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Tiny Treasures: Miniature Books (Opening Reception Talk)

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Tiny Treasures: Miniature Books Talk

I just have a couple of points and things I would like to highlight. First I would like to talk about ... what is a miniature book. So, miniature books are books smaller than three to four inches in any direction. Collectors get more and more picky as they try and find the better stuff so their definition kind of narrows. Some people only have two inch books and smaller in their collection. For our purposes it is about 4 inches. They can be printed by hand press, printed on machine, computer printed or artist's books on various medium or even hand written.

The most common question I get when talking about miniature books is, why? Why do people make miniature books, what purpose does it serve? And it actually has served lots of purposes throughout time. Religious texts, if you were a very devout person you would keep something on your person at all times and it's really convenient. If you were in a time of religious persecution then it was easy to conceal. Children's books are thought to be more ergonomic for small hands. And there's novelties such as cracker jack prizes and also they are seen as a form of showmanship for printers and book artists to show [using] intricate details to highlight their skills.

So our collection. My knowledge of our collection started with a single box when I was actually in my orientation tour of January 2015 coming through and I saw... "oh we have a small box of miniature books" soon another box popped up and I got a couple of stragglers of miniature books that would land on my desk until eventually I got excited about it so I went through the stacks row by row picking out every single miniature book that I could possibly find. By that point I knew I was going to do the exhibition so it was a really fun scavenger hunt. So we have roughly, in the collection here we have two to three hundred miniature books and they are found in virtually every genre and throughout every time period.

So for my exhibition I kind of wanted to highlight the diversity of the collection. So we have literature we have some handbooks (PA announcement breaks in "The Kentucky building will be closing in 30 minutes, The Kentucky Building will be closing in 30 minutes twice) we have handbooks, bible devotionals and religious texts. We have children's books and novelties and toys prizes and also in there we have promotional materials there's just a couple things I want to highlight out of the exhibition here one is in the center case behind Maria right here we have our oldest I guess what we would call miniature books, cuneiform tablets, which date to 2200 BC. And I guess that's a rough definition of books. Most cuneiform print of the time was basically lists, inventories, legal documents but they were made to be held in your pocket so I like to call those the first miniature books. Next to those we have 13th century English manuscripts, they are handwritten they are from England but they are written in Latin and they were actually drawn by monks handwritten so if you look the print it's very intricate and detailed it took a lot of time and effort so they are really fun to look at. And then also in that same case we have 17th century pages for the hand press period so I think there is Milton's paradise lost and there's a very other just individual pages and what's fun about that is they were done using the old hand press method so they would actually create a stamp for each letter they would carve it and they slide it on to a little slide and they would formulate every line for that page and set it next to other pages and then they would ink it and roll and stamp it and fold it together into this little book so each one of those tiny letters and you will see when you get up there was a hand carved stamp that was made just for that purpose. Over here we have a World War I U.S. army issued bible it's meant to be kept in your breast plate pocket. You always hear stories of you know bibles that save somebody's life or something like

that and I think my favorite from the exhibition is in this case we have Hazeltine's and Piso's cure for consumption. Consumption is a 19th Century term for tuberculosis and cough and this was a mass marketed remedy made out of cannabis extract and chloroform. It was designed to treat common cough and tuberculosis they were accused of quackery and brought up on charges and they were acquitted of all charges because apparently it did not contain opiates and it was found to have some medicinal value and purpose.

A little talk about the exhibition process. As Connie mentioned I received a q tag grant to put on the exhibition and I also used it to pay for promotional materials, brochures, but then also we kind of did a remodeling of these cases here they were originally just bare wood and so I purchased the board and velvet lining to put down and stretch just to give it a fun feel. And then also for each of these books they create an interesting conundrum of how to support the little books because they are not I guess with larger ones you use acrylic stands you need something small and moldable so Jonathan is actually holding the material I used. We call it PETG that's Polyethylene Terephthalate Glycol it's highly moldable but rigid plastic that's archive safe and I learned about this while working at Indiana University they in their special collections library they actually have the largest collection of miniature books in the world, and that's what they use and they recently gave a presentation at the Folger Shakespeare Library about these methods so as far as I know WKU and Indiana University, excuse me, are the only institutions using this material now but hopefully maybe the Folgers Shakespeare library and just a few more things I would just like to give a quick thanks to WKU libraries for funding this through the q tag, for Jonathan Jeffrey for his guidance through the process of making the exhibition, to the Kentucky Museum and specifically Sandy Staebell for letting me use some of the cuneiform tablets and also some of the props to liven up the exhibition and Jennifer Wilson for helping promotion and the brochures so thank you. I hope you all enjoy it.