faculty emeriti and administrators, have now been completed. Transcripts and recordings have been deposited in Special Collections & Archives, and Leith Johnson, university archivist, has worked to make the transcripts available on WesScholar at wesscholar.wesleyan.edu/oralhistory/. A link to the collection of memoirs will also be available from the Wach Collaborative website.

The set includes an extensive interview with Bill Finshin, Daniel Ayres Professor of Biology, Emeritus, who passed away in December. In this interview, Finshin related a whole complex of matters having to do with his Wesleyan career—his work as a scientist, his Jewish identity, his relationship with the administration, his colleagues, his hobbies and avocations—a rich and irreplaceable personal account. Another treasure in our collection is an interview with Bob Rosenbaum from folders.

Second, the interview was conducted in early June 2013 with Memoirs of the Last 50 Years of Wesleyan. The tape was recorded in 1981 and is still in the original tape format. After some time, one of the interviewees, a faculty member, left the university. The tape was stored in a cardboard box and forgotten until it was discovered in late 2014. The tape was then transferred to digital format and is now available in the Oral History Collection.

The interview with Bob Rosenbaum is one of the most valuable oral history interviews that we have. He was a member of the 1960s-era students movement and later became an important figure in the university’s history, serving as the chairman of the university’s board of trustees and as a member of the university’s faculty. He is also a noted author and has written several books on the history of the university and its role in society.

— KARL SCHIELE, DIRECTOR, MAISON CENTER FOR RETIRED FACULTY —

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY RECEIVES GRANT TO DIGITIZE WESLEYAN PRESS MATERIALS

I n mid-December, Wesleyan University received word that it had been awarded a grant under a joint project sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation called the Humanities Open Book Program. This Open Book program is part of the NEH agency-wide initiative called The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square. The purpose of the Open Book grant is to make out-of-print titles previously published by academic presses widely available in an open access (free) e-book format. The $100,000 grant that Wesleyan received will be used to digitize select titles in the areas of dance and theater that were previously published by Wesleyan University Press but are no longer in print.

The NEH grant proposal, coordinated by Betty McCormick, associate director of corporate, foundation and government grants, was a collaborative effort with Suzanna Tamminen, director of Wesleyan University Press; Diane Klare, interim university librarian; Susanne Javorksi, art librarian; Alec McLane, music librarian; and Francesca Livermore, digital projects librarian, that began in late April 2015. At that time, based on the scope of the grant, the team met to determine how to best gather titles for consideration. With Tamminen’s assistance, Javorksi and McLane then contacted the faculty chairs in the theater and dance departments respectively to determine which out-of-print Wesleyan University titles published by Wesleyan University Press the faculty would consider to be core, foundational titles in those two areas of scholarship. Wesleyan is well known for arts programs in theater and dance, so the decision to focus on those areas within the wide range of Wesleyan University Press titles that were possible choices enabled the committee to select titles still in continued demand in those two disciplines, even though they are no longer available for purchase.

Ultimately, 18 titles were selected to submit with the application, which was due June 30, 2015. The grant funds will be used to digitize these books and make them available via a Creative Commons License with the purpose of enhancing the role and demonstrating the significance of the arts and humanities in public life as well as in scholarship. With increasing focus on digital humanities in the arts, the ability to offer these Wesleyan University Press books openly will increase their reach to new readers, teachers, and students, allowing for new intellectual pursuits as well as provide additional insight into the role these works have played in sculpting society on a global scale. The books will be digitized in a format that will be compatible with any reading device, ensuring their broad dissemination. Over the next year, the work on digitizing these titles will commence, with a target date of completion and online availability by sometime in 2017.

— DIANE KLAIRE, INTERIM UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN —
students visited Special Collections & Archives where University Archivist Leith Johnson introduced them to archival collections that could be used to enhance the exhibits. Records pertinent to the Wesleyan Museum and some of its original collections, like local Middletown residents and Wesleyan faculty and student societies and missionary organizations, provided students with an illuminating backdrop of 19th- and 20th-century collecting priorities and practices. Jodi Almengo ’17 states, “The opportunity to work with Special Collections & Archives was instrumental to our curatorial vision. The archival research led us to develop a deeper understanding of Wesleyan’s history of collecting and allowed us insight into how collections have evolved over the last century and a half. Reading the handwritten descriptions of our objects in the archival documents, written by former Wesleyan university faculty and students, instilled in me a sense of pride.”

The resulting exhibition marks just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the research and learning opportunities that the Archaeology and Anthropology Collections have to offer the Wesleyan community. Ryan Moye continues, “I feel that the material we’re working with holds untapped potential as storytelling tools.” Indeed! The student-curated A Curious Case of Collecting at Wesleyan exhibition opens in May 2016 in the Olin Library Campbell Reference Center.

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