A Gallimaufry of Books

By David Isaacson

The books that the Friends of the Libraries offer at our biannual sales are not simply a miscellany or hodgepodge, but a gallimaufry. In case you have not experienced a literal gallimaufry, it is a ragout made (usually) of leftover meat and other ingredients. And just as adventurous diners know not to disdain what a good cook can do with leftovers, booklovers know that some of the tastiest intellectual dishes are served up at used book sales.

A good gallimaufry is not simply tossed together. Library liaisons periodically examine the thousands of books donated to the Libraries each year. We select what we regard as the choicest books to add to our collections. On rare occasions, a first edition, signed author's copy, specially bound, limited edition, or otherwise rather unique book has been given to the library, and the liaisons recognize that special attribute. More often, liaisons choose to add books to our collection that fall into one or more of a number of non-rare, but still significant categories, such as: the book is out of print; we already own it, but need another copy; we own other editions, but not this one; the book, while normally not acquired by approval or selection plans, is perceived to be one that readers might enjoy; or simply because the liaison finds the book desirable—it strikes his or her fancy, and the Libraries should own it. In any case, when a liaison adds a book to the library, there is an expectation that someone will be interested in reading or consulting it.

Since a gallimaufry consists of a choice though variegated selection, some donated books are neither selected as library acquisitions nor added to those that are to be put up for sale. Some books donated to the Libraries are, frankly, in such disreputable physical shape, or so intellectually without redeeming merit, that we simply cannot dishonor ourselves by selling them. While it might be argued that no book is without merit, some books truly require that they be retired, without obsequies, to a final resting place—recycled, of course.

The most recent book sale of the Friends was held on March 30-31, 1999. To give you a taste of some of the books that were chosen for the sale, here is a sample of titles that were not added to the Libraries' collections, but that we believed deserved a home on someone's shelf.

We already had a copy in Reference, as well as Web access to the 1998 Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory, but this expensive resource would be of value to an attorney, or even a layman obsessed with the law. A set of fat volumes listing the names, addresses, and specialties of the members of the American Bar Association, along with the texts of selected laws from all fifty states would be often referenced.

While we are not inhospitable to a career in this field, we really didn't need 50 copies of the third edition of a textbook published in 1988 called Introduction to Management in the Hospitality Industry.

Although our staff, on average, seems to be approaching a median age with more than passing interest in this subject, we chose not to add two copies of the Starr-Weiner Report on Sex and Sexuality in the Mature Years. A liaison cannot help but wonder why a book like this, let alone two copies, was donated to the library, but that, of course, is none of our business, although we do feel that Starr reports contain some intriguing statements.

I, personally, as a resident self-proclaimed dictionary maven, chose not to add Webster's New World Crossword Puzzle Dictionary. I did this in full awareness that the crossword puzzle is an American invention and its fans (and authors) have made a significant contribution to linguistics. Regardless, I, along with my addicted father (with whom I have had a few cross-
words) believe that no self-respecting solver of such enigmas would cheat by using such a dictionary.

Although some of our nursing or physician assistant students or faculty may be interested in the history of medicine (along with resident hypochondriacs), we decided that the Libraries' patrons would have to struggle along without the 1933 edition of Practical Hematological Diagnosis. For a similar reason, perhaps, we did not add the 1948 edition of Common Gastrointestinal Diseases.

Perhaps because it is not yet, to my knowledge, possible to major in the instrument, or that research grants are not frequently given to support scholarly investigations in its history, we reluctantly did not add to the Music and Dance Library a copy of How to Play the Harmonica for Fun and Profit.

Because we already owned a copy, we offered for sale a delightful collection of New Yorker cartoons published between 1950-1955.

Similarly, we already owned a number of copies of one of the old Roman classic love poets, Catullus, but I can recommend that this old Roman could teach quite a few things to contemporary practitioners.

We have no conscious bias against Tarheels—or educators—but decided to do without a copy of the 1991-92 North Carolina Education Directory.

Some lucky person content to own a 1966 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (minus volume 13) could buy the whole set for $10! While the article on Bill Clinton in that edition is not accurate—in fact, I couldn't even find it—one assumes that the article on Catullus would be just as accurate today as it was in 1966.

Some among my readers may be old enough to remember the nationally syndicated columns by Sidney J. Harris that commented, usually wryly, on all sorts of esoteric and surprising facts. These usually began with Harris admitting, almost as if he were a rather scatter-brained reference librarian, that he discovered a very odd fact while looking up something else. Well, we offered, in the final addition to our gallimaufry, a 1976 edition of 30 years of The Best of Sydney J. Harris.

If you were lucky enough to purchase one of these choice books, or something equally delectable from our servings at the book sale, you've done both yourself and the Friends of the Libraries a favor—and perhaps added a new flavor to your life. As the poet and lexicographer John Ciardi used to say, at the end of his NPR program on etymologies, "Here's good words to you."

April 14, 1999, was the occasion for the annual meeting and election of the officers and Board of the Friends of the University Libraries. Marilyn Gosling, Vice President, presided over the Business Meeting and Election that was held in the Meader Rare Book Room on the 3rd floor of Waldo Library. The following slate of officers was elected or confirmed as continuing:

Bettina Meyer, President, 1999-2000
Marilyn Gosling, Vice President, 1999-2000
Mary Ann Bowman, Secretary, 1998-2000
David McKee, Treasurer, 1998-2000

Board of Directors
Richard Brewer, 1999-2002
Robert Hahn, 1998-2000
Jan Dommer, 1998-2001
William Combs, 1998-2002

Following the business meeting, the Friends and visitors heard Sharon Carlson, Director; Archives & Regional History Collections at WMU, speak on the topic of "Cooperative Men and Library Ladies: Michigan's Ladies' Library Associations." Director Carlson, who is writing a Ph.D. dissertation on this subject for the Department of History at WMU, delighted and amused the audience with tales of these unique associations and the individuals associated with them. Formed originally in the early to mid-19th century, the associations are credited as the founding forces for "75% of all public libraries in the United States." The associations in Michigan were especially active during the last half of the 19th century, and were key to the development of a culture that fostered public library development across the state. In many communities, the "women acted directly as instruments of change."

The Friends were also introduced to WMU President Elson S. Floyd who spoke briefly to the group. President Floyd noted his strong support of the University Libraries at Western Michigan University, and his appreciation of the Friends' organization and efforts on behalf of the Libraries.

The Friends of the University Libraries sponsor this newsletter, Gatherings, along with a variety of fund-raising and cultural activities that support the mission of the University Libraries through the acquisition of books and other needed resources. The first of two annual book sales was held March 30 and 31, 1999. The Friends invite personal memberships that include Associate ($10), Contributing ($25-99), Donor ($100 to 499), Patron ($500 to 999), and Benefactor ($1,000 or more). There are also student memberships for $5 and Donor, Patron, and Benefactor Corporate memberships. Interested individuals should contact Bettina Meyer at Waldo Library, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008, or call 616-387-5143.

It's a late winter afternoon and already nearly dark; there are classes to teach tonight in Grand Rapids—over an hour's drive away. Loaded into the state car is a large box containing hands-on exercises, Library Guides, and a miscellany of handouts for students. Now the only worry is the weather. Just past the overpass at Plainwell, the car seems to enter the Twilight Zone! First comes rain, then sleet and ice, finally snow. Farther north, near the Wayland exit, the car emerges once more into a cold, but tranquil night.

Everything is calm again.

Once at the Grand Rapids Regional Center, there's a rush to get to the computer classroom, lay out the handouts, and turn on all the computer terminals before the class arrives. Students drift in, and soon the class begins. An explanation of the off-campus and online services available to them goes well; the students have lots of good questions. WestCat, the online catalog of the WMU University Libraries is demonstrated, to be followed by the steps of searching PsycINFO 1967, an online index to psychological journals and books found in FirstSearch, an OCLC online service provider. Oh no! The entire FirstSearch system is down; we can't gain access and search any of its 60 plus indexes and databases. Back to the schoolroom and blackboard drawings where we talk the students through the steps that they "will" follow when the system is "up" again. Finally, we help students work through hands-on exercises at the computers—for WestCat, and, if it comes back online in time, FirstSearch.

Though we've combined a couple of our mishaps, these are problems that really do happen whenever we travel away from the Kalamazoo campus. As continuing education librarians who serve Western Michigan University students at five regional centers, we often have to deal with similar and worse weather conditions, and a multitude of technical glitches that comes with the territory of computerized services. We won't even mention other possibilities that inevitably can occur when two dozen students travel to meet with faculty who have "promises to keep" and "miles to go." As a result, above all, we have to be adaptable, and roll with the punches. Our reward? These are students who come to learn how to learn, who are attentive, and actively engaged in the process, and who truly appreciate our being there for them.