Fondren Holds World’s Largest Collection Of 18th Century Plays

By HONEY MOORE

The benevolence of two Houstonians several years ago has resulted in Fondren Library’s Axson Collection, a large group of 18th-century English plays.

Purchased in memory of Dr. Stockton Axson, first head of the collection consists of over 2000 Rice English Department, the volumes and contains essentially 50 per cent of the plays published in that century. The range of works in the collection covers the entire field of interest from 1700 to 1800.

PARTICULARLY notable is the “collection within the collection” of plays which David Garrick either wrote or had a hand in writing. Manager of Drury Lane Theater for nearly thirty years and famous tragedian and comedian, Garrick organized the Shakespeare celebrations at Stratford in 1769.

The library has a bibliography of the books on microfilm and a catalogue of dates on which plays by Garrick were performed and whether or not they have a prologue or epilogue written by him.

THE AXSON collection has great value in research since many of the plays in it are not recorded in standard reference works of drama, others are known to be unique, and, even more important to the researcher, there are many separate editions of the same play. The library intends to keep adding to the Axson collection, which may serve as a nucleus for a research library.

Dr. Axson, brother-in-law to Woodrow Wilson, was born in Rome, Georgia, June 6, 1867. He entered Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina, and later, on the urging of Wilson, transferred to Wesleyan.

In 1899, after doing postgraduate work at Johns Hopkins, he followed Wilson to Princeton and taught there for 15 years, receiving honorary doctorates from Pittsburg, Wesleyan, and Knox.

Admired by all as an intensely human educator, Dr. Axson loved people, was a good actor, and taught his students to love literature. In 1914, after winning a reputation as a Shakespeare au-

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authority, he joined the Rice faculty. At that time he was involved in the important job of helping President Wilson with problems of the war administration.

WHEN HE DIED in 1931, Dr. Axson left a large portion of his property to Willa Board, who was his housekeeper at the Rice Hotel, where he lived in Houston. She spoke to President Lovett and Dr. McKillop at Rice about purchasing something for a memorial to Dr. Axson and in her will left a large bequest for just such a purchase.

Dr. McKillop learned that a bookseller in England had for sale a large collection of 18th century plays, and Dr. Carroll Camden, who happened to be abroad at the time, examined the collection and bought it for Fonden. Miss Board's bequest was supplemented by Jesse Jones in order to effect the purchase.