

Crossing borders

Exploring new realities with our neighbors

by Deborah B. Dancik

The other day I received a call stating that Canada Customs was holding a "suspicious" package addressed to me at the library. It turned out to be a completely innocent item from one of our long-standing library vendors located outside the country, and I was able to readily alleviate customs' concerns. The incident reminded me once again about borders.

One of the new realities in the last year has been our heightened consciousness of borders: the crossing of borders, who is inside and who is out; our relationships with neighbors who share our borders; recognizing the initiatives and issues surrounding the World Trade Organization (WTO), with its very real implications for breaching borders in economic and cultural ways; and North America's efforts to secure borders, while at the same time recognizing the continent's history of development through immigration and trade. These have been part of our renewed thinking about ourselves and our relationships with the rest of the world.

For those of us who cross borders frequently, live proximate to a border, or live and work in another country, we know borders not only as political and geographic entities but also as a mental construct. While latitudes and longitudes describe political and physical borders, culture, language, and forms of government play a significant part in how people de-

fine and think about themselves and how they relate to people beyond those intangible boundaries. While the landscape may be the same on both sides of the "line," we just "know" things are different on whatever side we are standing.

Extensive travels or living in a country other than one's own provide valuable perspectives. In learning about the intangibles of another place we come to understand ourselves in new ways. In his recent book *From Paris to the Moon*¹, Adam Gopnik offers insight into the distinctions, differences, and similarities that define France and the United States. His discoveries while in France about the nature of his Americanism are the cultural experience—the aspects of daily life, human interactions, and his orientation to politics large and small that define him as much as does his passport.

Gopnik recognizes how aspects of American culture and news had become common in France, as they have in many places. While this is often welcomed and decried at the same time, countries make considerable effort to maintain the underpinnings of their own cultural institutions that define what is within the border of who they are.

In Canada, for example, the publishing industry continues to receive government support in an effort to ensure avenues for Canadian
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About the author

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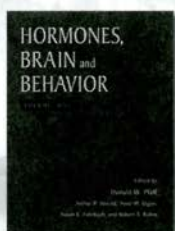
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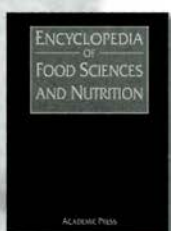
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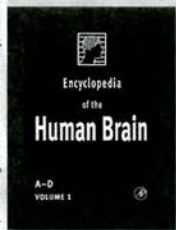
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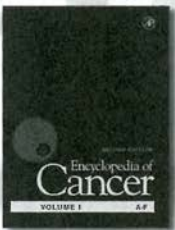
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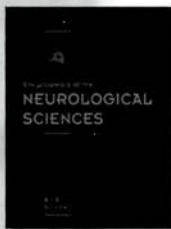
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Baltimore from the 1930s through the 1950s. Gibson is a current faculty member of the law school and has been active in the civil rights movement in Baltimore as a practicing attorney and political figure. Together the papers represent the initial collections of the African Americans in the Law Special Collection project.

A birch bark manuscript from a Buddhist monastery, believed to have been written in the first or second century A.D., was recently acquired by the University of Washington and will

become a key component of the Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project. The manuscript, among the earliest Buddhist writings known to exist, is from a private collector who recently died. The chain of possession from its location of origin to the collector is unknown. The manuscript consists of eight fragments of a scroll and is written in the Gandhari language, a derivative of Sanskrit. The style of script and the language suggest the manuscript comes from Gandhara, a region of what is now eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan. ■

(“Crossing borders” continued from page 656) creative output, perspective, and national voice. Whether countries will be able to see the implications for their cultural institutions or to protect them in WTO treaty negotiations remains to be seen.

Our professional literature offers insights into cultural distinctions as they are reflected in academic librarianship. Two recent articles provide very different but equally interesting cross-border perspectives. Dale Askey’s article “Academics Abroad”² delineates the challenges to scholars doing research in German libraries. In “Books in Bill Clinton’s Donation,”³ Hongyang Zhang and T. D. Webb review the background and implications of two donations to academic libraries in China and the United States. From both of these we can learn as much about our own orientation and points of view as we can about those elsewhere. Exploring academic library practice and cooperation, their relationship to scholarship, and the relationship of the latter to cultural institutions are part of understanding and appreciating the new realities that borders play in the flow of information and knowledge.

For academic librarians concerned with availability and access to scholarly and cultural output, the openness or permeability of borders and their influence on cultural institutions, and vice versa, will continue to be important to monitor.

Next summer, when ALA and CLA (Canadian Library Association) hold their joint conference in Toronto, Ontario, will be an opportunity for the kind of exchange and learning that comes from exposure to practice and

perspectives on both sides of that particular shared border. Canada has long been the United States’ biggest trading partner and the two countries function as very good neighbors. The air waves, which have never been good about respecting borders, allow those people who live within broadcast range on either side of the “line” to enjoy Canada’s CBC and the United States’ National Public Radio.

While Canada has two official languages, it is not a bilingual country. Its government is democratic and parliamentary and it shares with the United States common roots in British common law. Canada was founded on the concepts of peace, order, and good government, as distinct from life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The countries share many values, yet there are definitely differences between them, many of them nuanced.

For the ALA/CLA conference next summer, these distinctions serve as an incentive for crossing the border to take advantage of the opportunity for exchange, discovery, and the development of new relationships, which can only strengthen us in the world of new realities.

Notes

1. Adam Gopnik, *From Paris to the Moon* (New York: Random House, 2001).

2. Dale Askey, “Academic Abroad: Conducting Scholarly research in German Libraries,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 1, no. 4 (October 2001): 445–53.

3. Hongyang Zhang and T. D. Webb, “The Books in Bill Clinton’s Donation,” *College and Research Libraries* 63, no. 4 (July 2002): 367–75. ■