



Thursday, 28 March 2024, 4:30 p.m.

Tour: History of Science Collections,
Bizzell Memorial Library, The University of Oklahoma

The History of Science Collections, founded in 1949 with an initial gift from Everette Lee DeGolyer, is a premier research collection. Its holdings include nearly 100,000 print volumes and current publications in the field. The Collections supports multidisciplinary research in every chronological period, geographic region, and subject area of science, technology, and medicine. Among the oldest items are a cuneiform brick (ca. 1300 BCE), a small number of medieval and early modern manuscripts, and the Collections' oldest printed book, Hrabanus Maurus, *Opus de universo* (1467). Astronomy, physics, natural history, geology, technology, and science and religion are traditional areas of strength for the print holdings. Areas of recent concentration include women in science, Islamic science, star maps, and science and technology in Asia. Archives support research in the history of geology, meteorology, technology, and physics, among other topics.

THE FIRST 50 YEARS OF THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE COLLECTIONS

In December 1949, Everette Lee DeGolyer provided the University of Oklahoma with an initial loan of 129 rare volumes in the history of science. DeGolyer was an alumnus of the University of Oklahoma and one of the founders of geophysics who had amassed a fortune prospecting for oil. A general intellectual, DeGolyer was also an ardent book collector. DeGolyer became interested in the history of science after reading a book by then Harvard University president James B. Conant entitled *On Understanding Science*. From it he became persuaded that modern science could only be understood through a study of its history. Convinced that his success in his profession was shaped by the education that he had received at the University of Oklahoma, he had a great respect for his alma mater. On December 23, 1948, the director of the University of Oklahoma Press, Savoie Lottinville, wrote University of Oklahoma President, George L. Cross, relating a conversation that he had held with DeGolyer in which he stated, "don't tell anyone, but I'm going back home and examine my income tax status. I had the idea that it might be a good thing to establish a library devoted to the history of science at the University of Oklahoma. Nothing may come of this, but I am going to think about it anyway." Lottinville suggested to President Cross that DeGolyer might donate his books to the University if it would use them in connection with a course in the history of science and technology. Cross appointed a committee of three, with Lottinville as chairman, and informed DeGolyer of their intentions. In response to this interest DeGolyer then loaned the 129 books.

In December 1956, DeGolyer died and his will contained no provision for the collection. Upon his death, DeGolyer had given over \$120,000 in books and about \$80,000 in cash. The University has continued to support the collection that DeGolyer began, and other people donated books and money to buy books to assure that the collection retains its status as one of the best of its kind in the world. Eventually the name of the collection was changed from the DeGolyer Collection in the History of Science and Technology to the History of Science Collections, to reflect the contributions of the new donors. The individual collections retain their distinction either by their bookplates or by physical segregation.

Throughout its first fifty years, the Collections have had a remarkable continuity. Duane H.D. Roller remained curator of the Collections until his retirement in 1990. Marcia Goodman was the Collections' librarian until she retired at the end of 1994. Marilyn Ogilvie became curator after Roller's retirement. For fifty years, the Collections have continued to grow, numbering nearly 90,000 volumes in 2000.