

[Mount Angel Abbey Library](#) added 9 new photos from April 9, 2013 to the album: [Fr. Athanasius Buchholz and His Books](#).

April 9, 2013 ·

“In these days of Lent, let them each receive a book from the library, which they shall read through consecutively.” Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 48. From the beginning, the relationship between Benedictines and their books and libraries has been profound. At Mount Angel Abbey, one monk has taken that relationship to an even higher level. Fr. Athanasius Buchholz has devoted much of his life to books, and the Abbey Library has been the lucky recipient of the fruits of his work. Born in 1928, the Mount Angel area has been Fr. Athanasius’s home his whole life. He made his solemn vows in 1949, and was ordained in 1954 after studying in Rome. He had loved books since learning to read, but it was while studying theology that his sense of scholarship and interest in rare books truly began. He and a fellow monk crossed the Atlantic on the RMS Queen Mary, travelling second class, to study for their graduate degrees in Rome. They befriended an African-American woman who, because it was the early 1950s, had not been allowed to use the first-class ticket her children had bought her. They became table companions in the second-class dining room. She “was very sophisticated, well-travelled, well-educated, very cultured”, and introduced Fr. Athanasius to the world of art and culture that has been such an important part of his life ever since. He began collecting rare books soon after his return from Rome. Fr. Athanasius’s first purchase was for two books that he was quickly able to sell for \$200 more than he had paid for them, enabling him to buy a valuable copy of the first English translation of the Vulgate New Testament, published in 1582. This was the beginning of a collection of hundreds of high-quality books that have been making their way into the library for years. Many, of course, are of a religious nature, but Fr. Athanasius is a man of varied interests and his books reflect that. The many lovely books devoted to plants are a reminder that he was once president of the American Daffodil Society. His hundreds of book about birds are not only extremely beautiful, they are of the rare and valuable type that have often evoked strong feelings of envy in the birders that have seen them. In later life, he has developed a strong interest in Asian, especially Japanese, art, and has the books and objets d’art to demonstrate his knowledge. Fr. Athanasius has always been known as a man of strong opinions and somewhat independent ways, traits that have carried through into his book collecting. In the 1980s he was an assistant pastor at a parish in Portland. He was well known at Powell’s Books, and as he had “a bit of spare time”, he took a part-time position as a used book buyer. This job enabled him to grow both his knowledge and his collection of books, but, unsurprisingly, the parish priest he was also working for was not too thrilled about his “moonlighting” when it was found out, and his employment was quickly terminated. Fr. Athanasius’s strong attachment to the Latin Mass was the cause of another part of his life being somewhat unorthodox – or perhaps, very orthodox, depending on how you look at it! He made sure it was possible for Catholics to hear Mass said in the traditional way during times when that was difficult for them to find. Though he might be said to have done things “his way”, through it all Fr. Athanasius has remained a faithful son of the Church while serving the monastery, the seminary, and especially, the library. The books he has given the library are an example of how he has lived his life in the true Benedictine spirit.

