WHEN WE ASSUMED the editorship of this professional journal we asked each other, “what’s so special about special collections?” For that matter, “who cares about the rare books, manuscripts, and other artifacts that fall under the rubric of ‘cultural heritage’?” We had a hunch that these seemingly disingenuous questions, when put to a cross-section of scholars, students, booksellers, archivists, collectors, artists, authors, curators, publishers, photographers, filmmakers, performance artists and, of course, librarians, would provoke thoughtful anecdotes, lively discourse, and passionate disputation. We were not wrong.

The responses we received yield evidence of a broad constituency. Despite differing approaches to cultural artifacts and their significance, it is clear that this is a constituency that cares deeply about the notion of a shared cultural heritage and the objects, regardless of medium, that contain our history.

This premiere issue of RBM contains an assortment of these responses. From the academic to the avant-garde, the controversial to the conventional, the economic to the erotic, with the help of our Editorial Board we have assembled a compendium reflecting the reasons why people feel special collections are indeed special. Framing this issue are two essays, each offering perspective on the current status of special collections. From his vantage point at an independent research library, Werner Gundersheimer contemplates the implications of the information revolution on research libraries and the survival of special collections libraries within the university library. In his polemical essay, Daniel Traister takes a hard look at our core values and what makes special collections so special.
While preparing copy for this issue an important event took place. The final installment of *AB Bookman's Weekly* went to press. For fifty-two years *AB* has kept the book world abreast of the latest trends in collecting, charted the progress of the trade, and provided a forum for all bookish people. As a tribute to *AB*’s contribution to the antiquarian book trade we asked *AB*’s contributing editor, Joel Silver, to sit down with Jacob L. ("Jake") Chernofsky and discuss his twenty-seven year career as publisher and editor of *AB Bookman’s Weekly*. Their landmark conversation inaugurates “Exit Interview,” a new feature for *RBM*.

Future issues of *RBM* will explore legal questions for special collections; the interrelationships of museums, libraries, archives, and historical societies; the acquisition, preservation, and use of multi-media collections; and a host of other topics. We hope the work we publish will be sufficiently challenging and provocative that you will write to us and for us. It is our goal that *RBM* will become a forum where those who care about original materials can speak to one another. We welcome your suggestions for future issues, your submission of papers, and, if you are so motivated, your own ideas about “what’s so special about special collections.”