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Richard E. Voeltz

University Libraries

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Prologue

My career at the University Libraries began in September, 1968. I received a Master of Librarianship degree from Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia (now Emporia State University) in August, 1968. Frank Lundy, director of University Libraries at UNL had recruited me and Barbara, my wife, in the Spring of 1968. We moved to Lincoln in late August and began work officially on September 1.

Getting Started

The University Libraries consisted of four divisions: Education, Humanities, Science & Technology, and Social Sciences. Each division maintained its own staff and reading room in Love Library. I worked in the Science & Technology Division, and Barbara began to work with the Humanities Division. After several weeks, however, Barbara was transferred to the Circulation Department to assist Mary Doak, the circulation librarian. My first office was adjacent to the Science & Technology reading room on the first floor of Love Library (now the current periodicals room). My supervisor was Lyle Schreiner, and my office mate was Suzanne Ellison. Lyle was division head for Science & Technology.

The divisional plan was modified shortly after we arrived, to create departments for the areas served by the respective reading rooms. My office was moved several times during this process. I lived for several months in an office adjacent to the Libraries auditorium. As a result, I “attended” several economics lectures during the semester, while I worked in the office. Later, Suzanne and I moved to the basement of Love Library. It was an unfinished space, since the basement stairs had not been built when the library building was completed. It was a gray cinder-block color, and the light was inadequate for the space. One morning, Suzanne arrived early to find a man sleeping on her desk. She left quickly and quietly to tell Lyle of her find. The man had left before they returned, but our offices were moved again soon after that. Suzanne subsequently shared an office with Lyle on the first floor of the library. The Science & Technology offices subsequently moved to the third floor of Love Library, across from the current cataloging area.

Frank Lundy retired in 1971 and was succeeded by John Heussman later in the year. I moved to the C. Y. Thompson Library in the same year as an assistant librarian. Wayne Collings was director of the library. Eula Mae Adams and Helen Jensen were on the staff, working with the serial records and circulation service student assistants. I served as circulation supervisor, working with Marion Chapman and later with Cheryl Long in that capacity. I also served as liaison librarian for several departments, providing library instruction to the Ag Honors classes and other groups on East Campus.

In August, 1973, I transferred to the Undergraduate Library in Nebraska Hall. The library occupied the second and third floors in the west end of the building. Barbara Chandler supervised the library, assisted by Leslie

Manning and Ormond Somerville. Ormond moved to Love Library soon after I arrived at Undergrad, and I assumed his duties. One of my assignments involved a daily survey of the library's areas to spot and report failing ballasts in the fluorescent lights. Hums and leakage were clues to failure of the ballasts. I would place a 3 x 5 card in the frames of the lights to indicate the locations of the ballasts to be replaced. The electrician, Bob Pleinus, and I became friends as he worked to replace the ballasts. Since the library was located in an aging building, I also checked for leakage of air handling ducts. Seasonal water leaks developed in the ducts, and we kept several dozen waste baskets near the sites to catch the downpours. I later became the building maintenance reporter for the west end of Nebraska Hall. I still have the notes of the varied ills of the plumbing and heating systems reported during 1973, 1974, and 1975 in the building.

Branch Libraries

When the Undergraduate Library closed in 1975, I rejoined the Science & Technology Division in Love Library. During the summer of 1975, I became supervisor of the Life Sciences Library in Bessey Hall. The library consisted of a reading room on the second floor. The bookstacks were located on the second and third floors of the building. A cast-iron spiral staircase connected the second and third floors. A rare-book room housed the herbals and other books and journals of special importance to the history of biology. Since the temperature and humidity were not controlled in Bessey Hall, I arranged for the rare books to be moved to Love Library. The bookstacks extended to bookcases lining the second-floor hallway and a small room down the hall from the main library. The room was furnished with home-made wooden shelves. The bookcases in

the hallway were locked to prevent casual removal of the books. Each lock required a key, which made for a large number of keys in the librarian's desk. Roberta (Robie) Goetsch had resigned shortly before my arrival, so I borrowed a reference assistant to staff the library. Carol Fleshman was hired from a position in Love Library to fill the position at the Life Sciences Library. Mildred Lonsdale succeeded Carol, and Sharon Lewandowski then served after Mildred until 2004. Steve Sall and Marilyn Reedy jointly assumed responsibility for the library until its closure in July, 2005. A large water leak in the library in December, 1998, triggered an extensive rescue and reclamation effort in the collection. Slightly more than 1,000 books and journals were wetted as a result of a burst pipe above the library. Some of the lightly-wetted books were opened and air-dried with fans. The more heavily-soaked books were frozen in Food Stores freezers, to prevent mildew and to gradually dry the volumes. After a year of drying in the freezer, the books that still needed more drying were freeze-dried in the Food Science and Technology facilities on East Campus. About 20 volumes were lost in this incident. Prompt rescue and reclamation provided a high percentage of recovery in this incident

I assumed supervision of the Chemistry Library in 1976. It was located on the fourth floor in the east wing of Hamilton Hall. A small annex to the library was located on the fifth floor. The annex was later enlarged to accommodate books moved from the fourth floor. A much larger annex was later developed in the basement of Hamilton Hall's north wing. Continued collection growth required conversion of several journal titles to microfilm. Chemical Abstracts volumes were also gradually converted to microfilm to conserve shelf space. The oldest volumes of Chemical Abstracts were the first to be offered in microfilm. Reader-printers were purchased to accommodate the new format. Some journal titles were also

issued in microcard editions. Jenny Tunnell was my first assistant in the Chemistry Library. She was leaving as I assumed supervision at the library, so Pat Hammond was assigned to replace Jenny. Several other assistants also served in the Chemistry Library during its life: Jan Opecensky (later Rice), Julie Michael (later Crawford), Virginia Dunn, Mary Kay Hall, John Collins, and Haishu Zhu. Occasional water leakage in the library and annex caused some damage to the book and journal collection. A burst pipe on the eighth floor of Hamilton Hall during a winter break in the mid-1980s resulted in loss of several books in my office and part of the Varian spectra collection, an obsolete part of our reference collection. A subsequent leak in the fifth-floor annex resulted in wetting about 85 volumes of a chemistry journal near the east wall of the annex. They were dried and returned to the collection after several weeks. Several smaller leaks occurred in the librarian's office at the front of the library over the years, caused by overflows in a janitor's closet on the fifth floor. Little damage resulted in those cases. Low temperatures and high humidity in the basement annex of Hamilton Hall was a continuing concern. Several dehumidifiers were used to keep the humidity at acceptable levels. Finally, temperatures were raised in that part of the building to lower the relative humidity, and our struggle was eased somewhat. During the final months of the Chemistry Library's existence, asbestos removal in the annex provided a much cleaner space for our chemistry and chemical engineering collections. The Chemistry Library was closed in July, 2005, and the collections were moved to Love Library and the library depository facility on the East Campus.

Return to Love Library

In July, 2005, I returned to Love Library to serve as Science Librarian in the Reference and Instruction Department. In 2009, I transferred to the Digital Initiatives and Special Collections Department. I worked with faculty papers and publications in the Special Collections area in the east basement of Love Library. During my time in Special Collections, I revised the Libraries' herbals presentation, to give each herbal some historical context and relation to the history of botany and medicine. I also wrote a history and analysis of the American Petroleum Institute's Research Project 44. The project developed and published chemical and physical properties data for a broad range of hydrocarbon compounds. I wrote a history of the Seminarium Botanicum for presentation to a winter meeting of the Nebraska Native Plant Society. These three publications were deposited with the Digital Commons repository at UNL.

Epilogue

Forty-three years of employment at the University Libraries have encompassed remarkable changes in collection, organization, and distribution of information in the University community. Card catalogs and files of paper serial records have disappeared, and acquisition of library materials is now a highly automated process. The Libraries staff has grown and diversified as our delivery systems evolved. Branch libraries have disappeared as electronic search and delivery systems became more common and easy to use. Library instruction has become a routine part of service to the library's users. Adaptive equipment has been acquired to accommodate handicapped users of the library's collections and services. The Center for Digital Research in the Humanities has reopened an ancient role of libraries as places where contemporary technology is applied to scholarly research. My work over

these years has allowed me to delve into many areas of intellectual activity, and I plan to continue this activity into the future. If the past is prologue, I have many things to explore.

Appendix:

One Director and Several Deans I Have Known

Frank A. Lundy, Director, 1968-1971

John W. Heussman, Dean, 1971-1973

Adam Breckenridge, Acting Dean, 1973-1974

Gerald A. Rudolph, Dean, 1974-1984

James A. Rawley, Acting Dean, 1984-1985

Kent Hendrickson, Dean, 1985-1996

Joan R. Giesecke, Dean, 1996-