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# Afterword

## RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage

*Lisa Browar and Marvin J. Taylor*

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Since the first issue of *RBML* rolled off the presses more than 13 years ago, the world of rare books and manuscripts has undergone a series of upheavals that can best be described as tectonic. The contemplative reading rooms originally fitted out with mahogany bookcases, leather wing-back chairs, and Old Master prints where bibliographers, textual editors, and other scholars poured over the treasures of Western culture have yielded to undergraduate students working on the history of gender in photography, faculty contextualizing racial stereotyping by examining Victorian book design, and private researchers mining film archives for the next important video documentary. Reigning supreme over these seismic shifts in a once familiar landscape is the computer workstation that had to be squeezed in where the breakfront used to be, plugged into the power strip that also lights the former cataloger's favorite brass lamp.

While these exaggerations may overstate the point, it is true that special collections repositories in the past two decades have expanded their cultural missions. No longer are they exclusively repositories for preserving rare and valuable print and manuscript materials. Now these collections provide access, promote education, encourage new areas of research, develop new technologies, and consciously seek to raise the profile of cultural documentation for a broad audience. The pages of *RBML* have documented some of the best achievements of the librarians who have led these changes. With serious contemplation, hard work, and a

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depth of knowledge seldom found elsewhere in the library world, rare book and manuscript librarians have brought about a revolution in the profession, complete with ethical guidelines, standards, and a vision for the future that broadens the work to include non-print media, three-dimensional artifacts, digital objects, and a host of new “special” kinds of materials.

Those who care about preserving and using a shared cultural heritage have reached an important juncture. Increasingly, librarians are seeking the expertise of curators, conservators, technicians, historians, archivists, photographers, and other experts whose work overlaps. Because special collections repositories have always held much more material than printed books and manuscripts, strong ties have been developed to other professionals in related fields. At no time in the past have the sheer number of different media and the vast amount of it called for such close collaboration with colleagues outside the library profession. As the Association of Research Libraries and many major universities struggle with the prospect of hiring non-MLS degree candidates for library positions, the special collections community can offer leadership in bringing groups of experts together in a new forum for the study, interpretation, preservation, and accessibility of cultural documents.

With this in mind, it is time for *RBML* to grow. Long conversations with members of the profession, the *RBML* editorial board, and members of related professions have led to the transformation of *RBML* into *RBM: A Journal for Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*. This new title reflects the increased collaboration with booksellers, collectors, museum professionals, conservators, and preservation specialists in all media, as well as scholars, students, archivists, fine printers, photographers, museum professionals, video producers, filmmakers, and anyone interested in and working to preserve cultural heritage.

Of course, a name change is not enough. For the journal to serve the profession construed in this new context, it must change its content and focus. No longer will articles be simply about librarianship, though some articles of this nature will appear occasionally. The goal of the newly configured journal is to foster a conversation that transcends traditional professional boundaries. Some topics under consideration include managing photographic collections, legal issues for cultural heritage repositories, library-museum relations, and copyright in the digital age. The aim is to expand the discussions from the narrowly defined world of rare books and manuscript librarianship to the larger context of cultural heritage stewardship. Practical articles about special collections librarianship will appear from time to time, but they will be published alongside thought-provoking theoretical and philosophical pieces. It is hoped that *RBM* will become a place where members of this enlarged community will enter into a dialogue about documenting and preserving cultural history.

Equally important is the preservation of this history of special collections librarianship. Rare book and manuscript librarians spend much of their careers

preserving the history of others. It is now time for them to mine their own collective past. To this end, an occasional series entitled "Exit Interview" will appear, in which recently retired members of the profession will have the opportunity to reflect back on the changes that have occurred during their careers and to prognosticate the future.

Missing from *RBM* are book reviews. Rather than publish out-of-date reviews, a timely list of new titles received to assist with acquisition decisions will appear in each issue. This list will also be more comprehensive than the review process allowed.

All of these changes call for a redesign of the journal and ACRL director of publications, Hugh Thompson, and his staff, have contributed significantly to the journal's new look. The next issue will display all of these changes.

The kinds of conversations that will take place in the pages of *RBM* must begin with a consideration of the basics. In order to do this a wide-ranging group of individuals including scholars, collectors, dealers, printers, librarians, archivists, and many more were asked the question, "What's so special about special collections?" Their responses, along with a selection of articles that examine the nature and fundamentals of special collections librarianship, will appear in the first issue of *RBM*. Join us for the discussion.