

# From the Guest Editor



KAREN CLAY

Karen grew up in Canada, where she obtained a Masters degree in Engineering, followed immediately by an MLIS. Her first positions as a Librarian were at the International Institute for Sustainable Development and at Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. She has been the Library Director at Eastern Oregon University since July 2006. The EOU Library was extensively renovated in 2012, and ever since Karen has been hoping for an opportunity to organize and showcase the Library's special collections. Learning about the breadth of special collections covered in this issue has given Karen the inspiration to apply for grant funding to work with EOU's special collections and uncover whatever gems are hidden there.

I embarked upon this project because I was curious about how special collections could help forge strong communities, as well as how these community impacts could be effectively communicated and demonstrated. The plethora of articles received has taught me a lot.

What stood out the most for me when I read the submissions was the huge variety of communities served by special collections in Oregon. To help me take in all the different types of collections out there, I've binned them into broad (and sometimes overlapping) categories.

- Described by Nancy Hoover, the Center for Volga German Studies is a good example of a collection that serves a scholarly community. A large and active patron community interacts online via Facebook, through established methods of publication, and conference attendance. Other scholarly collections covered in this issue are the Klamath Waters Digital Library and the University Archives Geo-Heat Collection at the Oregon Technical Institute. Iris Godwin and Alla Powers describe how these collections bring hard-to-find information together into one place, connecting community members to find much-needed information on local water resources and heat wells.
- Other collections serve enthusiastic hobbyists. J.B. Bane describes the Sumpter Valley Railroad Restoration Archives, which has visitors from as far away as Europe coming to engage with the trains, the artifacts, and the archives. Martha Sutherland tells the story of community interaction at the Eugene Public Library's Record Listening Station, where program participants (many of them new to the Library) stay on long after the event has ended to discuss the music and engage with each other.

- Many collections serve to help preserve the history, heritage or contributions of particular communities. The articles highlighting these collections include the most poignant stories from patrons as they relate the impact of seeing themselves, their culture, or their family history and homes reflected in a particular collection. Often this recognition comes after years of feeling ignored or marginalized. Lee Catalano, Israel Gabriel Fin and Kirby McCurtis eloquently describe how the Black Pacific Northwest Collection, at the Multnomah County North Portland Neighborhood Library, helps black community members feel welcome. Karen Nitz writes about how collections at the Claire McGill Luce Western History Room at Harney County Library are incorporated into local events and celebrations. Steve Duckworth focuses on the process of developing a specialized collection and exhibit for the Historical Collections & Archives at Oregon Health & Science University. This new collection explores the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer history of OHSU, and Steve Duckworth details how the creation process has forged new partnerships, raised awareness, and strengthened a community that heretofore was not served at all. Iris Godwin and Alla Powers tell how a patron was able to find knowledge relating to her tribal family names in the collections at the Shaw Historical Library, as well as finding recordings of songs sung in her native Modoc language.
- There are some notable collections described in this issue that branch out to address unique community needs. Serenity Ibsen, from the Albert Solheim Library at Pacific Northwest College of Art, describes how a collection of student creative works can highlight and encourage the creative process. By collecting publications that have been conceived as artworks in their own right, this collection explores the frontier where art meets publishing. Brendan Lax and the Hillsboro Public Library make inroads into a highly non-traditional area of collecting with their Collection of Things. It turns out these Things can have a large and demonstrable impact on a local community, with checkouts (and waiting lists) for items as diverse as mochi makers, therapy lights, metal detectors, or frisbees.

When reading all these articles, I am struck by not only the broad spectrum of communities served but also the strong commonalities experienced across the range of collections. Many of the collections highlighted in this issue serve small communities, but the passion of the users they serve comes across in large measure. Patrons are described as enthusiastic, steadfast, or grateful. Stories abound of patrons returning after many years, patrons relating how meaningful it was to find a collection that responded to their needs, or to find a space that reflected their ancestry, heritage, or deeply held interests.

Another common theme is that of patrons giving back—contributing to the collection. Even the collections with large initial endowments rely heavily on the time and enthusiasm of volunteers. Through their shared interest, patrons and curators are often sustaining multiple partnerships with related organizations, many of them far-flung but held together by their common interest.

The impact of all these diverse and specialized collections is best illustrated by the words and actions of the patrons themselves. Together, the stories told in these articles illustrate how, by interacting through a collection, patrons become more connected with each other, with their history, their heritage, or their local community. By making an effort to listen to their patrons, the authors in this issue have written stories that, when brought together, demonstrate the considerable and far-reaching impact of special collections. There is the patron who grew up in North Portland and returns to the neighborhood after many years to seek out books from the Black Pacific Northwest Collection; the student moved by hearing recordings in her native language that was banned in her school days; the community members borrowing a sewing machine for their Fibers and Fabric meeting, and the die-hard Beach Boys fans socializing well past the end of an event.

As a manifestation of their service to a variety of communities, the collections in this issue cover a wide variety of topics and formats, extending the traditional boundaries of what constitutes a library collection. These community-focused collections include “things,” archival artefacts, recordings, and data. The one characteristic that they have in common is their community focus. I thought it was fitting to include on the cover a picture from a collection that brings together a community of student artists—this unusual collection exemplifies how a community influences the collection, just as the collection influences the community.

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