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# HISTORY OF THE BOOK: FIELD NOTES OF A CURATOR

Stephen Ferguson

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Editor's note: The 1997 RBMS Preconference in Claremont, California, focused on the history of the book from a variety of points of view. The speakers included professional academics as well as a number of specialist librarians. Final plenary session speaker Steve Ferguson based his following talk on his experience as a curator at a large university library.

First of all I want to establish that I am approaching the history of the book from the point of view of an academic librarian. Now this is a role in which I am constantly conscious of the larger teaching and research enterprise of which I am a part. My services are not an end in themselves but always regarded as part of the support system the university deems necessary for its central missions of graduate and undergraduate education as well as advanced research.

As we are told by the public press, almost on a daily basis, change is being forced upon colleges and universities from a variety of directions. State legislatures are cutting funding. The State of California now spends more money on prisons than on higher education. In fact, nationwide, funding for higher education stands fourth or fifth in priority ranking after K-12, health care, welfare, and prisons.

Funding is also a concern at private colleges and universities. Just think back to the early 1990s when so many reported deficits in the millions, in turn, kicking off elimination of academic departments as well as reduction of support services, such as libraries.

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Ideas about the current effectiveness of graduate training are changing too, as the market for jobs in the academy shrinks for those with advanced degrees. These ideas are part of a larger trend to relate the quality of higher education to learning outcomes rather than to the more traditional standards, such as facilities, numbers of faculty, and so forth.

Information technology is another factor of change. I'm talking not just about advances in computing but the emergence of powerful, high-speed communication networks. In fact, on some campuses because of these networks and the efficiencies they provide for one person to reach many, great attention is being paid to "distance learning."

I'm also talking about the changes caused by information technology in the traditional patterns of the funding, creation, publication, and distribution of academic research.

As we all know, changes in information technology in particular are changing how we are thinking about libraries in general. For instance, the acquisition, cataloguing, and use of those electronic materials by libraries are causing shifts in funding patterns internally within libraries. And these shifts will continue for years to come. Professor Eli Noam of the Columbia University Business School has noted "in the past, the library provided a platform for several complementary academic functions—information base, research environment, reference service, and community center. [In the future, he says, because of these changes] the latter two functions [reference service and community center] are likely to become more prominent as the former two functions [information base and research environment] decline."<sup>1</sup>

Concurrent with all these changes, the makeup of campus populations is changing—older students are enrolling in larger numbers, a number of them "retooling" for a second career. Traditional-age students are dropping out for a year or two then returning to campus. The ethnic and cultural mix is changing. Competition among academic institutions for the best students, as well as students in general, is on the rise.

All of these factors just mentioned—reduced funding, changing notions of academic quality, changes resulting from developments in information technology—and others as well—all of these factors have created a certain anxiety that is causing academic librarians to rethink what they do.

So it is when I think about the time and resources needed for the pursuit that we call "history of the book," I think about it under the influence of the factors I have listed above. In addition, I must consider my practical needs. The library's roof cannot leak. The books must be ready when called for. Those who use the collections ought to leave with a sense that there will always be more to see next visit. And, I can't overspend my budget.

Moreover, I try to meet these needs at a time when administrative overhead is greater than ever. Cataloguing, conservation, consortial arrangements, security arrangements—these have become more complex and technical. The result is that

I need more time to understand, absorb, and execute these processes as well as interpret them to our readers. Concurrently, the library's readers are seeking to solve more and more complex problems. We have seen over the past few days the interdisciplinary nature of just the history of the book, for example. The complexity of our readers' work means more investment of our time and resources in order to help them effectively.

Within all this complexity I have to make choices. Like you I have to make decisions about what are the "best practices" for reader service, for conservation of materials, for developing collections. We base these decisions not only in the context of the larger factors I've outlined already, but also on local factors such as the dictates of endowments or the needs of local faculty and students. But I would like to think that all of our decisions are based on our sense of what adds value to the experience of those who come into contact with our collections.

This fundamental principle of adding value is my concern. There are a number of notions as to what value and adding value means but I want to consider only two. On the one hand, I am interested in value in the sense of providing what others regard as useful. The notion here involves that of a system or a social network where the interdependent parts of the system "feed" each other. Here value is equivalent to resources captured by one and then passed along to another who will consume all or part of those resources in the process of producing something of value for the next person. On the other hand, I am also interested in value as meaning that which we put into our service reflecting what we consider of merit. We are humanists. We are interested in and committed to a respect for and an investigation of the records left by man. Moreover, we are committed to what Erwin Panofsky called the "endeavor to transform the chaotic variety of human records into what may be called"—and Panofsky here deliberately chose the Greek notion antithetical to "chaos"—"the cosmos of culture."<sup>2</sup>

In the course of this paper I will be referring back and forth and at different times to these two meanings of value.

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When asked to speak at this conference on the history of the book, I could not help but make the connection between my present probing for what matters in librarianship and the pursuit we call "history of the book." The questions that came to mind were, "So what about history of the book? What is the value of history of the book for my work in the context in which I work as an academic librarian?"

Now some of you may smile and think: "Those sorts of questions are best kept to yourself, Ferguson." Well, that's good advice sometimes, but I think these questions ought to be thought about out loud for reasons implied by what I have said already.

I would like to present to you this morning some of my probing, observing, and thinking relating to these questions. My main effort over the past months has

been to query others on these questions.

I have turned to those whom I consider part of the social network valuing the endeavors of an academic librarian—and these are a number of people. Bear with me while I go through my list.

It includes rare book colleagues in other academic libraries as well as at my own, colleagues in the academic library field who are not rare book specialists, and directors of libraries. Of course, faculty were involved and the faculty I polled were mainly those who participated in the vigorous discussion on the topic “Whither Book History?” held on the SHARP listserv in June 1996. I assumed that they might be sympathetic to questions on a similar topic.

I didn’t stop there. I was interested in what donors had to say as well as students. And I also asked established and experienced antiquarian booksellers, both because I had the opportunity to do so and because the books they sell me affect the educational outcomes at the university. Besides, booksellers think about the instrumental value of books all the time; they take ideas and turn them into money.

I asked my questions in a variety of ways—sometimes directly in conversation over coffee, sometimes more formally. Yes, I must tell you, I did construct a “survey form” and I did hand it about to a variety of people as e-mail or as printed text. Others responded to the form I posted on my Web site.

On the other hand, even though I chose to regularize the questions I asked, I do not call my efforts “systematic.” In many ways, I feel that what I have gathered should be called “field notes” rather than “survey results.” Like the field notes of an anthropologist, I feel that what I have gathered gives us some answers, but not all, as well as glimpses of larger patterns that need further thought and research.

What were these survey questions? Some of you here know from having read them already, but to recap, they were:

- Does the antiquarian book trade see “history of the book” as having any cash-value? If so, is that a good thing for a curator or a bad thing?
- Do our superiors in the library regard us any better or any worse because of an interest in history of the book?
- Have any of us ever gotten a new donor because of history of the book?
- Does history of the book offer opportunities to absorb new resources through new institutional partnerships?
- Will the professoriate regard us any better or any worse because of an interest in the history of the book?
- Does history of the book allow new opportunities for collecting and for interpretation of already existing collections?
- And my most fundamental question is: Does history of the book add value to our endeavors? Is that value worth the cost?

Now let’s turn to some answers.

My question about the book trade produced a remarkable range of responses.

1. Among faculty respondents, the question was skipped altogether or marked “Don’t know” or replied to along these lines: “I’m not in any position to answer this, other than to speculate that whether cash-value is good or bad, it is usually inevitable.”

2. Among graduate students I received a similar response. One noted: “I can’t say. My connections with the antiquarian book trade are purely voyeuristic.”

3. From the booksellers came quite varying replies, but taken as a whole you can get a sense of how value in the antiquarian book trade originates. One well-established American dealer stated:

History of the book expanded my market. It provided me with the language so that I could reach institutional customers. It provided me with certain ‘hot button’ words. It gave me the confidence to talk to people I didn’t know. I thought it was a way for me to do better ... to be able to communicate with librarians.

After a pause he added: “In Japan, history of the book has given librarians a way to get into the collecting of Western history—the history of the West.” And the dealer went on to explain that in a land where neither language, ethnicity, social traditions, religion, nor the like are shared with the West, the transfer of culture and the learning about Europe and the Americas is being accomplished by the sharing of objects. The idea is that trade in material goods leads to the study of material culture, which in turn is a gateway to understanding other aspects of the West. For this dealer, history of the book gave results with both his local and his overseas trade.

Yet for every dealer I encountered who said that history of the book helped his or her trade, I encountered another who did not invest time in it. Here’s a reply along those lines. These are the words of a well-established English dealer:

As more and more books go into libraries, booksellers look for new themes, they look for new paths through the old fields. Yes, in substance, booksellers will turn in this direction eventually, but in general, booksellers follow rather than lead. Take women’s studies or black history, these subjects really came out of the academy. Now they are valid categories for giving value to materials for sale. ... The problem for booksellers ... Well, they need to seek something to refer to ... something that will confirm the realness of what they are claiming ... Look at the last line of many dealers descriptions. It’s a citation of a bibliography or learned

article. ... Individual opinion is not enough to confirm importance, it's just like money—it's valued only when a number of people agree to use it—and then it becomes real money.

The dealer continued:

There's the old Christopher Dehamel story. It goes like this: when he was first taught how to catalog medieval manuscripts, he was told to emphasize either how incredibly rare the text was or how incredibly common the text was.

Later he added:

Biography is an easy way for collectors to get into a book ... And if you can't tie a name directly to a book, people will do so. Take the collecting of bindings, for example. There's an object, and the object immediately begets the question: 'Who was the binder?' Well in many cases we don't know, but people like to have an answer to that question. That's why I think that in the past so many 17th-century English bindings were attributed to Samuel Mearne. He was the only name we had, and people just tied his name to those bindings.

So biography has been the traditional method of showing the virtue of an article of antiquarian commerce. But, if there is no biographical aspect, then you need some sort of interpretive tool. Take what Wolff did with his collection of 19th-century fiction. He set out to best Sadleir. And until you had Sadleir—until you had his catalogue of 19th-century novels—until you have this book, it is quite difficult to start. People like lists.

This theme of what collectors want came up in a number of conversations with dealers. For example, one said: "Collectors want to know that they are right. ... Very few of them [venture out and] get into the history of the book."

4. Among curatorial colleagues, my question "Does the antiquarian book trade see history of the book as having any cash-value?" provoked a number of replies, of which I found the following most striking. It's from a colleague in the Northeast:

I'm not entirely sure how to answer this one, for my perspective is (obviously) not the trade's. I use Oak Knoll-published (re-published) texts; and I guess that is, for them, sort of a 'cash value' aspect of what I do. Some students, perhaps, do go on to buy additional materials in

the subject or become interested in collecting; I haven't been doing this long enough, however, to have students who've become collectors ... [but] ... I suspect that anything that helps make the book world seem attractive to the young and makes them more knowledgeable about it has 'cash value' to the trade with whom they will deal.

Since my respondent and I were corresponding by e-mail, I decided to engage in conversation. I wrote back:

I am especially struck by your reply: "... anything that helps make the book world seem attractive to the young and makes them more knowledgeable about it has 'cash value' to the trade with whom they will deal." I don't think the trade is really doing enough in this direction. I'm not suggesting a "Joe Camel" ad campaign, but they could partner more with those like us who are in a position to influence young people.

To which came this reply:

I agree entirely, but it seems to me that that is not something we can say to them EXCEPT by example—and such courses are the example we can offer them. But that they are bad about speaking to non-Methodists is something even the blind can see! and then they wonder where their future market is ...

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Now let's turn to another question. This one has to do with collectors and is implied by my query about "new donors." What value do they see in history of the book?

1. From faculty, the replies were similar to what I have received before regarding the book trade. They just didn't feel that the question related to them. However, one faculty member replied:

After spending years trying to bridge it, I sense that there is still a great gulf fixed between antiquarians and book historians. They've got heaps of money and spend it on beautiful books; we've got no money and study (for the most part) homely books; and I don't think they see any cash value in what we're doing. If they did, they'd be joining SHARP in large numbers, and with a few exceptions, they aren't.

2. Among rare book colleagues, one reply stood out:

I am surprised to be able to answer this indirectly: we have got a new donor because of our teaching activities, although it so happens that the specific donor we got came from a different class (one on westerns) that I taught last year. The donor (Yale '52 and a local attorney) gave us a bound MS of the poetry (un-published) of Winthrop Sargent, Harvard 1803, ... [and he goes on to describe the gift in greater detail. He continues:] Long-range, however, I am confident that a small number of those who take such classes will ultimately prove to be donors: these are invariably NOT courses that are required, so the self-selection process among students is likely to favor those with a predilection towards collecting books/MSS—and, of those who eventually do, presumably some will also turn out to be donors, as well.

And I would like to add that my respondent's note about the self-selection process is seconded by evidence presented in Roger Stoddard's 1987 paper "Teaching History of the Book at Harvard 1910–1988."

David P. Wheatland, the greatest collector of electrical books and founder of the Harvard Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, was deeply affected by the experience [of taking Professor George Parker Winship's course "History of the Printed Book" in 1922. This was a course Winship offered during the years 1915–1931.]

These are Wheatland's words:

By some miracle I was accepted along with the other ten whose names I regret after these sixty-five years, I cannot remember. Mr. Winship sat at the head of a long table and the rest of us arranged ourselves on either side.

The marvelous books that appeared at these meetings were in themselves interesting and beautiful, and they detracted from whatever Mr. Winship was saying. We turned pages very slowly and with great care ... as I look back on this course I feel that it is one that has given me more lasting pleasure and 'education' than most of the others I took while an undergraduate.

One time I heard William Jackson, who followed Winship and felt Winship lacked something in the academic approach to bibliography, say; "It seems to me that anytime I approach people about a gift toward the purchase of a rare book for the collection, the most generous turn out to be the students of

old Professor Winship.”

Jackson was obviously envious of Winship's influence, and he asked G.P.W. how he picked students for his course. Much to Jackson's dismay—perhaps just to dismay Jackson—the response came sure and swift: “Whiskey breath and club pin.”

3. As to what collectors themselves may have to say, I would like to relate the following. This from an American collector, passionate about late 19th- and early 20th-century English literature:

There is no question that the relationship between a rare books curator and a collector of rare books has an element of tension. Each has something the other covets: material which ‘belongs’ in the place where it does not reside ....

Convincing private owners to donate materials is, I think, one of the most important aspects of a curator's job. Merely “curating” a dead collection or archive is not enough. ... Following up on this last point brings up another aspect of the curator's job: informing the interested public (and who could be more interested than a collector?) of what his or her institution owns. This can be done in various ways—exhibitions (and their catalogues), personal communication, online information, newsletters—and it is surprising how many librarians show no motivation to keep the book world up-to-date. It's a two-way street; if we collectors, dealers, and scholars don't know who has what, privately owned materials will simply stay private.

Another valuable thing curators can do for collectors is to give advice. Not unbiased advice (that's an oxymoron) but just plain, simple, good advice. For the average curator, like the typical bookseller, knows more and has seen and handled more items than virtually any collector. Moreover, many curators have a finger on the marketplace, seeing larger trends whereas the collector concentrates on the special single item which at the moment seems too good to pass up. Curators can also make research tools available; few collectors, even really serious ones, can hope to have the resources of even a modest college library. But perhaps the greatest gift a curator can make to a collector is entree into the ‘book world’ of other enthusiasts, curators, bibliographers, and experts. This will lead to the flow of information—and gossip—and acquaintance and friendship and just possibly to the acquisition on both the private collector's and the institution's part of the “desiderata” we all seek.

There is a lot to parse here in this collector's response, but the sense I get from this collector is that what matters is our distributing information. I note, in particular, his words "informing the interested public of what the institution owns"—or—"make research tools available." To my mind this collector is signaling that our virtue lies in our informativeness. The news he can use is that which helps him understand the completeness of his collection or to understand connections of pieces in his collection to those elsewhere, sometimes located in surprising places. He is the researcher; from me he wants data.

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As you know, one of my questions dealt with history of the book offering new opportunities for interpretation of already existing collections. To a person, faculty, graduate students, and others like ourselves within the rare book field agreed that these opportunities were fruitful. And, as well from the faculty and graduate students came confirmation that regard for collections would go up once those collections were reinterpreted along the lines of history of the book. Moreover, their regard for us also brightens because of training in and proclivity toward history of the book. One faculty member said:

It's always hard for one group of professionals to understand fully what another group does, but library staff working in history of the book simply can't be stereotyped as "clerks" or "filers."

Yet running through the faculty remarks on this matter of collections was a second common theme. And about this I now have several quotes. The first is from a professor, now in the early years of her career:

It seems to me that professors and librarians tend to think of books in terms of what is in them. For example: this book is a late 19th-century printing of the Bible. I think librarians (particularly rare book librarians) should work with faculty members to generate new ways of looking at books. It is possible that a student will want or need to look at a late 19th-century Bible. It is also possible that a student may want or need to see a book produced for a certain audience, at a certain press, in a certain format, using certain technologies, etc.

And from a professor at a university in the Northeast and the founder of the Center for the Book at his university:

Remember, history of the book isn't primarily about rare books. Though we certainly don't exclude rare books from our purview, we are often more concerned with popular books. We're less likely to ask about the

provenance of an illuminated manuscript than about the readership of Uncle Tom's Cabin or dime novels. That means, of course, that a rare book library that wants to make a real investment in history of the book will have to acquire different kinds of books, and many documents (publishers' ledgers, library records, literary agents' correspondence) that aren't, strictly speaking, books at all.

From a professor instrumental in setting up a history of the book graduate program at a leading university in England:

Among other things, since historians and historians of the book increasingly see value in 'low' literature, curators who understand this will add to our ability to study these materials. Similarly, we need archivists who actively preserve materials about the book trade, which often are very elusive ... I do fear, though, that many librarians' and curators' interest in the history of the book tends toward the bibliographical rather than the historical, and that it is often difficult to gain the kind of context necessary for a wider interpretation of print.

An American professor:

A serious problem with the current state of history of the book is its persistent self-imposed limitation to pre-20th-century publishing. There are great opportunities for expanding resources as well as professional esteem in allowing less 'antiquarian' interests to gain recognition and support. As long as history of the book interest is felt primarily to involve such concerns as incunabula, European paper-making, and colonial readers, it will remain marginalized.

A professor in a media studies department:

So far, my research has not led me to special collections or rare books. At this point, I am particularly interested in public discourse about books, so I have relied on magazines and newspapers and the books I tend to be interested in are not rare—they are popular—and historically my research is either contemporary or in 1920s–30s. The theoretical orientation of my work tends to draw on cultural studies/sociology of culture/'new historicist' literary theories. That leads me to be especially interested in popular culture and in particular in the ways that distinctions between elite and popular culture are created and maintained. So, I hope that special collections librarians define non-elite forms of print culture as worthy of preservation—that seems crucial. I would want

to be able to find mass market paperback editions along with hardcovers—to compare the ways that the books are described to the different markets/readerships. Again, it's often the discourse ABOUT the book as much as the text of the book itself that I find most telling. My interest in mass media material may be very different from the interests of collectors and some curators. Mass culture, widely distributed material, can often be the hardest to find because it's not considered worth saving—it doesn't fit within the scope of the traditional library, yet it often is the most valuable material for historical/cultural research.

The theme in all these replies, it seems to me, is that reinterpretation is going to dictate new directions, and we had better fully understand what those directions are. Are we prepared to collect so-called “low” literature? Are we prepared for publishers ledgers and shop records? Collecting materials for the history of the book begets many large questions not easily answered and that require national and international, as well as individual action.

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Finally then, let us turn to the question about regard for our history of the book endeavors by library directors. It was difficult getting replies to the several questionnaires I sent out to directors. I do not know how to interpret the silence of some, perhaps too busy, perhaps they thought my asking these questions was not the best display of social intelligence on my part and they could not bear to tell me that.

Nonetheless, my own director at Princeton pointed out to me that the pursuit of the history of the book is founded on values that had taken root there years ago and that these values remain. Moreover, history of the book connects with another deeply rooted value in that “... we have collections that help readers interpret their cultures and ‘history of the book’ is not all that different from this particular mission.” She continues: “We want to make sure that we do not cut ourselves off from being available to the intelligent, forward looking and demanding people” whose various contributions have built up the university over the years.

Yet contrasting with these words I did get a long reply from a friend who is now the library director at a large Midwestern state university:

In respect to the initiative involving the ‘history of the book,’ I am both intrigued and skeptical.

During an era when too many university and college administrators are assuming that electronic-based tools will somehow fully supplant printed journals, reports, and even books, special collections programs that stress the importance of the ‘history of the book’ might play a significant role in reminding academic decision-makers of the con-

tinuing significance of this format. Nonetheless, I do not believe that electronic-based information poses any real threat to books, although over the next decade I would expect that many journals which are currently printed may be replaced by electronically published journals, in much the same way as journal citation databases have replaced printed indexes and abstracts. Books, however, will survive for years to come, simply because they still represent a format which is highly convenient and surprisingly inexpensive.

I, thus, wonder what value a 'history of the book' program has, particularly for non-research-based, academic libraries. Certainly, the 'history of the book' represents a legitimate field of study, but how many academic libraries can afford to support such a program? Frankly, in most academic libraries, special collections programs represent increasingly marginal programs ... and I offer that assertion as an individual who began his career in the field. Faced with increasingly tight budgets, most libraries will normally protect their most critical programs and collections. Personally, I would not sacrifice the interests of reference and cataloging and the book and journal budgets. Larger research libraries may still have the resources not only to support strong special collection programs but even to initiate such new programs as 'history of the book.' Elsewhere, special collection programs are doing well to retain their existing resources.

My skepticism of the 'history of the book' programs ... rests on my suspicion that the initiative has less to do with the interests of special collections itself or its parent library, than with the personal interests of its supporters. In assessing the strength of any program under my direction, I try to gauge how effectively it—and its staff—assist the library in achieving its mission—specifically the library's efforts to support the university's curricula and research programs. ... Working with any member of a library's staff, a constant challenge is to be sure that individual staff members follow work priorities which meet the library's objectives rather than their personal interests. Within special collections, I generally expect that it makes far greater sense for a program to commit its resources towards strengthening existing collections rather than opening new. In other words, I suspect that I—and perhaps other deans and directors—would be more inclined to support special collection programs that build upon their existing strength than to support a program which might be implementing a program which has more to do with the personal interests of its staff.

In larger research libraries, I believe that this initiative might indeed have value, but 'the history of the book' could prove to be a costly distraction for other libraries. Generally, I would urge special collections staff in such libraries to build upon their existing strengths and explore how such an effort can contribute most effectively to the mission of their library.

So where does this leave us? Is it at all possible to summarize all these differing voices? As one faculty member reminded me at the outset: "Fundamental questions rarely have clear, unambiguous answers."

What I hear in all these voices is the following. If we want to demonstrate to a wider audience that history of the book has value, then we have a lot of work to do.

I applaud RBMS for organizing this history of the book conference just as it did 17 years ago in Boston, the result of which was the outstanding publication *Books and Society in History*.

Those of you who were there at Boston may recall the joint resolution of that conference—a "manifesto" as our keynote speaker described it.

Yes, much has come out of that impetus. But my sense is that there is more to be done.

As some of my respondents have pointed out, we need to encourage young people to take up the study of the history of the book. We can do that. We can do that in a variety of ways locally. But we can also do it collectively.

We have shown the Section's ability to raise money—it's been raised for pre-conferences, it's been raised to finance awards for exhibition catalogues, it's been raised for the best article in RBML.

I suggest we raise money to foster and encourage the study of the history of the book. We could even start by sharing some of the money we already have. Some have complained that the RBML award is too much money when reckoned against comparable awards.

I suggest we take half that money and create an award for the best college student essay in the history of the book. We could extend this idea to include advanced scholars and set up another, separate award for the best essay or book. SHARP has already done this.

In addition, we could acknowledge that those who work in history of the book studies need money for preparation, to which end, we could solicit funds for the establishment of an RBMS fellowship in the history of the book.

I have already mentioned SHARP's example. We should take a cue from another corner, the natural scientists. Ernst Mayr, the Harvard zoologist, in his recently published memoir states:

Traditionally one became a biologist either through a medical education or by growing up as a young naturalist. At present it is much more com-

mon for a youngster to become excited about the life sciences through the media, particularly nature films on television, visits to a museum (often the dinosaur hall), or an inspiring teacher... The most important ingredient is a fascination with the wonders of living creatures .... They never lose the excitement of scientific discovery. ... nor the love of chasing after new ideas, new insights ....<sup>3</sup>

There's our cue. We need to provide for the excitement of discovery, for the love of pursuing new ideas.

Let's go back to the booksellers, this time not asking for money for a wine and cheese reception, but for the development of course materials on the history of the book that could be used in schools around this country. Let's ask them and others for money to produce media. I'm talking about films and videos, about multimedia, about a Web site that could be seen and used in schools and libraries around the country and perhaps the world.

There are other cues.

We could repurpose the ideas behind the organizing of the summer program for teachers at the UCLA special collections. There the idea is to basically pay the way for a select group of teachers to come into special collections and enable them to use the historic children's book collections with guidance so that they can produce new curricular materials for their classrooms. A further goal of this program, as I understand it, is to enable these teachers to be in turn teachers of other teachers who in turn would make use of these newly developed classroom materials. Now I ask you, couldn't teachers also be spending a summer at your library using your history of the book collections as a basis for new classroom materials?

Moreover, let's raise money to give a prize to those who use these course materials, to the teachers at all levels—elementary schools, high school, university—who are doing innovative work in the classroom and are getting the history of the book to students in new and exciting ways.

Professor Wayne Wiegand of the University of Wisconsin spoke this past February to the library school professors and instructors at the general meeting of the Association of Library and Information Science Education. He spoke about the importance and relevance of history of the book for the curricular needs of those present. His paper was entitled "Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Why Don't We Have Any Schools of Library and Reading Studies?" and his sense of the impact of that paper on his audience was that those who were already predisposed toward his plea came up to him afterwards and said they supported his views. On the other hand, there was a vast majority who just drifted out of the room showing no sign of interest in his points. My sense of this event is that one person cannot make these points to library school faculty. Many voices are needed. Here is an opportunity for RBMS to make its collective voice known to this group on this issue. And, we need to urge our faculty colleagues in history and literature to join us in this effort.

There are others to whom we should speak.

Let's urge those whom we know who are influential in the major book collecting clubs of this country to start thinking about those outside of their clubhouse.

Have they thought about sponsoring a book collecting contest for the college students in their city? Have they thought about supporting an essay contest? Would they support a course materials project?

When I heard recently that the Delaware Bibliophiles were offering each public library in their state a gift book—each library was offered the choice of a copy of Basban's *A Gentle Madness* or a copy of Manguel's *A History of Reading*—I realized that at last someone was thinking beyond the limits of their own circle.

We should so expand our thinking. We have seen the varying regard that history of the book has within our social network. I think we have an opportunity to obtain value for history of the book, but I think the way we obtain it is to reorganize our efforts so that we create that value in others.

Just as there is a National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, I propose that we become national even international in outlook, that we become coordinating, and by all means promotional when it comes to the study of the history of the book.

I am reminded of the words once spoken by Pogo and I would like to adapt them for my closing: "I have seen the future and it is us."

## Notes

1. Eli Noam, "Electronics and the Future of the Research Library," a paper prepared for the 1997 ACRL National Conference Choosing Our Futures < <http://www.ala.org/acrl/invited/noam.html#where7>> (2 September 1999).

2. Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline" in Theodore Meyer Green, ed., *The Meaning of the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938; reprinted by the Kennikat Press, Port Washington, N.Y., 1969) 96.

3. Ernst Mayr, *This is Biology: The Science of the Living World* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1997) 44.