

## Summary and Proposals for the Future

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THE PRECEDING FIVE PAPERS have viewed the acquisition of historical collections of children's books, covered their scope and location and, to some degree, their potential usefulness for scholarly research. They have named individual collectors and the kinds of institutions which have served research interests, indicating the quantitative and qualitative richness of materials and their geographical distribution. The acquisition, growth and disposition of these materials constitutes a special contribution to research in literary history and the increasing study of childhood. It also raises questions. Have libraries organized their collections to serve these research interests by making available books accessible? Are books being preserved? Is there duplication in collecting? Are some areas slighted? Are the cataloging, curatorial supervision and publicity adequate?

The passion for collecting of individuals who have passed on their holdings as gifts or made them available for purchase has served research well. In general, however, it is institutions, not private individuals, that enable the books to be seen and used. For many institutions, gifts have exceeded purchases. Donors or sellers have taken pride in collecting children's books for future study and appreciation — study of the art of illustration and printing, and of a country's past. Great collections such as those of d'Alté Welch and Edgar S. Oppenheimer have found homes in important libraries. New collectors are becoming known to dealers, and one day they too may bequeath their collections. As with other fortunes, the consolidation of literary treasures in the hands of knowledgeable and discriminating collectors has ultimately meant institutional benefaction. As buyers have combed the market, early items have become increasingly

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hard to obtain and their prices have escalated. One might well fear that sought-for items have been thoroughly siphoned off the market, but other estates will be settled and attics emptied of previous generations' antiquities, so that dealers may continue to publish catalogs of enticing, increasingly rare offerings.

Concern for optimum future research and study of historical collections leads to consideration of important factors: acquisition planning, housing of collections, bibliographic control and publicity.

#### PLANNING FOR ACQUISITION

Canfield notes a lack of acquisition plans and the need for more education of the general public about "the value of children's books in all aspects — as social history, children's entertainment, literary works, illustrators' canvases and collectors' items." Hodges points out that historical material may even be found on the library shelves of circulating collections.

#### HOUSING

Some donors have admitted being motivated to offer their treasures to institutions which they know will give them proper care and put them to the service of scholars. In some cases, agreements on housing and support have been consummated before the transmittal of a gift. Proper housing and supervision — a specialist curator is ideal — are essential for the truly valuable research collection.

It has been recognized that housing, or at least shelving, historical children's books as a separate entity instead of interfiling them with adult books is useful. Large institutions should consider whether or not a centralized location for their special collections of children's books is better than scattering these resources throughout the library, in rare book rooms, special collections departments, research divisions or central children's departments.

#### DOCUMENTATION

The documentation of collections in card files and published catalogs is necessary for research. Hodges stresses that "a wide range of bibliographies would be helpful in the study of the history of children's literature." For some major collections, published catalogs have been issued; for others, it has been indicated that they are forthcoming. These catalogs are more likely to come from institutions than from individuals, and in some instances, such publishing is the condition upon which a collection is given to an institution.

### *Summary & Proposals*

Specialized, published bibliographies as well as card files for collections are indispensable tools, immeasurably facilitating the work of researchers. They encourage study and stimulate buying and collecting. Hodges points out that such publication has been one of the prime benefits of historical collections of children's books in colleges and universities, and may itself generate funds or gifts.

A chronological arrangement for card files and printed catalogs can also facilitate research. Huthwaite notes the leadership of Valta Parma in gathering the rare juvenilia in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress and "devising the plan to shelve the books chronologically according to publication date" (generating a chronological card file as well as the author catalog). A quotation from a review of the second volume of the *Osborne Catalog* is pertinent here:

If only the arrangement had been chronological! It would have revealed the reasons for having a collection of historical children's books — to trace the development of children's literature; to assess social changes, changing views toward childhood; the growth of publishing and bookselling; the development of printing, binding, and illustration. With the revelations of a chronological arrangement probably most books about children's literature would have to be rewritten or at least substantially revised.<sup>1</sup>

#### PUBLICITY

It is obvious that the establishment and promotion of a collection can succeed in inviting gifts. Once gathered and organized, the contents of research collections should be publicized with a summary of their special qualities and identification of areas for research possibilities. This information on the books should be disseminated to authors, artists and scholars in many disciplines — education, psychology, sociology, and American studies. The Free Library of Philadelphia, which has attracted notable donors, has a policy which states that the books should be displayed and talks given about them.

#### FUTURE CONCERNS

What are the needs of the future?

In order to strengthen special collections for today's increased study by sociologists, historians and others, institutions might exchange items. Through national planning, a clearinghouse arrangement with regional centers for this exchange could be established. In this way, duplication

might be avoided, strengths increased and weaknesses identified.

Regional networking, with a joint data base and a cooperative acquisitions policy, may be advisable for union cataloging. Area users would have access for different collections.

Policy statements for the development of collections should be written and made available. Funding for building historical collections should be regular rather than erratic, including where necessary funding for studies related to the need for bibliographic control of historical children's books and the impact of computerized catalogs on this control.

Bibliographic tools must be available to support research, and cataloging — not only author and title, but subject cataloging — is the essential one. Published catalogs should be studied to determine needs and standards. Exhibits and their catalogs should make known the strengths and specialties of an institution's holdings.

As books from the nineteenth century and earlier become increasingly difficult to acquire, attention should be given to developing special collections of twentieth-century books. Current popular literature should be recognized as valuable for tomorrow's students investigating the controversial literature and cultural history of today. Culling such books from general collections can establish identifiable historical collections.

Increased opportunities for the study of the history of children's literature in library schools and literature departments should be made available.

There should be a wide criticism and review of works on the history and criticism of children's literature. Also, recognition of value of this material for the study of cultural history should be made in journals other than those which deal primarily with children's literature, for example, in journals concerned with American studies, psychology and sociology.

### *Reference*

1. Egoff, Sheila A. "The Bibliography of Early Children's Books: A Review Article," *Library Quarterly* 48:204, April 1978.