

Introduction

MICHÈLE VALERIE CLOONAN

THIRTY YEARS AGO Howard H. Peckham compiled an issue for this journal on the topic of rare book libraries. In his introduction he could propose that: "To devote an issue of *Library Trends* to rare book libraries and collections is clear recognition...that there is no extensive literature on the subject."¹ The number and scope of articles (and their sources) in this issue demonstrate that today the lack of "extensive literature on the subject" is no longer an operable phrase. In 1957 the apparent paucity of information on rare book librarianship was justification for a journal issue; in 1987 the flood of information calls for a reevaluation. A little wave has turned into a tsunami.

The chief difficulty now lies in establishing parameters. Koda points out that the 1957 issue "reflected a preoccupation with the concept of rare books and with the development of collections. During the ensuing years no one has provided an entirely satisfactory definition of rare books, but then it is not the issue that it seems to have been in the 1950's." (Indeed, the term *special collections* is preferred by some as is illustrated by the titles of articles in this issue.) Today the profession's concerns range widely to include computers and scientific equipment, standards, bibliographic control, fund-raising, preservation, ethics, security, and literary rights, as well as the increasing role of rare book collections in the humanistic disciplines. The history of the book has also emerged as a discipline; its pervasive and changing scholarship is considered by Koda, Schwab, and Ferguson.

Michèle Valerie Cloonan is a doctoral candidate, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and formerly of the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

A single journal issue cannot treat all of these topics, though the collection of essays presented here does cover a remarkably broad range. The issue is divided into five sections. In part I., an overview, Berger's article—as an introduction to the field—provides a survey and bibliography of the key issues in the profession over the past fifty years, starting, appropriately, with Randolph Adams's classic, "Librarians as Enemies of Books."² By happy coincidence, this issue marks the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. The next four sections are as follows: II. Advances in Scientific Investigation and Automation; III. The Practice of Rare Book Librarianship; IV. The Funding of Rare Book Collections and Programs; and V. The Preservation of Meaning and the Protection of Objects. The aims here are to highlight the various aspects of the rare book profession and to introduce some of the newer subdisciplines.

Section II. covers the scientific investigation of artifacts by bibliographers and other scholars, and the role of automation in rare book librarianship. Abt opens the section with an historical overview of the impact of science on the physical examination and treatment of books. Describing four categories of equipment in use for the physical examination of books, Koda stresses the need for scientific analysis alongside the traditional approaches of philology, textual studies, and history. Schwab also discusses this concept of teamwork in bibliographical research, as he describes historians' and physicists' use of the cyclotron at the University of California, Davis. Invaluable information on the production of the Gutenberg Bible has emerged from this collaboration. Woodward considers the scientific analysis of paper and ink in early maps. He too emphasizes the importance of collaboration and of the careful evaluation of technique(s). All three authors stress the importance of protecting artifacts from irreversible damage and of the thorough preparation of artifacts before testing can begin.

Automation has become an integral part of operations in most libraries, perhaps most significantly for bibliographic control. Davis deals with recent advances in this area, but also points out that computers "have the potential of returning us to the dark ages of purely local practice in terms of cataloging and automation standards. Use of the bibliographic utilities has gradually imposed a basic consistency and standardization upon catalog records—something they never had before in special collections." Thomas discusses in detail the various extant cataloging standards, "why they are needed; how they evolved; and how they may continue to evolve."

"The Practice of Rare Book Librarianship" in section III., includes articles on the careers of rare book librarians, and rare book librarian-

Introduction

ship in three different library settings: university, college, and public. Traister evaluates the stereotyping of rare book librarians, and makes observations about possible new directions for the profession. He proposes, for example, that the “emergence of the conservator and the conservation administrator as a force within both special collections and the larger library world, and as a potential bridge between the two, has long-range implications which have hardly begun to be felt”—a sentiment also reflected in the Cullison/Donaldson article.

Although there are no articles in this issue devoted exclusively to the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ACRL, one cannot overemphasize its importance in the rare book profession. Its committees have produced essential standards and guidelines, many of which are mentioned on these pages by RBMS members and nonmembers alike. Through its annual programs—the first of which was held in 1955—RBMS has addressed both practical and theoretical issues.³ The growth of RBMS from a small committee to a section of ACRL that in 1984 had nearly 1300 members⁴ has led to new publishing ventures. In 1986, for example, RBMS inaugurated the journal, *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship*, “in which a discussion of the principles, practices, questions, and issues of special collections can take place, since no other journal is given over exclusively to such discussion.”⁵

Ferguson, Antonetti, and Linard examine rare book librarianship at institutions of the type in which each works. Ferguson proposes that “rare books in university libraries have been supported on a continuous basis...in contrast to book collections in public libraries or in independent research libraries, which are suffering today because of lack of resources.” What has changed, he contends, is the climate of the university library as well as the managerial style. At present, librarians view themselves as information specialists, and in many cases the rare book connoisseur, as head of special collections, has been replaced by an “administrator” with special skills in areas such as grantsmanship. Ferguson also observes that many specialists whom the curator now calls upon would have been almost unknown thirty years ago: book and paper conservators, computer professionals, public relations specialists, and police agents specializing in art and book thefts.

Antonetti and Linard reflect on their own institutions as examples—not prototypes—of special collection departments in college and public libraries. Antonetti illustrates how a special collections department can have a strong teaching function. Linard considers yet another role that a special collections department can play through community outreach programs.

Funding is the subject of section IV. Streit reports the findings of a questionnaire on funding patterns for rare book acquisitions distributed to 164 libraries, including all ARL libraries. His high return rate (136 or 83 percent of the libraries surveyed) suggests current interest in the areas of budgeting, fund-raising, and library support groups. Streit concludes with the observation that "despite difficult times characterized by small budgets, competing interests within the library, and unstable growth patterns, most of those...who...build rare book collections are gamely looking ahead toward better days."

Child discusses the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for special collections. Over the past fifteen years, NEH grants have had a major impact on special collections, particularly in the areas of preservation, cooperative microfilming, building and renovation programs, cataloging, and the compilation of bibliographies and other scholarly reference works. She emphasizes the impact of the Challenge Grant program, originally "devised as a means of helping institutions to help themselves: by providing operating funds to tide them over immediate financial crises, by increasing their endowments through fund-raising in the private sector with the incentive of an NEH grant to spur contributions, and by reexamining the ways in which their endowments were invested and managed."

The final section, "The Preservation of Meaning and the Protection of Objects," is devoted to preservation and security. The term *preservation of meaning*, which I adapted from a conference held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin in 1986 on the "conservation of meaning,"⁶ is suggested in the Cullison/Donaldson article. "Preservation of meaning" refers to the physical integrity of objects. The physical evidence of books, for example, can be lost through ignorant or insensitive conservation treatments. In order to determine the best treatment for library materials, conservators and curators must understand the physical makeup of an object as well as its political, social, bibliographic, and iconographic significance. Cullison and Donaldson discuss the need for a cooperative approach to the treatment of objects, which must be based on a strong body of knowledge on the part of both the curator and conservator as well as a respect for and understanding of each other's disciplines. The need for this type of teamwork is still acute.

The other concern of this section is security. In the 1957 issue of *Library Trends*, this topic received scant mention in an article entitled, "Reader Policies in Rare Book Libraries."⁷ At that time, Wyly points out, the topic of security was "neither a burning issue nor a trend. [However] the past thirty years have...witnessed a dramatic increase in

Introduction

property crimes of all sorts." Wyly looks at major library thefts of the past twenty-five years and considers the notion of "loss of consciousness" on the part of patrons, reading room personnel, and administrators. She describes the John Crerar Library case and cites it as a striking example of this phenomenon. The 1983 Oberlin Conference on Theft, BAMBAM, and the RBMS Security Committee are also mentioned. The protection of objects is necessarily an ongoing concern.

Considering the flood of interest and activity in the field—as the present essays substantiate—one may hope that *Library Trends* does not wait another thirty years to devote an issue to rare book librarianship.

I am grateful to the contributors for making this issue possible. Thanks are also due to the following for their suggestions: Terry Belanger of the Columbia University School of Library Service, and Susan Dingle and D.W. Krummel of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois.

This issue is dedicated to Valerie Galembert and Kathryn Gerlach, my first two rare book teachers.

References

1. Peckham, Howard H., ed. "Rare Book Libraries and Collections." *Library Trends* 5(April 1957):417.
2. Adams, Randolph G. "Librarians as Enemies of Books." *Library Quarterly* 7(July 1937):317-31.
3. Ashby, Anna Lou. "RBMS: An Overview." *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* 1(April 1986):7.
4. Friedman, Joan M. "Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries." In *Rare Books 1983-84: Trends, Collections, Sources*, edited by Alice D. Schreyer, p. 153. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1984.
5. Gwyn, Ann. "Editorial Statement." *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* 1(April 1986):5.
6. "Paper: The Conservation of Meaning," conference held at HRHRC, The University of Texas at Austin, March 19-21, 1986.
7. Haugh, Georgia C. "Reader Policies in Rare Book Libraries." *Library Trends* 5(April 1957):467-75.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank