

*The Library as Place: History, Community, and Culture*, edited by John E. Buschman and Gloria J. Leckie. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007.

*Reviewed by John M. Budd*

This collection of essays began as an intended special issue of *The Library Quarterly*, which Buschman and Leckie were charged with guest editing. The issue had space for about a half dozen papers, but roughly five times that many submissions arrived. The special issue was never published, but the present volume was and represents the breadth and scope of scholarship on the topic. It is to Libraries Unlimited's credit that they had the foresight to produce this collection; it is undeniably the case that excellent work from various perspectives is being conducted.

In their introduction, Leckie and Buschman ask the key question that guides the volume and sets the tone for the scholarship: "what ultimately makes the library a place?" The question flows from consideration of the difference between library as space and library as place. The space of the physical library is certainly not to be ignored, but consideration of it is couched in terms of the human—individual, shared, and phenomenological—meaning of the space. The introduction mentions David Harvey, whose work on, especially, urban spaces sets a standard for investigation into people's construction of place, and the effects of space on human life. Given the work that both Leckie and Buschman have done over the years, it is not surprising that their own emphasis is on the library as place within the public sphere. Thus, place carries political, as well as social and cultural implications.

The thirteen essays that follow the introduction vary only slightly in quality; on the whole the writing is exceptionally clear. The variation that does occur is in the many ways that place can be examined. Ronald Tetreault, for example, writes about military libraries in the British Empire. There have been some treatments of military, post, and ship libraries of the U.S. military; the British approach is an interesting counterpoint to these studies. The imperial ambitions of Britain relied on a particular kind of learning and literacy; the military libraries, as Tetreault points out, were designed to serve the policy purposes of the Empire, along with providing for the well-being of the soldiers and sailors.

Place can also serve specific groups, as Julie Hersberger, Lou Sua, and Adam Murray observe. They study the building and life of the Carnegie Negro Library in Greensboro, North Carolina. Segregated society was oppressive in many ways; a progressive response was creation of community place that could serve social and cultural needs within a community. Explicitly an educational endeavour, the Carnegie Negro Library was intended to foster advancement through resources and space in which to confer, plan, and organize. Given the time and, to a slightly lesser extent, the location,

the library was not merely a Greensboro place; it was a place specifically for the Black community of Greensboro. It was a place that could be a site of identity through community.

In a somewhat similar point of view, Paulette Rothbauer examines the library in the context of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) patrons. The difference between the studies by Hersberger, Sua, and Murray and Rothbauer is that the Black community in Greensboro could employ political and social strategies to create a place they could call their own. LGBQ patrons have not had the social positioning to effect the same kind of “place of identity.” Rothbauer points out that the customary library policy of providing a safe place can result in tension when it comes to serving LGBQ patrons. The goal of anonymity is frequently achieved through presumed homogeneity; targeted services can either betray that goal or lead to an uncomfortable situation for some patrons. The tension, as Rothbauer noted, is displayed by the simultaneous perception of some patrons that resources are inadequate but that the place can foster community through shared space.

Academic libraries are also the topic of some work. Karen Antell and Debra Engel study the use of the library by scholars. Their investigation suggests some anomalies that challenge the customary view that older scholars are tied, physically and intellectually, to the book, while younger scholars are acculturated into digital resources. Only to an extent does that presumption obtain. Many faculty members do tout the accessibility of digital information, but many extol the benefits of interaction with physical materials. The latter phenomenon may be expressed in terms of browsing—being able to perceive categorically similar works in physical proximity. The results of their study suggest that the intellectual labor of scholars is diverse; there are many ways to inquire and discover, and the many ways may be manifest in the actions of a single scholar.

From social and subscription libraries to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, place has had, and continues to have, many meanings for people. The essays in this collection illustrate quite clearly some of the very important meanings that libraries have. Taken as a whole, the essays raise critical questions about any single ideological “state” for the library (primarily by demonstrating that there is no such thing as the library). There is no one space that can meet the social, cultural, political, or phenomenological needs of all people. The essays in this collection show how remarkable it is that libraries come so close to accomplishing such a goal. The book can not only inform, but serve as a catalyst for further inquiry.