

*A History of Modern Librarianship: Constructing the Heritage of Western Cultures*, eds. Pamela Richards, Wayne A. Wiegand, and Marija Dalbello. Santa Barbara and Denver: Libraries Unlimited, 2015. 248p. Paper \$60.00 (ISBN 978-1-61069-099-7).

This volume takes up a project conceived, although never fully executed, over twenty years ago. The world, and librarianship with it, has changed dramatically over that period. Why then press on with a project conceived in a very different moment and designed to address interests and concerns that felt important a generation ago? It is hard to find any compelling intellectual or professional reasons for doing so. Nor do the principal author/editors attempt to provide any. Rather, this is an *opus pietatis*, undertaken in memory of the originator of the project, Pamela Spence Richards, whose untimely demise effectively ended it in the '90s. It is a gesture, and a fitting one at that. But a gesture does not seem to this reviewer to be a persuasive reason for resurrecting a dated project. That said, the editors and authors of the five chapters that comprise this volume are all distinguished in their fields, and we should pay attention to their contributions.

The title of the book is a bit confusing: *A History of Modern Librarianship: Constructing the Heritage of Western Cultures*. The original project was conceived geographically to encompass the seven continents and librarianship within them. This was at the very beginnings of "globalization," and such an organization doubtless made sense. However, the intense pace of globalization, undergirded and propelled by the Internet, questions the value and relevance of such a template. The present volume, however, sticks to the original plan while whittling down the seven to four: Europe, the United States and Canada, Africa, and Australasia. Will African librarians be surprised to find themselves yoked to "Constructing the Heritage of Western Cultures"? For a global project, the focus on "Western Cultures" seems an unfortunate retreat. What happened to Mexico and South America, let alone Asia? That said, all of the authors in the volume stress regularly and in different ways their awareness of the dangers of parochialism and cultural myopia. A final chapter on "Digital Convergence" briskly summarizes developments in technology and their impact on librarianship in the United States and Europe.

The organization of the book into chapters according to geography yields a compendium; that is, a set of standalone compendia of information. This is clearest in Peter Hoare's diligent chapter on Europe, which not only goes back to the Middle Ages—it also has something to say about almost every European country from Ireland to Estonia, Sweden to Italy. It was a daunting assignment, to be sure; yet Hoare doesn't flinch, as he tackles national, public, and university libraries throughout the Continent. The bias is British, and that is perhaps understandable, even fair, given the footprint of British librarianship across Europe and beyond. What one comes away with from Hoare's chapter is how deeply embedded libraries have always been in the disparate contexts of the places and people in which they are situated. Even at 30,000 feet, synthesizing this variety is impossible.

Wayne Wiegand contributes a useful survey of the American and Canadian scene from the 17th century to the present. No one knows this territory better than Wiegand, who has traversed it regularly over a long and productive career. Anthony Olden surveys the African scene during the colonial and postcolonial eras and with a pronounced emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa. The legacies of British rule—some positive, some not so positive—are evident in African countries engaged in the work of nation building and development while trying to meet the information needs of citizens. Read together with Ross Harvey's fine look at Australasia, Olden's account underscores the limits of the utility of Western library values and orientations in non-Western societies. Harvey writes knowledgeably and sensitively about the attempts of Australasian librarians to

meet the needs of indigenous peoples, which remains an ongoing effort. Olden's and Harvey's chapters point to a larger set of issues that have dogged Western, especially Anglo-American, librarianship for a long time: the fallacy of thinking that Western values are universal values; the prescriptive stance of librarians assuming they know what people "should" be reading; the confusion between trying to meet the genuine needs of people as articulated by people and prescribing what they ought to be reading, and so on. While these issues are certainly much less prevalent today than they were even a generation ago, it is good to be reminded of their long reach over time.

The final chapter, "Digital Convergence," by Marija Dalbello, is a smart and informed overview of automation and its many children in the 20th and 21st centuries. Dalbello's contribution is brief and dense and will be useful for anyone seeking to know at least the fields, landmarks, and participants. Some might find it a bit too technical, although regardless it is well worth reading. If you think you know the basics, reading Dalbello makes you realize you probably don't! "Digital Convergence" is useful in another way as well: It is the only contribution not hinged to a place, and it tends to work better in a global context than the other chapters. Perhaps had this volume been conceived topically rather than geographically it might have had better luck in organizing and relating disparate contexts around the world. But that is another volume.—*Michael Ryan, New York Historical Society*