When Catholic missionaries arrived in Mexico in the sixteenth century, libraries were among the first things they built. Before long, however, they discovered that book theft was as much of a worry in the New World as in the Old. The solution came from a surprising source—cows.

Although it is not known when or where someone first had the idea of using a branding iron to burn an ownership mark onto the edge of a book rather than the rear end of an animal, it was being done in Mexico by the mid-1500s. The resulting marca de fuego ("mark of fire") was as close to permanent as you could get. The only way to remove it would have been to trim off the book’s edge, not something an amateur could easily do, so as a security measure, branding was an improvement over inscriptions and bookplates, which took little effort to remove.

The practice survived until the early nineteenth century and was mainly used by religious orders such as the Augustinians, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits, as well as communities of nuns. Brand designs typically featured letters, monograms, symbols, and insignia, and were sometimes identical to those used for marking livestock on farms and ranches that the orders owned.

A particularly interesting branded book was recently acquired for the Rare Book Collection at Western Washington University. A 1516 copy of the Opera summa of William of Auvergne, it bears the brand of the Convento de San Francisco in Puebla (known in colonial times as Puebla de los Ángeles). The brand is in two parts, almost always found together. One is a monogram consisting of the letters “P,” “V,” “E,” “B,” “L,” and “A,” spelling out the book’s place of residence. The other is a shield. Though only the outline of the shield appears, this seems to be because the hot brand wasn’t pressed hard enough against the book. (Story continues on page 4...)

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**Marks of Fire: Branded Books**

By Michael Taylor, Special Collections Librarian

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Newsletter content contributed by Elizabeth Joffrion, Tony Kurtz, Ruth Steele and Michael Taylor. Edited by Rozlind Koester.

Contact: Heritage.Resources@wwu.edu; (360) 650-7534; [http://library.wwu.edu/hr](http://library.wwu.edu/hr).
Despite the difficulties of the extended COVID-19 shutdown, Heritage Resources has continued to offer remote teaching and research services in support of our faculty, students and the public. In these pages, we provide some highlights from our work over the past year, including an exciting online archival project we’ve initiated to document the impact of the pandemic on our campus and across the community.

Recognizing that this history will be of interest for generations to come, Heritage Resources is actively seeking submissions for our digital archive of COVID-19 documentation, entitled *Telling our Stories: Western’s Response to COVID-19*. Our goal is to record and preserve the experiences of students, faculty and staff as they have adjusted to working, teaching and learning from home, including an unprecedented shift to online classes.

We are also interested in learning how social distancing, separation from friends and family, and online learning has impacted the lives of our colleagues and patrons. Throughout the pandemic and its aftermath, we will be seeking stories, photographs, art and poetry that chronicle the experience of COVID-19 through the voices of students, faculty, staff and community members. We will also archive recordings of WWU-sponsored programming, official university memos and directives in response to COVID-19. You can find more information, as well as a form for submitting content, on the project website. We encourage you to contribute your thoughts and experiences, and ask that you share this website with your friends, students and colleagues.

We have also created a series of new online instructional videos designed to assist faculty and students conducting research with primary and digital resources, which you may view on our website. It is our hope that the availability of these tools, in tandem with the support and expertise of our staff, will ensure the continuity of teaching, learning and research support so critical to our mission. Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss the COVID documentation project or other ways that we might support your teaching or research needs.

We are eagerly anticipating a phased reopening process when we can once again welcome the campus and local community into our facilities for teaching, research, and public programming, including our Distinguished Speaker Series. We look forward to seeing you again in the coming year.

~ Elizabeth Joffrion, Director

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**OnBase Project at Western**

By Tony Kurtz, University Archivist

University Archives & Records Management (UARM) works with all university offices to ensure that WWU is in compliance with requirements governing records retention and disposition. We develop and manage the official records retention schedules for the university, and represent WWU to the Washington State Records Committee which approves all records retention schedules for state agencies.

Although the proliferation of digital records has made records management more complicated by increasing the scale and complexity of records, the university has recently invested in a new system that will help alleviate some of these issues. UARM is partnering with other key WWU departments in the implementation of OnBase, an enterprise content management system that helps manage business workflows and their associated records. UARM staff Rachel Thompson and Tony Kurtz have played lead roles in managing the OnBase Records Management module, the first of its kind at WWU.

The records management module will allow us to automate records retention and disposition processes and workflows for thousands of records, while also incorporating regular checkpoints that will allow offices to review, approve, or halt those processes as needs might dictate. (Story continues on page 3...)
This is a similar process to the one that UARM has used for decades with paper records that we store for offices in the University Records Center. Currently there are a handful of offices using OnBase, but the number is growing—and there are already over 3 million records in the system.

The journey to UARM’s participation in the OnBase project was years in the making. In 2016 we wrote a successful funding proposal thanks to leadership and support from Heritage Resources Director Elizabeth Joffrion and Dean of Libraries Mark Greenberg. The intent at the time was to establish a framework for applying records management accountability within the university’s emerging SharePoint environment and to establish a mechanism for preserving archival records created in that environment. We received one-time money for building the framework and recurring funds to support digital storage.

As it turned out the university’s SharePoint instance was not developed enough at that time to initiate what we intended. Instead, we merged our efforts with the university’s replacement process for a separate document management system, which was being phased out, in return for a commitment that the replacement would have a records management component. As a result, we are currently helping to configure the sophisticated records management module that WWU purchased as part of the OnBase system.

We are grateful for the work that our colleague Rachel Thompson put into the OnBase project and into transforming records management at WWU over the past seven years. On April 30 Rachel left us to accept a position as Records Officer at a state agency in Olympia. We wish her all the best and thank her for all of her contributions!

The Center for Pacific Northwest Studies is honored to provide stewardship for a collection of ten oral histories documenting South Asian experiences during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Described in this detailed online guide, the interviews were conducted by Dr. Dharitri Bhattacharjee (South Asian and Indian Ocean historian in WWU’s History Department) during July and August 2020.

Dr. Bhattacharjee’s interviews sought to invite and share a wide range of South Asian voices—they include rich conversations with students, essential workers, community leaders, academics and members of the business community. South Asian perspectives and history are too frequently absent from or underrepresented in the historical record and in archival collections—CPNWS is delighted to be able to provide a home for this collection, and to preserve and make the interviews available for future generations. We express thanks again to Dr. Bhattacharjee and everyone who participated in and supported the Stories To Tell series.

Conversations were originally live broadcast via Zoom through the Western C.A.R.E.S. program. Digitized copies of the unrestricted interviews are available to view in WWU’s MABEL platform, and these interviews will also be shared in the future via the South Asian American Digital Archives.
On other books from the same convent, the shield contains five marks representing the Five Holy Wounds of Christ, which St. Francis of Assisi received as stigmata in 1224.

Francisco de Toral, the first Bishop of Yucatán, inscribed the book with his name and the words “de San Francisco de los Ángeles” (i.e., at the convent of St. Francis in Puebla) probably between 1558 and 1561, when he was serving as Provincial of the Franciscan Province of the Holy Gospel. Toral is remembered today for investigating the actions of Diego de Landa, destroyer of the Mayan codices and, ironically, author of an account that played a crucial role in helping scholars decipher the Mayan writing system in the twentieth century. Toral also commissioned the work of another Franciscan friar, Bernardino de Sahagún, who spent more than two decades researching and compiling the Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España, the most extensive early account of the Aztecs.

Why are marcas de fuego important? One reason is that they allow scholars to reconstruct the libraries of colonial Mexico and understand what books may have shaped the thinking of men like Toral, Landa, and Sahagún. In that sense, such books were active players in the transformation of North America during the period of colonial rule, not mere witnesses to history. Following independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico’s liberal government viewed the Church, and wealthy religious orders in particular, as a remnant of colonial oppression. To break with the past, many orders were dissolved and their property confiscated. Some books were transferred to other libraries, but most were dispersed. Today, they can be found in collections around the world—including, for the first time, Western Libraries.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank our volunteers and student employees for all they do in support of Heritage Resources. We would also like to thank the many individuals, families, and organizations who have made generous monetary gifts and contributions of collection materials.