Abstract
Provenance records provide access to evidence about a book’s previous ownership. Those records are based on physical evidence present in the book. The physical evidence of ownership takes many forms, such as bookplates, signatures, inscriptions, stamps, marginal annotations, and branded bindings.

The literature and oral tradition of the rare book world have always suggested that records of previous ownership and their physical formal should be maintained for sentimental reasons and for their research value to literary, historical, and bibliographical scholarship. That value has been affirmed in the writings of numerous authors based both in the profession of library and information . . .

Full Text:
PDF

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5860/rbml.11.2.134

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The institution also actively sought out collections that contained rare materials. In 1867 the Library of Congress purchased the large private library of Peter Force and in 1906 bought the Russian collection of Gennadii Yudin. Gifts from many generous donors also added greatly to the rare holdings. Joseph Meredith Toner in 1882 made the first gift to the nation of a large library—about 43,000 books, pamphlets, scrapbooks, and bound periodicals on American history, the history of medicine, and other subjects. By the time of the Thacher gift the Library's considerable number of rare books necessitated the creation of a special section to house and to care for them. In 1934 the division moved into its present reading room and stack area. The collection brings together rare books from the former libraries of the Schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine, Graduate School of Public Health, Nursing, Pharmacy, and Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic including notable donations by Dr. Gerald Rodnan and Dr. Mark Ravitch. The scope is international in terms of language and origin of materials. Each of these "collections" exposes the provenance or strength of our rare book collection while highlighting the most interesting items and gems. The Browse the collection links below (also available on each page) open a list in each category and facilitates perusal of titles not shelved by class numbers: Dentistry Highlights and Overview (Browse Dental Books - Gems and Classics collection).