

Special Libraries

by Laura Whitehead

Public libraries are the generalists of the library world; they serve the diverse needs of a community. Special libraries, on the other hand, serve a very specialized group of individuals for a particular purpose. In many cases, the general public does not even know these wonderful gems are there, hiding in plain sight.

The Braille Institute Library has six California branches that serve the needs of the blind or visually impaired. Like your public library, they include comfortable reading areas, computers, free wireless internet, and various books, magazines, and periodicals in braille and audio formats. They also have CCTV magnification stations available to assist patrons who wish to read traditional print materials.

The American Museum of Natural History in New York has its own library. The library was founded at the same time as the museum and is now one of the largest natural history libraries in the world. The primary function of the library is to support the work of those employed at the museum, but it is also available for use by outside scholars and members of the general public.

The National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland, is the world's largest biomedical library. While it supports and conducts scholarly research, it also provides access to reliable health information through the National Network of Libraries of Medicine and its maintenance of PubMed and MEDLINE for the public.

The Brooklyn Art Library in Brooklyn, New York, houses The Sketchbook Project. It contains more than 41,000 physical sketchbooks from over 135 countries and another 20,000 digital sketchbooks, making it the largest collection of sketchbooks in the world. Anyone can order a sketchbook, fill it with sketches, and send it back to be cataloged and added to the collection.

The Denver Zine Library has one of the largest zine collections in North America, housing over 20,000 zines. It is a non-profit organization run entirely by volunteers. You can visit the library and have full access to the collection during open hours. Once you have visited the library at least three times you can even check out their zines and enjoy them at home for three weeks.

Special libraries are not exclusively found in large cities far from Nebraska. Clay Center, Nebraska, is home to the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center. This center conducts research to find solutions to problems that affect meat production. The U.S. Meat Animal Research Center Library supports the researchers who work at the center.

The John G. Neihardt Center Library in Bancroft, Nebraska, is a research library containing books, periodicals, interviews, and John G. Neihardt's personal correspondence. It is part of the Neihardt Center and is tasked with preserving the works of John G. Neihardt and making them available for study.

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Genealogical Society Library is housed within the Union College Library in Lincoln, Nebraska. It provides information for people who are searching for information on their ancestry. Among other important tools it contains census information, church and cemetery records, and city directories.

The Kripke Jewish Federation Library in Omaha, Nebraska, provides computer access, wireless internet, comfortable reading areas, and a children's area. They have Jewish books, periodicals, and Russian Language resources. They also provide programming of special interest to the Omaha Jewish community.

In addition to the libraries mentioned above, there are many other types of libraries including Presidential, corporate, government, law, prison, military, music, transportation, and theological.

Finally, for those library lovers who cannot get enough of books, there is The Grolier Club on Manhattan's Upper East Side. This library is completely comprised of books about books!