



## Michèle V. Cloonan

DEAN AND PROFESSOR

A.B., Bennington College

A.M., University of Chicago

M.S., University of Illinois

Ph.D., University of Illinois

Teaching/Research Areas

Preservation; publishing history; bibliography

**SIMMONS**

Graduate School of Library  
and Information Science

## Michèle V. Cloonan: To the Four Corners of the Earth

Michèle Cloonan is proof that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. "I grew up in an extended family where there was a strong interest in the arts, academics, and travel. My aunt is a political scientist and a poet who writes about international human rights issues. My great-aunt was one of the first female CPAs in Chicago and a passionate traveler. My grandfather spent the last fifteen years of his life living on tramp steamers.

"My life has been punctuated by serendipity," says Cloonan. She never aspired to become a librarian, for example. But during her junior year at Bennington College, she happened to see a notice posted for bookbinding classes and signed up. The teacher, Kathryn Gerlach, had studied bookbinding in Leipzig, Germany, and had worked with some of the most distinguished book designers, printers, and illustrators of the twentieth century. Gerlach also encouraged Cloonan to study in Europe. Under her tutelage, Cloonan took the first step toward becoming a book conservator and developed a lifelong passion for international travel and culture.

"It was in Dublin, Ireland, while interning in Trinity College's conservation laboratory, that I began to think about conservation in an international context. We needed to prepare *The Book of Kells* and other items to travel to the States for an extended exhibition tour. The book had never left the British Isles before, which raised key conservation concerns. But what left a lasting impression on me was the national controversy that ensued about these treasures leaving Ireland. I learned the meaning of cultural heritage and its role in history and politics. These are issues that I have focused on in my research," recalls Cloonan.