Building a Research Library History: Part II

By Sharon Carlson

The second half of the WMU library history involves the evolution of the institution from a college to a university and the corresponding growth of its library resources. One figure, Dr. Katherine Stokes, was especially instrumental. She guided that growth from 1948 through 1967 including the years that brought "university" status and designation. Stokes also led the Library through a major move from the East Campus to a new "Waldo" building on the West Campus in the late 1950s. Under her leadership, the library grew from one of fewer than 100,000 volumes to more than 400,000 volumes.

Stokes held a bachelor’s degree from Boston's Simmons College, a M.A.L.S. from the University of Michigan, and completed doctoral work at the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign campus. She brought 14 years of experience at the Pennsylvania State College Library, and three years at the University of Illinois, Champaign, when she arrived at WMU in 1948. At the time of Stokes' appointment, the library was still housed on the East Campus. The campus was in the midst of a post-World War II growth period that included many returning GI's as well as expansion of the physical plant and the College's curricula. As the decade closed, classroom buildings and dormitories were designed for and built on the grounds of the West Campus. The construction of the Administration Building (now named the Seibert Administration Building) in 1952 on the new campus was especially symbolic as operations moved from one side of the railroad tracks and Stadium Drive to the other side where there was significant room to expand.

One of the issues to be resolved was library access. To accommodate library users, an annex was placed in the new administration building, but it became obvious that a full library facility was needed—and that it should be placed on the West Campus. The movement of the library from old to new was a monumental undertaking according to Hazel Cleveland Saye who worked in the reserve books area from 1939-1965. In an oral history recording, Saye described the complex operation.

We outgrew the campus and the campus moved to the west campus. ... We had labels put on each shelf [in the new building] beforehand—600's, 700's, 900's—where they would go on the shelves. The books were moved a shelf at a time. The boxes each held one shelf and trucks moved them over to the new library.

Completed in 1958 on land that had once been a horse farm and later a golf course, the new library had open stacks, four floors, elevators, and a loading dock. The decorative scheme featured American Indian themes and several pieces of art related to Abraham Lincoln. Dwight B. Waldo had studied Lincoln for most of his life, and had been an avid collector of Native American artifacts. His interests were reflected in the building named for him.

The new library building was designed to hold 225,000 volumes and seating space for 1,000 readers at a cost of 1.5 million dollars. The Department of Librarianship, described in the first half of the University Libraries' history, occupied the entire east wing of the second floor and included its own "laboratory library" collection, a section of which later provided a basis for the existing Children's Collection in Waldo Library, as well as classrooms and administrative offices. When the School was closed in 1985, its entire history including all student and administrative records was deposited in the University Archives where researchers can find a case study in library education in the mid-twentieth century. Also found in the building at that time were the University Archives and regional history collections although the unit was not administratively part of the Libraries until the late 1980s.

Even in 1958, there was recognition that expansion would be necessary within a decade. A library remodeling was completed in 1967 that added 90,000 square feet to the original building including shelf space for 450,000 volumes and study space for 2,000 students. The year 1967 also marked the retirement of Stokes. Always active professionally, Stokes had been involved with the Michigan Library Association, the American Library Association, the Midwest Academic Librarians' Conference, and the Association of College and Research Libraries. She "retired" to a new role, taking the position of College Library Specialist at the Library Services Branch of the U.S. Office of Education, Washington, DC.

Peter Spyers-Duran, who was a major catalyst to change in the few years that he was here, followed Stokes. Spyers-Duran came from the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee where he had been associate director of libraries from 1963 to 1967. He was born in Budapest, Hungary, and had completed his graduate library work at the University of Chicago. He had also served as a reference librarian at the Chicago Public Library.

During his short tenure at Western, Spyers-Duran spearheaded the conversion of the Dewey classification system to the Library of Congress system, which had become heavily favored for the academic environment. The first automated holdings information for serials information was implemented, and the first theft detection system was installed. The Libraries also reached the 500,000 volume mark in September 1968. Spyers-Duran left in 1970 to go to Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, a graduate-intensive institution based on an entirely automated administrative system. In 1983, he became Dean of Libraries at Wayne State...
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University; he retired from Wayne State in 1995.

Carl Sachtleben followed Spyers-Duran, and served as director from 1971 to 1987. Under his leadership, the library weathered some of the most severe financial retrenchments in its history. Regardless, the collection continued to grow at about 40,000 volumes per year.

By the 1980s, the 1967 expansion had long since been outgrown. In 1983 the library contained 1.3 million volumes plus 785,000 microfilms and maps. Branch libraries in Education, Physical Sciences, Music and Dance, and Business were developed to make certain collections more accessible and free up space in Waldo. One of the high points during Sachtleben's tenure was the construction of the Dalton Center, which included improved facilities for the Music and Dance Library, replacing library facilities that had been used since 1951 when Mayberry Hall was opened.

Sachtleben was active in several Michigan library associations. He served as chairperson of the Michigan Council of State College and University Library Directors from 1983-1985, and was a member of the Michigan Library Association. He was on the Board of Trustees of the Library of Michigan at the time the new library was built in Lansing.

For the year following Sachtleben's retirement. Associate Dean Hans Engelke acted as interim head of Libraries while a national search was conducted. Charlene Renner was hired in 1988, arriving from the University of Washington, Seattle, where she had served as associate director. Prior to her work at Washington, she had been assistant director at the Iowa State University Library, Ames. Renner had also held several technical services positions before becoming a library administrator. She earned a bachelor's and master's degree in English from Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, and a M.L.S. from Drexel University in Philadelphia.

One of Renner's most pressing challenges was the cramped and outdated library space. The collection stood at 1.8 million volumes at the time of Sachtleben's retirement. Student work areas had given way to stacks in the main library, and with only 820 seats left for study, Waldo Library was far below accrediting standards. Renner's major accomplishment was the planning and renovation of Waldo Library as it is seen today. That renovation essentially resulted in a new building, creating an additional 104,000 square feet. The new Waldo Library has 257,000 total square feet and 1,900 student stations. Renner also introduced the first automated systems for handling books, resulting in the first online catalog. The out-moded card catalog was eliminated, and the modern OPAC, accessible from a computer terminal, became the key access point for all of the cataloged books, documents and other records that had been acquired by the Libraries since 1903.

Renner was the first WMU librarian to head the Libraries with the designation as Dean. Dean status recognized the importance of the University Libraries as a major unit on campus, giving it the same status as a college. Renner took an active role in several professional activities and organizations. She was a member of the Michigan Library Consortium, the OCLC Users Council, the Michigan Library Association, and the American Library Association.

In 1993, Renner returned to the faculty, taking on special projects for the Archives and Regional History Collections. She has processed several complicated collections of personal papers. Her most recent endeavor has involved indexing University publications, including the Western News and the Western Herald.

Upon Renner's return to the faculty, Harley Behm, Director, University Computing, assumed temporary leadership of the University Libraries until Lance Query was hired as the Dean in 1993, hailing from Northwestern University, where he had held several administrative positions. He had earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri, Columbia, and master's and doctoral degrees in history from Indiana University, Bloomington. His M.A.L.S. is from the University of Chicago.

The University Libraries experienced phenomenal growth and expansion under Query's administration as described in the Spring 2000 issue of Gatherings. President Emeritus Haenicke made major funding commitments that brought unprecedented collection development. The Meader Rare Book Room was completed with a décor and furnishings readily comparable to fine reading rooms anywhere. Also in Waldo, a Preservation Room, a Web Office, and two electronic classrooms were developed. The Visual Resources Library was established in Sangren Hall, and in the same building, the Education Library was given a major overhaul. Several program and/or service initiatives including Information Literacy; University Libraries' presence on the WWW; cataloging of electronic resources; implementation of a state-of-the-art Web-based online catalog; cataloging of government documents and maps; off-campus document delivery and instructional services; a preservation program; and online interlibrary loan were implemented. The collections grew to 4,000,000 volumes.

Lance Query left the University Libraries in July, 2000, to assume the position of Dean of Libraries and Academic Information Resources at Tulane University, New Orleans. Dr. Joe Reish, who is also Dean of the Carl & Winifred Lee Honors College, serves as Interim Dean of Libraries. During our current period of an intensive national search for a new dean, the staff and faculty have had time to reflect on the history of the University Libraries and to ponder the future. A history should predict how the past might influence future events. This brief history strongly suggests that decisions about
- physical space and its use,
- how and what books and other resources are acquired or made accessible,
- the nature of the faculty and staff’s professional expertise,
- on and off-campus user services as related to curricula and research,
- the ever-changing technology, and
- the overall mission of the future library
will be among the challenges faced by a new dean.

One conclusion of this history also seems to be clear: as we approach the end of the first century of WMU’s library history, the University Libraries is firmly positioned at the center of a “vibrant, state supported, student centered research university of more than 28,600 students.” (Mailer that “Invites Applications and Nominations for the Position of Dean of Libraries,” WMU, November 2000.)

Katherine Stokes, Director of the Library, 1948-1967

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