

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 13, 1956

### **After Love, Rare Books**

"After love, book collecting is the most exhilarating sport of all." This bit of sentiment was written by Rosenbach in "A Book Hunter's Holiday." It is well chosen for the introduction to a story concerning the late Mrs. Frances M Loeber Popoff and her husband. Gleb Popoff of Monterey, and their fascinating search for old books, old printings and examples of water-marked papers.

A few months ago, we had an article in the Diary on the opening of the Rare Book Room of the University of California Library. This prompted a friend of Mr. Popoff to tell us the story of a collection of unusual and valuable books which Mr. Popoff had recently presented to the University in memory of his wife. The memorial contribution is also a thanks offering for the education the donor and his wife had received from the University.

Mrs. Popoff, who was for seven years a member of the Monterey Library board, graduated from California in 1920. The following year she received her degree in medieval history from her alma mater. At one time she taught French in the Monterey High School. She made four trips to Europe during her lifetime and attended the Sorbonne in Paris in 1931 and again in 1938. Her special interest was always archaeology, according to her husband. The two traveled great distances in Africa, Egypt and other out-of-the-way places to study history and life of the people who inhabited those countries in centuries gone by.

Mrs. Popoff never tired of adventure and was always thrilled over an unusual find of a rare book, an historical item, a volume with rare or unusual binding. examples of the earliest watermarking on paper, or the early histories of coins and Russian publications.

When Mrs. Popoff died in May of 1954, Mr. Popoff decided to give his wonderful collection to the University in her memory.

He graduated from the University in 1935 at the age of 36, his wife having encouraged him to attend college at that age. He received a degree in pharmacy and during his college days had charge of the Drug Garden on the campus. This feature of the University grounds is no longer in existence.

Donald Coney, University librarian, and Kenneth J. Carpenter, librarian of the Rare Book Room, were very pleased with the collection presented by Mr. Popoff. Many books which he did not consider truly rare were so considered by the University. Mr. Coney had book had bookplates printed for the volumes, with the University seal and the memorial inscription: "In memory of Mrs. Frances M. Loeber Popoff. B.A., '20, M.A. '21. 1899-1954."

Among the books Mr. Popoff has contributed is a copy of "The Sacred Evangelism," printed in Moscow in 1717 by order of Peter I, in Church Slavic.

The librarian wrote Mr. Popoff: "I was delighted to see the books you sent up, particularly the 1717 Moscow printing of the Gospels which will help fill in a major gap in our typographical collection. We have lacked, until now, a good example of 18th century Russian work, and this book will mark the beginning of what we hope will be a useful selection of Russian printing – an aspect of Russian culture not now easily studied in the libraries of the West. "

Mr. Popoff, in addition to being a rare book collector is also a book binder of unusual talent, using his appreciation of beautiful hand-made papers, watermarks and parchment in accomplishing a superior finished product. Of his binding of the "The Sacred Evangelism" Mr. Coney wrote: "Let me compliment you on your expert craftsmanship."

"A collection of Forty Title Pages," "Ave Maria," "Coats of Arms of Provinces of Russian Empire," "Russian Medieval Architecture," and 12 volumes of "Coins of Russia," are among other publications which Mr. Popoff has given to the University Library.

The "Collection of Forty Title Pages," of which we saw unbound duplicates, are mostly of folio size and are of the 16th-19th century. Several pages are by noted printers. The work is arranged in an album made by the donor.

"Ave Maria," and "Pater Noster," translated and printed in over 100 languages, and "Coats of Arms of Provinces of Russian Empire," St. Petersburg, 1880, large original embossed binding, official edition, 83 plates in color and index, considered a very rare item, were gladly added to the University collection of "Russian Medieval Architecture," by Davis Roden Buston (printed in Cambridge, 1934). Mr. Coney wrote from the Library this Comment: "I think it will interest you to know that

Boston's "Russian Medieval Architecture" has been searched for on behalf of our Architecture branch here for some time without success. I know that architectural students and faculty will be grateful for this gift." There are 108 plates of photos of ancient Russian Churches and 104 pages of text in this volume.

The 12-volume gift of "Coins of Russia" printed in St Petersburg, 1881-1914, by the Imperial Russian government containing hundreds of plates and portraits of Russian rulers and a deluxe edition of rare binding. Only a few sets of a very limited edition are in the United States

In August of 1955 Mr. Popoff again visited the University Library and presented an additional gift in memory of Mrs. Popoff. He also plans more gifts in the future.

It was a great pleasure and a privilege to see these books, to feel the rare leather bindings, the beautiful paper, and to enjoy the extraordinary talent in book binding of Gleb A. Popoff.