

THE 1825 JOHN VAUGHN KEAN CATALOG & JEFFERSON'S
LAST BOOKLIST: THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA'S
FIRST BOOKS ARRIVE IN CHARLOTTESVILLE

As Gilmer's order of books began to arrive in crates from London and Europe, a catalog was required to make the new library useful to students and faculty in the fledgling university.⁴⁸ This first catalog, extant in the Albert & Shirley Small Special Collections Library at UVA, is what is known as a holdings catalog, in that it describes a collection of books on shelves, in contrast to the aspirational list Jefferson was then at work compiling. It is a small manuscript booklet prepared by the university's first librarian, a recently enrolled undergraduate named John Vaughn Kean.⁴⁹ Inscribed on the catalog's improvised title page is "May 16th 1825," presumably the day on which Kean finished the catalog.⁵⁰

Kean's catalog is the product of a meticulous amateur. It is crudely bound with multiple gatherings chain-stitched together and covered in gray pulp paper. On the recto of its first leaf, Kean inscribed a provisional title—"A catalog of the Library of the University of Va."—and below this, added his name three times in a flourishing script. Despite the homespun quality of Kean's catalog, its front-matter demonstrates a working familiarity with Jefferson's bibliographical habits and system of library organization. For example, after providing an itemized account of the library's holdings by format ("168 folios, 388 4tos, 1609 8vos ...") Kean drew a table of classifications comprising 42 subject chapters (fig. 9). The graphical layout of this table is identical to the one that appears on the rediscovered leaf of Jefferson's 1824 catalog (noted above; also see fig. 8), indicating that Kean had Jefferson's catalog on hand while preparing his own. This is supported by Jefferson's brief correspondence with Kean. In a letter sent to Jefferson on 22 April 1825, Kean remarked that he was returning a catalog to Jefferson: "I have sent the catalogue, which you have been so kind as to make for me." There is little doubt that Kean is here referring to the lost 1824 catalog, or a copy of it.

48. These first books are described in Rotunda Library Online (RLO), <http://www.rotundalibrary.online>, a bibliographical database and short title catalog that lists every book shelved in the University of Virginia's first library. Filter results by "Provenance: John Bohn (London)." The absence of a catalog for these first books was a serious concern. Writing to the University's first librarian, John Vaughn Kean, Jefferson explained that a library "in confusion loses much of it's utility" ("Thomas Jefferson to John V. Kean, 16 May 1825," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5229>). In an earlier letter charging Kean with his duties as the university's librarian, Jefferson noted that Kean would be expected to "keep the books ... in their stated arrangement on the shelves according to the method and order of their Catalogue" ("Thomas Jefferson to John V. Kean, 30 March 1825," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5092>).

49. John Vaughn Kean was the son of Dr. Andrew Kean, who served at various points as Jefferson's personal physician. The younger Kean was appointed to the post of Librarian by Jefferson on 30 March, 1825 ("Thomas Jefferson to John V. Kean, 30 March 1825," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5092>).

50. The Rotunda would not open for another 19 months, in October 1826. The first books to arrive at the University of Virginia were shelved in Pavilion Seven, a structure embedded in the western arm or "dependency" of the University's Jeffersonian lawn.