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Book Review: *Forging The Future Of Special Collections*

By: Greta Reisel Browning

Abstract

Book review of *Forging The Future Of Special Collections*, edited by Melissa A. Hubbard, Robert H. Jackson, and Arnold Hirshon.

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REVIEWS

If you are interested in reviewing books for this column, please contact Carolyn McCallum at mccallcj@wfu.edu or Steve Kelley at kelleys@wfu.edu.

Forging the Future of Special Collections, edited by Melissa A. Hubbard, Robert H. Jackson, and Arnold Hirshon, Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2016, 202 pp., ISBN: 978-0-8389-1386-4, \$85.00.

In October 2014, the Kelvin Smith Library at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio hosted a national colloquium, “Acknowledging the Past, Forging the Future,” which considered the past and future of special collections in libraries. The colloquium inspired this book, which is edited by the meeting’s co-chairs. While the content of this publication emanates from the colloquium presentations, the book’s organization differs from the colloquium program and many of the pieces are greatly expanded.

There are two introductory pieces that provide background for this publication, but Robert Jackson’s, in particular, situates it within the continuing conversation about national special collections’ goals. The book contains seventeen chapters and an index, and is organized into three parts. Each part contains several chapters that discuss different aspects of the part’s theme from the perspective of special collections and library personnel, collectors and donors, booksellers, and academic faculty. These chapters address the paradigm shifts that have occurred in the world of special collections, from the mid-20th century to today.

The first part, “Communities,” contains six chapters and addresses current issues in collecting and research. Topics include theoretical approaches to thinking about objects, practical approaches to collecting for special collections, including community-based collecting, donor perspectives on special collections, observations on changes in the private collecting field, and the changing research audience in the digital world. Jim Kuhn’s discussion about collecting for special collections is particularly notable. He addresses new tools and best practices for gifts-in-kind, the evaluation of print collections using data-driven tools, and the development of successful collaborations in collecting.

The second part, “The Enduring Object,” contains seven chapters and covers how traditional practices in collecting and providing access to materials are evolving as they adjust to increasing digital access and digital scholarship. Joel Silver introduces the section with an inspirational piece in which he urges special collections libraries to capitalize on the enduring allure of rare materials in outreach and education. Other chapters in this section discuss the state of the

special collections library profession, special collections research, and collecting amid the developing world of digital scholarship. Several chapters explore the bookseller's relationship with libraries, private collectors, and the historical record that these groups capture. The section concludes with an exploration of born-digital modern literary archives and emerging digital research products.

The third part, "From Periphery to Center," contains four chapters, two of which present teaching experiences and two of which review the macro changes in the special collections world over the last 40 years. Jay Satterfield's case study of how Dartmouth College's special collections realigned their staff mission to create successful outreach through instruction is especially intriguing.

This compilation captures a valuable cross-section of perspectives on the state of special collections and their possible future directions. One valuable feature of the book is that many of the authors are leaders in their fields, including head curators, administrators, long-time collectors and booksellers, and faculty, who have seen broad changes in cultural heritage-related fields. Another appealing feature is that many of the chapters are brief, which helps busy professionals stay current in their profession. Also, the editors have performed a great service to the special collections field by documenting the thoughts exchanged at the colloquium and sharing them with the wider world.

Special collections and library professionals, private collectors interested in working with libraries, and booksellers would benefit from reading *Forging the Future of Special Collections*. As Robert Jackson explains, "We chose to call this (book) 'Forging the Future' not 'Waiting for the Future' nor 'Wondering about the Future.' The implication is that the future is in our hands." (p. xv) This book is a must-read for all in the special collections community.

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