TUCKED INTO A CORNER of the first floor of the University of Pittsburgh’s Hillman Library is one of its great treasures: Not a dusty copy of Chaucer or an old map of Penn’s Woods, but Eduardo Lozano, the man who built Hillman’s world-famous Latin American library collection from scratch, including the university’s renowned Cuban and Bolivian collections.


In 1967, Lozano was the director of two libraries in San Juan, Argentina. One day, he received an international phone call from Cole Blasier, political science professor and founding director Pitt’s Center for Latin American Studies. Lozano had never heard of the University of Pittsburgh; in fact, only three years prior, Pitt had no Latin American program — no courses, no research, and certainly no library collection.

Lozano said he’d come for one year. “After a year,” Lozano recalls, “[Blasier] insisted he wanted it to continue, and he insisted he wanted me.

“Cole had a Siamese cat. I said, ‘If you’ll give me one of the cats of your Siamese cat, I’ll stay.’ I received Murphy, my Siamese cat.”

In the beginning, the budget was small: The collection was being built from the ground up, and hackers had no idea if it would catch on. But as Lozano describes his methods, it’s clear that — like a shoestring-budget backpacker venturing off the beaten path — the do-it-yourself method has yielded unique results.

“I prefer to select book by book,” Lozano says. “Most libraries do it via ‘approval plans,’” in which a third-party dealer sends the library packages of books on a schedule.

“It also seemed necessary to travel to Latin America and establish connections with publishers and dealers,” he explains. These personal connections — with more than 200 institutions, he says — helped Lozano keep abreast of the publishing landscape. Moreover, he adds, “[G]oing there, you got [books] at local prices, not export prices.” The personal connections allowed Lozano to look beyond commercial publishers’ catalogs to include things such as government documents, statistical reports, white papers and political pamphlets — all hard to come by in the U.S., and thus valuable to researchers.

Probably the most impressive of Lozano’s methods has been developing these connections into mutually fruitful exchange programs. Because of the U.S. embargo against doing business in Cuba, an exchange program was the perfect arrangement — “a sort of library diplomacy,” Lozano says. “It’s invisible. There are no invoices, none of those administrative things.” (This is completely legal, Lozano emphasizes: Hillman has official permission for the exchanges from the U.S. State Department.) Less glamorously — but more easily — Lozano also obtains Cuban volumes in other Latin countries.

Political circumstances can be dicey elsewhere, too. Once in Bolivia — under the Meza dictatorship — Lozano had to make a clandestine rendezvous to pick up a collection of 1,000 political pamphlets, 200 miles from La Paz.

Volumes from Pitt’s specialties, Cuba and Bolivia, as well as all the other Latin countries, make their home snugly at Hillman, as does Lozano himself. (Those seeking more information on the collection can visit www.library.pitt.edu/libraries/latam/latam.html or call 412-648-7735.) He isn’t lonely: “I’ve been in libraries 50 years. It’s my house. My house [at home] is full of books, the library is full of books … and a library has no country.”

After nearly four decades building Pitt’s Latin American collection, Lozano says he never thinks of leaving or even retiring. “I never saw this as a career, with steps to go to Harvard. I came to build up a collection.

“I’m going to die someday, because probably everybody is. I worry about that — the collection is not finished! Probably someone is going to write something new.”