EDITOR’S NOTE

“Exposing Hidden Collections” is one of the most important initiatives for the world of special collections and archives to develop in a very long time. But I must admit when I first heard of it, I asked myself “what hidden collections?” We don’t have any hidden collections at the Spencer Library. We have many unprocessed or underprocessed collections, but we know what and where they are. The point is, of course, that no one else knows about these collections. It is a problem our profession has long grappled with, or perhaps in some cases, not grappled with at all. How many collections have we acquired knowing full well we could not process them for a very long time? Backlogs of these “hidden” collections are all too common, and, without extraordinary movement to break our collective mindset and provide help are unlikely ever to be exposed. This mindset is a combination of our insistence on high-level catalogue records and finding aids, and limited resources to maintain that level of attention across the vastness of our backlogs. The result is that many repositories produce a few exquisitely catalogued collections, while continuing to add to the collective backlog.

The Association of Research Libraries Special Collections Task Force is helping us break through this mindset and obtain help. It articulated the situation in a white paper and organized a conference at the Library of Congress where many of us came together and agreed that we can no longer afford high-level processing (that basic records for all collections are better than no records for most collections). This work has gained the attention of ARL directors and granting agencies to focus on increasing resources to support processing. As we move forward in this collaborative effort, we have a very real possibility of achieving the goal of providing timely access to all of our collections.

We who labor in the backlogs owe a great debt to ARL for undertaking this initiative. We owe much to our colleagues who serve on the Task Force and those who participated in the conference at LC. But ultimate-
ly the success of this initiative rests squarely on each of us as we expose our own local hidden collections.

The first five articles in this issue, all devoted to “Exposing Hidden Collections,” were selected and edited by Barbara M. Jones and Judith M. Panitch. Their attention to both substance and detail is greatly appreciated, and it has been a pleasure to work with professionals who have taken their editorial responsibilities seriously. Their work bodes well for similar “guest editorships” in the future.

Finally, we take note of the retirement of Roger Stoddard of the Houghton Library at Harvard. Dan Slive has produced an exceptional interview with Roger, who looks to be giving up the varied life of curator for the purer joys of bibliographer. We wish him well in his “retirement.”