

Alison M. Foley. *Can One Man Make a Difference?: An Analysis of the Effects of the Crimes of Gilbert Bland on Rare Book and Special Collection Security Measures and a Review of the Evolution of Recommended Security Guidelines*. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2005. 36 pages. Advisor: Helen R. Tibbo

In large part because of his methods—cutting maps out of rare books during open hours and under observation—infamous thief Gilbert Bland caused shockwaves in the academic library community in the 1990s and highlighted attention on the lack of comprehensive security measures in place in rare books and special collections repositories. Archivists and curators from the institutions targeted by Bland were interviewed to determine how much the Bland incidents affected the security measures in place. Interviews were also conducted with curators at institutions not targeted by Bland to determine if Bland's crimes had an effect on the wider professional community. Additionally, a review of the professional literature was undertaken to evaluate the evolution of recommended security guidelines.

Headings:

Archives and libraries

Bland, Gilbert Joseph Lee

Book thefts

Theft prevention

CAN ONE MAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF  
THE CRIMES OF GILBERT BLAND ON RARE BOOK AND SPECIAL  
COLLECTION SECURITY MEASURES AND A REVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF  
RECOMMENDED SECURITY GUIDELINES.

by  
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty  
of the School of Information and Library Science  
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in  
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2005

Approved by

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction.....	2
Literature Review	
Crime and Criminals.....	3
Security Guidelines.....	5
Brief Review of Gilbert Bland’s Crimes.....	13
Methodology.....	18
Findings	
Professional Guidelines.....	19
Application of Guidelines.....	21
Effects of Bland’s Crimes.....	24
Conclusion.....	26
Appendix A Target Interview Questions.....	30
Appendix B Non-Target Interview Questions.....	31
Bibliography.....	33

## INTRODUCTION

As long as there have been libraries, there have been security problems. As the methods of theft have changed, so have the responses and attempts at prevention. From placing curses in precious Egyptian volumes, to chaining down books in medieval monasteries, to electronic surveillance of reading rooms, the keepers of historical documents have struggled to protect their collections.

Even during the Middle Ages, when access to literary works was very limited—in large part available only to clergy—theft was an issue. The Renaissance saw an explosion of book collecting. In many cases collections were created through theft, as books became coveted as objects rather than for their content.<sup>1</sup> More recently, the 1980s saw an increase in book thefts accompanying a dramatic increase in the market value of rare books.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons for theft are varied, but have not changed significantly through time. Books are stolen out of greed, out of hatred for libraries and librarians, and even by a misguided few to “protect” the items from the poor handling of librarians and other patrons. All libraries and public collections are at risk for theft and mutilation of books, journals, and other materials. Special collections, rare books and archives are particularly vulnerable, as many of the items they hold are unique and of high monetary and historical value, and therefore irreplaceable.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Lesley Knieriem, *Book-Fools of the Renaissance*, (University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science Occasional Papers, 1993), 5.

<sup>2</sup> William E. Chadwick, “Special Collection Library Security: An Internal Audit Perspective.” *Journal of Library Administration*, 25 (1998) : 16.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Crime and Criminals*

Many early writings on book theft focus not on how to secure collections, but rather, on the stories of the thieves themselves. This was in part because their crimes were seen as so audacious. The boldness of many of these early book thieves led to the idea of the book thief as “bibliomaniac,” and gave us literature in which the varied motivations and crimes of bibliomaniacs were explored. Works such as *Bibliomania in the Middle Ages* by F. Somner Merryweather in 1933, *The Anatomy of Bibliomania* by Holbrook Jackson in 1950 and *Bibliokleptomania* by Lawrence S. Thompson in 1968 laid out the stories of alleged “book madness” and the crimes to which it led, and attempted to understand the psychological problems and sociological implications of this affliction.<sup>3</sup>

There are many tales of bibliomaniacs throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In her thesis on the subject, K. Lesley Knieriem categorizes the different types of bibliomaniacs by what she believes to be their differing motivations, including those financial, aesthetic, nostalgic, nationalistic, for social climbing and even altruistic, as in the case of Thomas Bodley (1545-1613).<sup>4</sup> This last type of motivation is by far the least common in the world of bibliomania. Even in the case of Bodley (the only case identified as altruistic) the altruism was deemed “the self-centered altruism of a late Renaissance book-fool.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence S. Thompson, *Bibliokleptomania*, (Berkeley, CA: Peacock Press, 1968), 7.

<sup>4</sup> K. Lesley Knieriem, *Book-Fools of the Renaissance*, (University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science Occasional Papers, 1993), 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

By far the most infamous bibliomane in history was Don Vincente, a former Spanish monk alleged to have committed eight murders in his fervent quest for books.<sup>6</sup> Don Vincente did not consider himself a thief, as he testified in court, but believed he was serving a higher purpose. When asked if he was sorry about committing the murders he proclaimed, “Every man must die sooner or later, but good books must be conserved.”<sup>7</sup>

As book thieves can be truly fascinating subjects, the examination of psychological aspects of book theft has continued to the present in works such as *A Gentle Madness* by Nicholas A. Basbanes (1995) and in journal articles such as Philip Weiss’ “The Book Thief: A True Tale of Bibliomania” published in *Harper’s Magazine* in 1994 and “Biblioklepts” by Christopher Reed in a 1997 issue of *Harvard Magazine*. These examinations generally focus on individual book thieves and their motivations. In particular, there have been numerous examinations of the case of Stephen Carrie Blumberg, the title thief of Weiss’ *Tale*.

Indeed, Stephen Blumberg has been written about more than any other modern-day book thief. Blumberg spent over twenty years looting libraries throughout the United States and Canada. It is estimated that in this time he took some 23,600 books from at least 268 libraries.<sup>8</sup> Blumberg was very good at what he did and managed to sneak into even the most ‘secure’ rare book collections to get what he wanted.<sup>9</sup> He was also very good at covering his tracks, removing almost all traces of identification from the works he stole.

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 467.

<sup>9</sup> Weiss, Phillip. “The Book Thief: A True Tale of Bibliomania,” *Harper’s Magazine* 288 (January 1994) : 37.

The Blumberg case has also served as an example in a lot of literature that is focused not just on the tales of exceptional thieves, but on security issues. Because Blumberg was able to bypass security measures in so many ways at so many highly reputable libraries, he is mentioned in many articles as a cautionary tale.

### *Security Guidelines*

Even before Blumberg, security in archives and special collections was a big issue. Professionals and professional organizations began to prepare guidelines that would assist individual repositories and the profession as a whole to protect their holdings.

A review of the literature on special collection security may lead one to assume that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Security guidelines themselves have only primarily changed in the use of new technologies, however, the perception of security issues and the willingness to discuss them within the profession has changed much more. Security and crime are issues that archivists and curators—the “gatekeepers” of our cultural heritage in special collections—have historically not wanted to think too much about or discuss. In large part this reticence was due to a fear of admitting that their collections were vulnerable. Fear also affected how thefts, once discovered, were handled, as it was thought that donors might rethink their donations to a collection they deemed unsafe. Yet the issues of security and crime are of the utmost importance: without proper security, donors will be unwilling to share their collected works, and great public collections will not be available.

The focus on security issues in large part emerged through the efforts of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and their Archival Security Program Committee,

which was formed in the 1970s with some urging by James B. Rhoads. Rhoads' 1966 *American Archivist* article "Alienation and Theory: Archival Problems," addressed the issues of security and put forward suggestions on the handling of thefts, starting with an identification of the major causes. Rhoads asserted that there were two major reasons that people steal documents. The first was simple greed, and included people who stole for monetary gain. The second was impulse, which encompassed a large and diverse group of thieves including kleptomaniacs and the mentally deranged.<sup>10</sup>

In the article, Rhoads focused in part on how dealers, collectors and repositories should work together to serve all of their interests, as collaboration was the surest way to discourage theft and make it more difficult. He also explained that there were four basic requirements he felt were essential measures for repositories to protect archival holdings, though he did acknowledge that, "no system of deterrents is universally suitable."<sup>11</sup>

The first measure that Rhoads felt was essential was "round-the clock" surveillance. This included employing guards, mechanical or electronic alarm systems, or some combination of the two. The second suggestion was the development of procedures that would insure that thieves were not given access to manuscripts to begin with. The third, and most basic measure, was barring researchers from the stacks and storage areas and the creation and use of separate, staffed, reading rooms. Lastly, he suggested a systematic marking program to ensure institutional ownership could be identified.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rhoads, James B. "Alienation and Theory: Archival Problems," *American Archivist* 29 (April 1966) : 197-208.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

Rhoads understood that not all repositories could implement all of these ‘essential’ measures. Specifically, he noted that not all items could be marked and that repositories needed to be selective in their marking and consider the use of security copies. The step that Rhoads felt was most important, and that could be implemented at all repositories, was the training of staff to be a little less trusting and more watchful. As he asserted, “A good archivist must [be] suspicious!”<sup>13</sup>

Rhoads also suggested procedures for the aftermath of a theft, including the vigorous prosecution of thieves. He further suggested that the SAA act as a clearinghouse for theft information so that the collaboration he promoted could be more easily undertaken.<sup>14</sup>

In part due to Rhoads’ prompting while he was President of SAA, the archival security program committee was created by a small group of members. Once formed, this committee was able to secure a grant from the NEH of slightly over \$99,000 to support their security initiative, including a national register of lost or stolen archival materials.<sup>15</sup>

The SAA security committee was not alone in trying to tackle the issues of repository security. In September of 1973, the Burns Security Institute of New York published the results of their “National Survey on Library Security.” Asserting that library crime was about much more than just financial loss, the firm undertook a survey of 255 public libraries and covered many aspects of dangers, protection and prevention.<sup>16</sup> While the main focus of the Burns survey was public libraries, some information on

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>15</sup> Leab Martin, Abigail. “The Saying and the Doing: The Literature and Reality of Theft Prevention Measures in U.S. Archives-Part I,” *Library & Archival Security* 15 (June 2000) : 27-75.

<sup>16</sup> Burns Security Institute. *National Survey on Library Security*. New York: Briarcliff Manor, 1973.

special collections was included, such as the fact that of 172 reporting libraries, seventy-eight granted researchers access to their closed stacks.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, though roughly 44% of respondents believed book theft was worse than it had been five years prior, forty seven percent had neither security guards nor alarms.<sup>18</sup> The Burns group went on to suggest that the logical first step to improve security was periodic inventories. They also recommended stricter control over closed stacks and increased cooperation with local fire and police departments, suggestions that would be proposed by many writers on archival security.<sup>19</sup>

One such writer was Edmund Berkeley, Jr., who became “intensely aware of the major national problem with archival theft”<sup>20</sup> while working at a repository that was robbed. In the aftermath of the theft, Berkeley noted the problems the repository faced, starting with the repository’s lack of a shelf list, which seriously hindered their ability to identify and locate materials.<sup>21</sup> The incident, which was an “insider job,” led to many changes at the repository including much more limited access to the vault, the creation of a log of vault entries, and the rearrangement of the reading room for better monitoring. Berkeley also suggested special training for employees who staffed the reading room desk, having the university’s legal advisor review new security, and being more honest about theft as the lack of theft reporting only assisted the work of thieves.<sup>22</sup> Many of Berkeley’s suggestions became the basis for the professional guidelines to follow.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>20</sup> Edmund Berkeley, Jr. 1976. “Archival Security: A Personal and Circumstantial View.” *Georgia Archive*, Spring, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Berkeley, *Archival Security: A Personal and Circumstantial View*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 17.

One of the first and most important sets of repository security guidelines was the 1977 manual written by Timothy Walch for the Society of American Archivists, titled simply, “Archives & Manuscripts: Security.” In the manual, Walch proposed that security was “an important but often neglected aspect of archival work.”<sup>23</sup> Walch proposed procedures to help prevent what he saw as an increasing problem with theft, starting with solid security planning with consideration of staff, patrons and the collections. In just six brief chapters, Walch examined nearly all aspects of repository security from the creation of security programs to theft deterrence to protections against fires and floods. As pointed out by Abigail Leab Martin in her 2000 report in *Library and Archival Security*, “[Walch] advanced new ideas that would so permeate the literature as to become clichés.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, many ideas that have become standard in any discussion of archive and special collection security were first set forth by Walch. Further, by emphasizing measures that could be implemented at relatively little expense, Walch made security for repositories of all sizes a feasible idea.

Throughout the 1980s, further steps were taken to increase standardization and cooperation in security. An ad hoc security committee was created by the Rare Books and Manuscript section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 1979. In cooperation with the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America (ABAA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the SAA, a central listing of missing and stolen works was created. The database, *Bookline Alerts: Missing Books and Manuscripts*, known as BAMBAM, was a big step. Previously, many thefts were left unreported out of fear of embarrassment or in concern for loss of faith of

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<sup>23</sup> Timothy Walch, *Archives & Manuscripts: Security*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Abigail Leab Martin. 2000. “The Saying and the Doing: The Literature and Reality of Theft Prevention Measures in U.S. Archives – Part I.” *Library and Archival Security*, 15 (2).

donors. With the creation of a central list, repositories and book and manuscript dealers could cooperate to help prevent thefts and to track down stolen items when thefts did occur.<sup>25</sup>

In 1982, the ABAA published “Rare Books and Manuscript Thefts: A Security System for Librarians, Booksellers, and Collectors” (“*Rare Books*”) by John H. Jenkins, the president of the ABAA. As stated by Terry Belanger in the forward, the security system described in the book was the result of cooperation between librarians, archivists, antiquarian booksellers, and book collectors. But, “the driving force behind this cooperation, and indeed, behind the whole current war on book theft, is John Jenkins.”<sup>26</sup>

Jenkins’ system, “a new and more powerful attempt than has ever been made before to prevent book and manuscript theft,”<sup>27</sup> starts with an explanation of the nature of book thieves and then focuses on what to do *after* a theft. The first suggestion is to immediately put on notice anybody who might be able to assist in the recovery of the item(s), including those to whom the materials might be offered for sale. This is neither the first nor the last time that notification of a theft has been recommended, but it remained as one of the measures least likely to be taken.

*Rare Books* continues with advice on what to do when stolen books are recovered, as well as what to do when one is offered stolen books. Additionally, Jenkins advises how to avoid book thefts, though he notes that prevention “is a complex subject that is beyond the scope of [his] guidebook.”<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, he recommends guidelines for

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<sup>25</sup> John H. Jenkins, *Rare Books and Manuscript Thefts: A Security System for Librarian, Booksellers, and Collectors*, (New York: Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, 1982) I.

<sup>26</sup> John H. Jenkins, *Rare Books and Manuscript Thefts: A Security System for Librarians, Booksellers, and Collectors*, (New York: Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, 1982), 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

prevention that are much like those suggested by RBMS and Walch. The suggestions included naming a Security Officer with authority to carry out the security program; and drafting security policies in conjunction with “the administration, staff, legal authorities, and other knowledgeable persons.”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Jenkins recommends minimizing access points to the special collections building and stacks areas, background checks conducted upon hiring of employees, orientation for researchers and the requirement of a photo id for all users. Jenkins also suggests that the administrators of special collections should be knowledgeable of the laws for dealing with theft.

This legal knowledge was discussed in greater length in 1985 with SAA’s publication of “Archives & Manuscripts: Law” as part of their Basic Manual Series. The authors, Gary M. Peterson and Trudy Huskamp Peterson, cover numerous aspects of the laws that affect repositories, focusing mainly on federal laws and practices. The authors assert that providing records is the focus of the majority of legal issues, and fall into three general areas: “establishment of researcher identity, credentials, and liability; delivery, custody, and return; surveillance and enforcement of regulations.”<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the guide provides information on how to register researchers, how to handle replevin—the recovery of property that has been improperly or illegally taken—and ways of making successful relationships with lawyers.

Security concerns remained a major focus the rest of the 1980s. The ACRL RBMS Ad Hoc Security Committee became permanent and went to work creating new guidelines. Still, much of the literature of the time generalized about all repositories, or

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<sup>29</sup> Jenkins, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Gary M. Peterson and Trudy Huskamp Peterson, *Archives & Manuscripts: Law*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1985), 74.

dealt solely with large academic libraries. Some works focused on the types of thieves to watch for and how they could be identified. Others focused on security procedures and systems. Few writers focused on both the types of thieves and security procedures and how they were related. Also increasingly rare were works focused on rare books and special manuscript collections rather than on large, general libraries. One exception to this was the 1987 work, *Special Collections Security: Problems, Trends, and Consciousness* by Mary Wyly. This article explored the changing environment in special collections, the increased rate of thefts, the varied types of thieves and their methods, and organized responses to theft prevention.<sup>31</sup>

Much of the literature that followed reiterated the same basic ideas put forward by Walch and others. Thorough planning was presented as key to any security program, as were the placement of a repository security officer, thorough staff training, patron registration and closed stacks. In 1994, the ACRL RBMS Security Committee released “Guidelines for the Security of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Other Special Collections.” The guidelines were reminiscent of those proposed by Walch, with some added information and further recommendations regarding technology. The appointment of a security officer was still recommended as were close supervision of staff, registration of patrons, restricted access to valuable items and awareness of laws for dealing with theft.<sup>32</sup>

Just after the RBMS Guidelines were released, in 1995, Gregor Trinkaus-Randall published “Protecting Your Collections: A Manual of Archival Security” through the Society of American Archivists. Trinkaus-Randall identified six categories of collection

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<sup>31</sup> Mary Wyly. “Special Collections Security: Problems, Trends, and Consciousness.” *Library Trends*, 36 (Summer 1987) : 242.

<sup>32</sup> ACRL Rare Books & Manuscripts Section’s Security Committee. “Guidelines for the Security of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Other Special Collections.” *College & Research Libraries News*, 60 (October 1999) : 741-748

protection: deterrents to theft; the identification of missing items; environmental controls; protection from, prevention of, and recovery from disasters; exhibition and loan of materials; and the insurance of valuable items.<sup>33</sup>

Trinkaus-Randall's suggestions were similar to the guidelines by the RMBS committee. Both considered it crucial that security plans be written down, and both recommended consulting other knowledgeable staff members and legal authorities. As Trinkaus-Randall explained, "the plan must be written down and distributed; otherwise, the institution is courting disaster."<sup>34</sup>

Because of tight budgets, many institutions were unable to implement all of the security measures suggested by the professional guidelines. It was believed that the security measures in place were sufficient and budgets would not allow for electronic monitoring systems and other high tech-high priced measures. For many, that belief changed drastically with the discovery of the crimes of Gilbert Bland.

## **BRIEF REVIEW OF GILBERT BLAND'S CRIMES**

The story of the crimes of Gilbert Joseph Bland, Jr.—aka James Perry—should serve as a cautionary tale to all who work in rare books and other special collections. Theft and mutilation of materials has always been a concern for administrators of special collections, but the crimes of Gilbert Bland stand out from the rest. Bland's crimes are noteworthy not only for the vast amount of materials he was able to steal, but also for the manner in which he committed his crimes. Previous infamous book thieves, such as Stephen Blumberg, devised ways to get around security measures, such as removing

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<sup>33</sup> Gregor Trinkaus-Randall, *Protecting Your Collections: A Manual of Archival Security* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1995) 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

materials under cover of night. Bland stole materials (almost exclusively rare maps) out in the open, in front of those who were responsible for monitoring him and other researchers using the same collections. Not only did Bland steal the maps he wanted, he mutilated the books from which they came by slashing the maps out with a razor.

In February of 1994 Bland and his wife opened Antique Maps & Collectibles, Ltd. in a shopping complex in Florida.<sup>35</sup> Bland proceeded to build his collection by stealing centuries-old maps from rare books he found at distinguished universities around the country. Bland was not an expert on antique maps, however, and in addition to offering materials at odd—often very low—prices, he made some dealers nervous by his “ability to find multiple copies of relatively scarce pieces.”<sup>36</sup>

Bland kept himself very busy. Living up to his name, he went about his work unnoticed, blending in with other academics and library patrons, and slicing valuable maps out of rare books wherever he went. It was not until December of 1995 that the world would finally get wind of Bland’s actions.

It was at the beautiful George Peabody Library at Johns’ Hopkins University that Bland was finally caught. A fellow patron, Jennifer Bryan—curator of manuscripts at the Maryland Historical Society—was watching Bland and began to feel he was up to something. Bryan reported her suspicions to library officials, which led to a footrace through Baltimore, with three Peabody security officers chasing after Bland, after he dashed out.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Miles Harvey, *The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime*, (New York: Random House, 2000), 220.

<sup>36</sup> Harvey, Miles. “Mr. Bland’s Evil Plot to Control the World,” *Outside* (June 1997) : <http://outside.away.com/magazine/0697/9706bland.html>

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

Once he was brought back to the library, Bland admitted to stealing a map out of “The General History of the Late War,” a 1763 volume by John Entick with which he had been working. Upon returning the map, apologizing profusely, and offering several hundred dollars in compensation, Bland was released by Peabody security and the Baltimore police.<sup>38</sup> It was only later that security officials discovered a notebook left behind by Bland contained a “hit list” of rare maps and the repositories which held them.<sup>39</sup>

The discovery of the notebook is likely why Peabody librarians began to publicize the incident. As Robert Karrow, the Newberry Library’s curator of maps explains, “A lot of library thefts have gone unreported in the past. You’re embarrassed, and maybe you say to yourself, ‘What will the donors think?’ And you’re reluctant to talk about the whole issue because you don’t want to give the crazies ideas.”<sup>40</sup> Fortunately, librarians at the Peabody did not think this way. After discovering numerous other thefts by Bland from previous visits to their own library, Peabody employees began to notify the other repositories whose names they had found listed in Bland’s notebook. They also posted the information on ExLibris, an internet discussion group for professionals involved with rare books and special collections. It was because of this that many curators went through their records to find that “James Perry” had visited their institutions and that they were indeed missing precious items such as a map of “La Florida” from the 1527 *Theatrum Orbis Terrarium*, the first modern atlas.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Shen, Fern. “They Didn’t Throw the Book at Him; Suspect in Thefts from Rare Volumes is Let Go in Baltimore.” *The Washington Post*, Final Edition, 16 December 1995, Section B (Metro), B1.

<sup>39</sup> Harvey, “Mr. Bland’s Evil Plot,” 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> Harvey, “Mr. Bland’s Evil Plot,” 1.

Though Bland targeted nineteen institutions within the United States, only four pressed charges. Bland was believed to have stolen some two hundred and fifty maps from these institutions, worth an estimated half a million dollars or more, yet he served less than two years in jail and paid less than eighty thousand dollars in damages. Further, it was discovered after his court cases in the United States that Bland had also spent time at repositories in Canada. In one three day visit to the University of Washington in Seattle and Vancouver's University of British Columbia, Bland stole materials worth fifty thousand dollars; damage to the books themselves caused an additional one hundred thousand dollars in damages. Bland never faced charges from these incidents.<sup>42</sup>

Many people believe that Gilbert Bland did not get nearly as severe a sentence as he should have. As Russell Maylone of Northwestern University told Miles Harvey, "If Bland gets in front of my car, I'll run over him—but in a nice way...Oh, and then I'll back over him again."<sup>43</sup> One of Bland's plea bargains was even rejected by Superior Court Judge Robert Hobgood who felt "the penalty is not severe enough for what this man's done."<sup>44</sup> Professionals involved with rare books and special collections likewise fumed over Bland's light sentence, but were mainly alone. As Barry Ruderman, a lawyer and map dealer, points out,

"It's very easy for a prosecutor to say, "He ripped a few pages out of a few books? I've got better things to do. To the ninety-nine percent of people who don't understand the magnitude of what he's done, Bland just doesn't seem to represent a threat to society."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Beatty, Jim. "Mr. Bland's Misadventure," *Saturday Night* 113, November 1998, in *FACTIVA* [database online], accessed 19 September 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Harvey, *Island of Lost Maps*, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Harvey, *Island of Lost Maps*, 314.

<sup>45</sup> Harvey, "Mr. Bland's Evil Plot," 11.

Bland's crimes nonetheless hit rare book and manuscript repositories like a shockwave. Numerous articles about the thefts appeared, and workshops devoted to Bland's crimes and the issues of security were held around the country.<sup>46</sup> What Bland had succeeded in doing, ironically, was to educate legal authorities about the high financial value and historical importance of many library materials. Further he provided a wake up call to repository officials about the need for better security. As librarian John E. Ingram of the University of Florida explained:

“...the ultimate effect of [Bland's] ‘work’ is that we have better security for our stacks, we have better security for our reading room, we have surveillance, which we didn't really have before—and in the final analysis, we have a much more astute, perceptive staff working with the collection, which is probably the best of all.”<sup>47</sup>

Once details about the Peabody incident were sent out over ExLibris, curators around the country were searching their call slip records and discovering items missing from books that Bland, under numerous aliases, had used. For many, this incident highlighted the importance of cooperating with others. Details of Bland's activities were published on professional listservs (electronic mailing lists) and in numerous newspaper articles about the crimes. This led curators and archivists around the country to review their records, which in turn allowed them to identify items missing from their collections and add to the shared knowledge of Bland's activities, allowing the process of claiming lost materials to begin.

Not all of the stolen items have been returned. Though the FBI took possession of many of the stolen maps as part of a plea agreement Bland made, dozens of items remain

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 335.

in the care of the FBI because they remain unclaimed.<sup>48</sup> While the reactions to the Bland case created a much more open atmosphere, and showed that publicizing incidents could result in the recovery of stolen items, many curators and librarians are still afraid to make thefts known, and some even deny to themselves that they may be, or have been, victims of theft. Even with incontrovertible evidence, some librarians refused to acknowledge that items from their collections had been stolen, according to FBI Special Agent Gray Hill, who worked on the Bland case for years.<sup>49</sup> Second Eileen E. Brady, former editor of *Focus on Security: The Magazine of Library, Archive, and Museum Security*, “Librarians have an ostrich mentality when it comes to security: they have their heads in the sand and their tails in the air, and they’re ripe to be screwed.”<sup>50</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

The goal of this research project is to analyze the evolving professional guidelines on special collection security measures, and to investigate the effects of the crimes of Gilbert Bland on the security measures in academic library special collections. Bland’s actions, especially his methods, caused shockwaves in the profession in the mid-nineties. This in turn focused attention onto the lack of adequate security measures many repositories had in place. To determine what, if any affect Bland’s crimes had on the profession, interviews were conducted with librarians and curators from some of the institutions targeted by Bland. In an attempt to determine if the crimes had an even broader effect within the profession, interviews were also conducted with librarians and

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<sup>48</sup> Humphreys, Adrian. “The Extraordinary Mr. Bland,” *National Post*, 10 October 2000, in *FACTIVA*, accessed 19 September 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Harvey, *Island of Lost Maps*, 286.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

curators from other institutions not targeted by Bland, but similar in size and location to the target institutions.

The eight interviewees from target institutions were chosen based on the literature and news accounts of the crimes in question. This included the nineteen institutions located in the United States, but not those located in Canada. The fifteen interviewees from non-target institutions were chosen randomly from other institutions around the country of similar size and location to the targeted institutions.

The analysis of professional guidelines is based on a review of the professional literature, including journal articles, conference presentations and published books, on crime and security measures in special collections.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Professional Guidelines***

As illustrated in the above review of professional literature, the guidelines for security measures in special collections have not changed significantly since the late 1960s. While style and some particulars have changed, the current recommendations for special collection security are echoes of the suggestions first put forward by Rhoads and Walch decades ago. The current guidelines were completed by the ACRL Rare Books & Manuscripts Section's Security Committee in October 1999.

The first recommendation in the ACRL RBMS guidelines is the appointing of a Library Security Officer (LSO) by the library director. The LSO is to be given the authority to plan and carry out the security program, should be widely known by other

administrators, and should develop cooperative relationships with legal staff, administrators and even outside consultants such as local law enforcement agencies.

The committee's second recommendation is the creation of a formal, written collection security policy, which should be a part of the repository's standard policies and procedures. The first step in this policy is ensuring that access to collection materials be limited. They propose having as few access points to the collection as possible, and keeping the public within public areas, with no access to collection areas. Another part of the access issue is keys and keycards. It is recommended that keys to secure areas be issued only on an "as needed" basis and that locks be changed on a regular basis.

It is also recommended that staff, including student workers, be chosen very carefully. When feasible, it is suggested that background checks and bonding of employees be considered. Alongside this, it is strongly recommended that all staff be thoroughly trained in security guidelines and procedures so that they understand their legal rights and their responsibilities. One major responsibility is balancing the access of researchers with the protection of materials. For this reason it is recommended that all researchers be required to register with their name, address, affiliation, and some form of identification, preferably a photo identification. Registration procedures should include an orientation of the rules of the repository as well as how to handle materials.

Another important part of the guidelines as pertaining to researchers is the restriction of extraneous items allowed into the reading room. There should be an area available for researchers to stow their personal items, such as coats, notebooks and briefcases, rather than allowing them into the reading room. Additionally, researchers are to be monitored at all times and should not be situated in a way that obstructs the view of

the monitor. In addition to monitoring researchers, collection materials should be carefully inspected before and after use.

Lastly, the Committee has recommendations to ensure identification of materials should there be a theft or disaster. Accession and catalog records should be complete and up to date. Information required for insurance policies should also be complete and kept current. Where possible, it is also suggested that materials be marked with a unique marking that will allow for identification and recovery of items that may be lost or stolen. Though the professional guidelines from Rhoads through RBMS have been fairly consistent, their implementation has not.

### *Application of Guidelines*

Through interviews with curators and archivists around the country, it became clear that strict adherence to professional guidelines is not the norm, even though many of the security improvements recommended by the guidelines can be implemented at low cost. It appears that another factor remains in the way for many, and that is time. For instance, the undertaking of shelf readings requires an extraordinary time commitment, especially for those institutions with large collections. This is another example that proves the old saying, time is money.

Of the 23 subjects interviewed for this project, including those who were Bland's targets, 5 or 22%, have a formal, written security policy. In some cases, there is a written policy for the libraries at their institution, but nothing specific to the special collections and rare book departments, even though those areas are at higher risk and usually contain items of much greater value. While the creation of a written policy can indeed be time consuming, it is a vitally important part of collection protection. Even just having the

names and numbers of important contacts and legal authorities available to employees and a procedure in place for theft response could save valuable time in tracking a thief and starting the process of replevin. All interviewees did say they had written rules of use for researchers to read upon registering to use the repository, even if they did not have a formal, written policy.

Repositories fail to follow the security guidelines on many other points. Only five respondent repositories undertake shelf readings and regular inventories while, 78% do not. This is due in large part to the immense size of the collections in large academic libraries, especially manuscript collections for which item by item inventories are just not possible. Two of the five repositories that answered affirmatively to undertaking shelf readings explained that shelf readings are a ongoing process and take place as time allows, frequently done by student assistants. Almost unanimously, respondents explained that their repositories did not have an “official” Library Security Officer as recommended by the guidelines. One respondent repository affirmed that it has an “official” library security officer, while six other respondents reported that they act informally in this role themselves.

When asked about their relationship with local authorities, three respondents (38%) from the group targeted by Bland reported that they do not feel a need to develop the relationship because there are already contacts by their parent libraries with legal authorities. The majority of interviewees who responded positively about a relationship with local authorities indicated that the authorities in question are campus police, rather than local police or sheriffs. As one interviewee explained, for many large universities the campus police are the first and main contact for legal issues, with other authorities

contacted as necessary. Fortunately, those respondents who have developed relationships with their campus police feel that the value and importance of the collections are well known to the campus police.

All respondents confirmed that researchers in their repositories are required to register and that call slips are kept permanently. Almost all of the respondent repositories require photo identification, which is either photocopied or held by a staff member while the researcher is in the reading room. Only 4 (17%) respondents affirmed that they do not require photo identification. Likewise all respondents confirmed that researchers are limited in what they may take with them into the reading room, although there is some variation as to what is allowed. Specifically, seven of the repositories (30%) allow researchers to bring laptops into reading rooms while the others do not. In a few rare cases (two), respondents said they occasionally make exceptions to what is allowed in order to avoid difficulty with a patron.

The monitoring of reading rooms was the question that saw the most variety in answers. Some repositories rely solely on employees to monitor the reading rooms. Others have video cameras in the reading rooms, and a few also have motion detectors for hours the repository is closed in both the reading rooms and stacks areas. Budgetary concerns trumped fear of theft in nearly all cases where cameras were not utilized. Asked about security training, none of the respondents had attended any kind of training classes, nor did their employees. Additionally, most interviewees did not perform thorough background checks on employees or have them bonded, though access by employees was restricted in some repositories.

While most of the respondents indicated that they did not strictly follow professional security guidelines, they were all aware of the guidelines, such as those by ACRL. Additionally, most respondents explained that even though they did not follow the guidelines strictly, the measures they have in place are based on the professional guidelines. As one would suspect, the major factors in not implementing all the guidelines were time and money, even from respondents who felt that university officials understood the importance of the collections held.

### *Effects of Bland's Crimes*

Not unexpectedly, it appears based on interviews that Gilbert Bland's crimes had the greatest effect on target institutions. However, though Bland's actions caused alarm throughout the profession, and shone a spotlight on the insufficiency of security measures in major academic library special collections, it appears his story was not as effective a cautionary tale as one might suspect. Interviews with respondents in target institutions show the discovery of Bland's crimes led to an increased understanding of the need for improvements in security, even though those improvements could be costly. All target respondents made security changes after Bland, but the extent of those changes varied from institution to institution. Not all respondents required the checking of personal items before Bland, but after Bland they all do. Four respondents had their reading rooms rearranged so as to ensure better and more thorough monitoring of patrons. All of the target respondents have added electronic monitoring devices, and most, but not all, of the other respondents indicated they now have electronic surveillance as well. This surveillance exists mainly in the form of cameras, but also includes motion sensors and alarmed doors.

Bland also affected the issue of publicizing thefts and cooperating with others to better ensure the return of stolen items. All of the target respondents indicated that they were made aware of Bland's thefts and mutilations at their repositories by outside parties, six from the postings on ExLibris and two by phone calls from the FBI. Though some respondents indicated they are still somewhat uncomfortable with publicizing thefts, all respondents said that they would indeed publicize any thefts in the future and cooperate with others in order to boost their chances of having items found and returned.

Even after the discovery of Bland's crimes, six of the eight respondents from target institutions still do not have a formal, written security policy and five do not have a library security officer. Additionally, though most respondents developed relationships with local authorities, as well as the FBI, during the Bland incidents, not all respondents have maintained a cooperative relationship with outside authorities.

Interviewees from repositories that were not targeted by Bland indicate that Bland did not have as wide an effect on the profession as assumed. Though all interviewees were familiar with the Bland case, only one confirmed that they made changes based solely on that case. Additionally, thirteen of the fifteen non-target respondents were unaware of any incidents of theft or mutilation in their own repositories. It is not known if Bland admitted to all of his crimes and targets, so it is quite possible that those who believe they have not been victims of theft are simply naïve. Only three (13%) of the non-target respondents affirmed that they do have a formal, written policy, but as with the targeted institutions, most do not. As they also had no incidents of crime, to their knowledge, six respondents have not developed a cooperative relationship with outside

local authorities, although thirteen asserted they had some sort of relationship with campus police.

Much like the target respondents, non-target respondents stated they do not follow the recommended professional guidelines strictly. Most, however, have implemented the same measures as target repositories. Recommended measures that most of them follow are the registration of researchers, requiring researchers to stow personal items outside of the reading room, monitoring of the reading room, and permanent retention of researcher registrations. Again like target respondents, most non-target respondents are not able to conduct regular shelf reading or inventories due to the volume of their collections, but three asserted they have ongoing shelf reading by student employees, and most have limited access to materials with closed stacks.

Some of the non-target respondents have added electronic surveillance equipment such as alarms, and tattle-tape devices or security strips in materials. Cameras in the reading rooms are rarer among this group, and a good number of repositories still rely solely on employee monitoring of the reading room during open hours.

Only two non-target respondents indicated they were aware of any incidents of theft or mutilation in their repositories. In those cases legal actions were taken by both, but neither indicated that new security measures were not put into place because of the incidents.

## **CONCLUSION**

The value of rare books and manuscripts has been steadily increasing for decades. The digitization of materials and the placement of finding aids online have made it easier

for thieves to locate items they may wish to steal. Nonetheless, many repositories do not follow the recommended professional guidelines, even though they have remained much the same since the 1970s and several well publicized thefts have occurred in the intervening years. In most cases, the lack of implementing recommended security measures are a result of low budgets and limited time. While curators and archivists are aware of guideline recommendations, they do not feel they are all necessary or feasible.

As the case of Gilbert Bland has shown, it is often impossible to discover if a theft has occurred. In the case of Bland, those running the repositories that were targeted were made aware of the thefts only when the Peabody publicized their incident and warned others that their materials were part of a hit list in Bland's notebook. It is still not known, and likely never will be, if there were more materials stolen by Bland than has been reported. Even when the FBI contacted some repositories to inform them that they had materials stolen by Bland, they were rebuffed by a few who would not admit, even to themselves, that they were vulnerable to theft.

The recommendation of publicizing thefts and working cooperatively with others for a better chance of having materials returned has been a part of the guidelines for decades. Nonetheless, it was a recommendation that most professionals ignored out of fear of their repositories being seen as vulnerable and potentially scaring off donors. The Bland case had a lot to do with this recommendation finally being implemented in many repositories. The institutions victimized by Bland discovered first hand how important it is to the profession for information to be shared. Even those that were not directly affected by Bland relate that they would most likely make public any thefts they might suffer, in order to have the stolen items returned to their care. It seems that this, at least,

was a change that Bland's crimes brought not just to his targets, but also to many others within the profession. Anybody still ignoring the recommendations of cooperation is forgoing the opportunity to recover materials if conscientious dealers are alerted to the thefts and, similarly, authorities are alerted when certain materials are brought in for sale.

Repositories with rare books and special collections need to seriously consider implementing the other security recommendations that are a part of the professional guidelines. As the Bland case shows, many repositories were not aware of having incidents of theft. This is likely still the case for repositories that have not implemented all the recommendations. The guidelines are meant not only to help professionals deal with thefts after the fact, but to prevent them. Prevention of theft and avoidance of the need to track items is of vital importance. While electronic security measures can certainly be costly, the loss of materials can be even more costly. Not only do many of the items in special collection repositories have high monetary value, they carry great historic value as well. The public's ability to access these historic documents cannot really be measured monetarily. If cost-benefit analyses are done in purely financial terms, it is not just the repositories that will lose. All of us will lose. Bland and other criminals have taught valuable lessons about the importance of securing the historical record, but those lessons are for naught if we continue to ignore them.

Security in special collections is still a sensitive area for many. Most of the people who were requested to participate in this research study declined. Though not all responded with a reason for not participating, the answers from three in particular indicate a discomfort in sharing security information, although knowledge of a repository's security measures is often enough to deter criminals. Even Gilbert Bland,

who was audacious enough to commit his crimes in broad daylight, while being monitored, could have been deterred, or perhaps stopped sooner. As he told investigators, “If there would have been a [security] camera there I never would’ve went in, I never would’ve stayed there, I never would’ve ordered any books...”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Harvey, *Island of Lost Maps*, 343.

## APPENDIX A – TARGET INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Security Procedures

- 1) Do you have a formal\* security program? If yes, was there one before the Bland incidents? \*Formal: written, part of official policies & procedures, part of staff training & orientation
- 2) Do you have a cooperative\* relationship with local authorities? Did you before?  
\*Cooperative: contact names and numbers known to staff, written procedures for contacting local authorities as in disaster planning, have been in touch with local authorities and possibly discussed emergency response.
- 3) Do you perform regular inventories (such as shelf reading)? Did you before Bland?
- 4) Were security standards based on the professional guidelines (RBMS) in place before the thefts?
- 5) Were new security measures put into place after the Bland incidents? If so, what were they?  
Was there a significant increase in budget for security issues?  
Was there an increase in background checks of staff?  
Was there an increase in focus on users?  
New registration procedures? Changes to monitoring?
- 6) Do you have a security committee and/or security officer? If yes, was there one before Bland?
- 7) Is there signage indicating what the security measures are to patrons?
- 8) What do you believe is the role of librarian/archivist in preventing crime?

### *Bland Thefts*

- 9) How was your repository made aware of the theft(s)?  
Was it detected internally or was there notice from authorities or another victim library?
- 10) Were the identified stolen/destroyed items insured and thus value known?
- 11) If it is known, how long was it between the incidents and their detection?
- 12) How many items were involved? How many were recovered?
- 13) Is/was there concern about publicizing incidents?  
If so, what were these concerns?

## APPENDIX B – NON-TARGET INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Security Procedures*

- 1) Do you have a formal\* security program? If yes, how long has it been in place? How frequently is it updated? \*Formal: written, official policies & procedures, part of staff training.
  - 2) Have you had any major incidents of theft or mutilation of materials?
    - When did they take place?
    - Were legal actions taken against the perpetrator?
    - If so, what was the outcome (jail, fine, etc.)?
  - 3) Do you have a cooperative\* relationship with local authorities? When was this instituted? Was it in response to any particular incident?
    - \*Cooperative: contact names and numbers known to staff, written procedures for contacting local authorities as in disaster planning, have been in touch with local authorities and possibly discussed emergency response.
  - 4) Do you perform regular inventories (shelf reading)? When did these begin?
  - 5) Are security standards based on the professional guidelines (RBMS) in place? Have they always been in place or were they in response to an incident?
  - 6) Were new security measures put into place after any particular incidents? If so, what?
    - Was there a significant increase in budget for security issues?
    - Was there an increase in background checks of staff?
    - Was there an increase in focus on users?
    - New registration procedures? Changes to monitoring?
  - 7) Do you have a security committee and/or security officer? If yes, how long has it been in place?
  - 8) Is there signage indicating to patrons what the security measures are?
  - 9) What do you believe is the role of librarian/archivist in preventing crime?
- If there was an incident of theft/mutilation:***
- 10) How was your repository made aware of the theft(s)?
    - Was it detected internally or was there notice from the authorities or another victim library?
  - 10) Were the identified stolen/destroyed items insured and thus value known?
  - 11) If it is known, how long was it between the incidents and their detection?

12) How many items were involved? How many were recovered?

13) Is/was there concern about publicizing incidents?

If so, what were these concerns?

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