

Juneteenth at Special Collections and University Archives

As an archivist, I often suggest that a highlight of any visit to Special Collections is the opportunity to experience the power of primary source materials. This is especially true, perhaps, when the materials are associated with the enslaved African-American people of 18th and early to mid-19th century America. To hold in one's hand a common kind of document of its day, but now a 200-plus year-old document that represents the sale of a 12 year-old named Elijah to a White man named Dickson of Greenbrier County, may bring that history a little closer. On June 23rd, in recognition of Juneteenth and at the invitation of VTTI, Special Collections presented that Bill of Sale, along with other documents—inventories of property, tax assessments, other bills of sale, a runaway notice—that record the details of a system whereby one group of people were owned, bought, and sold by another. We also had on display a remarkable 1913 diary by Jeffrey Wilson of Portsmouth, Virginia. Wilson, born into slavery in 1843, not only records the day-to-day events of 1913 in Jim Crow Virginia, but recalls earlier experiences on similar days, reminiscences of the first time he was hired out to a new master, his time as a body servant to a Confederate officer, and, later, his time in the U.S. Navy, for example.

In addition to these manuscript materials, we presented volumes from our rare book collection, including an 1839 edition of *Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, edited by Theodore Weld, his wife Angelina Grimké, and her sister Sarah Grimké; and an 1861 first edition of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, one of only about a hundred copies in libraries around the world. Other titles included a first edition of *12 Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup, along with an interesting later edition; early editions of all three of Frederick Douglass's autobiographies; and an 1852 early two-volume edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, among others.

If you missed this event, be sure to look for it next year . . . or just come visit Special Collections and University Archives. We're open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm.

Thanks.

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