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BENE LEGERENEWSLETTER OF THE
LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

- [Optometry Library Major Gift](#)
- [Visit to Cuban Librarian Training School](#)
- [Summer Reading List](#)
- [The Inquisition](#)
- [Du Bois Letters](#)
- [New Faces](#)
- [Recent Gifts](#)
- [Calendar of Exhibits](#)

The Library Associates

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NEWS FROM BANCROFT LIBRARY**INQUIRING ABOUT THE INQUISITION?**

In February 1996, a collection of particular interest to the Bancroft Library was offered for sale, a remarkable cache of 61 volumes of Mexican Inquisition manuscript records covering the years 1593-1817. Scholars agreed that this collection might very well be the last group of Inquisition records to ever come onto the market.

Occurring just at the time when state appropriations to the University were at a low point, there was no way that Bancroft could stretch state funding to purchase the collection. However, recognizing that the collection was a perfect complement to existing Bancroft collections on the Inquisition, Charles Faulhaber, recently appointed James D. Hart Director of the Bancroft Library, decided to take a risk and appeal to Bancroft friends and supporters to help purchase the collection.

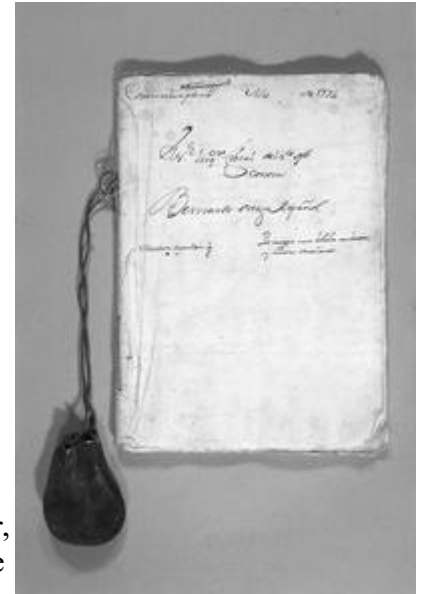
The rest, as they say, is history. With the help of the UC Public Information Office staff, word got out and soon there was extensive newspaper and TV coverage. As a result of this attention, 198 donors made gifts totalling more than \$100,000 for purchase of the collection.

After extensive conservation treatment, the Bancroft Library is now delighted to announce the availability for research of the manuscripts relating to the Mexican Inquisition.

Requests to use these materials for research began the moment the acquisition was announced four years ago. Though the documents had apparently been stored in a relatively sound environment for many years, conservation treatment was required. Handling the materials prior to conservation risked losing some of the ink from the texts, so Bancroft had to achieve a balance of conservation efforts with immediate use of the materials for scholarly inquiry.

For the most part the documents received conservation treatment to mend iron gall ink damage, after which pages were sewn into individual folders and boxed in groups. Two original leather covers were still attached to the texts, but two others, unattached, may or may not be originals. Interestingly, some of the individual pages were apparently folded by the original scribes, which created the margins for notes and allowed for better organization of the documents.

Introduced into Castilian Spain in the late 15th century, the Inquisition was especially aimed at "New Christians," primarily Jews converted to Christianity. In the Americas, the Inquisition was established primarily to protect against the Protestant "menace." Inquisitors often focused on such breaches of orthodoxy as bigamy, blasphemy, superstition, and witchcraft. By the 18th century, supporters



Trial record with evidence attached.

of the Inquisition also prosecuted many cases of solicitation of sex in the confessional.



Gillian Boal, Rear Book Conservator.

The documents in this collection, the equivalent of legal case files, contain a wealth of social information, including genealogical lists, records of property, and the most minute details of personal evidence.

Selections from the collection permit both graduate and undergraduate students to explore firsthand the Mexican colonial period. William B. Taylor, professor of history,

employs the original manuscripts in a graduate seminar on the church and religion in Spain and the Spanish Empire. Each student in a recent class examined and transcribed a case to better understand the institutional context and larger social and political history of the Mexican Inquisition. Student evaluations of the course indicate that handling the documents was one of the course highlights. Professor Taylor believes that this cohesive body of institutional records is an ideal source from which to create a teaching and research laboratory in Bancroft for students interested in colonial Latin American history.

To facilitate and encourage additional research with these unique documents, Bancroft has compiled 125 Mexican Inquisition manuscripts to create a subject/thematic finding aid in the *Online Archive of California*, accessible through the Library's Web site: www.lib.berkeley.edu. With the use of digital technology, scholars and students everywhere may now acquire extensive information on the Mexican Inquisition manuscripts.

Many thanks to those Bancroft friends who helped to make this happen.

[\[top\]](#) [\[prev\]](#) [\[next\]](#)

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