

Buffalo and Erie County Public Library

We spoke to Amy Pickard, Rare Book Librarian at the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library's Central Library. Ms. Pickard has been with Buffalo and Erie County Public Library since 1999.

Library Dimensions and Background

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library system currently consists of 38 libraries, down from 52 in previous years. The library's \$22 million proposed budget for 2008 reflects restorations to its budget, which in recent years had suffered major cutbacks.

Ms. Pickard's library, the Central Library, encompasses more than 400,000 square feet of floor space and includes two non-circulating special collections, the Grosvenor Room and the Mark Twain Room; the Mark Twain Room is regarded also as permanent exhibit space. The building also includes rotating exhibit space, meeting rooms, a 324-capacity auditorium, and a café.

Although staff assignments can change depending on demand, the Grosvenor Room shares two full-time librarians and two part-time librarians with the general reference desk, while the rare book room inside the Grosvenor Room has one full-time and one part-time librarian on staff. "We're not completely dedicated to the rare book room," Ms. Pickard said. "We straddle, in a way. We have a reference desk schedule, and then as greater demands arrive, there may be staff scheduling, reshuffling."

The viewing room, for viewing of items from the closed stacks, accommodates two people. If demand exceeds that, the librarians fall back on scheduling appointments, which is the preferred way for patrons to use the resources of the Grosvenor Room.

Trends in Rare Book & Documents Special Collections Management

Collection scope and background

The Grosvenor Room is thematically focused on genealogy, rare books, and music. The Rare Books Collection encompasses 100 local atlases from the mid- to late 19th century and early Americana such as anti-slavery literature, Shaker literature and Bibles, and local newspapers and imprints dating to the pre-Civil War era. The room also includes Milestones of Science, a collection of 196 printed works of science and technology, and one of the first rare book collections in U.S. public library history.

The Mark Twain Room is a special exhibition room and home to the handwritten manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain, who worked briefly in Buffalo, intended to donate all of the *Huckleberry Finn* manuscript to the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, but he believed the first half to have been lost by the printer. However, more than a hundred years later, the first half of the manuscript turned up in California, in the trunk of a Buffalo library curator who died with it in his possession. The two halves of the manuscript were reunited in 1992. Rounding out the collection are first edition and foreign language editions of Mark Twain's works, as well as a mantel salvaged from Twain's Buffalo home and Norman Rockwell prints from the 1940 cover of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Acquisitions and development

While the Grosvenor Room has a small budget for current publications, mostly for the genealogy collection, the Rare Books Collection relies strictly on donations for acquisitions. In years past, however, some items were purchased by the Library Foundation of Buffalo and Erie County, an independent not-for-profit organization. "They have since changed focus and location," Ms. Pickard said, "But they still offer funding that the library can apply for and be granted through the County."

Trends in Rare Book & Documents Special Collections Management

Pre-screening procedures and security

Although non-circulating, the Grosvenor Room collection is mostly open stacks. “The only things we have in closed stacks are because of condition; they’re too fragile, or they may still be one-of-a-kind items that may not fit the ‘rare books collection’ criteria,” Ms. Pickard said, “Genealogy manuscripts, for example.”

The Grosvenor Room requires patrons to sign the visitors’ register, and patrons must check tote bags and other large containers while using the collection. Librarians also monitor patrons.

“When they need to use something from the rare book collection, it is more formalized and a little stricter,” Ms. Pickard said. To use the closed stack items, including the Rare Book Collection, patrons sign the register requiring their full address, phone number and documentation of the item they wish to see. Librarians check the written information against photo identification but do not photocopy it or otherwise retain it for their records. Librarians then locate and retrieve the item in the closed stacks. Patrons are led to a viewing room, equipped with two security cameras. “We sit at a table facing them while they are using the material,” Ms. Pickard said. Depending on the delicacy of the item, librarians may require patrons to use gloves. “Clean hands are safer than gloves,” Ms. Pickard added.

“Relative to other collections in the library, we are definitely more secure than other areas in the library. And I think that’s necessary,” Ms. Pickard said. On the subject of mutilation or damage, Ms. Pickard commented, “Obviously we’ll know if a person tears a page out, facing them and having full view of what they’re doing. Assigning responsibility would be fairly clear in that situation, but a person using something in the Grosvenor Room who has signed in and checked their bag – someone would have to witness careless damage.” In addition to librarians and staff, Ms. Pickard told us, the library has senior pages working on a part-time basis, helping patrons with microfilm, computer issues, photocopiers, and dispensing New York state records on microfiche. “There are people around to witness something, but you can’t patrol the stacks all the time,” Ms. Pickard

Trends in Rare Book & Documents Special Collections Management

said. "We also have onsite security and security officers who patrol the Grosvenor Room. But the clientele of the Grosvenor room is less problematic than those who use other rooms," she added.

Security officers don't tend to patrol the Grosvenor room any more frequently than others. There are usually six on duty at one time, roaming throughout the building. Two stations are manned at all times (entrance/exit) and there are roaming officers.

"People resort to extraordinary measures to take with them what they would like," Ms. Pickard said. Fortunately, they have not encountered that in the last couple of years in the rare book room. About a year ago, however, pages were found to be torn out of items in the Buffalo Collection, a local collection full of irreplaceable and unique local items.

Publicity and exhibits

Outside of the Grosvenor Room, the library has horizontal display cases, "typically used for music-related displays," Ms. Pickard said. The library also has a rare book display room. "We change both displays about every three months or so." Items in rare book storage are sometimes rotated out specifically for exhibits, either because there is limited shelf space or the items are simply too fragile to be kept out all the time: "Some things you would not want to expose to light."

Ms. Pickard publicizes the Collection through community outreach. They simply lack the manpower and time, however, to go out and do it as much as they would like. "It requires a lot of preparation time. It's probably 10:1 prep to presentation time. Recently, we visited the LDS [Latter-day Saints] Family History Center for a family history fair to talk about genealogy resources here at the library. One-hour presentation, two staff members. We presented very specifically what we had and what genealogists want to know, and that's a matter of compiling many facts and dates," Ms. Pickard said. Librarians make presentations with visual aids, primarily making use of Microsoft *PowerPoint* for illustrations, "for people to see an item and recognize it."