



**COLLECTING WESTERN AMERICANA:  
BOOKS from the LIBRARY of JOHN BLEW**

**An exhibition in the Special Collections Research Center**

**February 4 through April 11, 2002**

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The University of Chicago Library**

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## **COLLECTING WESTERN AMERICANA: BOOKS FROM THE LIBRARY OF JOHN BLEW**

**As long as I can remember, I have been a collector—** butterflies and stamps as a child, baseball cards as a teenager and, after a long hiatus devoted to developing a law practice and raising and educating three children, antiquarian books. Over time, I focused broadly on collecting historical Americana, especially works devoted to the exploration, settlement and development of the vast lands west of the Allegheny Mountains—both the “first” American west (east of the Mississippi River) and the area we think of today as the American west. I quickly learned that most of the rarities in Americana were seldom available and, when they were, usually commanded prices beyond my means.

I began in earnest to collect books about 12 years ago, upon discovering *U.S.IANA*, that oddly titled but priceless one volume bibliographic guide to Americana compiled by Wright Howes, the Chicago antiquarian book dealer and bibliographer (1882-1978), and published by The Newberry Library in 1962 (2nd ed.). Shortly thereafter, I was intrigued to learn that Howes had encouraged another Midwestern lawyer, Karl Yost from Morrison, Illinois, to collect “reprint Americana” (prior to his death in 1987, Yost skillfully edited, annotated and self-published five works comprising his own Reprint Americana Series).

About the same time, as a participant in the University of Chicago’s Returning Scholar Program, I took the three basic undergraduate survey courses in American history. This stimulating experience rekindled my interest in 18th and 19th century American history. It also gave me first hand experience with “scholarly” reprint editions of important Americana and published collections of original historical source materials – journals, diaries, memoirs, reports and the like – which had been skillfully edited. Instead of textbooks, each of these courses was taught using reading materials consisting principally of long excerpts from such collections of primary materials and from contemporary works of the period, often appearing in such reprint editions, many of which were published during the latter part of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. I was fascinated by these books. They were not only absorbing in their content, but were often published in an appealing format, employing fine paper and impressive bindings. I began looking for these editions in dealer catalogues, at book fairs and in used book shops. Many of them were issued in limited numbers, usually no more than 750 to 1,500 copies, most of which found their way into libraries, historical societies and other institutions. As a result, they too were not readily available (which of course increased the pleasure of the hunt for them), but they turned up more often and were much more affordable than the first editions and the primary materials on which they were based.

During the approximately 50-year period from the end of the Civil War to the start of

the First World War (1865-1915), there was a significant increase in academic and popular interest in American history beyond the Appalachians. Responding to and in part stimulating this interest, commercial publishers during this period issued new editions of rare and inaccessible books from the early period of American exploration, pacification and settlement of the lands west of the Appalachians. Together with historical societies and other public and private institutions, they also published for the first time collections of primary source materials as well as important works of original scholarship on American history. As a result, these important books and source materials were made available to a whole new set of readers who had no access to or, often knowledge of the originals.

The word "reprint" has perhaps taken on something of a negative connotation over the years. Many of today's reprint editions are regarded as *inferior* to the original works both in packaging and content. What I discovered, however, was that the reprints issued during this 50-year post-Civil War period were often *superior* to the first editions in virtually all respects except rarity. For one who cares about the look and feel of a book, reprint editions and published collections of primary materials from this period hold significant appeal. They tend to have handsome and sturdy cloth bindings and to use heavier grades of paper and easily legible type which show remarkably little "foxing" or other physical deterioration after 100 years. They are often printed in multiple volumes with uniform bindings that are attractive to look at, a pleasure to hold and easy to read. In addition, certain publishers and editors frequently issued a number of individual works having similarities in content as parts of a series, with each volume uniform in binding and format. For a collector, seeking out and procuring all of the volumes of a given series adds another appealing dimension to collecting this genre. By contrast, the first editions of such works, especially those published in America, were often printed on pioneer presses using poor quality paper and tiny and deteriorated type and issued in flimsy and unattractive bindings.

Collectible reprints and collections of source materials from this period were typically prepared for the press by skilled and knowledgeable editors, many of whom had a flare for writing and long experience living and working in the geographic areas of the country where the events recounted in the edited works actually occurred. Their learned introductions and scholarly notes add depth and insight to the texts. Except for carefully reproduced or specially prepared new maps, these works typically contain few if any illustrations. The materials are presented in a straight-forward fashion. What is important is the text itself. And with good reason. Many of these accounts were – and remain today – gripping, exciting, in some cases blood-curdling and nearly always fascinating descriptions of events which the writer personally observed or in which he or she was a participant. Many of these pioneer authors, often possessed of little or no formal education, could write in a vivid, direct, compelling and sometimes eloquent style seldom duplicated by today's writers.

John Blew

## **ROBERT CLARKE & CO.**

**Robert Clarke (1829-1899)** emigrated from Scotland at age 11 and settled with his parents in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he spent the remainder of his life. Largely self-taught, he joined a Cincinnati second hand bookseller in his early twenties, where he learned the trade and continued to hone his interest in Americana. Within a few years he acquired ownership of the business. In 1858 he organized Robert Clarke & Co., and for the next 36 years, until his retirement at age 65 in 1894, Robert Clarke dominated the firm which bore his name. This period coincided roughly with the emergence of Cincinnati as the intellectual and cultural center of the Midwest.

Robert Clarke & Co. sold new and used books at retail and wholesale, published a wide range of books and pamphlets under its own imprint, and acted as a custom job printer and binder. Robert Clarke & Co. was one of the largest publishers of law books in the United States. Beginning in 1876, the firm issued a series of comprehensive and carefully annotated catalogues of "books and pamphlets relating to America", mostly rare and out-of-print works, under the title *Bibliotheca Americana*. These catalogues were highly regarded by historians and collectors of the period, and they remain useful references to this day.

The business prospered under Clarke's leadership and provided the means for him to buy a large house in Glendale, an exclusive Cincinnati suburb, and to pursue his wide-ranging personal interests, including those of book collector, gatherer of historical manuscripts and other original source material, and editor and publisher of scholarly reprints and original works. The principal subject of all of these pursuits was the early history of the Ohio River Valley.

The centerpiece of the company's historical publishing activities was the *Ohio Valley Historical Series*, which was issued in seven titles (and eight volumes) between the years 1868 and 1871. All of the works contain important accounts of events and individuals in the early history of both sides of the Ohio River, many of them rendered by those who were participants in the events being described. Robert Clarke personally edited the entire series. It was clearly a labor of love. All of these works are bound in the uniform green pebble cloth which characterized most of the firm's publications during this period and became its "trademark." Although critically well received—and still important to this day—the series was not a commercial success, and Clarke chose to discontinue it in 1871.

Notwithstanding the close of the *Ohio Valley Historical Series*, over the next 20 years Robert Clarke & Co. went on to publish a number of other important works dealing with the history and literature of the Ohio River Valley. In fact, during the 25 years from 1865 to 1890, Robert Clarke & Co. was the only commercial firm or other institution of any importance engaged in gathering and publishing early source material on the Ohio River Valley.

Robert Clarke was a serious book collector. At his home in Glendale, he added a large library to house his extensive collection. Over the years, he sold large collections of his books to Rutherford B. Hayes, the Newberry Library and William A. Proctor of the soap manufacturing family. He was also a member and, in some cases, a founder of a number of learned societies, including organizations devoted to the study of natural history, archeology, local history and genealogy.

He was also, apparently, a very nice man. One scholar who has studied him states that:

*"In his dealings with other men, the publisher was universally respected; the feeling that some of his employees had for him amounted almost to adoration. He never married, but his large home was always shared with relatives. His love for children and quiet generosity towards unfortunate persons became proverbial."*

He died suddenly, at the end of a grueling trip to several Ohio cities in search of historical source materials. What a way to go!

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*Ohio Valley Historical Series. Miscellanies. Ohio Valley Historical Series, No. 7. Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1871.*

Charles M. Walker. *History of Athens County, Ohio, and incidentally of the Ohio Land Company and the first settlement of the state at Marietta with personal and biographical sketches, narratives of pioneer adventures, etc. Ohio Valley Historical Series, No. 2. Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1869.*

[William Smith] *Historical account of Bouquet's expedition against the Ohio Indians in 1764. Ohio Valley Historical Series [No. 1] Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1868.*

Daniel Drake. *Pioneer life in Kentucky: a series of reminiscential letters ... edited with notes and a biographical sketch by his son, Charles D. Drake. Ohio Valley Historical Series, No. 6. Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1870.*

William M. Darlington. *An account of the remarkable occurrences in the life and travels of Col. James Smith, during his captivity with the Indians, in the years 1755, '56, '57, '58, & '59. With an appendix of illustrative notes. Ohio Valley Historical Series, No. 5. Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1870.*

James McBride. *Pioneer biography, sketches of the lives of some of the early settlers of Butler County, Ohio. Ohio Valley Historical Series, No. 4. Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1869-71. Vol. 1 & 2 of 2.*

Consul Willshire Butterfield. *History of the Girtys, being a concise account of the Girty brothers ... also of the part taken by them in Lord Dunmore's war, in the western border war of the Revolution, and in the Indian War or 1790-95....* Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1890.

W. H. Venable. *Beginnings of literary culture in the Ohio Valley, historical and biographical sketches.* Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1891.

Alexander Scott Withers. *Chronicles of border warfare or, a history of the settlement by the whites, of northwestern Virginia, and of the Indian wars and massacres in that section of the state with reflections, anecdotes, &c.* A new edition edited and annotated by Reuben Gold Thwaites. With the addition of a memoir of the author ... by the late Lyman Copeland Draper. Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Co., 1895.

*Bibliotheca Americana, catalogue of a valuable collection of books and pamphlets relating to America ... with a descriptive list of Robert Clarke & Co's historical publications.* Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1876.

## **FRANCIS P. HARPER**

**Francis P. Harper (1856-1932)**, the New York City antiquarian book dealer and publisher, has always been overshadowed by his younger brother, Lathrop C. Harper (1867-1950), who became his business partner in 1887 and who, following Francis' retirement in 1910, went on to a distinguished solo career as a dealer in rare Americana and a close associate of the famous Philadelphia bookseller, Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach. However, Francis Harper deserves recognition for his own considerable accomplishments.

Harper was born into comfortable circumstances in New York City. He entered the book business in 1883 at age 26 when he purchased the business of an existing rare book dealer in Lower Manhattan. No less an authority than William Reese, the leading dealer in rare Americana in the United States today and a student of the history of bookselling in the United States, has noted that "The first book dealer who can be said to have made a specialty of the American West was Francis P. Harper of New York City."

However, Francis Harper is best known not as an antiquarian book dealer but as a publisher of Western Americana, including both important scholarly reprints or reissues of long out-of-print and inaccessible earlier works and of original scholarly studies. In this endeavor, he enlisted the services of two extraordinary cohorts, the military officer, surgeon, ornithologist and theosophist Elliott Coues (pronounced "Cows") (1842-1899), and the military engineer and historian Hiram Martin Chittenden (1838-1917).

With Dr. Coues as editor, Harper published new editions of the first publication in 1814 by Biddle and Allen of a history of Lewis and Clark's epic journey, the *History of the Expedition*. . . (1893, in four volumes) and of Zebulon Pike's 1810 *Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi*. . . (1895, in three volumes), two of the three most important of the early books on western exploration and each a cornerstone of any collection of Western Americana. Wright Howes calls these Harper reprints the "most scholarly" and the "best" editions of these fundamental works, respectively. Their long introductions and extensive annotations draw heavily on Coues' deep knowledge of Western topography, ethnology and natural history gleaned in part during his postings as a medical officer in the United States Army over 15 years to a number of forts in the American West. His edition of the 1814 Biddle and Allen history of the Lewis and Clark expedition was the first reprint of this seminal work in almost 80 years, during which interest in Lewis and Clark and appreciation for the importance of their two year journey of exploration had languished. Coues also "rediscovered" and extensively consulted the original journals of Lewis and Clark held by the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. The Harper-Coues edition of Lewis and Clark represented a significant



advance in the scholarship of that incredible journey and helped to rekindle popular interest in it. The Harper-Coues "partnership" also produced multi-volume editions of four other important but little-known works of Western Americana.

However, the most significant of Harper's publications came not from Coues but from Hiram Martin Chittenden, another former U.S. Army officer who developed a deep and abiding interest in the history and topography of the Western United States while serving as an engineer at various military posts in the West. In 1902 Francis P. Harper published Chittenden's *The History of the American Fur Trade in the Far West* in three volumes. This work of original scholarship draws upon an array of primary source materials, many of which were discovered by Chittenden during his research. According to Bill Reese, the work remains today ". . . one of the basic sources on the fur trade [which] has stood the test of time as few other secondary works have." Harper also published Chittenden's two volume *History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River* (1903) and, with Alfred T. Richardson as co-editor, his four volume edition of the previously unpublished journals and letter books of Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, S.J., the Jesuit missionary whose knowledge of and influence upon the Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest made him an important figure in the pacification and settlement of that region during the 19th Century.

Harper's output as a publisher, though small in quantity, was of the highest quality. Many of these nine works remain standards to this day, and all can be read with interest and excitement.

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Elliott Coues. *The expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, to headwaters of the Mississippi River through Louisiana Territory, and in New Spain, during the years 1805-6-7. A new edition....* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1895. Vol. 1 of 3.

Elliott Coues. *The expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, to headwaters of the Mississippi River through Louisiana Territory, and in New Spain, during the years 1805-6-7. A new edition....* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1895. Vol. 2 of 3.

Elliot Coues. *History of the expedition under the command of Lewis and Clark....* A new edition.... New York: Francis P. Harper, 1893. Vol. 1 of 4.

Hiram Martin Chittenden. *The American fur trade of the far west, a history of the pioneer trading posts and early fur companies of the Missouri Valley and the Rocky Mountains and of the overland commerce with Santa Fe.* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1902. Vol. 1 of 3.

Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson. *Life, letters and travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. 1801-1873 ... edited from the original unpublished manuscript journals and letter books and from his printed works with historical, geographical, ethnological and other notes; also a life of Father De Smet.* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905. Vol. 1 of 4.

Hiram Martin Chittenden. *History of early steamboat navigation on the Missouri River, life and adventures of Joseph La Barge.... American Explorers Series, No. IV.* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1903. Vol. 1 of 2.

Elliott Coues, editor. *The journal of Jacob Fowler.... American Explorers Series, No.1.* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1898.

Elliot Coues, editor. *On the trail of a Spanish pioneer; the diary and itinerary of Francisco Garcés in his travels through Sonora, Arizona, and California 1775-1776.... American Explorers Series, No. 3.* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1900. Vol. 1 of 2.

Elliot Coues, editor. *Forty years a fur trader on the upper Missouri, the personal narrative of Charles Larpenteur 1833-1872.... American Explorers Series, No. 2.* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1898. Vol. 1 of 2.

Elliot Coues, editor. ...*The manuscript journals of Alexander Henry ... and of David Thompson ... 1799-1814.* New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897. Vol. 1 of 3.

## **REUBEN GOLD THWAITES**

Reuben Gold Thwaites (1853-1913) was a renowned editor and author of scholarly works of American history. While working as a journalist in Madison, Wisconsin early in his career, Thwaites (pronounced "Thwāy'tees") was a frequent visitor to the library of the State Historical Society, where he came to know the then Superintendent, Lyman C. Draper, a "hunter-gatherer" of original historical source materials without peer. Draper quickly recognized in Thwaites a man of his own predilections and tapped him as his successor when he retired in 1887. In 1891 Draper died and left to the Society his incomparable and vast collection of original historical source materials, assembled over a lifetime.

From 1887 until his death 27 years later, Thwaites served as Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. For the Society, Thwaites procured the funds and supervised the design and construction of a free-standing building, opened in 1900, to properly house the collections and other functions of the Society. He also organized, edited and published, over the Society's imprint, many volumes of the *Collections* of the Society (primary source materials, much of it collected by Draper).

During the entire period in which Thwaites was Superintendent of the Society, he carried on an extremely prolific and demanding campaign of editing important historical source materials, which were issued by several different commercial publishers. One of the first was to complete an unfinished project of Draper, who in 1890 had contracted with Robert Clarke & Co., the Cincinnati publisher, to prepare a new edition, with an introduction and scholarly notes, of one of the classic works of early trans-Appalachian Americana, *Chronicles of Border Warfare* by Alexander Scott Withers, originally published in 1831 (a copy of this edition is displayed in the Robert Clarke case).

His next and perhaps most ambitious project was the translation (with help from a corps of assistants) and editing of the historical accounts left by the Jesuit missionaries who had entered the Upper Midwest between 1610 and 1791, often the first white men to make contact with the indigenous Indian tribes. This monumental work was published from 1896 to 1901 under the title *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* in 73 matching octavo volumes, uniformly bound in a brown fabricoid cloth, by Burrows Bros., a leading Cleveland, Ohio publishing house known for its splendid productions. Thwaites insisted on a format which contained, side-by-side on facing pages, the original French, Latin or Italian text and the English translation thereof, together with an exhaustive introduction and extensive scholarly notes by Thwaites, a two-volume detailed index and a bibliography of the highest quality by Victor Hugo Paltsits. An edition of 750 sets was produced, nearly all of which were acquired by libraries and other institutions. It was both a critical and financial success. Wright Howes called it "a monumental editorial achievement."

The Jesuit Relations project had been conceived and orchestrated by Arthur H. Clark while a young and industrious employee of Burrows Bros. Clark left Burrows Bros. shortly thereafter and founded his own firm in Cleveland, The Arthur H. Clark Company, which in addition to carrying on a thriving rare book business, specializing in Americana, became a leading publisher of high quality scholarly reprints and original works of Americana, with an emphasis on Western America, and which remains in business to this day. In a few years, Clark and Thwaites would again collaborate.

Having thus established his reputation as one of the finest historical editors of his time, Thwaites was approached in 1901 by Dodd, Mead and Company, the New York publisher, to undertake the task of editing for publication for the first time, under the auspices of the American Philosophical Society, the original manuscript journals of Lewis and Clark and certain other members of the Corps of Discovery which had recently come to light. The occasion was the fast approaching centennials of both the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition. During the three years he worked on the project, Thwaites deciphered the often nearly illegible handwriting of Lewis and of Clark and ferreted out additional materials, such as the original maps prepared by Clark and the original journal of Private Joseph Whitehouse, both of which were included in the publication. He also made significant factual discoveries and organized, collated and annotated the entire mass of material into a unified whole.

The work was published by Dodd Mead in eight strikingly handsome red cloth octavo volumes, in 1904-1905. In addition to this trade edition, a limited edition of two hundred copies was issued in 15 quarto volumes bound in green cloth with the spines stamped in gold and printed on hand-made paper with extra wide margins and beautiful illustrations of Indians, scenes of Indian life and views of Western scenery done by Charles Bodmer and reproduced from Maximilian's Atlas. Both editions include a lengthy introduction by Thwaites, bibliographical data prepared by Paltsits and an atlas volume with a complete compliment of maps. It is a sumptuous production, and is illustrative of a growing number of publications of primary materials and of reprints in deluxe formats of rarities of Americana which were beginning to be issued by various publishers in the early decades of the 20th Century.

While still at work on the Lewis and Clark project, Thwaites was contacted by Arthur Clark, who by this time was operating his own firm in Cleveland, to edit and annotate a collection of important early narratives of trans-Appalachian exploration which were by then inaccessible to a wide audience for one reason or another. Thwaites chose each of the individual works, which covered the years 1748-1846. The series was published from 1904-1907 in 32 octavo volumes (including two index volumes) and the folio Bodmer Atlas. It consisted of 36 different individual works, each reprinted in full text with an introduction and annotations by Thwaites. Several of the works required more than one volume, such as *James's Account of S.H. Long's Expedition, 1819-1820* (the third of the cornerstone works of Western exploration, with Lewis and Clark and Pike), which appears in four volumes. Each volume in the series was uniformly bound in a

rich and heavy burgundy buckram with the title stamped in gold on the spine. The paper used is thick, the type clean and legible. These volumes set the physical standard for publications of The Arthur P. Clark Company which is still followed today. A total of 750 sets were published. The series made an important contribution to scholarship in Western Americana by pulling together a diverse group of early travel and exploration narratives, most of which were "rare or nearly unobtainable," organizing, introducing and annotating them, and preparing a detailed index which made them far more accessible than previously.

Thwaites was also an avid outdoorsman. He took many long canoe trips down the rivers of the Midwest and wrote about several of them. One such work, *Afloat on the Ohio*, published in Chicago by Way and Williams in 1897 in a colorful binding is on display.

In a memorial address in 1914, the noted historian Frederick Jackson Turner summed up Thwaites' contribution to American history in the following words:

*"He did a man's work, and left an indelible impress not only on this Historical Society and the State of Wisconsin, but upon the historical activities of the nation."*

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Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. *The Jesuit relations and allied documents, travels and explorations of the Jesuit missionaries in New France 1610-1791....* Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Co., 1896. Vol. 1 of 73.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. *The Jesuit relations and allied documents, travels and explorations of the Jesuit missionaries in New France 1610-1791....* Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Co., 1899. Vol. 44 of 73.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. *The Jesuit relations and allied documents, travels and explorations of the Jesuit missionaries in New France 1610-1791....* Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Co., 1901. Vol. 71, 72, 73 of 73.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. *Early western travels 1748-1846, a series of annotated reprints of some of the best and rarest contemporary volumes of travel ... Journals of Conrad Weiser (1748), George Croghan (1750-1765), Christian Frederick Post (1758), and Thomas Morris (1764).* Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1904. Vol. 1 of 32.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. *Early western travels 1748-1846, a series of annotated reprints of some of the best and rarest contemporary volumes of travel ... Part I of James's account of S. H. Long's expedition.* Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1904. Vol. 14 of 32.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. *Original journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition 1804-1806, printed from the original manuscripts....* New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1904. Vol. 1, part 1 of 8 (in 15).

Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. *Atlas accompanying the original journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition 1804-1806, being facsimile reproductions of maps, chiefly by William Clark....* New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1904. Vol. 8 of 8 (in 15).

Reuben Gold Thwaites. *Afloat on the Ohio, an historical pilgrimage of a thousand miles in a skiff, from Redstone to Cairo.* Chicago: Way & Williams, 1897.

Frederick Jackson Turner. *Reuben Gold Thwaites, a memorial address.* Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1914.



With sincere thanks to the staff of the Special Collections Research Center, especially Alice, Dan and Valerie, for inviting me to mount this modest exhibition and then for supporting and guiding me during its conception and composition. The process necessitated that I think about my collection and its relationship to the main exhibition which it accompanied. This proved to be a stimulating, difficult (at times) and ultimately very satisfying experience. It is perhaps nearly every collector's fondest wish to share his or her collection with others who might derive enjoyment or benefit from it. Participating in this exhibition enabled me to do just that, and I am most grateful for the opportunity.

John Blew  
May 10, 2002