In 1988, the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (ACRL/ALA) marks its thirtieth year as a separate Section within the Association of College and Research Libraries. The origins of a professional organization devoted to the concerns of rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians go back at least a decade earlier. In 1948, an ACRL University Libraries Section meeting was devoted to rare books in the university library. John Cook Wyllie, speaking on "Why a Rare Book Room?" named "some of the best known curators of rare books in this country," and asked his audience to guess how many belonged to ALA. The answer was none.1 The situation began to change rapidly, however. By 1954, a Committee on Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Special Collections had been formed within ACRL, charged to "promote wider understanding of the value of rare books to scholarly research and to cultural growth, bring improvement to the care, use and recognition of rare books in all libraries, and encourage librarians of these collections to become active members of ALA."2

The Committee, whose successive chairs were Gerald McDonald, Colton Storm, Georgia Haugh, and Marjorie Wynne, undertook immediately several projects and programs; and it was soon apparent that a more permanent, autonomous, and flexible structure within the parent organization was necessary to fulfill the Committee's mission. An ALA reorganization, completed in 1957, defined ACRL as a division representing the interests of libraries of higher education, independent research libraries and specialized libraries, with the ability to organize Sections representing fields of activity distinct from those represented by existing Sections.3 At its 1958 Midwinter meeting in Chicago, the ACRL

Alice Schreyer is Assistant Director of Libraries for Special Collections at the University of Delaware, and the current chair of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ACRL.
Board of Directors voted to establish the ACRL Rare Books Section. Formation of a Section to succeed the existing Committee had been requested jointly by Robert Vosper, in his capacity as chairman, Special Committee to Study Section Status for ACRL Rare Books Committee; and by Marjorie Wynne, then chair of the standing Committee. Vosper’s Committee noted that Section status would afford “greater continuity, wider membership participation in worthwhile projects, and full control by the group itself over its officers, committee appointments, and the like.” Among other advantages offered by a Section were an ongoing forum for continuing education and recruitment, and a mechanism (through ALA) for locating and keeping in touch with interested persons.

The formation of a professional membership organization to meet education and communication needs reflects the dramatic rise in the number of rare book, manuscript, and special collections departments in university libraries during the 1940s and 1950s. The principal locus of growth—university libraries—determined both the professional identity of those charged with responsibility for administering the new operations, and the natural home for their professional organization. Coming to their posts with training or experience as librarians; members of the book trade; bibliographical, literary or historical scholars; rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians identified themselves increasingly as specialist librarians. Membership in the principal professional organization for American academic librarians, the Association of College & Research Libraries of the American Library Association, recognizes shared goals and the need to cooperate and communicate with colleagues throughout the library. Stephen Ferguson charted a leadership trend in rare book librarians over the past thirty years: “the leadership is now coming from within the profession, not from outside it.” Ferguson notes several factors contributing to this change; an additional and central one is the role played by RBMS itself in shaping the profession of rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarianship in these three decades.

From the beginning, programs and publications were identified as the primary means of meeting the information, education, and communication needs of this emerging professional community. The ACRL Committee offered an annual program each year of its existence; beginning in 1959 (with the exception of 1960), the Section has sponsored a preconference (preceding—usually—the Annual Conference of the American Library Association) lasting two to three days, comprising formal talks and topical panels. Marjorie Wynne described the first conference in Charlottesville, attended by over 200 librarians, booksellers, authors, and collectors, as follows: “there were eight panel discussions, three addresses, and any number of unscheduled cocktail parties.” Charlottesville, it would seem, set a high standard for conviviality and substance, and all subsequent preconferences have been notable for this attractive blend. The Section
also offers an annual program session at the ALA Annual Conference, on a topic of interest to a general library audience.

Appendix I, compiled by Stephen Ferguson, provides a valuable record of preconference dates, venues, and themes. The meetings have ranged widely over subjects, issues, and trends of theoretical or practical interest to members of the profession and those with whom we interact. Preconferences have become an annual rite—a town meeting for the community of rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians representing different types of institutions, levels of responsibility, and specialties within the field; scholars; booksellers; collectors; and other members of the library and book worlds.

Appendix II, also compiled by Stephen Ferguson, illustrates the important contributions made by RBMS preconferences to the literature of rare books, manuscripts, and special collections librarianship. Beginning with *Rare Book Collections*, edited by H. Richard Archer (Chicago: American Library Association, 1965), a project undertaken by the ACRL Committee on Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Special Collections, and completed under the auspices of the Section, professional publications have played an important role in Section activities. For example, professional practices and procedures relating to access to original materials, borrowing material for exhibitions, ethical standards, machine-readable cataloguing records, security, and transfer of materials from general to special collections have each formed the focus for RBMS committee consideration, and the basis for a published brochure, article, guideline, or standard. Several are currently being revised; ALA has just published a brochure by Peter Van Wingen, *Your Old Books*; RBMS ad hoc committees are working on new documents covering gifts and appraisals and literary rights.

Through its endowed Katharine Kyes Leab and Daniel J. Leab *American Book Prices Current* Exhibition Catalogue Awards, administered by the RBMS Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee, the Section recognizes and encourages excellence in this publishing area, of increasing importance within the profession. *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* as a vehicle for publishing will stimulate research and writing. The journal affords a mechanism for disseminating the results of such studies to the profession, for publishing suitable preconference papers, and for building a permanent record of literature in the field.

Membership in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, which was 300 in 1962, now stands at over 1,800 members, a relatively constant level for the past decade. Section activity continues to expand: there are now ten standing and ten ad hoc committees, and three discussion groups. RBMS has liaisons to five other library or scholarly groups, and is a joint member of an interdivisional ALA
committee concerned with government documents. Among the ad hoc committees formed at the 1988 Midwinter meeting is one charged to study the feasibility of a statistical survey of rare book, manuscript, and special collections libraries, in order to tell us more about our collections and our operations. A membership directory, a long-standing desideratum first proposed by Herbert Cahoon, is again under active discussion. The Continuing Education Committee, which has had responsibility for organizing preconference seminars and panels, is investigating additional ways of meeting the profession’s continuing education needs and broadening the scope of the Committee’s charge to include professional education.

Under three decades of dedicated leaders (see Appendix III for a list of officers), the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section has responded and contributed to the growth and development of American rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarianship. The organization has represented the concerns of librarians and specialists charged with the care, custody, and use of rare books, manuscripts, and other special collections within ALA and to other professional and scholarly groups. The thirty years since the founding of RBMS coincide precisely with the period between the 1957 issue of Library Trends devoted to rare book libraries and collections and the 1987 issue on “Recent Trends in Rare Book Librarianship.” During this time, the profession has been affected by library-wide developments such as automation and preservation, economic factors, trends in scholarly research, changing patterns of private book collecting, and altered conditions within the antiquarian book trade. The response to these forces has been vigorous and effective: new and expanded library school training programs; grant projects for preservation and cataloguing; successful private and corporate fund-raising; sophisticated publications, public and exhibition programs; applications of technology to bring together automated records for rare books, manuscripts, and other special formats, often in a library’s online catalogue, and to create new access points; imaginative, new collecting areas that reflect research needs and available material; expanded interest in promoting use of collections; cooperation among rare book, manuscript, and special collections librarians to share resources and records and promote common goals. The profession of rare book, manuscripts, and special collections librarianship is flourishing; the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section is flourishing—Happy Birthday to us!

NOTES

1. College and Research Libraries 10 (1949): 291. All three papers delivered at the meeting were published together as a supplement to this issue of College and Research Libraries. The others were: Lawrence Clark Powell, “Policy and Administration,” and John Alden, “Orga-
nization and Service.” The “Rare Book Code” written by Powell for UCLA’s rare book department is also included.


# Appendix I

**ACRL/RBMS Preconference Institutes and Preconferences, 1959–1988**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>18–20 Jun</td>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>Manual, Finances, Civil War, Cataloguing and Classifying, Acquainting the Public with Rare Books, Portraits, Prints, Broadsides, Colonial Americana, Antiquarian Trade and Auction Houses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>none</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>6–8 Jul</td>
<td>Oberlin College</td>
<td>Care and Preservation of Rare Books</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>15–16 Jul</td>
<td>Coral Gables</td>
<td>Book Illustrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>12–13 Jul</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Western Americana Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>25–27 Jun</td>
<td>University of Kansas, Linda Hall Library, Kansas City</td>
<td>Rare Books in Natural History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>1–2 Jul</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Librarians and Bibliographers, Making of a Rare Book Librarian, Rare Books and Automation, Early American Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>13–14 Jul</td>
<td>New York (Morgan Library), jointly with BSA</td>
<td>Men and Books: The Interdependences of Collectors, Rare Books, Librarians and Booksellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>22–24 Jun</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>Techniques of Special Collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>20–22 Jun</td>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>Antiquarian Book Trade in the 20th Century</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>18–20 Jun</td>
<td>Philadelphia, jointly with BSA Middle Atlantic Chapter</td>
<td>Americana</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>25–27 Jun</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>The Private Collector of Rare Books and Manuscripts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>17–19 Jun</td>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Interdependence of Rare Books and Manuscripts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>22–24 Jun</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Outward Reach of the Midwest to the Scholarly World</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>21-23 June</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Pacific Coast Research Collections</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>30 June-2 July</td>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>Special Collection: Conservation and Preservation</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>25-28 June</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Eighteenth-Century English Books Considered by Librarians, Booksellers, Bibliographers, and Collectors</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>14-17 July</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Maps and Atlases: A New World in Rare Book and Manuscript Collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>19-23 June</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>Bibliographic Miscellany: A Collection of Papers by Divers Hands</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>24-28 June</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Books and Society in History</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>23-26 June</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>The Collection Builders: Booksellers, Book Collectors, Librarians</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>6-11 July</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Growth in the Face of Adversity: The Business of Special Collections in the 1980's</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>29 June-2 July</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Enemies of Books: Revisited</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>19-22 June</td>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Collecting the 20th Century</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>2-5 July</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Changing Concepts of Rarity and Value</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>24-27 June</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Fine &amp; Lively: The Arts in Special Collections</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>23-26 June</td>
<td>Stanford</td>
<td>Reconsidering Libraries and Scholarship: Special Collections and New Directions in Humanities Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>5-8 July</td>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>Libraries &amp; Museums: Leaves from Each Other's Books</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX II

Compiled by Stephen Ferguson

ACRL/RBMS Preconference Institutes and Preconferences, 1959–1988: Record of Published Lectures and Papers

1. 1959 18–20 June University of Virginia Manual, Finances, Civil War, Cataloguing and Classifying, Acquainting the Public with Rare Books, Portraits, Prints, Broadsides, Colonial Americana, Antiquarian Trade and Auction Houses

1960 none

2. 1961 6–8 July Oberlin College Care and Preservation of Rare Books

3. 1962 15–16 July Coral Gables Book Illustrations

Frederic G. Melcher:
  *Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt at Sixty.*
Lucien Goldschmidt:
  *Baroque Book Illustration.*
Lawrence S. Thompson:
  *Book Illustration in Colonial Spanish America.*
Georgia C. Haugh:
  *The Beginnings of American Book Illustration.*
Budd L. Gambee:
  *American Book and Magazine Illustration of the Later Nineteenth Century.*
William A. Bostick:
  *Contemporary Book Arts and Their Roots.*
Herbert Cahoon:
  *The Author as Illustrator.*

All the above papers published in *Book Illustration* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1963).


4. 1963 12–13 July Chicago Western Americana Institute

Archibald Hanna:

5. 1964 25–27 June University of Kansas, Linda Hall Library, Kansas City Rare Books in Natural History
William T. Stearn:  
*The Use of Bibliography in Natural History.*

Sten Lindroth:  
*Two Centuries of Linnaean Studies.*

Frans A. Stafleu:  
*Redouté and His Circle.*

John C. Greene:  
*The Founding of Peale’s Museum.*

Jerry Stannard:  
*Early American Botany and Its Sources.*

Richard C. Rudolph:  
*Illustrated Botanical Works in China and Japan.*

Robert M. Mengel:  
*Bibliography and the Ornithologist.*

Alan Boyden:  
*“Un-natural” History.*

Jacob Zeitlin:  
*Natural History Books from a Rare Bookseller’s Point of View.*

All papers published in *Bibliography and Natural History* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries, 1966).

6. 1965 1–2 July  University of Michigan  Librarians and Bibliographers, Making of a Rare Book Librarian, Rare Books and Automation, Early American Music

7. 1966 13–14 July  New York (Morgan Library), jointly with BSA  Men and Books: The Interdependences of Collectors, Rare Books, Librarians and Booksellers

8. 1967 22–24 June  Stanford University  Techniques of Special Collections

Edwin Wolf, 2nd:  
*Fine Art of Selling Duplicates.*

J.M. Edelstein:  
*On Disposal of Duplicates.*

P. William Filby:  
*Techniques of Exhibitions.*

Dorothy Bowen:  
*Techniques of Display.*

Jean Tuckerman:  
*Techniques of University Exhibitions.*

Andreas L. Brown:  
*Valuation and Appraisal.*

Frederick R. Goff:  
*How to Appraise a Gutenberg Bible.*

9. 1968 20–22 June Kansas City
   Antiquarian Book Trade in the 20th Century

   John J. Walsdorf:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in Great Britain.*

   Hendrik Edelman:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in France.*

   Robert Cazden:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in the Germanies.*

   Mario Witt:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in Italy.*

   Lawrence S. Thompson:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in Spain.*

   Jens Nyholm:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in the Scandinavian Countries.*

   Menno Hertzberger:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in the Low Countries.*

   Joseph Rubinstein:
   *The Antiquarian Book Trade in the U.S. and Points South and North.*


10. 1969 18–20 June Philadelphia, jointly with Americana
    BSA Middle Atlantic Chapter

    The Private Collector of Rare Books and Manuscripts

12. 1971 17–19 June Austin
    Interdependence of Rare Books and Manuscripts

   Harry Ransom, *Development of Research Collections at the University of Texas in Recent Years*, in *AB Bookman’s Weekly*, 48 (July 5–12, 1971): 3–6.

13. 1972 22–24 June Chicago
    Outward Reach of the Midwest to the Scholarly World

14. 1973 21–23 June Los Angeles
    Pacific Coast Research Collections

15. 1974 30 June–2 July University of Virginia
    Special Collection: Conservation and Preservation


16. 1975 25–28 June San Francisco
    Eighteenth-Century English Books Considered by Librarians, Booksellers, Bibliographers, and Collectors
William B. Todd:

John W. Jolliffe:
  *An Eighteenth-Century STC.*

William J. Cameron:
  *Short-Title Cataloguing and Automated Bibliographical Control of Pre-1800 Books.*

G. Thomas Tanselle:
  *The Descriptive Bibliography of Eighteenth-Century Books.*

Donald D. Eddy:
  *Eighteenth-Century Bibliography: Facts and Opinions.*

Patricia Hernlund:
  *Problems of Editing Business and Trade Manuscripts.*

Keith I.D. Maslen:
  *Seven Years Editing the Bowyer Ledgers.*

Donald F. Bond:
  *Problems in Editing the Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay.*

Robert J. Barry, Jr.:
  *Addicted to Rarity.*

William P. Barlow, Jr.:
  *Eighteenth-Century English Books: The View of a Collector.*

Alexandra Mason:
  *Catesby, Curll, and Cook: Or, the Librarian and the Eighteenth-Century English Book.*

Herman W. Liebert:
  *Summary.*


17. 1976  14–17 July  University of Michigan  Maps and Atlases: A New World in Rare Book and Manuscript Collections

Norman J.W. Thrower:
  *Cartography in University Education.*

David Woodward:
  *The Form of Maps: An Introductory Framework.*

John A. Wolter:
  *Research Tools and the Literature of Cartography.*

Ralph E. Ehrenberg:
  *Photocopying and Microcopying Rare Maps and Atlases.*

Robert W. Karrow, Jr.:
  *Cartobibliography.*

Paul N. Banks:
  *The Conservation of Maps and Atlases.*

John Winearls:
  *Progress in Cartobibliography and Automated Cataloging of Maps in Canada.*

Coolie Verner:
  *Overview and Summation.*

All the above papers published in *The AB Bookman's Yearbook*, 1976, part I, pp.3–73.
18. 1977 14–17 June Toronto

Book Selling and Book Buying:
Aspects of 19th-Century British and North American Book Trades

Terry Belanger:
From Bookseller to Publisher: Changes in the London Book Trade, 1750–1850.

Judith St. John:

Mihai H. Handrea:
Books in Parts and the Number Trade.

Michael Turner:
Reading for the Masses: Aspects of the Syndication of Fiction in Great Britain.

Douglas Lochhead:
J. Ross Robertson, Publisher: Aspects of the Book Trade in Nineteenth-Century Toronto.

Larry McMurty:
Introduction to Franklin Gilliam.

Franklin Gilliam:
The Case of the Vanished Victorians.

Robert Nikirk:
Two American Book Collectors of the Nineteenth Century: William Loring Andrews and Beverly Chew.

All the above papers published in Book Selling and Book Buying (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978).

19. 1978 21–24 June New Haven

The Study of Books as Physical Objects: State of the Art


20. 1979 19–23 June San Antonio

Bibliophilic Miscellany: A Collection of Papers by Divers Hands

William H. Bond:
Manuscripts in the Library, in AB Bookman’s Weekly 64 (November 5, 1979): 2994f.

Archibald Hanna:
Precedents, Problems and Prizes, in AB Bookman’s Weekly 64 (October 29, 1979): 2804f.

William B. Todd:


Books and Society in History

G. Thomas Tanselle:
Introduction.

Elizabeth L. Eisenstein:
From Scriptoria to Printing Shops: Evolution and Revolution in the Fifteenth-Century Book Trade.
Henri-Jean Martin:
*Publishing Conditions and Strategies in Ancien Régime France.*

Katharine F. Pantzer:
*Printing the English Statutes, 1484–1640: Some Historical Implications.*

Bernhard Fabian:

Raymond Birn:
*Book Production and Censorship in France, 1700–1715.*

John P. Feather:

Frederic Barbier:
*The Publishing Industry and Printed Output in Nineteenth-Century France.*

James J. Barnes:
*Depression and Innovation in the British and American Book Trade, 1819–1939.*

Paul Raabe:
*Library History and the History of Books: Two Fields of Research for Librarians.*


22. 1981 23–26 June San Francisco The Collection Builders: Booksellers, Book Collectors, Librarians


25. 1984 19–22 June Austin Collecting the 20th Century


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Changing Concepts of Rarity and Value</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Fine &amp; Lively: The Arts in Special Collections</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Stanford</td>
<td>Reconsidering Libraries and Scholarship: Special Collections and New Directions in Humanities Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>Libraries &amp; Museums: Leaves from Each Other’s Books</td>
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## APPENDIX III

Compiled by Georgia C. Haugh; completed by Barbara Paulson

**Officers of the ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section**

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<th>SECRETARY</th>
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<td>1958–59</td>
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<td>Frances J. Brewer</td>
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<td>Edwin Wolf, 2nd</td>
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<td>Robert Ormes Dougan</td>
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<td>1965–66</td>
<td>Marcus A. McCorison</td>
<td>Julius P. Barclay</td>
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<td>1967–68</td>
<td>Lawrence S. Thompson</td>
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<td>1968–69</td>
<td>J. Melvin Edelstein</td>
<td>Neda Westlake</td>
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<td>Alexandra Mason</td>
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<td>Clyde C. Walton</td>
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<td>1972–73</td>
<td>Howard Applegate</td>
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<td>Terry Belanger</td>
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