

Selection of general collection materials for transfer to special collections, 2nd ed: A draft

*Attend the hearings in Los Angeles
on February 5, 1994*

A successful transfer program depends upon cooperation and coordination at every level of the library organization. Both will be assisted considerably by a written policy statement. In developing the policy, it is essential to obtain the sanction of the library's senior administration. The policy should be written by those who are administratively responsible for the transfer program, usually the head of special collections, the head of collection development, or the two in concert. The development of selection criteria and transfer procedures depends upon wide agreement among, and must involve all relevant components of, the library: these will generally include special collections, reference, cataloging (including automated systems personnel), gifts, circulation, government documents, preservation and collection development.

The transfer policy must:

1. promulgate publicly the library's definition of, and policy toward, rare and special collections, strongly justifying the measures being taken to protect rare materials, and describing how these measures will enhance the institution's resources in carrying out its mission;
2. establish firm lines of authority for the conduct of an economical and expeditious program;
3. list the criteria of rarity being used in selecting transfer items, which may be influenced to some extent by the nature and strengths of the library's general and special collections;
4. set forth clear procedures to be followed in the transfer process, including procedures for recommending transfer, altering bibliographic and circulation records, and inspection by preservation staff; and

graphic and circulation records, and inspection by preservation staff; and

5. incorporate procedures to insure that readers will be able to locate items during the transfer process.

In many institutions it will be useful to solicit comments from faculty, students, and/or other well-informed researchers, consult with staff at other libraries, or bring in a consultant to review or advise on statement preparation.

Once completed, the policy should be approved by the library's senior administration and incorporated into the library's overall collection development policy.

Transfer procedures

A transfer program has three phases:

1. identification of materials which fit the selection criteria;
2. physical relocation and processing; and
3. record changes.

1. Identification of materials

Ideally, a transfer program will systematically inventory large segments of the general collections, examining each item individually and reviewing the bibliographic records for each: catalog cards, computerized records, accession or shelf list, and so on.

Few libraries, however, will find such a comprehensive review possible. They will opt instead to review materials and records selectively, perhaps as part of a program with another purpose. Regardless of how broadly based the transfer program is, the direct inspection of both individual transfer candidates and their corresponding bibliographic records is usually essential. A selective program based on knowledge of the history of the collection and designed to review areas of known strength may meet a substantial part of the need.

A selective review may include any of the following:

- a. reading the shelves (or examining the shelf list) in classifications known-or thought-to-contain candidates for transfer, such as early or local imprints;
- b. reviewing chronological files for early imprints of particular interest and value; or
- c. producing from machine-readable records

review lists based on imprint date, place of publication, literary genre or subject, or any combination of similar keys.

Rare material may be identified during the routine handling and review of materials for the following library functions:

- a. acquisitions; b. gifts and exchange; c. cataloging; d. preservation; e. binding; f. photoduplication; g. microreproduction; h. circulation; i. inventorying and shelf-reading; j. interlibrary loan; k. preparation of exhibitions; l. collection surveys; m. retrospective conversion of records; and n. weeding.

Any of these activities may incidentally locate multiple copies in the collection, the retention or disposal of which will be determined by local policy.

2. Conservation treatment

Conservation treatment should be considered carefully as a component of the transfer policy. Such treatment (e.g., label removal, repair, phase boxing, complete restoration) for individual items is desirable, but it may create backlogs or funding requirements which complicate the transfer program. The simplest physical treatment may prove most effective or most immediately cost effective. The transfer program may provide information that will prove useful for more extensive restoration of transferred items at a later date.

3. Record changes

A means must be devised, as part of the transfer program, to inform readers promptly when the location of an item has been changed. Catalog records should be updated with new locations. Records should also be reviewed and, if necessary, enhanced to provide adequate access in accordance with standard institutional policies and procedures. In some instances

Development of these guidelines

The first edition of the guidelines for transferring general collection materials to special collections was prepared by an RBMS ad hoc committee chaired by Samuel Streit and was published in *C&RL News* (September 1987). In January 1993 the RBMS Executive Committee began to consider a revision of the guidelines as part of its periodic review of the section's standards documents. It was decided that the document would be given an initial review before a new ad hoc revision committee was appointed. This process resulted in several relatively minor changes to the text—most of which derive from the fact that automated catalogs are now the rule rather than the exception. The revisions were based on consultations with members of the original committee that drafted the guidelines and with members of the RBMS Executive Committee. In its present form, the second edition of the transfer guidelines was approved by the Executive Committee at the 1993 Annual Conference. On Saturday, February 5, 1994, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. there will be a hearing on the revised document. Comments may also be addressed to Richard W. Oram, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, P.O. Drawer 7219, Austin, TX 78713-7219; e-mail oram@utxvm.cc.utexas.edu.

Many libraries intentionally acquire rare books, documents, and manuscripts, but virtually all libraries acquire books and documents which, with time and changing circumstances, and regardless of intention, become rare. Over time, they acquire a special cultural and historical value, and sometimes a significant financial value in the marketplace as well. These guidelines relate to librarians' responsibility to identify rare and valuable materials in general and open stack collections and to arrange for their transfer to the greater security of special collections departments.*

These guidelines reflect two pervasive and underlying conditions which influence both the formulation and the administration of transfer policy: the identification of the rare and special, and the complex interaction of library departments required to effect changes in the records by which readers are informed of the location of materials.

Transfer policies and procedures will vary from institution to institution, depending on staffing, physical setting, and use of the collections; these guidelines are written to identify the general topics to be considered in an adequate transfer program.

*While some libraries have had a good experience with intermediate, restricted access collections, others have not. The wisdom of whether to form them seems to depend on circumstances peculiar to a particular library and is not addressed in these guidelines. Note, however, that their use requires policy decisions regarding what to transfer and how to do so which are parallel to those considered here.

complete recataloging may be desirable, but in most cases a change in location information will suffice for machine-readable catalog records. Nonautomated libraries may choose to:

- a. annotate (or jacket) catalog cards; all cards might be treated or, less successfully, only some (e.g., main entry);
- b. charge transferred items via a circulation record;
- c. place a dummy in the old location to refer to the new; or
- d. transfer all materials published prior to a stated date (e.g., 1751 or 1801) in some or all subject classifications without record changes but with general publicity. This systematic change has been received well in some libraries.

What to transfer

The transfer decision should simultaneously evaluate the unique qualities of an item and apply institutional policy. Thus the candidate for transfer (e.g., an 18th-century book) may fall within the scope of an existing special collections or rare book collection development policy. Selection for transfer implies that all similar items in the collection (e.g., all books in original bindings printed before 1751) ought to be considered also.

The constraints on policy are familiar: the institutional mission and the resources—personnel, space and equipment, technology, and budget—needed to conduct that mission. The interaction between mission and resources dictates realism and, often, compromise. Defining what is rare or unique is not always obvious, and decisions will vary among institutions. Still, certain general criteria apply in evaluating an item for transfer:

1. age; 2. intrinsic characteristics and qualities; 3. condition; 4. bibliographical, research, or market value.

1. Age

The longer an item has survived, the more worthwhile saving it probably becomes; as an item ages it becomes one of a decreasing number of witnesses to its own time. Consequently, there is now universal agreement on the need to protect 15th-century printing, even if fragmentary or present in "leaf" books. There is growing agreement on the same grounds to protect all materials, regardless of form or condition, printed before 1801. There is less gen-

eral agreement on books of later date and on "regional incunables"—books published in a locality or region in the first years (or decades) after printing was established in them—in spite of a consensus that responsibility for them must somehow be distributed among many institutions.

2. Intrinsic characteristics

Books may possess intellectual value, artifactual value, or both. For those books of intellectual but not artifactual value institutional circumstances may necessitate partial or complete substitution of the original by microfilm or photocopy. But items with artifactual value, e.g., finely printed or bound books, manuscripts, drawings, or other original artwork including tipped-in photographs, require special protection of the objects themselves. Such material will require transfer.

It is generally recognized that miniature books (ten centimeters or smaller) are too vulnerable for open stacks and that many books with prints and original photographs—often produced in limited quantities—are vulnerable to mutilation and deserve protection.

Other categories on which there is wide, but not always general, agreement include:

- a. fine and signed bindings; b. early publishers' bindings; c. extra-illustrated volumes;
- d. books with significant provenance; e. books with decorated endpapers;
- f. fine printing;
- g. printing on vellum or highly unusual paper;
- h. volumes or portfolios containing unbound plates;
- i. books with valuable maps or plates;
- j. broadsides, posters, and printed ephemera;
- k. books by local authors of particular note;
- l. material requiring security (e.g., books in unusual formats, erotica, or materials that are difficult to replace).

3. Condition

While age itself dictates transfer for our oldest surviving books, condition may be more important in judging more recent material. All values of the book—scholarly, bibliographical, and market—may be greatly affected by condition. Copies that are badly worn, much repaired, or rebound, should not automatically be considered for transfer, unless the age of the material preempts condition as a criterion.

The durability of most library materials produced since the mid-19th century has declined drastically. It is now increasingly difficult to locate even representative examples of many

19th- and 20th-century printing and binding processes in fine original condition. So many volumes have required rebinding, for example, that the richness of the original decorative art applied to bindings and printed endpapers is increasingly difficult to find and study. Therefore, less than fine copies must be scrutinized as possible transfer items. Dustjackets frequently contain important information (e.g., text, illustrative design, and price), and if they are still present on general collection copies they should generally be retained.

4. Bibliographical, research, or market value

The rarity and importance of individual books are not always self-evident. Some books, for example, were produced in circumstances which virtually guarantee their rarity (e.g., Confederate imprints). Factors affecting importance and rarity can include the following:

1. desirability to collectors and the antiquarian book trade; 2. intrinsic or extrinsic evidence of censorship or repression; 3. seminal nature or importance to a particular field of study or genre of literature; 4. restricted or limited publication; 5. the cost of acquisition.

Older reference works and early periodicals still needed for general use frequently become quite valuable and may require careful consideration for transfer, especially if facsimile or other reprint editions are available to replace them on the open shelves. In recent years, attention has been given to the need to protect valuable government documents. Reports of scientific discoveries and exploratory expeditions, documents with valuable maps or plates, ethnographic reports, and early documents of major historical significance are subject to theft, mutilation, or deterioration and may require transfer.

Selected reading

The development, definition, and updating of a transfer policy is a complex and ongoing process. It requires the exercise of imagination and good judgment, and profits from wide and informed reading. Although there is no literature dealing with transfer *per se*, the following books, selected from the large literature about books and book collecting, may provide special help to those charged with forming and reforming their library's policies.

Brook, G. L. *Books and Book Collecting*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1980.

Carter, John. *ABC for Book Collectors*. Sixth ed. rev. by Nicolas Barker. London: Granada Books, 1980.

———. *Taste and Technique in Book Collecting*. London: Private Libraries Assoc., 1982.

Cave, Roderick. *Rare Book Librarianship*. Second rev. ed. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1983.

Gaskell, Philip. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Peters, Jean, ed. *Book Collecting: A Modern Guide*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1977.

———. *Collectible Books: Some New Paths*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1979.

Schreyer, Alice D. *Rare Books, 1983-84*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1984.

Streit, Samuel. "Transfer of Materials from General Stacks to Special Collections." *Collection Management* 7 (Summer 1985): 33-46.

Walsh, Jim, et al. *Rare and Valuable Government Documents: A Resource Packet on Identification, Preservation, and Security Issues for Government Documents Collections*. 1993. A packet of materials available from Depository Libraries. ■

(Conference circuit cont. from page 638)

sity of Southern California) described the process of adding value to a commercial newswire service and the usage patterns of the resulting full-text news. News from 211 topic areas is brought into the library system and reformed into seven databases along the lines of a print newspaper, e.g., general news, business, sports. Remote users account for one-half of all use; however, remote users read "recreational" databases such as sports and columns more than library readers. Another difference between library use and remote use occurs in the reading method; library use involves more searching, whereas remote users browse more.

Similar in format to the ACRL conferences, the ASIS conference interspersed four plenary sessions throughout the conference program. Particularly interesting was Lee Olsen's (IBM) presentation "Multimedia: Transforming the Way We Use Computers." Olsen gave a sophisticated multimedia presentation using text and image files stored on his personal computer. The liveliest part of the discussion that followed centered on the ability of multimedia to blur the distinction between archival images of actual events and subsequent recreations. ■