The extraordinary energy that Ben Primer brings to his job as Associate University Librarian (AUL) for Rare Books and Special Collections has been likened to that of the Energizer Bunny. How does he keep track of cataloging issues, reference needs, manuscript and book acquisitions, donor relations, and much, much more? He doesn’t, he claims. Rather, his secret is to hire good people, give them the resources to do their jobs, and then let them know he trusts them to make good decisions. When deciding whom to hire, he says, “the most important question I ask myself is: ‘Is this person able to make independent decisions—and yet know when to ask the right questions?’”

Ben has been analyzing problems and making creative decisions since he arrived at Mudd Library as curator of Public Policy Papers in January 1990. Soon named University Archivist as well, and finding himself with a small staff and a huge cataloging backlog, he began writing grant proposals to raise money for more staff. The benefit to users was evident in the ever-expanding number of online finding aids, which allow researchers all over the world to determine whether Mudd holds materials vital for their projects. As well, Ben’s emphasis on excellence is reflected in awards from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference for the finding aids for the papers of Adlai Stevenson, the Association on American Indian Affairs, and others.

As Acting AUL for Rare Books during the two-and-one-half-year search for William Joyce’s replacement, Ben concentrated on revitalizing the Library’s relationship with the Friends organization. “It was really important,” he says, “to figure out ways to grow the membership, and the best way to do that was to have programming that would attract people.” Working with the Friends Program Committee and the department’s Manager of Special Projects, Lisa Dunkley, Ben expanded the number of Friends events and directed recruitment efforts at younger alumni. Today, as the “face of the Library” at Friends events, he takes pride in seeing the organization grow by about 100 new members per year (250 in 2002!).

Now entering his second year as AUL, Ben is clearly focused on the challenges before the department. “One of the things I’m trying to do is to rethink the way we are currently organized,” he says. “I’m trying to see the department as a whole rather than as Firestone and Mudd,” and he wants the staff to see themselves in this way too. To this end, Ben hired Don Thornbury to lead the technical services staff. With Don’s expertise, Ben feels, the department has gained control over the complexities of cataloging its many and diverse collections. “And that’s really what I think it’s all about,” he says. “We serve the faculty, we serve the students, we serve scholarship best when we are able to tell the world what is sitting in our holdings.”
Service also involves reaching out. Ben has been meeting individually with faculty members to find out what their experiences have been in the department, what would be valuable to them for their research, and how better to serve them and their students. As part of this effort, the search for a head of public services to guide the two reading rooms continues.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is to continue building the collections. “Our peer institutions are often buying collections in the seven figures,” Ben notes. Lacking a budget for purchases at that level, he is working with the University’s Development Office and thinking about ways to create endowments and to encourage gifts. Every few months, for example, Ben and at least one curator and faculty member visit a collector who owns materials that Princeton would like to attract.

There is a positive energy pulsing throughout the department these days. “We have tremendous talent among the curatorial staff,” Ben says, “and we’ve hired some exceptional catalogers.” With his commitment to service and to his staff, Ben Primer will continue to energize Special Collections.

An avid armchair mountaineer, Rich proposed that the Friends of the Library sponsor a daylong conference to celebrate these remarkable achievements. With an initial grant from the Friends, she secured the participation of British mountaineer and travel writer Ed Douglas, whose new biography of Tenzing Norgay has just been published by the National Geographic Society; Dr. Hornbein, a specialist in high-altitude physiology; historian Martin Isserman, whose work-in-progress is *Himalayan Mountaineering: From the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes*; and climber, photographer, and author Ed Webster, a veteran of seven Himalayan expeditions. Moderating the discussions will be David Robertson Jr. ’36, former chairman of the Friends of the Library and biographer of his father-in-law, George Leigh Mallory, the Cambridge don who was lost on Everest in 1924.

Following morning panels on Everest past and present and on the politics of mountaineering in the Himalayas, Ed Webster will present an afternoon slide show of his 1988 attempt to ascend Everest via the Kangshung Face without oxygen, radio contact, or Sherpa support. The day’s events will conclude with a reception and exhibition in the Library’s Main Gallery, and an evening screening of documentary footage of Everest and its would-be conquerors. The events are sponsored by the Friends, the Council of the Humanities, the Shelby Cullom Davis Center, the Geosciences Department, the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, and the National Geographic Society.

So come and chill out on Saturday, April 12. Look for your invitation in the mail.
A conch shell dating to the eighth century is one of Alfred Bush’s favorite documents in the Princeton Collections of Western Americana. Incised with glyphs, the shell is the earliest dated American manuscript in the Library, and evidence shows it to have been the ink pot of a Classic Maya calligrapher. Bush, who retired as curator on January 1, liked to show this object to visitors because it demonstrates a concept that he tried to emphasize in his forty years of maintaining and building the collection, namely, that the history of what we think of as the American West extends back centuries before the arrival of white pioneers, among whom were his own forebears. The shell also suggests the spirit that guided his philosophy as curator, to find and preserve “the Indian voice.”

Bush arrived at Princeton in 1958 as an assistant editor of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson. While researching the iconographic record of the third president, he was instrumental in rediscovering Rembrandt Peale’s first life portrait of Jefferson (1800), long thought to have been lost. Bush’s Life Portraits of Thomas Jefferson, first published in 1960, has gone through four editions.

At the request of Librarian William Dix, Bush became curator of Western Americana in 1962. Presented in 1948 by Philip Ashton Rollins (Class of 1889), the collection was strong in overland narratives and the cattle trade. With the aid of additional bequests, most notably that of Dr. J. Monroe Thorington (Class of 1915), which brought materials on the Southwest and Indians, Bush expanded the holdings fivefold. “The great satisfaction for me,” he says, “is having been able to use what was here and build on its strengths.” He was instrumental in bringing the archives of the Association on American Indian Affairs to Princeton, and he concentrated on nineteenth-century photographs long before their scholarly value began to be reflected in their prices. The collection is today regarded as among the nation’s most important, and its archive of tribal newspapers and newsletters—“that’s where the Indian voice is”—is unrivaled.

Bush always regarded the collection as a tool for teaching, and he taught courses in several departments over the years and collaborated on special projects with faculty. With Lee Clark Mitchell, he published The Photograph and the American Indian (1985), based on the collection’s more than one thousand albumen photographs by such masters as Edward Curtis and Sheldon Jackson.

Asked what he would miss most in retirement, Bush responded, “the Indian students—my best educators.” For four decades he was an informal adviser to American Indian students at Princeton and served as a faculty adviser for innumerable senior theses. He is particularly proud that Princeton’s American Indian students have largely returned home to serve their communities, and he has helped to give them voice by publishing three monolingual collections put together by Princeton alumni—two in Navajo (1989 and 1995) and one in Ojibwe (2002)—intended to help students learn their native languages. Princeton’s American Indian alumni honored him in 1993 at an
GIFTS FROM FRIENDS AND DONORS

An extraordinary group of new books, manuscripts, and maps has kept curators busy recently. As always, the generosity of the Friends has enabled significant additions that strengthen the collections. With Friends funds, John Delaney, curator of historic maps, purchased a first edition of Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville’s *Nouvel Atlas de la Chine, de la Tartarie Chinoise . . .* (La Haye, 1737). The result of collaboration between French Jesuits and the Chinese themselves, the work contains forty-two maps, with many details of costume, customs, and trade. It is “the most important set of maps of China since the Blaeu/Martini atlas,” explains Delaney, who was fortunate to acquire a copy of that 1655 work soon after this purchase. A complete set of images of the d’Anville maps can be viewed through a link at the online catalog entry.

In honor of Alfred Bush’s retirement, the Friends bought *Mexico Illustrated*, by John Phillips (London, 1848), which has twenty-six oversized lithographs. This spectacular volume joins what Bush describes as Princeton’s “extraordinarily strong gathering of color plate books concerning Mexico.” He adds, “My own long association with Mexico (since participating in an archaeological excavation in western Campeche in 1958) made it also a personal choice.”

Finally, Don Skemer, curator of manuscripts, has acquired a cache of nine autograph letters from Thomas Hardy and twenty-three from Florence Hardy, thanks to funds from the Friends. The letters, all addressed to Dr. Caleb Williams Saleeby, an English physician, were written between 1914 and 1929. According to Skemer, these additions to the Robert H. Taylor Collection “pertain to Hardy’s writing, opinions of other authors, music, theater, general news, and other subjects of mutual interest.”

Recent gifts from individual Friends and others have spanned the centuries and have enriched all the collections. Mrs. Margaret Field, a public librarian from Clarksburg, N.J., has donated her pristine copy of *A Selection of Hexandrian Plants, Belonging to the Natural Orders Amaryllidae and Liliaceae, from Drawings by Mrs. Edward [Priscilla Susan] Bury* (London, [1831]). It contains thirty exquisitely hand-colored aquatints—each of a single life-size flower—by Robert Havell, who engraved the plates for Audubon’s *Birds of America*. “I am especially delighted because this book is by a woman artist who deserves greater recognition,” says Rebecca Davidson, curator of graphic arts. She notes that in making this gift, Mrs. Field “wanted to ensure that this splendid volume would be kept intact and made available to students, faculty, and scholars for their research and enjoyment.”

Mrs. Betty Kelen and her daughter Julia Kelen have made a gift of four hundred political cartoons and caricatures by Emery Kelen and Alois Derso. The artists’ keen observations of people and events in interwar and postwar Europe greatly enlarge Mudd Library’s already impressive collections of political cartoons.

In the words of Curator of Rare Books Stephen Ferguson, Friends Council member Bruce Willisie ’86 “has an uncanny eye for the unique selection that fits perfectly well into the remarkable ocean of materials we have here. Unlike others, who chase highspots, he goes for the unusual.” That’s an apt description of the wide-ranging materials that Mr. Willisie has bestowed recently upon the Manuscripts, Rare Books, Graphic
Arts, and Cotsen collections. Don Skemer received Willsie’s collection of fifteen individual Ethiopic magic rolls and two intact groups of magic rolls and folding amulets (eighteenth to twentieth century). They will complement the Library’s Ethiopic manuscripts, the largest such collection in the Western Hemisphere.

To Rare Books, Willsie donated three broadsides with early American folk poetry. Two of them present sentimental poems written in 1812 by Stephen Fisk, including “Song, composed on the death of Sally Shaw. . . . This song is supposed to be her own language, just before she departed this life.”

A small portrait of an eighteenth-century gentleman is Willsie’s gift to Graphic Arts. Although there may be some doubt, the likeness is said to be that of Governor Jonathan Belcher.

Over the last year, Willsie has also made several gifts of manuscripts written by children and young people. These are not considered to be juvenilia, because the authors did not grow up to be artists or writers. Nevertheless, Andrea Immel, curator of the Cotsen collection “was delighted when Bruce began turning up these little caches of letters, diaries, and journals because they so nicely complement the children’s writings—copy books, ciphering books, and family or school ‘magazines’—that Mr. Cotsen has been buying over the years.” Willsie’s most recent gift to the Cotsen collection consists of letters written by ten-year-old Marcus French to his older sister Eleanor while she was away at boarding school between 1925 and 1927. According to Immel, “Almost every letter has also been illustrated by Marcus with amusing stick figures, some highlighted with crayon. Others have been interrupted with a ‘short’ from Pathex News on some noteworthy event, such as the January thaw. Marcus has quite a sense of humor, wryly describing his encounters with his dreaded algebra teacher and the misery of being the only child at a dinner party, alternating with exuberant accounts of going trick-or-treating, setting fire to a big willow tree, seeing a Harold Lloyd movie, or watching the antics of his dog Jock and cat Dixie. The series of letters give us a look into the experiences of an ordinary boy growing up in New York during the 1920s.”

Look for more outstanding gifts in upcoming issues of the newsletter.
Brave New World

The publication of the second volume of *A Catalogue of the Cotsen Children’s Library: The Twentieth Century* is the occasion for a colorful and surprising exhibition that will occupy both the Main Gallery and the Milberg Gallery, beginning May 4. According to Curator Andrea Immel, the exhibition’s title, “Brave New World: Twentieth-Century Books from the Cotsen Children’s Library,” alludes to Miranda’s famous line in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. One of the purposes of the show, she says, “is to demonstrate that children’s books reflect the legacy of modernization in all its complexity and ambivalence and excitement.”

The exhibition will be divided into two parts. The Main Gallery will feature artwork and children’s books published between 1900 and 1950, organized around themes of commercialism (shopping, products especially for children, and advertising techniques aimed at children and parents), education (textbooks, books for art education, materials for teaching hygiene), technology (humanized machines and electricity), urbanization, and war (propaganda, games, activity books especially for children). Because the Cotsen research collection is international in scope, the exhibition will juxtapose books from America, England, France, Germany, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Japan, and the Soviet Union. According to Immel, Cotsen is perhaps “the only historical children’s book collection in the English-speaking world that could mount such an exhibition of picture books and original artwork without borrowing from other libraries.” Visitors will see “children’s books from all over the world which they probably did not know existed—and might not be able to see together again.”

The focus of the second portion of the exhibition, in the Milberg Gallery, might be described as children’s books for adults. Among highlights that include artists’ books by Jean Cocteau, Salvador Dali, David Hockney, El Lissitzky, and Barry Moser, visitors can expect to find items that are not only highly original but also, in Immel’s words, “delicately subversive.”

To open the exhibition, Barbara Bader will speak on “Twentieth-Century Children’s Books in Three Countries: Russia, Japan, and the United States” (*see the Friends Calendar*). Bader, one of the foremost authorities on the twentieth-century picture book, was for many years in charge of reviewing children’s books and adult nonfiction at *Kirkus Reviews*. She is the author of *American Picturebooks from Noah’s Ark to The Beast Within* (1976).

Immel notes that she and her assistants for this exhibition, Eric Johnson, the Cotsen Curatorial Assistant, and Heather Shannon, one of the catalog project staff members, are working closely with Cotsen Outreach Coordinator Bonnie Bernstein to develop programs for children that will incorporate the items and themes on display. And she adds, “It’s no exaggeration to say that we are really having a wonderful time putting this all together from an embarrassment of riches.”

Bush Retires . . .

alumni college that he created and directed, “Native Voices, Native Ground: The American Indian Confronts the Twenty-First Century.”

In retirement, Bush plans to divide his time among homes in Princeton, Santa Fe, and San Cristobal de Las Casas, Mexico. His connection with the Princeton Collections of Western American will not end, however. The Princeton community can look forward to an exhibition of American Indian images sometime in the future.
From left: Kirby Hall, John Rassweiler, Rosemary O’Brien, Irvin Schorsch, Yvonne Ruben, Harold Shapiro, Anita Schorsch, and Robert Ruben.


Three of the four Adler prize winners. From left: Allen Taylor ’03 (first prize), Jordan Paul Amadio ’05 (honorable mention), and Bruno Mikanowski ’04 (second prize).

University Librarian Karin Trainer and Friends Treasurer Millard M. Riggs Jr.

Friends Annual Winter Dinner
January 25, 2003
Procter Hall

Photos by Denise Applewhite

President Emeritus Harold Shapiro discusses “Whatever Happened to the Colonial College—Libraries and All?”
THE FRIENDS’ CALENDAR

Exhibitions and Related Events

MAIN EXHIBITION GALLERY AND LEONARD MILBERG GALLERY
FOR THE GRAPHIC ARTS, FIRESTONE LIBRARY

Last chances to view “Unseen Hands: Women Printers, Binders, and Book Designers” (April 13) and “Hand Bookbindings: Plain and Simple to Grand and Glorious” (April 20)

Brave New World: Twentieth-Century Books from the Cotsen Children’s Library

Sunday, May 4, 4:00 p.m.: Lecture by Barbara Bader, “Twentieth-Century Children’s Books in Three Countries: Russia, Japan, and the United States.” Betts Auditorium, School of Architecture. Followed by the exhibition opening and reception.

Friday, May 30, 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., and Sunday, June 1, July 6, August 3, and September 7, 3 p.m.: Gallery talk with exhibition curator Andrea Immel.

WIESS LOUNGE, SEELEY G. MUDD MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, 65 OLDEN STREET


Gallery hours: Weekdays, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Wednesdays to 8:00 p.m.); weekends, noon to 5:00 p.m. (except Mudd Library).

More Events

On Top of the World: An Everest Anniversary Conference. Saturday, April 12, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Dodds Auditorium in Robertson Hall and Main Exhibition Gallery of Firestone Library. Reserved seating: (609) 258-5049.

Friends Annual Spring Dinner. Sunday, May 4, 6:30 p.m., Prospect House. Invitations will be mailed.


One-day Exhibition of rarely seen items from the collections of Leonard L. Milberg, ’53. Friday, May 30, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Firestone Library lobby. A keepsake will be available. Presentation at 11:00 a.m.