

Introduction

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THE LAST DECADE OF THE nineteenth century and the first decade of this century witnessed some activity in the collecting of historical children's books, but that flurry did not extend much beyond New England generally, and the Connecticut Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society specifically.¹ A resurgence of interest in collecting occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1938 six articles appeared in *Library Journal* under the title "Collections of Rare Children's Books: A Symposium." The series had been prepared under the auspices of the Publicity Committee of the American Library Association (ALA) Section for Library Work with Children. Each writer described a specific collection. The authors and the collections they discussed deserve recognition in the introduction to this issue of *Library Trends*: Valta Parma wrote about the Library of Congress; David Davies, illustrators of the last half of the nineteenth century represented in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery; Wilbur Macey Stone, his private collection; Elva S. Smith, the collection of the Carnegie Library School of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh; Mary H. Kidder, the Hewins collection in the State Historical Society Library (Hartford, Conn.); and Anne Carroll Moore, the New York Public Library.²

Ten authors contributed to the special topic of the October 1975 issue of *Wilson Library Bulletin*, "Children's Literature Collections and Research Libraries." Five of the articles relate to the collecting of historical children's books in the United States. James Fraser, guest editor, stated that the special issue "grew out of a discussion of the varying de-

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grees to which research libraries are responding to the growing scholarly interest in child culture and children's literature."³ Moulton described some of the holdings of the Essex Institute in Salem, Mass.⁴ Smith discussed the collections and acquisitions of UCLA.⁵ Gottlieb commented upon historical children's books of the Pierpont Morgan Library.⁶ Henne cited the interest and activity in study and research about children's literature as reason for the need to plan systematically for the acquisition and use of resources. Since no library will ever be able to develop a comprehensive, definitive collection, there is a need to review the scope and condition of existing collections in order to develop plans and agreements that will eliminate unnecessary duplication and assure acquisition of pertinent resources. Henne suggested that planning on a regional level need not wait for a national plan to evolve. She closed her article with principles essential for research libraries to follow in developing collections of children's literature.⁷

The literature on research collections contains, in addition to the sources mentioned above, scattered accounts describing specific collections and one other source, *Subject Collections in Children's Literature* edited by Carolyn W. Field,⁸ a subject index to collections which was planned by the Committee on National Planning of Special Collections, Children's Services Division of ALA.⁹ The committee continues to take an interest in identifying and describing research collections of children's materials. Regional lists have been prepared by members of the committee and a revision of Field's book is under consideration.

With this kind of meager publication record, it hardly seems premature to devote an issue of *Library Trends* to the study and collecting of historical children's books in the United States. The intent of this issue is to describe the state of the art and to suggest proposals for the future. The issue emphasizes American children's books published before 1920. (Textbooks and school books are not covered.) The traffic across the Atlantic from colonial times to the present prohibits, however, any clear distinctions between American and English book collecting patterns.

What, then, has been studied? What have the collections and the tools helped to produce? The dissertations of many disciplines, if not interdisciplinary study, that have stimulated the study of historical children's books in the United States, are discussed and assessed by some contributors. The final paper includes a description of academic courses, conferences and exhibits, all of which serve to encourage scholarship in historical children's books.

Each of the authors, at one time or another, expressed to the editor

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concern about the difficulties of researching his or her particular topic. Since the subjects covered in this issue have not been treated exhaustively elsewhere, many authors had to lay the foundation with the hope that others will eventually produce works to round out their findings. Thus, this issue is meant to provide a framework to be filled in as others share knowledge of their collections, publications and studies. If during the next ten years some of the questions raised by this publication are dealt with, and if other collections are described and studies reported, this issue will be sorely in need of updating. It might even be possible, then, to document some trends.

In the opening section of this issue, collections are described according to the type of institution in which they are located. Because most institutions have been indebted to the collecting activities of individuals, Coughlan describes the collections of eleven persons who have attained eminence in one way or another among collectors of historical children's books. Coughlan's article appropriately precedes those about research collections in public and academic libraries, to which many of the individual collections have been donated. Two institutions, the Pierpont Morgan Library and the American Antiquarian Society, have been the recipients of notable collections and stand out as giants among numerous other private and society libraries which have, as Canfield points out in her article, given little thought to collecting children's books.

Individual collections have been (or will be) given to institutions that either have already become known for their research collections of children's books or have shown evidence of stability and growth as collecting agencies in other areas. Thus, the donors seem reassured that even though libraries can never give the love that only collectors can bestow, their collections will be cared for and possibly augmented and used. Of the collections Coughlan mentions, at least four have ties with the Free Library of Philadelphia. Two collections have been given to state universities in Florida, the donors of each serving also as curators.

Other articles treat public libraries, college and university libraries, historical societies, private libraries and museums. The writers in this section attempt to provide an overview of research collections of historical children's books in various types of libraries by discussing how the collections were started, how they are organized and maintained, and how the holdings are made known. The special collecting interests of certain libraries are mentioned. Patterns and trends are noted, albeit tenuously.

The viewpoints of persons responsible for collecting historical children's books in public libraries are reported in Maxwell's article. A varie-

gated pattern emerges with regard to provisions for the development, housing and bibliographic control of the collections. While the three public libraries (Philadelphia, New York and Boston) that began early to develop historical collections of children's books have identified their collecting intents, many other libraries have given little planning or direction to the development of their collections. In some libraries the collections just grew; in others, books have been retired to historical collections, probably saved from destruction by some librarian's penchant to preserve.

The specific department to which historical children's books are assigned is probably not so critical as recognition of the many interests served by historical children's books, and the planning of means to alert users to their locations. An obvious way to document the collections is through cataloging that will inform scholars and other interested persons of the contents of collections. Many public libraries have adequately described their collections and a few have published catalogs that inform outside users of the holdings. Eventually, computerized catalogs should enable more people to ascertain the holdings of specific public libraries. Meanwhile, in some public libraries the cataloging (or lack of it) of these materials precludes determining the nature of the holdings, a situation that worsens when those who work with the collections leave no permanent records.

Maxwell's findings suggest that the prevailing conditions, which are a result of the low priority and meager funding given to developing and documenting collections, are aggravated by the lack of personnel. If it is true that great collections flourish because of the dedication and persistence of inspired individuals, what can be hoped for when historical children's books constitute only one responsibility of an overburdened staff?

The emphasis of public libraries upon fulfilling users' information needs, especially those of current interest, might further curtail the acquisition and cataloging of materials not of general and popular interest. Already the guardians of some collections have been called upon to defend the collection's existence. Withering collections are likely to expire; good collections might stagnate. Some public libraries have, however, accepted a commitment to make historical children's books available to a public not adequately served by the limited access and scope of research libraries. Public libraries can and do make known, both here and abroad, the unusual holdings of their collections through exhibits, publications and brochures. These efforts help to identify strengths of collections and in turn draw users to these resources.

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In her article about academic libraries, Hodges notes that researchers have come from many fields in order to utilize the historical children's book collections in college and university libraries. The special collecting interests of certain academic libraries have attracted scholars and rewarded them with the resources essential to their publication and research projects.

Vigorous programs of collecting and cataloging historical children's books, absent in many public libraries, are no more evident in academic libraries. Gifts have provided some impetus to collection development, but expenditures to strengthen holdings or provide bibliographic control have fallen victim to other priorities. Hodges does suggest, however, that some fortifying of collections might come from within academic libraries; shelves of general or circulating collections could be combed for titles appropriate for a special collection of historical children's books. The diverse emphases of special collections in academic libraries reported in Hodges's paper, as well as the range in value and wealth of the holdings, suggest the breadth that might some day be encompassed by these libraries. Until then, certain universities will continue to be the citadels which attract scholars through the strength of their collections.

Canfield reminds the reader of the well-known and substantial collections of two private libraries and an antiquarian society. She mentions a few other familiar institutions, as well as some museum collections which are perhaps not so familiar to researchers. Further investigation of collections in county historical societies, art museums, recreated villages, presidential homes, religious libraries, and business galleries — all cited as examples in the article — might well uncover titles that have hitherto eluded scholars.

In contrast to discussions of collections within types of libraries, Huthwaite's article is devoted to the Library of Congress (LC). The copyright law of 1870 brought children's books to LC, but the matter of cataloging them was not easily resolved. In the late 1930s, efforts were made to organize LC's holdings and to seek titles that had previously been published; gifts from many individuals enhanced these efforts. Considering the size and various locations of the collections, and the complexities of LC, the establishment of the Children's Book Section in the early 1960s was welcomed. Its publication program has added immeasurably to the bibliography of historical children's books and has also produced other information about children's books. No other libraries discussed in this issue assume the role of leadership and service to the nation which has been undertaken by the section.

Haviland succinctly summarizes the material presented in the first five articles and provides an overview of historical children's book collecting. Factors to be considered in planning for researchers of today and tomorrow are acquisition, housing, bibliographic control, and publicity. The article closes the section with suggestions to increase accessibility and strengthen the usefulness of collections of historical children's books.

The economics of purchasing cannot help but be a crucial factor in determining the directions that collecting by individuals and institutions will take. Reissman describes the emerging interest in the collecting of historical children's books and discusses the prices that certain cravings have stimulated. Many children's works are priced remarkably low, however, and could yet be gathered rather inexpensively for historical collections which aim to accommodate researchers of social history. Many of the children's books published in the early 1800s can still be bought at modest prices. Libraries could thus build collections representative of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century without huge outlays of money. Unfortunately, at this time of favorable prices, many libraries have had to reduce or eliminate funds for purchasing in this area.

Reissman hints several times of the knowledge, taste and judgment, as well as the time and energy, necessary to create important and imaginative collections. This is perhaps another reason why collecting children's books is the province of individuals rather than institutions. Staffs with the essential expertise and requisite time do not exist. Many individual collectors eventually seek institutions to house their collections. Private collectors tend to have individual tastes, and few attempt the comprehensiveness expected of large institutions. Some private collections fit appropriately into the collection programs of institutions; others, which have been given to or bought by libraries, must be shelved alone, with no complementary material.

Reissman offers his views concerning the reliability and interpretation of published auction sale prices (and relates some curious incidents involving books bought at auctions and from bookdealers). He outlines many factors of the recent major auctions of children's books and speaks of the need for more reference books to aid collectors in the field of children's literature.

Those studying historical children's books of the United States need sources to guide them. Whalley provides a British perspective on the quality and usefulness of secondary sources for the study of historical children's books of the United States, noting some of the possible ways to locate books in a field lacking both substantial bibliographies and numerous

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reference books. The substantial contributions of A.S.W. Rosenbach and d'Alté Welch are acknowledged here and in many articles of this issue. The unusual sources from which information can be gleaned are discussed. While this exploration might be intriguing to some, others, for whom these destinations are but the beginning points of their studies, may find the journey bewildering. The usefulness of Darton's *Children's Books in England*¹⁰ to an American audience is discussed by Whalley, but she cites the need for a comprehensive history of American children's books which would consider them in relation to socioeconomic conditions. Other needed publications are works focusing on individual periods, special subjects, and individual artists and writers, as well as catalogs of special collections and sources indicating their locations.

Robertson and Stahlschmidt discuss hard copy and microform facsimiles of American children's books. Produced for both scholarly and popular markets, facsimiles are useful tools for researchers and students of the history of children's literature who have no easy access to original editions; they also provide insurance, in that early editions soon deteriorate with heavy use. At present, reprinting and facsimile production is a scattered industry with few standards regarding quality of reproduction, selection of titles, or inclusion of critical and bibliographical material. This circumstance, coupled with the problems resulting from the absence of any single source for recording or reviewing the production of these facsimiles, creates many difficulties with regard to control and access. Robertson and Stahlschmidt propose some measures to help alleviate this situation.

Finwick reviews research about historical children's books undertaken in various disciplines during the past thirty years. She describes both the manual and computer research approaches to finding citations on the subject, and comments on the usefulness of several access tools as well as the difficulties encountered in the searches. Thirty-five doctoral dissertations and a few other studies are grouped into eight categories: (1) historical development, (2) themes in social history, (3) juvenile periodicals, (4) genres, (5) individual authors and their works, (6) literary criticism, (7) history of publishing, and (8) illustration. While constructed for purposes of analysis, this grouping suggests the need for further studies, as few dissertations fall within any one category.

MacLeod discusses academic courses, conferences and exhibits—activities that both reflect and foster scholarly interest in historical children's books. The report of her survey of accredited library school courses on the history of children's literature describes the backgrounds of the instructors and the courses' contents. Conferences that have included some

aspect of historical children's books, as well as one symposium dedicated to the topic, are discussed and an annotated list of historical children's book exhibits is included. MacLeod concludes her article with a call for genuine scholarship in this emerging field and a comprehensive and reliable system for reporting activities.

Historical children's books are useful to researchers in literature, social history and art, as well as in the history of printing and publishing. The last few years have witnessed a developing interest in the study of these books. If this interest spreads from Alcott and Alger to the rest of the alphabet, will libraries with research collections be ready to respond? Have collections of historical children's books been cataloged so that they are accessible to researchers? Is bibliographic information about historical children's books included in printed and computerized catalogs? Have the collections been organized to reflect the needs of scholars?

The lack of widespread use has been proposed as a reason for not improving such collections although research activity is tolerated in collections much more expensive to establish and maintain than historical children's book collections. The use to which the well-known collections of children's books in the United States are now put will surely help to determine whether there would be more activity if such collections were better developed and organized.

A primary need now is to find out what is available in libraries that have not cataloged or publicized their collections. An assessment of existing collections must precede a national plan for collecting historical children's books of the United States. Institutions should specify their collection policies and develop a focus for each collection from an analysis of its strengths and limitations. The national jigsaw puzzle should then be viewed to identify the missing pieces, and efforts made to interest libraries and other institutions in gathering such collections for themselves.

Both large and small libraries need to cooperate in the development of historical children's collections. This was made apparent by a recent personal experience. An interlibrary loan request for an Altshefer title could not be filled because the book was not in the university collection. The following week I visited a small town and decided to find out whether or not the public library (to which the state interlibrary loan network does not provide bibliographic access) had the title. Not only that title, but several Altshefer books were in the library basement among other unused books. A last-copy center for such books would not only make them accessible to scholars, but would also enable small libraries to make room for titles in greater demand.

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A national plan for collecting might be enhanced by the development of regional centers responsible for encouraging libraries and institutions to report their holdings. Such a regional center need not limit its interests to historical children's books but could also help identify research collections of current children's books, including foreign publications. The center could also serve as a clearinghouse for publications and activities related to children's literature. Close communication among regional staffs would provide the beginnings of a national plan, if not a network itself.

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