

**Paul Conway and Martha O'Hara Conway.** *Flood in Florence, 1966: A Fifty-Year Retrospective: Proceedings of Symposium, November 3 and 4, 2016, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018. Softcover, 234p. \$19.99 (ISBN 978-16-0785-4562). Also available in digital format: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/maize/mpub9310956/1:18/-flood-in-florence-1966-a-fifty-year-retrospective?rgn=div1;view=toc> [accessed 15 January 2019].

The year 2016 marked the fifty-year anniversary of the tragic and destructive flood in Florence, Italy. The floodwaters shook the world with their indiscriminate destruction of human life, property, and priceless Florentine cultural heritage. Early in November of 1966, days of heavy rains transformed the Arno River into a raging beast, overflowing its retaining walls and submerging much of the city and the area around it in foul, murky water filled with sediment, vegetation, sewage, motor oil, and the flotsam of human civilization. The floodwaters either destroyed or badly damaged historic collections of art, sculpture, architecture, books, manuscripts, and documents stored in low-level galleries or basements of institutes, libraries, museums, and private residences.

Reports of damage to the city and its foundational collections of Renaissance art quickly spread worldwide via photographs, news reports, and films; in the United States, *National Geographic* magazine devoted an entire issue to the flood and recovery efforts documented by photo essayist Balthazar Korab. These reports were responsible for garnering rapid public support and for galvanizing an international league of volunteers, dubbed the “Mud Angels,” who flocked to Florence to aid in the salvage and restoration efforts.

There were hosts of challenges posed by enthusiastic but untrained volunteers who undertook the recovery and cleaning of rare books and manuscripts, and the sheer scale of the task was daunting. More than a million damaged volumes in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze alone needed immediate treatment. Nevertheless, the British team, led by Peter Waters and others, managed to salvage many thousands of books and, in the process, developed new salvage and restoration strategies and triage techniques for use on a mass scale. In short, the disaster ushered in a new understanding of library book conservation.

Recognizing the significance of the fifty-year anniversary to preservationists and conservators, the University of Michigan Library organized a two-day symposium that brought together surviving members of the British team, book restoration and conservation specialists, historians, and library educators to share their experiences and reflect on the transformative changes in the profession in the years since the

flood. In addition, the symposium featured screenings of two rare films: Franco Zeffirelli's *Florence: Days of Destruction*, recently restored by the University of Maryland, and *The Restoration of Books, Florence, 1968: A Film by Roger Hill*.

The essays in the volume are organized into three areas: book and paper conservation, disaster preparedness and response, and conservation education and training. The essays are arranged in a logical order, and editors Paul Conway and Martha O'Hara Conway provide a helpful introductory essay, capturing many of the salient points of the event. Endnotes after each of the essays serve to collate copious resources, creating a bibliography unique to the subject at hand. Some of the essays feature black and white and color images, which add to the overall appeal of the book.

Readers will enjoy the vivid first-hand accounts of conservator Don Etherington ("After Florence: Development in Conservation Treatment of Books") and Sheila Waters ("Peter Waters and the Origins of Library Conservation: A Memoir") about their salvage and restoration work. Peter Waters led the British team of restorers in devising a restoration system for damaged books on a scale that is hard to imagine; photographs of building interiors draped with drying sheets of paper hint at the enormity of the challenge. Dried and brittle text blocks left from initial salvage efforts were washed, dried, and pressed to restore usability while they awaited rebinding. Later, Waters brought his expertise to the Library of Congress and ushered in a new era of phased book conservation, a progressive approach designed to treat large numbers of books at one time.

John Comazzi's essay, "The Florence Flood and Its Aftermath: The Photography of Balthazar Korab," together with the essay by Bryan Draper and Carla Q. Montori on the Franco Zeffirelli film (*Florence: Days of Destruction*) and Cathleen Baker's discussion of Roger Hill's film (*The Restoration of Books, Florence, 1968*) provide a fascinating glimpse into the visual documentation of the disaster and recovery efforts. The importance of these images and films in public awareness and support for recovery efforts cannot be overestimated.

The rest of the brief essays are lively and give a sense of what the symposium must have been like, replete with remembrances, homages to colleagues no longer with us, debates, and lively discussions on the finer points of book conservation. Points touched on by the speakers include contrasting views of the art and science of book conservation; the importance of cross-generational teaching and learning; the relationship between art and book conservation; the challenges of establishing academic book conservation programs; and the impact and preservation of digital artifacts and information. An unintended consequence of the digital revolution

and threat to library conservation is the “perceived decline in the essentialness of cultural artifacts,” noted by the editors in their introductory essay. In the book’s closing essay, Michael Suarez argues that librarians who justify discarding copies of books by deferring to access copies of a single microfilmed or digitized image of the book are irrevocably impoverishing the diversity of the material published record.

As an educator and steward of a university rare book collection, I found *Flood in Florence, 1966: A Fifty-Year Retrospective* to be thoroughly enjoyable reading as well as a point of departure for stimulating discussions with students and colleagues. The book is significant as a published, material record of the symposium and a testament to those individuals past and present dedicated to the field of book conservation. Finally, this book reminds us that preserving books and manuscripts is not really about saving artifacts for their own sake, but for ours.—*Tamara E. Livingston, Kennesaw State University*

**John Carter’s ABC for Book Collectors**, 9th edition. Nicholas Barker and Simran Thadani, eds. (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Books, 2017) ISBN: 978-1-58456-352-5 and **Sidney E. Berger**. *The Dictionary of the Book: A Glossary for Book Collectors, Booksellers, Librarians, and Others* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

Dictionaries and encyclopedias represent bundles of choices. No book is large enough to address every aspect of its topic. Space is always at a premium. There are always more terms or variants that could be included. Publication due dates always limit how much more time one could devote to a project. The choices made by authors of these two books listing terms describing books shape the works, of course, but also provide the basis for judging them together. There is merit in a head-to-head comparison.

John Carter first published the *ABC* in 1952 and carried the work through five editions himself. Nicholas Barker inherited the effort to produce a sixth edition (1980) and eventually two more. Now Barker is joined by a coeditor in Simran Thadani; this collaboration brings a classic work to its third generation. Carter’s work was conceived as a serious but not somber aid to book collectors who wanted an introduction to the arcana of book description terms used in trade catalogues. The heart of *ABC* in the most recent edition are still, naturally, Carter’s own entries, supplemented through subsequent editions with terms like *Internet*. The focus tends to be on terms useful to collectors of volumes from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries and remains on physical aspects and features of codices and bindings, publication, and classic large-scale bibliographies and their compilers. Carter’s original imprecations are retained, such as the one on *Issue-mongers*, which