

Huntington Library Collection Development policy for Rare Materials

Introduction

The Huntington Library is an independent research library that holds more than 11 million items dating from the 11th to the 21st century. Founded in 1919 by Henry Edwards Huntington, the Library serves researchers both in person and through virtual services.

Guiding Principles

The Huntington develops its collections through gifts and purchases. Responsibility for rare acquisitions rests with the Library curators, overseen by the Avery Chief Curator, and the Library Director, and in consultation with colleagues in the Library and the larger institution, community partners, and researchers.

This policy provides definition and direction for the development of the rare collections. In accordance with that purpose, the Library commits to the following:

- Upholding the institution’s founding purpose “to advance learning, the arts and sciences, and to promote the public welfare”
- Curation, exhibition, and interpretation of our collections
- Access to our collections for fellows, other researchers, students, colleagues, and other professionals
- Preservation of the collections
- Support and dissemination of research related to the collections

The collection development policy will be periodically evaluated and revised as necessary. Curators will adapt collecting priorities to reflect new and differing areas of interest and concern, as well as new collecting opportunities.

Ethical collecting practices statement

With a strong commitment to the institution’s [DEI strategic plan](#), the Curatorial Department develops its collecting strengths mindful of past biases in acquisitions that failed to provide the fullness of the historical record. The Library seeks to respect cultural patrimony of other nations and communities, with attention to provenance and national and international law.

Scope

The Library holdings encompass:

- Rare materials
- General collections – monographs and serials (physical and electronic)
- Reference collections (physical and electronic)
- Digital collections

Rare Materials

The Huntington Library’s rare holdings are centered on 14 intersecting collection strengths. These do not define the totality of the Huntington’s collections but represent the core collection strengths that

curators actively steward and develop. The diversity of the Huntington's collections can be explored further through the Library's online catalog and other search tools.

Cross-Collection Themes

The Huntington Library develops its core collection strengths with attention to themes that extend across them. The Library seeks to acquire in thematic areas that build on the existing collection while increasing material in areas of developing interest. Cross-collection themes include:

- Business & commerce
- Communications
- Environmental studies
- Health, wellness, and disability
- Identity
- Labor studies
- Law & politics
- Religion & spirituality
- Transnationalism & migration (forced and willing)
- Travel & transportation

Core Collection Strengths

The Library's 14 core collection strengths are described with links to research guides and digital resources at <https://www.huntington.org/library-collections>

American History

Existing Collection Strengths: The Seven Years War; the American Revolution; the early Republic, the Civil War and Reconstruction era; Mid-Atlantic region, especially New York and Pennsylvania, the Midwest, and Virginia and other southern states, from the colonial era through Reconstruction, and the history of the Indigenous peoples in these geographic locations. American Presidential papers.

Current Collecting Priorities: The colonial and Revolutionary eras; Jacksonian America; the Civil War; Reconstruction; the Gilded Age; and World War I era, with an emphasis on manuscript material. Immigration and emigration; labor, including enslaved and indentured; religion; gender; childhood and aging history; African American experience in the early Republic, antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction eras.

Architecture

Existing Collection Strengths: Architectural records related to the built and landscaped environment in Southern California from the beginning of the 20th century through World War II with a strong representation of known architects who helped shape the region. Antiquarian rare books, especially 18th-century British architecture and landscape design books; 19th-century American architecture and pattern books. Documents, reports and Federal WPA land use maps from the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Department and the Los Angeles Department of City Planning.

Current Collecting Priorities: Important architecture and design records related to Southern California from circa 1900 through mid-late 20th century; regional landscape design collections from early-mid 20th century; papers related to housing in Los Angeles in the 20th century; archives of diverse-background architects in the 20th century.

British History

Existing Collection Strengths: Late medieval, early modern and modern English history, and related early modern Western European history. Focuses include British politics and administration; public works; family archives; trade; the Atlantic slave trade; and imperial administration. English legal affairs; economy; diplomacy and foreign affairs; and aristocracy and gentry families from 1300 through 1890; as well as English religion, reform, and social/cultural life.

Current Collecting Priorities: The Atlantic slave trade; British plantation systems in the Atlantic world; abolitionist movements; British imperial administration (16th-19th centuries); British family archives, especially ones relevant to individuals, families, and locations represented in our collections; and archival material pertaining to early modern women and gender.

California

Existing Collection Strengths: Hispanic history both before and after 1848, including migration, journalism, and politicians and community leaders from Californio families to 20th-century personages; law and politics, especially Southern California politics after 1900; the development of California's power, water, urban, and agricultural infrastructure; Los Angeles in the Great Depression; the history of women; and the environment.

Current Collecting Priorities: Nineteenth- and twentieth-century California history: law and politics; urban, power, and agricultural development; and women's history. Pre-1848 California materials remain a priority as do materials in Southern California history after 1848 and before the rapid expansion of the mid-1880s; migration and California's borderlands history and the communities of this history.

Early Printed Books

Existing Collection Strengths: British and American printed material from the 15th century onward, particularly English renaissance and Colonial American; early exploration and travel; incunabula; science, medicine, and technology; maps and atlases; selected literary authors; history of printing; fine printing; miniature books; Mexican incunabula; extra-illustrated books; and original woodblocks.

Current Collecting Priorities: Continental materials directly related to our British and/or American holdings, especially recusant publications and works by British or American authors originally published on the Continent in languages other than English. Other pre-1800 focuses include private acts of Parliament and associated materials such as petitions and addresses by special-interest groups; works on canal building and hydrology; and early works on printing, both letterpress and intaglio.

Hispanic History and Culture

Existing Collection Strengths: Mexico and California and their secular and ecclesiastical administration under New Spain, especially in the 18th century: Bourbon reform of colonial administration in the late 18th century, the Inquisition in New Spain, Spanish exploration, and the Spanish state's expansion into what is now northern Mexico, California, and the Southwest of the United States. Early Mexican imprints and Mexican pamphlets and broadsides documenting the history of religion, political thought, medicine and health, education, and Mexico's war for independence.

Current Collecting Priorities: The governments of the Spanish colonial state of New Spain and Mexico and their impact on Indigenous peoples, women, Afro-Mexicans, territorial expansion, commerce, mining, religion, and exploration. The modern Mexican migrant experience, from a transnational and borderlands perspective, especially personal papers and family letters. Travel in Mexico after 1850 to the post World War II period.

History of Science, Medicine, and Technology

Existing Collection Strengths: The history of the physical sciences; mathematics; astronomy; civil engineering; and the history of technology in specific fields, most notably the history of electricity, and the history of aerospace, aviation, and ballooning. The history of medicine, with particular focus on women's health; medicine in Southern California; and medical incunabula. The history of color and color theory; the history of the natural sciences, including the history of evolution; and natural history from the 15th century to the present.

Current Collecting Priorities: Women's health and women in medicine; health and medical technology, especially related to disability, cardiology, and neuroscience; the history of medicine in the American West, especially in Southern California and as it relates to disenfranchised groups; history of science, technology, and medicine that offers a global perspective. Illustrated items that highlight intersections between art and science. Environmental history in the 19th and 20th century; Darwin foreign-language translations; and personal papers and professional archives of persons of color active in the aerospace industry in Southern California.

Literature in English

Existing Collection Strengths: Works by British novelists, playwrights, and poets from the 15th-century to the present in print and manuscript, American literature of the 19th century in print and manuscript; 20th- and 21st- century American authors in manuscript as well as author libraries. Theater of the 18th through early 20th century, including actors and theater managers. Twentieth-century California literature with an emphasis on Southern California. Travel and expatriate writing in manuscript and print; 18th- through 20th-century and political and editorial cartoons, primarily in print, and the papers of 20th-century feature and culture reporters.

Current Collecting Priorities: Literary archives that reflect the diversity of Southern California literary communities; literary archives of writers of historical fiction and speculative fiction, including science fiction, fantasy, and romance; archives documenting local feature-based journalism, or non-fiction related to other collection strengths; travel writing and expatriate writers; 19th-century amateur bookmaking and writing in manuscript. Print productions with artifactual interest, including but not limited to fine press books and artist books related to

significant unique Library holdings, as well as works that are primary sources in their unique formats.

Maps and Atlases

Existing Collection Strengths: Portolan charts and atlases and derroteros; early printed maps and atlases; European and American coastal charts and marine atlases; pre-1800 printed European and American maps; 19th-century American state and road maps, topographical and geological maps, and birds'-eye views; and Southern California survey, land use, insurance, and railroad maps.

Current Collecting Priorities: Notable rarities and print and manuscript maps that complement intersecting core collections especially American history and the Pacific Rim; marine maps and atlases; alternative cartographies and non-scientific mapping; and utopian and/or planned community maps.

Medieval Manuscripts

Existing Collection Strengths: Fifteenth-century Middle English texts; Latin manuscripts and illuminated manuscript volumes produced in England between 1100 and 1500; Latin Bibles produced in France between 1100 and 1500; English legal texts; English historical chronicles; English/Western European liturgical texts; Books of Hours; and literature.

Current Collecting Priorities: Fifteenth-century Middle English and Western European manuscript codices that build on our existing thematic strengths; decorated rolls with scholarly research value; chronicles; travel narratives; and later-medieval manuscripts that yield unique insights into the relationship and transmission of knowledge between manuscript culture and incunabula/early print culture.

Pacific Rim

Existing Collection Strengths: Chinese American history; Japanese American history; manuscripts and books on Chinese exclusion in the US in the 19th century; European (and later American) exploration and conquests in East Asia from the 16th century onward; and collections on American missionaries and settlers in Hawaii.

Current Collecting Priorities: Chinese American and Japanese American history, especially immigration, family and business history; Asian antique dealers in California; Hawaii, including the Japanese presence there; Commodore Matthew Perry and the opening of Japan to the West; the Boxer Uprising; American exploration and conquests in China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines from the 1800s.

Photography

Existing Collection Strengths: The Civil War; landscapes of the American West; Native American peoples and places; Southern California, particularly Los Angeles, and its urban and suburban development through the work of amateur photographers and the archives of commercial studios and corporations.

Current Collecting Priorities: Individual photographs and collections that represent the diverse population and places of Los Angeles and environs; contemporary California women

photographers; photography that intersects with other collecting areas including the history of medicine, aerospace, and the Pacific Rim.

Prints, Posters, and Ephemera

Existing Collection Strengths: Visual culture and social history from the 1700s to the 1900s: American commercial lithography; British satirical prints; California promotional ephemera; American traveling entertainment; valentine, friendship, and devotional ephemera; maritime and military history; American rail transportation; and education ephemera. Formats include almanacs, broadsides, billheads and letter sheets, children's literature, greeting cards, literary posters, pictorial envelopes, political ballots, product packaging, rewards of merit, sheet music, stock certificates, toys and games, trade catalogs, and view prints.

Current Collecting Priorities: Enhancements of existing strengths; American trade journals, technical manuals, and literary magazines (1800-1920); Mexican commercial lithography (1800s); California counterculture (1950-1980); European and American visual albums (memory albums, scrapbooks, albums amicorum, (1700-1920); and suffrage and social reform (1800-1920); valentines and related ephemera created for U.S. populations underrepresented in the Rosin Collection.

Western American History

Existing Collection Strengths: Overland migration to and settlement of the Rocky Mountain, Southwest, and Pacific Coast areas; missionary work with Indigenous peoples; transportation, with an emphasis on railroads; the military frontier of European American expansion; the development of water, agricultural and mineral resources; the Mormon exodus to and settlement of the Great Basin region; and economic, social, and political developments in the United States-Mexican borderlands in the 19th through the 21st centuries.

Current Collecting Priorities: North American West during the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries with an emphasis on migration and settlement; extractive industries; transportation, travel, and recreation; community development; recreation; indigenous experience; immigrant communities; encounters between Indigenous peoples and immigrants; environmental impact of industrialization and urban growth on the region's landscapes.

Types of materials

The Huntington Library collects books, manuscripts, archives, prints, posters, ephemera, photographs, architectural records, and a variety of other original materials. Emphasis is placed on acquiring items in their original states.

We accept archival collections that contain a broad range of formats and material types including, but not limited to, parchment and paper documents, photographs, slides, film, audiovisual and sound recordings, and objects.

Currently, The Huntington accepts digital materials and formats on a limited basis. For archival collections with large amounts of digital files, or formats that require highly specialized equipment to read/preserve, please contact a curator.

Duplicate Copies

We do not accept duplicate copies of items already held in the library. Exceptions may be made in instances where a second copy has different features, but the general rule is against adding redundant copies of published works.

Other Repositories

In the spirit of professional cooperation, the Huntington Library works with the many excellent special collections libraries and repositories nationally and internationally to steward historical and cultural legacies. When materials do not fall within our collecting emphases, the Huntington Library looks to recommend fellow institutions that can provide them suitable homes.