



Summer 8-29-2000

## Books Date from 1475 Treasure of Rare Books Slated for IWU Display, Study; Books Focus on Politics of Freedom, Democracy

Bob Aaron  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "Books Date from 1475 Treasure of Rare Books Slated for IWU Display, Study; Books Focus on Politics of Freedom, Democracy" (2000). *News and Events*. 979.  
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/979>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Aug. 29, 2000

**CONTACT:** Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

**Books Date from 1475  
Treasure of Rare Books Slated for IWU Display, Study;  
Books Focus on Politics of Freedom, Democracy**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Just think about a library with bookshelves jammed with these rare editions: Journals of the Continental Congress (1774), a first edition of The Federalist (1788), the first English translation of Plato's Republic (1763), or a 1640 edition of Machiavelli's, The Prince, which remains a guide to politics and intrigue after four centuries.

Illinois Wesleyan University's Sheean Library will have those titles as part of a 70-volume exhibit--The Wisdom of the Ages Antheneum--slated for Sept. 12-Dec. 7. The display is courtesy of the Remnant Trust, an Indiana-based educational foundation that is home to a collection of about 400 rare volumes and manuscripts stretching back to the 1400s.

The exhibit is part of several special events planned for the 2000-2001 school year marking IWU's 150th anniversary. The exhibit also celebrates construction of IWU's new \$26-million Ames Library.

Commenting on the exhibit, President Minor Myers, jr., wrote in Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine: "Brian Bex, an alumnus of the class of 1964, and his son Kris have created the Remnant Trust, an extraordinary project. Remnant collects editions of the classics of Western culture and politics, in printings, which date from the 1400s to the 1800s. Remnant Trust loans them to universities, making only one demand: that students be allowed to actually handle the originals."

Among the stellar works slated for IWU are Thomas Paine's Common Sense (1776), first illustrated Bible in America (1791), the first Hebrew Bible printed in America (1814), and the first American edition of Karl Marx's Capital (1889).

Three other key works included in the exhibit are a second edition of Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America (1836), a perceptive analysis of the U.S. political and social system in the early 19th century; abolitionist Frederick Douglass' classic autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1846), a key example of period literature aimed at arousing anti-slavery sympathies; and the first Chicago printing of the Emancipation Proclamation (1863). A leaf of the Gutenberg Bible, the first book ever printed, also will be part of the exhibit.

The oldest books on exhibit will be Summa Theologiae by St. Thomas Aquinas (1475), St. Augustine's Meditations (1482), and St. Augustine's de Civitate Dei (1494) in Latin.

Other great books of political philosophy that are part of the IWU exhibit are a 1682 edition of Hugo Grotius' landmark work on international law, Of War and Peace, Thomas Hobbes' masterpiece Leviathan (1651), and a second edition of John Locke's Two Treatises of

Government (1694). Hobbes and Locke are credited with laying the theoretical foundations of modern constitutional government.

Remnant Trust President Kris Bex believes it is important for students and others to read these great works about freedom, liberty, and democracy in their original form, especially in a pop-culture era characterized by television programs like Jerry Springer and professional wrestling.

"We need balance in our society," Bex explained. "We need to talk about the ideas that made this country what it is--a great experiment in liberty, freedom, and dignity.

"We're trying to show people," Bex added, "that the idea of liberty didn't suddenly appear 200 years ago with the Founding Fathers. It's a great experiment over the centuries going back to Aristotle and others."

The Remnant Trust is so committed to spreading the word about freedom that it refuses to lock up its valuable collection in sterile display cases, roped off from viewers. The trust's trademark is encouraging readers to touch, feel, and read the original pages containing the great words and thoughts of political philosophers from various countries and generations.

"The Remnant Trust," Bex said, "is interested in taking its substantial investment in books and putting it at risk, if we can get ideas into the heads and minds of people--especially students." Consequently, IWU students will be using many of the books on exhibit as part of their class work this fall in various courses probing the Enlightenment, early modern Europe, U.S. history, and religion.

Bex downplays the fragility of antiquarian books, explaining that the only threats such volumes really face are extended exposure to direct sunlight and rapid and continuous changes in humidity. IWU Serials Librarian Sarah George echoes this sentiment, noting that the Remnant Trust emphasizes access over preservation. The trust's attitude, she said, "is what good are [the books] if people don't know they exist?" adding that the IWU exhibit is a "wonderful opportunity" to see unique and rare volumes "that most people won't have."

The Remnant Trust has built its rare collection of first-edition and other works on liberty by scouring flea markets, estate sales, auctions, and book fairs, as well as working with high-powered book dealers in New York City, London, and elsewhere.

When a Remnant Trust exhibit visited Milwaukee earlier this year, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel wrote: "It makes you want to whisper, not as if you are in a library, which you are, but as though you are in a church or a pagoda. The reverence spills out of you unbidden as you lean over the glass cases lining the wide aisle . . . For there, in front of you, close enough to touch--yes, go ahead and touch--is a 1475 copy of St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae, one of three known first editions in the world."

Bex deftly fends off queries he frequently fields about the unique collection's price tag.

"The value of these books," he explained, "is in their content--not their cost. What is important is what is contained in these books."

An opening reception for the Remnant Trust book display is scheduled for Sept. 21 at 4 p.m. in Sheean Library, located on IWU's Eckley Quadrangle. It is open to the public, free of charge.

The Remnant Trust exhibit is open to the public. Sheean Library's hours are Monday-Thursday, 7:45 a.m.-1:30 a.m.; Friday, 7:45 a.m.-10 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.; and Sunday, 11 a.m.-1:30 a.m. Sheean Library will be closed over the Thanksgiving holiday, Nov. 22-25. It will reopen on Nov. 26 from 6 p.m.-1:30 a.m.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$26 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction.

As IWU approached its sesquicentennial it won several national accolades. U.S. News&World Report ranks it among the nation's most selective liberal-arts campuses. It's ranked 12th nationally by Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine among private colleges and universities in terms of delivering high-quality education at an affordable cost. It's ranked the 8th "most wired" college in the nation by Yahoo! Internet Life. Men's Health magazine ranks IWU among the 10 "most male-friendly colleges in America."