Convictions -- Lessons for Library Benefactors

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Libraries accept research collections and to libraries have had similarly bitter experiences.  Librarians know well the appeal of the "Big Deal," especially for online publications.  Why shouldn't you purchase a deal that gives you the most journal titles?  Less input from faculty is required, fewer subscriptions need to be placed individually, and "My Library Collection Will Be Bigger Than Yours" has bragging rights.  The big deal, however, costs big bucks.

The adage "Get the most for your money" made his fortune — much of which he spent on Walt Whitman, who represented to him the spirit of America.  Charlie wanted to express his gratitude to America by placing his monumental Whitman Collection in the Library of Congress through his generous gift-purchase arrangement.  At the end of his life he was painfully unhappy about the mistreatment of his Whitman by the Library of Congress.  Among other betrayals, the Library of Congress failed to unpack and catalogue the entire collection.

Many other donors of great collections to libraries have had similarly bitter experiences.  Libraries accept research collections they don't know what to do with and may not really want, in order to avoid blame for rejecting them.  Then they neglect the collections.  A library benefactor who has donated a dozen major collections to a dozen libraries complains that none of these institutions has given proper attention to his books or to him.  Admittedly he is a pain-in-the-ass; but he is a generous pain-in-the-ass who expected that his benefactions would be valued.  He also expected gratitude — not systematic ingratitude.  He is a slow learner: once or twice are bad luck; but twelve out of twelve are enemy action.  The experienced benefactor understands that although it may be possible to make conditions or stipulations about cataloguing, shelving, and maintenance, they will not be honored.  There is no such thing as a grateful institution.

Until recently I deprecated collectors who justified auctioning off their collections by claiming that they could not have acquired their books if other collectors hadn't sold out.  I have written articles insisting on the duty of librarians to alert the importance of such publications to the fields they serve.  Librarians should be alerted to the importance of such publications and no piggy bank should be so broken that there isn't room in the budget for the inclusion of these periodicals.

This summer, I’m still hoping to put on a lavender “tee,” spread a beach blanket, and read the magazines I really want, most of which don’t come my way in “My Big Deal.”

Next time I’m offered “Big Deal or No Deal,” I hope I’m wise enough to say, “No, Thanks.”  And I hope you’ll think about doing the same.  

8thly That my said Library be continued in its present form and noe other books mixt therewith Save what my Nephew may add to them of his own Collecting in distinct presses.  That the said rooms and books so placed and adjusted be called by the name of Bibliotheca Pepysiana....  12thly And that for a yet further Security herein the said two Colleges of Trinity and Magdalen have a Reciprocal Check upon one another.  And that the College which shall be in present possession of the said Library be subject to an Annual visitation from the other and to the forfeiture thereof to the like possession and Use of the other upon Conviction of any breach of their said Covenants.

— From the Last Will and Testament of Samuel Pepys, 13 May 1703
Convictions

2. Specify that nothing be discarded.
3. Specify that everything be maintained in the rare books/special collections department of the library: that the books are not to be scattered.
4. Tell librarians who express concern about duplication — the shibboleth that terrifies the products of schools of information science and librarian-ship who orgiastically and orgastically discard and destroy the precious objects they are charged with protecting and preserving — that a duplicate copy is not a duplicate until proven so. Even then, three copies are better than one. Bowdoin’s Hawthorne-Longfellow Library declined Frazer Clark’s magnificent Hawthorne Collection on the basis of putative duplication.

5. Provide money for the compilation and publication of a proper catalogue — on paper and on telly. Do this while you are alive and can attempt to supervise it.
6. Do not leave your money to a library for an acquisitions endowment. The book-dopes will mis-spend it because they won’t know how to spend it on books and will waste it on something else that is meaningful to them — like furniture.

7. Do not be conned into trusting the administrators’ statements of gratitude. No matter what they say, they resent you and your books because the books remind them of their exclusion from the things that you value. They also resent your money and the way you have spent it. There is a wide breach between those who spend their own money on books and those who do not: these constitute responses to life. What you spend your money on defines you. Never trust a bookless library administrator.

Rumors.

Speaking of preconferences, we have NINE planned. Electronic Resource Management Systems: Learning from Experience with Kristen DeVoe <devoek@cofc.edu>, Evaluating Digital Repositories and Platforms: A Look at Projects and Products with Becky Lenzini <rlenzini@earthlink.net>, Developing Digital Repositories and Platforms: A Look at Projects and Products with Becky Lenzini <rlenzini@earthlink.net>, George Machovec <george@coalliance.org> and Bernie Reilly <reilly@crl.edu>, Negotiating with Vendors: Do’s and Don’ts with Buzzy Basch, Marketing for ROI: Branding and promoting your collections and services with Elisabeth Leonard <elisabeth@elisabethleonard.com>, Acquisitions Basics and Beyond with Paul Rittlemeyer <pvr3y@virginia.edu> and Dawn M. Waller <dwaller@virginia.edu>, Crime on the Coast with Ann Hamilton <ahamilton@georgiasouthern.edu>, Serials Resource Management with Buzzy Basch <buzzy@basch.com>, Creating the Capacity for Change: Transforming Library Workflows and Organizations with Rick Lugg and Ruth Fischer, and Are publisher licenses compatible with library technology? with Simon Inger, Tracy Gardner and Pinar Erzin <simon@sic.ox14.com>. Check out the descriptions www.katina.info/conference.

What did you do for Memorial Day? Becky Lenzini was in Southern Illinois visiting with her dad who is an incredible octogenarian! He is driving around the country like a thirty-

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