

The Ken Donelson Special Collection of Juvenile Literature

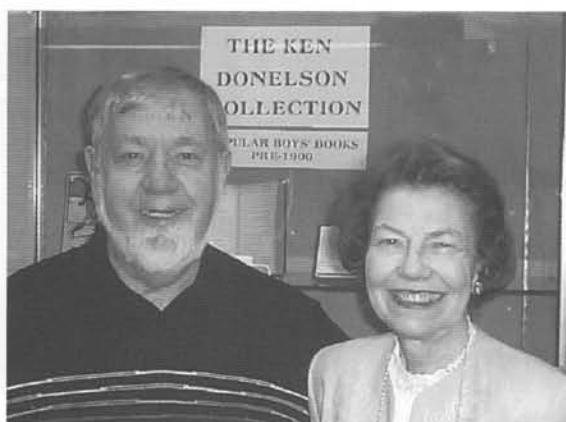
Jim Blasingame

When Arizona State University Professor Emeritus Ken Donelson bought his very first book as a small boy in Clarinda, Iowa, he had no idea it was the beginning of what would eventually become The Ken Donelson Special Collection of Juvenile Literature now residing in ASU's Hayden Library. In a dedication ceremony and reception on April 29, 2003, Special Collections Librarian Marilyn Wurzburger recognized Dr. Donelson and his wife, Marie, for their donation of over 800 books dating back to 1835, and invited scholars of young adult fiction to make good use of them. Although some of the books in the collection are still being catalogued, and many of the oldest, especially those with remarkable illustrations, are on display in glass cases, the entirety is now available for use with the help of the special collections librarians.

Ken began this collection when he was in elementary school and added more books as he grew up. He lost a few upon the advent of WWII and a tour in the Navy when his mother gave some of them away. Ken began acquiring significant titles in earnest while working on his doctorate at the University of Iowa and continued to the present day. He looked for books primarily in bookstores, such as Acres of Books in Long Beach, California, which he believes is one of the best bookstores on the West Coast, along with Powell's in Portland, Oregon. Acres of Books in Cincinnati, Ohio, was also a help, as were two bookstores in Kansas City, Missouri, that were later lost to urban renewal.

Books from the early Nancy Drew series were the most difficult to find, according to Ken:

They were starting to cost me a lot of money. The later ones were less expensive, but they were also not nearly as well written. Fortunately, many of the books I had collected as a boy were the early ones from the 1930's and 1940's. *Derrick Sterling* by Kirk Munroe, was also a difficult acquisition. I looked for that one for a long time and finally found a first edition that was just gorgeous and another copy that I kept for myself. That's probably the most rare book in the collection. Some of the books from the American Sunday School Union would be very difficult to find because, although you can easily find books printed by that organization (they printed them by the thousands), it would be very hard to locate a specific title that you might want.



Arizona State University Professor Emeritus Ken Donelson and ASU's Hayden Library Special Collections Librarian Marilyn Wurzburger (4/29/2003)

A majority of the works in the collection were originally written for a young male readership, although Ken did not consciously set out with that intention; rather, he was a boy when he began and first collected what he liked to read, including sports stories, mysteries and adventures. His favorite authors in the collection include Capwell Wykoff, who wrote great mysteries although he was never an especially influential author; John Tunis, who wrote mostly sports books; Ralph Henry Barbour, who wrote sports, mystery and adventure books; and William Heyliger, who wrote sports stories and career

books, although they weren't called career books back then in the 1920's and '30's.

Ken believes the Nancy Drew books may receive the most scholarly attention, given the Nancy Drew conference at the University of Iowa in 1993, and purely by coincidence an ASU student defended a master's thesis based on the entire Nancy Drew series and all that has been written about it on the day of the collection's dedication. He also believes some scholarly inquiry is merited by the youth mystery books from the 1920's through the 1940's. When asked if he saw any other use for the books other than for scholarly purposes, Ken replied, "Yes—for fun."

Ken's long-time colleague and coauthor of *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, Alleen Nilsen, Professor of English at ASU, remarked, "Ken always insisted on going directly to the source himself rather than relying on someone else's opinion. This collection makes it possible for scholars of young adult literature to study the actual books and follow in Ken's footsteps."

During the dedication ceremony, Special Collections Librarian Marilyn Wurzburger highlighted some of Ken's accomplishments as provided by the Arizona English Teachers' Association who recently recognized him with its rarely awarded Distinguished Service Award. These accomplishments included "51 years of service to English education, serving as the editor of *English Journal* for eight years and contributing to the recognition of literature for adolescents as an individual genre. Mostly, however, he is just remembered by thousands of his former students as a lovable man who showed them how to become English teachers."

Inquiries about the Ken Donelson Special Collection of Juvenile Literature may be directed to:

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ALAN Members who are interested in doing research in any aspect of young adult literature (and who would like up to \$1000 to support your efforts!) are encouraged to apply for the 2003 ALAN Foundation for Research in YA Literature Awards.

Winners will be recognized at the ALAN Breakfast
November 22nd, NCTE, San Francisco

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