



## **The Patrons' Post**

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California State University Fullerton**

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### **Cautionary Collections by Albert R. Vogeler**

Most of us are collectors, though few of us have a passion for collecting. Some are unwitting collectors—collectors by inadvertence, indecision, habit, whim—accumulators of everyday things like decorative bottles in the kitchen, change in the cookie jar, unread email messages, and outdated magazines. Such miscellaneous collecting, essentially passive, is not the subject of this article. Nor is the more purposeful yet modest collecting carried on by those who care about books.

People who collect books or scholarly materials like maps and manuscripts on a grand scale are subjects of particular fascination. They have chosen to enjoy, to celebrate, and ultimately to bequeath, some of the concentrated cultural capital of the world. They are emulating at a personal level the larger institutional endeavors of libraries and museums. If they are sufficiently rich,

dedicated, discerning, and long-lived, their collections may be absorbed by, or even become, independent libraries or museums. The names Huntington, Widener, Morgan, Bancroft, and Folger are the first that come to mind.



According to an ideal or normative model of collecting, all collectors have some ultimate purpose—to sell for profit, to bequeath to a relative, to bestow on an institution—though initially they might simply hope to refine the pleasures of connoisseurship until the last breath of life. But then what? Except for the reliquaries entombed with ancient monarchs, all collections have to be relinquished, gracefully or reluctantly. Personal collections go on being personal if private buyers acquire them or descendants inherit them. Otherwise, they become institutional collections. In the transfer of a collection from personal to institutional ownership, one responsibility is lifted, another undertaken. The collection assumes a new identity in its new setting, has new users and new uses, and depends upon new caretakers.

But let's look at several counter-examples to the norm, exceptions to ordinarily good and extraordinarily good private collections that might be expected to make an orderly transition to a new institutional status. These examples carry bibliophilia to a new stage.

Some collectors allow their passion for books to disrupt and dominate their households. I have known two men, English and American, whose homes became virtual book warehouses while their wives looked on stoically. My English friend, a lawyer and epicure, lived in a pretty cottage in rural Essex. He had constructed floor-to-ceiling bookcases of rough-hewn wood that filled his entire living room like library stacks, leaving only a small periphery for furniture. There he feasted on his thousands of volumes on literary subjects, as he did on his gourmet lunches in London.

In a suburb of Los Angeles, a visit to my other friend's home for lunch began with a surprise: there was no place to eat. The entire house was filled with books on nature and geography. To accommodate them, closets had been emptied and the clothes hung on rolling racks in the dining room, where the table was piled with books, and they were stacked in every nook and corner. Dining was outdoors at the pool by necessity.

These are relatively minor examples of promiscuous collecting that has gotten out of proportion—indeed, out of control. The supreme example of private scholarly acquisition run amok is that of the nineteenth century bibliophile Sir Thomas Phillipps. Inherited wealth allowed him to begin collecting European manuscripts and early printed books in his youth; what impelled him to do so remains mysterious. In the absence of psychiatric explanations, his condition has been called *bibliomania*. It was a grandiose, unrelenting compulsion that would dominate his life, his family, his heirs.

As he became acquainted with the medieval and renaissance materials held by Continental monasteries, palaces, estates, and collectors, he systematically approached the owners on an extensive European tour, and thereafter relied on correspondence and agents. He offered financially distressed inheritors deals they could not easily refuse for possessions they did not sufficiently value. Phillipps was both a predator in his vigilant readiness to pounce, and a benefactor in his rewards for cooperation. His network of information and his cultivation of sources, many years in the making, yielded a continuing accession of treasures, and each success encouraged new ambitions.

Not content with single purchases, Phillipps acquired whole collections, each the accumulated winnowing of generations. When he moved from his country house to another larger one that was better able to contain his growing collection, long wagon trains wended their way along country roads with their precious cargo for two years.

The miracle was that he conducted all his activities alone, corresponding with agents and sellers, opening boxes as they arrived, cataloguing and shelving their contents. He received thirty to fifty manuscripts and books per week. Fearing fire, he stored them all in metal boxes, ready for quick moving.

Phillipps negotiated continuously and tenaciously, but sometimes his offers failed because his fortune, though vast, was not unlimited. The 4,000 to 5,000 pounds he spent annually put him into chronic debt and anxiety, and made him irascible. He treated the many scholars who visited his collection with courtesy, but neglected his wife and daughters. Two condign ironies plagued his later years: his frustrated eldest daughter eloped with a thief who had stolen manuscripts at Oxford; and a fall from a library ladder caused injuries that ultimately led to his death in 1872.

The reverberations of Phillipps's overreaching lasted more than a century. He had amassed some 60,000 manuscripts and 50,000 books. Great libraries like the Bodleian and British Museum had long been competing for some of his holdings, but could not deal with his choleric temper, or meet his stipulated terms, or decide on what to buy or how much to pay; private collectors and antiquarian booksellers similarly dithered and bargained; and it took innumerable public and private auctions to dispose of his holdings. Not until 1977 were his last manuscripts sold.

Phillipps life's work, despite its outlandish aspects, has had some good and lasting consequences. His high bidding on the antiquarian market, and the fame of his library, raised prices, promoted public interest, and stimulated scholarly research. Neglected and endangered literary treasures found a safe haven together for a time. After passing through his hands, most are probably now better preserved and more accessible in their new institutional settings than they ever were in scattered locations all over Europe.

From such sublime excess to the ridiculous, bizarre, and pathetic excess of the Collyer brothers is a leap, but a tempting one. Homer and Langley were collectors, too, and housed their accumulating possessions in their five-story mansion on upper Fifth Avenue in New York. Upon their deaths in 1947, police forced entry and discovered that all floors had been filled almost ceiling high with an infinite miscellany. Dark narrow passages wound through the detritus, allowing access and additions to the stacked, packed, and jumbled mass of boxes, mattresses, magazines, newspapers, furniture, tires, baby carriages, crockery, bottles, pianos, chandeliers, bicycles, guns,

fabrics, clocks, appliances, clothing, foods stuffs, canned goods, paper goods, lumber, tools, trash—and books.

Books? What were the Collyers doing with 25,000 books? Were they big readers? One was blind, the other a dedicated street scavenger. What kind of books? The answer is they were mostly outdated medical, engineering, and legal texts, many in multiple copies. So much for the ultimate stage of pathological collecting.

Let us turn away from such depressing anomalies to the fulfilling pleasures of purposeful and responsible private book collecting. Our esteemed former president Gordon Van de Water has written “The Collecting Bug and How It Bit Me.” Those of us who are vulnerable to that bug’s bite should be advised to take heed of these cautionary cases.



## **Activities Report**

### **Howard Seller and Lis Leyson**

During the spring of 2012 members of the Patrons of the Library are invited to attend several interesting and special activities.

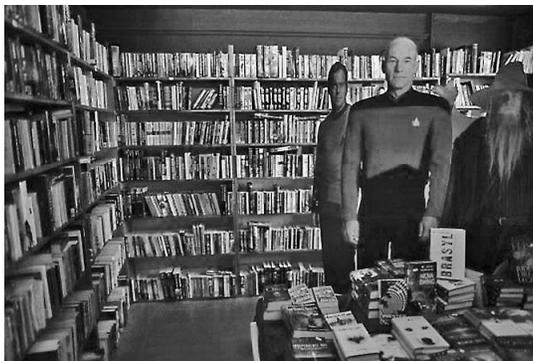
Our first event, on Saturday, January 28, will be a lecture by John Rabe, host of the popular KPCC radio show *Off Ramp*. Mr. Rabe began his radio career at the age of 18. After graduating from Michigan State University, he moved to Florida, where he hosted the well know program *Morning Edition*. Before moving to California, Mr. Rabe worked at Minnesota Public Radio, where he hosted *All Things Considered* and produced a documentary, *Walking Out of History*, about Ernest

Shackleton's voyage on the Endurance. In 2004, he moved to California to join the staff at KPCC. Mr. Rabe's talk will focus on how live radio works.

On Saturday, March 24, Narda Zacchino will talk about the role of media in a democracy. Ms. Zacchino is an author and award-winning journalist. During her 31 years at the *Los Angeles Times*, she was a reporter, a bureau chief, a vice president, and the editor of the Orange County Edition. From 2001-07, she served as the deputy editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She co-authored the book *Boots on the Ground by Dusk* about Pat Tillman, the NFL star and Army Ranger, and she is currently working on a new book about California. Ms. Zacchino is currently a consultant at the daily news website *Truthdig.com* as well as a senior fellow at the USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership and Policy. Both David Rabe's and Narda Zacchino's lectures will be at 2 P.M. in the Pollak Library, room 130. Admission to the lectures and parking on campus are free, and everyone is welcome.

On Friday, April 27, the Patrons will offer a field trip to the historic Susanna Bixby Bryant Ranch, which is the site of the Yorba Linda Heritage Museum. Each room in the museum depicts a different period or aspect of the area's history. The grounds are planted with California native plants and include a small replica of the original botanic garden. More specific details about this event will be announced later.

We invite you to participate in all of these activities and look forward to seeing you.



Getty Images/Christopher Furlong

## **BOOK SALE CENTER ARTICLE FOR PATRONS POST**

The Patrons and Emeriti Book Sale Center is open throughout the academic year, except during the semester finals period and the intersession between the fall and spring semesters. We sell used books, both from donations and excess volumes from the CSUF Library. Our very low prices of \$1, \$2, or \$3 per book are set to help the CSUF students and others purchase books which are usually extremely expensive. All proceeds from sales are designated to purchase books for the Library, vitally important in this era of drastically reduced state funding.

Our hours are 11 to 3 on Tuesdays, 11 to 7 on Wednesdays, and 1 to 5 on Thursdays. Please visit us regularly – new stock is added each week.

As always, we need your donations to keep the shelves stocked in L 199. Please call 657-278-4055 and ask for Joy Lambert in order to make arrangements. If you are interested in joining the Patrons and Emeriti volunteers working in the Book Sale Center, please call June Pollak at 949-661-0463.

## President's Report

The Coordinating Council for Community Support Groups met following the Volunteer of the year award luncheon on November 1, 2011. Patrons Board member Lis Leyson received this year's award.

Steve Murray, acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, provided a campus update. The University found funds to allow faculty to “buy out” of teaching one class to allow time for scholarly projects to keep current in their fields. The library is “evolving” toward more emphasis on electronic resources than print materials. A study of circulation records found that 80% of books in the collection have been checked out one time or less. The library is looking at “acquire on demand” purchasing to add to the collection as needed.

Book storage in open shelves when students are relying less on books seems like an inefficient use of space, so collapsible shelves for closed stacks were considered. Cost is a factor, but so is the excessive structural load from denser shelving. Storage in the basement would be the only option for such shelving.

The app ifullerton has webcam feeds that show where space is available for student groups to gather. Library space freed up by more efficient storage could be converted to areas for students to work collaboratively. A second campus Starbucks may be a future enhancement of the library's social space.

Current construction on campus includes expansion of lab space for the psychology department in the humanities building. Additional lab space is needed for biology and biochemistry.

Mary Dalesi reported that Arboretum membership remains steady at about 1500. Verne Wagner said that there will be joint mixer events with other CSU campuses.

Lee Brackett, MAAM Alliance for the Performing Arts president, reported that 18 seniors traveled to New York city for auditions, and all of them received call-backs. Sandy Johnson of the Music Associates said that the scholarship fund increased from \$42,000 to \$52,000.

Art Alliance president Martha Bartholomew mentioned that the current exhibition “Food: How We Consume it, How it Consumers Us,” will run through December 15.

## MEMBERSHIP REPORT

By

Nancy Holmes

Membership in the Patrons of the Library offers individuals privileges at the Pollak Library as well as discounts at Titan shops, Marriott CSU Ha' Penny Pub and CSUF performing arts and athletic events. In these times of continuing state budgetary problems, your membership in the Patrons of the Library is of great import as the Patrons provide significant support services to the Library. Said services are book purchases, periodical subscriptions, activities, lectures, operation of the Book Sale Center in cooperation with the Cal State Fullerton Emeriti, plus significant projects such as the cataloging of the Roy V. Bowell Collection of the History of Cartography.

Please maintain your membership in our beneficial organization and urge colleagues, friends, and family to join us. Our website, [www.library.fullerton.edu/patrons](http://www.library.fullerton.edu/patrons), identifies events, activities and other relevant information. Also, please feel free to contact me at 714.738.5590 or via e-mail at [nancylynnholmes103@gmail.com](mailto:nancylynnholmes103@gmail.com) should you need any additional information