

On flight, space, and all kinds of aircraft

By Dana M. Caudle

Developing the aviation collections at Auburn University

Ed note: In lieu of our usual Grants and Acquisitions column, *C&RI News* this month offers the story of acquiring a collection—the aviation collection at Auburn University.

A unique body of materials

In 1985 Auburn University (AU) received the opportunity to acquire a unique body of materials on aviation history. Using these materials as a base, the AU Libraries were able to build one of the foremost collections in aviation history in the country. Prior to 1985 this area of the collection received no special interest. The AU Libraries only had 4,017 books in aviation, 3,932 of them in English. Then in August 1985 professor David Lewis received a call from an old friend of his, William A. Leary, history professor and author at the University of Georgia. Leary had been contacted by Ben Hamilton of Hampton Books in Newberry, South Carolina. It seems Hamilton, a former book dealer in New York, had a collection of aviation materials he wished to sell. Since Leary had been unable to persuade the University of Georgia to buy the collection, he passed along the information to his friend David Lewis and mailed him a dated catalog of part of the Hampton collection.

Books in a barn

Lewis took this catalog to William Highfill, dean of the AU Libraries. Highfill was very interested and appointed Lewis, Wesley Newton, also of the History Department, Bobby Holloway (assistant dean for technical services), and Boyd Childress (social sciences reference librarian) to look into the offer. These four men drove to

Newberry to see the collection. A small farm was marked with a sign that said "Books." Hamilton turned out to be an eccentric, elderly gentleman whose old plantation house was packed with collections. He had acquired the aviation collection from various places and persons, including a former officer in the German Luftwaffe. The rare items were kept in the house, but the majority were in the barn, a long structure with a dirt floor down the middle and floored stalls or bays on each side. The bays were crammed floor to ceiling with books. As the four men were admiring the collection, Lewis picked up one book that had the skin and skeleton of a snake on it. Needless to say, he was quite startled.

The men drove back to Auburn very excited about the quality of the collection. Lewis and Newton in particular were very enthusiastic about purchasing it. Highfill sought special funding from the university administration to pay for it, so he went to President Martin, the head of AU, who told him to go ahead and purchase the collection with library funds. "You have the money, buy it." Holloway made all the negotiations. Originally, Hamilton wanted \$100,000 but Holloway had almost talked him down to \$50,000 when Hamilton's wife interjected. She insisted that her husband not accept less than \$75,000. Holloway agreed to pay the \$75,000 in three installments over the next three years. So Childress and David Smith (head of the Cataloging Department) transported the collection from South Carolina to Auburn in October 1985.

Beginning the process

Acquisitions ordered and paid for the collection in 1985–87 using year-end gift money. The collection consisted of 40–50 very large boxes of books and another 20–30 boxes of serials.

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The Hampton Collection brought an additional 3,703 titles to the libraries. It also had a significant number of serials and included more than 8,502 volumes overall. Aside from being dusty, the materials were in fairly good shape, considering how they had been housed. The boxes were brought in to the library and placed in the old Treasury Room for storage until they could be processed. Library staff separated the collection into serials, English-language monographs, and foreign-language monographs, all to be processed. The majority of the English records were loaded by 1988. The foreign-language materials were handled after that. The materials were provided with black flags to distinguish them from the rest of the incoming materials. Gene Geiger (head of the Special Collections Department) then examined the collection to see which volumes would be housed in Special Collections. The more fragile items in Special Collections are held in a climate controlled room with other fragile materials. The books in the main collection are intermixed with the regular books on the shelf. In the end, 1,294 titles were sent to Special Collections, 165 were sent to the Treasury Collection, and 2,244 titles, including 1,857 monographs and 387 serials, went to the general collection.

Copies that duplicated material in Special Collections were kept; copies that duplicated main collection material were sent to Childress for evaluation. Those materials that were not kept remain in the Acquisitions Department for final disposal. Only 8–9 shelves, a very small percentage of the whole, remain. Acquisitions has a list of duplicates to offer other

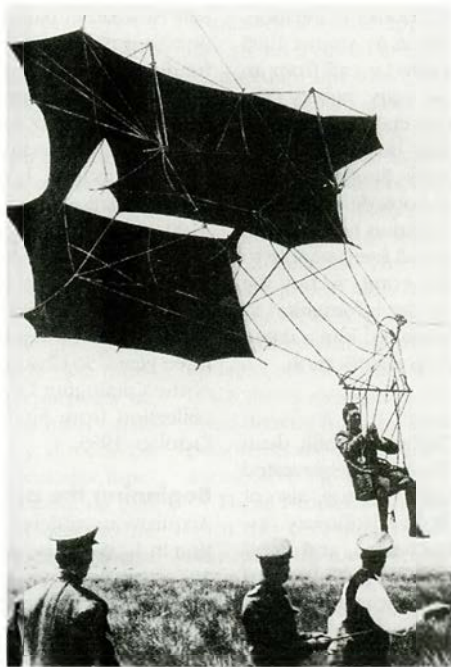
libraries. It took a total of 8–9 years for everything to filter through the Acquisitions Department. This collection had a lower priority than the processing of new materials.

After the records were loaded into NOTIS by the Acquisitions Department, the books were sent to cataloging. Each book was searched in OCLC. Library of Congress copy was found for 120 titles, old Library of Congress copy input by other libraries for another 1,767 titles, OCLC member library copy for 1,058 titles, leaving 758 titles or 20% needing original cataloging. The bulk of the English-language materials was cataloged prior to 1992. The foreign-language titles and the English titles requiring original cataloging were cataloged from late 1994 through early 1996.

The collection itself

The Hampton Collection's true strength lies in the fact that it is chronologically and geographically broad. Lewis describes the collection as "very catholic." There is an impressive number

of countries represented, including Latin America, along with many early works from the 15th to the 20th century. One strong area is the history of aviation, including the technical side of flight and some works on the history of space. Other strong areas include foreign-language publications, aviation medicine, aerospace engineering, and technical works on aircraft maintenance. The collection also covers lighter-than-air craft, civil and commercial aviation, and military aviation, including World War I and the period between the World Wars. There is an amazing variety of national



A pre-WWI British military glider.

histories, particularly in German. Lewis considers it to be a very strong collection, providing a real core of research materials in the history of aeronautics.

Most of the materials are early 20th century with 58% of the collection (2,152 titles) being in English. As for the foreign-language items, the French materials (490 titles) cover such topics as the innovation of engines, particularly in World War I. The German materials (843 titles) deal with airships, World War II technology, and rockets. The Italian materials (145 titles) emphasize design, the Russian (21 titles) cover the space race, and the British emphasize aviation history. Other languages include 92 Spanish titles, 21 Portuguese titles, and a smattering of materials in Swedish, Dutch, Danish, Latin, Czech, Polish, Norwegian, and Japanese.

Expanding the collection

To build on our existing strong holdings, Childress continues to develop the collection. Q. M. Dabney and Co. regularly publishes a catalog of out-of-print aviation materials and Childress selects items to be purchased from these catalogs to compliment the Hampton Collection. Since the purchase of the original collection, the library has added an additional 2,001 items in several languages, bringing the total number of aerospace titles to 9,721 as of February 1996. Much of the collection would command a high price on the out-of-print market. The collection's estimated worth is about 4–10 times the original \$75,000 the libraries paid for it. The library has \$4,000–\$5,000 worth in 25 titles alone.

Funds for collection development come from grants or gift moneys from NAAL, the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries, a consortium of Alabama academic libraries which gives collection development grants to member libraries. The library has invested a total of \$7,000–\$10,000 to improve the collection. In addition to Dabney, other book dealers Auburn has used are the Military History Book Shop and Fernandez Gattell, a dealer in Spanish-language materials. Childress tries to purchase anything we don't have, provided it meets the parameters of the collection. Though parameters are virtually nonexistent with no limits for language or format, price is one of the



Valerie Audec, a French pilot in the Indo-China War.

factors. Childress won't purchase many expensive titles, but he will purchase anything under \$200, when funds are available.

Using the collection—on call to CNN

The collection has received quite a bit of use, and not just for research purposes. During the Gulf War, CNN called with questions twice. Outside of the Smithsonian, the Hampton is one of the strongest aviation history collections in the country, along with UCLA, the University of Texas at Dallas, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Between the Hampton collection and the out-of-print materials acquired, the collection is fairly comprehensive. There are four aerospace history professors at Auburn who have used the collection to publish several books. William H. Trimble and David Lewis collaborated on *The Airway to Everywhere: A History of All American Aviation, 1937–1953*. Trimble has written two other books using the collection. Lewis and Newton also collaborated on a history of Delta airlines. Lewis is also writing a biography of Eddie Rickenbacher. Steve McFarlane and Newton have written one book on WWII bombing.

In addition to the books and serials on aviation, the Archives Department has a number of pictures, brochures, programs from air club meetings, clippings, technical manuals and diagrams, and other ephemeral material from the Hampton Collection. The bulk of the archival material is in French and German. Other related items include the papers of Eddie Rickenbacher, WWII pilot Isham J. Dorsey, and John Milton Bancroft, an aeronaut (balloonist) in the Civil War. ■