

## *Guidelines to Using the Benson*

The Benson is part circulating library, part rare books and manuscripts reading room. You can go upstairs into the extensive stacks and check out books just like you can at the PCL, for example, but if you want to access any of the more rare and precious materials, you have to request them through the reading room and sit with them there. The Reading Room houses not only rare books and archival collections, but also software, audio-visual materials, photographs, sheet maps, memorabilia, and ephemera. The oldest volume in the collection was published in Paris in 1491 the oldest New World imprint was published in Mexico in 1543/44.<sup>1</sup> There are a few simple guidelines to using the Benson reading room though it's much more laid back than the HRC's reading room.

The Benson reading room is at the end of the hall through the glass doors on the left of circulation desk.

Reading Room hours: M-F 9-5; Sat 1-5; Sun closed

In the regular circulating library section of the Benson, you're allowed to bring bags, drinks, and pens, just like the PCL, but once you enter the Reading Room, you have to leave your drinks and writing utensils in cubbies. You're allowed to have your bag with you. There are pencils and paper provided by the Reading Room on the tables for you to use, and you can only use these pencils and paper to take notes on the materials you see. Remember not to take out your own pen and paper.

Before you head to the Reading Room, find out what you want to request online using the regular library catalog, which includes all of the Benson's rare books:

<http://catalog.lib.utexas.edu/>

Or to search the collections of rare manuscripts, use the Texas Archival Resources Online: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/>

The rare books and manuscripts are organized by collections. These collections are usually named after the person who collected the materials, which were eventually sold or donated to the university. You might find first editions of books published in the 1800s, or the original personal correspondence between two South American

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://lib.utexas.edu/benson/rarebooks.html>

poets, for example. You can look at different collections here:

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/benson/exhibits.html>

Once you've found something you'd like to examine using these online resources, write down the catalog information and head to the Reading Room. Put your stuff in the cubbies and go to the help desk inside the Reading Room and show the librarians what you're looking for. Then you'll sit down at one of the tables and wait for the librarian to bring you the requested materials. You can sit and look as long as the Reading Room is open that day.

The librarians are great resources and very helpful once you have an idea of what you'd like to see. If at first you don't have any idea, the best thing to do is attend a class-organized tour or set up your own tour with one of the librarians there. They'll introduce you to some of the gems of the Benson. Have fun!