Among MARBL’s most recent acquisitions is a rare set of three “flip-books” featuring golf legend and Emory alumnus Bobby Jones. The visual effect is a moving image of Bobby Jones demonstrating his championship style. This series of three flip-books, published by Flicker Productions in the 1920s, was issued by Harrods in London as a store promotion. Jones demonstrates “Drive and Mashie,” “Brassie and Iron Shots,” “Out of the Rough,” and “Putt.” (“Mashie” is a term for a middle-distance iron, and “Brassie” refers to a club with a wooden head and a brass-plated sole.)
IN 1843, BEFORE THE FUTURE CITY OF ATLANTA WAS EVEN KNOWN as such, the residents of the community surrounding the terminus of the Georgia Railroad realized their little settlement needed a proper name, one worthy of the growing community situated at this strategic rail junction. When former governor Wilson Lumpkin visited that year, the residents decided to honor his daughter, Martha, by naming the budding town Marthasville. The name formally was adopted by the state general assembly on December 2, and the new town was known as Marthasville for the next four years, until 1847, when it was renamed Atlanta.

Among MARBL’s most recent acquisitions is a set of commonplace books compiled by Martha Lumpkin that offers a glimpse of life in Georgia in the mid-nineteenth century and a peek at the early history of Atlanta. Martha Lumpkin filled these books with clippings, letters, poems, inspirational quotes, and other items that held special meaning for her. She also cut out the signatures from the letters of her father’s correspondents and, as was the custom of the day, pasted these autographs into the albums. Sprinkled throughout are the names of Georgia’s political elite, including governors, congressmen, judges, and merchants. Under the heading “Some of Father’s Best Friends,” she pasted the signature of President Andrew Jackson, a close political ally of her father in the removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia land.

Martha Lumpkin’s commonplace books are a welcome addition to Emory’s strong collections of primary source material documenting the history of Atlanta.

[A Fine Excess]

A Three-Day Celebration of Poetry at Emory University

April 2–4, 2008

In April, National Poetry Month, the Emory Libraries will host a three-day celebration of poetry that will bring to Atlanta some of our finest contemporary American poets for a series of readings and conversations on poets and poetry. Among the distinguished participants will be two former U.S. poet laureates: Richard Wilbur and Mark Strand, as well as W. D. Snodgrass, Mary Jo Salter, J. D. McClatchy, and nine other poets published by the Waywiser Press. Dana Gioia, poet and chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, will be on hand to open the proceedings. In addition to readings, the program also will include a number of live interviews inspired by the Waywiser Press’s Between the Lines series. The two past winners of the Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize, Morris Creech and Erica Dawson, will read as well.

“Poetry should please by a fine excess and not by singularity. It should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost as a remembrance.”—John Keats

This three-day series of events will coincide with the exhibition “Democratic Vistas: Exploring the Raymond Danowski Poetry Library,” curated by Kevin Young. The 75,000-volume Raymond Danowski Poetry Library was given to Emory by the Poets Trust in 2003 and is believed to be the largest such collection ever assembled by an individual collector.
For the past ten years, MARBL has devoted considerable energy to the acquisition of unique and rare materials related to African American history and culture. One principal collecting focus is black print culture—the world of print material created by and for, and often published within, the African American community. Especially for the nineteenth century, orality has been regarded as the principal form of African American cultural expression and production. However, there is a considerable tradition of printed material that begins in the late-eighteenth century and expanded throughout the nineteenth century. By the beginning of the last century, hundreds—if not thousands—of journalists, writers, publishers, and printers were producing millions of pieces of literature annually, from religious tracts, poetry, children’s books, and novels to newspapers, periodicals, organizational reports, and reference books.

Emory now has an extraordinary array of black print culture. Items range from one of the early black-published pamphlets, David Ruggles’s antislavery tract “Extinguisher” Extinguished! (1834) to hundreds of volumes of poetry and political pamphlets published during the Black Arts Movement by Broadside Press, Third World Press, and dozens of others beginning in the 1960s. Emory’s collection includes the first black-authored, black-published, and black-printed book—Robert Benjamin Lewis’s Light and Truth (1844, 1849)—and books illustrated by African American artists, such as Henry Bibb’s Narrative of the Life of Henry Bibb (1849), with a frontispiece by the prominent African American engraver Patrick H. Reason. Emory holds the only known bound volumes of the Washington, D.C., newspaper Colored American, published in the late 1890s and early years of the twentieth century. Also resident here is one of two known copies of Frederick Douglass’s Narrative (1847) that bears the cover imprint, “Rochester: Printed at the North Star Office” (1848).

Emory holds an extensive collection of African American broadsides (single sheets printed on one side only) and a distinguished collection of rare and unique African American periodicals. Emory’s librarians collect bookplates of African American collectors, bookmarks, and print ephemera. We also preserve “palm cards” (an intermediary between the nineteenth-century cartes de visite and twentieth-century calling cards), church and funeral home fans, funeral programs, posters, and charts. We have acquired African American almanacs, printed ribbons and pins, sheet music, calendars, programs, newsletters, and even tickets used to admit the holder to quadrennial church conferences.

The richness of these holdings will allow scholars to re-examine notions about African American cultural production in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They offer fertile ground for rethinking issues of literacy, entrepreneurship, political advocacy, and religious belief. The freedom to publish entailed the freedom to advocate for oneself and one’s group in an unmediated fashion, uncontrolled by white political, social, economic, or cultural structures. In short, Emory’s holdings of rare African American publications offer a unique and growing source for the study of the African American experience in all its diversity.

“I have worked in virtually every major special collection of African American writing—that includes libraries at Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, the Moorland-Spingarn, and the Schomburg. Once I really had to. Today, I start and often stay with MARBL. The collection astonishes and energizes me. I generally find what I need and want and what I didn’t even know I needed until I saw it listed. From Phillis Wheatley’s poetry in chapbooks to the items associated with black print culture, there is nowhere that has as extensive a collection of the black press from its beginnings until now. I also like the fact that our collection attracts other scholars—with whom I then get to meet and consult—and that the staff is so helpful and encouraging to my students, undergraduate and graduate. This collection has impacted my research agenda and is one reason I stay at Emory and encourage others to come.”

—Frances Smith Foster, Charles Howard Candler Professor of English and Women’s Studies, Emory University

W H E N  E M O R Y  C O L L E G E  W A S  C H A R T E R E D  I N  1 8 3 6  A T  O X F O R D,  G E O R G I A,  i n s t r u c t i o n  i n  a n y  a s p e c t  o f  t h e  a r t s  w a s  s t i l l  m a n y  y e a r s  i n  t h e  f u t u r e .  C a n d i d a t e s  f o r  a d m i s s i o n  i n  1 8 4 5  w e r e  e x a m i n e d  o n l y  i n  G e e k s ,  L a t i n ,  a r i t h m e t i c ,  a n d  a l g e b r a .  M u s i c ,  h o w e v e r ,  w a s  i n  e v i d e n c e  i n  t h a t  s a m e  y e a r ,  a s  d o c u m e n t e d  i n  a C o m m e n c e m e n t  p r o g r a m  t h a t  l i s t s s i x m u s i c a l  i n t e r f u l d e s  i n t e r s p e n s e d  a m o n g  t h e  t w e l v e  s t u d e n t  o r a t i o n s  a n d  t h e  a d d r e s s  b y  C o l l e g e  P r e s i d e n t  A g u s t u s  B a l d r i n g  L o n g s t r e e t .

What about other facets of the arts in the early decades of Emory College? There was no mention in the nineteenth-century student study of art history or of the experience of studio art, but there are references to a college museum. In a section titled “The Museum,” the college catalog for 1876–1877 provided this description: “The Mineral Cabinet is very large, containing several thousand specimens. . . . We solicit the co-operation of our friends in bringing together a still larger and more perfect collection of mineralogical and other specimens that may be useful in the study of Natural Science and Natural History.”

Similarly there was no mention of theatrical productions in those early years. Although the study of literature eventually found its way into the college curriculum, the customs of the Methodist Church and the rules of Emory College did not allow dramatic performances. Creativity was not discouraged, however; and in 1886, the students of the college began publishing the Emory Phoenix. Serving both news and literary purposes, the magazine included essays, poems, and other writings by Emory students. The Phoenix is also known for launching the tradition of Dooley, a skeleton long known as “the immortal spirit of Emory.”

During these years, music remained a regular part of college life. In July 1879 Commencement included a “Grand Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music,” with twenty selections presented by individuals, duets, and quartets. Performers were members of the graduating class, faculty members, and “young ladies of the community.” In 1882 a “Commencement Concert” by the college classes included selections from opera. A college orchestra is first mentioned in the Phoenix in February 1887. The first photograph of an Emory Glee Club appeared in the 1883 yearbook, the Zodiac. Traveling in two mule-drawn wagons, that group made its first— and perhaps only—tour to Newborn, Georgia. Even as there was growth in these extracurricular musical activities, the School of Vocal Music ceased instruction in any curricular musical activities, the School of Vocal Music ceased instruction in any academic year. The difference is that the tree is planted each fall in conjunction with the convocation that marks the opening of the academic year. The difference is that the tree is planted by the entering class rather than the graduating class. Song contests among groups of new students are another feature of current college orientation that evokes the tradition of Emory. Women’s Chorale debuted in 1955. Combining men’s and women’s voices since 1990, the University Chorus is one of the many student musical groups that continues the longstanding tradition of music at Emory.

Another tradition that has been revived more recently is reminiscent of those nineteen-century Arbor Day observances. A tree is planted each fall in conjunction with the commemoration of the day that marks the opening of the academic year. The difference is that the tree is planted by the entering class rather than the graduating class. Song contests among groups of new students are another feature of current college orientation that evokes the tradition of Emory. Women’s Chorale debuted in 1955. Combining men’s and women’s voices since 1990, the University Chorus is one of the many student musical groups that continues the longstanding tradition of music at Emory.

The Glee Club remained active from 1893 until 1912. There was no organized Glee Club when Emory University was chartered in 1915, but the tradition was revived in 1917. In its March 1918 debut, the new Glee Club gave the first public performance of Emory’s “Alma Mater.” The words were written by I. Marvin Rant (Emory College Class of 1918) and sung to the same tune as Cornell University’s “Far Beyond Cayuga’s Waters.” With only two slight changes in wording in nearly ninety years, the “Alma Mater” remains an Emory tradition.

Performances by student choruses have continued largely uninterrupted since the Glee Club revival in 1917. Beginning in 1920, the Glee Club was led by legendary choral music director Malcolm H. Dewey. Dewey—who taught in the Department of Romance Languages, was the founding chair of the Department of Fine Arts, and also coached the tennis team—remained as director until 1957. Known as “The South’s Sweetest Singers,” the Glee Club moved beyond that first mule-drawn wagon excursion to tour throughout the United States, to perform in Cuba and Europe, and to sing at the White House. Emory College became coeducational in 1953, the first musical group for women was organized in 1954, and the Women’s Chorale debuted in 1955. Combining men’s and women’s voices since 1990, the University Chorus is one of the many student musical groups that continues the longstanding tradition of music at Emory.

The Sounds of Music at Emory College

When Emory College was chartered in 1836 at Oxford, Georgia, instruction in any aspect of the arts was still many years in the future. Candidates for admission in 1845 were examined only in Greek, Latin, arithmetic, and algebra. Music, however, was in evidence in that same year, as documented in a Commencement program that lists six musical interludes interspersed among the twelve student orations and the address by College President Augustus Baldwin Longstreet.
Collections of manuscripts, rare books, and old master prints are often site-specific: they tend to inhabit the top floors of museums and libraries, and Emory’s MARBL would seem to be no exception. Visiting them sometimes makes me feel like the proverbial poet climbing the slopes of Mounts Helicon and Parnassus, in hope of dancing with the Muses and drinking from the Hippocrenian stream, sacred source of poetic inspiration. Given the growing fame of Emory’s collections, this analogy surely qualifies as something more than idle fancy.

These thoughts recently crossed my mind as I made my way to the tenth floor of the Woodruff Library, in search of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century illustrated books to show my seminar on early modern printmaking. But why should MARBL, like its sister collections elsewhere, be ensconced in an aerie?

The Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum is housed in the magnificent (if slightly decaying) Edwardian Galleries, high above the grand three-story hall devoted to Asian art. The Manuscripts Room of the newly built British Library is cantilevered over the Rare Books Reading Room, while the Map Room floats above Manuscripts. The National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London fills the south side of the museum courtyard, whence one may survey the passing crowds below. The Rijksprentenkabinet (National Collection of Prints and Drawings) at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, occupies beautifully lit and surprisingly modern quarters, again near the top of the museum’s library wing. In order to reach the Stieltjesaal (Study Room) of the Albertina in Vienna, one must climb a massive late Baroque stairway several stories high.

Perhaps the quality of light is one answer. Diffused through layers of skylights in high-ceilinged rooms, soft natural light permeates these spaces, suffusing the works on paper with a gentle glow. Securing these subtle effects of illumination must be one reason why nineteenth- and early twentieth-century curators installed their collections where they did.

But there was another motive, more cultural than utilitarian. Prints, drawings, manuscripts, and early printed books were once presumed to be the purview of connoisseurs. Connoisseurship was revered as a high calling; its exponents included aristocratic, even royal collectors of the objects of study and appreciation but also untitled experts whose erudition and discernment opened doors to social advancement otherwise closed. Rare works on paper were placed far from and above the madding crowds. Even today, one must obtain a reader’s ticket to gain access to the British Museum Printroom, and to get a reader’s ticket, references are required.

Times have changed for the better, of course; and MARBL, like many special collections elsewhere, is an open and welcoming place conducive to study. One feels cocooned by the surroundings, insulated from distractions, rather than excluded. Students researching honors projects, faculty writing articles, and visiting scholars consulting archives mix quietly in the reading room, overseen by friendly staff. It may seem odd comparing MARBL to older institutions such as the British Library, but in fact, MARBL houses a world-class library of early modern printed books published in the Low Countries (present-day Holland and Belgium) between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. I have a particular interest in emblem books, which first appeared in the early sixteenth century. The complex experience of viewing and reading these emblem books can be communicated only by firsthand examination of the originals. One then discovers how subtly image and text interpenetrate and how their interaction is informed in turn by the expository commentary. The material qualities of these books also become evident. These elements then determine our response to the relation between verbal and pictorial imagery.

What MARBL allows us to recuperate, high above the Emory campus, is the dynamic of reading and viewing that made emblem books one of the chief delights of book lovers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thanks to MARBL, my students are given a chance to share in these pleasures. &