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## Collecting the Wretched Refuse: Lifting a Lamp to Zines, Military Newspapers, and Wisconsinalia

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### ABSTRACT

Newspapers/periodicals librarian James Danky does collection building wherever he goes and with whomever he communicates, it seems. Thanks to his efforts, the Madison-based Wisconsin Historical Society collects materials from categories other librarians usually overlook, including zines (homemade periodicals, produced for reasons other than to make money, usually photocopied and published irregularly), something he compares to “other print forms that served the same purposes”—radical handbills of the 1880s, poetry pamphlets of the 1950s, and underground newspapers of the 1960s. Danky also collects Wisconsin-based periodicals, no matter how small their circulation, nor how esoteric their content, from *Cheese Reporter* to *Clothed with the Sun*; prison publications; and military, embassy, and consulate publications. WHS is the only institution in the United States collecting military base publications, a genre full of racy-sounding titles like *Shoot 'Em Down* and *Danger Forward*. These magazines and papers provide unique, close-up views of soldiers’ lives, or at least a glimpse at the culture in which they work.

Give me . . . the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!  
—Emma Lazarus

In libraries wherever I go, I’m heartened and disheartened. All too often I’m aggravated when I see exclusionary library polices and unhelpful practices that go against librarians’ stated basic principles. But at the same time I’m cheered by lively and unusual collections, exhibits, books,

and special items new to me. Often the latter are the result of one innovative, thoughtful, energetic, passionate librarian. When I look at union catalog holdings for alternative press titles—for the likes of *Cometbus* and *Carbusters*—I often find just a few owning libraries, and immediately can name (and mentally picture) the individual librarians responsible for collecting them. One is Jim Danky.

## ZINES

How many librarians correspond professionally with people named Barney FreeBeer and Aaron Cometbus? Danky does. Here's a letter, representative of countless similar letters Danky has sent in his career, this to the editor of *Free Beer*:

Mr. FreeBeer:

*The Library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin has been negligent in not including your important publication in our permanent collections earlier, so please send one copy each of your work. Quite the publishing hotbed is West Bend evidently (new editor of the Wisconsin State Journal formerly labored on WB's newspaper). If we need to pay you, and we are poor of course, then please enclose a modest invoice. Lastly, do you know of other zine publishers in Wisconsin, that I should know about? I bought my copy of your work at Rainbow Books in Madison.*

*All the best.*

James P. Danky

Jim Danky does collection building wherever he goes and with whomever he communicates, it seems. Thanks to his efforts, the name and address of the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) often appears in lists of zine libraries, on Web sites and in print, with small, grassroots projects the likes of JustabunchKids Community Library and the Long Haul Info-shop. As a result, people like Barney FreeBeer write him to donate their homemade publications. Danky says that the publisher of *Rats* ("Newsletter for the rodently inclined") delivered each issue himself (J. P. Danky, personal communication, November 14, 2006). "When he brought in the final number, I asked him why he was stopping. He said that he'd said all that he wanted to about rats." Twenty-six issues of the newsletter were published from 1993 to 1997.

For items such as *Free Beer* and *Rats*, reviews are rare. Regardless, and no matter the publications' production values or writing quality, Danky acquires all Wisconsin-made zines that come to his attention. The WHS holds over a hundred that can be found by searching the library's catalog (Madcat) under "*Fanzines—Wisconsin*," a heading further subdivided by the name of the Wisconsin community in which each is published.

By *zines* I refer to homemade periodicals, produced for reasons other than making money (many out of some mania or passion), usually photocopied and published irregularly. Danky was acquiring zines for the Wis-

consin Historical Society long before the term *zines* was commonly used as a contraction of *fanzines*. The society holds eight issues of punk fanzine *Catholic Guilt*, for example, the first three issues of which date from 1982. That same year Mike Gunderloy started *Factsheet Five*, a tiny mimeo publication for his friends, that would by the early 1990s become a full-fledged review magazine that fostered cross-pollination between zine publishers on the one hand, and helped raise awareness of zines in the mass media on the other. Thanks partly to Gunderloy, we now have self-identified “zine librarians” and such books as *From A to Zine: Building a Winning Zine Collection in Your Library* (Bartel, 2004). Danky’s practice of collecting all sorts of unclassifiable underground press publications, however, predates this.

Danky’s advocacy of alternative press collecting, in such works as *Alternative Materials in Libraries* and *Alternative Library Literature*, are another reason we now have “zine librarians” and “zine libraries.” As early as the 1970s Danky was showing librarians the how and what (if not always the why) of alternative acquisitions in a newsletter called *Collectors’ Network News*, which reviewed such publications such as *The New Age Harmonist* (1978) and *Doing It! Practical Alternatives for Humanizing City Life* (1977).

In *Alternative Materials in Libraries*, a 1982 publication coedited with Elliot Shore, Danky urged librarians to consider “self-publication and the whole spectrum of alternative materials” (Danky, 1982). From 1984 to 2002, ten editions of *Alternative Library Literature* (these coedited with Sanford Berman) often addressed the significance of small-circulation periodicals, from local and regional publications to zines. The latter warranted a special section in the 1994/1995 edition, a section reprinting Julie Herrada’s “Zines in Libraries: A Culture Preserved,” first published in *Serials Review* (Herrada, 1996).

A writer interviewing Danky for a Milwaukee newspaper recently labeled him “the Godfather of Zines” (Becks, 2006). The appellation recognized his role catalyzing the Madison Zine Fest, an annual event started in 2004 by Danky protégé Alycia Sellie, at the time a University of Wisconsin–Madison library school student. “From my perspective,” Danky notes in the interview, “zines produced in Wisconsin are important because they constitute one of the authentic voices that would otherwise be lost.” Viewing zines through a long historical lens, Danky sees them with “other print forms that served the same purposes”—radical handbills of the 1880s, poetry pamphlets of the 1950s, and underground newspapers of the 1960s.

New York–based librarian Jenna Freedman acknowledged Danky in an article about zine collecting published in *Library Journal* (Freedman, 2006). The founder of a zine collection at Barnard College, Freedman notes on her library’s Web site over a dozen kindred zine collections in academic libraries, and nearly twice as many more in public and “volunteer” libraries.<sup>1</sup> Most—if not all—are indebted to Danky, whose own collection has been a model in taking strange things seriously.

WHS owns more than thirty zine titles produced in Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin's two largest cities, including *Bored and Violent*, *Candles for Girls*, *Disorderly Conduct*, *Harry Cletus*, *Hot Sex*, *Math Club Porno*, and *Raw Goof*, all from Madison, and *Allah Makes My Ass Tired: And Other Names I Didn't Use For My Very First Zine*, *Crème-Filled*, *Dumpstered Ivan*, *Holywickedflyingjesus!*, *Nantucket Bucket: The Journal of Dirty Limericks*, *Revolution of None*, and *Secret Life of Snakes*, from Milwaukee.

Why collect such apparent oddities, low-circulation photocopied items the likes of which few have seen? Simply this: because they are a part of Wisconsin's culture and history. Let's not attempt to sanitize our culture, Danky might say, but let future historians see for themselves the true diversity of interests and modes of expression that thrived for a time. After all, imagine being able to read a list of titles, but not being able to examine them. The vaunted freedom to read means nothing if the things we want or need to read are unavailable.

Zines are source material waiting to be mined. Scholars began to recognize this in the early and mid-1990s. *A Zine-ography: An Annotated List of Books and Articles about Zines* (Dodge, 1998) notes, for example, two chapters on fanzines in Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992), a paper on "queer punk fanzines" in *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (Fenster, 1993), a 1994 conference paper on using zines in the classroom (Hudson, 1994), and Thomas McLaughlin's "Criticism in the Zine" in his book *Street Smarts and Critical Theory* (1996).

Stephen Duncombe's *Notes from Underground* (1997) was the first book-length critical work about zines. A revision of his City University of New York 1996 doctoral thesis, Duncombe's research was aided immeasurably by the New York State Library's collection of zines whose provenance was *Factsheet Five* editor Mike Gunderloy. Had Duncombe been based in the Midwest, he would have relied heavily on WHS collections.

As zines have become more widely known as a genre, so have they been taken seriously in academia, if sometimes because the authors of scholarly works were once zine editors themselves. Those skeptical of the research value of *Math Club Porno* and *Dumpstered Ivan* should take note of Daniel Brouwer's "Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines" in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2005), which examines *Diseased Pariah News* and *Infected Faggot Perspectives*. While it is too early to say just what role zines in WHS collections will play in scholarship, the question is moot. Without such zines, there would be no scholarship.

Libraries are full of books published in New York, but print culture is produced almost everywhere humans live. Certainly it is produced not just in large cities where wealthier libraries are based and where more librarians are likelier to spot new publications, but also in small cities, towns, and rural areas. The WHS zine collection reflects this, providing a map of Wisconsin. Witness: *A Muse on the Mound* (published in Blue Mounds),

*BlipVert* (Chilton), *Duck Milk* (Elkhorn), *Artslut* (Manitowoc), *Suki Girl Zine* (North Freedom), *Fuck & Fight* (Oshkosh), *I'm a Playground Person* (Racine), *My Moon or More* (River Falls), *Truck Stop Zine* (Shorewood), *As the World Burns* (Stevens Point), *Meat Eater Anonymous* (Waukesha), *Spare Change* (Waukegan), *Distorted Views* (Wausau), *Tight Pants* (Wauwatosa), and *Free Beer* (West Bend).

WHS zines are integrated into the periodical collection as a whole. There is no separate "zine collection," and the corresponding catalog records reflect this. The record for *Rats*, for example, has a single subject heading (*Rats—Periodicals*) while *Guinea Pig Zero*, a zine devoted to the topic of human medical experimentation warrants three (*Drugs—Testing—Periodicals*, *Clinical trials—Periodicals*, and *Human experimentation in medicine—Periodicals*). Neither, however, is assigned "Fanzines" as a genre heading. It should also be noted that the Library of Congress has now established the subject heading "Zines"; LC waited for the word to appear in multiple dictionaries before doing so.

LC catalogers could have asked Danky. A few years ago I published a chapbook (*Hello James*, 2003) reproducing "selections from letters by the editors of zines, mini-comics, newsletters, tracts, and other self-published periodicals in response to a postcard from the Wisconsin Historical Society." In it I wrote:

For the past umpteen years, James P. Danky has been collecting alternative library materials. In his role as Newspapers and Periodicals Librarian since 1976 . . . Danky has grown a collection that represents the range of human endeavors more fully than most libraries. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* noted nearly a decade ago—in a piece titled "Visionary Librarian Guards Free Speech"—that "to take the pulse of contemporary America, Danky subscribes to 8,500 newspapers and magazines annually," resulting in a mailbox "stuffed with papers published by religious extremists, anti-environmentalists, nudists, prisoners, disgruntled CIA dropouts and other people living on the fringe."

This representation of marginal voices is no accident. "I love libraries, but I am frequently disappointed by them," Danky (1994, p. 3) said in remarks on being selected University of Wisconsin School of Library and Information Studies Distinguished Alumnus for 1993:

I sympathize with their financial limitations, but I am increasingly intolerant of their personal biases of class, of race, of religion, of national origin, of sexual preference. I have devoted myself to bringing as wide a variety of viewpoints as possible into the library in the hope of capturing the ephemeral nature of today's society. That I fail at this goal bothers me only a little, and I do determine to redouble my efforts. If I had but one single wish for libraries, it would be that each one would collect all of the materials published in their service area. That single and not particularly profound step would do more to create a bibliographic universe of unparalleled diversity that would fulfill the goal of fairness than anything else I can imagine. (pp. 3–4)

## WISCONSINALIA, PRISON PUBLICATIONS &amp; MISCELLANEA

Unparalleled diversity, indeed. Besides zines, the WHS collection includes myriad other Wisconsin-based periodicals, no matter how small their circulation, from *American Bowler* (official membership journal of the American Bowling Congress) and *Frames & Lanes* (publication of the Women's International Bowling Congress) to *The Informer* (publication of Oil Jobbers of Wisconsin), *The Trapper and Predator Caller*, *Wisconsin Woman*, and the *Zor Zephyr*, publication of the Zor Shrine, mysteriously labeled A.A.O.N.M.S. A 1989 article about Danky and the WHS periodical collection published in the weekly Madison *Isthmus* (Forman, 1989) notes such holdings as *Cheese Reporter* ("Serving the world's cheese industry since 1876"), *Catholic Guilt*, *Clothed with the Sun*, and *Cap City Creosote Times* ("a quarterly newsletter for patrons of the Capital City Chimney Sweep Company), all published in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin periodicals cover a cultural gamut, including glossy city magazines, African American and Native American papers, business publications (the likes of *Wisconsin Architect*), historical journals, little magazines (small press poetry), hobbyist publications (such as the newsletter of the International Fire Buff Associates), women's magazines and newsletters, environmental magazines, and publications from hate groups. "It is often impossible to review a publication without reviewing the organization that publishes it," a review of *Posse Noose Report* notes (Danky & Cashin, 1986, p. 154). "In the case of *Posse Noose Report*, there is little choice. The poor production values and varying sizes of issues are meaningless because no one interested in extremist politics would consider these to be pertinent features . . . Not for everyone, but for those with an interest in the authentic voice of the radical right the PNR hits the mark" (p. 154).

"Think globally, and collect locally," Danky used to say. Not that he limits himself to Wisconsin. WHS holds selected zines published outside Wisconsin, some based on a publication's perceived significance (such as *Cometbus*, a longstanding and influential punk music culture zine) and some based on other areas in which Danky collects, such as radical politics. I'm not sure why WHS holds *Ant Spoim*, *Bovine Gazette* ("Official Publication of the Holy Church of Moo"), *Fat!So?*, *Kinetic Skookum*, *Primeval Salamander*, *Quickdummies*, and *Turd-filled Donut*, but I'm glad to know that some library does.

In the British *Library Association Record* in 1991, Danky notes that WHS collections closely reflect his personal and professional travel schedule: "better for Chicago than Indianapolis, more Honolulu imprints than Nebraska titles." But he added, "I have overcome this geographical bias, in part, by sending letters to specialized bookstores in various cities asking that they send me samples" ("Serial Thrillers," 1991, p. 679). When Danky was in the United Kingdom on a Fulbright scholarship in 1991, he shipped back three boxes of periodicals to the States, treasure troves

of British alternative tabloids, radical and ethnic publications, and zines. (I know—I saw them first and described some of them in several issues of *MSRRT Newsletter*, publication of the Minnesota Library Association’s Social Responsibilities Round Table, and still remember some of my favorites, *Schnews* and *Do or Die*, to name two.)

Besides being creative in his collection building, Danky is tireless and persistent. That his aspirations are both comprehensive and focused has long been apparent. For years Jim sent me large boxes of printed matter representing duplicates, sample copies, things sent him by colleagues (sometimes things *I’d* sent him that made their way back to me), and items he’d picked up on his travels—some hand-picked with me in mind because he knew so well my interests in radical and esoteric publications. These boxes also regularly included signs of another of Danky’s collection building tactics: photocopies of pages of reviews and periodical lists from every source he could find, dutifully checked against WHS holdings. Jim would even send me copies of the publication that I edited, *MSRRT Newsletter*, marked up and clearly used in this way.

In the “Danky boxes” (as I came to call them) I found newsletters by and for collectors of toothpick holders, Abraham Lincoln impersonators (*Lincarnations*), and an Andy Griffith fan club; trade magazines for funeral home directors and clergy; contemporary Japanese and Russian language papers from North American cities; genealogical periodicals of all sorts (from *The Middle Tennessee Journal of Genealogy & History* to *Mishpacha: The Jewish Genealogy Society of Greater Washington*), and dozens of other unique and sometimes nearly uncategorizable titles.

An article about the WHS collection that appeared in the now defunct *Lingua Franca* in 1992 mentions *Just for Openers* (a publication for collectors of bottle and can openers), *The Christian Conjurer* (official publication of the Fellowship of Christian Magicians), and *Fighting Woman News*, a magazine for female martial artists (Rigby, 1992). “All these specialized kinds of publications will be of interest to historians in the future,” Danky says in the *Isthmus* profile (Forman, 1989, p. 12); “I know that because I am familiar with the kinds of things historians are presently interested in that we’ve gathered before—and the things that we all wished we had which don’t exist anymore.”

Such as prison publications. “In the mid-1970s I had considered doing a bibliography on prison papers and have tried to subscribe to as many as possible,” Danky reports (J. P. Danky, personal communication, February 26, 2007). “These are hard titles to acquire for obvious reasons.” The prison press thrived in the 70s, says a 2005 report in *Counterpunch* magazine,

when, according to Jim Danky, Librarian of the Wisconsin Historical Society, which is home to the nation’s largest collection of prison newspapers, highly politicized prisoners brought “the ethos of the 60s inside with them” and cranked out enough radical rags to fill a library. Among

these were *The Iced Pig* edited by Weatherman and Attica prisoner Sam Melville and the *San Quentin News*, known for its censored report on bird excrement in the prison cafeteria. (Caldwell, 2005)

### MILITARY, EMBASSY, AND CONSULATE PUBLICATIONS

Thanks to Danky's efforts, WHS continues to be the only institution in the United States collecting military base publications, a genre full of racy-sounding titles like *Shoot 'Em Down*, *Danger Forward*, and *Bulldogs on Five*. These magazines and papers provide unique, close-up views of soldiers' lives, or at least a glimpse at the culture in which they work. "Researching the role of the military in history without using military newspapers would be as absurd as researching the history of American politics without newspapers," Danky has said (Wisconsin Historical Society, n.d.).

Since no one else does, WHS holds *Hawaii Army Weekly*, a newspaper "serving the 25th Infantry Division (Light) and U.S. Army, Hawaii;" *The Tankard*, newspaper of the 128th Air Refueling Wing, Milwaukee; *American Fighter Aces & Friends*, magazine of the American Fighter Aces Association in conjunction with The Museum of Flight; *Front Range Flyer*, magazine of the 302nd Airlift Wing, U.S. Air Force Reserve Command, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado; and *Mountain Messenger*, from the Mountain Warrior Recruiting Battalion, Beckley, West Virginia.

The WHS began collecting armed forces periodicals in the nineteenth century, but the bulk of it dates from late 1979 when the society began acquiring them from an avid collector named Walter S. Dougherty, a Floridian who had started his collection during World War II. The WHS also holds some less parochial military titles, including *The Jewish Veteran* ("Jewish soldiers in Iraq"—official publication of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States); *Marines* ("The Corps' Official Magazine"); *Spokesman* (from the Air Intelligence Agency), and *Recruiter* ("The Magazine of the Air Force Recruiting Professional").

An article in the *Wisconsin State Journal* (Martell, 2004, p. D1) described this part of the WHS collection, including such titles as *Sand Script*, containing an article about "skyrocketing suicide and accidental death rates" among military pilots, and *Tallil Times*, with "tips on how to react to ambushes." "The publications are not just being saved for historians," writer Chris Martell notes. They are also for the families of veterans. "With luck the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan will all become old," the article quotes Danky:

A few will have saved some of these publications but most will not. Libraries are created as a source for common memories. The veterans, their children and grandchildren will be able to look at these newspapers someday and see what their ancestors were doing in the war. I'm always surprised at how the major media doesn't look at these small publications. There is disdain and ignorance of them among the major

media. But if they are ignored, there are things about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan that will never be understood. (p. D1)

Embassy and consulate newsletters represent another related category of noteworthy but overlooked publications Danky has collected at WHS: “the only documentary record of American diplomatic activity from the grass roots,” he says.

The society developed this collection to complement its national collection of military newspapers and periodicals only after determining that no library or archives in the country was already engaged in these activities . . . Dating from about 1990, these 400 titles arrived at the library from every country the United States has diplomatic relations with. The titles are frequently the only publication in English from smaller, less developed countries, especially when published at consulates distant from the capitols. From current up-to-the-moment perspectives on diplomatic life to the routines of thousands of Americans in the foreign service, these newsletters have already been utilized by anthropologists and sociologists on both the Madison campus and beyond. In 2002 the State Department determined that the Library could no longer receive the newsletters due to security concerns following 9/11. (J. P. Danky, personal communication, April 10, 2003)

If no one else will, Danky will collect esoteric religious periodicals, from *Mormon Focus* and *Lutheran Women Today*, to *The Sacred Name Broadcaster* (Assemblies of Yahweh), *The Whole Truth* (The official magazine of the International Church of God in Christ), and *The A.M.E. Church Review*. Thanks to Danky, I think, I’ve seen a trade publication by and for ministers, just the sort of item he’d know and care about.

Again: Why bother to collect such things? In November 2006, Danky wrote to a West Coast acquaintance who in the late 1970s had gone “to the People’s Temple garage sale, after the Kool-Aid,” where he’d acquired one issue of People’s Temple News and then sent it to Madison, knowing Danky would appreciate it. “Later the Graduate Theological Library at Berkeley,” Danky told his friend, “working with Stanford, found some additional issues, and asked to borrow ours, which was the only known copy. In any case, your perceptive grab helped make all of the later work, including the new documentary on Jonestown, possible in a way” (J. P. Danky, personal communication, November 27, 2006).

Careful attention to acknowledgments in books and documentary films will show that “Wisconsin Historical Society” is frequently used as a research source. Within a few days of writing that last sentence, I was reading Ewen & Ewen’s *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Equality* (2006), a history of “science in the service of prejudice.” Deep within its pages I came upon a reference to *Freedom’s Journal* (“the nation’s first African American newspaper”), then saw on the next page a graphic reproduction “from the collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society” (p. 331).

The same sort of acknowledgment can be found in reference to cultural productions dealing with labor history and radical politics of all kinds. Maybe even in histories of collectibles. Yes, if no one else will, Danky will collect publications by and for passionate collectors, the likes of *The Train Collectors Quarterly*, *North South Trader's Civil War*, *Knife World* and *The Pony Express* (the official newsletter of the Mustang [car] Owners Club International). Who better than a collector to identify and collect publications about collecting?

Danky wrote in an email missive to Wayne Wiegand in 2005:

When I was hired in 1973 I knew a tiny bit about the collection but nothing like the last years have taught me. No library has our breadth, though a number collect in the same depth in some areas . . . For Wisconsin titles there is no competition, unfortunately. Too bad, as we don't see all that much from outside Dane County, and for, say, Milwaukee, there is no real way to do a good job unless you are there, on the ground gathering up the stuff. The changes at Milwaukee Public Library mirror those of nearly all public libraries . . . [t]hat is, they do not see themselves as repositories for their own community's past or at least not much beyond the daily/weekly newspaper. Most publics in Wisconsin do not even purchase the microfilm we produce of their own newspaper, preferring to rely on us for [interlibrary] loan if it is requested. So I am pretty sure that there is no institution [that] would pick up any slack if the Society did not continue doing what we do today, unfortunately. (Some evidence of this is the very high percentage, say 60–90%, of current serial titles that are unique to OCLC. This is across all subject areas, so you would think that if another institution was interested that we would find their cataloging, but that has not been the case in my tenure.)

But I am optimistic. All it requires is that the Library get someone with intelligence and lots of energy, organizational skills, and the ability to listen to colleagues and patrons and the collecting can proceed. . . . (J. P. Danky, personal communication, September 9, 2005)

In an op-ed piece in the *Anchorage Daily News*, Michael Carey (2004) wrote about the difficulty he experienced finding a good home for “a pile of alternative newspapers from the '60s and early '70s” (p. B4). At last he was put in touch with the right institution, and the right person. The WHS collections are so extensive that “when the Alaska State Library wanted copies of early Alaska papers, its librarians contacted the Madison organization,” Carey noted (p. B4). And how did the WHS obtain so many anti-war papers from the Vietnam War era in the first place? “We subscribed,” Danky told him.

Someone find another Jim Danky, please, for the next generation.

#### NOTE

1. Retrieved February 17, 2005, from <http://www.barnard.edu/library/zines/links.htm#libraries>

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Chris Dodge is a freelance writer, editor and indexer living in northwestern Montana. Librarian and columnist at *Utne Reader* magazine from 1999 to 2006 ("Street Librarian"), Dodge was before that a cataloger at Hennepin County Library in Minnesota. He has written and spoken widely on the alternative press, maintains the Street Librarian website, and edits the Web-based *Thoreau Today*.