

LEW D. FELDMAN, 70, BOOK DEALER, DEAD

Was Imaginative and Tenacious in Acquiring Rare Works—Founded House of Dieff

Lew D. Feldman, a rare-book dealer for nearly 40 years and head of the House of El Dieff, which he founded, died on Saturday at Doctors Hospital. He was 70 years old and lived at 139 East 63d Street.

Mr. Feldman was an imaginative and tenacious dealer who was willing to back his judgments with great amounts of cash and in the course of his career bought the Chaucer "Canterbury Tales" from the Chatsworth collection for \$216,000. It dates from 1455. He bought Robert Herrick's "Poetical Commonplace Book" for \$95,200. He also paid what was then a record price for a manuscript when he bid and won for \$252,000 half of the manuscript of Caxton's translation of the "Metamorphoses" of Ovid. The other half of the work was at Magdalene College, Cambridge. A hue and cry followed that purchase, however. The feeling was that the two parts belonged together and in England. Through the generosity of Eugene B. Power, an Ann Arbor, Mich., businessman, the missing part of the manuscript was presented to the college. Mr. Feldman turned it over for what he paid for it.

Bought 20th-Century Work

His interest was not limited to antiquarian material. He was equally resolute in acquiring 20th-century literary items. In fact, he was probably the only man who bid on 56 successive items at Sotheby's London while dressed in pajamas, a robe and a raincoat. He had gotten up late and was so fearful that he would miss out on the bidding that he simply put on a raincoat and headed for the auction rooms.

Included in the contemporary material Mr. Feldman acquired was the draft autographed manuscript of E. M. Forster's "A Passage to India" and a host of Somerset Maugham books and autograph items. He paid \$16,800 for 65 letters sent by Ernest Hemingway to Adriana Ivanich, a close friend from Venice.

One person close to the field said that there was hardly a 20th-century manuscript that did not at one time or another pass through Mr. Feldman's hands. He was there to bid at every auction, that person added. As a result, he was largely instrumental in building the unsurpassed collection at the University of Texas. He also helped enlarge the contents at the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library and the libraries of many private collectors.

Mr. Feldman was born in Hoboken, N.J., on Oct. 3, 1906, and graduated from Boy's High School in Brooklyn. That ended his formal schooling. He served in the Marine Corps in 1927 and 1928 and then became a plant superintendent for various plastics manufacturers. He began collecting books as a young man, but started to think seriously about it when he bought a barrel of books from a Fourth Avenue dealer and sold one for more money than he paid for the lot. In 1937 he started the House of El Dieff, made up from his initials, L. D. F. For many year the business was in Jamaica, Queens, before it moved to 139 East 63d Street.

He is survived by two sons, Arnold and Joel. His wife, Sally, whom he married in 1927, died in 1972.