

Sarawak Gems: Barry Roper Special Collections at Sarawak State Library

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Abstract. Sarawak is rich with interesting landscapes and various ethnicities among the members of the society. To ensure the arts and cultural heritage, as well as the collection of publications related to the state, are gathered under one roof, the State Library of Sarawak has taken the initiative to collect all the materials and make them available as their Sarawakiana collections. A special collection was selected as a sample for the case study to understand the treatment of Sarawakiana collections. This paper discusses the purpose of acquiring the collections, the treatment, and the relevance of Barry Roper's collections to Sarawak State Library.

Keywords: Special collections, Collection management, Barry Roper, Sarawak State Library, Library management.

1 Introduction

Sarawak is a land full of a variety of cultures and ethnicities. The state is one of its kind, with a vast landscape and multiple flora and fauna. On top of the interesting tourist attractions, the state is also rich with its cultural and knowledge heritage. These cultural and knowledge heritages are being gathered and stored in state information agencies. The leading organization involved in the collection and distribution of the local heritage is the Sarawak State Library.

Sarawak State Library, also known as Sarawak State Library, is located in Sarawak, Malaysia, specifically on Borneo Island. The library opened to the public back in the year 2000. The library serves as a knowledge and reference center and a location for leisure activities. The library building was surrounded by a herb garden, a recreational park, and a huge lake filled with different types of local fish species. Aside from their magnificent architecture, the establishment of the community library is also to be a

centre for reference, education, and information or dissemination of information relevant to the state's economic, historical, social, cultural, political, and other background development, and achievements.

The necessity to serve the community throughout the state has allowed the Sarawak State Library to open a few branches. Pustaka Miri, located in the state's northern section, first opened its doors to the public on 19th October, 2002, and formally opened on 10th December, 2002. The youngest Pustaka branch, with the theme, educate yourself, was established on 21st October, 2020, in Sibu, Sarawak. The Pustaka Miri and Pustaka Sibu functions follow the Sarawak State Library Ordinance 1999.

The library has four main service sectors: the library services, depository services, corporate management and Pustaka institute. Depository services were set up in the year 2002 and are supported by three (3) main Divisions; Archives Management Division (AMD), Records Management Division (RMD) and Sarawakiana Division (SD).

According to Sarawak State Library Ordinance 1999, Sarawakiana Division is responsible for developing and preserving the library's niche collection (Sarawakiana Collections). At the same time, SD is also responsible for promoting services, programs, and activities and making information accessible to the public and researchers as prescribed under Sarawak State Library Ordinance Cap 29 (Sarawak State Library Ordinance, 1999, 2020). Besides Sarawakiana collections, the division is responsible for managing Borneo and Malaysiana collections. The division is backed up by the Legal Deposit Unit, the Special Collection Unit, and the Oral History Unit. These units ensure that Sarawakiana collections, whether in Sarawak or elsewhere, can be acquired, preserved, and afterwards accessed by patrons or the general public. (*Sarawakiana Art Collection Online _ About Us*, n.d.).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Special Collections in Malaysian Libraries

The development of library collections has always required careful planning from the management. Books, journals, magazines, maps, monographs, and online materials are the core business in any library. Nevertheless, these collections are divided into a few categories: fiction and non-fiction for books, reference books, eBooks, databases, rare collections and special collections. Rare collections or special collections are not necessarily available in all types of libraries, but their existence of it does give an impact on the overall service provided to their patron.

Libraries in Malaysia have created special collections to increase access to and knowledge of their collections. At the same time, the special collections in the library could become one of the promotional tools used to attract users to the library. Darbey & Hayden (2008) define special collections as printed items such as rare books, letters, and ephemera which have traditionally been categorized as collections or kept apart from main holdings. According to Gakobo (1985), special collections are ideally built around special subjects that reflect the major goals of the institution's existing research, teaching, and service programs and those planned for the future. Such materials in a special collection represent specialized institutional needs, and therefore, their

acquisition must arise primarily in the context of university scholarship and research and only after that in the context of collection building. Of course, it has to be said that special collections occur by chance-e.g., by a donor's will.

In Malaysia, names such as Malaysiana, Sarawakiana, Borneo, or "Nusantara" collections are examples of the name given to the library's special collection. Collection development for this division is based on their niche area. According to (Janaki, 2011), Malaysiana holdings at University Malaya Library include materials about Singapore and those published there in the early days. The reason is that Singapore was part of Malaysia until 1964. The current definition of Malaysiana is Books/Journal articles/Conference papers about Malaysia published locally or overseas, Books/Journal articles/Conference papers written by a Malaysian, and Books/Journals published in Malaysia and Conference/Seminars held in Malaysia.

The Sarawak State Library (Sarawak State Library) has aided in the preservation of state public documents and archive items through its Depository Services Sector. They have collaborated closely with the Sarawak Museum Department in preserving and storing state-related papers and manuscripts. As of now, the two organizations are still in the process of transferring the museum's least valuable manuscripts to the state library. Despite receiving documents and manuscripts from the museum, the state library has preserved some priceless manuscripts in its Sarawakiana Collection (Ing et al., 2011).

The Sarawak State Library established its Sarawakiana collections to capture and gather all the arts and cultural heritage representing the multi-racial community in the state. With the uniqueness of every ethnic they have in the state, it is the library's responsibility to ensure they preserve all the documents, pictures, audio visual materials and manuscripts related to the state (Sarawak State Library Ordinance, 1999, 2020). On top of that, Sarawak has been an interesting subject to research and write. Therefore, many publications, papers and books were written about Sarawak and Borneo in general by local scholars and writers and international scholars.

The Sarawakiana collections were managed by the Depository Service Sector of the Sarawak State Library. The sector was responsible for acquiring, recording, preserving and utilizing library resources or items published in Sarawak. The Sarawakiana collection at the Sarawak State Library has 90,000 volumes of Sarawak-specific resources. Books, series, pamphlets, maps, pictures, coins, textiles, stamps, lithographs, visual arts, artefacts, personal collections (contributions from individuals), and resources in various formats comprise the collection.

Rare collections are among the materials in the Sarawakiana collections. Rare collections and special collections have distinct scopes and definitions. A particular collection does not have to be rare, but a rare collection is usually one-of-a-kind. Incunabula, rare books, printed books, manuscripts, archival records and materials, ephemera, photographs, prints, maps, and other graphic works; audio-visual material in all formats; born-digital and digitized media; art objects and three-dimensional (3-D) objects³ that are considered irreplaceable or unusually rare and invaluable are examples of special collections. (Kilmarx et al., 2020).

Rare books, for example, have their definition. The rarity (just a few copies were printed or survived), quality (pristine, worn, or filthy), age (manuscript, proto-printing, incunables, or recent), format (fine printing), and copy-specific qualities like bindings or ownership inscriptions of a rare book were all determined. Rare books are also

expected to have historical, cultural, intellectual, or monetary value, though judgments of these qualities vary over time and may differ amongst secular, academic, or religious institutions, as well as countries.

3 Methodology

A qualitative research method was conducted to assess the administration of special collections in the Sarawak State Library. The Sarawakiana collections in the library are divided into individual items and a collection of materials. The acquisition process for the special collection is also different from other library resources since they are acquired from many sources. It needs to undergo an assessment process to ensure the collection or resources fall into the criteria of Sarawakiana collections.

In the study, we selected Barry Roper's collection. The library acquired the collections from a collector of books, records and other resources related to Sarawak. An observation process has taken place to understand the collections' acquisition, management and preservation process.

We conducted a face-to-face interview to explore further the role and intervention done by the librarians towards the collections. The interview took place in the Sarawak State Library. The respondents for the interview were three of the staff responsible for managing Sarawakiana collections. The selection of the respondents was based on a number of criteria. They must be a staff in the Sarawak State Library, they must be directly involved in the acquisition and management of the special collections and they would have the authority in giving the information regarding their special collections. Three officers in the State Records Repository under the Sarawak State Library met the criteria. They were the Head of Special Collections Unit and two librarians who are in charge of the Sarawakiana Special Collections.

The interview sessions took place in the Sarawak State Library. The interviews were then transcribed and the transcriptions were being analysed using thematic analysis. The researchers used the six steps approach towards thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4 Findings

The youngest “baby” in the Sarawakiana collections is Barry Roper’s collection. The existence of this collection in the library is not only able to add diversity to the available collection, but at the same time, the collections can help the library increase and maintain its heritage value. This paper aims to identify the special collection in the state library collection and determine the administration and preservation plan for Barry Roper's collection. The existence of special collections in the library will help increase the image of the library or information agencies and, in a way, increase the interest of patrons in the sustainability of national heritage or local contents among the community. The future of local heritage depends on the roles of information agencies.

Barry Roper's collection is one of the new collections available in the Sarawakian Division. The collections comprised print and non-print materials such as books, maps, brochures, card games, audio materials, albums, slides, pamphlets, correspondences,

coins, photographs, artifacts, etc. It is very interesting to learn about Barry Roper and his collection, specifically those related to the land of Hornbill, Sarawak.

Based on the information received from the informant, Mr Barry Roper is the owner of Eastgate Bookshop, which is located in East Yorkshire, England. He owns about 2057 items in the bookshop, and about 60% of the collections are about Borneo. Some of the collections were the only existed copy available worldwide. Roper joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) in 1950, trained as an engineer, and specialized in helicopters. He has been in the service for 28 years, and his postings included Cyprus, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and Borneo. According to Roper, his collection includes books once owned by the “White Rajahs”, the English Brooke family who founded and ruled the Kingdom of Sarawak from 1841 to 1946. They wrote themselves – notably Sylvia, the last Ranee, who called her evocative autobiography Queen of the Headhunters (Newsroom, n.d.).

Barry Roper's collection was one of Sarawak State Library's special collections. The objective of having this collection in the library is clear and in conjunction with Sarawak State Library Ordinance, 1999. In 2019, the library acquired the collections. The library gathered information about the collections from the library's patron. Based on the suggestion, the team went to England and arranged to get the collections. The purchasing process follows the steps and requirements set up by the department. 19th October 2019, the collection safely landed in the library.

2,647 of Barry Roper's collection is located in the special collection room on level 1, Sarawak State Library. Figure 1 is the image of Barry Roper Collections are located in the special collection room. Small items such as game cards, pins, and medals are placed in a display box, and the rest of the books are on the shelves.



Figure 1: Special Room for Barry Roper Collections

Having special collections as part of the library's collection material, it required more than just a place for the materials. Issues related to any special collection are the availability and accessibility of the collections for their patrons. Barry roper's collection consists of books and other materials such as vinyl records, cards and pins. These need

special care and attention to ensure their existence will last longer and benefits the organization and the patrons.



Figure 2: Vinyl Records of "White Rajah" The Story of Sarawak

One of the issues that need a proper solution is the digitization plan. Digitizing a special collection requires good planning and execution. Otherwise, special collections will be a "hidden collection" in the library or other information agencies. According to Jones (2004), the unprocessed collections are inaccessible because they are likely to be in closed stacks, eliminating the possibility of discovery by browsing. As a result, digitizing the collection appears to be the best solution for the library. Although it was not easy to begin, the process should be faster and quicker to make the presence more accessible.

5 Discussion

Culture and heritage are about people and the things that are important to them. According to some, the roles of information agencies in the life cycle of heritage management are widely debated. It is critical to protect cultural heritage; therefore, technological advancement appears to be the best tool for bridging the gap and, in some ways, raising community awareness. A national heritage's future depends on the government's plans and actions to ensure the country's heritage's sustainability. The Sarawak State Library is well known as one of the prominent information agencies that are actively involved in the preservation and digitization of the local content and national heritage of Sarawak.

Special collections are part of the national heritage, and as part of the cultural building, the development of this collection is needed in the library. However, it is not easy to have a special collection as part of the collection; hence it comes with some challenges. Storage facilities for collections, space within the library's building, staff

speciality and skills in handling special collection and budget allocation are among the issues and challenges of having a special collection in the library. Darbey & Hayden (2008) highlighted in their article that to ensure the organization's members understand the best practices in collection storage facilities, the premise required precise regulation of light levels, temperature, and humidity, as well as a high level of security. As a result, the upkeep of the facilities is expensive. Sarawak State Library is facing similar difficulties in managing its Sarawakiana Collections.

Barry Roper collections were brought in into the library back in 2019. These collections were placed in the special room located in the state library. Currently, the general public does not have access to these materials. The materials need to be indexed, catalogued and digitized before they are ready to be used by the library patron.

The digitization process is time-consuming and requires a large sum of funds. However, the benefits of digitization projects may overcome the issues of the collection becoming tempered or broken (Terras, 2011). The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington launched "The Optical Digital Image Storage System (ODISS), digitizing 220,000 pages of documents. The ODISS project found digital representations of their holdings to be simple to use, with significant time savings for searching and retrieving information, improved legibility for high-resolution digitized documents, reduced storage space and reduced handling of original documents. Thus, they were perhaps overly optimistic in their predictions of the digitized material's longevity - suggesting 100 years!

In the case of Barry Roper's collections and other collections in the Sarawakiana collections of Sarawak State Library, their main interest is to ensure their collections are made available for public consumption. To do so, they have to find the best way to ensure the longevity of their collections. Therefore, the digitization of the collections would enable the library to showcase its special collections and, at the same time, preserve its valuable heritage.

6 Conclusion

Barry Roper's collection is an example of many other collections available in the Sarawakiana collections in the Sarawak State Library. The collection acquisition, management and distribution process showed that the library took a huge interest in preserving and allowing ongoing access to all Sarawak-related resources within their possession. Being a public library serving a state like Sarawak, the library has a lot of work and a long way to go before it could be the one-stop centre for the state's heritage resources.

Fortunately, many patrons and organisations in Sarawak would be more than willing to assist the library in their quest to strengthen the library's special collections. Indeed, the special collections in the Sarawakiana collections are valuable gems that would prove the richness of the state's arts, culture, and historical and scholarly heritage.

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