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SIDNEY E. BERGER is currently the Ann C. Pingree Director of the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. It is the third-largest library in an art museum in the United States. Sid and his wife, Michèle Cloonan, are proprietors of the Doe Press, for which they hand print books of poetry and other works, some by Pulitzer Prize winners. He makes paper and casts type by hand. Since 2002, he has been an English, Communications, and GSLIS (Graduate School of Library and Information Science) professor at Simmons College in Boston, where he teaches Editing Copy and Proof, History of the Book, and Rare Books and Special Collections Librarianship. Sid is also an adjunct professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He has published and lectured widely on literary, bibliographical, and library subjects.

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Printed in the United States of America
18 17 16 15 14 5 4 3 2 1

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Berger, Sidney E.
Rare books and special collections / Sidney E. Berger.
   pages cm
   Includes bibliographical references and index.
   1. Libraries—Special collections—Rare books.  2. Libraries—Special
   collections—Administration.  3. Libraries—Special collections—Nonbook
   materials.  4. Libraries—Special collections.  5. Nonbook materials—Collectors and
   collecting.  I. Title.
Z688.R3B47 2014
025.2'816—dc23 2014006055

Book design by Kim Thornton in the Charis SIL and Proxima Nova typefaces.
Cover image from Harley MS 4986; courtesy of the British Library; www.bl.uk/manuscripts.

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To Joe and Frances, without whom none of this could have been written, to Rafe and Aaron for their enduring love, and to Michèle, for her encouragement and inspiration
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What are librarians supposed to do now? For a long time, what librarians did was provide people with the books that they wanted to read, and help people find information about what they wanted to know. This information was usually available somewhere in print, in places not obvious to casual readers or even to many scholars, and it was the librarian’s job to locate it and pass it on. With the development in recent years of widely available online resources, including searchable access to millions of books and journals, the work of librarians has changed, and where it goes from here isn’t at all clear. A librarian doesn’t have to attend many professional meetings before encountering a new and popular philosophy of librarianship, which holds that “Services Are the New Collections.”

For many librarians, this slogan makes a lot of sense. Librarians have spent decades competing with each other to build large collections of printed materials, and now, with the availability of free and subscription-based online resources, much of the information that library users want is available without the need to consult these collections. Readers and researchers may not even need to go to the library, since what they’re looking for is available to them electronically wherever they are. For some of today’s research libraries, large collections of books and journals have been quickly transformed from assets into liabilities, and printed materials are increasingly being relocated from central library spaces to offsite storage-and-retrieval facilities. Since a large number of libraries can now have access to the same resources, focusing acquisitions resources on electronic information, and concentrating staff time on making this information available at all times and in the forms most convenient to users, sounds sensible. Libraries have long been understaffed and underfunded, and being able to provide needed information to the widest possible audience is a desirable goal.

But that doesn’t mean that all libraries are the same. As Sidney Berger makes very clear, there is much more “information” in physical objects such as books and
manuscripts than can be reproduced by any surrogates, including online reproductions. Library administrators have now taken notice that what distinguishes a library or library system, other than 24/7 reference chat or apps for using library resources on mobile devices, are the irreplaceable holdings of their special collections departments. Whether for research by scholars, or viewing by students and the general public, the physical objects in special collections libraries have a significance and evocative presence that is tangible, but sometimes difficult to define. It's the duty of special collections librarians to acquire, preserve, make available, and interpret these objects, and how this may be done, intelligently and effectively, forms a large part of the subject matter of this book.

More important than this, however, is the foundation on which special collections librarianship rests—a knowledge of the objects themselves, including what they are, what they're made of, how they were created, and what's happened to them since then. This kind of knowledge is becoming rarer among librarians these days, as older librarians retire, and as younger students work increasingly, even in library schools, with online rather than with print resources. This relative lack of familiarity with original resources is by no means limited to librarians, as anyone who has worked in reference or public services in a special collections library can attest. Fifty years ago, much of the traffic in any large rare book reading room came from faculty members in the departments of English and history. Research has changed a great deal in these fields since then, and practically all of today's hires in history and English have never really worked with original books and manuscripts, even in graduate school.

A few years ago, I gave a tour of the Lilly Library to a lecturer visiting Bloomington, who was interested in seventeenth-century England in general, and John Milton in particular. When he told me that his recent research related to early opinions of Paradise Lost, I showed him our copy of the first edition of 1667, which is one of just a few copies to survive in its original binding. When he said that he had never seen a copy, I misunderstood him, because I thought he meant that he had never seen a copy in an early binding. As it turned out, he had never seen a copy of the first edition at all, and, in fact, he'd never seen any edition of the book that predated the twentieth century. He was quite surprised that the first edition, which is a smallish quarto, wasn't larger, since he was imagining it to be a big folio volume, as befitted its historical importance.

It’s easy to lament the lack of coverage of books and their histories in current education in the humanities and social sciences, but it’s more productive to realize that this creates a wonderful opportunity for special collections libraries. It’s up to us as librarians to make our collections better known, and to demonstrate how transformative they can be. To do this well, we need to learn as much as we can about what we have, and we should be willing to spend the rest of our careers learning more.

In his masterly survey The Portuguese Seaborne Empire: 1415–1825 (London: Hutchinson, 1969), eminent historian and book collector Charles R. Boxer noted that his book was based on the resources of his own private library, along with those of other major libraries around the world. He also told readers that he had “been able to visit at one time or another most of the places concerned, from the Spice Islands of the Moluccas to the Backlands of the Mato Grosso.” Just as Professor Boxer’s book was the product of more than forty years of immersion in all aspects of his subject, so is this present volume the result of many decades of Sidney Berger’s complete involvement in all aspects of books, from their creation to their institutional care. His experiences as a papermaker, typefounder, compositor, printer, collector, antiquarian bookseller, author, bibliographer, librarian, and teacher enable him to consider and describe the world of rare books and manuscripts with a perspective that few others can match. This is a challenging time for librarians, and while we can’t foresee exactly what libraries of the future will look like, for those of us who work with special collections today, this book provides needed and thoughtful answers to the question of “what are librarians supposed to do now?”

Joel Silver
Bloomington, Indiana
February 2014

www.alastore.ala.org
Acknowledgments

In writing this book, I have drawn on the assistance of many people who must be acknowledged.

Charles Harman of Neal-Schuman got this started, with his insight and encouragement, and his colleague Sandy Wood did a superb job editing the first half of this book. Eventually that task was ceded to Rachel Chance of ALA, whose reinforcement kept it going. More recently, Russell Harper and Carolyn Crabtree, also of ALA, stepped in and wonderfully ushered this volume through the press.

Tamara Gaydos, Tom Horrocks, and Maureen Whalen also read various chapters and made many valuable suggestions. And my deep appreciation to Jeff Dykes, whose brilliant photography brings much to light here.

Matt T. Roberts and Don Etherington’s book Bookbinding and the Conservation of Books, cited many times in the present volume, has been invaluable in its breadth and clarity. Equally amazing are this volume’s excellent drawings by Margaret R. Brown, who graciously allowed their use. The “pictures-worth-thousands-of-words” cliché works here: Brown has saved me thousands upon thousands of words with her outstanding artistry.

Thanks also to Stanley Nelson, whose illustrations of typecasting are superb, to Bill Stoneman for permission to use the Houghton Library digital camera policy, and to Valerie Hotchkiss of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Rare Book and Manuscript Library for allowing me to have access to that magnificent collection.

And of course, as the notes and bibliographical entries indicate, this volume owes a great deal to the many scholars who have worked in this endlessly broad field.
THE LIBRARY AND THE CLASSROOM ARE THE CENTERS OF INTEL-
lectual ferment at many institutions, and in many of these orga-
nizations, the rare book and special collections department is the
jewel in their crown. Here are held the works of the world’s great
thinkers and artists, scholars and printers and bookmakers, the
most important scientists and writers—all available locally and, in
many instances, remotely for patrons’ use. This department is the locus of the cen-
tral educational mission of the institution. And it is also the venue of the most intel-
lectually and fiscally valuable materials in the library.

A good deal of literature exists on special collections and rare books, including
scholarship on just about every aspect of the field. After all, rare books have been
with us for millennia, rare book collections have been around for centuries, and rare
book and special collections departments have existed for a long time as well. The
field is extremely broad, and no single volume—nor, perhaps, a hundred volumes—
can cover it comprehensively. Nonetheless, those working in these areas—including
librarians, archivists, booksellers, collectors, historians, other scholars, and anyone
else interested in them—could profit from an overview of the realm. The present
volume aims to be that overview.

For decades I have been teaching courses relating to books: Rare Book Librarian-
ship; History of the Book; Medieval Codicology: The Medieval Book from Sheep
to Shelf; Enumerative, Descriptive, Historical, and Textual Bibliography; The His-
tory, Materials, Manufacture, and Bibliographical Description of Paper; Preserva-
tion Management; Preservation and Conservation of Library Materials; The Book as
Physical Object; and others. And through the years I have had to assemble readings
for my students from myriad sources because no one volume on the market offered
the information I wished to convey.
Naturally, no single text could ever be sufficient, because the topics for each individual class are wide-ranging. Further, on certain technical aspects of book history and manufacture, few volumes “got it right.” Too many authors were not practitioners of the crafts or skills they were writing about. Few had made paper, cut a punch, struck a matrix, or hand-cast printing type; made papyrus or amatl or tapa cloth; or printed on a handpress. Few had run a rare book department or had special training in archives or had worked in the antiquarian book trade. Few had extensive training in the branches of bibliography or had produced a scholarly edition of the work of an important author. Some were collectors or gatherers of books and manuscripts, but not too many had thought deeply enough about these artifacts to say anything useful—let alone accurate—about them.

Many writers turned to the works of others, trusting that the other authors were, themselves, expert in the subjects they were writing about. But many of those authors were as ignorant as their successors. For instance, a myth about the making of papyrus—that the strips cut from the plant must be pounded until they fuse—has persisted for at least a century and a half. This error is typical of the lack of scholarship in the field of rare books: writers simply repeat claims without actually testing them. (If the strips of papyrus are pounded, the fibers will separate, and the strips will be mushed out of shape. The strips, arranged in alternating vertical and horizontal layers, must merely be pressed, so that the pith fuses, binding all the fibers into a single sheet.) In a similar vein, paper was not invented in AD 105, Gutenberg did not invent printing, and his greatest achievement was not the printing press.

It was one thing to locate texts for my students that covered the topics of my lectures, and another thing altogether to find texts that were accurate and thorough. There are indeed many excellent, accurate, thorough texts available, but none as comprehensive as is needed for a student to become conversant in this wide world of special collections.

I have done all the activities listed earlier. And I have given much thought to all the things one needs to know to be competent—expert—in the rare book world. To be really knowledgeable, one must immerse oneself in an activity, with hands-on experience. Or one must study it and know which experts to study under—the one who would pound the papyrus strips or the one who would put them under pressure.

The basic premise of the present volume is this: a person working in rare books and special collections must know a certain body of information. This book aims to supply that body of knowledge—at least as much as can be recorded in a single volume. Although the primary readers of this book are librarians working in rare book and special collections departments, anyone working with rare books and manuscripts should know what this volume imparts. A bookseller, a collector, an archivist, a historian, or anyone working with rare, old volumes or manuscript materials should be able to distinguish a folio from a quarto from an octavo; should be able to recognize antique laid, modern laid, and wove paper; should be able to identify a wire watermark, a three-plane mark, and a shadowmark (also called a light-and-shade watermark); should understand the process of moving a text from writer to reader; should be able to create (and therefore interpret) a professional bibliographical description of a printed piece from the handpress period; should be able to appraise a book or manuscript to determine its monetary worth; should be familiar with legal issues in the rare book world; should understand the differences among preservation, conservation, and restoration, and know how these terms are applied in a collection; and much more.

A bookseller who offers a “second edition” of a book when he is really offering a commercial version of the first edition (as opposed to a deluxe version of the same edition) certainly does not understand the meanings of the terms edition, printing (or impression), issue, and state, and, therefore, probably does not know what points are. And he would also not know that a book printed from standing type in 1800 is the same edition as one printed in 1900 from stereotype plates made from that very type.

The present volume is a compendium of information, terminology, and experience gathered over more than forty years, aiming to make anyone who
works with rare books able to speak with authority, using the accepted vocabulary, and not perpetuate the errors that have been canonized over the centuries. Another objective is to gather in a single volume the essential information that practitioners in the rare book field should have, so they will not need to run from book to book or from one Internet site to another (and often to sites with questionable information). This book also looks broadly over the rare book librarian’s trade, which is remarkably varied and complex. It tries to cover in some depth what special collections librarians need to know to do their jobs right.

Because no two rare book and special collections departments are alike, no handbook or textbook or compendium of information can fully cover the needs of all who work in such departments. Therefore, along with much specific information that will be useful to anyone working with rare books, this text also offers a general approach to the field.

And while librarians will certainly find information they need here, because the rare book librarian’s activities intersect with those of many others—booksellers, archivists, scholars, collectors, students, conservators, and preservationists, for example—it is important that all these people speak the same language, know the same things about books and their makeup and handling, and understand the pressures on each person in the book trade. These pressures include how to handle gifts or sales to libraries; how to treat damaged books and manuscripts; how to undertake fund-raising and outreach activities; how to describe books in such a way that a person who cannot see a particular volume can compare his to the one described; how to make collections secure; what to do when thefts are discovered; how booksellers, archivists, librarians, and collectors can work cooperatively; and so on. These matters affect all in the book world, not just librarians.

A scholar goes into a special collections department and is given access to certain materials. She wishes to make copies of them. What should she do? What should the librarians do? Should they allow her to make photocopies or take photographs by herself? Should they make copies for her? Are there reasons for not allowing any copies to be made? What are the legal and fiscal issues involved in such a scenario? In chapter 8 we look at such questions.

Pipes burst in the basement of a library where a substantial number of books are stored. Parts of the collection are getting wet. What should a patron or a librarian do? Who should be notified? And what should be done with the damaged volumes? Preservation and conservation issues are dealt with in chapter 12.

A bookseller in San Francisco is brought a few extremely valuable books. The person who brought them in wants to sell them. The dealer checks the standard bibliographies and discovers that some of these volumes seem to have been stolen. What should he do? Chapter 7 looks at security and theft in libraries.

A public library needs money to repair its leaky roof. It gathers books from its constituents and plans a book sale. But the librarian knows that some of the donated volumes could be quite valuable. She asks a local rare book librarian to help her appraise the sale items so that the library can maximize its take. What should the rare book librarian do? This is actually an issue of ethics, which is dealt with in chapter 2.

Donors want to give their lovingly assembled library to a special collections department. What should the receiving librarian consider? Are there moral, ethical, or legal issues he needs to know about? What considerations should be on the table before the donation is made? How should he direct or advise the donors, especially if the library does not want some of the items being given? This complex situation requires the librarian to know about standard practices in the profession and to be acquainted with federal, state, and local laws, as well as the policies and procedures of her institution, all addressed in the present volume.

These are just a few of the subjects covered in this book. As mentioned earlier, a librarian in charge of a rare book and special collections department must have broad knowledge, including about the nuts and bolts of administration, about issues pertaining to legal matters, personnel, acquisition, preservation
and conservation, and about much more of a theoretical nature—all discussed here. But a schooled special collections person also needs to know other kinds of bolts and nuts having to do with the physical materials under her care. This information is here as well. And others in the rare book world should be similarly knowledgeable, not only for their own edification but also to be able to converse lucidly with the special collections librarian about their mutual interests.

Such conversation will necessarily require the use of a specialized vocabulary and a common knowledge about such things as parts of books, binding terminology, famous people in the book trade, practices having to do with theft, mutilation, information dissemination, access to knowledge, selling and buying and donating rare materials, appraisal, ethical standards, and so forth. The present text, while not pretending to be comprehensive (comprehensiveness is impossible), will inform anyone in the realm of rare books and manuscripts about such matters.

In writing this book, I have drawn on a wide range of sources along with my own extensive experience in the rare book field. Many of my examples come from my own life: I have worked in an antiquarian book store, been a head of special collections, been involved actively in the production of books from writing to editing to casting type to making paper to printing by hand, and have taught these subjects for more than forty years. Throughout are sidebars that reinforce or illuminate the theoretical materials of the text with practical experiences. I hope that these personal stories will make the text come alive for you. Anyone working with rare books will benefit not just from learning hypothetical or academic material but also from knowing what goes on in the real world.

---

Chapter 1 is an overview of the fields of special collections and rare books: What do these two closely related, overlapping fields have in common? What do these departments hold? How did those materials get there? What are the responsibilities of those who oversee the items? What is the department’s role in its institution? What are the psychological realities of running such a unit? Some basic concepts are covered: rarity and scarcity; the place of first editions in the department; staffing; the importance of knowing the collection, the patrons, the booksellers, and others; the role of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section in the life of all special collections personnel; and other issues common to the field.

Chapter 2 considers what it takes to manage a rare book department, with an eye toward ethics, professional guidelines, department functions, the creation and importance of a collection development policy, acquisition, weeding and deaccessioning of rare materials, the possibility of using vendors and approval plans, processing and cataloging the collection, transferring books from open stacks to the special collections department, lending books, dealing with patrons, and so forth. Although the bulk of this material is aimed at the librarian in a special collections department, it is important that scholars, booksellers, and collectors understand how these departments work. The chapter also considers the moving of a rare book library, a highly complex and pressure-packed undertaking.

A close relative to the rare book department is the archive—the focus of chapter 3—often overlooked in expositions or discussions about the management of special collections. The Society of American Archivists is an organization parallel to the American Library Association, with its own governing body, regulations, ethical standards, policies, procedures, practices, and responsibilities. Because the operations in archives overlap a good deal with those of special collections, and because most special collections departments are affiliated with (or are inseparable from) archives, chapter 3 gives a brief overview of this closely allied repository, with a look at paper-based and digital materials and how archivists deal with both.

Chapter 4 discusses the physical materials of the collection. In every profession that deals with physical objects, practitioners need to know about those objects: what they are made of, how they are put together, how to identify them, how to describe them, and so on. This entails knowing a vocabulary that has evolved over decades or centuries. People in
the discipline need to speak the same language when they write or converse about the materials they use. This chapter looks at many materials that exist in special collections departments: papyrus, parchment and vellum, paper, printing type, presses, bindings, inks, and more. The terminology here overlaps professions: booksellers will bring vellum-bound books to librarians and offer them to collectors. The dealer may say in a catalog, “This volume is quarter bound, has gilt dentelles, and has AEG.” Knowledgeable booksellers will know the jargon of the trade, and librarians working in rare books and special collections need to understand this vocabulary. Archivists, too, will encounter bound volumes, broadsides, manuscript materials, and so forth, and they need to understand when a collector or bookseller talks about the shadowmarks and deckle edges in documents, the stab binding of a pamphlet, or the volume that uses amatl in its binding. A knowledge of how paper is made or bindings are created is invaluable in the rare book profession.

In chapter 5 we look at the physical layout of a special collections department. Sometimes these units grow incrementally from a locked closet to a single room to a cluster of rooms. Sometimes they are purpose-built facilities with security and environmental controls in mind from the beginning. What are the optimum ways of laying out the space and creating a congenial and secure facility, given the two kinds of “histories” that are possible for such collections? Layout needs include offices, work areas, public access space for greeting patrons and containing tables for them to sit at when they are using the department’s materials, stacks for the collections, storage spaces, areas for the unit’s hardware (copy machines, microfilm readers, and so forth), space for the public access terminals, and much more. All through the design of the department there should be a focus on security, environmental conditions, access to collections, satisfactory lighting, and much more.

The following chapter (chapter 6) covers fund-raising. No department can ever say, “We have enough (money) (staff) (space).” Like the larger organization around it, the special collections department can be a black hole, sucking in all the resources made available to it and wanting more. No library wants to remain static; growth is good—for the collection, for the patrons, and for the institution. But growth requires resources, and an active rare book librarian, working with the organization’s development staff, can have a strong, positive fiscal impact on the department’s resources. Successful fund-raising strategies require good people skills, a positive attitude about one’s profession and one’s collection, and an enthusiasm to better the department’s conditions and holdings.

Chapter 7 examines one of the most important aspects of library operations—security. A stolen or mutilated book will be of no use to a patron who needs the information it contains. In the past, many libraries covered up the loss, not wanting to face the humiliation of having been lax in their security measures and not wanting potential donors to know that they were not good stewards of their collections. Today, theft is treated much more responsibly, and libraries have beefed up security in ways that are discussed in this chapter. Because thieves tend to prey on special collections—the institution’s most valuable materials—librarians must be particularly aware of thieves’ methods of operating and should be on top of the latest security devices and measures.

We live in a world governed by laws, and in the special collections department legal issues often arise. Chapter 8 deals with many situations in which the law affects the management of rare books and manuscripts: Who owns the content of printed matter, manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, audio and video materials, and the like? What are the responsibilities of those in charge of these materials with respect to publication and the granting of permission for the use of intellectual content? What laws govern purchases and the acquisition of gifts and deposits? What should a good Deed of Gift contain? In the acquisition of a gift, what are the responsibilities of the donor? of the librarian? What do booksellers need to know about selling books to libraries or about being the go-between for a gift from a donor to a library? For instance, what is the relationship between the library, the donor, and the bookseller with respect to an appraisal that needs to be done on the materials donated? Who is responsible
for the appraisal of donated materials? Who will pay for it? Who gets to see it? What is the “Three-Year Rule”? What are the legal implications of a deposit? What is a Promised Gift Agreement? Is it legal for a public institution to charge patrons fees for the use of library materials? Can a library that receives funding from the federal government refuse to put filters on its computers? What effects has the USA PATRIOT Act had on libraries? And on and on. Much of the information in chapter 8 will also be useful for those outside the department (administrators, archivists, scholars, booksellers, faculty, collectors, donors) who are involved with rare books.

Bibliography, the subject of chapter 9, is an enormous field. By its very nature, it impacts the life of anyone working with special collections materials. We look at enumerative, descriptive, historical, and textual bibliography—each of which impacts the rare book person’s life in a different way. People involved with rare books and materials (in special collections departments, archives, bookstores, and private collections) should understand how to use (and compile) bibliographies. They should know the important reference tools in their fields, and they should be able to recognize a reliable and an unreliable bibliography.

Descriptive bibliography is crucial, for it teaches anyone handling books (especially those produced before the nineteenth century) how to describe them in such a way that someone not looking at the copy being described will know what it looks like and how it compares to other copies. When a bookseller lists a rare book in a catalog, the collector or librarian needs to know exactly what is being described: what it looks like, how it is made up, what materials it is made of, what condition it is in, and so forth. The description should indicate the format of the book (folio, quarto, octavo, duodecimo, or another) and whether it is complete. And much more. Rare book catalogers also should understand bibliographic description so that they can populate MARC records with the appropriate information.

Historical bibliography is another extremely broad realm of scholarly inquiry, as chapter 9 explains. What kinds of historical research could anyone working with special collections do? The answer is all kinds. And “all kinds” means delving into just about any discipline in the world. Responsible and well-informed rare book librarians and booksellers will know where to look to educate themselves about books and manuscripts in general and about the specific ones they are doing research on.

And textual bibliography is the discipline in which responsible, reliable, authoritative texts are studied and produced. If two versions of a text exist, which one should the bookseller advise the librarian to acquire and which should the librarian advise the scholar to use as the basis for her research? How can a scholar distinguish between a poorly produced and a reliable edition? Librarians themselves can be textual bibliographers, creating reliable texts for their patrons. How do they go about this? Chapter 9 is a thorough exposition of how this branch of bibliography impacts the world of those working with rare books and manuscripts.

Chapter 10 discusses collecting and handling the materials of a special collections department. We look in depth at collection development, with much information from the perspective of the librarian and the bookseller, and we consider various methods of acquisition, dealing with booksellers (in person, on the Web, through their catalogs), dealing with book scouts, and acquiring books from the Web, book fairs, and auctions. The chapter also examines the antiquarian book trade: What do librarians and collectors need to know? What do booksellers need to let librarians know? Who are the players in the game? And an important section of this chapter is devoted to appraising books and manuscripts: how to do it, the tools of the trade, what to look for, what features raise (or lower) the fiscal value of the item, and so forth. What kinds of value are there beyond the monetary? How should this kind of information influence the purveyor and the purchaser of rare materials? Despite the altruistic nature of librarianship, its practitioners must face the worldly reality that the items they deal with have monetary value. Much of this chapter guides the librarian into thinking about the fiscal realities of his trade, and booksellers and collectors should be as fully aware. For the dealer, such knowledge is essential—her livelihood depends on it.
Special collections departments do not exist in vacuums. They depend on others for their resources, and they are just as dependent on their users, for if the department has no users, it has no reason to exist. The greater the use a department has, the more it can justify its existence and the more resources it has the right to request from its parent institution. To increase use, librarians need to reach out to many constituencies. Chapter 11 provides guidance and presents various forms of this activity, which can be tremendously diverse, depending on the personality of the librarian, the kinds of activities the institution will allow him to perform, and the nature of the community the library serves. Staff levels might allow the rare book librarian to partner with other departments to hold meetings and workshops, offer lectures, and engage audiences young and old.

One essential task for the special collections department is to extend the longevity of the materials in the collection. Chapter 12, “Preservation, Conservation, Restoration, and Disaster Planning” details appropriate actions that must be taken in these realms. The brevity of this paragraph is in opposite proportion to the importance and extent of the information that this chapter presents. Entire courses are taught on preservation of library materials, preservation management, digital preservation, and the like; conservation is a field unto itself, requiring much specialized training in chemistry, book history, material sciences, bookbinding, paper manufacture, and a great deal more. Chapter 12 presents an overview of the two related fields—with a glance at restoration (more appropriately expatiated upon in the realm of museums). Many a library does not have its own preservation officer or conservator on staff. The importance of these positions cannot be overstated, and chapter 12 makes a case for creating them.

Even if an institution has a preservation librarian and a separate department of conservators, the rare book librarian must understand all the issues, policies, practices, and responsibilities of those in charge of preserving the collections. In fact, with specialized knowledge about the physical makeup of the holdings, and the further knowledge of where information resides in these materials and how they are used, the librarian may be a crucial player in preservation and conservation decisions. At smaller institutions, the librarian himself may be the only one responsible for these activities.

Chapter 13 is about special collections departments today. Traditional materials—paper based, vellum and parchment, items incorporating metals and plastics in their makeup, film, audio, and other analog holdings—remain in special collections departments and continue to be acquired by them. Additionally, the digital age, which began a long time ago, has impacted nearly everyone in the world. Librarians have been eager beneficiaries of and contributors to this revolution. This chapter looks at the traditional activities and all the new opportunities that the electronic world offers. Those working in special collections, as this volume demonstrates, need to know a great deal about many issues (and many kinds of issues) relating to their responsibilities. Digital technologies, while simplifying librarians’ lives in many ways and making it possible to serve their clientele to a greater extent than ever before, complicate matters considerably by adding enormously to the knowledge required of anyone employed in the rare book world.

The final chapter picks up a variety of topics that did not fall comfortably in any of the preceding chapters: nonbook collection items, department and extra-department protocols, administrative and fiscal oversight (budgets, annual reports, and such), staffing and human relations issues (hiring, chains of command, searching for and moving to a new job, and so forth), development activities and solicitation of gifts, and special topics (marks in rare books, fine press books, artists’ books and altered books, and canvassing books). I review current trends and speculate on future directions, and the text concludes with a brief section on the survival of special collections departments.

As I mentioned earlier in this introduction, this text does not purport to be definitive. It cannot be, given the immense complexity of the book world and the equally extensive variety that exists in rare book
departments around the world—indeed, just in the United States and Great Britain alone. Instead, I have tried to convey a blueprint for thinking about responsibilities, materials, operations, personnel, activities, and many other areas of rare book and special collections librarianship, bookselling, collecting, and research in the field. The aim throughout is to enlighten all who deal in any fashion with rare books about what they should know.

For me, there is no more exciting, thrilling, and rewarding realm than the world of books—especially rare books and the world in which they live.

The range of topics covered in this text supports my notion that one can never be bored in this field. And it also supports my contention that to be responsible as a librarian, bookseller, collector, archivist, or other participant in this milieu, you must know a good deal about many topics. I offer this volume as one step in the direction of fulfilling that need.

Sidney Berger
Waban, Massachusetts
2013
SOME PRACTICAL REALITIES

This book is about rare books and special collections. All those involved in the rare book world must know a great deal about the physical objects in their care, the legal issues relating to these objects, technology, ethics, and much more. But librarians, in addition to all these issues, must deal with the narrower world of the institution they inhabit. For them to be effective at their jobs, some absolutely basic issues must be addressed. Hence, this chapter looks primarily at library practices.

Rare Book and Special Collections Departments

Although a rare book department, in its generic sense, differs from a special collections department, the two terms have come to be used almost interchangeably. Not all items in a rare book department are rare, nor are some of them books. There will also be photographs, pamphlets, maps, drawings, sketches, possibly philatelic or numismatic items, paintings, and a great variety of other genres of materials. Perhaps the term rare books goes back to the origin of the department, when certain volumes were segregated from the parent collection because of their value or vulnerability and put into a separate, more secure environment.

But custodians would also have seen, for instance, maps of great rarity, manuscripts that were, by their very nature, unique and irreplaceable, and photographs that were equally unique. And they would have wanted to secure these items as well. It would be only natural to do so in the same place in which the rare books were kept. There might not even have been much intellectual connection between one item and another: a scarce book on medicine; a few first editions of American, French, and British writers; a collection of letters from a Civil War soldier; a political pamphlet that would cause some trouble if it were left in open stacks; a book of anatomy with explicit illustrations of bodies; and so forth. That is, the items
in themselves may not have made a coherent collection, the only qualities bringing them together in the first place being their monetary value and their vulnerability to mutilation.

To call it a rare book collection would have been strictly inaccurate, but the designation does convey the idea of rarity and the need for protection as well as the notion that this is where research can be done on manuscript and printed sources. So Rare Book Department might be the best way to designate this facility.

On the other hand, a special collections department is the repository of items that are not necessarily monetarily valuable but are distinguishable by virtue of their being assemblages of materials of like kinds or on like topics. In one sense, “special collections” are valuable simply because of the cohesiveness and extent of the items on a particular topic, in a particular genre, or by a particular author. Hence, there can be a special collection on orchids or tobacco, romance novels or science fiction, James Joyce or John Steinbeck, bookplates or binders’ tickets, labels or trade cards, or any other focused area or genre of collecting.

So the two kinds of collections are distinct in some respects, but they overlap in a few others.

For instance, they both require heightened security; neither will circulate its holdings; ideally, both will be housed under special environmental conditions, possibly better than those for the open stacks; they require preservation and conservation attention beyond that of the circulating collection; the cataloging of their materials is more extensive than that of the circulating collection and may require special training; methods of obtaining their materials differ from those used by the collection development department; and so forth.

And because it is more expensive to run two separate departments than it is to run a single one, these two functions (rare books and special collections) are usually combined in a single facility, sometimes with both designations as the title of the department, sometimes with one or the other designation in the unit’s name.

Finally, it is unusual to find two separate departments because their holdings overlap. Any rare book department will have individual assemblages of materials that are special collections. And every special collections department will hold rare books.

As for the name, it may be common to call such a department Rare Books and Special Collections, but this is rarely necessary because each part of that title

WHEN I ARRIVED at the University of California, Riverside, as head of the special collections department, I found some peculiar holdings: a yoke for two oxen, a Nazi knife in its scabbard, polo mallets, large keys to South American cities in fancy presentation boxes, a couple of vials containing tree bark, kids’ metal lunch boxes, two massive paintings, a particularly hideous metal sculpture on a pedestal, and so forth. What these objects were doing there was beyond me. I could not see their relationship to the department.

I learned that the ox yoke and polo mallets were part of the campus’s heritage, having come from the days when the school was the Citrus Experimentation Station for the University of California (UC)—long before the second UC campus (UCLA) was established in the 1920s. The Nazi knife and keys to the cities came from the holdings of professors who had retired and left their collections to the library. The Buck Rogers metal lunch box was part of the famous J. Lloyd Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy, the department’s most renowned and largest special collection. The tree bark came from the first naval orange tree, cultivated at that campus in the early days of the twentieth century. The enormous paintings, which were leaning face in against a tall wall, turned out to be particularly awful. It was clear why they faced the wall. They were reputed to be too big to be stored in the campus museum, but I suspect their ugliness got them exiled to the library. Likewise, the sculpture was horrible—so it was stuck in the far reaches of the rare-book stacks, down an aisle holding almost-never-used serials, facing a wall so one could not see it when one glanced down that aisle.

Incidentally, the rubber covering of an old auto foot pedal is in a special collection at the Houghton Library at Harvard. Paper decorator Rosamond Loring used it to decorate paste paper.
implies the other part. In the present volume, the terms *rare books* and *special collections* will be used interchangeably, unless the text calls for one particular kind of collection.

**Department Holdings**

In many special collections departments, one might find a host of things that one would not expect to find there. The department is in a library, so books and manuscripts, prints and drawings, photographs and maps, and many other paper-based items will be on the shelves and in cabinets and files. But what about Native American baskets, a printing press, shoes and socks, handkerchiefs, the rubber covering of an old auto foot-pedal, a special chair, a rolling pin? Articles like this could wind up in a special collections department just as easily as could a book or pamphlet. In any institution, when people find objects that simply cannot be jettisoned, especially because the items are relevant to the history of the organization, they want these things preserved. The only logical place, it is generally agreed, is the library. The reasoning goes something like this: “Libraries hold all kinds of things. They are good at storing important things that someone may wish to know about or consult someday. There really is no other place to house these things. Let’s give them to the library.”

It is clear that if an institution has something it does not know what to do with and, for any reason, cannot dispose of, special collections is a good dumping ground. Also, people at institutions see the special collections department as not merely the custodian of the standard books, pamphlets, manuscripts, photographs, archives, and so forth. It is also seen as (and therefore becomes) a repository of all kinds of realia, a permanent holding zone for items too “precious” to part with, a storehouse of articles that might someday shed light on something that some researcher might find useful. It is also possible that these nontraditional items came as parts of gifts whose donors stipulated that all the materials donated had to be maintained by the institution. Jetisoning selected pieces was not an option.

One key issue when considering holdings is that all things contain information of some kind. The job of the library is to link that information with the patron who needs it. It is sometimes not the librarians’ job to say, “This item contains no information—or no information that our users would ever search for. We can discard it.” (Although that is exactly what happens in weeding a collection; see later in this chapter.) Keen special collections librarians can see the research potential of the items in their care, and they know which to hold on to. Some things they must hold on to; they have no choice.

Department holdings, then, can take many forms. And if the library has a good collection development policy, the holdings should focus properly on the department’s collection, mandated by many things: the present needs of the patrons, the history of the collection itself, the different levels of collecting assigned to each subcollection, and so on. (This point will be covered in more detail in chapter 2 when we look at collection development policies.)

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the kinds of holdings in the department will differ depending on the emphasis of the collection. If the department is primarily a “rare book” division, the emphasis will be on rare books; if it is a true special collections department, one will expect to find some rare books but also a host of items that might be exceptionally inexpensive or common. The J. Lloyd Eaton Collection mentioned in the sidebar is a true special collection: it contains many thousands of cheap paperbacks that would find their way into mighty few libraries of any kind. However, the Eaton Collection is the world’s largest holding of books on science fiction, fantasy, horror, and Utopian literature, and to be comprehensive it must hold thousands of volumes that were issued only in paperback, that were printed in huge numbers, that cost next to nothing when they were published, that can be had for pennies at garage sales today, that may be in poor condition from having been made from cheap materials and having been read over and over and tossed aside, and that would normally be chucked into the trash after years or even decades of abuse. Many volumes in the Eaton Collection fit this description. But
they are the only copies of these titles cataloged anywhere in the world. This is a Special Collection in its purest form—exactly what that rubric indicates.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is, of course, overlap with rare book holdings because rare items can themselves be part of a special collection. The Eaton Collection at UC Riverside has a large number of exceptionally costly books, including, for instance, a copy of *Fahrenheit 451* in the asbestos binding, first editions of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century books on fantastic voyages, and many other treasures. And rare book collections can be special collections, of course, if the special holdings are valuable, rare, or unique.

Naturally, as indicated earlier, we are speaking about many things beyond books: manuscripts, photographs, prints and drawings, maps, trade cards, philatelic items, realia of all kinds, and any number of other genres of materials. This is one of the great appeals of the field for many people: it is varied and filled with riches at all levels of one's budget in a great array of manifestations.

Special collections librarians must familiarize themselves with all the department's holdings—if not volume by volume, at least area by area—and acquire materials in the department's areas of strength and greatest use. And they should be open-minded about what to let into the department. They do not want to bring in junk or items that might never be used, but the sheer breadth of objects that might wind up in the special collections department is prodigious. There are untold numbers of locks of hair of important writers or historical personages; scarves and other pieces of clothing of the famous; other personal effects such as pens and inkwells and desks; pressed flowers; printing plates and woodcuts (the actual engraved blocks); papermaking, bookbinding, and typecasting equipment, and so forth. Think of the rare book department as a museum of the book (and the manuscript), and then it becomes clear that the holdings can be almost anything that will fit in.

**The Role of the Department in the Larger Institution**

Although rare book departments might like to see themselves as meccas for researchers, occupying a lofty place in the scholarly world, the envy of those around them, the fact is that most such libraries are situated in and beholden to the larger institu-

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**AS A SPECIAL** collections librarian at UC Riverside, I engaged the help of the entire circulation staff to identify books that should have been in special collections. I tutored all who worked in circulation about the criteria that would qualify items for transfer to my department: age, limited printings, certain kinds of illustrations, bindings of various kinds, books signed by their authors, and so on. Not all the items in circulation staff pulled aside for special collections, of course, were admitted into my department, but it was good to have many sets of eyes working for me at a point of great book-viewing activity in the library. Over the years, I did transfer into my department a good number of items that should have been there in the first place. And I made it a point to congratulate and thank the circulation staff for their acuity and diligence.

The same went for Interlibrary Loan (ILL): when items were requested from other institutions, the ILL folks paged them and measured them against the criteria I gave them. Many a volume that would otherwise have been sent out was held back, identified as rare enough that it should not have been circulating, least of all to another institution. Bibliographers and selectors notified me when a particularly expensive item was purchased. Many of these I earmarked for special collections. Reference librarians, catalogers, and even students who reshelved books became allies, finding items for me that were candidates for transfer to special collections, and I reinforced their efforts with hearty and heartfelt thanks.

This was a form of internal outreach, and in the long run the library was better off and the collection was enhanced with the transfer of many items to a more secure department.
tions of which they are a part. This simple statement has some profound implications. To begin with, the department might not exist without the parent institution, and every special collections librarian must remember this. Second, the department must function in the same way that the parent library does, and with the same primary directive: to serve patrons by linking users with the information they need.

Another responsibility is to serve the parent institution in ways that will make the larger body prosper. A rare book librarian, for instance, may wish to contact the chancellor or president of her institution to offer the department for development activities. After all, when an executive officer wants to show off the institution, why not start with the jewels? The library can label itself with the now-trite phrase “the jewel in the crown”—the most intellectually and visually striking venue at the school, whose holdings will impress anyone.

The rare book department runs a risk by its very nature. There may be jealousy from other departments who see what may seem like a disproportionate amount of resources being devoted to expensive books and manuscripts. Think of how many books for the general collection can be had for the price of a single old book or manuscript that maybe no one will ever use. It is incumbent on the librarians in this department to work with all colleagues in a collegial way. This requires much outreach, tact, and insight. And for good reason, for many other departments can be close allies.

It cannot be overstated that staying on good terms with all departments is a must. When you reach out to other departments, asking for their help in strengthening special collections, you must also express a strong appreciation for those who help. This kind of outreach may entail a good deal of training of others, explaining what to look for and why. Once they understand the vulnerability of their library and the cultural heritage they are protecting, colleagues will become increasingly invested in the department by becoming its guardians. It is important that they understand why special collections exists and, far from being jealous, why they should be proud to be at an institution with such treasures and with a reputation based partly on those treasures.

This kind of internal cooperation will make the special collections department no longer a snobby, discrete unit; it will make the department an ally, integrated into the institution. It is important for all your colleagues to see that they are working toward the same end: offering access to our patrons, protecting our cultural heritage, and being responsible.

In holding some of the great treasures of the institution, the rare book department is in a unique position to help the campus at a level above and beyond the library. If the department has a relatively attractive space, it is prime real estate for hosting dignitaries of all kinds. As noted earlier, one form of internal outreach can be to the president or chancellor of the school. The offer is simple: the department is willing to host any gathering that the president or chancellor wishes, and can quickly mount a pointed exhibit focusing on the interests of those who will be in attendance.

It should take little time to prepare a few vitrines with materials from the department, showing the guests some of the treasures of the institution. Even if the library has a no-food-or-drink policy, it may be worth bending this rule now and then for the goodwill such an event could generate for the department and the institution. Just be sure that a well-trained cleanup crew is on hand. Use the opportunity to welcome the guests to the department, and give a short introduction to the items on display. Though the event is not yours, the venue is, and any plug you can get for your department could be useful.

Outreach to others at the institution can be useful as well, as the sidebar about asking for help of the police department shows. This kind of outreach must be done with tact. The goal of such a request is ultimately to improve the department in one way or another.

Not to be cynical, but one thing must be mentioned concerning the psychology of asking for improvements to one’s domain. If one goes to a superior and straight out asks for something—an additional staff member, an augmented cataloging budget, physical improvements in the venue, and so on—the chances are that a flat-out no will be the result. An old attitude is common in libraries: You have gotten along thus far without it, so you certainly
A DIFFERENT KIND of outreach can be tremendously valuable. When I began working at UC Riverside, I called the campus police chief to introduce myself and to ask for help. I wanted an expert from the police department to help me do a security analysis for the department. The police are there for just this purpose, and it became clear that they were quite pleased that someone on the campus reached out to them for their assistance. The chief and his best security officer came over to help.

I prefaced our walk-around of the department with a conversation about the importance of the collection, its relationship to the campus and our cultural heritage, its value for scholarship beyond its monetary value, and so on. They got it, and they were wonderfully responsive and immensely supportive. The security officer wrote a superb report, which I was able to use when I wanted various kinds of security upgrades for the department.

don’t need it now—whatever the “it” is. (We will see this again and again in the planning for the operations of the department.) Parallel to this attitude is another: I know you are just asking for this so you can get more things for your department; if I give you this, you will just ask for more.

But if the ask comes with a strong corroboration from an outside expert (in the case cited in the sidebar, the top security officer of the campus police force), the administration cannot take your requests too lightly. The request may still be denied, but at least the denial is not a personal “defeat” because it is a rejection of the recommendation of an authority.

As the sidebar explains, one good by-product of having sought the police report was that the officers became part of the special collections “family,” and they were thereafter instantly responsive to any security issue relating to the special collections department.

Similar outreach to the fire department of the institution will bring these professionals into this family. One course of action is to ask the fire department to do a fire assessment of the unit. Their response time in an emergency will be improved for two reasons: they will have a greater sense of responsibility to the special collections department after their report is done than they did before it, and they will have had a fresh look at the physical layout of the place, so that they can maneuver effectively in the space if they need to be there.

One way to strengthen this connection between the special collections department and the firefighters is by asking them to give department personnel a workshop in the use of fire extinguishers. Fire department personnel are usually set up to do this kind of training, and they appreciate the special collections department’s taking such an active interest in them and their services. An important by-product of this approach is that special collections staff will become proficient in the use of the extinguishers. Not every institution will have such intelligent, well-trained, helpful colleagues in these areas (security and fire), but do not hesitate to reach out to them. Everyone benefits.

Another target for outreach is the faculty. It is important to seek out the professors on campus to offer the department’s services to them. For example, contact a professor who teaches in an area in which the special collections department has strong holdings and offer to host her class in your department to expose her students to primary research materials. It is possible that the professor herself did not know of your holdings. The result could be increased patronage of the department, a desired goal, because increased use is a strong help when asking for augmentations to the staff or for additional resources of any kind.

Becoming familiar with the faculty can have other benefits. If your department has strong collections in the areas of a professor’s interests, he can become a selector for you. That is, the professor can notify you of important items that should be added to the collection. If the items he recommends are expensive, faculty research funds may be available that can be shared for the purchases.

One word of caution, however: faculty members can be quite powerful at the institution, and though you want to give them the best service you can—as you want to give all your patrons the best service—you cannot please all people all the time. It
is not uncommon to encounter professors who think that because they are faculty, they have special privileges and should be given extraordinary treatment. Professors may demand, for example, that they be allowed to take rare books to their offices. Rules are not meant to be broken. To allow this practice could lead to disaster. Who knows how many other professors, hearing of this arrangement, would demand the same treatment? If the rule is that no book circulates from the department, that rule should not be relaxed for anyone.

The department should thus have a written policy that clearly spells out that books do not circulate from the department. A written policy, on paper, that can be handed to anyone requesting this kind of special treatment, carries a good deal of authority. The document makes it clear that the department is not discriminating against one party; it is following a standard policy that applies equally to all. Just be sure that any such policy, in paper form or clearly spelled out on your website, has been shown to and approved by the administration of the library. Policies are subject to review, and certainly they should not be enacted without having been taken through the proper channels. (Appendix 6 reviews the forms you might wish to have on hand in the rare book department.)

So while outreach to faculty will usually eventuate in good relations between them and the special collections department, the friendships that will ensue should not weaken your resolve to maintain the professional practices of the department.

The Psychology of Special Collections; or, The Expectations of Patrons and Colleagues

In running a rare book department, librarians will encounter a variety of responses from their colleagues and patrons. Although specific responses will be considered throughout this chapter and elsewhere, some generic statements are in order.

All libraries have finite budgets. The corollary to this is that there is never enough money to allow a library to do everything it wishes to do. Librarians will almost never say, “We have all the staff, money, and space we need. Don’t give us any more.” The opposite is usually the case: “We could use more money, staff, and space.” So when a special collections department acquires an extraordinarily expensive item, responses could be negative: “Why do they need that? Just think of how all that money could be used in the rest of the library.” “We could have bought hundreds of Level 3 and Level 4 books for the price they paid for that atlas.” “They spent how much on that book? Just think of how much we could be giving to our underpaid staff with all that money.” The rare book librarian must counter all these attitudes with tact and patience, with good PR and friendliness, and with an understanding that others see things from perspectives different from hers.

It could be jealousy that prompts such attitudes among those outside special collections. After all, there is a gloss and fame that comes with being part of a rare book department that no cataloger or
reference librarian has. It behooves special collections personnel to befriend all those around them to try to defuse that “they think they are better than we are” attitude. The fact is that all who work in the library have the same mission: to link patrons with the information they need. In that view, it does not really matter in what department one works. And that appreciation should be uppermost in the minds of all rare book librarians in their dealings with those around them.

We could take the stance that the customer is always right, but that position would have to be modified when the customer’s being “right” compromises the department’s security or violates any other reasonable policy.

Another element of the psychology of running the department is the notion that special collections is exclusive—that is, only the elite are allowed inside. Potential patrons frequently say, “I didn’t know I could use that department,” or “I thought the rare book department was closed to people like me,” or “I assumed you had to be a professor to work in there.” Some special collections, especially at private institutions, can be as exclusive and excluding as they want to be, but that is not always good. This kind of negative PR might keep the load light on the staff, but it sets up a barrier to research, if only a perceived barrier. There is no way to know what kind of largesse could come the way of the department, or what kind of research might emanate from the department, if it did not turn away people by projecting such an attitude. Rare book librarians must of course screen users carefully, but they should not set up a screen that discourages anyone from asking to use the department’s holdings.

Our colleagues and patrons (local and distant) in this field expect from special collections departments some fairly basic things: decent service, courtesy, enthusiastic (or at least uncomplaining) effort, access to information, reasonable explanations for policies that they might not understand, consistency in service from one visit to another and from one patron to another. They expect to be treated well, not as inferior beings, not being given the impression that they are being catered to by an elite staff which deigns to let them use the institution’s precious goods. They should never feel as if the librarians are doing them a favor.

And our colleagues must understand why special collections may seem to get a disproportionate amount of resources, especially for acquisition. Good rare book librarians will command the same kind of respect that they feel for their own colleagues. The whole staff of the library should feel “We are all in this together” and not feel that special collections librarians are “special” or overly indulged.

The Placement of the Department in the Institution, and the Department’s Management

Special collections departments may exist in various places in libraries. In many libraries, the departments are located in Collection Development; in others they are under an AUL (Associate University Librarian) for Technical Services or in Reference (under an AUL for Public Services), and in still others they are positioned directly under the administration of the library. If the institution is old and large enough, special collections could be its own unit, as is the case, for example, of the Houghton Library at Harvard.

In one respect it does not really make any difference where in the hierarchy the department exists; its functions and responsibilities will not differ regardless of its position in the institution. In another respect, there is some reputation to be had if the department is a freestanding unit or if it is positioned directly under a library director, or perhaps a president or chancellor.

Chapter 3, “Archives,” will address management, but with specific reference to the management of the collection. Here, though, the concept of management is crucial because the subject of this section is the department’s place in the larger organization.

The department head will often have a staff working under her. This arrangement calls for managerial skills, which do not come naturally to many people. Library schools do have courses in library manage-
ment, and they could be useful, with much reservation, because the skills they present are not necessarily inherent. We can talk about the X and Y method of management—the stick and the carrot method. We can talk about the Directing style, the Participatory style, the style that encourages teamwork, the paternalistic or autocratic style, and on and on. But this is not a book about the level of management. It is a book about responsibilities, among other things, and regardless of one’s style of managing, the rare book librarian needs to manage two completely different kinds of things: the collection and the people around it.

As for the collection, the manager should learn best practices in many areas (covered by the present text): cataloging, security, access, legal issues, marking books, paging and reshelving, cataloging and creating finding aids, and much more. And the department head should do everything in his power to insure that all these best practices are adhered to. Managing the collection means not putting the holdings at risk in any way, no matter the reason. And managing also should be done with an eye to efficiency—which is another way of saying that if the collection is properly overseen, the staff will be operating with maximum productivity and the patrons will be happy to work there, knowing they are well served.

Each department will have its own rules. With rare books, there is no room for the laissez-faire style of management in which the chief leaves the staff to do what they will, observing along the way and making sure that no one gets out of line or slacks off. Because of the nature of the items in the department and the rules about who can bring what into the secure area, who may use pens in what places, who must toe the line with respect to ethical practices, and so forth, there is no room for slack management. It might force the special collections head to be firmer than he likes with the people who work under him, but issues of ethics and access and security trump all others, including the issue of likeability. Being a manager whom people really like or one who is a friend to all staff members is fine, but not to the detriment of the collection or the department’s operations or security.

Further, management often means training. A good manager knows the collection and the operations of the department and must often train those under her in what is best for that department. The manager does not need to know all. A reference staff will know more about department holdings than does the head of the department. The head will probably not be a cataloger, but she should know good reference service and cataloging when she sees them. Department heads often will have taken classes in these fields and should know when a book or manuscript has been properly cataloged and when proper reference procedures have been used. Department heads should know from the patrons’ perspective when they have been well served. This is not to say that you must be glaring at the staff at all times to make sure they are doing their jobs properly. It does mean that you must be observing the staff to make sure they are doing their jobs properly. The distinction is subtle. The key issue here is that the manager must see to it that the department she oversees is operating as well as it can. If it is not, it is a reflection on her.

Access: The Prime Directive

Libraries exist to link patrons with the information they need. I have made this point several times already and shall make it again. Everyone who works in the library has the same objective: increase access.
to information. And I mean everyone, from the custodians to the director. The cleaning that the custodians do keeps bugs and fire hazards away. Bugs and fire will harm or destroy materials, preventing access to the information those materials contain. The director makes sure that all staff, even the custodians, work toward serving patrons.

There is a perception among many—even among some special collections personnel—that the librarian's first job is to preserve the collection for future generations. And, of course, preservation is key to long-term access to information. But some librarians take this responsibility to an extreme, prohibiting access for any number of reasons—for instance, that the item is too fragile to use, or that a surrogate copy is all a patron needs, or that the potential user is only a high school student.

But there is really no ethical reason to prohibit access. If an item is too fragile to use, get it conserved or reformatted so scholars will have access to the information it contains. Of course, reformating does remove the patron at least one level from the original item, and some conservation work by its very nature takes away information from the original. In chapter 12 we will look at this in depth. But conservation aims to extend access to the information an item holds.

A good deal of literature exists on the use of special collections by high school students or undergraduates. Most of that literature comes from those who have an open-door policy for such patrons. Many rare book librarians agree with the view that the department should encourage young people to experience the use of primary materials. If the potential user is a high school or even a junior high student, his age and immaturity should not automatically disqualify him from using original or other special collections materials. He is possibly your researcher of the future. Exposure to the department's treasures can make a significant difference in a student's life, especially in terms of his connection to libraries and research. A department should never discourage young readers from using the rare book collection. Naturally, there must be good training and surveillance for students, but so should there be for all users.

Other kinds of patrons deserve equal treatment, though sometimes that intention entails a risk. For instance, some patrons might look shabby and unkempt. The department must, of course, screen potential patrons. Intake sheets (personal information forms) are standard tools for screening. They determine name, address(es), phone numbers, research areas, possibly specific items the patron
wishes to use, and so forth. They may include names of references as well. It might be that a homeless person—one without an address—enters the department as a patron. The requirement to obtain an address for all users might have to be waived in such an instance. It must be remembered that even a homeless person pays taxes, and, therefore, in a publicly funded institution, has the same right to access as does anyone else. If the special collections department is in a public institution (a university or public library, for example), it may be illegal for the librarian to prohibit someone from using the collection, no matter the patron’s appearance. The librarian should be aware of local, state, and federal laws in such instances.

Private libraries may have similar constraints about use, but they are in a better position to require letters of reference, advanced reservations, and other strictures that may limit access to the collection. But the original stance remains: although the librarian must keep as open a mind as possible about who has access to the department and must try to accommodate as many users as possible—balanced by a keen regard for preservation and security—access must be a prime consideration in deciding who may use the collection.

Rarity and Scarcity

In the world of special collections, the words rarity and scarcity are bandied about often. In their catalogs, sometimes to get a premium price, booksellers might say, “A scarce book,” or “Exceptionally scarce.” It is like the word very, which has been so overused that it has lost its meaning.

These two words—rare and scarce—indicate some difficulty in finding an item. Dealers often use the word rare for a book that one may find a half dozen copies of on the Web. Such dealers may simply be justifying their hefty asking price. Admittedly, this interpretation is not always true. There are truly rare or scarce books out there—hard to find, beautifully made, significant texts that are essential for important collections and that legitimately command high prices. But not all books described by those two words meet all these criteria.

The point here is that booksellers should use these words carefully and sparingly, librarians should ignore them when they see them in booksellers’ catalogs or quotes, and they should purchase books regardless of their rarity or scarcity but on the bases of their appropriateness for the collection and their affordability.

However, we are indeed talking about rare book departments, and though such departments may contain a preponderance of items that are not strictly “rare,” they do have collections that are characterized by holdings that are difficult or nearly impossible to obtain. The terms, usually used for expensive books, should not make the librarian shy away from an item so described. The attitude should not be, “A rare book. It’s probably beyond my budget.” It should be, “Let’s see what it is, how germane to my collection it is, what the asking price is, and, if I want it for my collection, what I can do to get it.”

For many librarians, especially those at non-profit or public institutions, the “we cannot afford it” mind-set has been instilled in them for so long that this attitude is difficult to overcome. But as a professional with a strong responsibility to increase and improve library holdings, the librarian should think about the possibilities, not the impossibilities, of acquiring rare materials. Holding truly rare materials that scholars can use and will seek out will distinguish a library.

First Editions

John Carter’s entry for “First edition” says:

Very, very roughly speaking, this means the first appearance of the work in question, independently, between its own covers. But, like many other household words, this apparently simple term is not always as simple as it appears. The question When is a first edition not a first edition? is a favorite debating exercise among bibliographers and advanced collectors; and some contributions to the confusion will be found in the present work under

This note highlights the complexity of issues that surround first editions, and we must not let that rubric attached to a book give it some special aura of value and make us immediately take it into the rare book stacks.

Carter and many others look at most first editions as artificial rarities, made rare by the mere fact of their being firsts, and with no other redeeming, value-enhancing quality. But the fact is that for centuries firsts have been garnering premium prices, and for this reason alone many of them should be handled with a heightened level of security, especially volumes that command seriously high prices.

Some books that were issued in large press-runs could be scarce and valuable, especially if the demand exceeds the supply. However, it is difficult to predict what books in their first edition will eventually merit being housed in the rare book department. If a volume is of a particularly collected, popular author, but the library does not have a special collection of that author’s works, even if the book could be valuable, it may not be a candidate for being housed in special collections. And many a book over the years goes from being just another volume on the shelves of a circulating part of the collection to being scarce and valuable by virtue of an author’s new-found fame and collectability, because the book wins a prize of some kind, because it is on a topic that suddenly becomes a rage in the collecting world, or for other reasons.

In the end, when librarians are looking for criteria to guide them on selecting what goes into the special collections department and what stays out, the fact that a book is a first edition might have some merit in its favor to bring it in. Obvious other criteria include the present (and potential future) monetary value of the item, who the author is, whether the book is illustrated or not and what kind of illustrations it has, and so forth. (In chapter 8 we will look more at appraisal: what affects the value of books?)

That a book is a first edition is not enough in itself to make it a candidate for housing in special collections.

And as Carter suggests, what exactly is a first edition may need to be elucidated for a particular text. Is it the first appearance of the text in print, bound into covers? Is it the first printing of an author’s work in her own country? What about a book that is issued in short numbers for reviewers (that is, “review copies”)? These might have many typographic errors in them, or they can be printed on cheap paper with black-and-white illustrations (or no illustrations at all), when the one that is eventually published for general consumption is on fine paper and has color illustrations. Here is another question: Should a librarian, seeing the new collectability of a current author, head for the stacks to pull in the first editions of that author’s earlier books, knowing that those early volumes will now be collectors’ items themselves? Many a scholar of rare books, including librarians and booksellers, may look at the desirability of first editions as an artificial phenomenon—that is, a foolish obsession of irrational collectors. But the fact is that some of these books can command hefty prices, and thus they should be protected from thieves by having them brought into the safety of the rare book department.

Staffing

In many institutions the rare book department is tiny—consisting perhaps of one FTE (full-time equivalent) position, or even only a part-timer. In others,
the staff could number fifteen or twenty or more. Of course, staffing is dependent on many variables: the size of the collection, the nature of the housing institution (public, private, state-run, for profit or non-profit), the size and budget of the parent institution, its mission, the resources available for the department, the recognition (or lack thereof) by the administration of the importance of the department, and other factors.

Also, depending on the size of the host and the department, its functions may vary from mere caretaking of some rare or vulnerable items to a full-service facility with its own acquisitions, reference, development, ILL, cataloging, processing, and other units. If we accept that the primary responsibility of the department is to offer scholars access to information, then the department needs at minimum a staff (of one or more) that can catalog books, create finding aids for manuscripts, page and reshelve books, make the physical objects available to patrons, and keep some kind of record of the unit’s activities. Other essential duties may include handling acquisitions, dealing with donors, doing some kind of reference (for local and distant patrons), and creating surrogates (e.g., digitizing, photocopying, or microfilming).

All these functions are essential in a living department—one that is not stagnant or moribund. But in some small institutions, the director of the rare book facility works only a few hours a week in this area and may spend the bulk of her time as a cataloger or reference librarian.

As mentioned earlier, it is the rare (maybe nonexistent) department whose head would say, “We have plenty of space, resources, and staff. We don’t need any more of these.” No special collections department could not use additional staffing. It is incumbent upon those in special collections units to do everything in their power to meet the prime directive of access. Because access is provided by employing many kinds of services, as already indicated, the single-FTE department head must try to be as many things as he can to as many patrons as need to use the department. In a tiny unit, it may take continuing education, an understanding administration or supervisor, and extreme dedication to achieve this goal. In a larger unit, access should be an achievable deliverable. Even in tiny departments, imaginative use of volunteers and interns can go a long way in fulfilling the department’s responsibilities to its patrons. The unit head must assess the department’s needs and create a collection development plan that includes a prioritized listing of optimum staffing for her department—even if there are no resources at present for those listed. (For additional thoughts on this topic, see the section “Personnel Selection and Training” in chapter 14.)

Knowing the Collection

One of the first activities a special collections librarian should do in a new position is to learn the collection. No matter at what level one works in the department, from director to lowest-level pager, a knowledge of the department’s holdings is essential.

Learning about the unit’s collection can be achieved through talking to others who know it, reading whatever literature there is about it, working on the front line (for instance, in reference), looking at all the department’s finding aids, browsing the cataloging records, and simply walking the stacks.

**AS A NEW** employee at the American Antiquarian Society (AAS), I did all the things mentioned in the text to familiarize myself with the collections. In the process I learned about the society’s huge collection of uncataloged pamphlets, and, whenever I could, I would open a box or two and quickly thumb through them to see what topics they covered. I saw leaflets on a huge variety of topics, and I got to know pretty much what was there without memorizing the location and subject matter of more than fifty thousand items. This knowledge was tremendously useful for me when scholars came in, for I would get to know their research areas, and I remembered seeing items they would want to know about among the pamphlets. I was able to supply from that collection important reading matter to many patrons during the time that I worked at AAS.
The higher you are in the hierarchy of a special collections library, the more chance there is that you will be involved in the politics and administration of the institution, and the less you will be dealing directly with the collection and its users. But that is no excuse for not knowing what the library contains. On any number of public occasions the director may be asked what the library contains and what its strengths are. For grant writing, for lectures, for development activities of various kinds and other forms of outreach, for interviews—all employees in the department should be familiar with the unit’s holdings.

Similarly, “knowing the collection” implies knowing its weaknesses and knowing the weaknesses of the building in which it is housed. A familiarity with the department’s gaps will help you to build the collection. An understanding of its personnel shortages may be useful in fund-raising. A knowledge of its weaknesses as a physical plant may garner support for performing deferred maintenance and possibly raising funds to fix leaky pipes or roofs. The more you know about the collection, the better off you and the collection (and the patrons) will be.

Knowing the Patrons

Librarianship is a service profession. We serve a wide variety of users, from young adults to seniors, from the general public (especially genealogists) to sophisticated scholars. From people ignorant about doing research in a rare book facility to experienced researchers with decades of familiarity with rare books and scholarly practices. Being able to help them all is part of our mandate, but it is also gratifying to know we are fulfilling our primary responsibility.

One excellent way to give the best service to the patrons is to get to know them and their research areas. A top-level administrator in a large special collections department may not have time for such acquaintance. But most others in the department can help patrons through the experience they have with the collection. Although the patrons’ primary acquaintance will be with the reference staff, it is important for others in the department to get to know who is doing research there.

At some research libraries, scholars working for an extended time (say, a week or more) in the special collections department are asked to give presentations to the staff about the work they will be doing at the library. All rare book staff should be encouraged or required to attend these talks so that they can bring to the scholars their knowledge of materials in the collection the researchers may profit from. Even if the department is of the one-FTE type, the librarian can discuss in detail what the patron needs and can offer information about the collection tailored to these needs.

This level of service may be difficult to provide, especially for small, overworked, understaffed departments in which each librarian is doing the work of three people. But not providing this service is detrimental to the researcher and will not garner any kind of appreciation or support from the user. Nor do we want poorly served, disgruntled patrons going out into the world and bad-mouthing us to others.

Some patrons can be a chore, difficult to deal with and seemingly impossible to please. But most of them are grateful for our services and willing to impart what they know to our staffs. Most scholars appreciate having an audience to speak to about their work. It gives them an opportunity to articulate what they are working on, as if they are doing a dry
run of the scholarship they will be writing up or the lectures they are preparing. The librarians can benefit greatly from this opportunity, for the scholars are working on materials in the library and the staff can learn more about their own materials than they knew before. This increase in their own knowledge will help them to help others in the future.

Naturally departments cannot offer a forum for all researchers who use special collections, as just described, but even a short conversation with patrons about their work, beyond the minimal words exchanged when we are delivering research materials to them, can teach us things we can use in the future.

Library users bring their own interests and passions to their work, often making them experts in the areas of their research. Librarians can share the patrons’ interests and learn a great deal from them about the library’s collections. A host of benefits can ensue.

**Knowing the Collectors**

There may be some rare book or special collections departments that are static—that is, ones that exist with no growth. But for the most part, these departments are alive and developing, with active programs for researchers, acquisition, cataloging, and the like. For many in the rare book field, acquisition is one of the pleasures of the job. It is enjoyable and educational to acquire books and manuscripts, especially the kind that wind up in special collections departments. Making information available to patrons is satisfying to both parties, the giver and the receiver. Making materials available to patrons (and thereby justifying the acquisition of these materials) is equally satisfying. And being able to share one’s interests—for some, even one’s passions—is another bonus.

As noted earlier in this chapter, rare book departments do not exist in a vacuum. They exist for the purposes already delineated. There is a fraternity and a sorority of participants: booksellers, librarians, historians, archivists, students, researchers, collectors, genealogists, novelists, journalists, casual readers, and many others. The librarian will be enriched by being involved with all these people, and such contacts can lead to the enrichment of his library’s collection in several ways.

Many of the finest subject collections in our rare book libraries began as private collections, often the passions of people with no (or little) academic training. George Arents (1875–1960) put together a

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**I HAVE DONE** research in libraries’ special collections in which the only exchanges between me and the librarians have to do with regulations I must follow and how I should use the materials and what I may not take into the reading room. This lack of interest does not necessarily reflect an unfriendly attitude, but it does not foster any learning on the part of the staff. If the employee wants to learn about the collection, if she wants to improve her services, one way to do so is to learn about the materials in her care. And even a brief chat about these materials with the people using them will help.

One possible fringe benefit is that a friendship may ensue that could be useful to both parties. At UC Riverside, when I was head of special collections, I met a scholar working on B. Traven, the mysterious author of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and many other wonderful books. The researcher was one of the world’s foremost scholars about Traven, and over the months that he was in my department, I learned a vast amount about this shadowy and enigmatic writer. This made me a greatly more informed librarian, and I was able to use this information to help subsequent scholars who visited the department. Later, when a conference on Traven was being held in Sweden, I was invited to speak about my department’s collection. At the conference I met a host of Traven scholars, and eventually my library acquired the research papers of some of them. The benefit to me personally was great; not only did I gain a friend but I became a more responsible and knowledgeable librarian about one of our major collections. And the benefit to the library was equally great, with the notoriety we garnered and the materials we acquired.

This is only one of many such experiences I have had, and it can be a model for others who have similar opportunities to interact with their patrons.
wide-ranging collection of materials on tobacco. In 1942 he deposited this collection at the New York Public Library where it is now called The George Arents Collection on Tobacco. The Rosamond B. Loring Collection of Decorated Papers, now at the Houghton Library at Harvard, is another accumulation put together by a private party and then given to a special collections department. These are just two of many thousands of special collections in rare book libraries, begun outside a library.

One feature of these collections is that, regardless of the academic background of their compilers, these collectors became experts on the topics of their collections, so the holdings they amassed were gathered intelligently and with discernment. Institutions usually cannot gather such collections from scratch on their own. Nor can any librarian, for the most part, become a subject expert on all the areas of the special collections in her care. Collectors are often true subject experts, and they may spend decades and significant amounts of money on their hobbies.

If a library has a special collection in a particular field, one way to augment it quickly is to acquire a fully developed collection from a private party, by gift or purchase. Knowing who these collectors are is not easy, but contacts with booksellers and collecting clubs can be useful. Therefore, it might be valuable for librarians to be involved as much as they can with the book clubs in their areas and even ones in distant places. A list of these can be found at the website of FABS, the Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies. Some clubs, like the Caxton, the Grolier, the Zamorano, the Rowfant, the Philobiblon, the Book Club of California, and the Roxburghe, along with the Society of Printers, have been around close to, or more than, a hundred years. Their members are generally collectors with keen interests, deep knowledge, and impressive holdings in the areas of their passions. Rare book librarians can only profit from becoming acquainted with these people, in the knowledge they can glean from them and from the possible collections they can acquire from them.

One way to open a dialogue with a collector about the disposition of his collection is to take him to lunch and forthrightly ask about his plans for it. If the collector is not geographically close enough for this approach, a formal letter on department letterhead stationery will do. (E-mails are simply too informal and too easy to get rid of with a simple click on the X or the Delete button.)

Many special collections libraries have exhibition or display areas, and arranging an exhibition of a private party’s collection, possibly accompanied by a catalog or lectures, or both, shows the library’s serious interest in it. Where the relationship goes from there depends on the skills of the librarian and the interests and intents of the collector. The overriding point here is that good things can happen for the library if the head of the department engages the friendship of collectors.

The connection between many a collector and a library has resulted in a sharing of information and resources between the two. A by-product of this collaboration is that collectors and librarians, seeing eye to eye on the importance of the collection, can form strong friendships over their common interests.

**IN MY OWN experience, a wonderful Blake collector generously donated items from his own collection, or he bought them for us from dealers and gave them to my library. I notified him of unusual Blake items that came to my attention, some of which he was able to add to his collection. Our friendship was formed over our mutual interest in Blake, and we were both beneficiaries of this connection.**

**Knowing the Institutional Collections**

As service professionals, special collections librarians, as noted several times, have as their prime directive imparting information to their patrons. If the collection she oversees does not contain the information the user needs, the librarian should be able to give the researcher advice on where that information can be found. To be versed in the field of rare books, one should be familiar with the major collections around the country or should be able to find out about them. Before we had the Internet,
this meant immersing oneself in the literature of the field, knowing what reference books would lead one to such information. Now it is easier, for most rare book facilities have websites on which their major and important collections are listed.

Friendships can develop between curators of outside collections, and these relationships, like those with collectors, could result in the enhancement of our holdings.

The point is that the more we know about our profession, the better we will be at helping patrons to find the information they seek. Knowing the holdings of other institutions can be an important tool.

**Knowing the Booksellers**

Perhaps the most direct friends that rare book librarians have are the booksellers. There is, of course, a commercial relationship between them, and the perception and the actuality of potential conflicts of interest could appear. But specialist booksellers whose expertise is in a library’s own areas of specialty will have a line on many items that the library may wish to own.

Rather than listing their goods in catalogs or online, booksellers often first consult us, giving us right of first refusal on choice pieces. They always find material that the library cannot find on its own. This alone is a valuable service. And as experts in their fields, they are often information resources for librarians, who themselves cannot be subject specialists in all the areas of their library’s holdings. The booksellers know the intellectual side of their field and know that field bibliographically as well.

Most booksellers love books the same way that many rare book librarians do, and it has been natural for many of them to become the librarians’ friends. But friendships aside, there is still an ethical level of interaction that must be maintained. Chapter 2 takes up the important subject of ethical conduct for special collections librarians. Here it is sufficient to say that the booksellers can be superb resources for librarians, helping them to build superb resources in many ways.

For instance, dealers sometimes sell special collections departments important items at excellent prices; give the library gifts now and then to keep the friendship alive; and turn collectors on to the department, people whose collections make them instant friends of the library. As “matchmakers,” booksellers bring together librarians and others with like interests, for their mutual benefit. Dealers also alert librarians to items at auctions or in other booksellers’ holdings. They can bid for the library at auctions and inspect items at auction houses that librarians cannot get to. They will often offer the library good terms for buying expensive items.

There are also stories about fiendish, foolish, greedy dealers, but these tales are few compared to the great number of accounts about the many good ones.

**Knowing the Authors**

Author collections are common in rare book libraries. And if a library collects the works of particular living authors, those authors might donate or sell their manuscripts and other germane possessions to the library. If the authors are deceased, a connection with their heirs might achieve the same results.

One enterprising librarian conceived the idea of contacting a host of science fiction (sf) writers who
were still fairly young. She convinced them that her library was the perfect venue for their archives, and she now has a substantial collection of papers of sf and fantasy writers. Such collections contain first and later editions of works, drafts, digital versions, correspondence, and other papers of the authors. Personal contact with the holders of authors' papers can contribute significantly to a library’s ability to acquire important author collections.

Cooperative Collecting

By its very nature, the rare book department collects many costly books. But no department has an infinite budget. Unless one has a vastly wealthy donor, has immense endowed acquisition funds, or works for an institution with a gigantic endowment that allows for nearly limitless buying, the limitation on one’s resources will constrain purchases. One way to stretch the budget is to engage in cooperative collecting.

Cooperative collecting means developing one’s collection in coordination with other institutions in the neighborhood. When scholars go to a library to do research, they want to have as many of the resources they need as possible in a single collection. It saves them time and money not to have to go from repository to repository to work on materials.

If a special collections department is near other like libraries, the managers may meet to create a plan of cooperative collecting, dividing subject areas among them. Scholars may not be able to see all the materials they need at one facility, but they may be able to use items at libraries close by. This arrangement works well for general collections, but it can be especially economical for rare book departments.

Sometimes, because of the nature of individual collections, it is imperative that geographically close institutions acquire the same books. The special collections librarians at the five southern University of California campuses (UCLA, Riverside, Irvine, San Diego, and Santa Barbara) met to plan to collect cooperatively. Though this plan worked to a small degree, in some respects it would not work. For instance, San Diego has a superb poetry collection; Santa Barbara has a strong fine press collection. When a fine press book of poetry came out, each library needed a copy of the title for its own collection. Though it was unlikely that two copies were needed for scholars, the collections themselves demanded having a copy in each library. (See levels of collecting in chapter 2.) However, cooperative collecting may be a practical solution for geographically clustered libraries, and it pays to pursue this strategy.

RBMS

The Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) is a division of ACRL (the Association of College and Research Libraries), itself a division of ALA (the American Library Association). The section’s website says: “RBMS strives to represent and promote the interests of librarians who work with rare books, manuscripts, and other types of special collections.” Elsewhere on its website is the following: “From its inception [more than fifty years ago], RBMS has attempted to foster communication between special collections librarians and assist in their professional development.” In the RBMS Newsletter (No. 12 [November 1989]) is this statement, which, more than twenty years later, holds true:

The mission of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) is to exercise leadership in the local, national, and international special collections communities in order to represent and promote the interests of librarians, curators, and other specialists concerned with the acquisition, organization, security, preservation, administration, and use of special collections, including rare printed books, manuscripts, archives, and graphic, music, and ephemeral materials; to enhance the capability of special collections libraries to serve the needs of users. (p. 1)

In the United States, RBMS is the single most important organization in the rare books and special collections field. Members are mostly librarians, though there are institutional members, booksellers,
archivists, graduate students from library schools, scholars, and others. RBMS has many standing and ad hoc committees, discussion groups, a full governing body, and liaisons to other groups. It is a tremendously active, highly professional organization, with decades of experience, extensive knowledge, expertise in a wide range of fields, and a membership willing to reach out to the broad rare book community—beyond the world of libraries.

Library school students interested in rare books and special collections should be encouraged to join RBMS, especially when they are students and the dues are quite low. Each year the organization has a preconference the week before ALA’s annual conference and usually in the same city as ALA’s meeting (or one nearby). The preconference themes focus on many aspects of rare book librarianship, and other papers are given that range across a broad spectrum of rare book topics.

This preconference is an event for educating younger members of the profession, for meeting friends, and for seeking employment. Formal job interviews may not be held during this meeting, but this is an opportunity to meet others in the field. Further, almost all the committee meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend, so a person new to the profession or thinking about getting into it can sit in on sessions about all aspects of rare book librarianship. These committee meetings are informative, and they allow attendees to connect actively with others in the profession.

As noted, even some booksellers are RBMS members and attend the preconference—an excellent venue at which to connect with some of their best customers. And in recent years, the ABAA (the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of America) has been holding small book fairs at the preconferences, creating another opportunity for attendees to meet the dealers.

**RBML, RBM, and Publishing in the Field**

The journal produced by RBMS, begun in 1986, was originally titled *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship (RBML)*. Since 2000 it has been called *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*. This journal, the primary voice in the field, publishes original articles and some of the talks given at the annual preconference (and, more recently, book reviews, as was done in *RBML*). Although it is an ACRL publication, *RBM* is not a perquisite of membership—it requires a separate subscription. People new to the profession may do well to look over the full run of the journal from its inception to get a sense of the range of topics it has covered. It is still a good resource for those trying to get up to speed on issues in the profession.

It is important for special collections librarians to think about publishing in the course of their work. They are close to original, valuable, rare materials and can spread the word about their collections through publication. And they lead active lives in the profession and will have much to say about the issues they face in running their departments, dealing with accessions and donors and administrators, learning about the intricacies of particular collection areas, and so forth. By publishing, they will be doing a service to the field, and, in return, publication can only help them in their own understanding of the subject matter of their research, in their advancement in their employment, and in their profession. *RBM* is a good place to get their work into print.

But it is not the only place. Because the subject matter of the broad fields of rare books and special collections is equally broad, there is a host of venues for publication. In chapter 9 we will look at the four main branches of bibliography. Here I will briefly mention only one: historical bibliography. As a study of this field shows, a huge number of disciplines can contribute information to those in special collections. So there is a world of publishing possibilities for those in rare books.

In a syllabus by Anne Welsh at University College London, we find this description of her course on historical bibliography: “By the end of the course, students will have an overview of the history of the book and the materials that make it up (paper, vellum, bindings, illustrations, print, etc.), some practical experience of bibliographic description, and knowledge of the major techniques for research,
including provenance research, copy census and reader analysis." Some of the topics this course intends to cover are book history, materials of book construction (several are mentioned), provenance, copy census, and reader analysis. The "etc." covers a vast territory. The point is that in the world of rare books and special collections, one single rubric, Historical Bibliography, covers an exceptionally wide range of topics, not all of which would be appropriate in the pages of RBM but which would be appropriate reading for a special collections librarian. The researcher should know what journals would be suitable for publishing articles on various topics. There are scores of journals and newsletters, magazines and online periodicals for librarians to publish in. Being familiar with the publications in one’s field and being an active scholar in that field are desirable goals for rare book librarians.

**CILIP and the Rare Books and Special Collections Group (RBSCG)**

In Great Britain, CILIP, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, is “the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers.” One of its divisions is the Rare Books and Special Collections Group, similar to RBMS in the United States. The group’s website explains its purpose:

The Rare Books and Special Collections Group unites librarians responsible for collections of rare books, manuscripts and special materials, with other interested individuals. The group promotes the study and exploitation of rare books, encourages awareness of preservation, conservation and digitisation issues, and fosters training opportunities related to the maintenance, display and use of collections. [Note that “exploitation” is used in the British sense of “to use for profit,” with no negative implications.]

The group meets three or four times a year, and it publishes an online newsletter three times a year with news, reviews, and articles, along with some of the papers delivered at the group’s conferences.

A professional rare book librarian should be actively involved in his profession. Attendance at the meetings of this group and of RBMS, involvement with committees, and participation in discussion groups will be part of the librarian’s growth. Especially early in the librarian’s career, there are few better venues for learning about the profession and for networking to meet others in the field. Many booksellers, archivists, and even some private collectors attend these meetings, so the networking is not merely to meet colleagues, it is to meet others outside the library profession who are involved in one way or another with rare books.

**Training the Rare Book Librarian**

Some areas in the field under scrutiny in this book are constantly changing, while others—especially historical ones—stay the same. The field is so vast that no one can be on top of everything there is to know. In the field of special collections (as in many fields), the notion of “core competencies” is always under scrutiny. What does it mean to be a fully competent rare book librarian? What skills must she have and what information does she need to fulfill the prime directive of supplying information to her patrons? One problem in answering these questions is that there are many kinds of information (practical, theoretical, legal, historical, technological, and so forth). Another problem is that there is certainly more information that could be useful to any given librarian than she could digest or retain. A third problem is that if a librarian wants to augment her knowledge to prepare herself for all patron needs, she could spend her entire career in continuing education (CE), taking classes and workshops, going to conferences and lectures, and reading endlessly. This way lies madness. It is more sensible for her to figure out what information and skills she needs for her particular job.

Every rare book librarian should assess the collection she works in and figure out what knowledge she needs to be an effective, responsible caretaker for that collection. This might mean becoming a subject specialist—to some degree—for the special col-
collections in the department. And it could mean learning details about some of the most used collections in the library: What physical materials are they are made of? What historical information about the topics of these materials must she know? And what of the provenance of the materials in her care? Is there historical research she can do to make her a more “informational” librarian for her clientele? And on and on. The particular collection and its users will tell the librarian how she must prepare herself to be the optimum caretaker.

Getting to know one’s collection, taking workshops, preparing for and then mounting exhibits, and publishing in the field are all forms of CE. Also, it will be useful for the librarian to learn as much as possible about current (and coming) technology to determine if any of it can be helpful in making the department’s holdings more available and safer than they are at present. Clearly, CE need not be strictly in the areas of the books and manuscripts in the department.

There are many opportunities for CE, and the first thing one thinks of when it comes to training rare book librarians is Rare Book School (RBS) at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Since 1983 RBS has been offering classes on many topics to prepare people for the profession or to increase the expertise of those already in it.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign also offers a summer program in rare books, with many courses. The program leads to a certificate and is the only program that currently certifies its graduates. Just before leaving UCLA, I started a rare book school there, and it now offers several courses. One can also take courses at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, the University of Utah, the Claremont Colleges in California, and several other institutions that offer courses or workshops in printing, papermaking, bookbinding, and many other topics.

Three universities (Indiana University, Long Island University, and Pratt Institute) have Rare Book and Special Collections specializations in their library schools. Other library schools offer classes in book history or rare book librarianship, the history of libraries, bibliography, medieval codicology, and other courses germane to the education of a rare book librarian. The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), The Los Angeles Preservation Network (LAPNet), Lyrasis, the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and other organizations offer workshops useful to rare book librarians.

As emphasized earlier, attendance at scholarly conferences and other meetings is also educational, and librarians and others in the rare book field should try to attend them when time and resources permit and when the pedagogy of the workshops or classes will truly improve their ability to serve their patrons. Especially early in one’s career in special collections, attending RBMS meetings and preconferences, and joining committees and working groups, is a valuable part of one’s continuing education in the field.
In Britain, RBSCG also offers many learning opportunities, with a liaison with the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association, lectures, the dissemination of information about rare book holdings at various institutions, and more. In 2011 the group held a conference on how to “flaunt” your collections (how to get information out to the world about your holdings), and one on how to develop a major special collections exhibition. And in association with the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association, the group produced the document Theft of Books and Manuscripts from Libraries: An Advisory Code of Conduct for Booksellers and Librarians. The opportunities are vast for training in the field.

It is impossible for everyone in rare books to know everything about the field, so the librarian, the bookseller, the scholar/bibliographer, and the collector will have to choose carefully among all the learning opportunities available. A collection strong in children’s books might spur its caretaker to learn as much as possible about particular authors, book illustration techniques (especially chromolithography), the history of this field, and where the great children’s book collections are. Useful, perhaps, might be workshops on printing techniques, binding, and genres of kids’ books. A workshop or class in the making of medieval manuscripts might be excellent, but that was not a period rife with children’s books, and such a workshop may be relatively useless for one’s job. Of course, such an experience might be personally satisfying, irrespective of one’s on-the-job needs, and the pleasure one gets from enhancing one’s personal knowledge cannot be discounted. Just because an opportunity to enhance one’s knowledge arises in a subject that has nothing to do with one’s job does not mean that opportunity should not be taken.

The one area of training that may be useful for all who work in rare books is cataloging, whether the librarian becomes a cataloger or not. To understand special collections cataloging fully one must understand a great deal about books: their provenance, printing, composition, materials, and so forth. Even if the librarian does not go into cataloging, knowing that discipline will increase his abilities as a rare book librarian.

Many institutions have continuing-education funding available for the staff. If the employer does not offer such funding, the librarian may apply to any of a number of private foundations, the federal government, or other funding agencies that support this kind of training. The University of Virginia Rare Book School has fellowships for some attendees. The more the librarian knows, the more his library, his institution, and the scholars he serves will benefit.

This chapter has dealt with some of the practical realities of running a rare book or special collections department (or both)—what to do, what to know, how to prepare yourself to do it, what resources are out there, and the like. It is certainly not definitive. Someone once said that your education will teach you about 20 percent of what you need to know for your job. The job will teach you the rest. In the rare book world, this may be true, because it is such a varied realm that one will be facing new challenges and new things to learn every day. In a rare book department it is also true, because each department has its own special collections, its own specific holdings, its own policies and procedures, its own quirks, and its own particular responsibilities, shaped by the parent institution and by the users. A tactic that might work well in one environment might not work in another. Librarians must shape their own educations based on the world around them.

Here we have looked at some overriding concerns and broad areas of operation. More specific, practical concerns will be dealt with in forthcoming chapters.

NOTES

1. As we shall see in chapter 3, archives often fit in with special collections, and a department may have a double title: Special Collections and Archives (or Archives and Special Collections).

2. For levels of collecting, see chapter 2 and appendix 2 in the present volume.

3. No theory of management will work for all people. Clearly, some people have one style of management, others have a different style, and still others were
not meant to manage. Further, a manager may need to use one style of direction for one staff person and a completely different strategy for another. The good manager needs to be flexible and insightful enough to know what kind of treatment to give each person she supervises.


6. See the organization’s website at www.fabsbooks.org.

7. See www.rbms.info.

8. See www.rbms.info/history. A great deal more information is available about RBMS on this excellent site.


11. This statement is at www.cilip.org.uk/about/special-interest-groups/rare-books-and-special-collections-group.

12. Programs come and go, and there is no guarantee that these three schools will continue to offer this specialization.


14. For one provocative, but discursive, essay on training students for a career in rare books, see William E. Landis, “Personas and Archetypes: Envisioning the 21st-Century Special Collections Professional,” RBM (Rare Books and Manuscripts) 7.1 (Spring 2006): 40–48, http://rbm.acrl.org/content/7/1/40.full.pdf+html. In the same issue of this periodical is Deirdre C. Stam’s “Bridge That Gap! Education and Special Collections,” pp. 16–30 (http://rbm.acrl.org/content/7/1/16.full.pdf+html), in which she has a section titled “Education of Librarians” (pp. 25–30). Another article in the same issue is worth looking at: Patricia Fleming, “Education and Training of Special Collections Professionals, Librarians, and Archivists in Canada,” pp. 69–72 (http://rbm.acrl.org/content/7/1/69.full.pdf+html).
The aims of this book have been many, but the basic one is this: If you are working with rare books and special collections, you need to know a lot of things. This book aims to tell you what you need to know, whether you are a librarian (the main audience for the text) or a bookseller, an archivist or collector, a historian, or anyone else who wants to know what there is to know that could be useful.

The scope here has been broad because the field of special collections is broad. And as historical bibliography has shown, there is really no end to what information might be useful to anyone working in the field of rare books. Hence, there is no “definitive” text for those working in rare books and special collections. Those in the rare book field cross paths with historians; with people in law, sociology, psychology, all areas of medicine, finance, preservation and conservation, architecture, science, technology; with professional and amateur writers, donors, scholars, students; and with adults and children. The users of the library’s holdings might be local or remote, rich or poor, well educated or unschooled. The breadth of this field leads to its endless fascination.

As has been noted several times in this book, the world of information is expanding at a fast pace. Large quantities of information that might be useful to readers of this book have been produced since the writing of this text ceased and the book went into production. There isn’t enough time in anyone’s life to keep up with even a fraction of it. The present text has tried to look with some circumspection at the field, offering to those in this broad realm information about and advice on ways to approach special collections and rare books. A key point is that no two people/institutions/collections are alike; hence the general principles and specific information presented here will be useful only up to a point. Beyond that point, people will need to draw on their own experiences, follow the rules and regulations, policies and practices of their own institutions and states, and solve their own distinctive problems as they arise.
It behooves us all to stay current in our field, whether it be with new theories about access to information, changing laws, developing technologies, new ways of looking at customer service, evolving methods of information retrieval, cost-recovery issues, discoveries in book history, and anything else that might direct our thinking about the materials in our care and the people who use them.

Rare books and special collections are about everything. In a sense, the field is so broad that it encompasses everyone. Those who are the gatekeepers are in a position of responsibility and accountability, and we must strive to be as knowledgeable as we can so that we can be relied on by those who seek our advice and assistance. The present text offers an introduction to this knowledge.

The rare book world has its challenges and rewards, its fascinations and satisfactions. This text has aimed at opening this world to many readers. The more we know about the things we have in our lives—like books, manuscripts, photographs, archives, and the other things that make the book world a realm of endless fascination and responsibility—the richer we are.
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