

FineBooks & COLLECTIONS



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Constructed at a cost of \$200,000, the Clements Library opened on June 15, 1923. Architect Alfred Kahn based his design on a sixteenth-century casino on the grounds of the Villa Farnese in Caprarola, Italy, and declared the Clements his favorite building.

It was the moment all serious collectors live for. And so, on June 15, 1923, William L. Clements gladly gave his kingdom. Clements had pursued antiquarian Americana at a high level for two decades. Now his *alma mater*, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, would house his extraordinary collection, in a beautiful building Clements helped design. In his presentation remarks Clements paid homage to such great Americana collectors as John Carter Brown and James Lenox, and he expressed the conviction that with the opening of his library, Ann Arbor would attract a large number of serious students of early American history. “Inspiration and written expression in full measure will come from those who see and use such books,” he said, “along with a realization of the great things they stand for, and the pivotal events

they first narrate.”

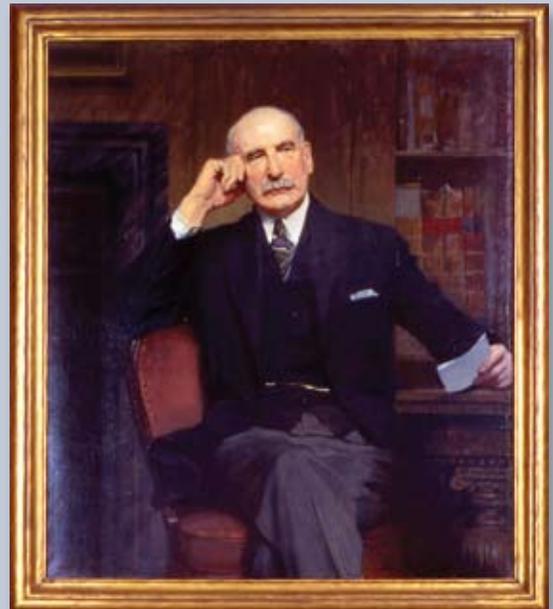
Clements loved the rarities he had accumulated, and he was confident that future generations would share his fascination. But true to form he placed some limits on that fascination: he didn’t want Michigan undergraduates or “the ordinary graduate student” rifling through his collection; in fact, in his dedication remarks Clements said he’d be happy if only “a handful of eminent historians” used the collections annually. After the ceremony he wrote to his friend Worthington C. Ford, a historian who directed the John Carter Brown library from 1917 to 1922: “I have returned home to a house empty of nearly all books, so it is needless to tell you how totally lost I am.”

William Lawrence Clements was born in Ann Arbor on April 1, 1861, the sixth and last child of James and Agnes

Michigan's Bibliomaniac

BY J. KEVIN GRAFFAGNINO

William L. Clements
Gave His Alma Mater
a Great Madness



William L. Clements (1861-1934), painted portrait by Herman Hanatschek, 1930.

Clements. James Clements was a gas engineer with interests in several Michigan cities, and on graduating from the University of Michigan in 1882 with a degree in engineering William began work at the Bay City Industrial Works, in which his father was a principal investor. Young Clements became manager of the company in 1883, and in the succeeding decades he made the company a national leader in the manufacture of steam shovels and other heavy railroad equipment. By the time he turned 50 he was moderately wealthy, chief investor in the First National Bank of Bay City, and a member of the University of Michigan board of regents.

Clements began his collecting career later in life than most bibliophiles. He filled his home in Bay City with an assortment of everyday books in the 1880s and '90s,

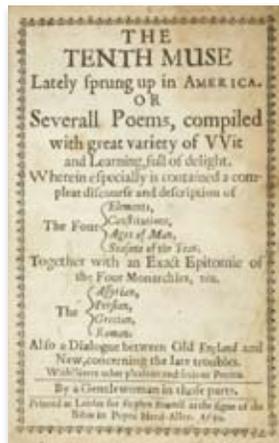
and then in 1903 he bought the Americana collection of Civil War veteran and Bay City merchant Aaron J. Cooke. Because Cooke and Clements were close friends, as the older man neared the end of his life he welcomed the opportunity to transfer his books to Clements. According to Margaret Maxwell's 1973 biography *Shaping a Library: William L. Clements as Collector*, Cooke's library was "rich in Americana and other volumes from the sales of Brinley, Barlow, Menzies, and other great 19th-century book collectors," so acquiring the 1,000 Cooke volumes gave Clements a strong foundation on which to build. At the age of 42, he had the money, leisure and inclination to make the most of this good start, and in the remaining three decades of his life he did just that.

With the Cooke nuggets in hand, Clements began buy-

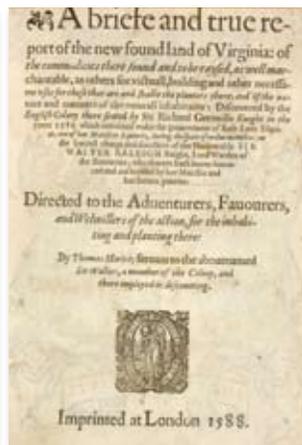
The library's only unofficial photo of William Clements shows him golfing with other University of Michigan regents, among them fellow book collector Junius Beal, whose father built one of Ann Arbor's finest Victorian houses. The Beal House was demolished in 1957 to make way for Ann Arbor's downtown public library.



'If a man is even moderately enthusiastic, and has actually collected a sufficient number of books [he has] a case of Bibliomania.'



(left) Anne Bradstreet's (1612-1672) *The Tenth Muse* (London, 1650) was the first published book by an American woman author. William Clements' handwritten notes on this copy stated proudly, "Very fine copy, 1/2 inch taller than the Church copy ... one of the most highly prized items of Americana ... Including this copy, only three are in private hands."



(right) "The first book printed in English describing actual settlements in England," Thomas Hariot's (ca. 1560-1621) *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (London, 1588) was one of William L. Clements' prize possessions. He bought the Henry Huth copy in 1914 from Bernard Quaritch for \$7,000, and called it "the star of all Americana." London dealer Henry N. Stevens, who sold Clements many of his greatest acquisitions, wrote in the 1920s, "Collectors of rare English books always speak reverently and even mysteriously of the 'quarto Hariot' as they do of the 'first folio.' It is given to but few of them to touch or to see it, for not more than seven copies are at present known to exist."

ing Americana from Francis P. Harper in New York, C. F. Libbie in Boston, and the sales of the Anderson Auction Company. He met legendary dealer George D. Smith in 1905, but apparently Smith's emphasis on supplying rarities to Henry E. Huntington kept him from selling much to Clements. By the early 1910s, Clements had caught the Americana bug in a serious way. Mostly shut out by Huntington's much fatter wallet at the first two of the fabulous Robert Hoe auctions in 1911, in 1912 he purchased 140 choice early American titles—Anne Bradstreet's *Tenth Muse* (1650), Adriaen Van der Donck's *Beschryvinge van Nieuw-Nederlandt* (1656); William Smith's *History of the Province of New-York* (1757); Bernard Romans, *East and West Florida* (1775)—that had belonged to New York City collector Newbold Edgar, from Lathrop Harper, for \$17,500.

The following year Clements brought his first full-time librarian to Bay City to care for and catalogue his 3,000 volumes. In 1914, perhaps encouraged by his acquisition of Thomas Hariot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588), which he described as "the star of all Americana," he had sufficient pride in his holdings to publish *Uncommon, Scarce and Rare Books Relating to American History ... from the Library of William L. Clements*.

Issuing his catalogue did nothing to slow Clements' pace of acquisition. He plunged with enthusiasm into the bibliographic tar pit of Theodor de Bry's *Voyages* (1590-1634), Levinus Hulsius' *Sammlung von sechs und zwanzig Schiffahrten in verschiedene fremde Land* (1598-1660), and the *Jesuit Relations* (1632-72), building superb collections of those seminal sources on early America. Expanding his horizons from books and pamphlets, in 1918 he bought 3,000 volumes of duplicate 18th- and early 19th-century American newspapers from the American Antiquarian Society. When high-priced rarities became available—James Rosier's *True Relation of ... the Discovery of the Land of Virginia* (1605) in 1918 from Philadelphia dealer A. S. W. Rosenbach for \$6,000; Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Voyages* (1599-1600), along with John Smith's *True Relation of ... Virginia* (1608) and *Description of New England* (1616) for a total of \$13,000 from George D. Smith in 1919—Clements invariably noted how much his hobby was costing him (in 1919 he spent \$60,000 on acquisitions, making his total expenditures on books since 1903 more than \$400,000) and then wrote the check. "I am adding Americana as fast as opportunity offers," he wrote to Clarence Brigham at AAS. "I do not know what I would do if I did not have this interest."

By the end of the 1910s Clements had begun considering what to do with his collection. He had visited the great Americana libraries in New York and New England, and that experience shaped his thinking. In September 1919, at a meeting of the University

of Michigan regents, he informally offered his library to his alma mater. The following month, as chair of the board's library committee he led a delegation of University regents and librarians back to the East Coast so they could share his vision of how to proceed, and in February 1920 he placed a formal offer before the regents. They accepted immediately, and over the course of the next three years Clements and the university crafted an agreement.

Clements pledged to donate his library and to provide \$175,000, plus \$15,000 for furnishings and equipment, to build a suitable home for it, if the university would guarantee an annual appropriation of \$25,000 for staff salaries, acquisitions and operating expenses. While both sides agreed quickly to these details, the relationship of the Clements Library to the university's central library system became a key point. At the outset Clements had stipulated that the head of his library would work "under the general instruction and supervision of the General Libraries of the University," but as negotiations proceeded he changed his mind. The autonomous Elizabethan Club library at Yale and the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University were better models, he declared, so in October 1922 he demanded that Michigan set up a structure in which a separate five-person Committee of Management would oversee his library. UM officials and library administrators were

surprised and dismayed by the change, but they went along rather than argue with Clements about it.

All the while Clements kept buying. In February 1920 he acquired John Brereton's *A Briefe and True Relation of the Discoverie of the North Part of Virginia* (1602) at a New York auction for \$4,050. On a trip to England in July 1921 he bought 220 volumes of the papers of Lord Shelburne, Britain's Prime Minister during the American Revolution, at auction for \$10,000, a remarkable bargain that nonetheless contributed to his book-buying expenses of \$70,000 that year. Realizing that he had neglected cartographic early Americana, in 1922 he paid Henry N. Stevens of London \$5,500 for 149 maps of Revolutionary America. When the library of the late Henry Vignaud, eminent collector and student of early American history, became available in Paris in the fall of 1922, Clements brokered a deal in which he and the University of Michigan would split the \$17,700 cost based on how much of the collection he added to his holdings.

The amounts Clements was spending may not seem impressive to a 2009 eye, but when you adjust \$70,000 1921 dollars for inflation and come up with more than \$800,000, then couple that with the fact that Clements was never close to membership in the rarified financial echelon of fellow collectors J. P. Morgan and Henry E. Huntington,

The Great Room measures 91 x 35 feet, with a 25-foot-high ceiling. The walls are paneled in English oak. Artifacts in the room include painted portraits of Lord Shelburne and Lord George Sackville-Germain, whose papers are at Clements, an 18th-century clock from the Hasbrouck House in Newburgh, New York, and Benjamin West's monumental painting, *The Death of General Wolfe*.





Early American prints and views are a major strength of the Clements Library. This hand-colored engraving shows Fort George and the city of New York in the 1760s. Constructed on the site of the Dutch Fort Amsterdam, Fort George stood until 1788, when it was demolished and the rubble used as landfill at Battery Park. London publisher Carrington Bowles issued this popular print from the mid-1760s into the 1790s, and the Clements copy is on paper watermarked 1794.

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his spending merits more respect.

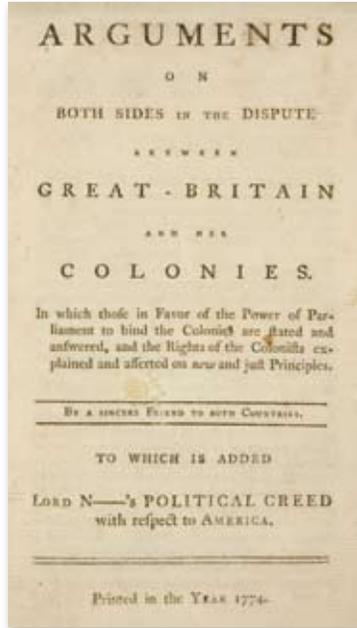
Clements may have expected that he would be done with his hobby after his library opened in June 1923, but in fact he was far from “the conclusion of a book-collector’s career” he’d predicted in his dedication remarks. Spurred on by the first Clements Library director, Randolph G. Adams, he remained as avid a collector as he’d ever been. In December 1925 he paid Miss Frances Clinton \$120,000 for 16,500 manuscripts of her illustrious ancestor, Revolutionary War general Sir Henry Clinton, eclipsing his purchase that same year of 5,000 manuscripts of Clinton’s American counterpart Nathanael Greene for only \$35,000. Two years later Clements added a large collection of the papers of Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the American Colonies 1775–82, for \$45,000.

He concluded his remarkable decade of Revolutionary War acquisitions by acquiring 20,000 manuscripts of British general Thomas Gage for \$100,000. These collecting coups, in which Clements and his agents negotiated long and skillfully with the descendants of important leaders in the

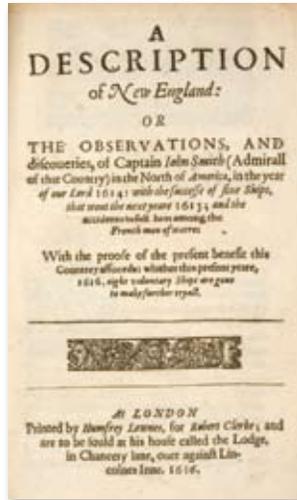
Revolution, elevated his library from a sterling collection of printed materials to an unequalled archive of unique sources on Revolutionary America.

In each case Clements outmaneuvered collectors, dealers and institutions with far deeper pockets than his, blending finesse, perseverance and outright luck to come out ahead. In the process he also demonstrated that it is far easier to start collecting antiquarian treasures than it is to stop.

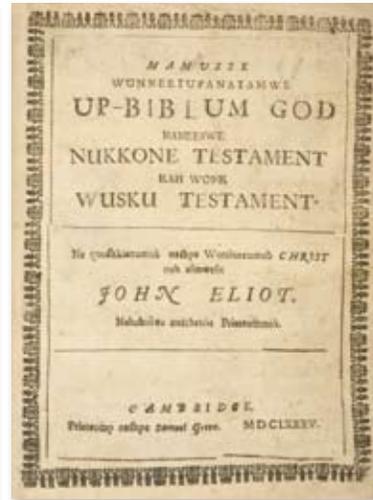
Clements kept a close eye on “his” library after 1923 as well. He was in constant contact with Adams, sometimes to the latter’s consternation as the founder tried to set library policies and procedures for the new director. Although Adams fit perfectly Clements’ desire for a trained historian with a passion for antiquarian books and manuscripts rather than “just a librarian” to run his creation, like many founding donors Clements found it difficult to pass the torch even to his hand-picked and very capable administrator. Dealing with requests that were really orders from Bay City, and advice on what kinds of researchers were worthy to use the library, required considerable tact



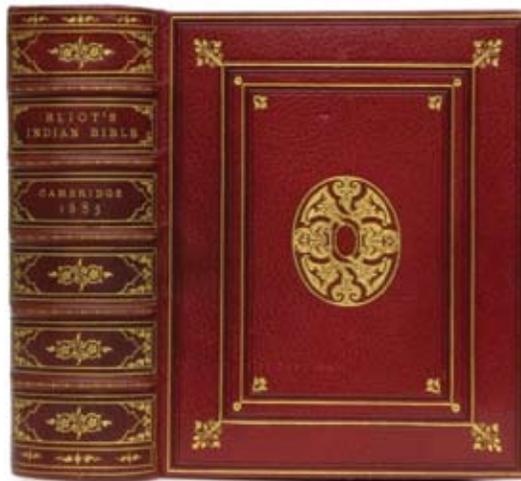
Joseph Galloway's (1731-1802) *Arguments on Both Sides in the Dispute Between Great-Britain and Her Colonies* ([London], 1774) is one of several American and British thousand political pamphlets of the American Revolution era in the Clements Library collection. In it Galloway discusses his "plan of union" for creation of an American colonial parliament to help preserve England's North American empire.



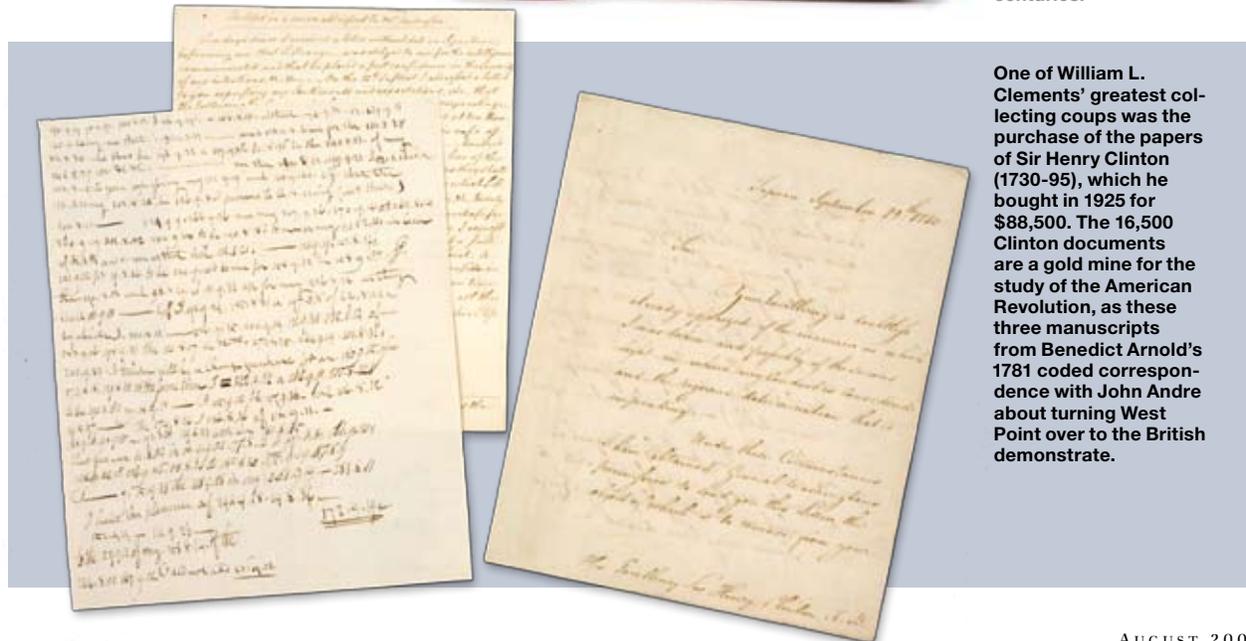
(above left) William L. Clements acquired his copy of John Smith's (1580-1631) *Description of New England* (London, 1616) in 1917 for \$4,000. Complete with the rare folding map featuring a portrait of Smith, and bound in limp vellum, it is from the library of Sir William Douglas, first Earl of Queensberry, and bears his crest on the front and back covers.



(above right) William L. Clements purchased his copy of the second edition of John Eliot's (1604-1690) *Indian Bible* (Cambridge, 1685) at the 1914 auction of the collection of Houghton, Michigan, collector Lucius L. Hubbard. It once belonged to Native American Presbyterian clergyman Samson Occom (1723-92) and bears his 1748 signature on the last page.



(left) The binding of the Clements copy of the 1685 Eliot Bible is by Francis Bedford, "in his most elegant manner." The 1914 Merwin catalogue of the Hubbard sale describes it as "full crimson crushed levant morocco, sides neatly gilt and blind tooled, with corner ornaments and gilt centre-pieces, richly gilt back with heavy bands, inside gilt line borders." The Library's collection includes many impressive bindings by Bedford, Bayntun of Bath, Zaehnsdorf, Sanford, Pratt, Sangorski & Sutcliffe, Riviere, and other leading craftsmen of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



One of William L. Clements' greatest collecting coups was the purchase of the papers of Sir Henry Clinton (1730-95), which he bought in 1925 for \$88,500. The 16,500 Clinton documents are a gold mine for the study of the American Revolution, as these three manuscripts from Benedict Arnold's 1781 coded correspondence with John Andre about turning West Point over to the British demonstrate.



Samuel de Champlain's (1567-1635) *Les Voyages de la Nouvelle France Occidentale, dicte Canada* (Paris, 1632) is a seminal work on the early exploration and settlement of North America. The Clements copy, complete with all maps and illustrations, is bound in seventeenth-century vellum and was part of the remarkable library of Robert Hoe (1839-1909).

Also in the Clinton Papers is this anonymous British spy's manuscript map of George Washington's camp at Valley Forge in 1777. The Clinton, Shelburne, Germain, Gage, and Greene manuscript collections at Clements are rich in such unique sources on the American Revolution. The Clements owns more than 500 manuscript military maps from the war.



The defeat of George Armstrong Custer and his 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, or the Battle of Greasy Grass Creek to the Native American victors, in June 1876 electrified the nation. John Mulvany (ca. 1844-1906) painted *Custer's Last Rally* in 1881, and chromolithographed reproductions of the 20' x 11' painting began to appear soon after. Mulvany's depiction of the heroic Custer and his men sold well, rivaling the Anheuser-Busch Company's prints of Cassily Adams' "Custer's Last Stand" for popularity. Walt Whitman wrote after viewing Mulvany's painting, "It is all at first painfully real, overwhelming, needs good nerves to look at. . . . I only saw it for an hour or so; but it needs to be seen many times—needs to be studied over and over again."

Clements outmaneuvered collectors with far deeper pockets, blending finesse, perseverance and outright luck.

and patience on Adams' part. On balance Clements and Adams got along quite well, and Clements' ongoing interest certainly worked to the library's benefit, but occasionally Adams must have pondered the wisdom of the age-old axiom, "Never take a job heading an organization where the founder is still alive."

The last years of Clements' life brought a mix of happiness and distress. His wife divorced him in 1930, but he remarried the following year. In the summer of 1931 his Bay City bank closed, and Clements poured a great deal of his own money into getting it reopened in 1932. A Democratic landslide in Michigan's spring 1933 elections cost him his seat on the university board, ending his 24-year tenure as a regent. Keeping a close eye on the Clements Library provided a much-needed diversion from the battering that the Depression wreaked on his corporate and personal finances. Much to his own dismay, early in 1934 Clements felt compelled to inform the university that he or his estate would have to sell rather than give to the Clements Library the great Revolutionary manuscript collections that he had kept in Bay City. He hoped for an economic upswing that would restore his capacity to donate as he had always intended, but it did not come before his death on November 6, 1934. After three years of negotiating and helped by a \$100,000 donation from Detroit collector Tracy W. McGregor, the university paid Clements's heirs \$300,000 spread over a decade for the Gage, Shelburne, Germain, Clinton, and Greene papers.

Seventy-five years after his death, William L. Clements stands as one of the great Americana collectors of his or any other generation. In assembling his collection, he acquired prized rarities from the libraries of such noteworthy predecessors as Elihu D. Church, Henry Huth, William Menzies, and Brayton Ives. He worked successfully with many of the principal American and British dealers of his time—Francis and Lathrop Harper, Henry N. Stevens, Alfred Quaritch, A. S. W. Rosenbach, Bernard Maggs—to bring the best copies of the rarest titles to his shelves. When it came time to plan the Clements Library, he consulted with and gathered advice from leading authorities like George Parker Winship, Wilberforce Eames, Clarence Brigham, and Worthington C. Ford. At auction, in relationships with dealers and in negotiations with private owners he more than held his own against Henry F. DePuy, Beverly Chew, Henry E. Huntington, Herschel V. Jones, and the other leading collectors of his day.

Looking back on his collecting career, Clements wrote, "If a man is even moderately enthusiastic, and has actually collected a sufficient number of books to make a foundation of a library as a specific subject, he, by general understanding among his co-sufferers, has been inoculated with the disease and has a case of Bibliomania." Few individuals have caught the virus more permanently or accomplished more under its influence than Clements.

Today the William L. Clements Library is an impressive monument to its founder. The Library's first three directors—Randolph G. Adams, Howard H. Peckham and John C. Dann—averaged 28 years on the job, and each excelled at strengthening the collections in ways that broadened the library's parameters while maintaining the depth important to scholars. As a result, for any collector of Americana prior to 1900 the Clements is a remarkably attractive destination. From the architectural beauty of Albert Kahn's 1923 building, modeled after a 1587 casino on the grounds of the Villa Farnese in Caprarola, Italy, to the rare books, pamphlets, maps, prints, photographs, and manuscripts that shed light on North American history from Columbus through the 19th century, the Clements offers collectors and researchers a wealth of unique resources. On almost any aspect of the early American experience—military history, politics and government, religion, gender and ethnicity, culinary history, the creative arts, travel and exploration—the holdings at Clements are among the best in the world. Like such peer institutions as the American Antiquarian Society, the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, the Newberry Library, the Huntington, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Beinecke Library at Yale, the Clements lays claim to a breathtaking array of sources on our heritage.

Henry E. Huntington once wrote, "The ownership of a fine library is the surest and swiftest way to immortality." If Huntington was right—and what self-respecting bibliophile could doubt him?—the name of William L. Clements will live forever. 📖



Kevin Graffagnino is the director of the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He started an antiquarian book business as a teenager and has worked in the field as curator, auctioneer and author for more than 35 years. He is the editor of two collections, *Only in Books: Writers, Readers & Bibliophiles on Their Passion* and *All the Good Books: Quotations for Bibliophiles*.