



Introduction

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TO DEVOTE AN ISSUE of *Library Trends* to rare book libraries and collections is clear recognition of two facts: that they are administered differently from other libraries, and that there is no extensive literature on the subject. Not alone is the American public in labeling rare book libraries as esoteric places difficult to understand. Younger librarians, trained under today's banner extolling service, sometimes are affronted by locked book cases and regard "non-circulating library" as almost a contradiction in terms, akin to "bladeless knife." Even some scholars think it pointless extravagance to buy an expensive first edition of a title that has been reprinted or can be photostated. Inevitably, the rare book library has acquired a reputation for arrogance or preciousness.

Yet these same people understand and approve of the concept of a limited hunting season and a limit on the number and size of fish that may be caught. These rules apply to the conservation of natural resources. The application of conservation measures to books (which incidentally do not reproduce themselves) for the sake of preserving them through innumerable seasons for successive generations of "hunters" to use and enjoy is not so readily comprehended. Rare book libraries do have regulations that may appear strange. Certainly they reflect attitudes no longer in vogue. Yet they cannot be dismissed as antiquarian hangovers; the distinctive operating practices have developed logically from the nature of the material in custody. The unusual characteristics of that material may be summarized briefly as follows:

It is expensive. The average cost of each book added to a public library is about four dollars; to a university library, about six dollars. The price paid per acquisition at the William L. Clements Library last year averaged \$92; at the John Carter Brown Library, \$97. These

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figures are unexceptionable and probably are exceeded by a few other institutions.

It is so scarce as to be difficult or impossible of replacement. Two copies of a book are not bought in the first acquiring of a title, and reordering in case of loss is useless. Manuscript items are, of course, unique.

More than the text is important. Rare books may be prized for their pictures or maps, for their binding or association, for their printer or place of publication, for their scarcity or other factors. Priority puts a premium on first editions. In such libraries it does make a difference in what form a text reaches their shelves.

Compared to modern publishing output and the size of city libraries, material eligible for inclusion in a rare book library is small in quantity. Usually it has been sifted by generations of scholars and collectors. A rare book library, therefore, is almost never a big library.

Such characteristics as have just been mentioned stimulate certain attitudes toward rare books. Translated into policies they include the following:

Physical protection is emphasized. The attitude of the curator more nearly resembles that of a conservationist than of a public librarian. Measures taken include locked cases and file drawers, humidified circulating air, absence of direct sunlight, cleanliness, oiling of leather bindings and boxing of books in paper or board covers, careful checking in and out of books used, and sometimes special insurance.

Use is restricted. Circulation outside the building is almost never permitted, and reading rooms are supervised. Cautions are given about handling rarities. Readers have to identify themselves and sometimes prove their competence by depositing that they have exhausted the secondary materials on their subject. Since most of the patrons are doing research, a very high percentage of them are scholars, as distinguished from the lay public and children.

Acquisitions are given prime attention and usually are the direct concern of the administrative head. Dealer catalogs are studied intently. Books are bought individually, not in lots, and exchanges with other libraries are not practiced.

Classification is simplified where the library is small or devoted to a single field, and spine labels are generally avoided. A chronological arrangement is favored for rare Americana, for instance. Further unorthodox classification is readily made if reasons appear for it.

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Cataloging is frequently detailed, so as to permit identification of the particular copy owned. References to bibliographies ordinarily are made, as well as added entries for printer, place of publication, date, bookplates, binding, autographs, etc.

The dearth of rare book library literature is indicated by the surveys several contributors felt obliged to make for their articles. Moreover, close reading of the essays will reveal that the authors do not always agree with one another in their attitudes about rare books. In part the differences arise because there is no great body of written matter which might tend to standardize their views; in part, because of the genuine and recognized differences among rare book collections. This issue of *Library Trends* may well become a solid reference work in this uneven field.

The articles assembled here do not, of course, cover all aspects of the subject. Rather they touch on certain highlights and perplexing problems in this area of librarianship. Acquisition has been discussed in an earlier issue of this journal; the special cataloging problems of rare books should be explained in conjunction with the subject of cataloging generally; the relation of rare book libraries to private collectors is a hackneyed theme. The topics which are discussed sometimes are broad, sometimes are particularized.

L. C. Wroth, the "dean" of rare book librarians, succinctly points up the distinctive character of rare books and indicates how closely the librarian pores over his wares—and by implication how fond he must be of books. T. R. Adams analyzes the impact of the rare book philosophy on the library world. Certain administrative aspects are discussed in C. K. Byrd's treatment of rare book collections in university libraries, in Ellen Shaffer's account of such collections in public libraries, in L. B. Wright's hard-hitting essay on the temptations and obligations of acquisition, and in Georgia C. Haugh's survey of the treatment of readers. F. R. Goff emphasizes the continuing usefulness of rare books in modern research activity.

Collecting trends and costs have often determined the nature and completeness of rare book collections. A dealer, R. A. L. Tree, casts a backward glance at special fields and supplies some figures and opinions that give pause for thought on what lies ahead. One solution to the cost problem has been the formation of "friends" groups to help in making purchases; as secretary of the largest organization, R. O. Schad tells of its success and benefactions. Finally, we are given a hard measure for distinguishing uncommon, scarce, and rare books

by a venerable dealer and student of price fluctuations, Wright Howes. To all of these distinguished contributors the editors are indebted.

Rare book librarians tend to associate with scholarly organizations made up of actual and potential readers. They are not trying to maintain aloofness from the library profession, even though the programs at professional meetings have to be devoted to problems and themes which do not concern them. Nor do they wish to be regarded condescendingly as "queer" or consciously different in this era of pronounced emphasis on library service and public relations. Custody of expensive and often irreplaceable material, however, does cause them to maintain certain attitudes and policies which the public libraries have left behind in their astonishing advance and multiple services. In this sense, rare book librarians tend to be old-fashioned, orthodox, and out of step. They retain old concepts about books and their use that seem to be passing out of style. It should be a matter of pride to all librarians that the profession continue to be a large enough mansion to afford room for variations of philosophy, and that uniformity of attitudes is not wholesome or desirable to cultivate.

A note of appreciation is due to the many librarians who patiently answered letters and questionnaires thus providing the essential information upon which much of the following discussion is based. The libraries of the following universities participated: Brown, California, California at Los Angeles, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Johns Hopkins, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio State, Princeton, Texas, Virginia, and Yale; data were also secured from the Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Enoch Pratt, New York, and Philadelphia public libraries; the Library of Congress, and the National Library of Medicine.

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