

# **The Darlington Memorial Library: A Gift to the Humanities**

by

Rush G. Miller  
Hillman University Librarian and Director

and

Mike Dabrishus  
Associate University Librarian

University Library System  
January 20, 2010

We are here this afternoon to celebrate the official opening of the Humanities Center. What an appropriate location! This space has been a focal point for research in the humanities since the room was completed over 75 years ago. But the real genesis for humanities research in this space goes back much longer than the construction of the Cathedral of Learning. Indeed, one could take the position that the history dates back to the early development of the City of Pittsburgh.

Nearly 200 years ago William Darlington (1815-1889) was born in Pittsburgh. The population of the city was about seven thousand inhabitants, but it was still the largest city in the West, with Louisville being the second largest. The son of Benjamin and Agnes Darlington, he attended private schools during his youth and then Jefferson College, now Washington and Jefferson College. After graduating, he studied for a career as an attorney, being admitted to the Bar of Allegheny County on November 20, 1837. According to a contemporary business directory, his law office was located in a building on Fourth Avenue above Smithfield Street, just outside that part of the city impacted by the great fire of April 10, 1845, one which destroyed the buildings of the Western University of Pennsylvania.

William Darlington married Mary Carson O'Hara (1824-1915). Mary, also educated in private schools during her youth, could speak and read Spanish, German, French, and Italian. After Mr. and Mrs. Darlington married they moved to Guyasuta, located near Sharpsburg.

Mrs. Darlington was the granddaughter of Revolutionary War General James O'Hara. General O'Hara was quite prominent among Pittsburgh businessmen. In partnership with Isaac Craig in 1797, he built Pittsburgh's first glass works on the south side of the Monongahela River opposite the Point. He went on to develop several other businesses and in the process became a very wealthy man.

Guyasuta was originally the country estate of General O'Hara, and Mrs. Darlington had inherited it from her father. The name of the estate was in honor of the Seneca Indian Chief who served as a guide for Major George Washington when the young militia officer served in the region at the outset of the French and Indian War.

Mr. and Mrs. Darlington had three children that survived to adulthood. Their names are O'Hara, Mary, and Edith.

O'Hara (1848-1916) attended Western University of Pennsylvania but transferred to Yale University where he graduated with honors in 1871. Following his graduation, he traveled in Europe for almost a year, visiting places of historical interest and collecting books and other objects of interest. He had a keen interest in history, botany, horticulture, sports, and horses. He especially enjoyed horseback. His favorite horse was named Dick. When Dick died in 1905, the following notice appeared in a Pittsburgh paper: "Dick, oldest horse in Allegheny County, died today. Dick was 43 years old. His owner, O'Hara Darlington of Guyasuta, will have him buried on the estate in an especially made coffin."

Mary (1852-1925), thought of as the quiet and reserved member of the family, studied at the Pittsburgh School of Design. Her close friends called her "Minnie." She survived her siblings and was responsible for seeing that a large part of the family's library and historical materials came to Pitt.

Edith (1862-1919) attended Pittsburgh Female College, now Chatham University. She was a member of the D.A.R. and a charter member of the Twentieth Century Club. She was the only woman to serve on the Pittsburgh Sesquicentennial Committee of 1908. Along with her brother, she was active in the Pittsburgh Amateur Photographer's Society, which was created in 1885. Much like her brother loved horses, Edith loved dogs. At one point she had nine—their names were Bonnie, Tricky, Toto, Pansy, Curly, Puck, Pepper, Prince, and James G. Blaine (who was originally from Western Pennsylvania).

All of the children were well read and acquired books. For example, O'Hara Darlington collected first editions of English literature from the Victorian era. He was especially interested in Dickens and Thackeray. His collection includes an early edition (1719) of Defoe's *Robison Crusoe* and the first American edition (1866) of *Alice in Wonderland*. He was also very interested in books that contained lavish illustrations. Each of his books bears a bookplate in his name. His sisters also owned books, as evidenced by their names in many of the books in the collection, although not to the extent that O'Hara did nor with a defined focus.

Credit for building a large library goes to William Darlington. It's quite possible that his father had a role in William's interests in history and books as several of the books in the Darlington family library bear the name of Benjamin Darlington. That includes *The Writings of George Washington*, the multi-volume history written by Jared Sparks.

By the time William was 32 years old he was actively acquiring books. We know this because he maintained a ledger where he recorded his book orders from November 30, 1846 to January 4, 1867. After he retired in 1856 he had more time to devote to his collecting interests. He received catalogs from dealers, and every three or four months, sometimes longer, he would place an order with a dealer from New York, Philadelphia, London or some other city. Many of his early orders were for books associated with American history. His own research interests focused on Western Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley, so he would buy everything pertaining to the region. His appetite grew to books on travel and exploration, world history, natural history, and biography, drama, and poetry. And while the vast majority

of his books were acquired from dealers and booksellers, he sometimes bought volumes on the trips he took to Europe with his family.

He would eventually amass a library of about 10,000 volumes, which was described by some as the largest private library west of the Allegheny Mountains. With a library so large and extensive, it's impossible to share with you today all of the major acquisitions as there are so many! Allow me a few moments to touch upon some very interesting examples. A cornerstone of North American exploration, namely, *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery*, is part of the collection. It was published in Pittsburgh in 1807, little over a year from the day that members of the Lewis and Clark expedition returned. Its author is Patrick Gass, a member of the expedition. Mr. Darlington's copy has pencil sketches in the front and back depicting scenes from the frontier. Some wonder if they were done by Gass himself, who lived in the region up until his death.

Ben Franklin produced many extraordinary publications at his print shop in Philadelphia. The Darlington collection holds several of them, including eleven of the thirteen Indian Treaties that Franklin printed between 1736 and 1762.

Of special note is John James Audubon's *Birds of America*. This four-volume set, consisting of 435 plates depicting 1,065 birds from 497 species, was engraved, printed and hand-colored between 1827 and 1838. Fewer than 120 complete sets of this very rare publication exist today. Mr. Darlington purchased his set in the summer of 1852 from a dealer for \$100 per volume. When the volumes were received at Pitt the estimated value of the set was established at \$7,000. Based upon recent auction records, today the monetary value of the complete set is likely around nine million dollars.

Mr. Darlington's library included much more than books. Manuscripts in the collection include letters written by George Washington when he was in Western Pennsylvania in 1754 at the outbreak of the French and Indian War. Another letter by Washington pertains to the Whiskey Rebellion. There is an account book that records transactions at the Indian trading post at Fort Pitt, together with letters and documents relating to the conduct of the business from 1759 to 1765. There are hundreds of letters associated with figures prominent during the early history of the United States, including several from Alexander Hamilton, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Bouquet. Of special interest are the papers of General James Wilkinson, consisting largely of letters addressed to Major Samuel Smith, who was a military officer during the American Revolution. The letters, dated between 1804 and 1809, relate to the conspiracy of Aaron Burr and his trial.

The atlases that Mr. Darlington acquired reflect his interest in geography and exploration. It includes more than one hundred volumes ranging from world travel and exploration to state atlases with county maps. The oldest world atlases, in contemporary bindings, contain maps enhanced with beautiful illustrations of sea monsters or beasts, sometimes a unicorn, occasionally cannibals, frequently a sailing vessel, mermaids of course, and other figures that cause one's imagination to run wild.

Amongst the rare atlases, Simon Gyrnaeus, in his 1532 edition of *Novus Orbis Regio*, adequately defines South America but North America appears as a very narrow strip of land described as "Terra de Cuba." By 1573, the Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius, includes

in his atlas a group of seven maps of “America,” providing better definition to the New World than many other atlases had up to that time.

While the world atlases occupy a special niche in the Darlington Collection, atlases of Pennsylvania and those for neighboring states reinforce the appreciation that Mr. Darlington had for Colonial America and state history. Indeed, while the regions depicted in faraway places in world atlases may conjure up vivid images, Mr. Darlington never strayed from his romance with the French and English struggle for the empire that constituted the New World.

As for single-sheet maps, Mr. Darlington’s interests were without boundary. “We will send any maps that may come for you—we have just received a map of Panama without a mark (a new map) that is yours.” Thus wrote the proprietor of Joseph Sabin and Sons bookstore from New York on September 1, 1874, to Mr. Darlington. The letter provides insight to the breadth of Mr. Darlington’s collecting interests while at the same time explaining, at least in part, how Mr. Darlington assembled a collection of nearly six hundred items.

For someone very interested in history, travel, and exploration, as Mr. Darlington certainly was, acquiring maps to complement his extensive collection of books and manuscripts seems only natural. There is clear evidence that some of his maps were removed from books or atlases, although it is impossible to determine if such items were loose when he purchased them or if they were removed subsequent to his acquisition. Regardless, together they form a valuable collection.

About a year ago W. Graham Arader, perhaps the most influential and knowledgeable map dealer in North America, was featured on the “Today Show.” He brought with him five maps which he referred to as “the most important maps in United States history.” The Darlington collection includes four of them! They are a 1715 large scale map of the American Colonies by Herman Moll; a 1755 Map of America by John Mitchell; a 1796 map of the United States by Aaron Arrowsmith, who Mr. Arader described as “the best map maker in the world”; and an 1816 map of the United States by John Melish.

Maps of states, colonies, and larger regions of the United States comprise a significant number. The vast majority of them are printed, many enhanced by watercolors done by hand. When Mr. Darlington could not acquire a map from one of his usual sources, such as dealers, he resorted to another approach. He would secure the services of someone to examine maps, especially manuscript maps, and provide him with hand drawn copies that closely resembled the originals! Mr. James A. Burt acted in that capacity, meticulously copying manuscript maps located at the Public Record Office in London and then sending them on to Mr. Darlington, adding a special dimension to the collection.

You should be aware that there are two significant paintings that grace this space, both by James R. Lambdin. I refer to the painting of William Darlington at the entrance and that of O’Hara Darlington in the room in the back. (This may need to be clarified.) The painting of William Darlington once hung above the fire place in Mr. Darlington’s study at GUYASUTA. Lambdin, originally from Pittsburgh, went on to achieve critical acclaim for his portraits of several presidents, some of which hang in the National Portrait Gallery. He also served as director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Art. Upon his death in 1889, the *New York Times* noted: “Mr. Lambdin held a place among the leading portrait painters of America.”

Perhaps the most prominent painting in the collection is one entitled "Pittsburgh in 1806." It hangs in the reading room of the Special Collections Department in Hillman. The painting is by George Beck, who also did paintings of other American cities. Scholarly research of the painting leads many to believe that it was actually done in 1804. If so it is more significant as the image portrays Pittsburgh very close to the time when Lewis and Clark embarked upon their historic expedition.

## **Collection Comes to Pitt**

As I noted earlier, O'Hara Darlington attended Western University of Pennsylvania. And William Darlington served on the Board of Trustees of W.U.P. from 1880 to 1889. All of the family members treasured books and knew the significance of being educated. So it was not surprising that the family chose to donate their library to Pitt.

On May 8, 1918, the Board of Trustees of the University of Pittsburgh accepted the offer from Mary and Edith to receive the collection. A formal presentation was made as part of commencement exercises on May 30.

At that time the library was located in State Hall. As library space was extremely cramped, and the Darlington library nearly doubled the size of the Pitt library, the vast majority of the books and papers were put in local storage. This was also true when the second portion of the gift arrived in 1925. In 1931, about 4,000 volumes were loaned to the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. A few hundred were kept in the office of the University Librarian. Over 6,000 volumes were stored in boxes sent to the Cathedral. We have a record book that documents which books were loaned to HSWP. It was not until space in the Cathedral of Learning was completed to house a University library that the Darlington materials in storage and those at HSWP were reunited.

Several years ago we came to the conclusion that the Darlington library had severely outgrown its space. Also, we realized that it needed to be stored where the environmental conditions, such as temperature and humidity, as well as light conditions, were more suitable. At the same time, we believed that many of the historical materials that the Darlingtons had acquired needed greater access. It dawned on us that we could better preserve the collection AND make it more accessible by both moving it and developing a major digitization project focused on the materials.

Once materials were removed, we began the digitization project with books from the collection. Almost half of the Darlington books have been scanned, either by our own Digital Research Library or the Internet Archive. Since the books have been scanned, statistics continually show how frequently they are accessed. In a report received from the Internet Archive just a couple of weeks ago, we learned that the nearly 4,300 books hosted by IA were downloaded 25,272 times during the month of December 2009. We also learned that all of the books have been downloaded a total of 205,332 times in the past year.

In addition to books, we've scanned nearly 900 maps, over 50 broadsides, nearly 2,000 images, and five atlases. We're currently completing work on the manuscripts in the Darlington collection, numbering more than 75,000 pages. All of this is freely available through the Darlington Digital Library website and PittCat+.

In closing, we are certainly grateful that the Darlington Family entrusted to our care their books, atlases, manuscripts, photographs, and other historical materials. I think that they recognized that by placing the collection with Pitt the materials would continue to benefit the students, faculty, and visiting researchers who used them. Of course, Mr. and Mrs. Darlington, and O'Hara, Mary, and Edith, could not possibly have known that their precious library would be used by those not just on this campus but by people across the globe, thereby opening up a whole world of discovery. But I think it entirely fitting—and a spirit that we share with them both today and in the future. In beginning the next chapter in the history of this facility as the Humanities Center, I hope you will enjoy their legacy as well.

Thank you.

---

## **Bibliography**

Alberts, Robert C. *The Story of the University of Pittsburgh, 1787-1987*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986.

Herbert, Anne Hemphill. *Personal Memories of the Darlington Family at Guyasuta*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1949.

Kinne, Emma E. "The Library. The University of Pittsburgh. Historical Sketch from 1875 to 1935." Pittsburgh, 1936.

Palmer, Arlene. *Artistry and Innovation in Pittsburgh Glass, 1808-1882: From Bakewell & Ensell to Bakewell, Pears & Co.* (Pittsburgh: Frick Art & Historical Center, 2004.

Patch, Margery Hurlbut. "The Darlington Memorial Collection of Books." *University of Pittsburgh Record*, Vol. 1, No. 1; October 1926: pp.15-19.

Salisbury, Ruth. "Survey of the Darlington Memorial Library." *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, Vol. 47, January 1964: pp. 19-29.

Starrett, Agnes. *The Darlington Memorial Library*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1938.