



Office of Public Affairs

Dec. 20, 2002

Media only: Vicki Moeser (202) 357-2627 ext. 111
Linda St. Thomas (202) 357-2627 ext. 108

Public only: (202) 357-2700

Smithsonian Libraries Opens State-of-the-Art Natural History Rare Book Library

The newest addition to the Smithsonian Institution Libraries is the Joseph F. Cullman 3rd Library of Natural History. It houses, for the first time in one place, the Smithsonian Libraries' entire collection of approximately 10,000 rare and valuable natural history books and manuscripts. The Cullman Library, located in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, offers easy access to natural history scientists, museum curators, researchers, students and visitors.

It is named for New York City businessman Joseph F. Cullman 3rd, whose \$2 million gift established an endowment to support the programs and operations of the facility. With a wood-paneled reading room, protected stacks, and a special book-storage vault, the Cullman Library offers basic necessities unavailable before.

"We are thrilled to have such an elegant space in which to receive researchers," says Nancy E. Gwinn, the Smithsonian Libraries' director. "With its intimate, yet spacious and comfortable design and sophisticated security and climate controls, the Cullman Library allows us to meet the research needs of a greater number of people, while still ensuring the safety and longevity of our materials." The natural history rare book and manuscript collection had previously been dispersed among a variety of buildings on the Smithsonian campus.

Among the many treasures are Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, as well as publications from his voyage on the Beagle; George Catlin's and Edward Curtis' accounts and illustrations of Native American peoples; publications of exploring expeditions from Captain Cook to John Wesley Powell; works by ornithologists John James Audubon, Daniel G. Elliott, and John Gould; Konrad Gesner's 17th-century *Icones animalium*, an early zoological encyclopedia published in 1560 with many woodcuts of recognizable and imaginary animals; Hieronymous Bock's illustrated Renaissance herbal *Kreutterbuch*, published in 1587; and

numerous other centuries-old books—in anthropology, botany, mineral sciences, paleontology, and zoology—that are necessary to the scientific work of the National Museum of Natural History.

“The Cullman Library not only increases our efficiency and ensures the collections’ safety,” says Leslie Overstreet, curator of natural history rare books, “it also enhances the Libraries’ ability to conduct research on the books themselves. Having the volumes in closer physical proximity will allow for the recognition of previously unforeseen connections between works, something that will unquestionably advance the investigations of contemporary researchers. Our knowledge of a book’s provenance can provide a wealth of valuable information about a period’s social circumstances, customs and scientific progress.”

The Cullman Library complements the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology, located in the National Museum of American History. The Dibner Library holds the Smithsonian’s collection of rare books and manuscripts in the physical sciences and technology. Contained in this world-class collection of 25,000 rare books and 2,000 manuscripts are many of the most important works dating from the 15th to the 19th centuries, covering topics in engineering, transportation, chemistry, mathematics, physics, electricity and astronomy. Researchers can also find substantial holdings of rare books and journals related to the history of flight and aviation in the Admiral Dewitt Clinton Ramsey Room in the library of the National Air and Space Museum, and on decorative arts and design in the Thomas A. Bradley Room of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library in New York City.

The Smithsonian Libraries shares its rare collections with the public through its Exhibition Gallery adjacent to the Dibner Library, through loans to other institutions’ exhibits, and through public programs and publications.

The Smithsonian Institution Libraries welcomes the use of its facilities by outside researchers and scholars working at an advanced level in the fields of study represented in its collections. In order to use its collections, researchers are expected to have conducted preliminary research in appropriate public and academic libraries and to have identified, through the Libraries online catalog at www.siris.si.edu, specific materials that are necessary to their work. All readers in the Libraries’ rare book facilities must make appointments in advance, register and comply with special policies regarding the care and handling of rare materials, which can be reviewed at www.sil.si.edu/specialcollections/access.htm. The Smithsonian Institution Libraries is not a lending library and its materials are available for on-site use only.