

October 29, 2002

"Letters To The Editor"
New York Times
229 W. 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

Dear Friends,

Discarding damaged or truly obsolete library materials is a practical necessity, but lately--in part flowing from a reigning mentality that deemphasizes print and AW in favor of purely digital resources and more highly values circulation stats than the profession's noble commitment to promote intellectual and cultural diversity--there's been a virtual epidemic of trashing, hiding, or selling arguably historic and valuable items without proper review or consultation. Colette Brooks' "So many books, so little space" (10-26-02, p. A19, A21) fails to recognize the nationwide urgency of this book-erosion. At San Francisco Public Library, for example, an expensive new downtown building was constructed with ample accommodation for computer terminals but hugely insufficient shelf space for books, resulting in thousands of volumes (some estimates suggest half-a-million) being unceremoniously and often secretly pulped or remotely stored.

In another recent case, Hennepin County Library in Minnesota severely decimated its own periodical collection, lamely claiming that most of the dropped titles could be found online. That decision was made without first consulting primary stakeholders: library users and frontline reference staff. Variations of this frequently appearance- or number -driven practice are now so common that a Midwest borrower was prompted to write a scorching poem in

California's Anderson Valley Advertiser. And the alarming trend has also been described in such publications as The Unabashed Librarian, Match!,

With best wishes,

People's Culture, Exapno Mapcase, and

Spunk.

Sanford Berman

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