Betty Bengtson, in her presentation at this conference, says that where general collections have become more "homogenized..., it is in our special collections that the distinctiveness of our research libraries will be maintained" (see page 92 in this issue).

I have been concerned about using the term mainstream as a metaphor for library orientation. Bengtson’s image of whitewater canoeing gave focus to the source of my uneasiness: we are in real trouble, not only in special collections, but in real trouble as libraries in general if uncontrolled forces sweep us along and our role becomes one of reaction rather than active policy-making. Are we only to bob along on rafts hoping to navigate a current over which we have no control, or is our true responsibility to direct the path the stream itself will take?

Special collections libraries are facing two issues: what should we become in the future, and in some cases—such as the Kansas City Public Library example (in which the library decided to sell off most of its rare books)—should we exist at all? I will return to the latter question. Let us begin with where we are headed.

The glut of information and the financial black hole of technology might be the worst of the uncontrolled “streams” if we let these library trends control us. Research libraries, whose special collections are at the center of original research, are evolving from providing resources for knowledge to “information centers.” As university librarians try to balance budgets, they are latching on to cliches, such as the “access vs. ownership” and “just in time vs. just in case” phrases in collection development, as William Jones has noted (see his article, pp. 80 ff. of this issue).

The seduction of technology and the gateway to other library resources through the Internet have opened the floodgates for these approaches. Special collections librarians must take the position of challenging our directors to step out of this flood...
and review where it is taking us. Does the promise of the universal virtual library provide a better product than the original materials it purports to replace? Is the virtual library less costly or more costly to create and maintain? And, perhaps most important, is the virtual library what scholars really want, or what some who run libraries think they want?

First, we must make our library leadership understand that digitized texts and images are only a new form of transmission. We have had facsimiles of original materials for centuries, first through engravings and now through photoreproduction. Today one can find a reproduction of Botticelli’s “Birth of Venus” in Janson or the Beowulf manuscript in the Early English Text Society series. These reproductions serve the majority of instructional uses of these two icons of western European studies. But the art historian may well need to visit the Uffizi and the medievalist the British Library at some point in their research to view the originals. Virtual libraries may provide another form of secondary access, but not a substitute for consulting the original firsthand. The Collection Development Committee of the nine University of California campuses concluded its 1992/93 annual report by asking “whether the virtual library that will certainly serve the University of California in the future can accurately be described as a virtual research library.”

Second, I submit that conversion of our libraries to virtual libraries is a far more costly proposition than the cost of running our special collections libraries, which several of our speakers noted under their discussions of our “special-ness.” Part of taking stock of where libraries are headed is to understand that a balanced approach to traditional and virtual libraries is the key to the success of both. It is not an either/or proposition. Developing a virtual component of the library may work for new materials originally produced in an electronic rather than paper format, but though the technology exists to accomplish it, it is financially impossible to convert all retrospective collections to a universal virtual library.

Bob Zick, an Associate Librarian of Congress involved in LC’s “American Memory” project, has suggested that one day everything at LC will be available on workstations and that libraries will no longer be places. I suggest here that Mr. Zick do the financial calculations to convert the estimated four billion pages of text of LC’s estimated twenty million volumes. And this does not begin to address the other millions of manuscripts, prints, photographs, maps, motion pictures, and sound recordings LC holds. And what about the rest of us? Where is the money? I can report that automation costs at UCLA impinged upon other library functions long before California’s current budget crisis. Making a virtual library from our existing library will not improve our budgetary situation.

Most important, are digitized texts and images what most scholars want in order to conduct their research? Perhaps they are in contemporary scientific research where current journal literature is the principal resource and publishers’ conversion to electronic formats is already upon us. Or in certain textual studies. Or for the
preservation of and easier access to a finite group of images. But in the humanities, social sciences, and history of science, which comprise most of our collections, I have yet to hear from any quarter the demand by our constituents that we transform our collections to virtual libraries. Jones’s ongoing survey of humanists confirms this point, and I heard nothing to the contrary at the 1992 Harvard and Oxford conferences looking at special collections in the 21st century.

As Jones reports, “Special applications of computers . . . are exceptions to the more common use [of original collections by humanists]. Some scholars have made use of specialized databases like the *Thesaurus Linguae Grecae*; this use has involved the database not as a substitute for print text” (page 86 in this issue). I do believe we should participate whenever feasible in use-driven digitization projects, such as the electronic text project at Princeton or RLG’s plan for digitizing photographs. When the demand is actually there and the project is manageable and affordable, our participation shows a willingness to mesh some of our operations with the rest of the library, tempered by a rational approach.

So how do we stem the tide? For years, we in special collections have been set apart from the rest of the libraries in which most of us reside. We are partly to blame for this, sometimes by our own attitudes; but some of that perception of “special-ness” is caused by the uninformed perspectives of our fellow librarians. Brian Schottlaender’s paper (see pp. 98 ff. of this issue) documents the extra attention many of our functions require.

But how different are we really? We collect. We catalogue. We provide public services, including reference and outreach through bibliographic instruction, teaching courses of our own, and mounting exhibitions. We make the same use of our parent library’s various systems, from online cataloguing to e-mail communications. We participate in development efforts, often leading the way in this area. And we participate in library publications. These are the major components of a research library’s operations. Why then do our colleagues continue to set us apart when we do what they do?

Special collections librarians must now take the responsibility for addressing this gap in understanding. Those who have had the opportunity to take the Merrily Taylor/Sam Streit course on advanced management of special collections in Rare Book School will have heard Taylor say that our key role is to educate our library administrators continually, maybe even daily. Bengtson reinforced this point. We can close the gap by taking a pragmatic approach to our own operations and by explaining these functions to our library administrators in *their* language. Our challenge, as Schottlaender said, “is to develop mechanisms which are both adequate to the task and consonant with those employed elsewhere in the library” (page 100 of this issue). Let me pose some questions to illustrate what I mean.

In collection development, how many of us have written policies based upon discussion with the Associate University Librarian for Collection Development and
other selectors, placing our special collections policy in the context and language of the rest of the library’s statements? How many of us have incorporated standard models such as the RLG conspectus to describe our four- and five-level holdings in the context of the one-, two-, and three-level holdings of the general collections in those subject areas?

How many of us have paid more than lip service to cooperative collection development locally, regionally, or nationally? To develop a national network of shared resources, we must each focus our efforts on local and regional collections, basing our selection decisions on the research needs of our parent institution. We must communicate with each other, especially in subject areas where we overlap, and identify portions each of us is willing to allow other libraries to develop comprehensively.

I have also come to believe that most collections serve the greatest scholarly good in research libraries close to where the collections were formed. In weeding some old backlogs this past year, Jim Davis, Rare Books Librarian at UCLA, and I found six shelves of New Hampshire pamphlets. How they got to UCLA no one knows, but we did know that no one would think to travel to Los Angeles to study New Hampshire history. So we shipped the lot off to Dartmouth. There might have been some sleepers in the collection (and we hope that there were), but the time and effort to discern these was outweighed in our minds by some first efforts toward cooperative collection development.

The ultimate question on the subject of collection development is: should all libraries have special collections? Daniel Bradbury’s account of the Kansas City Public Library’s (KCPL) reduction of special collections holdings seems rational. Materials at KCPL supporting other regional collections are being kept; materials out of the scope of the library’s mission statement and collection goals are being sold, the proceeds to support collecting within their policy. I do not think every central public library should try to emulate the New York Public Library, with its special collections department. I am not even sure every college or university should have special collections either, but I am certain that if they choose to have such departments, these libraries should be logical extensions of the general collections with materials supporting the institution’s teaching and research mission. And in making this commitment, the institution must then provide appropriate staffing, acquisitions, and operational support.

In cataloguing, how many of us have established tiers of descriptive cataloguing appropriate to the different types of materials we manage? There were queries on EXLIBRIS in May 1993 about this approach, a heartening sign. But I have also observed some special collections libraries which give the same Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books cataloguing to their reference collections that they give to their rarest books. Technical services directors forced to streamline their cataloguing operations must look askance at these absurdities. Whether you go to this extreme or not, you
should not leave your cataloguing practices vulnerable to someone else's review. Start your own review now and renegotiate levels of cataloguing with your cataloguers and the Cataloguing Department, so that when operational reviews come, and they will, you will be in a position to demonstrate both pragmatism and efficiency.

Furthermore, here is where we should be staking our technological future—providing more complete description of our holdings for better access rather than putting our materials in electronic formats when no purpose warrants it. Better description of our holdings is what the library directors and middle managers at the RBMS Preconference have prescribed, and it is what scholars want.

In public services, how many of us have attempted to mesh our policies and procedures with the rest of the library's? For our readers, this provides some consistency in practices which help break down some of the barriers of accessibility many perceive as artificial and unnecessary. For our colleagues in reference departments, this should provide clearer understanding of our holdings and define the relationship of our collections to the general collection. This communication about resources should parallel the collection development statement for special collections materials and should extend systematically to faculty teaching courses in the areas in which we collect.

How many of us have re-examined our reporting avenues? Does your library require an annual report from all departments? If not, do you submit one to the Librarian anyway? If so, what does yours look like? Do you attempt to set your special collections apart from the other departments' reporting style or do you make yours conform to the reporting standards requested as much as possible? Every library at least compiles statistical reports. Do you contribute to these reports, and do you attempt to identify the work you report in the language of the rest of the library? Let me give you two examples.

At UCLA one statistic reported by all libraries is "items shelved." This is a public service statistic that counts all materials put into their proper locations, whether they are new items cataloged, materials picked up from tables or reshelve shelves in the library, or materials returned through circulation. It is a measure of activity and indicates a staffing level necessary to accomplish this function. We duly report our figures for Special Collections' activity. We also take care to annotate our data, pointing out that in an open-stack collection, this indicates the full staffing necessary, but in Special Collections it indicated only half of our work since our staff must also fetch the items for the readers. A simple point, perhaps, but one which makes the library administration take a closer, and favorable, look at the staffing of our operations.

Another statistic is "mediated search services." In other departments this refers to librarians assisting readers with access to dial-up and online databases. While we do not perform these functions in Special Collection, we make a case that many of our extended reference services to our readers are equivalent "mediations" on the part of our curators.
In a period at UCLA when we are closing some branches and consolidating staff into larger combined departments, Special Collections was protected from staff cuts because we could accurately represent the extent and significance of our operations in language that allowed the library administration to compare our work on the same terms as other departments. These are simple examples of what attempts at participating in and directing the mainstream can do for us.

All of these efforts require that we seek out our library administrators and standing policy-making committees for ongoing discussions and active roles in these groups. We cannot sit back and wait for them to come to us. We can no longer take the position that the historical significance of the materials we curate make them ipso facto significant in future library plans. All of these efforts take time and take those of us in the administration of special collections that much further away from the books, manuscripts, maps, drawings, photographs, and ephemera that drew us into this area of librarianship in the first place. Our responsibilities have expanded from simply curating our collections to justifying their significance and role in the larger scheme of the library and the library’s research institution.

In one of the talks at the RBMS Preconference, Joan Gotwals commented that her special collections was omitted from a user survey and an accreditation review, and left out of Emory University’s planning for new roles for librarians. “In thinking over my discussions and writings about ‘the library of the future,’” she said, “I now realize how much I have overlooked Special Collections.”

Let us certainly continue to talk among ourselves about these issues, but let us also start taking them up actively with our directors and colleagues elsewhere in our libraries. Let us not get swept away by the mainstream, but become central participants in steering its course. This RBMS Preconference has provided a good start in the dialogue. Do not lose the momentum; take it home with you.

NOTES

WANTED
HANDWRITTEN AMERICANA
Account books, Journals and Diaries

Buying and Selling

Always buying for my collection records kept by Craftsman, Travellers and Farmers before the 1850's making Bedsteads, Chairs, Clocks, Cloth, Coffins, Glass, Coverlets, Iron, Pottery, Powder, Tools, Wagons, and Wheels.

Legal, Medical, Military Journals & Letters
Sketches and Architectural Drawings

Roy C. Kulp, Box 264
Hatfield, Pennsylvania 19440
215-362-0732

---

RARE BOOKS & MANUSCRIPTS
15th-20th Century

Medicine, Science, Technology, Natural History, Early Printed & Illustrated Books.
Catalogues Issued.

B & L Rootenberg
Post Office Box 5049 - Sherman Oaks, California 91403
Telephone: [818] 788-7765
Telesax: [818] 788-8839
SPECIALIZING IN SELLING ANTIQUARIAN AND RARE BOOKS IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE AND MEDICINE

JEFF WEBER • RARE BOOKS

Please write or call for a complimentary catalogue

We are interested in buying collections or better single items from both libraries and individuals

Appraisal services available for books and manuscripts

1923 FOOTHILL DRIVE
GLendale, CALIFORNIA 91201-1242
1-818-848-9704

Have Your Deaccessions Handled by One of New York City's Finest Sources for Antiquarian and Fine Books

Metropolitan Antiques Pavilion

Always seeking single volumes to entire libraries for auction consignment or outright purchase

Book Auctions Scheduled Monthly
Appraisals
Catalogue Subscriptions Available

110 West 19th Street between 6th & 7th, NYC 10011
Phone 212-463-0200 Fax 212-463-7099

1994 ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIRS
January 21st-23rd June 17th-19th October 7th-9th
Abracadabra Booksearch International
Culpin's (Antiquarian) Bookshop
3827 West 32nd Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80211 USA
(303) 435-0547 Fax: (303) 433-8060
1-800-545-BOOK (2665)

****************************

ABRACADABRA BOOKSEARCH INTERNATIONAL

can help you locate books for your specialised collections.

If you are seeking to add to your collections, send us your wants:-

1. We can locate books in a general or specific topic area

   AND

2. We can locate individual books, pamphlets, etc.

Founded in 1977, we are one of the world’s largest and most comprehensive search services. We have a very large net that is able to drag in that very hard to find item.

- TRY US! THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR OUR SERVICE!

****************************

William Doyle
GALLERIES
AUCTIONEERS & APPRAISERS

SPECIALISTS IN
FINE BOOKS, MAPS & AUTOGRAPHS.

We are currently accepting collections and single item consignments for upcoming auctions.

For more information regarding consignments and appraisal services contact Brendan H. Cahill.

MONTANUS, ARNOLDUS.
De Nieuwe en Weereld of Beschryving van America en Tzuid-Land.
Sold in June of 1993 for $7500

175 East 87th Street, New York, New York 10128
(212) 427-2730 Fax: (212) 369-0892