In the early 1970s, when I began to teach at the Columbia University School of Library Service, I quickly discovered that, though the literature of historical and enumerative bibliography was immense, the literature of rare books and manuscripts librarianship itself—whether separately considered or taken as a part of research librarianship as a whole—was virtually non-existent. Since I was at the time almost entirely innocent of any knowledge of rare book librarianship, my need for information was great. I found myself taking to the road to inform myself by personal observation.

In recent years, I have continued to spend a good deal of time visiting libraries. There is, however, a limit to what one person can do or see; and my range has been substantially extended by the observations of my students in the rare book program at Columbia. Each year, these students pay site visits to rare book and research libraries all over the country. They write an analysis of these libraries from such points of view as physical setting, preservation, security, cataloging and access, acquisitions, exhibition and publication programs, staffing, relationship with the parent institution, and so on. Student reporters tend to cast a cold eye, and the quality of mercy is not remarkably apparent in their reports. Still, their comments are based on first-hand inspection, and what they may lack in perspective they tend to make up for in freshness and style.

Though these student papers are not accessible to the public, perforce they constitute a significant part of what literature of rare book librarianship there is. Through their authors’ eyes, not always charitable, we can see where our field
has been coming from over the past ten years. The students do give credit where it is due; and it is pleasing to note, as you will see, that the picture gets brighter as we approach the present.

What follows is an exercise in counterpoint, followed by a coda. I have juxtaposed a series of commonplaces on the care and feeding of rare book and manuscript collections in libraries to a variety of direct quotations (virtually unaltered except for proper names) from students' reports on the various libraries they visited in the years between 1976 and 1985. I conclude with some general comments, again supported by the reports, on the present state of rare book and manuscript librarianship in the United States.

Almost the first thing one notices about libraries specializing in older materials is that they tend to be in older buildings; if the institution of which they are a part has a new library, the rare books and special collections can almost always be depended on to be housed in the old one. This tendency was summarized by one student, describing the rare book library at one of our ancient universities: the books, she reported, are housed

in a pillared, corniced, buttressed, and pedimented building which one dutifully recognizes as suggesting a temple of learning. One ascends rather than climbs the stone steps and passes through what can only be called a portal into an Italian marble foyer and thence into the main room of the Library itself. It is an elegant cruciform chamber, the sort of place in which one feels vaguely apologetic for not wearing a massy gold watch-chain across his waistcoat front or sweeping feathers on her firmly-pinned hat.

Where both new and old books share the same building—even one built relatively recently—a traditional setting is usually provided for the rare materials, as one student pointed out is the case at a northeastern library specializing in the history of medicine:

The Historical Library reading room, a Tudor baronial hall (the architect had put up several half-timbered houses in town at the turn of the century, so in 1939 this would have been a rather personal historical statement) is comfortably furnished and cosily and efficiently lighted by table and floor lamps of the pre-fluorescent era. Users of the furniture are not required to be users of the books.

Here is a description of a rare book department within the general college library:

One enters the Special Collections Suite through the type of wrought-iron gate associated either with rare books or with certain period Hollywood comedies set in Heaven. The tradition of the “treasure room” is tenacious. I wondered aloud whether the folios on custom-built shelving flanking the reception area had not been put there for the sole purpose of dazzling visitors by their size and prepos-
sessing appearance. The reading room, just beyond, is similarly decorated with Limited Editions Club volumes. A pair of bronze cranes, reaching skyward, frames the full-length window through which . . . unfiltered light used to stream onto the cloth spines.

Most newer college library buildings make at least some provision for rare books. One student, herself a graduate of a small women’s college in a rural setting where a new library building was opened in the late 1960s, returned to her alma mater in order to take a fresh look. Some people, she reported, like to describe the new library as looking like a

“glacier sliding down the hill.” One finds photographs of the structure on the cover of the magazine, Progressive Architecture, and it was listed as one of the 16 outstanding examples of campus design of the 1970s. It is the kind of building people drive off the Turnpike to see. Yet it is obvious that practicality gave way to aesthetics. The librarian was forced to remind the architect continually of the need for a significant amount of rare book and archival stack area. From the floor plan, one sees that the radically-designed structure (a most inefficient use of space) has locked the rare book room into an area which it outgrew upon moving in.

Old books—new ones, too, for that matter—like steady, even, year-round temperatures and humidity. A student comments on the unhappy relationship between humidity and books in a New York City library:

The library had a humidity-controlled air-conditioning system installed two-and-a-half years ago which breaks down regularly every summer, and thus in the summers the library is ventilated by the huge open windows. In the winter, the library is heated by steam heat with no attempt at humidity control. The vellum bindings are greatly deformed as a result.

The progress of preservation at a small northeastern private college:

The budget does not, nor is it able to, support a formal conservation or preservation program. The library itself is humidity-controlled and air-conditioned, but acid-free boxes and folders, and non-metallic clips are just arriving at the college library. They have been termed “extravagant” by the administration.

More and more rare book libraries are awakening to the importance of establishing preservation programs. Sometimes the awakening is slow, however; here is a description of a library with particularly important rare book and manuscript collections:

Additional evidence of a new attitude to old books was the hiring in 1963 of an amateur binder and conservator. Working with undergraduate volunteers, he began by vacuuming, painting, fumigating, exterminating, and rebinding in the nightmarish basement. When the bound newspapers had to be shifted to make way for the new rare book stack, he took the opportunity to deacidify and
repair with transparent Japanese tissue the most valuable nineteenth-century newspapers. At the same time he was also experimenting with lamination in silk and in cellulose acetate under heat and pressure and with restoring decayed leather with polyvinyl acetate. Unfortunately, he is reported to have experimented on some valuable things and left a legacy of cemented books and embalmed leaves.

An account of the conservation situation in a well-known library in the Midwest:

The library has a "passionate" conservator in a situation bordering on chaos. She was very frank in her feeling that the main library's administration did not fully understand the needs in this area. She works by a 40-hours-a-week wage. Her position must be renewed every year. She trains four students who work 10 to 15 hours a week. Right now, her lab consists of running water, a ledge, and a stainless steel pan large enough for a double spread. A major drawback is the lack of a fume hood; she must take items outdoors for treatment when harmful fumes are involved.

A preservation program in New York City:

Neither the material in the vault nor in any other part of the library is dusted or treated in any way whatsoever. The books from the stacks are notably filthy. The portrait collection, which includes engravings, etchings, photographs, &c., is mounted and matted by the secretary using a domestic iron and rubber cement on Bristol board of a high acid content and oaktag. When [a local] paper conservation group called to the attention of the library the fact that the portrait collection was being treated improperly, the library considered it an impertinence.

The importance of the new technology on preservation programs:

The one preservation policy the library does have is that rare materials which are in particularly bad condition be laminated. This is done by Mr. X, who uses a rather remarkable process which he says is reversible. Mr. X begins by deacidifying the paper and then separates the recto from the verso—that is, he splits the leaf down the middle. He sandwiches a sheet of Japanese rice paper between the two parts of the leaf, puts them back together again and covers both front and back with sheets of rice paper. The process does tend to give the page a rather fuzzy appearance, but the paper is considerably strengthened. One does question the use of this process on the first edition of Harvey's De motu cordis (On the Circulation of the Blood), 1628.

In older libraries, matters of preservation and matters of security tend to merge. An account of an ancient New England library:

We read that around the turn of the century it was discovered the library had many rare and valuable American first editions, so these were locked up. I assume, or at least hope, that the incunabula were locked up, too, but until the...
new stack was built in 1967, sixteenth-century books were at least in principle on the open stacks and able to circulate. They were put away, but now the seventeenth-century books with circulation cards in them look scandalous.

A description of related preservation and security problems, in a private Middle Atlantic university:

Continuing efforts are made to exterminate the insect population (silverfish) in the rare book collection's rooms, but given the age and size of the larger structure such efforts can hardly be completely successful; the passage of a waterpipe through the vault, above one range of bookcases, is cause for further dissatisfaction with the collection's present situation.

Security is also a problem, and—it seems to me—it is, in some ways, a related one. According to the Librarian, the rare book collection is protected by ignorance. While this has been the case till the present time, ignorance cannot be permitted to persist without further damaging efforts to increase utilization of the Collection's resources. In any case, as NUC pre-56 progresses and potential thieves become increasingly aware of the aid to their projects offered by such bibliographical devices, ignorance will not continue to persist.

A report on security matters, this time in a state university:

The Rare Book Room is closed off from the librarian's work area by a dividing wall so that readers are left unobserved. Manuscripts are delivered to users by the box. From September to June everyone in this state wears their Maine Guide jacket or down vest to Special Collections as well as everywhere else; the rucksack has usurped the role of the briefcase north of Boston, and one must conclude that if the inclination were present, Special Collections could be removed bodily in the course of an afternoon.

The University Library has a magnet-in-spine book alarm system, but it would be my educated guess that the more valuable Special Collections books are the least likely to have been protected by this device. In any case, readers are left alone, unobserved, for periods that would allow them to dissect, demagnetize, or even rebind any book in the collection. Possibly there is some small consolation in the fact that cataloging is done so poorly that no one would probably ever know what had been taken.

The greatest ravager of library collections over the centuries has been fire, and prudent rare book libraries now routinely install non-aqueous fire-extinguishing systems to protect their collections. One such system:

This is an excellent system for the Rare Book room, but its worth is complicated by the fact that the rest of the library has only a sprinkler system. Water leaking from the fourth floor could still damage the books. But barring this complication, Mr. Y, the rare book librarian, has his own vision of another type of disaster which entails the proper functioning of the Halon system to extinguish the fire in the Department, but the rampant spread of the fire throughout the rest of
the library. Mr. Y then envisions himself watching from the sidewalk as the Rare Book Department falls intact from the third floor to the ground.

To be useful, rare books and manuscripts must be catalogued, and a large number of rare book libraries have, over the years, produced magnificent card, printed-book, and on-line catalogs of their holdings. Many, however, have not. In the late 1930s, a student reported, an independent research library acquired a large number of books from a bookseller, or perhaps at auction, in Leipzig. Lacking the time and staff, or perhaps the will, to examine and completely identify each piece, the librarian hit upon the ingenious scheme of clipping the entries from the bookseller's catalog and pasting them onto catalog cards stamped with the legend TEMPORARY ENTRY. There they sit to this day.

A description of bibliographical control in a large history of medicine collection:

The card catalog is in an adjacent room; the card file in the rare book room itself, marked "For Staff Use Only," is essentially a shelflist and storage area for suspended projects such as provenance, printer, and obituary files. There is a lack of directional signs throughout the general and historical reading rooms and stacks; the Information Room has a somewhat tongue-in-cheek flow chart explaining how to locate a periodical, but almost every path leads to "ask the reference librarian." The preceding information about book location in the rare books room I puzzled out only after studying two diagrams and three pages of instructions, much of whose information was out of date.

Where the available catalogs are insufficient, the reader must rely on the knowledge and good-will of rare book librarians, who are frequently very well informed indeed on the subjects of the collections in their care. An observer comments about the staff at one collection of rare theological books:

The key to an improving situation would be to have some member of the staff become actively interested in the collection. Mr. Z is presently little more than a glorified book page, collecting materials for users and reshelfing them when they are no longer needed. If someone were to take an interest in the holdings of the library—which are absolutely remarkable, both in breadth and depth—one could make considerable progress in publicizing the collection, in expanding its use, and in creating an interest in finding funds to improve it.

An example of reference services in the rare book room of a university library:

In one instance I was told as part of a general introduction to the collection that, "We even have an incunabula around here somewhere...." My curiosity piqued, I searched about until I found a Wynken de Worde edition of Higden's Polychronicon, which was obviously the work in question. I pointed it out in a noncommittal manner as a rather interesting book. The librarian glanced at the
title-page and then rushed off, leaving me completely alone in Special Collections with those pristine white pages and jet-black ink for at least ten minutes. She returned with an appropriate bibliographical reference from the Gesamtkatalog; while she was gone, all I could think was that this woman has no idea if I know the Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendruck from a hole in the ground.

An independent research library's reading room:

The room itself is a wonderful mixture of wood, glass, and red tile. Lighting is provided by a skylight, which has lamps built into it for additional brightness. The walls of the reading room have built-in glass-enclosed wooden bookcases, which contain reference materials. They are locked.

It is sometimes argued that at the core of any rare books or manuscripts library is its acquisitions program. There is much to be said for such a contention. In order to stay alive in their subject fields, staff members need to be able to read antiquarian booksellers' catalogs with more than a tourist's interest, and to have at least an occasional opportunity to plug the gaps which occur in even the most comprehensive collections. Consider the alternative: one student reported this conversation with the curator of a substantial rare book collection in a large private college:

I asked him about collection development. Did the library have a policy? No. Who among the staff actively collects? Nobody, really, because they don't have a budget to buy books on any large scale. They buy a few now and then, but only with money out of the operating budget. But what about the X Collection, I asked: where did that money come from? The President of the College has a discretionary fund, so anything he deems worthy is bought out of his office. Are donations actively sought? No. He was more interested in consolidating what was there; he did not need more material when he was so obviously under-staffed. Does the library exhibit any of its material? Not any more. Not enough time.

My interview with him lasted eight minutes.

There are very few rare book libraries which do not rely heavily for acquisitions on gifts from alumni and other interested donors. An account of rare book gift-giving to a state university:

Dr. Y and his wife have brought over 1300 volumes to the library in shopping bags from their home in a nearby state. These books are kept together as the Y Collection, and the oriental rugs and organ that accompanied the collection now grace the Rare Book Room. This spontaneous contribution consists largely of fly-tying manuals and modern fine editions of books on salmon and trout fishing. Recently, Robert Haig Brown's book, The Salmon, a marvelous gargantuan folio that comes cased in cut-down oaken church pews (and a "Dr Y Collection book" if ever there was one), was on display. It is hard to escape the
conclusion that Dr. Y was preparing to retire to Florida, and his wife refused to let him cart all his treasures along with him.

It is often more possible to explore alternative or additional sources of income in order to buttress acquisitions funds than some libraries do:

The microform project deserves some comment. A microform company maintains a filming laboratory at the library, for which it pays rent. But the library does not even automatically receive a copy of any film made of an item in its collection. Occasionally, if the company feels that there will be no market for a certain item, it will donate its negative to the library. For every five pages photographed, the library may request one microfilmed page from something in the company’s current microfilm catalog.

A program of exhibitions in a rare book library can have the dual purpose of drawing the community’s attention to locally available rare book and manuscript resources, and of making these resources better known nationally and internationally, through the publication of exhibition catalogs. But, in one New York City library,

Exhibition of rare material is handled in a particularly destructive manner. Several of the most valuable and best-known treasures are displayed in a locked case in the museum. They are there on permanent exhibition, if 20 years can be considered permanent. The Hebrew Bible, a beautifully illuminated 15th-century manuscript of which they are justifiably proud, has been open to the same page for years. This fact would have been obvious even if the rare book curator hadn’t been willing to admit it; the pages are showing the effects of light and dirt, and the parchment is drying out.

The current practice in a large historical society library:

The library has no formal publications. Neither does it develop special subject bibliographies for the use of its readers. The librarian states that the library has neither the time nor the staff to do this. The library will occasionally publish a small leaflet on the occasion of an important acquisition, but this is fairly rare.

In visiting rare book libraries, one is immediately struck by the importance of having a competent and committed staff. In a report on a historical science collection within a larger scientific research library:

The library has been plagued by a succession of librarians whose interests were not geared either to archives or historical material, but rather to maintaining their relative positions in the employment hierarchy. There is no shortage of work to do, but it does require an interest in cataloging, arrangement and description of archival material, as well as the verification of names, dates, and sources. These activities were not popular with several of the present librarian’s predecessors, and she faces a considerable backlog.
A comment about the rare book staff of a library of a distinguished small liberal arts college:

The present Special Collections librarian hardly ever attends professional meetings. She does not drive and must care for a 95-year-old mother. She accepts her fate, and is not an independent thinker. The conservation program is non-existent for Special Collections as well as for the general library. In fact, decisions on binding Special Collections books are made for the most part by the cataloging department, which seems to regard all books not on MARC and not in OCLC as problems.

In a well-run rare book library, the different subject strengths and areas of expertise of the professional staff complement each other; unfortunately, the level of staff cooperation is sometimes as noted in this report about an Ivy League rare book department:

Relations among the curators range from hot to cold, as can be expected in an intimate setting like this one. Animosities are alternately kept in check or intensified by the enormous amount of freedom given to each curator. The department head has many more important matters to deal with than to act as referee, and he rules with a very light hand. The curators usually slug it out between themselves and enjoy the freedom to manage their collections as they see fit.

The rare book department in the central building of a very large public library:

The Rare Books Division of X Public Library, as a small entity within a large institution, benefits from its status. The Rare Book Division functions separately from the rest of the library; it operates largely according to its own rules and according to its own funds. As a result of its self-sufficiency, it maintains its scholarly attitude without subjection to public criticism.

But really to function well, rare book libraries need the active support of the central administration of the institutions of which they are a part. Here is another description of the level of such support, in a library which boasts a celebrated multi-volume printed catalog of its large and important collection of rare books:

A rare book librarian was first added to the Library staff in 1962 as a part-time position. In 1963, it became a full-time appointment, but by June 1973, it was once again part-time. Last year it was eliminated altogether. Today the Reference Librarian is in charge of rare books.

Rare book libraries are likely to profit from long-range planning, preferably including the production of formal, written goals and objectives which have the support of administrators in the parent organization. A report on the lack of planning in a southwestern university library:
One senses that the Special Collections Department has been in limbo for most of its existence. A Special Collections Department was obviously a good thing to have within a library, but early on no one seemed to have any vision as to what direction the collection should move in, whom it should be serving, and how the staff should be rallied and trained to achieve these goals. The succession of Head of Special Collections succinctly sums up the story. From 1945 to 1984 there have been sixteen Heads of Special Collections.

Students sometimes come away from their site visits to rare book libraries with intense memories of their experience:

My host, after a brief introduction, took me by the arm and led me into the stack area. I can say for certain that never in my blackest dreams did I envision a hole as black and evil as that crypt my host lead me into. Dirt and dust, vile-smelling mildew. He took me immediately to what interested me most, the John Doe Collection. There they were, six to eight thousand letters, 150 manuscripts, still largely unpacked and unsorted since their arrival from Europe several years ago. Thick dust covered letters and envelopes in open boxes; books were stacked in corners and on shelves and appeared to have been there for a very long time. Processing the letters, he told me, is a bit slow-going especially since every one is being encapsulated and every single letter is having a card entry made for it. My host related this information to me with great pride as a testimony to his thoroughness and expertise, wondering if I had ever heard of encapsulation. Yes, I said, I had. He seemed disappointed.

Student reporters frequently end their papers with some general philosophizing about rare book libraries, expounding upon the information gained in their site visits. Here are two such summary statements: the first, about a public university; and the second, about a private university rare book department. I have quoted from both papers earlier.

The public university:

It is possible to write a hypothetical alternative prospectus for this state university’s Special Collections with less inhibition than one would feel if approaching a more ancient and formidable institution. It is easy to ridicule an operation that operates on this scale; the entire Special Collections could be traded for a single volume off the shelf of any one of a number of New York establishments with the latter getting change.

One cannot escape the conclusion that this library demonstrates that when you don’t know anything, everything is difficult. Any rare book person would be taxed by the prospect of working in a collection such as this with a relatively robust physical plant and no rare books to speak of, but present staff are unable to identify coherently either what their Special Collections are, or what they should be. Poverty does not excuse everything.

“Window dressing” carries much weight in this business; there is a certain charm to be found in a special collection where most of the patrons sit around in
their pork pie hats with their hunting shoes up on the furniture reading Dr. Y's tactical trout books and complaining about the bucks taken last season, "with racks no bigger around than your baby finger." By the same token, disorder is, of itself, no vice; librarians seem to be particularly susceptible to an exaggerated, even compulsive, need for order; but, if Special Collections resembles something less than the Augean stables, it will take more than getting out the Plexiglas cleaner to put it right.

And here is the conclusion of the paper about a private university:

The Rare Book Collection of this university merits attention: it is too valuable a resource to be permitted to slip away. Certainly, it is in no immediate peril; nothing needs drastic repair or restoration; books are not damp; exterminators deal regularly with the silverfish; the water-pipe in the vault has had a guard installed beneath it—in short, despite the other demands on his time, the librarian has worked long and hard on securing the state of the Collection to the best of the too-limited resources at his command. But a collection such as this one cannot be judged safe simply because it is in relatively good shape today. It is meant to last as long as the University lasts, as a resource for a posterity which may well find new ways to extract knowledge from it we cannot now even begin to envisage. Its condition must, consequently, be judged from the perspective of a very long span of time indeed.

And in this world, time passes faster than we realize. Threats of physical decay, of theft, of ignorant mutilation—these are unlikely to be visible at any one given moment, but they persist for the long haul. Given the basic condition, a decision to do nothing becomes a decision to leave the Collection vulnerable to such threats. Despite its strengths, the Collection would find such a decision one it could ill afford.

When Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language was published in 1755, the story goes that someone came up to him at a party and complimented him for carefully omitting from his great work all vulgar, low, or offensive words. "Ah, my dear," Johnson is said to have replied, "then you've been looking for them." By this point the readers of this paper may wonder how typical of my students' papers these quotations are, and suspect that I searched those papers for vulgar, low, or offensive examples.

This is not quite the case. Of the well over a hundred papers I have on file, a substantial majority describe rare book and manuscript collections in various kinds of serious trouble. Their authors, as I have admitted earlier, do tend to cast a cold eye, and the reports lack subtlety. They dwell on the circumstances of individual institutions, and their perspective is generally quite narrow. Still, I find it hard to disagree with much of what my students write. Almost all libraries, for instance, have problems with preservation, and there never is enough money. But clearly there is no excuse for allowing seventeenth-century
books to circulate; there is no excuse for failing to uphold at least rock-bottom standards of dusting and vacuuming; there is no excuse for using rubber cement to fasten nineteenth-century photographs to new high-acid Bristol board. The correction of such problems may be done with little or no expense. Similarly with security: there is little or no excuse for reading rooms so arranged that the staff cannot see the readers; for allowing unlimited access by no matter whom to all materials no matter what; or for doors, cages, and other security devices which ignore the most elementary realities of life in both public and private research libraries today.

As regards rare book staffing, there is no substitute for intelligence, knowledge, industry, guts, and flair. Rare book libraries cannot function properly if their staffs appear to consist of solutions to personnel problems in other divisions of the library.

Most rare book, manuscript, and other special collections must sooner or later justify their existence by establishing at least some sort of connection with their parent institutions. Over the long haul, no endowment is ever large enough—or unrestricted enough—for a library to go it entirely on its own, without concern for its environment or a relationship with a clientele. Recall the first standard of ACRL’s Standards for College Libraries: college libraries shall develop an explicit statement of objectives in accord with the goals and purposes of their parent institutions. Departmental rare book libraries are bad when they go their own ways; when they are uninterested or otherwise unable to support instructional programs; because they are disinclined to serve even in part the development programs of their parent institutions; and when their staffs are allowed to stagnate, away from the main currents of the profession of which they are a part.

Where these troubles exist, the responsibility often rests at a higher level than that of the rare book staff itself. Research library directors are too often willing to stick their rare book and special collections-departments off somewhere where they won’t show; to staff them with persons who have no hope of creating much out of anything, much less gold from lead; and to content themselves with hoping that these departments, so housed and so staffed, will stay out of trouble, or at least keep out of the way. The misuse of rare book and manuscript library resources is at times the responsibility even of institutional chief executive officers. If rare books are perceived to have no rational place in the intellectual, social, or—heaven help us—even the public relations goals and objectives of the institution, these CEO’s should give them back to the Indians: give them away, sell them, or put them on deposit with other institutions better able to look after them, and more inclined to do so.

Fortunately, there are some capable institutions so inclined, and my general impression, derived both from my own observation and from student re-
ports, is that their number is increasing; slowly, the American rare book landscape is improving. If many students' papers in the past have reported a grim rare books countryside, more recent ones among them describe a more hopeful scenery: this account, for instance, of a special collections department within a large university library:

My impression, then, was that here was a mature, intelligent, extraordinarily competent group of people, working together, though each in his own niche, for something that they share a strong commitment to. Though I had heard about such congenial group endeavors, I felt that this was the first time that I had actually met with such a thing. The respect with which each person spoke of his or her colleagues was striking.

My students are sometimes almost bowled over by the excellence of the personnel they encounter:

Speaking with one of the library's rare book catalogers, I was reminded of someone's neat characterization of cataloging as "the backbone of the library": the proof of this library's excellence suddenly struck me as lying right there in that most modest of all the ground-floor offices, in the work being done by such extremely capable scholars as this one.

Statements like this one are increasingly typical:

It is clear that the department, the library, and the university have demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the collections. Through university development, the friends group, and gifts, they work to expand existing collections and update published catalogs.

Many collections reflect good, current, professional practice:

The physical condition of the collection and the building reflect the pride of the Society in its possessions as well as the intelligence of those who administer it presently. The stack areas are, obviously, closed and have controlled temperature and humidity. Dust seemed to be relatively under control.

For many years there has been an ongoing microfilm project with the idea that the less handling old artifacts receive the longer they will last. The library's policy is that when microform exists it should be used instead of the work itself. The librarian says this policy works well, but that they are rather flexible. If patrons cannot read the film or present reasons for seeing the real copies, they are usually allowed to do so. Producing microform copies of manuscript and printed works also allows them to be widely disseminated. Many major research collections own collected papers from the Society.

Some independent research libraries with substantial rare book collections have successfully reevaluated their mission, and implemented changes in order to meet their revised goals and objectives. Even the dual challenges of significant acquisitions and a balanced budget can sometimes be met:
This is not a static institution; on the contrary, purchases are made frequently in certain areas so that approximately 15% of present holdings have been acquired by gift or purchase since the opening of the library three decades ago. At the same time, the deficit has been whittled down so that it does not represent the vivid threat it once did. It has been recognized that fundraising must now be an essential part of the functioning of the library. The somewhat laissez-faire attitude towards money has been banished.

Students are increasingly discovering notably well-balanced long-range planning in the libraries they visit, as in this account of a state university rare book library:

On leaving the Library, with the staff's invitation to come again, I had the impression that I had discovered a very unusual place indeed. That impression has not yet been dulled by time or distance. The library is a balance between an active staff of differing talents and similar philosophy, a manageable, carefully-defined research collection in a modern, efficient building, and a well-planned financial structure designed to provide continual collection development. The Library has continued to be the reflection of the men who created it: a combination of progressive spirit, historical insight, and practical planning.

I wish that rare book librarians' salaries were higher, that working conditions in their institutions were better, that their supervisors were more knowledgeable and supportive, that their collections were more successfully interpreted and used, and that endowments were increasing more rapidly. Nevertheless, it is considerably easier to train rare book librarians these days than it was a decade ago, because there are so many more admirable role models both institutional and personal to point to. Furthermore, these positive role models are not restricted—as they tended to be until recently—to a relatively small number of mature institutions in the northeastern part of the United States. Not only is there more excellence, but it is now more widely spread out than it used to be, and it is much more evenly distributed across the country.*

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