

POGGIO BRACCIOLINI, PHYLLIS GOODHART
GORDAN, AND THE FORMATION OF THE GOODHART
COLLECTION OF FIFTEENTH-CENTURY BOOKS AT BRYN
MAWR COLLEGE

Eric L. Pumroy

ABSTRACT: The Poggio Bracciolini conference was dedicated to Bryn Mawr alumna Phyllis Goodhart Gordan (1913–1994) one of the leading Poggio scholars of her generation and the editor of the only major collection of Poggio's letters in English, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters* (Columbia University Press, 1974). Gordan and her father, Howard Lehman Goodhart (1887–1951) were also responsible for building one of the great collections of 15th century printed books in America, most of which is now at Bryn Mawr College. This paper draws upon Goodhart's correspondence with rare book dealers and the extensive notes on his books to survey the strengths of the collection and to examine the process by which he built the collection and worked with rare book dealers in the difficult Depression and World War II years, the period when he acquired most of his books. The paper also considers Goodhart's growing connections with scholars of early printing as his collection and interests grew, in particular the work of Margaret Bingham Stillwell, the editor of *Incunabula in American Libraries* (1940).

KEYWORDS: Phyllis Goodhart Gordan, Howard Lehman Goodhart, book collecting, incunabula

The conference that generated the papers for this volume was dedicated to Phyllis Goodhart Gordan (1913–1994), one of the leading Poggio Bracciolini scholars of her generation and the translator and editor of the only major collection of his letters in English, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters: The Letters of Poggius Bracciolini to Nicolaus de Niccolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). Gordan's interest in Poggio and Renaissance Humanism began during her undergraduate years at Bryn Mawr in the mid-1930s, and it was in the pursuit of research materials for her advanced undergraduate papers that she and her father, Howard Lehman Goodhart (1884–1951), embarked on acquiring what was to become one of the great medieval and renaissance libraries in the country. By the time of Howard Goodhart's death, the collection numbered roughly 1400 books printed by 1500, known as *Incunabula*. Of these, he donated or bequeathed more than 900 to Bryn Mawr. His daughter kept about 400 to support her work and added more to the total over the course of her lifetime, including a number of printed Poggio's. Between the two of them, they also owned roughly 150 medieval and renaissance manuscripts, and several hundred more sixteenth century printed books. Much of this collection is now at Bryn Mawr College, coming either as part of his bequest in 1951, or as part of her bequest or deposit by her family in

1994. The collection is one of the great renaissance book collections in the US, but the building of it is also an interesting story of the intersection of scholarly, family, collecting and financial interests in the middle part of the twentieth century.

The Goodharts were part of the circle of German Jewish families in New York City that rose to prominence in banking and investment in the late nineteenth century. Stephen Birmingham's book on these families, *Our Crowd*, begins with a view of this society as seen through the eyes of Phyllis's grandmother, Hattie Lehman Goodhart, one of the arbiters of taste and behavior in this circle. 'Granny' Goodhart, as Birmingham referred to her, was a Lehman (Birmingham, 1967: ch. 1, pp. 3-13). The Lehman Brothers investment company was run by her family, and her brother was Herbert Lehman, Franklin Roosevelt's successor as governor of New York. It was into this family that Howard Lehman Goodhart was born in New York City in 1884, the eldest son in the family. He graduated from Yale, joined the family business on Wall Street, and married Marjorie Walter, a 1912 graduate of Bryn Mawr College and the daughter of another prominent New York Jewish merchant family. In 1913 they had their only child, Phyllis; in 1917 he joined the army and served in Europe, and shortly after his return, at the beginning of 1920, his wife died. How the death of Marjorie Walter Goodhart changed the direction of his life is difficult to know, but from this point forward many of his major decisions were made with the future of his daughter and the memory of his wife in mind. He had earned or inherited enough money to be able to retire from full-time work in the investment business at the age of 40 (Bühler, 1959: 218), and had the means to underwrite the building of Bryn Mawr's new theater, named Marjorie Walter Goodhart Hall. When Phyllis enrolled at Bryn Mawr in 1931, he took up regular residence at the Green Hills Farm in Overbrook, a few miles from the College, to be close to her and provide a retreat from campus when she needed it. Shortly after coming to Philadelphia he began doing business with Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, the Philadelphia rare book dealer who played such a critical role in helping to build the collections of the Huntington, Widener, and Folger libraries. Goodhart was not yet a collector of rare books, though, and instead used the Rosenbach Company as a supplier of modern books, especially academic books that Phyllis needed for her classes¹.

We can date the beginning of the Goodhart incunable collection very precisely, thanks to the records of the Rosenbach Company. On Janu-

¹ Rosenbach Company Records, RCo VIIa: Customer Cards for H. L. Goodhart and Phyllis Goodhart, and Sales Book 22: January 1930-April 1933. Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia.

ary 12, 1934 he purchased from Rosenbach the *Historia Fiorentina*, the Italian translation of Poggio Bracciolini's history of Florence, printed in Venice by Jacobus Rubeus in 1476². This was at the beginning of the semester when Phyllis Goodhart wrote her paper on Poggio. As she told the story in her 1972 talk at Bryn Mawr, *Of What Use are Old Books?* she wanted to work with early printings of the writings of Poggio and other humanists, and so she asked her father to acquire copies from the collections at the New York Public Library. In the 1930s, acquiring a copy of a book meant going through the expensive process of producing a photographic copy of every page. He decided that in the long run the money would be better spent purchasing the books she needed outright (Gordan, 1973: 10).

The *Historia Fiorentina* was an isolated book purchase until the spring, and then Goodhart began buying seriously. Between April and July 1934, he purchased 48 incunables either from Rosenbach directly, or from auctions at which Rosenbach was his agent. He bought a mix of books, some landmark works in the history of printing, notably the Nuremberg Chronicle and Peter Schoeffer's mammoth 1470 edition of Jerome's letters. But he also bought humanist texts that would be of interest to his daughter, including the 1476 edition of Leonardo Bruni's *History of Florence*, the companion volume to Poggio's history; Perotti's *Cornucopia*; editions of several classical writers edited by humanist scholars, and a printed version of a Poggio letter to Leonardo Bruni³. In a letter to Rosenbach that summer, Goodhart pointed to this Poggio letter as exactly the kind of book that he was most interested in acquiring. Because it had never been translated and there was little scholarship on it, it is the kind of work that would support doctoral level research. He went on to say that while he would be delighted to have such famous books as the Schoeffer Jerome and the first printing of Dante (offered by Rosenbach, but not purchased), these landmark books were not his major interest, and in fact, buying them would quickly use up the money he had set aside for books.⁴

Goodhart and Rosenbach had an intense but short-lived business relationship, extending from the spring of 1934 to the spring of 1936, during which time Goodhart purchased more than one hundred incunabula at a

² Rosenbach Company Records: Sales Book 23, 1933-1936, p. 1218, January 12, 1934.

³ List of incunables sold to Howard L. Goodhart, 1934. Correspondence with Howard Lehman Goodhart, Rosenbach Company Archives, Series 1, Box 072, folder 41, 1934.

⁴ Howard Goodhart to A. S. W. Rosenbach, July 7, 1934. Correspondence with Howard Lehman Goodhart, Rosenbach Company Archives, Series 1, Bo 072, folder 41, 1934.

total cost of nearly \$50,000. After 1936 Goodhart purchased very little from Rosenbach, perhaps because he found Rosenbach's notoriously high prices unacceptable. In any case, he found a more congenial dealer in the old London firm of Maggs Brothers during a visit to his brother in England during the summer of 1934. The letters from H. Clifford Maggs to Howard Goodhart in August and September of that year show the beginnings of a warm and collaborative relationship between Maggs and the Goodharts. During this summer before her senior year in college, Phyllis Goodhart was a regular visitor to the bookshop, and her purchases and recommendations figure prominently in the correspondence from Maggs to Howard Goodhart. By the end of the summer, the Goodharts had purchased from Maggs two fifteenth century editions of Poggio's translation of Diodorus Siculus from Greek into Latin and a manuscript of his *Oratio in laudem rei publicae venetorum*⁵. Over the following year the volume of correspondence and purchases increased, with offers or responses from Maggs arriving nearly every week.

The correspondence between Goodhart and Maggs is revealing of how Goodhart went about identifying priorities for his collection, as well as how his collecting interests changed over time. During 1934 his collecting was centered around his daughter's interest in Poggio Bracciolini and Italian humanists. On Goodhart's instruction, Maggs identified all of the fifteenth-century texts cited in Shepherd's *Life of Poggio Bracciolini* and forwarded quotes to Goodhart as the works came on the market. In early 1935, for example, Maggs quoted editions of works by Columella and Firmicus, classical authors whose texts were uncovered by Poggio⁶. Goodhart developed his own interests soon enough and developed those collections in a similarly thoughtful way. His first major focus was on the works of Philo Judeaus, including manuscripts and early printed texts in which in which Philo's work was cited. Within a few years, his Philo collection was so comprehensive that it formed the basis of a bibliography of Philo's works that was published as an addendum to Erwin Goodenough's *The Politics of Philo Judaeus, Practice and Theory* (Yale University Press, 1938). He later donated his Philo Judeaus collection to Yale University, his alma mater. Within his incunabula collection, he developed a sub-collection of books printed in Rome. The Rome collection was sufficiently important to him that when the stock market plunged in the summer of 1937 and he had to cut back on his collecting, he told

⁵ Letters from H. Clifford Maggs to Howard Lehman Goodhart, September 21, 1934 and September 29, 1934. Howard Lehman Goodhart Papers, Bryn Mawr College. Binder: Letters from Maggs, 1934-1935.

⁶ H. Clifford Maggs to Howard Lehman Goodhart, November 11, 1934 and March 5, 1935. Howard Lehman Goodhart Papers, Bryn Mawr College. Binder: Letters from Maggs, 1934-1935.

Maggs that he was limiting his buying to books in just two fields: books on Philo and books printed in Rome⁷.

The most important change in his collecting focus came in the late 1930s, prompted by his reading of Hastings Rashdall's *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*. According to his friend Margaret Stillwell, compiler of *Incunabula in American Libraries* (1940), as soon as he completed the book, he asked Maggs Brothers to send quotes for all of the fifteenth-century editions of the authors mentioned in the book (Stillwell, 1951: 8). As a consequence of this change in focus, a significant part of the collection consists of editions of Patristic writers, particularly Augustine, Jerome, and Boethius, and works of medieval theologians, particularly Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Jean Gerson. The distinction between the medieval and renaissance books had become formalized by the time he made the decision to donate them to Bryn Mawr in the late 1940s. The books that came to Bryn Mawr were designated as the Marjorie Walter Goodhart Medieval Library in honor of his late wife. Most of the works by Renaissance and classical authors remained with his daughter and she referred to them as the Humanist Library in the 1955 catalogue of the Goodhart incunable collection (Gordan, 1955).

Howard Goodhart was much more than just a collector of books. Margaret Stillwell called him a «scholar-collector» in her talk at the dedication of the Goodhart Medieval Library at Bryn Mawr and noted that he was someone who actually read the books in his collection (Stillwell, 1951: 18). On two occasions he talked with her about undertaking research projects based on his books. In January 1941 he wrote to her about his plans to do a book on Sweynheim and Pannartz, a volume that would contain a bibliography of the books they printed, a study of each volume, where surviving copies could be found, and references to translations of the prefaces and colophons. He also invited her to collaborate on the volume, but she demurred. While willing to help, she explained that this was truly his project since Sweynheim and Pannartz imprints were one of the strengths of his collection⁸. Nothing more seems to have come of this project, but a few years later he wrote to her that he was working on an article, *An Appreciation of English Scholarship before 1500*, that would draw upon his knowledge of early English printing and his collection of fifteenth-century English books.

⁷ Howard Lehman Goodhart to H. Clifford Maggs, July 2, 1937. Maggs Brothers Archive, Folder 1279 GOA-GOP 1934 and Miscellaneous 1935-1936, British Library.

⁸ Howard Lehman Goodhart to Margaret Stillwell, January 27, 1941, and Margaret Stillwell to Howard Lehman Goodhart, January 31, 1941. Margaret Bingham Stillwell Papers, Brown University Library.

As with his Sweynheim and Pannartz work, though, he does not appear to have completed it⁹.

Aside from his own scholarly use of his collection, Goodhart both encouraged and supported scholars who shared his interests. He was especially generous in opening his collections to Bryn Mawr students and faculty members. Classics faculty members Lily Ross Taylor and Berthe Marti both brought their graduate students for a visit to his apartment in the Hotel St. Regis in Manhattan in the spring of 1936 to look at his books and hear him discuss them. He not only invited people to see his books, but he also lent them to scholars who needed them for their research¹⁰. Berthe Marti borrowed all of his fifteenth-century editions of *Pharsalia* for a project she was doing in 1939, and in the same year Bryn Mawr English professor Samuel Chew borrowed a manuscript account of a trip to Jerusalem around 1500, with the intention of translating and editing it for publication¹¹. His generosity was not limited to Bryn Mawr faculty. In 1938 he lent all of his Aenas Silvius books to Leona Gabel, an historian at Smith College¹², who was working on an edition of his works. Independent Renaissance scholar Susan Fowler met regularly with him in the early 1940s when she was working on Gaspare de Verona, and frequently consulted his manuscripts¹³.

One of his longest professional working relationships was with Margaret Stillwell, curator of the Annmary Brown Memorial in Providence, Rhode Island, where she oversaw a substantial collection of fifteenth century printed books. She had also been working on compiling a census of fifteenth century books in the United States since the mid-1920s, with funding from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Bibliographical Society of America. Goodhart made his first report of his books to her in January 1935 when he sent her descriptions of 93 of his books and he sent regular reports to her thereafter. Their relationship quickly moved beyond that of compiler and contributor, as their frequent letters showed him becoming both a patron and friend. The

⁹ Howard Lehman Goodhart to Margaret Stillwell, November 2, 1944. Margaret Bingham Stillwell Papers.

¹⁰ Lily Ross Taylor to Howard Lehman Goodhart, February 3, 1936 and Berthe Marti to Howard Lehman Goodhart, February 29, 1936. Bryn Mawr Binder II, Howard Lehman Goodhart Papers, Bryn Mawr College Library.

¹¹ Berthe Marti to Howard Lehman Goodhart, April 26, 1939 and Samuel Chew to Howard Lehman Goodhart, February 25, 1939. Binder: Bryn Mawr Letters, 1938-1941, Howard Lehman Goodhart Papers, Bryn Mawr College Library.

¹² Howard Lehman Goodhart to Margaret Stillwell, March 5, 1938. Margaret Stillwell Papers, Brown University Library.

¹³ Correspondence between Susan Fowler and Howard Lehman Goodhart, 1943-1945. Folder: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Howard Lehman Goodhart Papers, Bryn Mawr College Library.

funding for the incunable census was unpredictable and often inadequate to hire the assistants that were needed for the final preparation of the book, but in Howard Goodhart she found someone who was willing to step in with contributions to hire assistants so that she could keep the work going forward between grants. Their friendly relationship continued after Stillwell's *Incunabula in American Libraries* appeared in 1940, as they continued to talk regularly about his latest acquisitions, their research projects, and eventually, the future of his collection. In 1948 he wrote to her for advice about his books, for although he had been planning for some time to place them at either Bryn Mawr or the New York Public Library, he had recently been given contrary advice. The library director at Yale had visited him and made a pitch for the books to come to a large research library like Yale's, and a bit more surprisingly, the chair of the English Department at Bryn Mawr had met with him and questioned the college's ability to handle the books. Stillwell responded by expressing her doubts about Bryn Mawr as well and suggested her own library as another option¹⁴.

Within a few months of this exchange of letters, Goodhart had made the decision in favor of Bryn Mawr, undoubtedly influenced by his daughter. The first volumes arrived in early 1949, and more than half of the collection was in place by the time the Marjorie Walter Goodhart Mediaeval Library was dedicated on 1 June 1951, with Margaret Stillwell delivering the keynote address *Incunabula as Couriers of Learning*. Sadly, Howard Goodhart was unable to attend the dedication because of the growing cancer that would take his life a few months later. Goodhart had continued adding to the collection even after he had made the decision to donate it to Bryn Mawr. During 1950, he purchased more than 120 fifteenth-century books, and he added another 20 in 1951. In the introduction to her published catalogue of the Goodhart Collection, *Fifteenth Century Books in the Collection of Howard Lehman Goodhart* (Stamford: Overbrook Press, 1955), Phyllis Goodhart Gordan reported that by the time the transfer of books was completed following her father's death, there were 930 *incunabula* at Bryn Mawr.

Phyllis Gordan kept about 400 of the fifteenth-century books, principally the humanist texts, editions of classical authors, the 19 British incunables, and 25 editions printed by Sweynheim and Pannartz between 1468 and 1475 (Gordan, 1955: Introduction). During her lifetime she added a few books to the collection, including three Poggio Bracciolini works purchased between 1955 and 1961: an edition of the *Facetiae*

¹⁴ Howard Lehman Goodhart to Margaret Stillwell, October 17, 1948 and Margaret Stillwell to Howard Lehman Goodhart, October 20, 1948. Margaret Bingham Stillwell Papers, Brown University Library.

printed by Christopher Valdarfer in Milan in 1484, *De Nobilitate*, printed by G. Leu in Antwerp in 1489, and the first printed collection of his works, issued by Johann Knobloch in Strasbourg in 1510. Like her father, Gordan was generous in allowing scholars to use the manuscripts and early printed books that she kept in her home¹⁵. Following her death in 1994, most of her books came to Bryn Mawr either as a bequest or on loan from her family. In addition to her books, the college also acquired her research notes on Poggio, drafts of her intended volume of Poggio's correspondence with people other than Nicolaus de Niccolis, and an extensive collection of microfilm of Poggio manuscripts. She also left a small bequest to support continued work on Poggio, and it was these funds that provided critical support for the 2016 conference on Poggio at Bryn Mawr College.

Of the books at Bryn Mawr there are 18 of Poggio's works printed before 1600, including 10 of the 26 fifteenth-century books listed in Goff's *Incunabula in American Libraries*, and 4 fifteenth-century manuscripts. In addition, there are 9 eighteenth-century works, including the critical works in the rediscovery of Poggio at the beginning of the century, notably Recanato's *Poggii Historia Florentina* (1715), Lenfant's *Poggiana* (1720), and the Oliva and Giorgi' *Poggii Bracciolini Florentini Historiae de varietate fortunae* (1723). Among the highlights is a manuscript prepared for a member of the Bembo family of Poggio's *Oratio in laudem rei publicae venetorum*, one of two known copies in manuscript form.

In her 1972 talk at Bryn Mawr, *Of What Use Are Old Books?* Phyllis Goodhart Gordan ended her description of the fifteenth-century book collection that her father had assembled and given to the college with the observation that «together they seem to me to join us to an ancient and universal company of scholars» (Gordan, 1973: 27). Howard Goodhart would surely have appreciated this characterization of his book collecting. Throughout his relatively brief years as a book collector, he maintained a focus on building a library that would support research in medieval and renaissance studies, and this was a library that was used for his own research, by his daughter, and by many other scholars, both during his lifetime and since the books came to Bryn Mawr. At the heart of the collection is Poggio Bracciolini, for there would have been no Goodhart Collection without Phyllis Gordan's undergraduate excitement over Renaissance Humanism and Poggio in particular, a scholarly commitment that would endure throughout her lifetime.

¹⁵ See, for example, Monfasani, 1988: 18n71.

Archival Sources and Manuscripts

Howard Lehman Goodhart Papers, Bryn Mawr College Library, Bryn Mawr.
Maggs Brothers Archives, British Library, London.
Margaret Bingham Stillwell Papers, Brown University Library, Providence.
Rosenbach Company Records, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia.

References

- Birmingham S. 1967, *“Our Crowd”*: *The Great Jewish Families of New York*, Harper & Row, New York.
- Bühler C.F. 1959, *Howard Lehman Goodhart 1884-1951*, in *The Grolier Club. Grolier 75: A biographical retrospective to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Grolier Club in New York*, New York.
- Gordan P.W.G. 1955, *Fifteenth Century Books in the Collection of Howard Lehman Goodhart*, Overbrook Press, Stamford.
- Gordan P.W.G. 1973, *Of What Use are Old Books? A talk given 4 April 1972 to celebrate the adding of the one-thousandth incunabulum to the Bryn Mawr Library*, Privately printed by the Friends of the Bryn Mawr College Library.
- Monfasani J., *The First Call for Press Censorship: Niccolò Perotti, Giovanni Andrea Bussi, Antonio Moreto, and the Editing of Pliny’s Natural History*, «Renaissance Quarterly», XLI (1), pp. 1-31.
- Stillwell M.B. 1951, *Incunabula as Couriers of Learning: An Address Delivered at Bryn Mawr College at the Dedication of the Marjorie Walter Goodhart Mediaeval Library*, June 1, Howard Lehman Goodhart Papers, Bryn Mawr College.