

**THE JOHN CARTER
BROWN LIBRARY. A
HISTORY**

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The John Carter Brown Library. A History by George Parker Winship

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A HISTORY
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PROVIDENCE

1914

A HISTORY

THE FAMILY

THE John Carter Brown Library has a history that goes back as far as that of the University to which it now belongs and to which it has been linked for a hundred and fifty years by the family that gave its name to both. Starting as a family library, it has grown into an institution for historical research, widely known among scholars as an unequalled collection of Americana. The handful of pamphlets taken home from the country store passed from mother to son and grandson. They grew in number with the widening interests of two prosperous merchants and public-spirited men of affairs. The next generation bought rare books. John Carter Brown, turning his hobby toward the subjects that he most enjoyed reading about, became a collector of old books on America. His library came to be famous for its treasures and for the generosity with which he allowed scholars to use it. After his son's death, it passed in 1904 into the keeping of Brown University. There it is a lasting memorial to the collector and a permanent endowment for American scholarship.

The copy of "The Secretary's Guide, or, Young Mans Companion," printed by William Bradford

JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY

at New York in 1728, in which Nicholas Brown, aged eleven years, wrote his name in 1740, is the earliest of the family possessions now in the collection. The accumulation of a library cannot fairly be dated from this, however, nor from the tract on "The Importance of the British Plantations in America," in which his signature was written in 1749.

It was in July, 1769, when the contest over the location of Rhode Island College was at its height, that Nicholas Brown "bot at Dot^r. Gibbs Vendue" at Newport an author's presentation copy of Judge Samuel Sewall's "Phænomena quædam Apocalyptica Ad Aspectum Novi Orbis configurata," which was printed at Boston in 1727. At this auction sale he also secured "A brief Account of the Revenues, Pomp, and State of the Bishops, and other Clergy in the Church of England," printed at the same place two years earlier. As Nicholas Brown owned two copies of the Book of Common Prayer, it is probable that a keen but tolerant interest in matters of religious concern, rather than any feeling inspired by controversial dogmatism, led him to buy these books. They are now treasured by the Library because they belong within its especial field of collecting as well as for their sentimental value. Since 1769 there have been

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few years during which purchases were not made at book-auctions for the Brown family library, and scarcely one in which the Library records do not show that some addition was made to the collection.

One of Nicholas Brown's earliest possessions was a copy of "The English Pilot. The Fourth Book. Describing The West-India Navigation, from Hudson's-Bay to the River Amazonas," which was printed at London in 1745. This useful volume had belonged to his seafaring brother, who carried it with him on his last voyage. On the final fly leaf is found the record: "York in Virginy, Febery 15th 1750-1, Capt. James Brown Died half a Oure Past 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ at Nite." Captain James was the oldest son of James Brown of Providence, who had likewise followed the sea in his younger days. The elder Captain James Brown sailed on one of the little vessels with which a flourishing trade to the southward was managed by Nicholas Power, whose daughter Hope he married in 1722. Shortly thereafter he left the sea to enter the business of keeping a general store. Four of the sons of James and Hope Brown grew up to become the famous "Four Brothers" of eighteenth-century Providence.

As "Nicholas Brown and Company" the four brothers carried on the family business after 1762. They had diverse interests, however, and the sen-