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, 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-

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words) believe that no self-respecting solver of 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 hypochondriacs), we decided that the Libraries’ patrons would have to struggle 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.”