Observations on the Winthrop, Bentley Thomas and 'Ex Dono' Collections of the Original Library of Allegheny College, 1819-1823,

First listed by President Timothy Alden in Catalogus Bibliothecae Collegii Alleghaniensis, E Typis Thomae Atkinson Soc. apud Meadville. 1823.

Edwin Wolf, 2nd

Mr. Edwin Wolf, 2nd, Librarian of The Library Company of Philadelphia, was commissioned by Allegheny College to make a survey of the Original Library, March 6-16, 1962.

Notes:

Through his observations, Mr. Wolf uses the original spelling of the College's name: Alleghany.

This document is a typed transcript of Mr. Wolf’s original work.

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Section III. [Isaiah Thomas Collection]

The character of the Isaiah Thomas bequest can best be judged by the fact that the two authors most strongly represented in the collection were Oliver Goldsmith with his Vicar of Wakefield, Roman History, Miscellaneous Lyric Poems, Logic, Miscellaneous Thoughts, and Sermons. It was merely a selection from a bookseller's stock, one which the Rev. Dr. Bentley, against the background of his intellectual standards, described in 1793 as "chosen from the common demand and contain few curious books".

On February 3, 1820, Thomas, writing pessimistically to Alden about raising money for Bentley Hall at Alleghany- "the good people of Salem, and the government of a neighboring university and also other literary institutions are not pleased that the Dr. did not remember them in his will"- stated that it was his intention "to leave by will, or forward to you during my life, a selection from my Book stock, to the amount of 400 or 500 dollars, for your college library." Thomas made up his mind more quickly than his letter implied. On May 20 he sent Alleghany his donation of 422 volumes (a modern count was 433 volumes, of which 78 are now missing) valued at six hundred dollars and a pair of globes valued at fifty dollars.

This was not the end of Thomas's connection with Alleghany. On October 28, 1821, the shrewd collector of Americana suggested to Alden that he exchange any Winthrop books "written and printed in the Colonies before the Revolution...for more modern literature." Apparently, Alden kept this in mind for on December 6, 1825 he sent Thomas some books, including a Hebrew Bible, an odd volume of Purchas and "old pamphlets," in return for a forty-seven-dollar credit against the purchase of textbooks.

That there were good texts for a college library in Thomas donation cannot be gainsaid. But that this was no more than a selection of a little bit of the most popular with an admixture of remainders is obvious. While the lot did not have the distinction of the Bentley and Winthrop collections, it was probably more practically useful. There was a taste of everything medicine, military science, cookery, fiction, history, manners and a considerable amount of theology. There were a Boston 1806 edition of Pilgrim's Progress, Jonathon Edwards' Works in eight volumes, Worchester, 1808, Hume's History of England in six volumes, Philadelphia, 1796, Jedediah Morse's Geography made easy, Boston, 1816, and William Penn's Fruits of Solitude, New York, 1813. There was an edition of Shakespeare, Boston, 1813. Charles Brockdon Brown's Arthur Mervyn, Philadelphia, 1799, and Susanna Rowson's Trials of the Heart, Philadelphia, 1795,
together with American editions of some of the more popular English novels of the day, lent a lighter touch to the Worcester publisher's selection. A detailed listing of the works would serve little purpose. Today, the volumes are interesting chiefly as imprints. In their day, they formed a representative, miscellaneous collection of a popular nature.
Section IV. [Ex-Dono Collection]

Even more miscellaneous were the gifts received from individuals during the early days of the college. Many of Alden's friends in New England, New York and Pennsylvania sent a volume or a dozen volumes to the struggling institution of learning. Publishers, anxious for the text book business, added pourboires in the form of a book or so. The Congress of the United States for some years recognized Alleghany College as a deposit library and sent it series of government documents. Authors, friends of Alden, such as Hannah Adams, Thaddeus M. Harris, David Hosack, Eleazer Williams and others, sent copies of their own works. And, to be sure, fellow-ministers sent copies of their sermons.

Since there is nothing distinctive about the so-called "Ex Dono" collection, being of so miscellaneous and almost haphazard a nature, discussion of individual items will be postponed to later sections of this report. According to a modern count there were 1,255 such volumes listed in the 1823 Library Catalogue, of which 187 are now not to be found.

As a whole the early library of Alleghany College was what Timothy Alden claimed it to be when he appealed to the Germans of Pennsylvania in 1823 for funds to establish a Professorship in German literature: "The Library, a most useful and indispensable appendage to any such institution, through the munificence of Winthrop, Bentley, Thomas, and many other benefactors, comprising books in thirty different languages, is the first, except one, as to the excellence of the selection and point of value, belonging to any collegiate institution in the United States."