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Book Review: Creating the South Caroliniana Library

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Keywords

libraries, south carolina, special collections, architecture, history

Creating the South Caroliniana Library

John M. Bryan

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Ron Stafford is a state-wide expert on Open Educational Resources. He has presented at multiple national and state conferences. Stafford will be President of the Metrolina Library Association in 2023.

Standing elegantly on the famed historic horseshoe at the University of South Carolina, the South Caroliniana Library is a sentinel for the town of Columbia and the state of South Carolina. The library's imposing façade has welcomed generations of scholars into her reading room and the knowledge it contains. As the first freestanding academic library in the nation, the story of The South Caroliniana Library mirrors the broader history of South Carolina. Through her story, the reader learns not only the story of the library but gains a deeper understanding of South Carolina History.

At first glance, a reader assumes the book's target audience is Art Historians. Bryan is a renowned Art Historian focusing on Architecture. However, I argue the book is for anyone. John Bryan masterfully weaves different strips of history to form a holistic tome. Readers can enjoy the book as a whole or pick out threads that align with their academic study. Bryan masterfully weaves social, political, economic, educational, and general history into each chapter. A cast of local, state, national, and international characters engages readers, allowing them to dive deeper into their chosen subject. One force that created the South Caroliniana Library was the scientific study of history in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. True to scientific history, Bryan's work is well documented and contains quotes from individuals involved in the library's long history. Also, Bryan gives scholars a gift of 6 appendices full of primary sources.

Overall, Bryan's book is approachable; the author writes in a conversational style, allowing the reader to feel they are conversing with the author. Readers can approach this book without knowledge of architecture or history and easily engage with the author. The stories told within the pages are engaging and entertaining. The individuals involved in the history of the South Caroliniana Library represent all walks of life. With this cast of characters, anyone can find an engrossing story. Bryan was wise to write an architectural history of the South Caroliniana Library free of the lexicon of the field. Bryan inserts the library into its proper place on the historical timeline while explaining its architectural significance. However, the book's beauty is its story-driven nature, allowing readers to become lost in the book. At times, the reader feels they are reading a novel and not a scholarly book; this is the ultimate beauty of the book, its accessibility. Within the pages is the story not of a library but of a state. The book traces the South Caroliniana Library from President Barnwell and a group of trustees lobbying the senate to Richard T. Greener, the first African American Professor at the University of South Carolina. Bryan continues the story right before the building was closed for a significant renovation. The story of the South Caroliniana Library truly mirrors that of South Carolina, and Bryan masterfully tells both. He weaves them together in a document that tells the holistic history of buildings, her students/faculty, and the great Palmetto State. Reading Bryan's book will leave you a proud South Carolinian and, if you are lucky enough to wear the title, a proud alumni of USC!