



**Nominations for: Harold M. Forbes**

Curator

West Virginia and Regional History Center

West Virginia University Library

Morgantown, W. Va.

**Nominator: Jay Cole**

**1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?**

Harold Forbes, the Curator of the Rare Books Collection and Associate Curator of the West Virginia & Regional History Center at West Virginia University, deserves to win the I Love My Librarian! 2013 Award because he has opened the minds and hearts of thousands of students to the wonders of rare books and special collections. He has had a profound impact on the development of the state's premier archival collection, and his expertise has been invaluable to community and professional organizations. Harold has been a superb mentor and has inspired others to pursue careers in his field. He has also helped to make possible the publishing of treasured literary and historical works and has played a major role in a digital project which makes thousands of pages of historic newspapers available to everyone via the internet. Harold has excelled as a librarian, scholar, teacher and mentor. His passion for his profession, his much admired expertise, and his thorough and thoughtful pursuit of scholarly and community projects makes him a stellar candidate for this award.

Myra Lowe, Interim Dean  
West Virginia University Libraries

Dr. Jay Cole, Chief of Staff  
West Virginia University

**2. Please discuss how the nominee has helped you and/or others and made your experience of the library a more positive one.**

I am a special collections librarian today in large part because of Harold Forbes. After attending an antiquarian booksellers seminar in 2003, I decided to volunteer at the WVU library. I returned home and filled out the WVU online volunteer form, asking to work with rare books. A few weeks later I heard from Harold. He'd been waiting for the perfect project to make the best use of my bookseller skills. That opportunity came with the arrival of the Bacon Collection; 150 books covering a variety of subjects, formats and materials spanning the 15th to the 20th centuries. The Bacon Collection gave me my first real taste of bibliography and scholarly research. This project introduced me to the field of special collections and helped me to begin to imagine what it might be like to be a special collections librarian.

From this first project onwards, Harold gave me freedom. He gave me the freedom to touch, to explore, to research, to develop, and to create. Perhaps the greatest freedom was the opportunity to develop a collection based on my own interest – publishers' bookbinding designs. I learned so much developing the collection and that knowledge paid off in many ways, from winning the student book

collectors' award while earning my masters in library science, to publishing a peer reviewed article in a scholarly journal, to conference presentations based on my research.

Harold also gave me the freedom to teach; first as his assistant, then as his colleague. From Harold I learned how to interact with students and enjoy that priceless moment when a student gets it – when they connect with a book – that moment when a student's eyes light up while holding a book, touching a page and feeling its texture or looking at a binding and understanding how it represents the culture at the time of its publication or who its readership would have been – teaching with Harold gave me that appreciation.

Two of the best examples of working with Harold involved 1) an accident, and 2) an opportunity to work closely with a faculty member.

The accident occurred while Harold was at lunch one day and I accidentally dropped a seventeenth-century book. I was mortified and felt I had to tell Harold immediately. He'd told me where he'd be at lunch and I walked downtown to find him and confess. When I did, he couldn't believe I'd walked downtown to tell him about my accident and then he assured me that anyone who handles books as much as we do will drop something sometime. I returned to the rare book room, still feeling miserable, and when Harold returned he laid Shakespeare's First Folio on the table in front of me, and giving me a task, left the rare book room and Shakespeare's Folio in my nervous hands. I don't remember what task he asked me to do, but I do remember that this eloquent gesture of trust and faith in me was so meaningful that I treasure that moment to this day.

The chance to work with a professor came when Harold gave me the opportunity to assist English professor, Dr. Marilyn Francus, to develop a teaching tool. Together we worked to develop the Rare Book Pedagogy Module, a unit of exercises designed to introduce students and faculty to research with primary sources. This close interaction taught me how to work with faculty and helped me to further develop research and imaging skills. Dr. Francus and I presented this collaborative effort to the American Library Association's Rare Books and Manuscripts conference in Philadelphia in 2010. Both Harold and I continue to work with Dr. Francus teaching students using this module to this day.

Lastly, I would add that Harold continued to support me when I returned to school to get my masters in library science. I worked in the rare book room throughout my degree and was given the freedom to use any and all resources in my studies. This provided an unparalleled opportunity to find out what it would be like to work on large projects in a formal library environment.

I graduated from the University of South Carolina in 2009 and I am now the special collections librarian for the WVU College of Law. I was inspired to be a special collections librarian and I am able to fulfill this role in large part to the everlasting kindnesses and generosity of Harold Forbes.

Stewart Plein, Special Collections Librarian  
West Virginia University Law Library

### **3. How does the nominee make the college, community college, or university a better place?**

There is no doubt that the other nominators will have painted a glowing portrait of Harold Forbes as an exemplary university librarian who personifies the standards of the profession in working with students, faculty, and others at West Virginia University. I've worked with Harold for approximately four years and I may view his contributions a bit differently—more broadly—and I want to focus on this as one of the reasons I love my librarian.

Like over 180 other institutions in the United States, WVU is a land-grant university with a mission that extends our role beyond the campus to include service to the people of the State of West Virginia. Every day, Harold's depth of knowledge, availability, and curatorial expertise are on display at WVU. But at the same time the important and impressive ways that Harold works to fulfill WVU's mandate for openness, accessibility, and service to the people of West Virginia cannot be overstated. Harold recognizes and values the many and varied ways that all parts of WVU—the faculty, the WVU Libraries, West Virginia University Press—contribute to the land-grant mission. And this is how he and I have come to work together.

I am the director of West Virginia's university press. University presses and libraries make common cause with other cultural institutions to promote engagement with ideas and sustain a literate culture. Harold works closely with me on an important WVU Press initiative, West Virginia Classics, a book series he helped to establish. West Virginia Classics brings us together with faculty, the public, and the West Virginia Humanities Council to republish editions of treasured literary and historical works ([http://wvupressonline.com/series/west\\_virginia\\_classics](http://wvupressonline.com/series/west_virginia_classics)). To date, we've published four books that demonstrate the culture and diversity of West Virginia—from natural history, to race, to music. West Virginia Classics reach out to the general public and encourage people of all ages to explore their own story, along with West Virginia's story. Harold's enthusiasm for this book series and its mission is reflective of the passion he brings to all aspects of his work. West Virginia Classics promote the discovery and rediscovery of classic texts by young and old—a mission that typifies Harold's desire to inspire lifelong learning. Harold's contribution to this book series makes West Virginia—and therefore WVU—a better place.

But Harold's work at WVU also has a global reach. He has done a great service to national and international scholarship with his contributions to *Chronicling America* and the National Digital Newspaper Program, the Internet-based, searchable database of U.S. newspapers sponsored by the Library of Congress and National Endowment for the Humanities. Through Harold's efforts, digitized versions of some of the West Virginia and Regional History Center's large collection of historical West Virginia newspapers are discoverable and accessible far beyond Morgantown and West Virginia. The NDNP database materials demonstrate the culture, diversity, and unique history of the State and region. Harold's work for *Chronicling America* adds an important dimension to accessible, global literature that in turn makes learning and scholarship richer. It is an indelible contribution from Harold for and on behalf of the people of West Virginia.

Looking back through four years of emails and other materials from Harold, I easily see his humor, generosity, and above all his great passion for his work. He graciously gives of his time and expertise to reach out to new generations, promote engagement with ideas, give voice to minority voices and perspectives, and maintain the availability of important works. I think Harold believes that a rising tide does lift all boats. He takes a broad, synergistic view of the ways he can make WVU and West Virginia a better place—and he succeeds terrifically in this goal.

Carrie Mullen, Director

#### **4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and faculty and the teaching and learning process?**

I contacted Harold Forbes years ago to discuss ways to integrate archival experiences into my English classes here at WVU. He was enthusiastic about the prospect from the beginning, and supported me throughout the process—not only as I developed exercises for students and collected materials on archives pedagogy, but also as I tested those materials with my classes.

As I started bringing classes (from 10 to 25 students each) to the Rare Book Room, Harold provided impromptu talks to orient the students to the archives including presenting talks about the evolution of the book from tablets to scrolls to bound volumes; talks on the changes in book manufacturing, bindings, paper, and printing; talks on the ways to handle rare books and the conventions of rare book rooms; and talks on the history of the WVU Rare Books Collection. From the beginning, my students have been thrilled to be able to handle rare books, and every time they receive their assignments, Harold starts working with the students, often in groups of two or three, and sometimes one on one, answering their questions and pointing out details that they might not otherwise have noticed.

For instance, I teach a course on Jane Austen and Popular Culture, and fortunately, our Rare Books Collection holds first editions of Austen novels, as well as those of the works of her contemporaries, including Sir Walter Scott, Maria Edgeworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I was thus able to develop an assignment in which students are asked to assess the marketing of Austen's works in her time, based on evaluating her texts and those of her contemporaries—and then compare it with the marketing of Austen in the present, based on the editions of Austen that they are reading for class. I take the students to the Rare Book Room where Harold arranges for approximately 30 relevant texts to be available. Harold explains to the students the conventions of conducting archival research and demonstrates the way to handle rare materials. He also provides information about the book publishing industry in England in Jane Austen's day. The students then receive the assignment and get to work. The students are always delighted to be allowed to work with these 200-year old texts—in fact, when I took my Austen class to the Rare Book Room last spring, one student tweeted about the experience. More importantly, the pedagogical value of studying in the archives is enormous. As my students start assessing the texts, questions arise: why isn't Austen's name on the title page? Why were her novels published in this size and in multivolume sets? Was this format typical, or not? These are precisely the sorts of questions that my students should be asking—and suddenly, early nineteenth-century England is not a hypothetical place, but tangible and real—where real people wrote and published and read books, and where their concerns about audience, critics, circulation and profits were very much like our own. None of this would be possible without Harold, who provides the framework and support for my students to engage in the intellectual work that they need to do.

I have also brought undergraduates in my eighteenth-century literature courses to work in the Rare Book Room. Harold has pulled out gems from our collection for them. He explains the significance of first editions of Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, Alexander Pope's Iliad (with its long list of famous subscribers), and the achievement of Diderot's Encyclopedie. I have brought graduate students to the Rare Book Room to study book history, and Harold has arranged for them to analyze works ranging from Egyptian papyri, to a 15th-century Latin missal, to Dickens' Bleak House in its original monthly issues. Visits to the Rare Book Room are usually the students' favorite part of the course, and they often comment that working in the archives has changed their perspective about scholarship, history, literature, and culture.

Increasingly, my colleagues are bringing their students to the Rare Book Room, and integrating archives pedagogy and book history into their courses, too. A colleague who is a scholar of early American literature regularly takes his students to the Rare Book Room to study early texts by Thomas Jefferson; another, who focuses on nineteenth-century American literature, takes her students to see materials that shed light on race relations in Appalachia during that period. Yet another colleague, who works in digital humanities, uses the Rare Book Room as a jumping off point to discuss the evolution of the book from codex to electronic readers, and to help his students think about designing their own books.

All of the above is made possible by Harold Forbes. He has opened the world of rare books and archival research to the students at West Virginia University—and in doing so, helped students learn about literacy, literature, publication and technology in ways they never before imagined.

Dr. Marilyn Francus, Associate Professor of English  
West Virginia University

## **5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the campus community?**

I have had the good fortune of working with Harold Forbes for more than thirty years, and like literally thousands of other colleagues, students, faculty and patrons with whom he has interacted during his career, I am both personally and professionally the better for it. He is not only an exceptional librarian but an exceptional individual. I cannot imagine a more fitting candidate for this award.

Harold's contributions to the WVU Libraries and campus community are so diverse and numerous that I can only touch on a few of the most significant here.

Harold has had a profound impact through the years on the development of the West Virginia and Regional History Center, the state's leading archives-library, and one of the most valuable teaching and research resources on the WVU campus. While his contributions have been pervasive, his superlative work in developing the Center's unmatched collection of printed resources must be singled out. Harold is quite simply the foremost authority in the field of West Virginia bibliography. His preeminence dates back to 1981 when his book *West Virginia History; A Bibliography and Guide to Research* (359 pages) was published by the WVU Press. It continues to be demonstrated to this day through his contributions to the scholarly journal *West Virginia History* which publishes his review of Recent Publications each year in its Fall issue. Due to his expertise and dedicated efforts over the past four decades, the WVRHC holds the most comprehensive collection of printed resources in the field of West Virginia and regional history of any library in the nation.

Harold's efforts in administering the WVU Libraries Rare Books Collection must also be singled out for special praise. For many years, this priceless collection – one of the finest of any land-grant university – was largely unknown and unutilized. When it was transferred to Harold's control in the mid-1990s, he immediately set out to establish bibliographic control of the collection according to rare books standards and endeavored to address its conservation needs. In the years that followed, by working with library administrators, colleagues and faculty, he gradually transformed what had been essentially a closed, unknown, collection into a vibrant teaching resource which now hosts more than a dozen programs and classes each year, including hundreds of visitors from across campus and beyond. His efforts have brought much distinction to the WVU Libraries, not only on the WVU campus, but across the state.

Indeed, Harold's leadership in professional and scholarly endeavors extends well beyond WVU. He has served on numerous committees and boards of statewide importance including serving as a Citizen Member of the West Virginia Humanities Council, and service on both the West Virginia State Records Advisory Board, and the West Virginia Archives and History Commission which provides oversight for the State Archives and State Museum. He also participated in the recent Heritage Preservation -- Institute for Museum and Library Services "Connecting to Collections" statewide conservation assessment. As an outcome of that project, he volunteered to serve as WVU's designated conservation site visitor for participating libraries and historical agencies in need of conservation consulting.

A final major initiative that must be mentioned is Harold's leadership in the field of historic newspaper preservation and access. During the mid-1980s, Harold served as project director of one of the very first state newspaper preservation programs funded by the NEH's nationwide United States Newspaper Project. The goal of that project, which garnered not one, but three NEH grants, was to locate, microfilm and catalog literally every extant newspaper published within the state's present borders from the inception of newspaper publishing in the region to the present. A quarter of a century later, he is now directing the West Virginia component of the National Digital Newspaper Program, also funded by the NEH, and administered by the Library of Congress. The West Virginia project is currently in its second grant period. More than 200,000 full-text, searchable pages of historical West Virginia newspapers will be available online by the time the present phase concludes in August 2015.

The above examples really only scratch the surface of Harold's innumerable professional contributions to the WVU Libraries, the University, and the State of West Virginia during his career. They also fail to reveal why people not only respect and admire him, but in fact, "love their librarian."

As noted above, Harold is not only a remarkable librarian but also a remarkably fine person. He has a mild, disarming demeanor, and genuineness of character that make him almost instantly endearing to all who make his acquaintance. He is a people person, not so much in extroverted gregariousness, as in his sincere, "simpatico," concern for others, and in his desire to help them succeed in all endeavors. It is this personal quality, combined with his superlative expertise, that makes him such a perfect candidate for the "I Love My Librarian" award.