

RARE BOOKS COLLECTION

Continued from page 1

man Liebert of Yale's Beinecke Library to survey the situation and make recommendations. The Liebert Report (February 1969) recommended the merging of the department with The Bancroft Library. Skipper's written comments are clear: "Because of the strong intellectual and bibliographic relationships between the Bancroft Library and the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, the two would be mutually strengthened by an appropriate physical and administrative relationship." James D. Hart, Professor of English, former Vice Chancellor, and the Chair of the 1948 Special Committee, also reacted positively to the Liebert report. By midyear 1969, Hart was named the new director of Bancroft/Rare Books with an official starting date of January 1, 1970.

The hopes of Skipper and Hart were realized in the following years. The University's commitment to a rare book program encouraged gifts, and new endowments for collections were established both for Bancroft and for rare books. Usage of the collection increased markedly. By mid-1980s we were fully engaged in converting the catalogues into machine-readable form. There was a downside to being among the first rare book libraries to put its catalog online. A freshman came into Bancroft one day and wanted to see the Shakespeare first folio. I asked him why and he replied, "I looked it up on the computer. It's the only copy of *Hamlet* in the library."

From pharaohs to beatniks, The Bancroft Library's rare book collection presents research opportunities spanning 3,000 years of written records. An oft-repeated concern of former University Librarians was that collecting rare books in a public university was irresponsible. Rare Books policy and practice, however, is to tie acquisitions to the academic programs of the University. Major purchases are targeted at specific departments, programs, or faculty members. I call this "laying track in front of the scholarly locomotive."

—Anthony Bliss

Curator, Rare Books and Literary Manuscripts

A TALE OF TWO IMAGES

The depth of the collections held at The Bancroft Library sometimes even surprises those of us that work here. My father, Richard Cushing, died during the summer of 2004, and I began the tedious and delightful task of processing his personal documents. In one of his scrapbooks was a picture he had taken of a student antiwar demonstration on the Berkeley campus, with a fiery orator, a crowd, and signs calling for "Schools not battleships" and "Abolish ROTC." This would normally be an unremarkable sight at Berkeley, except that the date was 1935—the photo taken while he was an undergraduate here. Prominently visible in the photograph is an official sign declaring "University of California Campus Limits," a vivid reminder of the constraints on campus activism before the flowering of the Free Speech Movement. Less prominent was a poster affixed to the front of the rickety wooden podium, with the words "Strike Against War" and an image of a strident activist. Of all the placards evident, this was the only one with a graphic image, and as a poster historian it captured my attention immediately. I had never seen it mentioned before, and assumed I'd probably never know what the whole image looked like.

Several months later I was refiling posters from a presentation using



Mexico's Taller de Gráfica Popular collection, and I glanced at a nearby portfolio labeled "Broadside and pamphlets distributed at Sather Gate, 1935-1950." That certainly caught my eye, so I opened it up. Nested among the handful of flyers from the Communist Party and the Bay Area Transportation Union was a magnificent copy of the "Strike Against War" poster. To compound this unusual coincidence, it turned out that this particular portfolio had escaped retrospective conversion when library records went digital and did not exist in the on-line catalog. Serendipity, and the rich collection of The Bancroft Library, conspired that day to reveal a unique artifact of the visual history of the U.S. peace movement.

—Lincoln Cushing
Cataloger, Bancroft Library

