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Limited Editions, unlimited generosity

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LIMITED EDITIONS, UNLIMITED GENEROSITY:

**DR. JAMES MARSDEN PRESENTS K-STATE LIBRARIES
WITH ONE OF ITS LARGEST GIFTS-IN-KIND TO DATE**



Ray Bradbury, "Fahrenheit 451," 1982, illus. by Joe Mugnaini.

In 1968, an Oklahoma State University student was browsing a used bookstore in Oklahoma City when he happened upon a 1934 copy of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" published by the Limited Editions Club (LEC).

The student, James Marsden, was studying animal sciences, but he was an avid reader and collector. He bought that unique LEC volume, and then another, and another. Each one featured fine typography, design and binding in a tribute to the art of bookmaking.

Marsden kept collecting.

"The Analects of Confucius" printed on rice paper and issued in a handmade box of Chinese redwood (1933).

A 37-volume set, "The Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies of William Shakespeare," each illustrated by a different artist (1939-40).

A striking edition of Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" bound in aluminum (1982).

And he didn't stop there.

It would become one of the most valuable gifts of rare books Kansas State Libraries has ever received. The Richard L. D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections now holds a complete LEC collection of nearly 600 volumes.

Only four libraries have the whole series: the Library of Congress, the Nashville Public Library, the University of Texas and Kansas State University.

Established in 1929 by George Macy, each LEC volume includes original art by famous illustrators, photographers and major artists, most of whom hand-signed each copy. The books were issued via mail to club subscribers.



“BOOKS DON’T DO A LOT OF GOOD JUST SITTING IN YOUR HOUSE. THEY NEED TO BE READ. AT A UNIVERSITY, THERE ARE THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF POTENTIAL PEOPLE WHO WILL READ AND ENJOY THOSE BOOKS.”

– DR. JAMES MARSDEN

The Macy family sold the LEC in 1970, and the organization changed hands two more times until it was purchased in 1978 by Sid Schiff. Schiff and Marsden became friends, and the publisher would call the professor when he learned someone wanted to sell their LEC books.

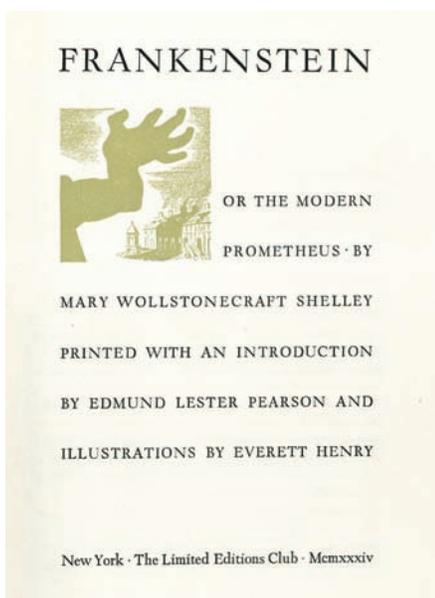
This was a boon: Only original subscribers who started receiving the books at the very beginning in 1929 had the whole series, so collecting LEC volumes in a pre-internet era was a veritable treasure hunt. Marsden looked for rare books during his travels, and he found them at estate sales and used bookstores.

He even acquired the most rare and valuable titles, including “Lysistrata,” with pencil drawings and etchings by Picasso (1934),

and James Joyce’s “Ulysses,” illustrated by Henri Matisse (1935).

“Any one of the LEC books is a piece of intellectual printing, art and binding history that spans continents and decades,” said Roger Adams, rare books librarian. “Jim’s gift is a selfless one: Years from now these materials will still be here. He’s leaving a legacy not out of any sense of personal pride but for future generations.”

In his professional life, Marsden became one of the nation’s foremost meat safety experts. He has been a Regents Distinguished Professor of animal sciences at Kansas State University since 1994. He will retire at the end of this year after a long, highly successful career in which he pioneered techniques key to preventing foodborne pathogens.



Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, “Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,” 1934, illus. by Everett Henry.



Franz Kafka, “Metamorphosis,” 1984, illus. by Jose Luis Cuevas.

The LEC publications are illustrated and signed by famous artists. Some later volumes include hand-made paper or unusual bindings.

Cover:

Top, L to R: John Steinbeck, “The Grapes of Wrath,” 1940, illus. by Thomas Hart Benton. Ray Bradbury, “Fahrenheit 451,” 1982, illus. by Joe Mugnaini. Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” 1985, illus. by Alice Neel.

Middle, L to R: Heinrich Harrer, “Seven Years in Tibet,” 1983, encased by hand-carved magnolia wood. Upton Sinclair, “The Jungle,” 1965, illus. by Fletcher Martin. Langston Hughes, “Sunrise is Coming After While,” 1998, illus. by Phoebe Beasley.

Bottom, L to R: Hart Crane, “The Bridge,” 1981, slipcase. John Steinbeck, “The Grapes of Wrath,” 1940, illus. by Thomas Hart Benton.

He said he intends to donate more of his book collection to K-State Libraries in the future.

“Books don’t do a lot of good just sitting in your house. They need to be read,” Marsden said. “At a university, there are thousands and thousands of potential people who will read and enjoy those books.”

He also noted the importance of preservation: “We kept them under glass, but even that’s not enough. They keep them under a controlled environment at the library.”

Marsden and his wife, Ruth, say that they appreciate that volumes like the LEC preserve the art of bookmaking in today’s era of reading online.

He hasn’t stopped collecting books, and they still read every day, everything from popular fiction to favorite authors such as Jane Austen, James Fenimore Cooper and Charles Dickens.

“I read Great Expectations in high school in one night,” Marsden said. “Stayed up all night because I couldn’t stop.”



James Joyce, “Ulysses,” 1935, illus. by Henri Matisse.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE: AN ENDOWMENT FOR THE MORSE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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By building our special collections endowment, K-State Libraries will have funds readily available for these acquisition activities. An endowment will allow the Morse Department of Special Collections to participate in a market where successful buyers must act quickly, and it will give us the freedom to strategically purchase and build collections.

We hope to enhance areas in which we already have strong holdings such as cookery, consumer movement history, military history and prairie studies.

To learn more about the endowment, contact Tracy Robinson, director of development, at 785-532-7568 or tracyr@found.ksu.edu.

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