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of papers with document boxes and acid-free folders thus preserving over 400 shelf feet of modern manuscripts. We do hinge and spine repairs with acid-free paper and PVA adhesive. Mold spores in books are killed with a 100% alcohol solution because we would need a fume hood and vent to use thymol crystals dissolved in alcohol. Since the goal is to preserve books in their original condition, Special Collections is one department in the library that retains dust jackets on books. We began to use sheet Mylar to cut dust jacket protectors since it was inexpensive and we could cover 45 books an hour rather than hand making 10 or so in the same amount of time. Every treatment is labor intensive even when we are able to add special equipment.

An operational problem emerged as the program grew. I could not supervise work in two different locations located on two separate floors of Waldo Library, and it was obvious that the duties needed personal direction as they grew more complex. To solve this problem, the position of Special Collections Coordinator was created in the fall of 1999. The current incumbent is Ms. Samantha Cairo, a graduate of WMU’s Medieval Studies M.A. program, and a “graduate” of the Rare Book Room’s “school of preservation” where she spent almost three years as a student worker. Recently, Ms. Cairo completed courses in book and paper repair at the Newberry Library in Chicago, and will use her new skills and techniques to improve our repertory of treatments.

The Preservation Office is an important part of the University Libraries’ efforts to maintain our collections. Along with the funding and administrative support has come excellent assistance in the graduate assistants supplied by the Institute of Cistercian Studies. Tracina Jackson-Adams and Dorothy Porter have been invaluable to our program, and have trained a corps of student workers to the tasks. The Preservation Office staff has been helping other departments of the Libraries with repairs, materials, and advice on how to do their own work. Our hope is that the program initiated by Special Collections will ensure that a century from now a reader can find and read any book that we currently have—and in the same condition that we acquired it. Such a goal requires endless attention to details long unattended, but the staff of Special Collections is dedicated to the preservation of our University Libraries.

The University Libraries—A Brief History

By Sharon Carlson

The history of the academic library at Western Michigan University begins with the origins of the institution itself. In 1903, after a battle in the State Legislature about the location, Western State Normal School was officially established in Kalamazoo. The first classes were offered in local school and governmental buildings in 1904 and attracted 117 students. By 1905, the original part of East Hall had been built. It included a series of rooms for the library that were located on the second floor. About 500 books had been acquired, and a librarian, Esther Braley, was hired to oversee and develop the collection. Miss Braley was appointed as the first library director at the salary of $800 a year—a fairly good salary for the time. She was a graduate of the University of Michigan, and had earned her library degree from the University of Illinois State Library School. Few individuals had such a library degree. In fact, the University of Illinois training school was the only degree awarding school in the Midwest, so that the new librarian in Kalamazoo came unusually well credentialed. In addition, Esther Braley had been employed at the University of Michigan Library. During her tenure at the State Normal School, Braley oversaw phenomenal growth in the collections. The fledgling collection of 500 volumes grew to 1,300 volumes in the first year alone.

The growth of the library was not surprising given the forward direction of Western State Normal School even during the first years of its existence. Agitation to build a library building came within the first decade as the scope of the School expanded its enrollment and programs. By 1913, a new science building had been constructed, and the number of volumes in the library approached 20,000. A few years later, in 1919, Western began granting four-year bachelor degrees. The State Legislature funded a library building program to provide the much-needed facility, but the outbreak of World War I, and rising costs during the war years put the program on hold until the 1920s.

World War I also contributed to the resignation of Western’s first library director, Esther Braley. One of Braley’s closest friends, Mary Master Needham, served as a nurse in World War I and was widowed as a result of the war when her husband was killed in a plane accident in France. She questioned the necessity of war and wrote about it several years later in a personal narrative, Tomorrow to Fresh Fields (Horizon House, 1936).

In 1918, Needham returned to the United States to talk about the destruction and devastation in France. She scheduled a presentation at Western and sought others to work with her toward the reconstruction effort known as the “American Committee for Devastated France.” She convinced her friend, librarian Esther Braley, to return to France with her. Braley took a leave of absence and wrote periodically to the Western Normal Herald of her work with the children in France. By 1920 she returned to the United States, but did not return to Kalamazoo.

In the meantime, Braley’s absence required somebody to lead the library. Anna French was the natural choice because of her education and experience. French had earned degrees from Michigan State Normal College and Drexel Institute School of Library Science; the latter school was the third library training school founded in the U.S. She had taught school in Kalamazoo for one year before beginning at Western as a Library Assistant in 1907.

Anna French’s two major contributions to Western State’s library history would be her direction of the construction of the first building dedicated as a library and substantial growth of the collections. French would also view firsthand the growth of Western, as it became Western State Teachers College in 1927, and 14 years later, in 1941, Western Michigan College of Education. Enrollment by the mid-1940s would top 4,000 students and, by the end of French’s career, Western would be attracting international students, and, in conjunction with the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, could offer its first

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graduate degrees to students.

Ground was broken for the original library building in May of 1923, which was constructed at the cost of $480,000. After the building was completed little more than a year later, 1924, five librarians and 24,000 volumes were moved into the imposing edifice that would serve as Western’s major library for the next 33 years. At the time of French’s retirement in 1946, the library would have about 63,000 volumes.

The new library building was symbolic of Western’s growth as an institution and the College’s place within the community. Neo-classical in design, the building completed, on the north side, the quad design of the East Campus hill. The interior featured marble stairs and a reading room spanning two floors. A large stone fireplace highlighted the north wall, and the spacious walls provided exhibition space for the Todd art collection. Exhibit cases in the reading room and foyer featured special collections. It was a closed stack system, with most of the growing collection kept in the stack tower.

During the last years of French’s appointment as director of the library, Western College formed a library science program with Miss Alice Louise LeFevre at the head of the Department of Librarianship, and a Kellogg Foundation Michigan College of Education. Though not administratively related, the instructional program always had ties to the library since it was physically located in the two library buildings (North Hall and Waldo), regularly used the library faculty to teach classes, and provided internship and employment opportunities for the undergraduate and graduate students.

The original curriculum focused on training school and public librarians and was under the School of Education. By the early 1960s, the Department offered library science degrees at the graduate level, and, by the close of the 1960s, had gained official American Library Association accreditation for its primary master’s program that prepared academic, public, school, and special librarians. Miss LeFevre served as head of this program until her retirement in 1963 when Dr. Jean E. Lowrie took over.

Lowrie directed the program and provided the leadership for major program development and expansion in the 1970s and 1980s that included, in the School of Librarianship’s curricula, an undergraduate minor, two master’s degrees, several M.S.L. specializations, and three specialist (two-year) degrees beyond the master’s level. For many years, the School had the third largest graduate enrollment in the University; students were recruited from State, national, and international settings.

Due to an assortment of reasons, the School of Library and Information Science closed its doors in 1985. However, about 2000 graduates are still working in local, state, national, and international libraries.

A number of the University Libraries’ faculty and staff members are graduates of the program.

Anna French lives on through the residence hall, located on the West Campus, named for her, and the library lore connected to her name. Prior to the last major remodeling, her picture was prominently displayed in a staff lounge on the second floor of Waldo Library that was also named for her. She was known for box-opening parties when new shipments of books arrived. She taught a required Library Methods course in the library science department, and was recognized by almost all of the students on the campus in the 1920s through 1940s. French was also known for her love of cats. It is even rumored that she kept a cat in the library—ostensibly for rodent control, but also because she loved felines. At the dedication of French Hall in 1960, a former faculty colleague noted Anna French’s gift of gracious living which included “a fire well-laid, flowers carefully arranged, a contented cat in the center of the room, a cup of hot tea, and a friendly visit.” She had an active retirement from 1946 until her death in 1958 and took a major role in the University’s 50th anniversary celebration in 1953.

French was followed as director of the library by another interesting personality, Dr. Lawrence Sidney Thompson. Thompson was the first director to hold the Ph.D., which he had earned from the University of Chicago. His library science degree was from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Thompson was most likely the library’s first staff member who held membership in Phi Beta Kappa, and had published several scholarly articles prior to coming to WMU. During World War II, he served as a special agent for the FBI, and had also been employed as a bibliographer at the U.S. Department of Agriculture library before assuming his appointment at Western Michigan College in 1946.

During Thompson’s two years at Western, he wrote a guide to the library and, within his short period as director, the collection grew in size over 10% to 70,000 volumes. He left in 1948 to become a Professor of Classics and the library director at a major research university, the University of Kentucky, Lexington, a position he remained in until his retirement in the 1980s. Dr. Thompson was a prolific writer for the rest of his career at Kentucky and into his retirement. WMU’s catalog lists 20 books, and World Cat has references to 305 publications with which he was associated. He was particularly interested in bibliography, and the Kentucky Novel (University of Kentucky Press, 1953), jointly authored with Algernon D. Thompson, is still the preeminent work about authors and novels of that state. He wrote about rare books and special formats. His publication, Legends of Human Skin (University of Kentucky Press, 1948), appears to be one of the few works dealing with the use of human skin as a binding material.

Although not quite half-a-century, the first 43 years of the library history at Western Michigan University saw the foundations laid for today’s research library and cutting edge electronic resource center. The three directors, Braley, French, and Thompson were each significant to their period with Braley and French as key to the solid collection development, cooperative community relationships, and strong service orientation that mark and highlight the University Libraries. Watch for the second installment on WMU’s library history that will be found in the next issue of Gatherings.