

Editor's Note

SIDNEY E. BERGER

The articles in this issue emanate from the ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) program session held in Miami in June 1994. The focus of the panel was "Education for Rare Books and Special Collections Librarians," a tremendously broad subject because the field of special collections librarianship is equally broad.

In his fine study, Lawrence J. McCrank¹ considers most of the issues the panelists faced: "attitudes between bookmen and bibliographers" (p. 3); "the interplay between curators and library administrators" (p. 5); the mix of general and specialized education in library schools; the movement of "library education away from book-centered cores to processes and operations studies" (p. 6); the need for more training in information studies and the concomitant loss in the rest of the curriculum when such new courses are introduced; "the future of rare book librarianship" (p. 7); archival education,² psychological aspects of being rare book librarians within a profession surrounded by those relatively ignorant of their fields; and so on, all with respect to the education necessary to be a productive and responsible rare book and/or manuscript librarian.

As we know, special collections and manuscripts departments are libraries in microcosm. They deal with selection and acquisition, collection development policies and procedures, reference, preservation and conservation, photocopying and microfilming and other forms of reformatting, cataloging and inventorying and the production of various kinds of finding aids, serials, budgets, occasionally interlibrary loan, exhibitions and lectures, paging and reshelving, and everything else that goes on in the library at large. And the kinds of materials handled in rare book and manuscript collections are probably more numerous than those handled throughout the rest of the library. McCrank says, "It is now generally accepted that today's librarians must achieve flexibility and ability to cope with the whole information process" (p. 6). This is especially true for special collection librarians.

For these reasons, special collections and manuscripts librarians must be as schooled as possible in all these areas in order to function in a way that benefits their departments the most. No library school program trains us adequately in all

Sidney E. Berger is Head of Special Collections, Rivera Library, University of California, Riverside.

of these areas; and most of these subjects are touched on lightly or not at all in most of our library school curricula. So to bring us up to speed on all of the areas we are responsible for, and to allow us to keep abreast of new developments in the field, we read *RBML* and *EXLIBRIS*, and we seek continuing education courses of various kinds.

The aims of the RBMS panel were to discuss the kind of education that we need and to enumerate the places where that education was being made available. The speakers whose papers are printed here represent different backgrounds and experiences. Michèle Valerie Cloonan teaches in the Library School at UCLA, but she has extensive experience as a librarian. Her present position as Curator of Rare Books at Smith College and her work in the past in the Newberry Library give her a broad perspective on the needs of Special Collections Librarians. Similarly, William Joyce has been a Curator of Manuscripts and, presently, Head of Special Collections, so he understands both what the departments need and what training their personnel should have. Additionally, these two scholars have many years of experience in RBMS (Joyce as past chair), seeing where and why policy is made and seeing it implemented.

Richard Cox has for many years been teaching archives, a field that runs parallel to and often overlaps those of rare books and manuscripts. His extensive publication record indicates that he is in the forefront of that field as an educator. The insights that he has gleaned from that profession are clearly useful to special collections and manuscripts librarians.

We cannot complain that “we have heard all this before.” That is a cavil from the complaisant. But with the constant changes that we see in library practices, hardware, software, users, and so on, education for librarians in this field is an ongoing need. Every profession needs to do a self-analysis on a regular basis to keep its practitioners in step with current trends, laws, philosophies, and products. This is the *raison d’être* for the articles in the present issue.

NOTES

1. Lawrence J. McCrank, *Education for Rare Book Librarianship: A Reexamination of Trends and Problems*, Occasional Papers, No. 144 ([Champaign-Urbana]: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library Science, 1980). McCrank cites the main previous studies on the subject: Gordon N. Ray, “The Changing World of Rare Books,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 59 (April/June 1965): 103–41; Ann Bowden, “Training for Rare Book Librarianship,” *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 12 (Spring 1972): 224; Rollo G. Silver, “The Training of Rare Book Librarians,” *Library Trends* 9 (April 1961): 446–52; and several other articles. Also germane to this topic is Sidney E. Berger, “‘What Is So Rare . . .’: Issues in Rare Books and Special Collections,” *Library Trends* (Summer 1987). In fact, this entire issue of *Library Trends*, titled *Recent Trends in Rare Book Librarianship*, edited by one of our contributors to the present issue (Michèle V. Cloonan), should be useful.

2. McCrank: “Both archivists and special collections curators find themselves in programs which increasingly force them into studies associated with the new librarianship and information science”; and “the majority of today’s library school graduates are not even remotely conversant with rare books and manuscripts or repositories which care for primary resources” (pp. 8, 9).

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