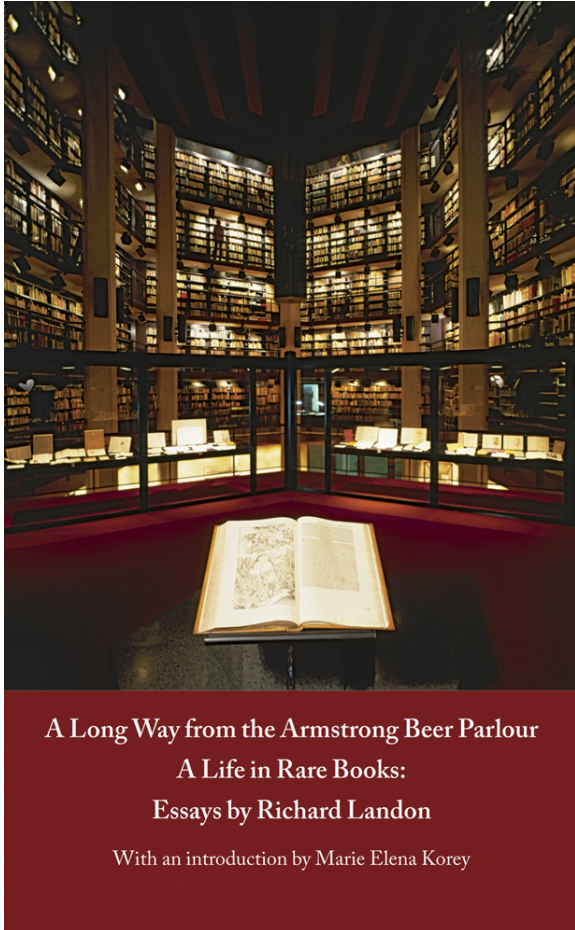


Marie Elena Korey, ed. *A Long Way from the Armstrong Beer Parlour* – *A Life in Rare Books: Essays by Richard Landon*



*A Long Way from the Armstrong Beer Parlour*  
*A Life in Rare Books:*  
Essays by Richard Landon

With an introduction by Marie Elena Korey

Richard Landon, ed. with an introduction by Marie Elena Korey. [\*A Long Way from the Armstrong Beer Parlour\* – \*A Life in Rare Books: Essays by Richard Landon\*](#). New Castle, DE and Toronto, ON: Oak Knoll Press and The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, 2014. 440p., ill. ISBN 9781584563303. US\$ 49.95 (hardback).

As Marie Elena Korey notes in the introduction to this volume, Richard Landon grew up in rural Armstrong, British Columbia, and intended to study agriculture at university, only to discover that his interests actually lay in the humanities. After his graduation from college in 1965, a year spent working in a serials position at the University of British Columbia Library led him to pursue a degree in library science, and not long after completion of that programme, in 1970, Landon made a trip to New York City to visit the Grolier Club and the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America. The title of this book comes from a journal entry from this trip, in which Landon described New York City as “a long way from the Armstrong beer parlour!”

What is the relevance of Landon’s background to the review of this book? Simply put, the essays in this collection are a series of mementos from Landon’s career divided into three sections: “Autobiography,” “Bibliography and Book History,” and “Collecting and the Antiquarian

Book Trade.â€• From his travels during sabbatical to his success in coaxing a hesitant colleague to speak at a conference, this volume presents a personal perspective of rare books librarianship. Those looking for an in-depth, academic resource on a particular subject will not find it here; neither will they find an objective introduction to the rare books world. These readers, at various times throughout the book, may find themselves wondering: â€œBut what is the *point?*â€•

Rather, as the second half of the title suggests, this volume provides a glimpse into â€œa life in rare books.â€• It is best suited to those seeking a portrait of someone whose professional life (and undoubtedly a good deal of his personal life, too) was wholeheartedly devoted to the study and collection of rare books. In *A Long Way from the Armstrong Beer Parlour*, the reader will find an exemplar in Landon, who worked his way from a minor cataloguing position to become Head of the University of Torontoâ€™s Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library. Many of the essays therefore relate to the interests of the Fisher Libraryâ€™s collections, such as the history of medicine (â€œThe Hannah Collection in the History of Medicine and Related Sciencesâ€•), the history of science (â€œCharles Darwin: Some Bibliographical Problems and Textual Implicationsâ€•), and Canadiana (â€œThe Collard Bequestâ€•). These topics may not appeal to all readers, but even so, Landon includes in the essays excellent examples of the more universal, everyday complexities that arise in the life of rare books, such as the gaps discovered by means of bibliographical research and the importance of navigating through a bookâ€™s often elusive provenance.

Featuring snippets of his scholarship and observations spanning the last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, Landonâ€™s prose is both informative and readable, displaying an evident expertise in his topics. Although his longevity within the profession may plausibly be attributed as the reason for this expertise, these essays also testify to Landonâ€™s engagement in scholarship and professional organisations â€“ notably the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the American Library Association. As such, this book will prove both a pleasant read for those looking back on their own careers and an inspiration for those (such as this reviewer) who are just beginning theirs. Perhaps most importantly, as Landon sadly passed away in 2011, *A Long Way from the Armstrong Beer Parlour* will serve as a tribute to the legacy of a great curator, administrator and rare books librarian who, over the course of his career, contributed to the growth and standard of excellence of a field which continues to grow, develop, and thrive.

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