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From the President



*“Perhaps our most important contribution is one that cannot be counted in circulation statistics or annual reports: libraries create **trust**.”*

If there is one thing librarians understand, it is that our work has never been just about books and reading. We organize collections, answer reference questions, and teach research skills, but those tasks are only part of a much larger mission. Every question at the reference desk, every storytime, every reader’s advisory conversation, and every technology class given is an opportunity to improve someone’s life.

Yet, because much of our work happens quietly, it often goes unnoticed. Success in librarianship is measured not by blaring headlines but by those quiet moments: the child who discovers a favorite book, the college student who finally finds the right source, the job seeker who submits their résumé online, the hobbyist who learns new crafting techniques, or someone new to the community who finds a welcoming place to belong. These moments rarely attract public attention, but they are the foundation of what libraries contribute to society.

In a world where information is available with a few taps on a screen, it is easy to wonder whether

libraries and librarians are still necessary. The answer is a resounding yes. Libraries remain among the most valuable institutions in our communities, and librarians continue to play an essential role in helping people learn, grow, and connect. Together, they provide opportunities that extend far beyond books.

This vital work does not happen in isolation. Through the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA), library professionals, workers, and stakeholders across public, academic, and school settings unite to advocate for the central role libraries play in the well-being and quality of life of their communities.

Today’s librarians work in an environment that is constantly changing. We are expected to be educators, technology trainers, archivists, information specialists, event planners, entertainers, grant writers, community partners, and advocates for intellectual freedom. We have to learn and adapt to new technologies while preserving access to historical collections. We help patrons navigate artificial intelligence, digital literacy, and online misinformation while continuing to celebrate the simple joy of reading.

That adaptability is one of our profession’s greatest strengths. Libraries have survived centuries of social, technological, and cultural change because our purpose has never been tied to a single format. Whether knowledge is found in a printed book, a digital archive, a makerspace, or an online database, our role remains the same: connecting people with information, ideas, and opportunities. NCLA gives library workers across the state a way to collaborate, share emerging best practices—from digital literacy to AI integration—and support one another as our roles evolve.

Perhaps our most important contribution is one that cannot be counted in circulation statistics or annual reports: libraries create **trust**. They are among the few public institutions where people

can ask questions without fear of judgment, explore unfamiliar ideas without pressure, and learn without the expectation of spending money. That trust is built every day by librarians and library workers who greet patrons with patience, empathy, and professionalism.

The challenges facing our profession are real. Budget constraints, staffing shortages and burnout, censorship efforts, and the rapid pace of technological change can make it difficult to focus on the reasons many of us entered this field. It is easy to become overwhelmed by daily demands and lose sight of the broader impact of our work. But every challenge also reminds us why libraries matter. Communities continue to need places that champion knowledge, curiosity, privacy, and equitable access to information.

As librarians, we are not merely managing collections—we are preserving democratic values. We defend the freedom to read, promote lifelong learning, and ensure that information remains accessible to everyone, regardless of age, background, or financial means. These responsibilities are not incidental to our profession; they define it.

Our work deserves to be celebrated, but it also deserves to be shared. We should tell the stories behind the statistics, explain the expertise behind our services, and remind our communities that

libraries are not passive institutions. They are active partners in education, civic life, and community well-being.

As we look ahead, the strength of North Carolina's libraries relies on the strength of our collective voice. Whether by joining an NCLA section, participating in legislative advocacy, or attending regional workshops, getting involved with NCLA ensures we continue to champion intellectual freedom, literacy, and equitable access for all.

The future of libraries will undoubtedly continue to evolve, but the heart of librarianship remains unchanged. It is found in our commitment to service, our belief in the power of knowledge, and our conviction that every person deserves the opportunity to learn. Those ideals have guided generations of librarians before us, and they will continue to guide those who come after us.

We should remember something that can be easy to forget amid busy schedules and competing priorities: *the work we do matters*. Every question answered, every program offered, every collection developed, and every patron welcomed strengthens not only our libraries but also the communities we serve. That is a legacy worth protecting—and a profession worth celebrating.



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From the Editor: Who Will Tell Your Story?

One article in this issue that really got me thinking was Gerald Ward's "[Guardians of Lore](#)," about portrayals of librarians and archivists in works of speculative fiction. Librarians function in these narratives, he says, as trusted protectors of access to cultural memory. Librarians preserve recorded knowledge—our communities' stories about ourselves—stories in which our individual identities collectively create shared cultural identities.

My thinking then "diverged in a yellow wood," as Frost might have said. Whose stories are recorded? How are they then retold? These thoughts were spurred in part by the From the Pages for this issue. Our From the Pages article this time is a reproduction of the first "[From our President](#)" column published in *North Carolina Libraries*. It was written by NCLA President Margaret H. Ligon, who was head librarian at the Pack Memorial Library in Asheville from 1945 to 1965. I knew nothing about her, so tried to learn a little. Ligon supported the creation of the Thomas Wolfe collection at Pack, and was directly involved in a volume celebrating Carl Sandburg (who lived in nearby Flat Rock)—facts that resonated with this former English major.

What other wonderful librarians are among us who deserve their stories to be told? How about

Dr. Annette Lewis Phinazee, the first woman and first Black American woman to obtain a doctorate in Library Science from Columbia University, and who started her library career at the Caswell County Training School in 1939 and finished it as the Dean of North Carolina Central University's School of Library Science. She was the first Black president of NCLA, elected in 1975. Or how about former Navy librarian and Randolph County Librarian Charlesanna Fox, who followed her 1953-1955 NCLA Presidential term by serving as President of the North Carolina Adult Education Association in 1956? Or former Assistant State Librarian John Welch, a longtime musician who served also as past chair of the Transylvania County Library Foundation and to whom books were "a gift in every sense—a doorway, a comfort, a spark."

We can tell their stories—and we **should**—to ensure that their part of our shared cultural identity is passed forward, and in hopes that in the future our stories will continue to be told for the same reason.

"But as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story we have together" —Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Letters to the editor should be mailed to:

Joyner Library, 1000 E Fifth Street,
Greenville, NC 27858,
or by email to editor@nclaonline.org.

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GERALD WARD

Guardians of Lore: Knowledge-Keepers, Libraries, and the Moral Work of Information in Genre Fiction

ABSTRACT

Genre fiction often turns to librarians, archivists, and knowledge institutions when information becomes unstable and ethically charged. Drawing on a curated corpus of fiction across fantasy, science fiction, horror, dystopian, and historical traditions, this thematic critical review uses close reading and interpretive synthesis to show how knowledge-keepers stage conflicts over access, censorship, preservation, authority, and collective memory. Informed by LIS scholarship, it argues that these figures emerge at narrative crisis points, are increasingly cast as heroes of access, expose the dangers of gatekeeping and concentrated informational power, and position libraries as liminal threshold spaces for moral testing and transformation.

KEYWORDS: *librarians in fiction, information ethics, genre fiction, archives and memory, censorship and access*

Within genre fiction, the figure of the librarian or archivist rarely enters a narrative as neutral scenery. These characters and the institutions they represent tend to materialize at moments when a story's world becomes unstable, when memory is contested, when authority is challenged, or when a community's access to texts determines whose version of reality will prevail. Read as cultural artifacts, such portrayals are not merely images of librarians; they are narrative instruments used to stage conflicts about knowledge, power, and the ethics of preservation.

From the perspective of librarianship, this essay examines a curated selection of prose fiction in book form across fantasy, science fiction, horror, dystopian, and historical traditions. The scope is intentionally limited to traditional books, including novels, novellas, and short stories that circulate in print, and it excludes film, television, comics, manga, and other non-book media. The aim is not an empirical content analysis or a systematic literature review, but a thematic critical review that uses close reading and interpretive synthesis to trace recurring patterns and to consider what those patterns suggest about librarianship as an ethical and cultural practice. While the analysis centers on librarians and archivists, adjacent knowledge-keeping roles, including conservators and booksellers, appear when narratives foreground preservation labor, material stewardship, custody, and circulation as forces that shape access to memory.

This essay argues that fictional portrayals of librarians, archivists, and other knowledge-keepers function as cultural metaphors for society's evolving relationship with knowledge, memory, and power. Across genre fiction these figures are repeatedly positioned at moments of narrative crisis, serving as guardians, gatekeepers, heroes, or antagonists whose actions reflect broader anxieties about access to information, censorship, preservation, and authority. By examining these portrayals from early twentieth-century modernism and pulp genre formation through contemporary genre experimentation, the essay demonstrates how genre fiction has increasingly shifted the librarian archetype from marginal caretaker to central moral agent, revealing changing attitudes toward who controls knowledge and how it should be used.

A brief conceptual note is useful here. The term "knowledge-keeper" is used as an umbrella for librarians and archivists as the primary focus, with conservators, scholars, and booksellers treated as secondary variants when their labor stabilizes, restricts, or circulates texts as cultural memory. In professional discourse, knowledge-keeping is often framed as stewardship, access, and trust. In genre narratives, those same commitments are intensified into crisis: access becomes a choice with immediate consequences; custody becomes a site of power; and preservation becomes a wager against erasure. These narrative intensifications make ethical tensions visible, especially

the recurring dilemma of when restriction protects communities and when it becomes coercion.

The essay advances four controlling claims. First, knowledge-keepers appear at points of narrative crisis where decisions about access determine whether truth is revealed, suppressed, or weaponized. Next, contemporary genre fiction increasingly recasts librarians and archivists as heroes of access, framing research and preservation as decisive forms of action. Third, villainous librarians and oppressive archives critique gatekeeping and the concentration of informational power rather than condemning knowledge itself. Finally, libraries operate as liminal and psychological threshold spaces where transformation occurs, and where boundary-making helps explain the recurring casting of librarians as moral guides, guardians, or antagonists.

Literature Context and Method

Representations of librarians in popular culture have long been a topic of library and information science (LIS) interest, in part because such depictions shape public expectations of the profession and, by extension, public trust in information institutions. Early LIS scholarship on librarians in speculative fiction, such as Marcia J. Myers's *Images of Librarians in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, emphasized prevalence and character coding, classifying portrayals as positive, negative, or neutral while also attending to prominence, gender, and author characteristics (Myers, 1998, pp. i, 6-8). This work is foundational for demonstrating that librarians appear with notable frequency in science fiction and fantasy and that portrayals vary with narrative centrality, yet its analytic orientation is largely classificatory, oriented toward representational accuracy and stereotype persistence rather than toward the symbolic and ethical functions these figures perform within narrative structures (Myers, 1998, pp. 6-8, 13-14).

This essay also engages broader LIS scholarship on stereotype formation and professional image, including work that links gendered perceptions of librarianship to cultural anxieties about authority, service labor, and expertise (Carmichael, 1992, pp. 411-414). Carmichael's study, "The Male Librarian and the Feminine Image," and Baxter's master's paper, *Stereotype, or Archetype? The Librarian in Popular Culture*,

are useful for establishing precedent and vocabulary for thinking about how librarian figures circulate in cultural imagination (Baxter, 2014; Carmichael, 1992). The interpretive project pursued here, however, diverges in emphasis. Rather than proposing typologies of representation, this essay treats recurring narrative patterns as evidence for a broader cultural argument: knowledge-keepers in genre fiction operate as metaphors for information ethics, institutional authority, and the stakes of controlling access to memory.

Additional LIS scholarship on popular representation can sharpen this essay's dialogue with questions of stereotype and professional image. Peresie and Alexander's study of librarian stereotypes in young adult literature is especially useful for this essay because several works in the corpus are young adult or crossover genre texts, where librarians and library-like institutions often appear as authority figures, guides, disciplinarians, or mediators of access (Peresie & Alexander, 2005, pp. 24-25). Pagowsky and Rigby's chapter "Contextualizing Ourselves: The Identity Politics of the Librarian Stereotype," in *The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions and Presentations of Information Work*, broadens this context by treating stereotype not simply as public caricature, but as a pressure on professional identity, credibility, labor, and the cultural recognition of information work (Pagowsky & Rigby, 2014, pp. 1-3). Bringing this scholarship into contact with genre fiction clarifies the intervention of this essay. The question here is not simply whether fictional librarians are flattering or unflattering, but what kinds of ethical and institutional work knowledge-keepers are made to perform inside narrative worlds, and what those recurring functions suggest about cultural understandings of librarianship itself.

This interpretive orientation draws theoretical grounding from Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford's account of a "discourse of fear." Radford and Radford argue that popular representations of libraries and librarians become intelligible within a discursive vocabulary that frames the library as a site of awe, danger, and control, and that repeatedly casts the librarian as a threshold figure positioned between order and chaos (Radford & Radford, 2001, pp. 299-300). Adapting that framework to a book-only

“*[The] guiding question is: how does book-form genre fiction use librarians, archivists, and adjacent knowledge-keepers to dramatize ethical conflicts over access, restriction, preservation, authority, and collective memory?*”

corpus, the analysis uses “discourse of fear” as a light interpretive scaffold rather than a comprehensive theory of representation. Specifically, it provides a shared vocabulary for tracing three recurring motifs across the texts examined here: gatekeeping as dramatized informational power, authoritarian librarians and oppressive archives as figures of ethical failure or institutional coercion, and libraries as liminal threshold spaces where narrative and psychological transitions unfold. Used in this way, the framework helps clarify why the library so often appears in genre fiction as both sanctuary and threat, and why access is repeatedly staged as a consequential crossing rather than a neutral transaction.

Corpus Construction and Scope

This essay is a thematic critical review rather than an empirical content analysis or a systematic review. Its guiding question is: how does book-form genre fiction use librarians, archivists, and adjacent knowledge-keepers to dramatize ethical conflicts over access, restriction, preservation, authority, and collective memory? To answer that question, I assembled a purposive, illustrative corpus of novels, novellas, and short stories in fantasy, science fiction, horror, dystopian, historical, and adjacent speculative traditions. Texts were included when they met four conditions: they appeared in book form; they featured an explicit library, archive, catalog, or knowledge-keeping role; that institution or figure functioned as a meaningful plot engine rather than incidental scenery; and the narrative foregrounded at least one core LIS tension, especially access versus restriction, preservation versus use, stewardship versus control, or institutional authority versus intellectual freedom. Works were excluded when library or archive motifs were only incidental, or when the primary medium was film, television, comics, manga, graphic narrative, or another non-book form. The resulting corpus is there-

fore curated rather than exhaustive and is intended to illuminate recurring narrative functions, not to establish statistical prevalence.

A book-only corpus also clarifies what is distinctive about print literature’s treatment of libraries. Unlike screen media, novels and stories can simulate the archive through form, footnotes, marginalia, embedded documents, invented catalogs, and recursive structures that make reading itself a mode of entering a textual institution. This formal capacity is particularly important for interpreting libraries as liminal spaces and for understanding why the profession’s ethical tensions are so easily translated into narrative stakes. The approach taken here therefore treats genre texts as both stories about libraries and as library-like artifacts that perform archival accumulation on the page.

Because this essay uses close reading rather than content analysis, claims about individual literary works are grounded in the primary texts themselves. Secondary LIS scholarship is used as an interpretive framework for identifying the professional and cultural stakes of those readings, especially around stereotype, authority, access, restriction, preservation, and public trust. In other words, the article does not claim that prior scholarship has already interpreted each novel in the same way. Rather, it places original readings of selected genre texts in dialogue with LIS scholarship on representation, professional image, and the discourse of fear.

Table 1. Corpus at a glance, mapping texts to claims

Table 1 summarizes the corpus at a glance; works are listed in the order they are first discussed in the essay, moving from the primary examples in Claim 1 through Claim 4.

Note. Table 1 is illustrative rather than exhaustive. It is intended as a navigation aid, not as a systematic coding scheme.

Table 1

Work	Form/Genre	Knowledge-keeper / institutional focus	Claim(s)	Primary ethical tension
Eco (1980) - <i>The Name of the Rose</i>	Historical mystery (monastic)	Monastic library; librarian-gatekeeper	1, 3	Restriction as protection vs coercion; secrecy; authority
Lovecraft (1929) - <i>The Dunwich Horror</i>	Horror	University library; special collections	1	Dangerous knowledge; access under threat; expert mediation
Rothfuss (2007) - <i>The Name of the Wind</i>	Fantasy (academic)	University archives; restricted access	1	Permission, hierarchy, and research under constraint
Bradbury (1953) - <i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	Dystopian SF	Censorship regime; memory as counter-archive	1, 3	Erasure; intellectual freedom; preservation as resistance
Asimov (1953) - <i>Second Foundation</i>	Science fiction	Hidden institutional knowledge; secrecy	1	Concealment vs disclosure; manipulation vs stewardship
Wolfe (1980-1983) - <i>The Book of the New Sun</i>	Science fantasy	Unreliable record; mediated testimony	1	Archival authority; evidentiary uncertainty; narrative control
Rogerson (2019) - <i>Sorcery of Thorns</i>	Fantasy (YA)	Libraries of dangerous grimoires	1	Risk management; containment; protective restriction
Rowling (1997-2007) - Harry Potter series	Fantasy (YA)	School library; restricted section	1	Permission-based access; rules; youthful transgression
Sanderson (2006-2008) - Mistborn trilogy	Fantasy	Suppressed histories; unstable records	1, 2	Provenance; authenticity; record manipulation
Kristoff (2016) - <i>Nevernight</i>	Fantasy (dark)	Internal archive; controlled institutional memory	1	Curated history; legitimizing violence; secrecy
Miller (1959) - <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i>	Post-apocalyptic SF	Custodial communities preserving fragments	1	Preservation as burden; knowledge reuse for repair vs violence
Hines (2012) - <i>Libriomancer</i>	Fantasy (urban)	Librarian as protagonist; access as action	2	Mediated access; selection; misuse risk
Cogman (2016) - <i>The Invisible Library</i>	Fantasy (multiverse)	Librarians as retrieval agents	2	Acquisitions ethics; ownership; harm and access
Lynch (2010) - "In the Stacks"	Sword & sorcery short story	Procedural boundary work in the stacks	2, 4	Rules as safety; permission; embodied access
Vinge (1992) - <i>A Fire Upon the Deep</i>	Science fiction	Information infrastructure; galactic librarian	2	Retrieval at scale; information as civic infrastructure
Brooks (2008) - <i>People of the Book</i>	Historical fiction	Conservator; material evidence as memory	2	Preservation enabling access; stewardship across time
Hellenga (1994) - <i>The Sixteen Pleasures</i>	Historical fiction	Conservation and repair after catastrophe	2	Restoration as ethical care; custody and heritage
Odom (2001) - <i>The Rover</i>	Fantasy	Archivist at center of quest	2	Lore interpretation; research under pressure
Bierce (2018) - <i>Into the Labyrinth</i> (Mage Errant 1)	Fantasy	Research literacy as survival competence	2	Evaluation and synthesis; institutional authority
Hawk (2013) - <i>Widdershins</i>	Occult historical fantasy	Archival inquiry; reference as bravery	2	Disclosure timing; reliability; access under threat
Pratchett (1986) - <i>The Light Fantastic</i> (Discworld)	Comic fantasy	Librarian as custodian of dangerous books	2	Stewardship; boundary-setting; preventing misuse

Table 1

Work	Form/Genre	Knowledge-keeper / institutional focus	Claim(s)	Primary ethical tension
Ende (1979) - <i>The Neverending Story</i>	Fantasy (YA)	Book as threshold; reading as obligation	2, 4	Imagination with consequence; responsibility of access
Funke (2003) - <i>Inkheart</i>	Fantasy (YA)	Texts crossing into life; custody as risk	2, 4	Containment vs release; mediation; care of stories
Nix (1995) - <i>Sabriel</i>	Fantasy	Specialized knowledge and artifacts	2	Stewardship; competence; responsible use
Nix (2001) - <i>Lirael</i>	Fantasy	Library apprenticeship; ethics of access	2	Training; restriction; responsibility
Nix (2020) - <i>The Left-Handed Booksellers of London</i>	Fantasy	Booksellers as guardians of circulation	2	Circulation control; protective restriction vs coercion
King (1986) - <i>It</i>	Horror	Librarian as local historian of trauma	2	Documentation as resistance; civic memory
Kostova (2005) - <i>The Historian</i>	Historical thriller	Archival research across libraries	2	Provenance; research under risk; access to violent history
Orwell (1949) - <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>	Dystopian	Record manipulation as state power	3	Trust in evidence; accountability; erasure
Caine (2015) - <i>Ink and Bone</i>	Dystopian fantasy	Library monopoly; regulated literacy	3	Coercive access regimes; inequality; surveillance
King (1990) - "The Library Policeman"	Horror short story	Punitive authority; fear and control	3	Coercion; intimidation; surveillance
Sanderson (2007) - <i>Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians</i>	Satirical fantasy (YA)	Librarian tyranny as satire	3 (briefly 2)	Monopoly on truth; manipulation; unaccountable gatekeeping
Borges (1941) - "The Library of Babel"	Philosophical short story	Library as universe; epistemic threshold	4	Overload; meaning; authority; orientation
Danielewski (2000) - <i>House of Leaves</i>	Postmodern horror	Archive-like form; evidence work as dread	4	Verification; uncertainty; procedural trust
Peck (2012) - <i>A Short Stay in Hell</i>	Novella (speculative)	Library-as-afterlife; access as ordeal	4	Access vs impossibility; endurance; consequence
Morgenstern (2019) - <i>The Starless Sea</i>	Fantasy	Subterranean archive; initiation	4	Custody; obligation; care for stories
Hackwith (2019) - <i>The Library of the Unwritten</i>	Fantasy	Custody of unfinished narratives	4	Responsibility for neglected stories; stewardship
Moers (2004) - <i>The City of Dreaming Books</i>	Fantasy	Book-city; custody as power	4	Scarcity; exploitation; access as leverage
Zafón (2001) - <i>The Shadow of the Wind</i>	Historical mystery	Secret library; ritualized access	4	Custody; secrecy; care as obligation
Murakami (2002) - <i>Kafka on the Shore</i>	Magical realism	Library as refuge; identity	4	Guided access; reflection; relational stewardship
Calvino (1979) - "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler"	Postmodern fiction	Reading as threshold; narrative instability	4	Authority; coherence; desire for completion
Fforde (2001) - <i>The Eyre Affair</i>	Meta-fantasy	Governance of story; travel into books	4	Regulation vs freedom; intelligibility; stewardship
Hawkins (2015) - <i>The Library at Mount Char</i>	Horror-fantasy	Coercive library system; sacred fear	4	Knowledge as domination; punishment; transgression

Knowledge-Keepers Appear at Points of Narrative Crisis

Across genres, knowledge-keepers are often introduced at moments when information becomes destabilizing, positioning librarians and archivists as narrative gatekeepers whose decisions shape whether truth is revealed, suppressed, or weaponized. This claim extends LIS scholarship that treats popular representations of librarians as culturally meaningful rather than merely decorative, while shifting attention from whether an image is positive or negative to what narrative work the knowledge-keeper performs (Myers, 1998; Peresie & Alexander, 2005). It also builds on Radford and Radford's account of the library as a space of awe, danger, control, and threshold crossing, where access is rarely neutral and where the librarian often becomes a figure through whom order and disorder are negotiated (Radford & Radford, 2001). In the texts examined here, the knowledge-keeper rarely functions as a convenient source of exposition. Instead, the plot turns on conditions of access, whether a text can be consulted, an archive entered, a catalog navigated, or a record preserved long enough to influence events. Libraries and archives become engines of narrative triage, sorting what may be known, by whom, under what permissions, and at what cost. The resulting tension is not simply epistemic but ethical: the story treats access as a consequential choice, and it makes the institutional management of knowledge inseparable from questions of authority, responsibility, and harm.

A canonical illustration appears in *The Name of the Rose*, where Umberto Eco (1980) makes a monastic library the structural center of a murder mystery. The labyrinthine collection is not merely a setting. It materializes the politics of knowledge: rooms become barriers; classification becomes concealment; and the archive becomes lethal when particular texts are treated as existential threats. Eco also narratively renders the library's architecture as a technology of restriction; its spatial complexity and controlled pathways embody concealment in physical form, so that access is experienced as navigation through designed obstruction rather than as simple permission. The resulting crisis is narrative and epistemic at once. Violence escalates because the institution's access regime is enforced through secrecy and punish-

ment, and because control over reading is framed as a defense of order. In Radford and Radford's terms, the library operates as a threshold between order and chaos, and the gatekeeper becomes an agent whose authority over access translates fear into institutional policy (Radford & Radford, 2001, p. 300). Eco thus underscores that restriction is never neutral—it produces consequences that test the ethical limits of stewardship.

Horror frequently stages a similar crisis structure through forbidden texts and transgressive reading, a pattern that aligns closely with Radford and Radford's account of the library as a space where fear, control, and restricted access shape the user's encounter with knowledge (Radford & Radford, 2001). In "The Dunwich Horror," H. P. Lovecraft (1929) centers the Miskatonic University library as the site where knowledge becomes dangerous, not because books are inherently corrupting, but because access to specialized records enables action against an emergent threat. The narrative's urgency is inseparable from bibliographic pursuit; protagonists must locate, compare, and interpret rare volumes in order to name what is happening and to intervene effectively. The library's special collections become both resource and risk, a place where the costs of knowing are acknowledged even as the necessity of knowing is affirmed. The story thereby dramatizes a familiar professional tension: restriction may protect users, yet delaying access in a crisis can also become a form of harm.

Fantasy often externalizes crisis through restricted stacks and institutional barriers to research. Read through the threshold framework established by Radford and Radford (2001), the University Archives in *The Name of the Wind* function less as academic backdrop than as a regulated passage into authorized memory, where permission structures determine what can be known and by whom. Patrick Rothfuss (2007) frames the Archives as a site of both possibility and constraint, a place where access is actively managed and where the protagonist's search depends on reading literacy, catalog navigation, and the ability to work within, and around, institutional permission structures. The plot's stakes rise when the archive is treated as the only location where a volatile past can be reconstructed. What matters is not only

that knowledge exists, but that it is unevenly accessible, conditioned by status, authorization, and risk. Genre fiction thus converts the politics of special collections and restricted materials into crisis logic.

Other works intensify crisis by making the library itself a contested instrument of governance. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is often read within the history of censorship, book burning, and midcentury anxieties about ideological control, concerns that Fishburn situates within the modern symbolic history of book burning between the Nazi book fires of 1933 and Bradbury's novel in 1953 (Fishburn, 2008, pp. xiv–xv). Yet the novel also moves beyond censorship alone by showing what happens when a society's informational infrastructure collapses and memory must be preserved through precarious, embodied forms of custody (Bradbury, 1953). This reading connects directly to LIS concerns about public trust, professional legitimacy, and the cultural consequences of information control, especially when access is curtailed in the name of stability or social order (Pagowsky & Rigby, 2014; Radford & Radford, 2001). The narrative's counter-move, memorization, reframes knowledge-keeping as a human archive, a survival strategy when institutions are destroyed or rendered unusable. The story does not celebrate the loss of libraries. Instead, it warns that when institutions fail, the burden of memory becomes both fragile and perilous, underscoring why knowledge-keeping is so often narratively summoned at the moment of crisis.

Science fiction frequently maps crisis onto information asymmetry and the politics of hidden archives. Isaac Asimov's *Second Foundation* (1953) hinges on the consequences of concealed knowledge, where control over predictive models and secret records becomes a primary form of power. Although the text does not always foreground librarians as occupational figures, its narrative logic is recognizably archival: knowledge is stored, restricted, and strategically released to shape civilizational outcomes. Within this framework, access decisions become structurally consequential; concealment becomes strategy; disclosure becomes destabilization; and the boundary between stewardship and manipulation grows thin.

Archival theory sharpens this point because records do not merely preserve memory after the fact. They help produce, authorize, and contest it. Schwartz and Cook argue that archives are socially constructed through appraisal, preservation, description, mediation, and use, which means archival meaning is shaped by institutional intervention rather than passively inherited as neutral evidence (Schwartz & Cook, 2002, pp. 3–4). Read through this lens, genre fiction's unstable records and contested archives become more than plot devices. They dramatize the power of recordkeeping itself, especially when evidence is partial, mediated, or strategically controlled.

A related crisis structure appears in works that treat texts as unstable evidence and reading as epistemic risk. Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* repeatedly foregrounds unreliable records, fragmented testimony, and the ethical consequences of narrative control, making the archive itself a problem rather than a solution (Wolfe, 1980–1983). The central questions become not only what happened, but what can be believed, what can be preserved, and who has the authority to define the record in the first place. Under these conditions, the knowledge-keeper functions less as a custodian of settled truth than as a mediator of contested evidence, navigating gaps, distortions, and competing claims to legitimacy. This is an explicitly LIS-relevant configuration of archival authority, one that frames recordkeeping as interpretive labor, and positions access, description, and preservation as ethical acts with consequences for collective memory.

Recent fantasy literalizes the crisis function by making collections dangerous in themselves. In *Sorcery of Thorns*, Margaret Rogerson (2019) imagines libraries that house grimoires as volatile objects requiring constant supervision, with access regimes structured around risk, competence, and responsibility. When the plot accelerates, it does so through the instability of custody. A breach in collection control becomes a breach in public safety, and containment failures transform routine stewardship into urgent crisis response. The narrative tests whether restriction functions as protection or slides into coercion, dramatizing how ethically saturated access decisions become when information can harm as well as help.

A comparable, though less overtly lethal, institutional logic appears in the Hogwarts library of the Harry Potter series, where restricted collections and permission-based access frame certain knowledge as dangerous, regulated, and consequential, and where the library's rules make the politics of access legible even within a school setting (Rowling, 1997-2007).

Across many genres, moments of crisis are mediated through documentary fragments, marginalia, and the interpretive labor of reconstructing a record. This is one reason the librarian or archivist figure persists even in narratives not primarily set in libraries. The plot often requires someone who can read institutions as well as texts, someone who understands how records are produced, stored, described, restricted, and selectively revealed. Genre fiction transforms that institutional literacy into narrative power, framing the central ethical question as whether such power will be used to enable understanding or to secure control.

One way genre fiction sharpens this institutional dimension is by treating the historical record itself as contested terrain rather than stable evidence. Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy offers a crisis logic built around suppressed histories and unstable records, as characters must reconstruct truth from fragmentary texts and institutional narratives designed to conceal the past (Sanderson, 2006-2008). The struggle becomes archival even when "the archive" is dispersed across objects, memories, and partial documents. What matters is who controls the story of the past and which records survive to authorize legitimacy in the present. This concern aligns with Schwartz and Cook's account of archival power as power over what is preserved, named, ordered, mediated, and made accessible (Schwartz & Cook, 2002, p. 5). The crisis intensifies precisely because the record is engineered to mislead, aligning the narrative with professional concerns about provenance, authenticity, and the ethical power of institutional authority.

Some contemporary fantasy stages crisis through institutional memory and curated record-making. Jay Kristoff's *Nevernight* situates its assassin education within a culture of controlled history, where an internal archive and a chronicler-librarian figure render institutional memory a mechanism for legitimizing violence (Kristoff, 2016). The plot's tensions

hinge on what initiates are permitted to know, what histories are withheld, and how access is managed to produce loyalty and continuity. This is crisis librarianship inverted: records are not missing or destroyed. Instead, they are carefully curated to serve power, illustrating how archives can authorize harm while still presenting themselves as neutral instruments of preservation.

Post-apocalyptic science fiction offers another crisis variant by framing preservation as a response to civilizational collapse and as a contested inheritance. Walter M. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) centers custodial communities that salvage and protect fragments of scientific and textual memory after catastrophe, treating preservation as both moral duty and ethical burden. The novel insists that stewardship is never only technical. It is interpretive, political, and future-facing, shaped by what can be kept, what can be understood, and who is authorized to use it. The crisis, then, is not merely whether texts survive, but what preserved knowledge will enable, whether it will support repair, education, and restraint, or whether it will be mobilized for renewed domination and violence. Preservation is thus positioned as consequential choice rather than neutral caretaking, and the custodians' work becomes a form of ethical boundary setting over the conditions under which memory reenters public life.

Taken together, these examples suggest that genre fiction often treats knowledge as a destabilizing force that must be mediated through institutions and professionals. Crisis rarely emerges from information alone. It emerges from contested access, from institutional decisions that distribute knowledge unevenly, and from uncertainty about whether preservation and restriction serve protection or power. In LIS terms, these narratives dramatize core professional tensions: intellectual freedom versus safety, transparency versus stewardship, and open access versus the obligation to minimize harm.

This claim also clarifies why Radford & Radford's (2001) discourse of fear framework is useful without becoming determinative. Fear in these texts is not only fear of monsters or catastrophe; it is fear of destabilized order, fear of what reading might disclose, and fear of what institutions might do with the power to regulate knowledge (Radford & Radford, 2001).

In narrative terms, crisis is the condition under which knowledge-keeping becomes visible and consequential. In professional terms, crisis is when librarianship's commitments are tested most sharply, which helps explain why knowledge-keepers so often appear at the moment a story's world becomes unstable.

Modern Genre Fiction Recasts Librarians as Heroes of Access

Contemporary genre fiction increasingly reimagines librarians and archivists as active protagonists rather than passive custodians, elevating research and preservation into heroic work capable of saving worlds. This claim builds on stereotype and professional-image scholarship by shifting attention from how librarians are socially coded to how information work gets coded in the narratives as expertise, judgment, and agency (Myers, 1998; Pagowsky & Rigby, 2014; Peresie & Alexander, 2005). This shift recasts knowledge work as action, treating librarianship-adjacent practices, including reference and archival interpretation, as competencies that can rival swords, spells, and starships. In these narratives, the decisive intervention is often not force but access: securing the right text or record, and keeping it available long enough to change what becomes possible. The section that follows centers on a small set of anchor texts that demonstrate this "heroism of access," then briefly clusters additional examples that extend the pattern across sub-genres.

A vivid example appears in Jim C. Hines's *Libriomancer*, which imagines a librarian whose magic consists of extracting objects from books (Hines, 2012). The premise literalizes reading as agency, turning textual knowledge into a material resource that can be deployed under pressure. What makes the protagonist effective, however, is not spectacle but competence shaped by librarianship: familiarity with texts, the ability to navigate collections, and the judgment to decide when access should be granted, limited, or refused. Power in this narrative is inseparable from selection and mediation, and the risks of misuse are built into the mechanics of the plot. The protagonist is heroic because knowledge work functions as operational capacity, a form of skilled, ethically charged action rather than a decorative personality trait.

A parallel heroic reframing appears in Genevieve Cogman's *The Invisible Library* (2016), where librarians operate as agents retrieving dangerous books from alternate realities. The mission structure resembles acquisitions and special collections work translated into adventure form: identifying rare texts, assessing risk, securing materials, and determining who may consult them. Heroism resides in managing competing claims about ownership and harm, casting librarianship as ethical logistics. That same logic becomes more visibly procedural when the drama of access unfolds inside the stacks themselves.

Scott Lynch's short story "In the Stacks" (2016) condenses the heroic-access model by turning routine custodial labor into perilous, time-sensitive action. Set within a magical academy library, the narrative follows students assigned a rule-bound task of returning books to their proper places under the supervision of armored library staff, a framing that makes governance, procedure, and restricted space central to the story's tension. The stacks are not passive background but an active, hazardous environment where navigation, compliance, and knowledge of boundaries become survival competencies. Heroism, in this configuration, is defined less by brute force than by the capacity to move responsibly through a system of access and custody, enscribing librarianship as operational, protective work rather than incidental caretaking.

Science fiction extends the heroism of access into the realm of information infrastructure. In *A Fire Upon the Deep*, Vernor Vinge (1992) presents a galactic librarian as a key agent in confronting catastrophic threat, underscoring that information management is civilizational central rather than ancillary. Competence is not a character quirk; it is the plot's condition of possibility. Survival depends on the ability to locate, evaluate, and mobilize records across distance and complexity, and the narrative frames that capacity as a form of power capable of counteracting destruction. Read through an LIS lens, the novel elevates information organization to the level of social infrastructure, suggesting that access and retrieval become decisive when systems are under existential strain.

As a secondary, tightly bounded thread, preservation-focused fiction extends the heroic-access

model by foregrounding material stewardship as the condition for future knowledge. Geraldine Brooks's *People of the Book* (2008) centers the material life of a rare text and portrays scholarly and conservation work as the means through which layered histories of violence and survival can be recovered. Robert Hellenga's *The Sixteen Pleasures* (1994) similarly frames book repair as an ethically-charged intimacy with damaged heritage, treating restoration as both care for objects and care for what those objects carry forward. In both novels, preservation enables future access, showing how often-invisible labor can be narratively recoded as decisive action and reinforcing the essay's broader argument that stewardship is a form of access-making.

A wider cluster of texts reinforces the same pattern across sub-genres. Fantasy quest narratives revalue scholarly labor by treating archives and research literacy as survival skills, as in Odom's *The Rover* (2001) and Bierce's *Mage Errant* (2018) series. Occult historical fantasy and mystery similarly frame reference work and document interpretation as bravery under threat, as in Hawk's *Widdershins* (2013). Pratchett's *Discworld* (1986) offers a comic variant in which custodial boundary-setting is portrayed as courage, and the library's order must be defended in a world where information can be materially hazardous. Young adult portal narratives such as *Inkheart* (2003) and *The Neverending Story* (1979) align heroism with mediation rather than conquest by making access to story ethically binding and consequential. Nix's Old Kingdom novels and *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London* extend the knowledge-keeper frame to guardianship of dangerous circulation and to the difficulty of distinguishing protective restriction from coercive control (Nix, 1995; Nix, 2001; Nix, 2020). Other works treat preservation of memory as civic duty, as in King's *It* (1986), or frame archival research as courage under risk, as in Kostova's *The Historian* (2005). Even in satirical inversion, *Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians* (2007) underscores the same premise, that control over information is consequential power, even when that power is placed in the hands of antagonists.

A synthesis clarifies why this heroic turn matters for librarianship: contemporary genre narratives do not treat access as a simple ideal or an uncompli-

cated good. Instead, they present mediated access as the ethical core of heroism, where decisions about custody, disclosure, and circulation become burdens that demand judgment under uncertainty. The story-world intensifies risk, but the underlying questions mirror professional reality, including equitable access, harm reduction, preservation without hoarding, and authority exercised without coercion.

Taken together, these texts demonstrate a clear interpretive shift. Earlier representational scholarship often classified librarian images and their positivity or negativity (Myers, 1998), while LIS scholarship on stereotype and professional image has emphasized how cultural perception intertwines with authority and identity (Carmichael, 1992). Contemporary genre fiction increasingly treats librarianship as morally consequential work and casts the librarian as a central agent whose choices shape how knowledge moves through a world under stress. The heroism of access is, in this sense, mediated openness: inquiry and preservation framed as courage, and circulation framed as responsibility. That ethical complexity is precisely what makes librarians and archivists viable protagonists in modern genre fiction.

Villainous Librarians Represent Anxieties About Gatekeeping

Negative portrayals of librarians and archives in genre fiction rarely condemn knowledge itself. Instead, they dramatize anxieties about gatekeeping, censorship, secrecy, surveillance, and historical erasure by concentrating informational power in punitive institutions or authoritarian knowledge-keepers. These depictions also draw on longstanding LIS concerns about professional image and stereotype formation, where anxieties about librarianship's authority and expertise are often filtered through gendered assumptions about service, control, legitimacy, and the social visibility of information work (Carmichael, 1992, pp. 414-416). Villainy arises not from books as such, but from monopolized control over access, especially when restriction is framed as protection, order, or moral necessity. In these narratives, the library becomes dangerous when its authority is unaccountable, when custody hardens into coercion, and when the management of records is used to govern communities rather than to serve them.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) offers an influential model of archival villainy by depicting recordkeeping as state power, where the past is continually rewritten to secure present authority. The ethical failure is not preservation but manipulation, and the horror stems from the collapse of trust in evidence itself. Records no longer anchor shared reality; they become instruments of domination. Orwell's warning is sharply legible through an LIS lens: stewardship becomes authoritarian when it abandons accountability, treats documentation as disposable, and replaces the obligation to preserve the record with the convenience of ideological control.

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* complements Orwell by staging censorship as both policy and habituated social practice, extending the book-burning anxieties that Fishburn identifies as central to the cultural and historical period culminating in Bradbury's novel (Bradbury, 1953; Fishburn, 2008, pp. xiv–xv). The fear is not that knowledge exists, but that access is forcibly eliminated and the public is trained to accept disappearance as normal, even desirable. In this world, reading becomes deviance, and the erasure of books is justified as comfort and stability. Radford and Radford's "discourse of fear" helps name the affective mechanism at work: fear is mobilized to police reading, stigmatize curiosity, and legitimate coercive access control (Radford & Radford, 2001). Bradbury thus frames censorship not only as prohibition, but as the reengineering of desire, a cultural shift in which the absence of records becomes a condition of social peace.

Rachel Caine's *Ink and Bone* (2015) makes gatekeeping explicit by imagining a society where a library system controls access to books, regulates literacy, and violently enforces hierarchy. The antagonism targets concentration of power rather than learning itself. Preservation becomes monopoly; classification becomes coercion; and users become subjects whose intellectual lives are governed through scarcity and permission. The narrative critiques an access regime that has lost ethical rationale and become an engine of inequality, illustrating how the language of stewardship can be weaponized when an institution claims custody over knowledge but withholds the conditions for equitable use.

Stephen King's "The Library Policeman" (1990)

provides a more intimate and psychologically charged version of the same anxiety by rendering the library as a site of punishment and fear. The punitive librarian trope condenses coercion and abuse into a concentrated symbol, aligning closely with Radford and Radford's account of the library as a space where surveillance, humiliation, and dread can structure the user's experience (Radford & Radford, 2001, pp. 312–316). King's story is not a critique of reading or learning. Rather, it stages the emotional consequences of coercive authority, suggesting that institutional power becomes monstrous when it is exercised through intimidation, secrecy, and control over who is allowed to enter, to speak, or to ask.

Villainy can also be stylized through satire. Brandon Sanderson's *Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians* (2007), the satirical counterpoint flagged earlier, exaggerates librarian tyranny to highlight unease about institutions that determine what counts as truth and who is permitted to see it. The comedic framing does not soften the critique. Rather, it sharpens Sanderson's critique by making informational authority overt, absurdly centralized, and therefore easier to recognize as power. Even in playful form, the core anxiety remains: unaccountable gatekeeping can shape public reality, narrow dissent, and convert information control into a mode of governance.

Some narratives complicate the critique by showing how fear and control can emerge even when institutions begin with protective intentions. Eco's monastic library, while central to Claim 1, also illustrates how preservation can become punitive when protection is pursued without transparency or accountability (Eco, 1980). The boundary between stewardship and coercion becomes a moral fault line: rules meant to safeguard knowledge can harden into secrecy that endangers communities, and the institution's claim to protect truth becomes indistinguishable from a claim to monopolize it.

Taken together, these examples help explain why the villainous librarian trope persists even when contemporary librarianship foregrounds service, inclusion, and access. The trope condenses institutional fears into a single figure or system—fear that access decisions are arbitrary, fear that records can be altered or destroyed, fear that surveillance will replace privacy, and fear that expertise will become

unchallengeable authority. By converting these fears into plot, genre fiction makes the ethical stakes of professional principles visible. The point is not that librarians are predators or censors. The point is that institutions entrusted with custodial power must be accountable, or they risk being imagined as coercive. Read this way, the trope becomes less an insult than a cultural demand for transparent, rights-respecting information governance, especially when knowledge is contested and the record is politically consequential.

Taken together, villainous portrayals function as cautionary figures. They suggest that anxieties about libraries are often anxieties about power: who decides what may be known, how decisions are enforced, and whether records can be trusted. Genre fiction rarely imagines libraries as evil because they preserve books. It imagines them as dangerous when they become engines of monopoly and surveillance, when gate-keeping becomes weaponized, and when restriction is presented as moral necessity rather than ethical choice. The controlling claim therefore holds: these portrayals critique concentrated informational power, and they warn that the line between stewardship and domination is drawn, and redrawn, through the everyday politics of access.

Libraries Function as Liminal and Psychological Spaces

Beyond individual character archetypes, libraries in genre fiction frequently function as liminal and psychological spaces, symbolic thresholds between reality and imagination, memory and forgetting, and the self and its transformation. This claim develops Radford and Radford's account of the library as a site of awe, danger, control, and threshold crossing by emphasizing how genre fiction turns that threshold into a space of narrative and psychological change (Radford & Radford, 2001, pp. 299-300). In liminal terms, the library marks a boundary crossing, a passage into restricted knowledge, alternate worlds, or destabilized histories. In psychological terms, the library reorganizes interior life, intensifying fear, desire, obsession, grief, or responsibility. Entry into a library often initiates this shift, positioning librarians and archivists as guides who mediate passage through texts, institutions, and the consequences of knowing. Genre fiction thus treats libraries not merely as set-

tings but as charged environments where transitions occur and identities are reshaped.

Jorge Luis Borges's "The Library of Babel" (1941/2000) remains foundational for the library-as-universe motif, presenting an effectively infinite archive that collapses total knowledge and total incoherence into the same structure. The library destabilizes epistemic confidence: access exists in principle, yet meaning becomes practically unattainable. The resulting pressures are existential and social. Readers respond through hope and despair, but also through violence, sectarianism, and the desperate search for interpretive authority. Borges's compressed, recursive description effectively simulates archival encounter at scale, a world in which retrieval is theoretically possible but functionally defeated by overload, noise, and the absence of reliable orientation. The text intersects with Radford and Radford's (2001) threshold logic in a particularly stark form. The library becomes uncanny, intimidating, and morally charged because it both promises order and produces terror through its refusal to yield stable meaning.

Scott Lynch's short story "In the Stacks" (2010) offers a more localized and embodied version of this threshold logic by turning access to the stacks into a literal crossing into danger. Gates, rules, and armed supervision make the library's boundary work visible, and the stacks function as an active environment that can punish error, misreading, or disobedience. In this configuration, the threshold is not only symbolic; it is procedural and spatial, translating institutional order into immediate consequence. Read alongside Radford and Radford's account of the library as a site where fear and control can structure the user's experience of access, Lynch clarifies why libraries in genre fiction so often carry an affective charge—entry becomes a test of permission, competence, and constraint rather than a neutral encounter with texts (Radford & Radford, 2001).

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) modernizes spatial anxiety by framing textuality as architecture and reading as disorientation. Layered documents, competing narrators, and typographically unstable pages turn navigation of a text into a psychological passage, and the effort to make the record cohere becomes a source of dread rather than clarity. What emerges is less a stable archive than an

accretion of fragments that resists description, arrangement, and verification. Danielewski's formal design, including footnotes, embedded documents, and typographic disruptions, does not merely represent an archive; it reproduces its procedural feel by forcing the reader to sift, cross-reference, and evaluate competing traces as though doing evidence work in real time. The "archive" is not a neutral repository. It is a structure that rearranges perception, produces obsession, and destabilizes the reader's confidence in what can be known, what can be verified, and what can be trusted. In that sense, the novel makes the reader experience uncertainty rather than just understand it, as though the very methods we rely on to establish evidence are being withdrawn from under the reader.

This liminal force is not conveyed only through what these libraries contain; it is also produced

“Genre fiction can make the practice of navigation, evaluation, and inference feel consequential, which helps explain why the library so often functions as both sanctuary and threat.”

through how the texts are built. Borges achieves infinity through compressed description, while Danielewski builds a tactile experience of documentation through typographic disruption and layered citation. Both strategies mimic archival encounter: the reader must move through competing frames, incomplete evidence, and unstable interpretive cues. This formal simulation matters for librarianship because it demonstrates that fiction can represent information ethics not only through plot, but also through the reader's lived experience of seeking, sorting, and assessing records. In other words, genre fiction can make the practice of navigation, evaluation, and inference feel consequential, which helps explain why the library so often functions as both sanctuary and threat.

Steven L. Peck's *A Short Stay in Hell* (2012) intensifies the library as threshold by drawing on the Borgesian library-as-infinity motif and recasting it

as afterlife bureaucracy. Punishment is structured as archival labor inside an endless library where meaning is buried under combinatorial scale, and access becomes an ordeal rather than a right. The archive becomes fate: seeking a single text becomes a meditation on limits, authority, and the formation of the self through knowledge, in a universe where the promise of total information collapses into practical impossibility. Peck's novella thus dramatizes boundary work as consequence. Entry into the library is not merely transformative, but irrevocable, and the conditions of access shape what kind of person the searcher becomes.

Contemporary fantasies frequently treat libraries as portals and landscapes of identity, where entry reorganizes obligation and selfhood. Erin Morgenstern's *The Starless Sea* (2019) imagines a subterranean archive that operates as sanctuary and initiation site, binding characters to hidden histories and new forms of responsibility. A. J. Hackwith's *The Library of the Unwritten* (2019) depicts a library that houses unfinished narratives, framing custodial labor as ethical responsibility to neglected stories and unrealized voices. In both works, the library functions as a moral recruitment mechanism, not simply a location. Characters are changed by the terms under which they enter, what they are allowed to see, and what they become responsible for protecting.

Walter Moers's *The City of Dreaming Books* (2004) offers a darker portal logic by embedding book culture in a labyrinthine city where desire, commerce, and danger converge. Library-like spaces operate as boundaries saturated with appetite and threat, linking bibliophilia to exploitation and making the pursuit of texts inseparable from predation. Books become currency, bait, and leverage, and the conditions of access are shaped by scarcity, secrecy, and unequal power. In this world, the archive is not simply a repository but a marketplace of custody, where possession and control determine who may interpret, profit, or even survive.

Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind* (2001) provides a widely influential liminal library through the "Cemetery of Forgotten Books," a hidden collection that functions as both refuge and destiny. Entry initiates covenantal responsibility: the visitor must protect a chosen book, and that obli-

gation reshapes identity over time by binding the reader to custody, secrecy, and care. The bookseller emerges as a knowledge-keeper whose labor is custodial and moral, guiding novices through a ritual of access that feels simultaneously protective and restrictive. The library's threshold thus invites entry to an ethics of care, one that frames stewardship as a relationship rather than a transaction and demands commitment rather than casual consumption.

The liminal library often includes an implicit politics of custody, echoing archival theory's insistence that preservation, description, and access are never neutral acts but participate in the making of cultural memory (Jimerson, 2009; Schwartz & Cook, 2002). Hidden collections and secret stacks dramatize a recurring question: who gets to decide what survives, and on what terms. Zafón's archive formalizes this through a binding obligation to protect a chosen book, but the same ethical structure appears across portal libraries. The institution defines rites of entry, rules of handling, and norms of secrecy. Such practices echo professional realities, from reading-room procedures to restricted-access protocols and custodial policies, translated into mythic form. The narrative effect is to cast librarianship's boundary work as moral architecture. Whether the threshold is protective or coercive depends on justification and enforcement, which is why liminal spaces so often generate librarians as ethical mediators rather than merely as staff.

Not all liminal libraries operate as portals to other worlds. Some function as intimate psychological thresholds, spaces where memory, grief, desire, and identity converge and begin to reorganize. Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* (2002) positions a library as refuge and contemplative shelter, a place where access to texts and quiet routines creates the conditions for interior change. The library becomes a technology of reflection, less about spectacle than about permission to pause, to read, and to make sense of experience indirectly through story. Within that environment, the librarian's mediation of access carries quiet ethical weight. Guidance is offered without coercion; boundaries are maintained without spectacle; and the possibility of meaning depends on the stability and care of the space itself. In this configuration, librarianship is rendered as a form

of relational stewardship, sustaining the conditions under which seeking can occur and under which the self can be reconfigured without being forced.

Some postmodern works extend this threshold logic by making the act of reading the crossing itself. Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979/1993) constructs a labyrinth of interrupted texts that forces readers to confront narrative instability and the desire for completion, making the act of seeking a story a form of self-exposure. Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* (2001) literalizes travel into books and stages governance of story as institutional labor, implying that intelligibility requires forms of stewardship and regulation even when those forms invite contestation. These works collapse the boundary between reader and text, casting knowledge-keepers as mediators who maintain legibility, continuity, and the terms of entry.

Young adult portal narratives similarly align libraries and books with transformation by treating reading as an act that changes the reader's status in the world. *Inkheart* and *The Neverending Story* frame the book, and by extension the library-like repository that houses and legitimates books, as a threshold into altered identity and responsibility (Ende, 1979; Funke, 2003). In Funke's novel, the movement between text and life is not metaphorical; it is materially consequential. Custody of books becomes a form of risk management because stories can be released, misused, or weaponized. Ende likewise portrays the passage into story as ethically binding. Entering narrative entails obligation, and the reader's choices shape what becomes possible for others. Sometimes the library appears as a building with rules and guardians, and sometimes the book itself functions as the portal. But the narrative logic remains consistent: entry marks passage from ordinary life into a text-structured world where imagination carries consequence, and access becomes ethical labor. In these works, the threshold is defined not only by wonder but by stewardship. The ability to handle stories responsibly becomes part of growing up, and the library's symbolic function is to make that responsibility visible.

A final variant appears when libraries are framed as dangerous sacred spaces, places of awe that demand submission. Scott Hawkins's *The Library at*

Mount Char (2015) uses “library” to name a coercive system of knowledge and punishment that produces trauma even as it confers power. The threshold is brutal. Crossing entails compliance with an authority that defines what may be known, what may be done with knowledge, and what it costs to learn. Radford and Radford’s (2001) discourse of fear is resonant here: awe and dread intertwine, and transgression is met with consequence, making the library’s boundary work inseparable from domination.

Taken together, these depictions suggest that the recurring librarian figure cannot be separated from the symbolic labor performed by the library as a boundary-making environment. Libraries are where genre fiction stages transitions from ignorance to knowledge, from innocence to responsibility, and from isolated identity to collective memory. Whether sanctuary or mechanism of domination depends on how boundaries are drawn and enforced. That is why librarians recur as guides, guardians, and antagonists, and why the library itself remains one of genre fiction’s most persistent threshold spaces.

Conclusion

Fictional portrayals of librarians, archivists, and adjacent knowledge-keepers persist in genre fiction because they provide a durable narrative vocabulary for conflicts over knowledge, memory, and power. This essay has argued that such figures function as cultural metaphors for society’s evolving relationship with information and authority, and that genre narratives repeatedly position them at the point where ethical choices about access become unavoidable. When a story turns to an archive, a restricted collection, or a custodian of records, it is rarely staging mere atmosphere. It is staging the conditions under which truth can be found, withheld, reshaped, or destroyed.

The first controlling claim showed that knowledge-keepers appear at points of narrative crisis, where decisions about access determine whether truth is revealed, suppressed, or weaponized. Texts from Eco to Lovecraft to Rothfuss demonstrate that crisis is frequently produced through contested archives, restricted stacks, forbidden texts, and uncertainty about whether concealment protects communities or serves power (Eco, 1980; Lovecraft, 1929; Rothfuss, 2007). Across these narratives, the archive

becomes an engine of consequence, and the ethical question is sharpened into plot: who may know, under what conditions, and at what risk.

The second claim demonstrated that modern genre fiction increasingly recasts librarians and archivists as heroes of access. Contemporary narratives elevate research, preservation, and interpretive labor into decisive agency, treating information work as a form of action rather than a background competence. Whether through the book-magic of *Libriomancer*, the interdimensional retrieval work of *The Invisible Library*, or the infrastructural information competence of *A Fire Upon the Deep*, knowledge work becomes a means of intervention in worlds under threat (Hines, 2012; Cogman, 2016; Vinge, 1992). Even when the focus narrows to material stewardship, as in *People of the Book* and *The Sixteen Pleasures*, the same argument holds: preservation enables future access and resists erasure, and the labor that sustains texts becomes ethically legible as courage (Brooks, 2008; Hellenga, 1994).

The third claim argued that villainous librarians and oppressive archives primarily represent anxieties about gatekeeping and concentrated informational power. Orwell and Bradbury show how control over the record and the destruction of books function as domination, while *Ink and Bone* and “The Library Policeman” dramatize the fear produced when institutional authority becomes punitive and access is governed through intimidation or scarcity (Orwell, 1949; Bradbury, 1953; Caine, 2015; King, 1990). Radford and Radford’s (2001) “discourse of fear” helps name the affective logic that underwrites these portrayals: fear is used to police reading, justify restriction, and legitimate coercion in the name of order. In these texts, the library becomes dangerous not because knowledge is harmful, but because power over knowledge is unaccountable.

The fourth claim showed that libraries function as liminal and psychological threshold spaces where identities are reshaped. From Borges’s infinite archive to Danielewski’s textual architecture to Peck’s library-as-afterlife, the library becomes a boundary-making structure that renders moral choice inevitable by making entry, navigation, and interpretation forms of consequence (Borges, 1941; Danielewski, 2000; Peck, 2012). Contemporary fantasies extend this

threshold logic through portal archives and secret stacks that recruit characters into ethical responsibility for stories and memory, binding access to obligation and custody to care (Morgenstern, 2019; Hackwith, 2019; Zafón, 2001). These works underscore that the library's symbolic force is inseparable from its boundary work. What a library permits, restricts, and demands is what transforms the people who enter it.

Placed in dialogue with LIS scholarship on representation, stereotype, and professional image, these patterns support an interpretive shift. Myers, Carmichael, Peresie and Alexander, Baxter, and Pagowsky and Rigby provide precedent for taking librarian portrayals seriously as cultural texts, but this essay has emphasized what knowledge-keepers do inside narratives, the ethical conflicts they are made to stage, and the institutional anxieties those conflicts disclose. Genre fiction does not merely recycle familiar librarian stereotypes; it redistributes them into morally-charged roles that make access, custody, preservation, and authority narratively visible. The profession, in these texts, is imagined less as background service than as moral infrastructure, responsible for sustaining memory, enabling inquiry, and resisting coercive control while continually justifying the legitimacy of its power.

A brief reflective note is warranted because the argument carries professional implications. Libraries and archives are not only repositories; they are

civic institutions whose legitimacy depends on trust, transparency, and ethical consistency. Genre fiction exaggerates these stakes through heroism, villainy, and threshold imagery, but the exaggeration clarifies tensions that practitioners recognize: the difficulty of balancing stewardship and access, preserving without hoarding, curating without coercion, and maintaining public trust when knowledge becomes contested. In that sense, the recurring librarian figure does not simply represent a profession, it dramatizes the ongoing ethical work of making knowledge usable, accountable, and available in worlds where information can save, distort, or destroy.

Author Notes

Gerald Ward is Assistant Director and Head of Archives & Special Collections at High Point University Libraries.
gward@highpoint.edu



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LATRICE FERGUSON

Every Child Ready to Restory: A New Perspective on Early Literacy in Public Library Storytime Programs

ABSTRACT

Children's library programming is often the highlight of many public library offerings. Summer Reading programs and storytime programs often attract significant numbers of children and their caregivers. Storytime, in particular, has a long history in public library services for youth, and while there have been changes in technology and in attention to inclusive programs, there have not been as many changes to the format of storytime. The rhymes, songs, and sometimes even the books read remain strikingly familiar. Youth librarians often highlight how the program supports early childhood literacy for school readiness. However, adopting a broader perspective of literacies can reimagine storytime programs and root them in community practices, thus restorying storytime and offering young children opportunities of their own to story and restory their growing world.

KEYWORDS: *public libraries, youth services, storytime, early literacy*

Children's programming often comprises the majority of public library offerings (Campana et al., 2016). Staple programs, such as summer reading activities and storytimes, attract large numbers of children and their caregivers to local public libraries. The high level of access, combined with free and low-cost materials, makes library programs appealing to a diverse range of audiences. While oral storytelling has a rich history, the modern storytime program, which includes songs, books, rhymes, and fingerplay activities, has its roots in early 20th-century public library story hour programs. The practice of storytime in public libraries has a long history that developed in tandem with the emergence of children's spaces and literature. Children's librarians hosted story hour programs to read aloud to children, sing songs, and share rhymes. As time went on, they began incorporating puppets, crafts, and other elements to make storytimes more engaging. By the 1940s and 1950s, librarians serving children in public libraries began to promote the role of storytimes in supporting reading readiness (Albright et al., 2009). Librarians like Augusta Baker and Pura Belpré promoted stories for all children during this time, advocating for children's literature that avoided harmful stereotypes of Black and Latinx people. With the new focus on reading readiness and services for all children, public libraries expanded storytime programs to specifically target preschoolers and babies, promoting early literacy for everyone.

Public library storytime research often highlights the program's ability to support children in their development as readers. Libraries have incorporated initiatives such as Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR). First implemented in 2000 after a collaboration between the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) to support early literacy in public libraries, ECRR aims to assist children's librarians in fostering early literacy by sharing specific habits with families during programs (Ash & Meyers, 2009). Many children's librarians have integrated the tenets of ECRR into their activities, both within the library and during outreach programs (Campana et al., 2022). In its initial iteration, the tenets included letter knowledge, phonological awareness, print awareness, vocabulary, narrative skills, and print motivation (Ash & Meyers, 2009). Later, the program modified its format to focus on five practices: talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing (Neuman et al., 2017). Current library research in early childhood explores what parent-child interactions look like during library programming, including storytime, and how parents perceive early literacy initiatives in public libraries (Clark, 2017; Hassinger-Das et al., 2020). Children's librarians often promote storytime programs as an opportunity to bolster school readiness and reading skills among preschoolers. One study (Campana et al., 2016) demonstrated the impact of storytime programs on young children's early literacy skills.

Using mixed methods, including observations of storytime programs in 40 libraries across Washington state, the researchers noted both the early literacy components integrated into the programs and a positive correlation between early literacy content and children's early literacy behaviors. Today, storytime programs have evolved to incorporate advancing technologies, utilizing projector screens and microphones to improve accessibility in some spaces. Additionally, sensory storytimes are available to accommodate children on the autism spectrum and those with sensory sensitivities. Children's librarians integrate the work of early childhood educators into their storytime practices and professional development.

Currently, library programs have evolved to encompass activities beyond traditional storybook and song sessions, incorporating crafts, science experiments, and play activities for all ages. However, studies and discourse on public library storytimes primarily focus on the connections between these programs and school readiness. Scholarship has, with few exceptions, not fully explored how the varied activities that occur during storytime support broader youth literacy practices. Tess Prendergast and Karen Sharkey (2021) do not specifically discuss storytime, but they use sociocultural theories of literacy to reexamine case study data from a public library, focusing on young children and their families. Their work adopts a holistic approach to understanding how public libraries contribute to early childhood literacy by encouraging and supporting engagement with their spaces, resources, materials, and community members. This research gap limits opportunities to discuss the broader impact of storytime programming on the developing literacies of young children. Sociocultural theories of literacy expand the idea of literacy beyond a narrow set of skills practiced and learned in classrooms to include out-of-school and community-based literacies (Street 1995). Scholars in Literacy Studies link local, familial, and community-based literacy practices to the broader social and political structures that shape them. They argue that discourses, which are always tied to power, hegemonic societal structures, communities, and families, cannot be separated from the practice of literacy (Gee, 1991; Street, 1995; New London Group, 1996). In "A Ped-

agogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures" (New London Group, 1996), scholars introduced the concept of multiliteracies, arguing that literacy is not only interconnected with discourse but also occurs across various channels and media in hybrid forms.

By excluding sociocultural conceptions of literacy, research in public library services for children, particularly in programs such as storytime, offers only a limited perspective of what young children experience in these settings. Storytime provides rich opportunities to examine children's engagement as an expression of their storying and worldmaking practices. For young children, storying is not merely the act of sharing stories; it also involves co-constructing narratives with others (Goouch, 2010). Storytime at the public library encompasses sharing stories through songs, rhymes, and books. Still, young patrons can expect to engage with the librarian, the books themselves, and the other materials shared during the sessions. For young children, storying at the library plays a crucial role in their worldmaking practices. During storytime programs, young children frequently engage in socially and materially-mediated practices that aid in constructing and enhancing their growing understanding of the world (Stornaiuolo & Whitney, 2018; Wargo & Alvarado, 2020; Wessel-Powell et al., 2016). Children's librarians can play a crucial role in facilitating "worlding" practices that engage children's multiliteracies across the multiple modes in which librarians engage their young patrons.

Restorying Storytime

Restorying can be a significant theoretical framework for considering how the public library serves its community and young patrons. Scholarly exploration into young children's literacy practices would deepen the field of library science's collective understanding of how literacy is always connected to the lived experiences of young children. This work will strengthen and demonstrate how library practices are rooted in, built by, and built with the communities they serve. The flexibility in planning and the ability to respond quickly to their growing, changing, and developing communities can reinforce the value of public libraries for young patrons while not overstating the early reading strategies young children will learn during

“Restorying is a partnership and an affirmation that youth have stories to share and ways of being that can be affirmed.”

storytime programs. Restorying (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016), as a theoretical concept, reminds us that stories and storying should be a transactional practice that occurs between the reader and the text. That readers gain ownership to interpret, make meaning, and transform stories to grasp concepts for deeper understanding. Restorying occurs when readers reshape narratives to reflect themselves and their experiences. In today's digital world, restorying takes shape in fanfiction, YouTube series, and podcasts. For school-aged children, the act of restorying can also take shape through making and play (Wargo & Alvarado, 2019).

For public librarians, storytime programming often functions as it has for roughly a century. The rhymes and songs tend to be the same, with technology as the only new development in the practices. To build programming that offers greater opportunities for young children to story and thus restory their growing world, storytime as a practice must also be reimaged. Reimagining the practice of storytime programming requires understanding storying, worlding, and restorying literacy practices for youth. This study explores how public librarians are developing worldmaking practices that create space for restorying among younger children in the public library. This study intends to reimagine and reconsider what storytime can be with great attention to what makes public libraries unique and crucial to their communities. It examines how two library programs support worldmaking literacies while also illustrating a launching point for youth storying and thus restorying, because if storying is the ability to narrate and play out your world, then restorying is the agency to narrate yourself into a space that does not see you. Restorying is a partnership and an affirmation that youth have stories to share and ways of being that can be affirmed.

The following were pulled from a larger qualitative study examining how public libraries influence young children's world-making literacies through play and storytelling. The examples that follow are representa-

tive of the two locations' storytime programs intended for children from birth to 24 months, conducted in two different modes and regions. Using a sociocultural multiliteracies perspective, this study explores how early literacy is promoted with young library patrons both in person and online across these regions. The observed programs included nine online Toddler Storytime videos shared by the Wake County Public Library in North Carolina and nine in-person observations of Book Babies storytime at the Skokie Public Library in Illinois. Both programs aim to serve the youngest library users and highlight early literacy development. The data collected included observational fieldnotes, audio recordings, and online storytime videos posted on the Wake County website. The video data from both programs provide insights into the materials used, such as book titles and props, as well as librarian movements and audience engagement in both in-person and digital formats. Inspired by McKechnie (2006) and Campana et al. (2016), the recordings captured the storyteller's actions and, when available, are complemented by observational fieldnotes documenting children's activities. Digital fieldnotes describe the storyteller's activity and engagement with their absent audience.

The data analysis began with holistic coding to identify the materials, people, and activities involved in storytime programs, categorizing the data to support my analysis across different modes and datasets (Saldaña, 2021). After this initial holistic coding, I conducted rounds of descriptive and general pattern coding (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2020). The descriptive codes covered librarian engagement with the audience, props, books, stories, rhymes, or songs shared, as well as interactions with a partner if present. The next set of codes involved general pattern coding, which examined my observations as a researcher and the broader questions this research aimed to explore. These included sharing early literacy tips, direct engagement with parents and caregivers, connections to multiliteracies and sociocultural theories in literacy, and invitations to story,

make, or create. In the final analysis, the descriptive and general pattern codes were combined, providing insight into when specific literacy activities occurred during storytime programs and into the spaces available and created for early childhood storying. The findings below highlight standard practices in early childhood storytime that remain consistent across modes and regions, while also emphasizing the unique and dynamic experiences each space offers its young patrons.

Both Book Babies in Skokie, IL, and Toddler Storytime in Wake County, NC, engage in the early literacy practices familiar to public library storytimes for babies and toddlers. However, each program appears to draw from a distinct toolkit that aligns with the developmental age group it supports. For example, Book Babies leans heavily on song, rhyme, and routine in the librarian's storytime. Their program aligns with practices often featured in baby storytime programs for children aged birth through twenty-four months. In contrast, Toddler Storytime features more picturebooks alongside songs and rhymes. The online Toddler time is also a collaboration featuring many librarians across the Wake County library system, each with their own routine.

Despite their individual routines, the Wake County online Toddler storytime often begins with an introduction to Every Child Ready to Read's early literacy practices: talk, sing, read, write, and play. As mentioned previously, ECRR2 is a widely-shared set of practices in storytime programs that support early learning and school readiness. Many Wake County Toddler Storytimes introduce these principles, with some librarians speaking directly to parents and caregivers, while others communicate the practices to the toddlers themselves. Ms. S says, "show me your five fingers," while holding up her own, "ok, talking, singing, reading, writing, and...this is your favorite one...what?!" She places her hand near her ear, as if listening to the children speaking, "sleeping... NOooOoo...it's playing! That's right! When you do all these five, you are ready to read books and ready to go to school" (Wake County Storytime Anytime, 2020). Beyond these common and familiar storytime practices and habits, both the Wake County Library and the Skokie Public Library offer unique practices in the mode and delivery of their programs to restory

storytime practices in novel ways that enhance young children's worldmaking activities.

Book Babies Skokie, IL

At the Skokie Public Library, Olivia and Maisy share a strong camaraderie that they've built over many years of working together. They greet the babies and caregivers by name and introduce themselves to any patrons they haven't met before. The stuffed bear and sloth gently say hello to the babies and bring smiles to their faces as they settle into their seats. Storytime here is a bit of a misnomer because the librarians don't read any stories aloud. Instead, this lap-sit time features a regular selection of songs that Olivia and Maisy flow through smoothly, with improvised transitions acting as a bridge between them.

Maisy: *I'm so hungry. I skipped breakfast this morning, Olivia. What can we make to eat before going to the library?*

Olivia: *Hmmm... how about some eggs?*

Maisy: *Great idea! Let's make some eggs.*

Together: *Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again.*

They demonstrate the rhyme's movements for caregivers using the same stuffed animals that they used to greet the babies. They then share two additional rhymes, "Peas Porridge" and "Sugar Babies," and finally fill Maisy's belly with a song about pancakes.

Maisy: *Okay, I'm so full. Now, I'm ready to head to the library. Ms. Olivia, how should we get there?*

Olivia: *Should we ride old Joe?*

Maisy: *Oh, great idea!*

Singing Together: *Walking ol' Joe, Walking ol' Joe; You're the best horse in the country-o; Walking ol' Joe, Walking ol' Joe; You're the best horse in the country-o; Whooooaaaaa Joe*

Maisy, Olivia, and the caregivers engage in a lively routine, singing, bouncing, and dipping the babies as they make their way to the library. When Ol' Joe gets tired, they decide to take the bus and break into a rendition of "The Wheels on the Bus."

Once they arrive at the library, they shift their attention to the overflowing cart to select a collection of Board Books for caregivers to share with the babies. This one-on-one reading time happens at a different pace for each baby depending on their interest and mood. After each storytime, the books are sanitized, recognizing that babies read with their eyes, hands, and mouths. They read *Where's Ellie* by Salina Yoon and *Whose Knees Are These?* by Jabari Asim. While some babies cuddle close, examining the books with interest, others just touch the thick pages, running their fingers along the hard edges while they listen to their adult's voice. Some use this quiet moment to test out their knees, bending and crawling on the carpeted floor.

As caregivers finish reading, Olivia and Maisy move in opposite directions inside the circle of adults and babies holding colorful scarves. As they approach each group, they play peekaboo with the babies before giving the scarves to the caregivers to play with or letting the babies grab them to feel the mesh between their fingers and against their faces. The scarves wave around in the semi-circle in hands, big and small. As the scarves wave, Olivia and Maisy start to sing softly, waving their own yellow and pink scarves.

Fish in the water swim, swim, swim.

Fish in the water swim, swim, swim.

Their voices are soft and soothing, gentle as they draw attention back to themselves. They make a brief announcement that there are free books to add to home libraries. Then they sing their goodbye song, introducing ASL signs for the words more, together, happier, and friends. They sing "The More We Get Together" while signing along with the lyrics. After the group finishes singing, adults gather their babies, return the colorful scarves, and leave the storytime room. As soon as the door opens, some eager one-year-olds squeeze past the crowd into the room, ready for their turn.

While this storytime program is unique to the Skokie Public Library, its practices are quite common. The books used are intended for babies and toddlers. The songs are folksy and repetitive, making them easy to sing along with and simple to adapt. Olivia and Maisy might not have attended formal training to develop this storytime. Still, it includes common practices shared by many libraries, inspired by programs like *Mother Goose on the Loose*. The original *MGOTL* promoted a 30-minute storytime featuring repetitive songs and rhymes to "promote the development of the Whole Child, to enhance parent/child bonding, and to provide a joyful early literacy environment that focuses on learning through play" (*Mother Goose on the Loose*, n.d.). Along with *Mother Goose on the Loose*, numerous professional titles and resources, including online videos, blogs, and websites, offer ideas for sharing storytime programs at the library with Babies and Toddlers.

Toddler Storytime Episode 2 - Ms. S Wake Forest, NC

The Wake County Public Library website is part of the broader government site for North Carolina's most populous county. The library offers numerous events throughout the county for all ages, along with many publicly accessible online events and programs, such as recorded storytimes. The Toddler Time videos feature solo librarians presenting recorded programs with songs, read-alouds, felt board stories, and other unique materials. Ms. S is the featured librarian for episode two of Toddler Time. Her storytime showcases all the key elements of Toddler Time in the Wake County online storytime program while also including her own special practices and materials. Ms. S, like many of the other online storytimes, introduces the five practices promoted by EECR2 to support school readiness: talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing.

After her introduction, Ms. S brings out "uke," her ukulele, to sing her hello song.

Hello, Daddy, how are you?

Hello, Daddy, how are you?

Hello Daddy, how are you?

(In a deeper tone) I am busy, thank you.

She goes on to repeat the lyrics, singing that mommy is great, brother is awesome today, sister is fabulous today, and baby is good, thank you. Crucial to her engagement with her digital audience, Ms. S frequently asks questions and leaves pauses for potential engagement. At the end of her hello song, she says:

Hello, everyone, how are you?
Hello, everyone, how are you?
Hello, everyone, how are you?
(pauses)
"I know you're good today! Thank you!"

Not only does Ms. S leave pauses that invite her young audience to speak back and actively engage with her storytime, but she also undermines expectations by adapting the commonly used rhyme "Open, shut them." Ms. S interrupts the familiarity of the rhyme scheme, which would come as a surprise even for those not familiar with the rhyme.

Open shut them. Open shut them give a little
clap, clap, clap
Open shut them. Open shut them put them on your
HEAD! (Hahaha I got you!)
Open shut them. Open shut them give a little
clap, clap, clap
Open shut them. Open shut them, put them on your
Put them on your
SHOULDERS! (I got you again!)
(Slows down and quiets her voice)
Open shut them. Open shut them give a little
clap, clap, clap
Open shut them. Open shut them, put them on your
lap, lap, lap

Ms. S offers the unexpected by interrupting the rhyme and expectations, potentially sparking engagement among youth viewing her program. Her responsiveness also offers clues about how young children might respond to what they see occurring on their screen. That type of engagement opens avenues for emotional literacies while also reaffirming school-based literacies like language development through rhyme and repetition.

Ms. S's storytime theme is nursery rhymes and she reads two picturebooks by Jane Cabrera, *Here We*

Go Round the Mulberry Bush and *There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*. The first title features the daily activities of a family of dalmatian puppies on a cold day. The narrative would be familiar to anyone who knows the song, but, like many kids' songs, the title adapts the familiar lyrics to tell the story. By changing the lyrics, the title subverts the story's traditional expectations, making the familiar feel less familiar, much like how Ms. S changed the rhyme for "Open Shut Them." While the song "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" dates back to the 19th century, the modern illustrations and daily activities give the narrative currency. Similarly, *There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*, also has modern shifts that make the narrative more current and relevant to a modern audience. The old woman no longer "has so many children she does not know what to do", but instead "has so many children and animals too." Unlike the original, where the old woman "gave them all broth without any bread / Then whipped them all soundly and put them to bed," this version introduces a kinder old woman and a stew with coconut, potatoes, carrots, and peas. The changes suit modern audiences: the children are diverse; the food they eat is complex; and the ingredients are familiar to a wide variety of cultures. Ms. S's program builds in wonderful opportunities to model restorying traditional, often-repeated stories and rhymes through multiple modalities and methods.

Findings

These two programs provide insight into how restorying can be effective and may already be happening in youth storytimes. Through their activities, Maisy, Olivia, and Ms. S support youth worlding and storying while also engaging with traditional practices of storytime programs for young children. The findings below show how librarians advanced storytime practices by restorying storytime programs while also supporting young children's own developing worlding and storying practices.

Decentering the Librarian and Centering Connection and Story

When I spoke to Maisy about what makes the program successful, she said, "We have fun doing it. And I think the fact that we have fun doing it is a

little bit infectious.” They string together songs into a story, and caregivers read books one-on-one with their babies. The effect seems to create a more intimate atmosphere, with the storytelling shared by many within the space.

Maisy and Olivia’s ability to share and create a story together presents an opportunity to transform longstanding storytelling practices in storytime programs. This change occurs not through the songs they sing or the rhymes they share, but rather through their togetherness, friendship, and their commitment to decentering themselves during storytime. Restorying, as described by Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016), involves reimagining narratives as an act of self-assertion. Restorying storytime would necessitate rethinking and revolutionizing the practices there, with the concept of youth worldmaking at the forefront. This approach opens up even more space for young children’s placemaking.

Their activities facilitate multiple ways of being, diverse cultural engagement, and languages, while creating opportunities to build deeper relationships among attendees who include not only parents and children but also nannies, grandparents, and older siblings. Multigenerational family relationships are a vital part of diverse community literacies (Ellison et al., 2024; Jocson, 2022), so incorporating these one-on-one interactions supports the literacies that patrons bring into the space. These moments foster space for various languages and culturally relevant story sharing. Additionally, such one-on-one interactions promote greater development of vocabulary, phonological awareness, and reading comprehension than passive viewing of programs and media (Dore et al., 2025; Ewin et al., 2021). The activities in these storytimes support the development of multiliteracies by seamlessly connecting worldmaking and storying activities while also fostering school readiness.

Practices in Learning and Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a significant shift in how public libraries reach their young patrons. Young children’s online educational media has seen a boom with viral stars and channels like *Ms. Rachel* and *Gracie’s Corner* garnering millions of views and sparking TikTok trends. Public libraries across the country during that time also significantly increased

their online activity, offering programs for all ages, both live and as recordings. Wake County’s series of programming recordings is among this trend. On its website, Wake County Public Library has eighty-three posted storytime videos for babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and a series of Spanish/English bilingual storytimes.

Communicating learning content online to children has followed the same format as the earliest preschool programs, such as Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood and Sesame Street, which speak directly to the children watching. While research has been mixed about the effectiveness of media-based literacy development, studies show that programs that encourage engagement and interaction are more successful than passive media programs (Fisch, 2004; Holiday, 2021; Wohlwend, 2024). Ms. S speaks directly to her perceived audience, pausing to give them opportunities to talk back and engage with her. She tells her stories using various modalities, including singing with uke, picturebooks, fingerplays, and a flannel board rhyme. She says, “Be loud, you’re not in the library!” further encouraging the kind of interaction and engagement that might only be possible using online media from home. Her program also supports modern engagement with media and technology that digital natives would be familiar with.

More Ways to Restory

Even though they serve audiences in different locations, the songs they perform tend to overlap significantly. Not only between Ms. S and the librarians at Skokie, but across all the storytime videos and other story programs at Skokie. The familiarity and repetition make the songs and rhymes easy for children to join in but also result in storytime programs that are rarely updated beyond occasional changes in the books read. The familiarity of children’s songs and rhymes can aid language development and vocabulary retention. However, there are opportunities to further support childhood literacies in ways that only the public library can offer. To promote storying and cultivate opportunities to restory themselves into the stories they hear, it’s important to give young children opportunities for active participation during storytime.

Both the Skokie librarians and Ms. S open the door to additional opportunities to support young children's literacy development within their community, linguistic, and cultural contexts, while also supporting their worldmaking within those communities and their developing school-readiness. While any youth librarian can tell you how quickly asking a group of toddlers and preschoolers open-ended questions can send any program off the rails, Maisy and Olivia's programs illustrate how small group engagement between parents and their children can support cultural relevance, linguistic variety, and more opportunities to talk back and play around with the themes of the programs. Those opportunities support a more expansive range of literacy practices. Ms. S's digital storytime shares multimodal stories and songs, encouraging engagement with media that is slowly being buried by AI-generated content (Lajke, 2026). Additionally, the programs at Wake Forest are rooted in real-life spaces with tactile materials, where caregivers and children can interact. Spaces, places, and face-to-face interactions are important to the development of literacies, as studies have shown that young children struggle to transfer knowledge from 2D media to the real world (DeLoache et al. 2010; Dore et al. 2025). For public libraries, offering online storytime programs that explicitly emphasize the importance of face-to-face interactions and encourage viewers to attend in-person programs creates a bridge between screen time and the incredibly valuable live interactions with their expansive world.

Storytime is an incredibly popular service in many public libraries across the U.S. and abroad, and its format has seen little significant change in nearly a century. Literacy studies and sociocultural theories in multiliteracies can offer various avenues for examining how young children engage with storytelling through play, technology, and collaboration with the people and spaces around them. One such study illustrates how attention to physical literacies, separate from the structures of schooling, supports the embodied, culturally relevant storytelling practices of young Indigenous children (Riley et al., 2023). Other scholars have also theorized multimodal literacies in early childhood (Daniels, 2021; Lenters & Mosher, 2024; Wargo & Alvarado, 2020). Public libraries are also among their communities' oldest

public institutions. Their rootedness in communities is fertile ground for multigenerational, community-oriented, and designed storying and sharing. Restorying storytime practices involves decentering librarians and instead centering the worldmaking of young children, encouraging open exploration through more play and more open-ended ways to connect with stories, so that young children's individualism is not out of place. That might be viewing Ms. S's changing the words to "Open, Shut Them" as modeling for young children to make their own interruptions with one-on-one sharing with their adults in their home languages. Online programs represent fertile ground for this, since they can be paused to encourage those interactions.

Conclusion

Librarians often have considerable freedom and autonomy to innovate in their storytime practices. A wide range of new and diverse story programs in the library use technology, support diverse groups, improve accessibility, and provide opportunities for play and growth. However, many storytime programs across a wide range of public libraries still look very similar to their past iterations. Birth-to-five-year-old programs in the public library do not necessarily have to support school readiness to be successful; that is the joy of the public library. Restorying as a revolutionary act, i.e., restorying storytime itself in the public library, can reaffirm the library as a necessary, community-focused support system that engages with the diverse literacy practices of its attendees. In our scholarship and study of youth literacies, including more information about developing and supporting worldmaking literacies and affirming the broad ways of being that children and their families bring into the library, would help expand our understanding of what youth are doing in the library. Additionally, the mutuality of storying and worlding would help librarians bring a deeper focus to community languaging practices, family structures, and communal storytelling. In doing so, youth programming in the public library, such as storytimes, can be seen as a lifelong opportunity to grow and develop holistically, as an integral part of a community, rather than only a supplement to activities occurring in school.

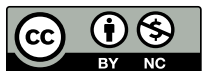
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Author Notes

Latrice Ferguson is Assistant Professor of Library Science in the College of Education at East Carolina University. fergusonla24@ecu.edu



Submission Requirements for North Carolina Libraries

Electronic articles can be submitted online at: <https://www.ncl.ecu.edu>

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- > APA or *Chicago Manual of Style*, most recent edition.
- > We have a rolling deadline; articles are peer reviewed when received.
- > Publication of accepted articles may be in upcoming or future issues.
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From the Pages of *North Carolina Libraries*, Vol. 6, No. 2-4 (1947)

Fairly early in the history of our journal, the tradition of having a column written by the president of the North Carolina Library Association arose. The earliest notice found so far was in a combination issue of the 6th volume published late in 1947. “From Our President” was written by Margaret H. Ligon to encourage North Carolina’s librarians to influence their communities in a positive manner by their “careful study and deep sense of responsibility.”

Ligon was the head librarian at Pack Memorial Library in Asheville from 1945 to 1965, during her term as president of NCLA (from 1947 to 1949). Her tenure at Pack was intertwined with the literary culture of Asheville. She supported the launch of the Thomas Wolfe Collection by colleague Myra Champion (Hill, 2023), and she authored *Letters Honoring Carl Sandburg in Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC 1950-1953*. Published by the library in 1953, this volume was composed of letters requested by Ligon from donors in celebration of Sandburg’s 75th birthday. During her tenure as NCLA President, Ligon helped establish the North Carolina Library Association Scholarship-Loan Fund to provide funding for library workers to attend library schools (Ligon, 1948). The Fund calls to mind Ligon’s own experience—she had begun working in Asheville’s library system in 1927 as a library substitute, then as a clerk and library assistant in the Sondley Library. Ligon paused her library employment to go to school, graduated in 1936 from Pratt Institute, then returned to the Sondley Library. She took a leave of absence to take a WPA appointment in 1937, returning to Asheville libraries in 1938 as a reference librarian at Pack Memorial Library. She was officially named new head of the City of Asheville Libraries in March 1945, though she had been acting head since January of that year. She served in that role until October 1965 (Carissa Pfeiffer, personal communication, July 28, 2026).

The North Carolina Library Association has active leaders who encourage our thoughtful participation in our profession and our communities. Having this column provides them one more place to raise their voice for us.

MARGARET H. LIGON • NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

From the President

Today the responsibility of the librarian is greater than ever before. From the beginning of time, man has attempted to record through pictures and symbols his knowledge and ideas for the benefit of posterity. This urge for the preservation of man’s progress has made a very significant contribution to our present day culture, and these ideas and records naturally fall within the walls of libraries—both large and small.

World conditions have become so complex, individual opinions so varied, our country so overrun

with ‘isms, that it is very difficult to arrive at a real solution to any problems. As librarians, we can be, by careful study and a deep sense of responsibility, an influence for the improvement of society in our community. With the multitude of ideas before the world today, librarians, by knowing their material and their patrons, have the opportunity to render a definite service to society. North Carolina has librarians of this calibre and I feel that the result of our determination today will be evident in the years to come.



Figure 1: Margaret Ligon at desk, circa 1954. Photo by Juanita Wilson, courtesy of Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC.

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North Carolina Library Association
265 Eastchester Dr.
Suite 133, #364
High Point, NC 27262

The NCLA Leadership Institute Supports Leaders Everywhere. Join us!

The North Carolina Library Association's Leadership Institute is now in its thirtieth year! This program meets a significant need for the community it supports. Because of the Leadership Institute, NC library workers of all ranks and recognitions have an opportunity to receive targeted training in areas like project management and conflict resolution, a one-on-one mentorship experience, and supportive networking and community-building. Building these skills translates into more effective tools in a person's toolbox as they progress through their careers.

The Leadership Institute (LI) fills a gap often seen in fields and professions that are largely service-oriented: the service side can be so busy and hustle-focused that little time is left for the type of professional development that ensures well-rounded, growth-focused, career experiences that contribute in turn to positive work experiences. We live in a world where library studies and library work both function as important lynchpins in their communities, connecting users to technology, resources, materials, and more. Participating in opportunities like the Leadership Institute helps to boost development among

library employees. Past LI participants report feeling more confident in navigating difficult situations with users, colleagues, and supervisors. They also report having a clearer understanding of how to manage and complete projects, stronger connections to the profession and colleagues across the state, and more knowledge about subjects that shape the profession. Most also leave with a strong sense of support and a newfound sense of community with others participating in their LI cohort.

Unique Features of the NCLA Leadership Institute

While there are many leadership trainings offered by educational entities, local municipalities, and others, NCLA LI is particularly unique in how it cultivates community. The Institute is held in non-conference years, with the application cycle taking place in the spring. During the fall of that year, approximately twenty-four attendees participate in a four-day intensive retreat. For the past several LI cycles, this retreat has been held at Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, NC.



The idyllic setting of this retreat, nestled among the Blue Ridge mountains, encourages a sense of togetherness from the first day. The structure of the institute builds on this with expert-led presentations, activities, project management workshops, and information-sharing throughout the day with time built in for reflection and networking. Evening activities include sitting around a bonfire and sharing stories and reflections, playing games, and cheering each other on during BINGO. Almost every year, attendees also track the number of black bears spotted and, sometimes, even how often bear sightings force walking routes to shift! The evenings are just as important as the days, for it is then that the cohort gets a real chance to know each other, and to build connections that extend beyond the professional sphere, to make friends, and to serve as cheerleaders for each other. This retreat builds the foundation for the rest of the LI experience.

Each Institute participant is assigned to a mentor group and will spend time at the retreat getting to know their mentor and others in their small group. These groups will become an important part of the Institute cycle for each person, as members provide support, feedback, and encouragement to one another. Groups are encouraged to meet regularly after the retreat and to stay in contact with each other.

As part of the application process, each Institute participant decides on a project to complete at their library with the support of their supervisor. Upon returning from the Institute, they work on implementing the project and chart its progress, seeking support as needed from their mentor groups. In the April following the retreat, everyone gathers for a one-day, in-person workshop. This mid-year meeting is where formal project updates are shared and participants give one another feedback. The meeting includes time for participants to talk with their mentors and mentor groups and to fellowship with the rest of their cohort. Training related to giving formal presentations is also an important part of this mid-year meeting. The Institute cycle's second year is an NCLA biennial conference year, and participants are asked to volunteer and/or present posters or papers at the conference. Many LI attendees who present or volunteer at the biennial NCLA conference share feeling more engaged and seeing practical benefits

from conference experiences and presentations in their daily work. Those who present often walk away with ideas for future scholarship, and those who volunteer gain a deeper understanding of conference operations and gain skills in working a large event. The cohort is honored with a "graduation" ceremony during the All-Conference Reception.

The Longevity of Leadership Institute

The existence of this flagship program creates positive ripple effects that impact leaders throughout the library world. By supporting the Institute, the North Carolina Library Association, the Library of NC, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and others demonstrate the importance of cultivating strong leaders at libraries of all types and among staff of all ranks. It sends a signal to library workers everywhere that their development is important and that no matter the situation in which their daily work occurs, they are welcome members of #TeamNCLibraries. This benefit cannot be underestimated.

Operationally, the Leadership Institute utilizes a self-sustaining cycle of leaders teaching leaders. There are always four tiers to the LI structure: cohort members are made up of new applicants. Six mentors are selected from the previous cohort's graduates and then form the Planning Committee for the third cycle. Two Institute Co-Chairs are then selected from the Planning Committee to lead the next Institute. This scaffolding maintains the central objectives and outcomes for LI through sustained familiarity and long-term investment and ensures LI has the ability to continue.

How can you support the NCLA Leadership Institute?

The Leadership Institute welcomes your support of NC library workers. Individuals, institutions, and professional groups may help in any (or all) of the following ways:

- Advertise the Call for Leadership Institute applicants;
- Encourage potential applicants (or apply yourself!);
- Once they're selected, encourage the leadership journeys of participants;
- Institutional leaders are encouraged to endorse the participation of potential applicants;

- Contribute or pledge financial support to ensure LI members have the means to attend the initial retreat, mid-year meeting, and NCLA;
- Donate swag and other items to create welcome kits for mentees or to offer as prizes at team-building activities;
- Donate refreshment items or financial gifts to stock the snack and beverage table for the 40-50 attendees (mentees, mentors, planning committee, and guest speakers) at the all-day retreat sessions and mid-year meeting;
- Offer to be a guest speaker or session expert; and
- Advocate on behalf of NCLA, Library of NC, the IMLS and its LSTA grant program, and libraries everywhere.

Author Notes

Laurie Lyda is the Library Services Manager at Rowan Public Library

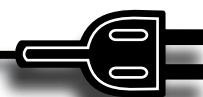
Rachel Olsen is an Outreach and Engagement Librarian at UNC Greensboro



Connect with Leadership Institute

To learn more about the NCLA-LI, visit <https://nclaonline.org/leadership-institute>. For more information or to offer support, contact leadership@nclaonline.org.





Why Digital Collections Matter

Libraries have always evolved to meet the changing needs of their communities while continuing to support learning, research, and civic engagement. Today, as new technology reshapes how information is created, shared, and consumed, libraries remain trusted places where people can find credible resources, thoughtful guidance, and reliable answers.

More than ever, libraries play an essential role in helping people do more than simply find information—they help people find *accurate* information. One of the most powerful ways libraries fulfill this mission is through digital collections, which provide free online access to authentic, authoritative resources that have been carefully preserved by libraries and other trusted institutions.

Digital Collections

Digital collections provide free access to primary sources, government publications, historical records, photographs, maps, oral histories, manuscripts, and other authoritative resources that enrich understanding and bring history and current events to life. By expanding access to these materials, libraries make it possible for anyone with an internet connection to explore trusted sources that were once available only by visiting an archive, library, or special collections reading room. For example, the [Library of Congress Digital Collections](#) provide access to millions of photographs, manuscripts, maps, newspapers, sound recordings, and historical documents that allow users to explore American history through authentic primary sources. Likewise, the [Digital Public Library of America \(DPLA\)](#) brings together materials from libraries, archives, and museums across the nation, making cultural heritage collections widely accessible through a single online portal.

Finding Truth in an Information-Rich World

Today, information is available through countless channels, including search engines, social media, and generative AI tools. While finding information has become easier than ever, determining its accuracy has become increasingly difficult. Libraries help bridge that gap by connecting users with digital collections that are carefully curated, professionally maintained, and built upon authoritative sources.

Digital collections provide access to authentic primary source materials that allow users to examine original documents, photographs, maps, correspondence, government records, and other historical evidence firsthand. Rather than relying solely on interpretations or summaries, users can explore original materials for themselves, evaluate evidence, and develop a more informed understanding of the topics they are researching.

One of the greatest strengths of digital collections is their ability to make these resources accessible anytime and from virtually anywhere. Whether users are exploring from a classroom, a library, or their own home, they can examine the U.S. Constitution, presidential papers, photographs, oral histories, maps, personal correspondence, and countless other historical resources. By making these materials widely available, libraries cultivate curiosity, encourage critical thinking, and deepen our understanding of our shared history.

Preserving Local Stories

Technology also enables libraries to preserve and share the stories of their own communities. Here in North Carolina, the [North Carolina Digital Collections](#) preserve and provide access to state government publications, historical photographs, military records, family



Figure 1: Using Digital Collections. Image generated using the prompt “person viewing a copy of the US Constitution on a computer screen, from the perspective over the person’s shoulder,” by Adobe Firefly, 2026 (<https://firefly.adobe.com>).

papers, and other materials that document the state’s rich history. Along with other collaborative digital initiatives, these collections support local history projects, genealogy research, classroom instruction, and community engagement while ensuring that North Carolina’s diverse voices and experiences remain accessible for future generations.

Local history reminds us that every community has stories worth preserving. Through digital collections, libraries make it possible to share those stories far beyond the walls of the library, connecting people with their heritage and inspiring new opportunities for research and discovery.

Technology That Serves

The newest technology is not always the most valuable, and the newest source is not necessarily the most accurate or trustworthy. Reliable information matters. Sometimes the greatest innovation is making trusted knowledge easier to discover, understand, and use.

Digital collections fulfill that purpose. Curated by librarians and supported by rigorous metadata, preservation practices, and institutional stewardship, they provide reliable access to authentic, authoritative information that researchers, students, educators, and the public can trust.

As library professionals, we have an opportunity to connect our communities with knowledge that is accurate, credible, and enduring. Digital collections open doors to resources many users may never have known existed. They connect learners with original historical documents, guide researchers to authoritative government information, preserve local history, and help every patron become a more informed consumer of information.

When technology expands access to trustworthy knowledge, strengthens civic understanding, preserves our shared history, and supports lifelong learning, it does far more than deliver information—it empowers people. The library’s most enduring promise is not adopting the newest technology—it’s ensuring that technology truly serves people. Whether through digital collections, online services, or emerging technologies, libraries continue to embrace innovation in ways that expand access, preserve knowledge, support learning, and meet the evolving needs of their communities.

Additional Examples of Digital Collections

- > [Hathi Trust Digital Library](#)
- > [Smithsonian Libraries](#)
- > [Internet Archive](#)
- > [Project Gutenberg](#)

On the Front Lines

Environmental Wellness Ideas in Community College Libraries

Introduction

My top three favorite birds are the tufted titmouse, the osprey, and the prothonotary warbler, and the bird I most want to see is the black-and-white warbler.¹ I began thinking about environmental wellness after I attended a bird identification workshop offered by Wake County Public Libraries. After that program, I felt as if my eyes and ears had been opened to the world around me. I became more aware of the birds' different preferences in habitat, their unique calls, their diverse behavior (even among the same species), and more.

I started to feel more positively not only about how I interacted with the environment but also how I spent my time – more time outside with friends, more time outside going on walks, less time in front of a computer when I didn't have to be. I wondered if my community college patrons would also benefit from this kind of experience. In this article, I will discuss the environmental wellness activities I have done at Central Carolina Community College Library and offer a few suggestions about how to implement these activities in community college libraries.

About Central Carolina Community College

Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) has three main campuses with multiple smaller sites spread across Chatham, Lee, and Harnett counties. All three main campuses have a library. The college serves a wide variety of students, including those seeking vocational training, Early College students, dual-enrolled local high school students, and adult learners. This variety of patrons makes for endless opportunities to be creative and experiment with different programs and resources.

Environmental Wellness at CCCC

Because of my experience with birdwatching, I thought that environmental wellness provided a great avenue for developing resources and programming opportunities that could potentially improve our patrons' mental and emotional wellbeing. Research has shown that being in/with nature improves how we think, how we feel, and how we behave (Weir, 2020).

For these efforts, I chose to keep my definition of "environmental wellness" simple: environmental wellness is learning about, participating in, and caring for the environment, particularly plants and animals. I focused the programming and resources on the local region (North Carolina and the South), predominantly the environment (plants and green space) and animals in North Carolina. I aimed to accomplish three goals:

- Empower patrons to spend time in their personal environments and local regions
- Connect community partners with one another
- Have tangible (sometimes, immediate!) results.

Resources

Our [Nature & Conservation LibGuide](#) (Figure 1) acts as an ever-evolving repository for resources shared by community partners like Wake Audubon, Garner Parks and Recreation, North Carolina State University, and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension of Lee County as well as materials held by the CCCC Library and other community college libraries. As I worked through designing the LibGuide and gathering information, I also identified gaps in our collection at the Harnett Campus Library. To address those gaps, I purchased several Peterson field guides as well as *Keeping a Nature Journal* by Clare Walker Leslie, *How to Teach Nature Journaling* by John Muir Laws, and *How Can I Help?* by Douglas Tallamy.

¹ If you are wondering what these birds are or what they look like, you can explore with the free app [Merlin](#) or check out [allaboutbirds.org](#).

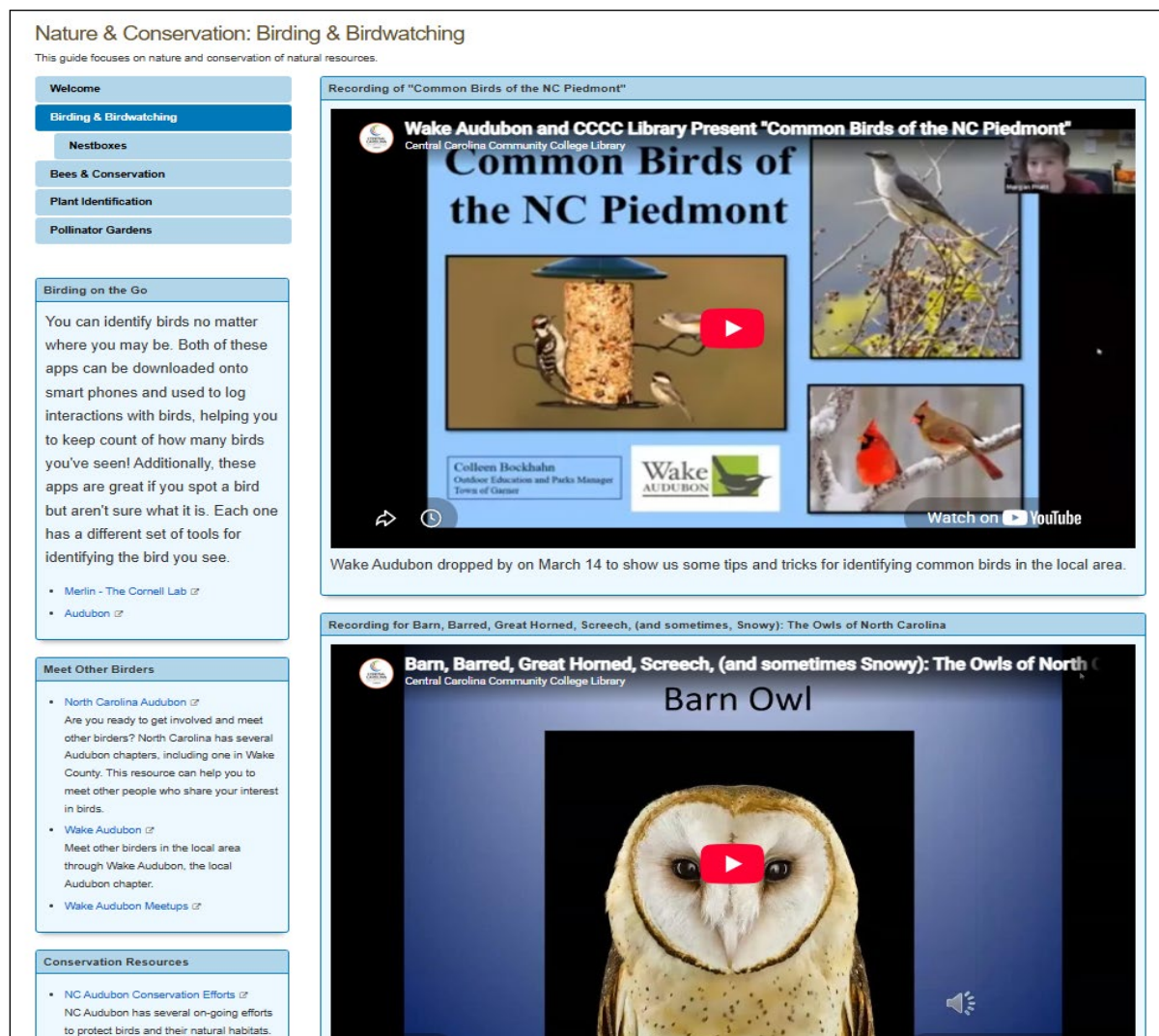


Figure 1: Birding and Birdwatching page of CCCC Library's Nature & Conservation LibGuide

At the Harnett campus library in particular, we increased awareness of environmental wellness resources by displaying these materials frequently, promoting the LibGuide whenever appropriate, and engaging with other materials, including setting up the [Smithsonian Gardens Pollination Investigation](#) poster display. For example, the Harnett campus library created a display highlighting resources on animals for General Biology II (BIO 112) and a display on gardening in North Carolina. Tying the displays to curriculum courses like BIO 112 makes an environmental wellness display relevant for community college libraries.

Programming

In Spring 2023, I partnered with Wake Audubon to present the online workshop “Common Birds of the Piedmont,” a welcoming introduction to com-

mon birds that people might see in the tri-county area of Chatham, Lee, and Harnett. The goal was simply to increase awareness about local birds, giving patrons new ways to look at the world around them. Although we only had 15 attendees, the recorded presentation has been viewed 306 times over the last three years.

While this activity was successful and I had a feeling that students enjoyed environmental wellness activities, I decided to be more strategic in my programming to better connect environmental wellness to CCCC courses. I chose to partner with a couple of instructors to provide environmental wellness programming during their class times. This helped ensure attendance and allowed us to collaborate with faculty to create relevant learning opportunities. In Spring 2024, I partnered with BIO 112 to host two activities, a workshop on bird watching and an on-

line program on bee hotels. The CCCC Library again partnered with BIO 112 in Spring 2025 to host an online program about owls. These opportunities were further enhanced by the expertise of program facilitators from the North Carolina Cooperative Extension of Lee County (bee hotels) and Garner Parks and Recreation (owls). As a result, we had 44 participants for our presentation on bee hotels and 21 participants for our presentation on owls. More importantly, we provided a meaningful learning experience for curriculum courses at CCCC.

In Spring 2026, we hosted the North Carolina Cooperative Extension of Lee County at both the Harnett and Lee campuses to show students how to propagate plants. We had 14 attendees at our Harnett Campus event and 59 at our Lee Campus event. Several students who had never propagated a plant before learned how to do so, and many of them walked away with a plant in hand and more information about the environment, soil, and the work of the extension. As students left the table, several of them stopped to say, “Thank you for doing this!” Even the CCCC gardening club was able to make a connection with the NC Cooperative Extension during the program.

For future activities, I hope to invite the NC Cooperative Extension to return, perhaps including presentations on pollinator gardens and other native animals, such as snakes, dragonflies, and butterflies. I have also invited the NC Cooperative Extensions of the three counties to join us for a volunteer fair so that students can take their interest in the environment and apply it in meaningful ways through the work of the extensions.

Suggestions and Conclusion

For community college libraries interested in supporting environmental wellness, consider the following questions: What do you love about the environment? What do your patrons seem to love? Start from that place of loving stewardship to identify your patrons’ interests and opportunities to align your library’s resources and programming to those interests. You can also consider which courses might be already primed for environmental wellness collaborations, such as biology, agriculture, and horticulture courses. Next, consider what is reasonable for you to maintain

and manage and how you can leverage the expertise of others. Connect with your community partners, particularly the cooperative extensions or your local parks and recreation team and let them lead. Public libraries are especially good at making these kinds of connections, and community college libraries can follow this model by strengthening relationships with community partners.

You may find that you do not have the time or staff to support large or long-term environmental wellness projects. There are plenty of low-lift ways to engage with environmental wellness. For example, a display that highlights a library’s animal and plant identification guides supports environmental wellness and may contribute to the wellbeing of patrons. It can become a pathway by which one neighbor (human) learns to recognize and appreciate another neighbor (a Carolina Wren, a purple passionflower, etc.).

As you decide what environmental wellness looks like at your library, take a moment and go outside. Listen and observe. All of what you see is a gift. What will you do with this good gift?

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Author Notes

Column Editor Scottie Kapel is the Scholarly Communications Librarian at Hunter Library, Western Carolina University.

Guest Columnist Morgan Pruitt is the Outreach and Assessment Librarian at Central Carolina Community College.



In Step with Library Leaders

Practice Part 1: Understanding Your Leadership Style

Welcome back! Thank you so much for your feedback, comments, and kind words. I had two questions from the first column: “How do you know if you should work in libraries when you may think you are settling for work that just seems interesting or easy?” The second question is, “How do you continue to move forward when you just feel stuck?”

There are always a few lucky ones who know from a very young age, or before college, exactly what they want to do in life and how to become it. For most of us, life changes, and we roll with it; sometimes, it can get a little off course, but we recreate ourselves and keep going. Change is difficult because it pushes you to do more to grow. To give some insight into answering the first question, there is nothing wrong with being interesting or easy. Ask yourself, do you enjoy what you are doing? Don't worry about what others think. It may be difficult to answer because of peer pressure, but also because librarianship can be vague. There are so many places to land, so many types of libraries to work in, different types of positions to secure, and a myriad of things to do. We have become more sophisticated with our approach to librarianship, and it gives us meaning to do this work.

I tell everyone that it is sometimes difficult to be true to yourself. Once I found out about library school and the types of librarians that I could choose to be during school and training, I knew that I could not be a cataloger. There is nothing wrong with becoming a cataloger. I had to ask myself, am I looking at this because it pays more? It seemed safe, but you need this type of wizardry to create records and find a place for the books! I felt that I was not smart enough and did not have enough patience or even discipline to do that job well, as intended. I decided that I was not wasting anyone's time when I could take something else. So, I decided that I had to look at all types of positions and departments. It was easy at first because I was already volunteering in

a large regional public library in the children's room and working in a new community college library that needed a director. Past jobs were department heads and leaders of units in non-library companies and roles, so after working and visiting different types of libraries and interviewing everyone there, I knew that I was going the academic route.

Look at your background and then journal what it is you really like to do and take some time to contemplate where your joy comes from. Make lists. If you like children, then a public library or even a school or media position may call you. Determine the skills you need, then visit and volunteer at those places. If you don't like the noise or the quick change of activities, decide that particular role may not be for you, and it will be ok. While you journal, you may also want to visit other employment agencies that test you to see what other things you may be interested in doing. And if you start and don't like the work after six months, no one will tell you that you must stay. But you must put in the work to go to the next level, step, or job to find your career. Look deeply into what you enjoy. If you are interested in science, you could also investigate special libraries in hospitals or industries that support healthcare, etc. I went to library school with someone who loved wrestling, and off he went to be a librarian for one of those businesses. Like writing and news media? They have libraries there, too. Sports, no problem! Now, to try to determine if you are stuck, you have to do pretty much the same. Ask yourself questions; research new opportunities. What would you love to be doing to become unstuck?

So, let's talk about leadership and some of the types of styles there are. Leaders are visionary. They think of ways to steer and forecast the future for the good of those who use their resources wisely. Among the leadership styles that are available, I will mention Transformational leadership, Servant leadership, Participative leadership, Achievement-Oriented leadership, and Coaching.

“Transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential” (Northouse, 2022, p. 186).

Librarians think, “How do we not become obsolete with all of the competition out here?” I remember a friend with two small children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. They used to love to go to the “library” called Barnes & Noble. She argued with them all the time that it was not a library. I used to ask her why not? We know it’s a store, but all they see are the books, counters, people sitting down reading, their children’s play area, etc. All of which may have changed the way we look at the library’s new architecture. You see that type of transformation in many businesses that keep moving forward and understand how to evolve. Leadership is the same in the library. When she was tapped to join a committee on new construction spaces in her public library, she could see the vision of what the new one could be based on retail experiences and the joy her children felt while visiting Barnes & Noble. User experience data informed library service and space improvements, leading to more enjoyable experiences in several departments and eventually better funding.

Let’s discuss a few more leadership styles as defined by Northouse (2022). I will start with my own style. I have a willingness to help people from start to finish and anywhere in between. I want everyone to be successful together. I am a people person identified by Myers-Briggs, which categorizes individuals based on their preferences in four dimensions: I love social interactions and prefer engaging with others, but I am not the life of the party, choosing to be the dependable worker bee. I focus on information that is practical and use logic in decision-making, valuing everyone’s input. While I prefer structure and organization while working toward goals, I want everyone to walk away with something from the process, which makes me a servant leader. There is lots of coaching and training in this style.

“...**Servant Leadership** is an approach focusing on leadership from the point of view of leaders and their behaviors. Servant leadership emphasizes

that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them. Servant leadership puts followers first, empowers them, and helps them develop their full personal capacities” (Northouse, 2022, p.253).

Now, depending on the time you have for project management, for resources, strategic goals, and library planning, or creating policies where there is team buy-in that have a direct impact on what the group wants to accomplish, Participative leadership may be your leadership style. These are usually Reference librarians, Instruction liaisons, and Outreach team members. It takes into consideration the entire group developing the next steps. This leader may have to step in to ensure that the project does not stall while trying to get everyone on board with the decision-making.

“Participative leadership...consists of inviting followers to share in the decision-making. A participative leader consults with followers, obtains their ideas and opinions, and integrates their suggestions into the decisions about how the group organization will proceed. This particular leadership style may also result in increased group performance through member participation and dedication to shared group goals” (Northouse, 2022, pp. 135-136).

For a leader who wants to really ramp up success as it relates to innovation, ideas that support assessment, continuous quality improvement, stretch goals that are over and above meeting expectations, identifying and moving high-potential employees and library workers to pursue leadership development opportunities to enhance their careers, Achievement-Oriented Leadership may be your type. These may be technical positions, working in new areas such as E-Sports, data or digitization, Makerspaces, and any area where there is a need to be forward-thinking, to modernize and improve resources and services through creativity in the library. This could be you!

Achievement-Oriented Leadership is “...characterized by a leader who challenges followers to perform work at the highest level possible. This leader establishes a high standard of excellence for followers and seeks continuous improvement. In addition to bringing significant expectations

for followers, achievement-oriented leaders show a high degree of confidence that followers are capable of establishing and accomplishing challenging goals” (Northouse, 2022, p.136).

When you are working through what you need to do or are working toward what you think you are really ready to do, this model slows down everything going on around you so that you can receive the support and time that you need to determine if you are on the right path. You learn new skills, have time to discuss questions and goals, and build employee confidence to grow your independence, which supports you during the discovery process.

Coaching (high directive-high supportive style)

“The leader focuses communication on both achieving goals and meeting followers’ socioemotional needs. The coaching style requires that leaders involve themselves with followers by encouraging and soliciting follower input. However, coaching is an extension of S1 [situational leadership] in that it still requires that the leader make the final decision on what and how of goal accomplishment” (Northouse, 2022, p. 110).

These are just a few types of leadership examples and strategies. Please keep in mind that in the library, there may be several different departments, with a leader in each one of them. Eventually, we get back to where we are supposed to be on this journey, and I only hope you have time to enjoy this next step. Spend time journaling what you like about what you do, and what you don’t. Research how to make it better. Ask users what they would like to see next. Think of a stretch goal that would make you feel proud of what you are doing. If you have 5-10 minutes each day, please continue reading about leadership and practicing what you could do differently. The best advice I can give you is to find someone whom you admire and focus on learning what they did to get there. Ask questions! Visit other types of libraries. It may make all the difference for you in librarianship. Was this dialogue helpful? What other suggestions would you try and please feel free to share with the QR code. Thanks!



QR Code: Article Evaluation Survey

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Author Notes

Column Editor Joanie Douglas Chavis is a tenured Associate Professor and Assistant Director for Research, Instructional and Engagement Services in the F.D. Bluford Library at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.
jchavis@ncat.edu



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The Afterlife of Books: Repair, Rebinding, and the Ethics of Library Preservation

For much of my professional life, I have worked with books at the point where their usefulness and vulnerability meet. As a librarian, I want books to be found, handled, read, taught from, and used; as a book conservator, I also know how easily well-intentioned repair can erase evidence of use, manufacture, ownership, or care. A torn page, a detached board, a broken joint, a failed adhesive binding, a stain, an inscription, or a warped cover may all appear to be damage. Sometimes damage is simply damage, but sometimes it is evidence.

This is the complicated afterlife of books in libraries. Their care does not end once they are acquired, cataloged, and shelved, because they continue to have institutional lives shaped by use, repair, neglect, preservation, and the decisions we make about their future. They circulate, break, return, disappear, get replaced, receive repairs, move into special collections, are housed in boxes, become teaching objects,

or are withdrawn. Each stage involves decisions that may seem small in the moment but become consequential over time.

The central question is not simply, “Can this book be fixed?” A more useful question is, “What are we trying to preserve?” The answer may be the text, the original binding, evidence of ownership or use, signs of manufacture or earlier repair, or a local association that gives the copy meaning beyond its contents. It may also be the ability of a student to check out the book next week, or the long-term survival of a fragile object that should no longer circulate. Preservation begins when we recognize that these answers are not always the same.

Preservation is not one activity

In library work, *preservation* is sometimes treated as another word for *repair*, which is understandable because repair is visible. A broken book goes to a bench

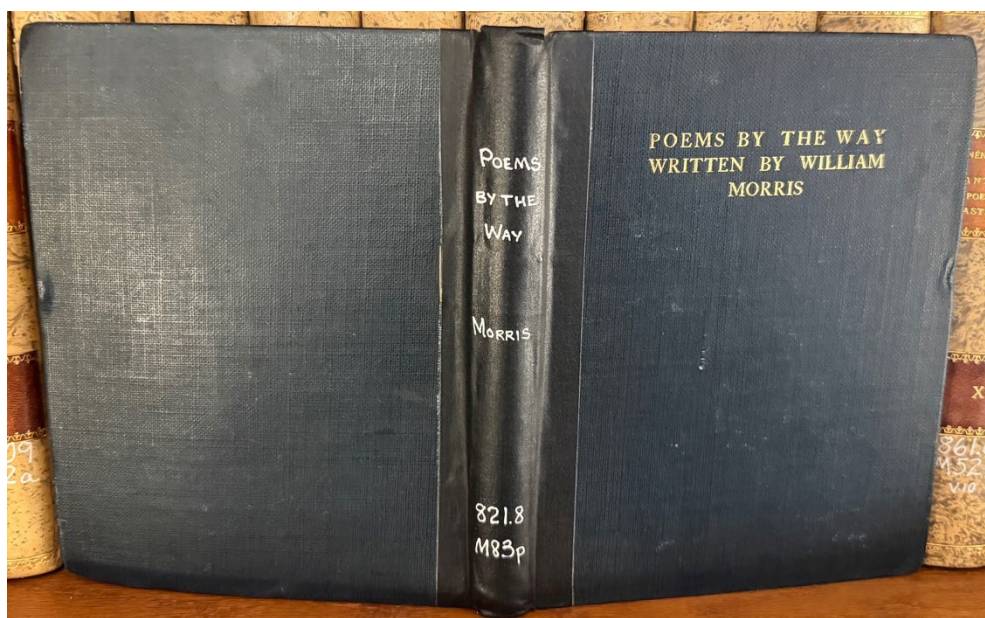


Figure 1 Crude repair with cloth tape

or a bindery and comes back apparently improved. Preservation, however, is much broader. It includes storage, handling, environmental control, disaster preparedness, binding specifications, digitization, replacement, boxing, staff training, documentation, and, at times, the deliberate choice to leave an item alone.

The American Institute for Conservation's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice places treatment within a larger "continuum of care," emphasizing preventive conservation, examination, suitable treatment, documentation, and the possibility of nonintervention when that best serves the object (American Institute for Conservation [AIC], 1994). That last point matters because nonintervention can sound like neglect, even though in conservation it may be the most careful choice. If a book can be safely handled in a box, or if its damage is stable and historically meaningful, repair may do more harm than good.

The American Library Association's Code of Ethics frames librarianship around the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information, with an obligation to ensure access for present and future generations (American Library Association [ALA], 2021). That language helps clarify why preservation is not separate from access. We preserve because collections are meant to serve people, but we also regulate use because unthinking access can destroy the very materials we hope to make available.

This tension is familiar to anyone who works with rare books, archives, or heavily-used circulating collections. Libraries are not museums, but neither are they warehouses of disposable content. They are institutions of use **and** memory, and preservation is one of the practical ways they hold those responsibilities together.

The circulating book and the ethics of usefulness

For general circulating collections, the most ethical preservation decision is often the one that keeps the book usable. A paperback with a failed adhesive spine, a standard monograph with detached boards,

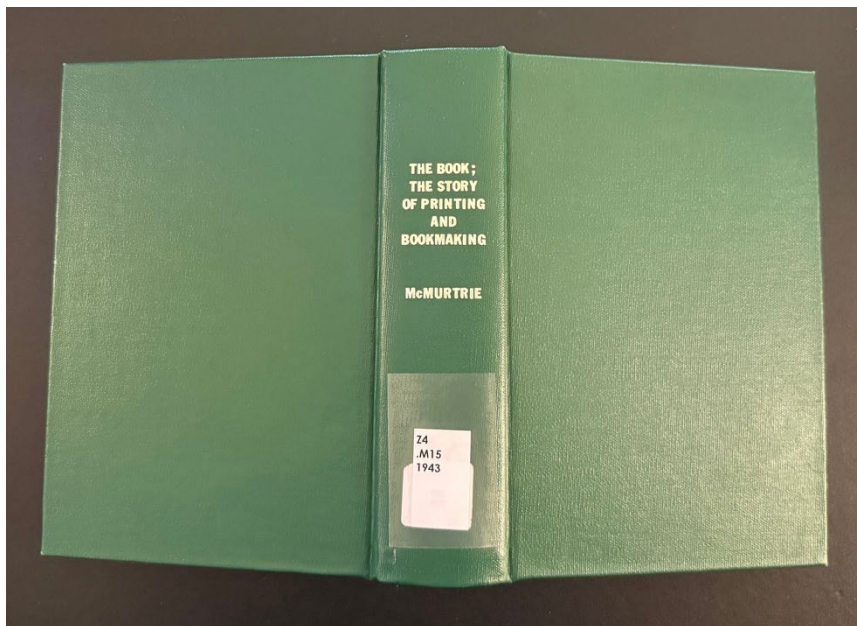


Figure 2 Rebound in library buckram cloth

or a frequently-assigned title with a broken case may not require special collections treatment. It may instead need repair, replacement, or commercial rebinding.

NEDCC's guidance on library binding is useful because it distinguishes between books valued primarily for their informational content and books with artifactual or historical significance (Northeast Document Conservation Center [NEDCC], n.d.-c). The National Information Standards Organization's library binding standard similarly addresses technical and materials specifications for first-time binding and rebinding of materials intended for library use (National Information Standards Organization [NISO], 2018). In other words, rebinding is not inherently careless; for the right book, under the right specification, it can extend the useful life of a collection and support access.

But "right book" and "right specification" are doing important work in that sentence. A general collections repair workflow still requires judgment. Is the book replaceable? Is the text block brittle? Is there a newer edition? Does the copy contain local annotations, an important inscription, or evidence of former ownership? Is it part of a donor collection? Is it being repaired because it needs repair, or because it looks untidy?

Those questions keep general collections work from becoming automatic. A circulating book does

not need to be rare to deserve thoughtful treatment, especially when poor repair can reduce usability, shorten lifespan, and create future costs. Clear criteria for replacement, repair, rebinding, and withdrawal are therefore part of preservation ethics, not merely collection maintenance.

Special collections and the danger of tidiness

The stakes change when a book has artifactual, evidentiary, or associational value. Nicholas Pickwood's essay "Determining How Best to Conserve Books in Special Collections" remains one of the clearest statements of the problem, arguing that treatment decisions must account for the historical and bibliographical value of books and warning that rebinding is not always the best course of action because it may cause significant historical and physical damage (Pickwood, 1994).

That warning should be posted in every room where damaged rare books are evaluated, because the desire to make books look neat can be very strong. A repaired spine, clean corners, and straight boards can give the reassuring impression that something has been saved, yet for some books neatness is the enemy of evidence. Old shelfmarks, bookplates, marginalia, sewing structures, decorated papers, binder's waste, stains, pasted-in clippings, and even patterns of damage can tell us how a book was made, owned, read, stored, and valued.

Pickwood asks a deceptively simple question: how much repair is absolutely necessary to do what is required? (Pickwood, 1994). That question shifts attention away from cosmetic improvement and toward purpose. If the goal is safe handling, a fitted enclosure and limited stabilization may be enough. If the goal is exhibition, a cradle, page-opening restriction, and careful monitoring may matter more than treatment. If the goal is teaching, supervised use and handling instruction may preserve more evidence than an invasive repair.

In special collections, damage does not automatically create a mandate for treatment; it creates a need for assessment. Does the damage threaten the survival of the book? Does it make the book unsafe to handle? Can the existing structure be supported without taking the book apart? How much original

material can be retained? Can the book be read safely without erasing the marks that make it meaningful? These are not only technical questions. They are curatorial, historical, and ethical questions as well.



Figure 3 Custom four-flap phase box enclosure

Housing is treatment

One of the most important lessons in preservation is that an archival enclosure is not an admission of defeat. Housing is treatment, and a custom enclosure, phase box, wrapper, folder, or support can reduce abrasion, dust, light exposure, distortion, and handling damage without altering the book itself. For fragile or significant bindings, housing may be the most respectful intervention available.

This is especially important for libraries with limited conservation budgets. Not every institution can support item-level conservation treatment, and not every item needs it, but many institutions can dramatically improve preservation through better shelving, protective enclosures, book supports, and handling procedures. NEDCC's storage and handling guidance emphasizes appropriate shelving, protective enclosures, and careful handling for books and artifacts on paper (NEDCC, n.d.-a). These interventions may not be glamorous, but they are powerful.

Storage decisions also influence whether treatment becomes necessary at all. A large book stored upright without support may eventually need repair because gravity has done what use did not. A fragile volume shelved between heavier books may suffer abrasion and board damage, while a book displayed open without adequate support may develop strain at the spine and joints. A rare pamphlet housed loose on a shelf may be damaged simply because no one recognized how vulnerable it was.

Housing is also democratic in a practical sense because it allows smaller institutions to make preservation progress without waiting for perfect funding. A box does not solve every problem, but it buys time, and in libraries, time is often one of the most valuable preservation tools we have.

Preventive care, the unglamorous infrastructure

Preventive preservation rarely attracts the same attention as conservation treatment, yet it usually does more good. Stable temperature and relative humidity, clean storage areas, pest monitoring, disaster planning, proper shelving, light control, and staff training protect whole collections rather than individual items. AIC identifies preventive conservation as a critical means of promoting long-term preservation, including appropriate conditions for storage and exhibition and proper procedures for handling, packing, and transport (AIC, 1994).

This is where preservation becomes a matter of infrastructure. The repaired book is only one part of the equation, alongside the HVAC system, the roof, the collections storage plan, the disaster supplies, the shelf spacing, the reading room procedures, the exhibit schedule, and the staff member who notices a leak before it reaches the stacks. It is also the written policy that helps future staff understand why one book was boxed, another rebound, another digitized, and another withdrawn.

The Library of Congress' emergency management guidance makes this point clearly. Preparedness includes continuity planning, disaster services, exercises, current information, and knowing what to do in an emergency, while response and recovery depend on informed, calm, and timely action that stabilizes collections (Library of Congress, n.d.-b).

In an emergency, preservation is not a sentimental attachment to old things. It is logistics, training, supplies, and decision-making under pressure.

Anyone who has dealt with wet books, mold, pests, brittle paper, or failing bindings knows that preservation is often most visible when something has gone wrong. The better goal is for preservation to remain nearly invisible because systems are working: the roof holds, the box fits, the shelf supports the book, staff know whom to call, exhibit light levels are controlled, and the book returns safely to storage after use. Infrastructure succeeds, in part, by not becoming a crisis.

Digitization, surrogates, and the original object

Digitization is often described as a preservation strategy, and in many cases it can be one. A digital surrogate can reduce handling of fragile originals, broaden access, support teaching, and make materials discoverable beyond the reading room. For brittle or heavily used materials, digitization may be one of the best ways to preserve informational access while reducing physical risk.

Yet digitization does not preserve everything. It can capture text, images, and some visual features of binding and use, but it cannot fully preserve structure, weight, texture, opening characteristics, paper behavior, sewing, smell, or three-dimensional evidence. Nor does a digital copy eliminate the need to preserve the original when the original has artifactual value.

The Library of Congress' mass deacidification program shows how preservation decisions often involve careful selection rather than blanket treatment. The program excluded materials already available or scheduled for microform or digital format, duplicates, and volumes too brittle or structurally compromised for treatment, while focusing on acidic materials that were central to institutional collecting priorities and physically sound enough to undergo the process (Library of Congress, n.d.-a). That selection logic is instructive because preservation is not simply doing everything possible to every title. It is matching method to material, mission, risk, and future use.

In local libraries, the equivalent decision may be less technical but just as important. Should a brittle local history volume be digitized, boxed, repaired, replaced, or moved to special collections? Should a circulating copy be withdrawn if a stable electronic version exists? Should a heavily annotated copy be retained even if the text is widely available elsewhere? These decisions require both collection knowledge and preservation judgment.

Documentation as institutional memory

One of the quietest but most important preservation practices is documentation. AIC requires permanent records of examination, sampling, investigation, and treatment, while Pickwoad similarly emphasizes the need for written reports that explain what was done, what materials were used, and what alterations were made (AIC, 1994; Pickwoad, 1994). Documentation matters because conservation decisions are rarely final, and future librarians, archivists, conservators, faculty, students, and researchers will inherit their consequences.

In practical terms, documentation does not always need to be elaborate. A major conservation treatment requires a formal report and images, while a simple circulating repair may require only a local note or workflow record. A decision to box rather than repair may be documented in an item record, spreadsheet, or treatment log. What matters is that the decision remains visible.

Without documentation, preservation suffers from a kind of institutional amnesia. Future staff may not know whether a binding is original, whether a board was reattached, whether a stain was tested, whether a book was boxed because treatment was deferred, or whether a withdrawn copy contained evidence worth noting. Documentation turns preservation from an isolated action into institutional memory.

It also documents ethical restraint. If no treatment was performed because nonintervention best served the object, that decision should be recorded; otherwise, the next person may see only an unrepaired book and mistake restraint for neglect.

What the afterlife of books asks of us

The afterlife of books asks libraries to resist simple categories. A damaged book is not always a preserva-

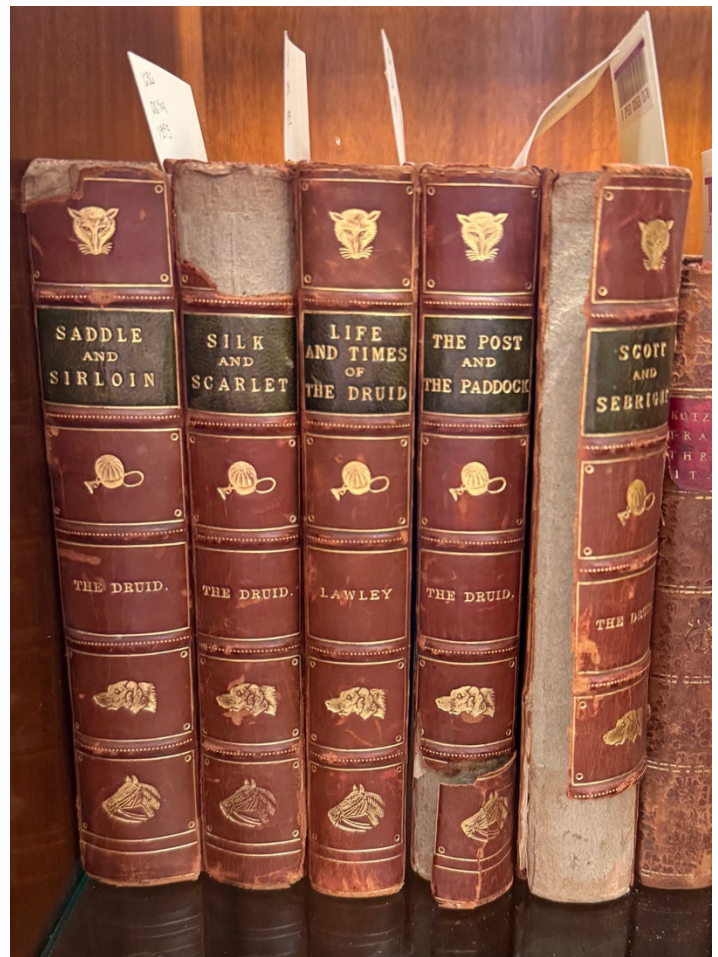


Figure 4 Untreated books with brittle spines awaiting treatment

tion failure, and a repaired book is not always a preservation success. A box can be a treatment; a withdrawal can be responsible; and a digital surrogate can expand access while still leaving important evidence behind. A circulating rebinding can serve the mission beautifully, just as a special collections rebinding can destroy what made the book worth keeping.

For those of us who work with collections, the practical challenge is to build systems that make good decisions more likely. That means training staff to recognize when an item needs special review, separating general collections repair from rare book conservation, writing better bindery specifications, and budgeting for boxes, shelves, and disaster supplies rather than only for dramatic treatments. It also means documenting decisions and accepting that preservation is not always visually satisfying.

Most of all, it means remembering that libraries preserve books because books continue to work on us and for us. They carry texts, but they also carry use, ownership, craft, neglect, care, institutional choices,

and human touch. Their afterlives are not accidental; they are shaped by policies, budgets, habits, training, and ethics.

In a previous Lagniappe article, I argued that libraries function as democratic infrastructure when they move information, sustain access, coordinate public work, and preserve evidence. Preservation belongs in that same conversation. It is one of the quieter forms of that infrastructure, keeping collections usable, evidence available, and future readers from inheriting only the results of our convenience.

The work is often ordinary: a box made, a hinge mended, a book left alone, a disaster plan updated, a note added to a record, a staff member trained to cradle a volume instead of forcing it flat. But ordinary work is how collections survive. Preservation is

not only what we do after books break; it is how we decide what kind of future they should have.

Author Notes

Column editor Gerald Ward is Assistant Director and Head of Archives & Special Collections at High Point University Libraries.
gward@highpoint.edu

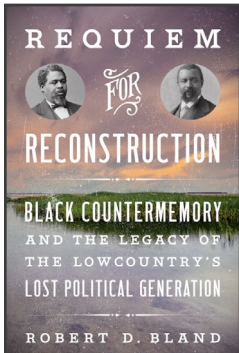


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North Carolina Books

Compiled by Laura Mangum



Requiem for Reconstruction

Robert D. Bland.
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2026. 260 pp. \$34.95.
ISBN 9781469691879

Robert D. Bland, Assistant Professor of History and Africana Studies at the University of Tennessee, is the latest academic to put a fresh set of eyes on a vital aspect of Reconstruction history that had become a niche subject because of apathy and the passage of time. Perhaps needless to say, most every foray into this history feels necessary and relevant in our region and in our time, and this work is no exception. *Requiem for Reconstruction* is Dr. Bland's first book publication, but he has written extensively on Reconstruction, the Civil War Era, and Black history and culture more broadly for over a decade. These writings range from academic works like "A Grim Memorial of Its Thorough Work of Devastation and Desolation: Race, Class, and Memory, in the Aftermath of the 1893 Sea Island Hurricane," which appeared in the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, to book reviews like that of Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Stony the Road* in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, to essays appearing in online publications such as *Muster: The Blog of the Journal of the Civil War Era*.

Focusing on the South Carolina Lowcountry with an emphasis on Beaufort and the surrounding Sea Islands, Bland divides his narrative into three parts: Part I, The Making of the Lowcountry's Rival Political World; Part II, The Postbellum Public Sphere and the Production of Black Countermemory; and Part III, The Afterlife of the Reconstruction Generation. Benefiting from the rich context added by extensive primary source research, including but not limited to archival manuscripts, contemporary (often Black)

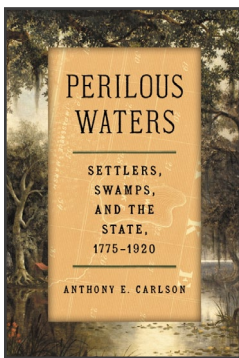
newspaper accounts, and government documents, as well as a thorough assimilation of existing secondary research, Bland's telling is fresh, clear, and calls to mind connections to present-day sociopolitical phenomena. For instance, Chapter 3 concludes Part I with an examination of how reactionary white supremacist "Redeemers" used gerrymandering tactics to mute Black political power and the "rival geography" that had been built by what Bland terms the Reconstruction Generation. Additionally, discussions of reactionary hostility toward federal government relief going to Black citizens following an 1893 Sea Islands hurricane and an overarching insistence in the early 20th century on agricultural and trade education at the expense of a broader curriculum do ring a bell.

The text does not shy away from tackling some of the more complicated aspects of this history, such as the internecine political conflicts within the era's Republican Party among groups such as northern white former abolitionists, free Black northerners who had relocated to the Lowcountry following the war, and the local people who had recently been freed from slavery (after all, the central focus of this historical account). Much of Part II is devoted to a study of Robert Smalls's life and legacy. Smalls, the son of enslaved Gullah people from Beaufort, first gained notoriety by commandeering a Confederate gunboat he was piloting and sailing it safely across Union lines. Later, he became a prominent politician, eventually rising to become a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, and became emblematic of vastly different things for progressives and Black Southerners on one hand, and reactionaries and revanchists on the other. The text concludes with a look at how Black researchers and historians used primary source data to fight for an accurate representation of this time and place in the face of the Lost Cause myth and post-war Reunification.

This book is suitable for academic libraries, especially those serving colleges or universities that are engaging in work around history and memory. The

chapter notes, bibliography, and index are all extensive, and the bibliography is subdivided into sections for each type of source cited (primary source manuscripts, secondary source academic texts, and so on). Useful maps and interesting contemporary images are interspersed throughout. The book is also suitable for public libraries, as it is accessible enough to provide an educational resource for a wide variety of readers who may be interested in learning about the history of their family, community, and country.

Ben Spanier
Elon University



***Perilous Waters: Settlers,
Swamps, and the State,
1775-1920***

Anthony E. Carlson.
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
Press, 2026. 282 pp. \$29.95.
ISBN 9781469694801

Throughout history, swamps and other wetlands have inspired fear, distrust, frustration, and respect. In *Perilous Waters: Settlers, Swamps and the State, 1775-1920*, Anthony E. Carlson explores the relationships between swamps, racial groups, economic ventures, and power in the United States. Carlson is professor of history at the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). SAMS is part of a US Army Command and General Staff College. Previously published titles authored by Carlson, including *The Other Face of Battle: America's Forgotten Wars and the Experience of Combat*, *Vanguard of Valor: Small Unit Actions in Afghanistan*, and *Vanguard of Valor Volume II: Small Unit Actions in Afghanistan*, have focused on military aspects of American history.

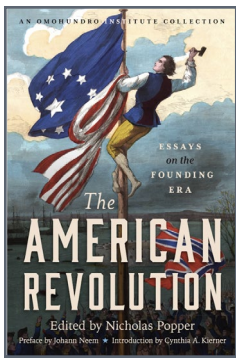
Perilous Waters is thoroughly researched and features an introduction by the author, notes, a bibliography, and an index. The introduction helps the reader to understand the context of the work and emphasizes the role of drainage in relation to swamps. The notes, bibliography, and index are help-

ful for readers who want to locate topics in the text or determine what evidence the author uses to arrive at conclusions. In this work, Carlson objectively draws from primary sources, including government documents, scholarly books, articles, and unpublished works. Relevant illustrations meaningfully add to the text and include photographs, diagrams, and maps. The book is information-rich, and a helpful feature of the monograph is its clear conclusions recapitulating the main ideas for each chapter.

Over the course of the text, Carlson emphasizes how the drainage of wetlands, often for agricultural purposes, has often relied upon government resources and authority. The text presents the drainage of swamps as much more than an engineering project. From the Revolutionary era to the beginning of the 20th century, large, governmentally-supported drainage projects have affected the relationships of people to the land, influenced politics, and involved social processes. Topics addressed in the monograph include racism, colonialism, environmentalism, and federalism, all in relation to swampland. Carlson treats the historical experiences of various groups with sensitivity. He discusses how swamps were used as safe havens by resilient, formerly enslaved African Americans. He also explores how Indigenous Americans' relationships with swamps transformed, along with the land, as settlers favored cultivation over harvesting native species of flora and fauna.

This title will appeal to readers interested in American history, environmental history, agriculture, and public policy, and would be a valuable addition to academic and public library collections. *Perilous Waters* will be particularly appreciated by historians and history students interested in the intersection of America's people, policies, and land. Readers interested in North Carolina will find the state's wetlands, particularly the Dismal Swamp and coastal region, represented throughout the book's text and illustrations. Overall, *Perilous Waters* provides readers with a geographically broader historical context of swamps in the United States beyond the South.

Laura Bright
East Carolina University



The American Revolution: Essays on the Founding Era

Nicholas Popper, ed.
Williamsburg, VA: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2026. 296 pp. \$29.95.
ISBN 9781469695129.

The American Revolution: Essays on the Founding Era is a timely collection of essays published to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the Revolution. Drawing on more than fifty years of scholarship, the volume brings together works by eighteen leading historians, adapted from previously published books and from articles in the *William and Mary Quarterly*. The collection aims to make decades of historical research accessible to a twenty-first-century audience while also demonstrating how much more complicated this era becomes when viewed through the experiences of a diverse range of people. Rather than repeating a familiar narrative centered on elite founders and military victory, it presents the Revolution as a contested, disruptive, and far-reaching event shaped by class, gender, race, slavery, religion, empire, Native diplomacy, and other factors.

One of the collection's greatest strengths is its inclusion of essays that demonstrate that political elites alone did not make the Revolution. Alfred F. Young's essay on George Robert Twelves Hewes shows how ordinary working people became politicized through direct encounters with British authority and participated in events such as the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party. Linda K. Kerber similarly demonstrates that women, despite having no formal political power, actively participated in the patriot cause through petitions, domestic labor, boycotts, and other forms of wartime support. She highlights examples such as the Edenton Tea Party of 1774 in North Carolina. These essays recover the political significance of people often omitted from traditional narratives and show that the Revolution reached deeply into everyday life.

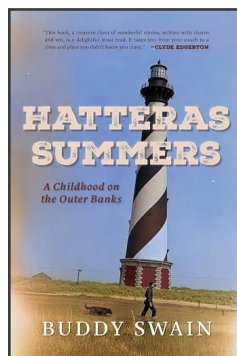
Other essays expand the scope even further by revealing the Revolution's imperial and global dimensions. Woody Holton argues that support for inde-

pendence in Virginia was shaped by struggles over western land, British efforts to limit expansion, and Native diplomacy, making the Revolution as much a conflict over territory as over political rights. Katherine Carté shows how patriot leaders drew on networks of imperial Protestantism and long-standing traditions of public religion to build unity, legitimize rebellion, and support the new government. Maya Jasanoff's essay on Loyalists reminds readers that independence also produced migration throughout the British Empire and reshaped imperial identities, while Manisha Sinha highlights the ways African Americans exposed the contradiction between liberty and slavery and helped lay the groundwork for the abolition movement.

The essays in this collection make a compelling case for understanding the American Revolution as more than the founding of a new nation. The volume is suited to academic libraries and, to a lesser extent, public libraries. Its accessibility is enhanced by the abridgment of the essays and the inclusion of limited citations at the end of each one. Additional features such as suggestions for further reading, brief author biographies, illustrations, and an index further support its use. Even so, these remain scholarly essays, and readers will benefit from some prior knowledge of the Revolution.

Linda Jacobson

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Hatteras Summers: A Childhood on the Outer Banks

Buddy Swain.
Durham: Blair, 2026.
146 pp. \$17.95.
ISBN 978-1-971807-03-4

When Hatteras Island is mentioned most people think of the numerous tall houses that line both sides of the island, the two-lane road that winds through the towns, or the fishermen who visit the island's point each fall. In *Hatteras Summers*, read-

ers are transported back in time to a Hatteras Island before it became a destination vacation spot. In this delightful book about the island in the 1940s and 1950s, author Buddy Swain shares his childhood memories and experiences during the summers he spent with his grandparents, who were inhabitants of the village.

Swain's memoir is comprised of vignettes of many fond memories from the summers he spent with his maternal grandparents. The chapters share the theme of exploring different elements and experiences the island offered, with titles such as "Going Clamming," "Going to the Landing," and "Going to Dinner." Each chapter includes intricate details about the island's landscape, island life, and locals, so that readers can vicariously experience the island during this period of history. Swain provides balance in his storytelling by including fun, entertaining anecdotes, as well as earnest portrayals of the islanders and the realities of life. He handles each depiction, whether humorous or solemn, with compassion and respect. Readers will appreciate the honesty of his approach. The memoir is also relatable, providing both coming-of-age experiences, like his first time holding hands in the chapter "Going to the Picture Show," and universal experience of bereavement following the loss of dear family members in the chapter "Going to Heaven."

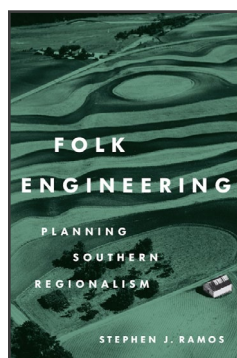
Hatteras Summers is accompanied by black-and-white photos and illustrations to help readers visualize how vastly different the island was in the mid-20th century. These photos and illustrations support the author's stories and expand readers' understanding of Swain's vignettes. The photos and illustrations are supplied by the author's personal collection, other local families' collections, and contributions from entities such as the Outer Banks History Center.

Swain is a retired educator and North Carolina native who currently resides on Hatteras Island, beside the house that was his grandparents'. He holds a B.A. in Science Education from UNC-Chapel Hill and a Master's in Botany from Duke University. Swain has taught in several North Carolina educational settings, including Craven Community College and East Carolina University. This is his second book. His first book, *Summers by the Sea: Echoes of a Hatteras Childhood*, was initially self-published, with only a

small distribution at the local bookstore on Hatteras Island. Due to the book's local success, Swain was approached about writing an updated, expanded edition, which evolved into *Hatteras Summers*.

This book is well suited for public libraries, as it offers both leisure reading and a historical account based on personal experience. Patrons will enjoy this visit back in time to a Hatteras Island that most cannot imagine existed before the boom of tourism and vacationing. Academic libraries with a focus on North Carolina history will find this book a valuable addition as it provides researchers with anecdotal evidence about the history of a notable North Carolina location, along with photos and illustrations for further insight and support.

Laura Mangum
East Carolina University



Folk Engineering: Planning Southern Regionalism

Stephen J. Ramos.
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2025. 279 pp. \$29.95.
ISBN 978-1-4696-9011-7.

At the turn of the twentieth century, intellectuals and policymakers in the southeastern United States continued a conflict between traditional agrarianism and industrialism that had begun during post-war reconstruction. In his book *Folk Engineering: Planning Southern Regionalism*, author Stephen J. Ramos looks at social engineering attempts to improve conditions for the Jim Crow-era South, which would bring large New Deal projects to the region. As the recent vice president-elect of the International Planning History Society, Ramos has proven to be an authority in the history of regional planning. After earning his Doctor of Design from Harvard University, Ramos served on the faculty of the College of Environment and Design at the University of Georgia from 2011 until his passing in January of 2026. Ramos authored a previous book, *Dubai*

Amplified: The Engineering of a Port Geography, which was adapted from his dissertation. He also co-edited *Infrastructure Sustainability and Design* and was the editor-in-chief for the *Regions & Cities* book series.

In a fairly robust introduction, Ramos focuses on regionalism in the historical context of addressing socioeconomic issues that came out of the Postbellum South. Here, he introduces Howard W. Odum, a social scientist who formed the Institute for Research in Social Science (IRSS) at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Ramos dedicates the first chapter to a roundtable event that took place on July 6, 1931, at the University of Virginia's Institute for Public Affairs. At this event, leaders of various social science fields, including members of the New York based Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) and the IRSS, came together to discuss how to tackle large interstate regional issues. One speaker of note was the then-governor of NY, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). This meeting became the foundation of a network of thinkers instrumental in advancing FDR's New Deal policies.

In the second chapter, the author rewinds and takes the reader through the early education and career of Odum, and the circumstances that led to the founding of the IRSS at UNC. Ramos uses this chapter to outline the institute's rise as a leader in quantitative social research, through the work of Odum's faculty peers and graduate students. Subsequent chapters reveal the theoretical context in which social science existed in the first half of the twentieth century. The difficulties between social science and natural science theory and practice are explained through the views and critiques of Odum's work by his contemporaries, much of which addresses his studies in race relations. These chapters succeed in reminding current researchers that early, turn-of-the-century social science was still rooted in Eurocentric theory, within the context of maintaining the status quo of white supremacy.

While most of this book is dedicated to the important task of creating the context in which regionalism was developed, Ramos finally gets to the heart of the matter in the last two chapters, with a more in-depth account of the evolution of regionalism within planning. This starts with Odum's classification of the regions of the United States and continues with critiques of various regional studies. The author expands on the implementation of so-

cial planning endeavors on the national level, while contrasting various modes of planning, revealing the incompatibility that can often occur between regionalism and planning at the state level.

Even though *Folk Engineering* is a historical account of southern regional studies, the author is not overtly critical of much of the ideology presented, especially the lack of a push for desegregation. Instead, he leaves this to the critiques of Odum's contemporaries, which may be a more powerful statement. Dense with often unexplained sociological concepts, this work is intended for a more scholarly audience. Aside from an index and a robust bibliography, this book includes forty pages of notes, which due to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, will be an invaluable resource for researchers who may lack either a sociological or planning foundation. This book is recommended for any academic library with sociology, planning, or Southern U.S. history collections.

James Brinkley
East Carolina University



The Curious Case of the Midnight Specter

Moriah Chavis.
Twenty Hills Publishing, 2025.
303 pp. \$16.99.
ISBN 9781956499391

Mystery entangles with a little fantasy and magic in the historic setting of Moriah Chavis' *The Curious Case of the Midnight Specter*. Set in late 19th century England, the novel opens with a conversation between Life and Death as they hover around the young adult heroine, Leighanna Pauley. She is battling consumption and is being tugged by both Life and Death, but in an instant, Death must depart because a murder has taken place nearby. Life knits Leighanna back together, but her brush with death leaves Leighanna with a purpose. She wakes with more determination and a bit of supernatural power that increases her sleuthing drive. She is determined to solve the horrific murder of a fellow socialite that took place while her own life hung in the balance be-

cause she feels the authorities aren't taking the investigation seriously enough. After much pleading, she enlists the help of her best friend as well as the daughter of the police commissioner. With her friends' help and while attending society events, Leighanna surreptitiously pursues leads to uncover the true murderer. Throughout the story, Leighanna is also accompanied by Life and Death, the two supernatural characters in the book that have not lost their connection to her since her illness. They each step into the story from time to time in harrowing situations and their presence makes the reader wonder which outcome will take place, life or death. Through Leighanna's alliances with each of these characters and her spunk and determination, she works to find the killer walking their streets. Is the infamous Jack the Ripper of the time responsible? Or is it someone closer to them all? Leighanna's investigation and tactics take the reader on a journey through the late 19th century English social life of a young lady mixed with the excitement and dangerous situations of bringing a murderer to light. Leighanna thinks and sometimes acts outside of the social mores for young women of her time, and it is this bit of feminism, toughness, and sense of justice that makes her a very likable character for today's young adult reader.

Told in third person, Chavis's intriguing tale appeals to mystery lovers as well as those who enjoy historical fiction and a bit of fantasy. The plot takes some twists and turns and includes some narrow escapes. Leighanna is a very believable character who, like many young women both then and today, find themselves in situations and roles defined by society's perceptions of what women should be. Leighanna gracefully puts a dent in some of those perceptions. The main characters in the novel are in their late teens to early twenties. *The Curious Case of the Midnight Specter* is Chavis' second published novel. Her first was the young adult fantasy *Heart of the Sea*. Additionally, she has published short stories.

Chavis is a North Carolina school library media coordinator and is passionate about engaging young adult readers in suitable and captivating stories. This book is recommended for high school libraries and public libraries with young adult sections. Even though the characters are a little older, the content is appropriate for middle schools as well. It's a refresh-

ing read that will pique the interests of patrons and keep them turning the pages.

Tracey Patterson, MLIS
Perma-Bound Consultant



Within Our Power: The Story of the Edenton Ladies' Tea Party

Sally M. Walker. Illustrated by Jonathan D. Voss.
Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History. 2024. 32 pp. \$18.00.
ISBN 9780865265066

You know about the Boston Tea Party of 1773, where barrels of British tea were famously dumped overboard into Boston Harbor, but how much do you know about the revolutionary women of Edenton and their act of protest known today as the Edenton Tea Party?

Set in Edenton, North Carolina, in 1774, this narrative nonfiction picture book for young readers fills a gap in quality juvenile literature on the topic and offers a timely text for instructional units centered on the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. With multiple freely available online educational resources and opportunities for field experiences in Edenton, NC, *Within Our Power* presents an engaging story to launch learning about the declaration that became known as the Edenton Tea Party, an often-overlooked event in North Carolina history. For older readers, the story offers a springboard for deeper exploration of such contemporary themes as political protest, civic engagement, and who gets to participate. For all readers, *Within Our Power* is a fine book packed with historical facts and a roll call of who's who in colonial Edenton.

The narrative begins by introducing a group of women living in "Edenton, Chowan County, the Colony of North Carolina," in the summer of 1774. The women often gathered at the home of Penelope Barker, whose husband was away serving as North Carolina's colonial agent to London. While sipping British tea and talking about popular topics of the

day, the women's conversation became more fervently focused on the unfair treatment of the American colonies by Great Britain's Parliament. Specifically, unrest was afoot regarding the colonists' lack of representation caused by how their tax money was spent, widely criticized as "taxation without representation." As the group of Edenton women learned more through newspapers and word of mouth, they became determined to act and make their voices heard. They drafted a statement announcing their participation in the widespread colonial boycott of British imports such as tea and cloth. Rather than remain anonymous, fifty-one women signed their names to the declaration. The document was printed in the *Virginia Gazette* newspaper on November 3, 1774, and in January 1775, it appeared in London's *Morning Chronicle*. The resolution with the signatures of women protesters sparked controversy at the time and is now regarded as one of the earliest examples of political activism by women in the American colonies.

Within Our Power is the most recent addition to Sally M. Walker's impressive catalog of more than sixty nonfiction books for children and young adults. Her *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine* won the 2006 Robert F. Sibert Award for best informational book, and a dozen of her titles have been award finalists or have appeared on booklists such as the Orbis Pictus Commended list. Clearly well-researched and providing a succinct overview of the political climate in 1774, this book offers insight into the Edenton women's daily lives to paint a striking backdrop for their act of political protest. Walker provides instructive background information and chronicles such teachable topics as the East India Company, the

Boston Tea Party, and North Carolina's First Provincial Assembly in New Bern. Jonathan D. Voss' illustrations reflect the colonial period with textured, sketch-like scenes in subdued hues and provide ample historical and cultural details to extend learning and discussion. The Author's Note addresses important questions left out of the narrative such as the status of African and Native American people in colonial America. A timeline of events completes the volume's usefulness for both the classroom and the casual reader.

This title is highly recommended for all public and school libraries, and it offers an important perspective for North Carolina collections and curriculum materials collections in academic libraries. With a recommended age range of Grades 3-5, *Within Our Power* is also suitable for use in middle grades. The following open educational resources make great companions to the volume for classroom instruction or for reading at home:

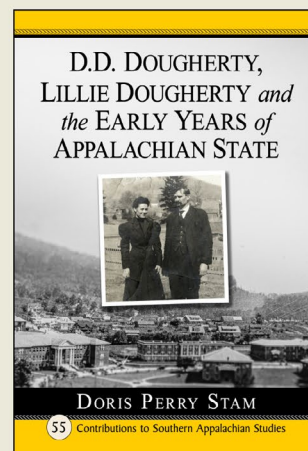
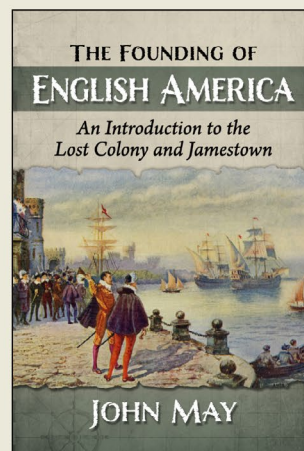
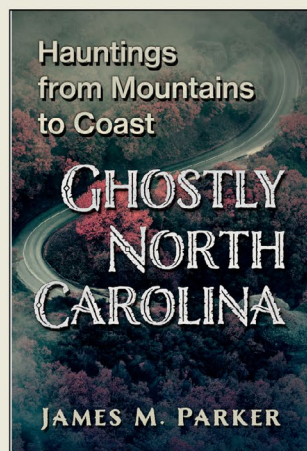
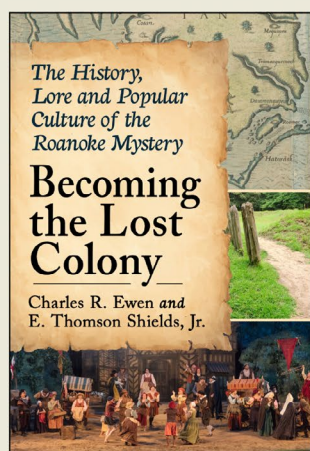
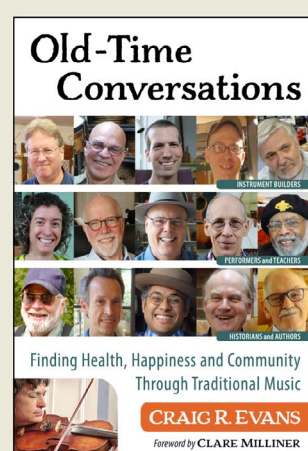
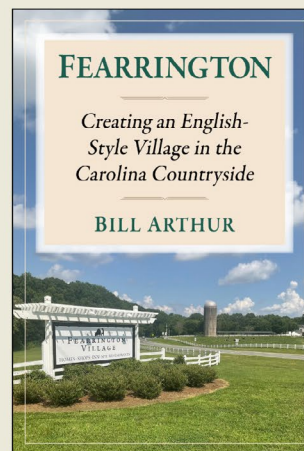
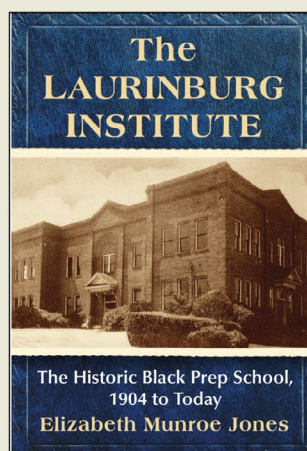
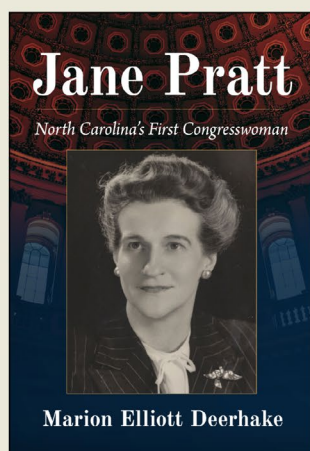
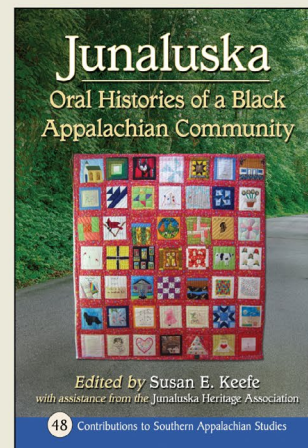
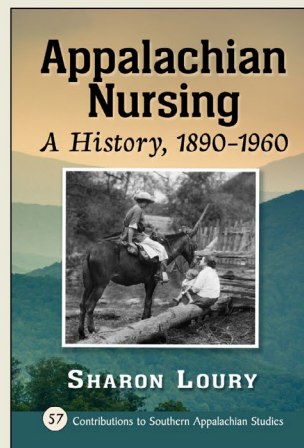
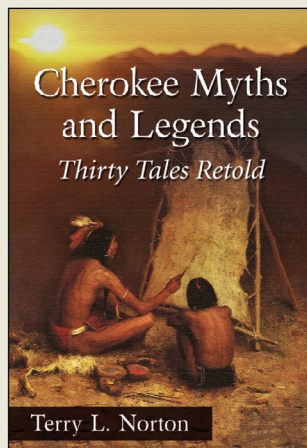
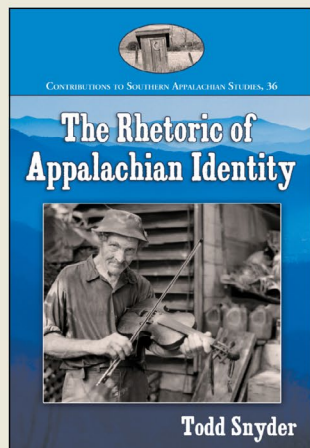
- [Edenton Tea Party Resolves of 1774](#), NC Department of Archives and History
- [Within Our Power: The Story of the Edenton Ladies' Tea Party: Learning Activities and Lesson Ideas](#), NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
- [K-12 Primary Source Instruction: America 250 Resources](#), East Carolina University
- [Visit Historic Edenton](#), North Carolina Historic Sites

Charlene Loope
East Carolina University

More North Carolina Literature

Looking for more works by North Carolinians or set in our state? You can always search [goodreads](#), [LibraryThing](#), or the catalog of your local library. Don't forget to browse your favorite bookstore! UNC Libraries has also created a [Literary Map of North Carolina](#) to help identify authors from your county.

If your interest in North Carolina is more general, the North Carolina Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill frequently updates their blog with new acquisitions to the collection and other posts related to the history, literature, and culture of our state. Connect to the [NC Miscellany](#) here.



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David Rachlin, ACRL-NC, STEM-
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Bluford Library, NC A&T
djrachlin@ncat.edu

Carlos Grooms, REMCo
Bluford Library, NC A&T
cgrooms@ncat.edu

Roz Tedford, ACRL-NC
Wake Forest University
tedforrl@wfu.edu

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