

R-E-S-P-E-C-T . . . Though neither of the guest editors would dare compete with Aretha Franklin, her hit pop vocal expresses well what advocates of popular culture materials in libraries think is long overdue — a little respect. Many libraries ignore popular culture because they consider it frivolous and peripheral to the library's mission, an example of the incredibly poor taste of the American public. But when we look around to see what libraries actually have in their collections, we almost always find something that is an example of popular culture, from cigarette cards and war posters to romances and detective fiction.

Popular culture materials are here to stay. Librarians must decide how to respond, based not on our individual opinions of popular culture but upon objective mission statements, collection development policies; curriculum needs; reader demand; and budget, staffing, and space constraints.

This issue of *North Carolina Libraries* has been planned as a disciplined examination of popular culture and its presence in libraries. Authors and topics were selected to cover a spectrum, from an overview of the discipline of popular culture through the process of selecting, cataloging, preserving, and providing reader access to popular culture materials. Thomas Henricks, a sociologist and Associate Dean of Social Sciences at Elon College, begins with a broad

look at popular culture: what it is, when it began and how it developed, how we can evaluate it, and whether libraries should collect such stuff. His introductory article is followed by a look at the history of popular culture in libraries by Susan Steinfirst, a faculty member at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Steinfirst applauds the acceptance of popular culture materials by public libraries and encourages academic libraries to consider popular culture a legitimate collecting area. A new Directory of Popular Culture Collections in North Carolina, prepared by Steinfirst and her class on popular culture, provides a first look at the number and variety of these collections in our state.

From Bowling Green State University, home of the Popular Culture Library, Dennis East, Associate Dean, Libraries and Learning Resources, discusses building a popular culture collection, linking collecting to teaching, research, and patron interests. He also discusses cooperative collecting, establishing good relationships with donors, and the importance of having a collecting policy.

The next logical steps in the creation of a popular culture collection are cataloging the materials, preserving them, and providing access. The Country Music Foundation in Nashville is renowned as the largest collection of country music recordings in the world. Linda Gross describes how the library and media center provides access to sheet music, films and videos, songbooks, periodicals, monographs, newspaper clippings, and sound recordings.

Thinking about preserving library materials often strikes terror in the hearts of librarians and archivists who feel overwhelmed by the size of the problem and the technical nature of most information on the topic. Neil Fulghum, Keeper of the North Carolina Collection Gallery, in a concise article on preserving popular culture materials, gives specific, non-technical advice, assuring us that some basic knowledge and a few simple applications can do much to ensure the longevity of our collections.

Providing access, says Duncan Smith of North Carolina Central University, includes selecting, organizing, responding to requests for materials, and promoting use of those items. Smith suggests several practical ways for libraries to provide access to their popular fiction.

And yes, popular culture materials do exist in school libraries. Diane Kessler and Karen Perry, two practicing media coordinators, describe the balancing act required of school librarians who must juggle curriculum needs, student requests, and their limited budgets. There are some strategies that work.

Cookbooks are examples of a popular culture genre ignored by many libraries. Jenifer Lyn Grady, a student in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, examines African American cookbooks as sources of important information on black culture. She discusses the content, format, and importance of these cookbooks and suggests how libraries can build African American cookbook collections.

The question of whether popular culture materials have a place in academic libraries is debated by Barbara B. Moran, Dean of the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Harry Tuchmayer of the New Hanover County Public Library.

We hope that this issue will help make us all more aware of the presence of popular culture materials in our libraries and of the emergence of popular culture studies as a legitimate academic pursuit. We believe that some articles will encourage our colleagues to collect popular culture items and to reconsider the role of libraries in modern society. We think that some suggestions will prompt action. If the issue accomplishes these goals, the authors will be pleased, and the editors will be delighted.

# Foreword ...

by Alice Cotten and Eileen McGrath,  
Guest Editors

