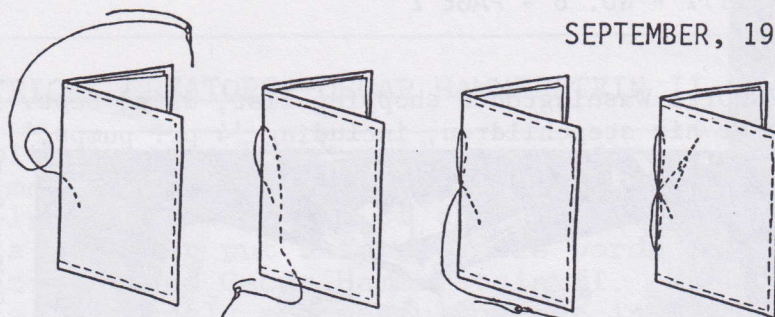




THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY. Peter Harben sent a very interesting article on this fascinating facility and its collections (*THE NEW YORK TIMES*, Sunday November 25, 1990). Here are some excerpts:

"Huntington was not educated beyond public schooling and it is not clear how he came to be such a serious bibliophile. Nonetheless, he spent over \$1 million on rare books in 1911, and entered the big leagues.

"One of Huntington's purchases that year was a Gutenberg Bible for which he paid \$50,000, a record at the time. According to a biography, when a friend chided him for needing such an expensive dose of the Holy Writ, Huntington replied that he found out only afterward that he could have bought a copy for 10 cents. The Bible on permanent display in the Library Exhibition Hall is one of 48 copies produced by Johann Gutenberg in about 1455. The type is set so evenly that from a distance the Latin looks like a hound's tooth check.

This is in contrast to the handwritten edition of 'The Canterbury Tales,' known as the Ellesmere Chaucer, also on permanent display. Completed in about 1410, 10 years after Chaucer's death, the book hardly shows its age. The vellum pages are not as yellow as last winter's newspapers, and the chestnut brown handwriting leaps out across the centuries, fresher than type can be. The manuscript is decorated in the margins; one page, for example, displayed a letter W encased in gold, giving forth to ebullient vines in russet and Wedgewood blue.

"Exhibition Hall at the Huntington is a paneled room dotted with glass cases. A mezzanine level is lined with bookcases containing more than 10,000 of the library's rare books. The remainder, about 600,000 books, are stored out of sight along with over two million manuscript items. Some of the strong points still reflect the interests of Henry Huntington or his collecting coups: 15th- to 18th-century English printing, Western and local California history, the evolution of book manufacture, early travel and exploration, ballooning, railroads, the history of photography, and English family life. Access to this material is reserved for scholars, about 1500 of whom come to the library each year to pursue their research.

"A Shakespeare first folio is a featured exhibit, as is a copy of Audubon's 'Birds of America' (1827-1838). Audubon's book is what is called a double-elephant folio, each page measuring 30 by 40 inches (0.76 by 1.02 m).

One piece of material related to American presidents is charmingly trivial: