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## **The Rockefeller Library, 1906-1972**

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THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

1906-1972

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A library was a major element in the 1904 proposals of the Executive Committee of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, incorporated on June 13, 1901, following conversations between John D. Rockefeller, Jr., representing his father, and Dr. L. Emmett Holt, representing seven medical colleagues. This 1901 incorporation authorised the Executive Committee, meeting in Dr. Holt's office at 14 West 55th Street, New York City, to expend up to \$20,000 per year over the succeeding ten years, for the purpose of medical research. In 1904 the Committee began its work in temporary laboratories at 127 East 50th Street, while construction of permanent headquarters began on land given by John D. Rockefeller at York Avenue and 66th Street. This "Central Laboratory" (Founder's Hall) was opened on May 11, 1906.

In preparation for the 1906 opening, the Executive Committee in September 1903 authorised Dr. Christian Herter and Dr. Simon Flexner to acquire in Europe a nucleus collection of materials for the establishment of a Library in the Central Laboratory. During the following two years, the formative stages of the Library cost the Institute something under \$1,000 per year, including the organisation of the \$5,500 Herter-Flexner purchase of periodicals, and implementation of operational decisions such as the formulation of a suitable acknowledgement of gifts to the Library, the design of a suitable Book Plate, and the selection of "house employees": one of these was Miss A.E. Schiedt, engaged as "library stenographer" in January 1906, at a salary of \$800 per year. The Library was established in two rooms at the north end of the first floor of the Central Laboratory (now the Personnel Offices) and by the end of 1906 was budgeted at \$1,500 per year. Although this amount seems today ridiculously low, it then represented at least 6.4% of the total budget of the Institute, well above the five per cent guideline accepted by library authorities today.

By 1908 Miss Schiedt was known officially as "the Librarian" and her salary had reached the dizzying height of \$1200 per year, in a total library budget of \$4,200. By 1911 the budget had reached \$5,000, and the collection numbered nearly 6,000 volumes. Of the subscription list of 250 periodical titles, more than half were obtained on exchange, and these mainly in return for materials sent out by the Publications Division of the Institute. In that year Miss Schiedt fades from the pages of Institute records, and the care of the Library was entrusted by Mr. Jerome Green, Manager of the Institute to Miss L.M.D. Trask, the first professionally trained Librarian, who managed the Library until 1938.

The Rockefeller University  
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The first physical move of the library came in 1920, when the rapidly growing collection, now numbering over 11,000 volumes, forced expansion into two small neighbouring rooms and the Assembly Room, which today is the central lobby of Founder's Hall. This was also a record year for acquisitions: nearly 1,000 items, partly due to the influx of European periodicals held back by World War I, and the year saw continuation of the preponderance in periodical subscriptions of gifts over purchases, with 107 titles being received in exchange for the Journal of Experimental Medicine alone, which trend lasted until astronomically rising production costs forced curtailment of the Publication Division's Exchange Program in 1970.

By 1923 the five room Library in the Central Laboratory was outgrown, with the overflow stored inconveniently in basement stacks, so that completion of the 38,500-volume capacity quarters in the newly-constructed "Library Building" (Welch Hall) abutting the Central Laboratory to the east in 1929 came none too soon, with its promise of "room to grow for at least fifty years". That promise ran out in the late Fifties: to quote from a report of the Faculty Committee on the Library of February, 1959: "the margin of extra space which normally is considered minimal by libraries was reached in 1957...we will need more space by 1967, and probably before...".

What was to be named Welch Hall was two stories above ground, with three levels of basement. The Library was housed on the second floor, which had an open mezzanine, converted in the mid-Fifties to a closed floor with stacks and individual study rooms. Potential expansion space existed in three core stacks on the basement levels, used at first by the Publications Division for storage. The first floor of the building was given over to dining and meeting rooms for Faculty and staff.

Library activities during the years between wars included the operation of two branch libraries, those serving the Departments of Animal and Plant Pathology in their Princeton location, and the Bermuda Laboratory. The animal pathology library in Princeton, begun in 1918, was expanded in 1931, to include plant pathology when that Department was instituted. Inaugural plant pathology materials were mainly gifts from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the combined Library, under the local supervision of Jeanne Ross from 1935 on, continued until 1950, when the Princeton operation was closed and all Library materials were sent to Welch Hall. The Bermuda Laboratory was established in late 1922 by special appropriation, to study, under the direction of Professor Osterhout, the cell activity of the marine plant *Valonia* in its native habitat, and was phased out as a Library responsibility in 1933.

Many interesting features of library life during those leisurely days emerge from the meticulous Annual Reports produced by Miss Trask. In 1923 she felt that "binding operations play such an important role that it has led me to consider the possibility of a small bindery of our own". Binding then was costing a little over \$1,200 per year, and the quotation of \$1,000 for the establishment of an in-house bindery sounded reasonable. Impossible to conceive, then, that the cost of binding would rise to \$20,000 by 1972. And world events had an impact even then in the Halls of Academe, although the aspects of such events which loomed large in the library world doubtless would seem whimsical to outsiders. World War I seemed in the main to mean great difficulty in acquiring foreign books and journals, and the infamous "Black Friday" of 1929, with its aftermath of hard times, meant shrinking budgets (ending in February each year from 1929-31, presenting dismal prospects for March through June!), curtailed services, and decreasing insularity as libraries began to allocate acquisitions responsibilities amongst themselves, and borrow what they could not buy. In 1926 the Rockefeller Institute Library first began to borrow needed materials from other libraries, chalking up 323 loans in that year alone, chiefly from the New York Academy of Medicine, Columbia University, and the American Museum of Natural History.

Yet, throughout these years, the Library won and held a significant place in the library world, and maintained a remarkable record of service to its own users. The Welch Hall Library was innovative for its time in terms of structure and equipment, and was visited frequently by admiring professionals for quite a number of years. The collection grew so wisely and so well that by 1936 interlibrary loans were being made to other libraries, and by 1948 more books were being lent per year (859) than were being borrowed from others (580). A unique service maintained by Miss Trask, which must have been of inestimable value to her patrons, was the production of daily "reference slips" - citations of important articles in relevant fields culled daily from periodicals as they were received, and sent to participating scientists; a laborious, manual forerunner of today's machine-based systems designated as "Selective Dissemination of Information" - that title probably would have appalled Miss Trask! The cost in time and effort to the Librarian must have been prodigious - nearly 5,500 slips were sent out in the six months of 1924 alone! -and, in fact, the service was suspended in 1930 to assess its value to patrons. The outcry of disappointment was so great that the service was re-instituted. It reached a peak of 8,866 slips for 1925, but had slipped to 517 by 1936, partly due to the emergence of effective commercial current awareness services, and finally was discontinued in 1937.

Miss Trask also established and supervised several special reading rooms on the campus and in Princeton, and was in the forefront of a struggle with German periodical publishers, whose prices apparently had become exorbitant. By 1931 committees of the American Library Association and the Medical Library Association had proposed severe restrictions on the purchase of German periodicals: the U.S. and Canada were to be divided into ten zones, each to have one subscription to each of the disputed periodicals, all other libraries in the zone to terminate their subscriptions. Faced with this threat, the German government imposed price reductions on the publishers of nearly 52% in 1933, and an additional 25% in 1934, cost breaks which unfortunately almost were wiped out by unfavourable currency exchange rates.

The Rockefeller Institute Library appears to have been very much of a closed corporation during the early years of Miss Trask's administration, being open to non-Rockefeller personnel only through limited Interlibrary loan, but the opening of the "Cornell Medical School" next door in 1931 was marked by the establishment of "reciprocal arrangements between our two libraries" - on-site use only, without the individual borrowing privileges.

In 1936 President Gasser ordered broadening of the scope of the collection to include "non-scientific" books for the first time - books on the history of medicine and science, medical classics, and biography - and requested that staff scientists supply to the Library reprints of their published works, in a first faint recognition of a possible archival function for the Library. He also required of them concise autobiographies for retention by the Personnel Division, and these have become a part of the Rockefeller University Archives.

In 1938 Miss Trask retired, and Miss Esther Judkins, a professional assistant since 1928, was appointed Librarian, (1938-1964). The collection had grown by then to nearly 24,000 volumes, with a periodical subscription list of 513 titles, and a total budget of approximately \$16,000.

Audiovisual materials began to be important library materials by about 1934, chiefly because of the introduction by governmental agencies of "filmstats" or "bibliofilms", an early version of microfilm providing a page reduction to one and three quarter inches, at ten cents a page, a considerable saving over the old, forty-cent photostat. The best available method of reading filmstats then was the use of "textile glass" of high power as a hand-held magnification device, but by 1939 the first effective readers were being marketed, and the Library purchased a Recordak Library Film Reader Mark C (Eastman Kodak) which still is usable. In fact, however, very little use has been made to date of microforms at this Library. The collection includes, thus, only the microfilm edition of the New York Times, and inexpensive portable film and fiche readers.

World War II again brought great difficulties in obtaining periodicals from Europe, but thanks mainly to the Library's agent in Amsterdam, a Mr. Swets, who continued to send periodicals through 1942 at considerable personal risk and without payment, as his funds were frozen in the U.S., Rockefeller Institute was more fortunate than most such customers, and the Library did a heavy interlibrary loan business sharing its wealth. By the end of 1943, however, all receipts of foreign periodicals except those from Australia, Great Britain, India, South America, and South Africa had ceased. Most of the periodicals held up during the hostilities were stored by library agents and shipped after the war - provided they had not become war casualties.

From March 1942 until June 1946 the U.S. Navy contracted for use of the campus Hospital for special Naval patients, during which time they made possible the establishment of a Patients' Library under the guidance of Miss Judkins. During its four years of life this library grew to about 1,000 volumes, and provided 24,542 loans of books to 1,166 patients. In 1946 the collection was stored in the hope of re-instituting this service at a later date.

The end of this second great war found the Library once again cramped for space, a state further complicated by the absorption of the collections of the discontinued libraries of plant and animal pathology. Some of the strain was relieved by sending duplicate periodicals to war-ravaged areas, and to U.S. Military camps, and by physical re-arrangements within the Library: basement stacks vacated by the Publications Division absorbed the overflow of bound periodicals in 1949, and additional compact shelving for current periodicals was installed on the second floor in 1950.

The immediate post-war period also brought changes which foreshadowed the shift from a one-librarian operation under the direct and active supervision of the Presidents of the Institute, to a distinct University administrative unit. The Library had grown by 1945 to nearly 30,000 volumes, with an annual circulation of more than 5,000 volumes, a periodical subscription list of more than 400 titles, and an annual budget approaching the \$100,000 mark. Professional librarians had been added to the staff to assist the Librarian - Daphne Morse, from the John Crerar Library in Chicago, in 1945; Sonya Wohl, fresh from the Columbia University School of Library Service in 1949; and Sally Wilson George in 1958. In 1965 Miss Morse left, and Miss George was succeeded by Zdenka Munzer as Cataloguer. Mrs. Munzer was replaced in 1966 by Mary E. Nahon.

From 1945-1965 the Library was operated by three professional librarians virtually without non-professional help, and essentially at the behest of President Gasser and his successor in 1953, President Bronk, with, from 1958 to 1964, the advice of a Faculty Library Committee. In 1965 with the departure of Miss Judkins and the appointment of Dr. Alfred E. Mirsky, Professor Emeritus of Cell Biology at the University as her successor, the Library began to take on modern dress. Dr. Mirsky unquestionably was in charge of the Library. For the first time, library operations and services were based on consultation with its professional staff and with members of the community it served. By 1971, when Dr. Mirsky officially retired, the total staff numbered over twenty, expending an annual budget of over \$300,000 on a collection grown to more than 150,000 volumes, and nearly 2,000 periodical titles, with an annual circulation of nearly 30,000 items.

During the latter years of the Judkins administration, there were several significant changes in the library picture.

The Patients' Library was re-instituted in 1954 at the request of Dr. Thomas Rivers, operated on a basis of once-a-week visits to the Hospital with selected books by a member of the Library staff, until the service was taken over by the Occupational Therapy Service of the University in 1959. This Library operation reached a peak of nearly 2,000 loans per year to 644 patients in 1957, and then decreased as the number of patients sank to 64 in 1957, and nine in 1958.

Increasingly heavy use of the Library was dealt with in 1954 by instituting a Registration Book for recording after-hours users of the Library. This Book is maintained by personnel of the Campus Security Department, and enables use of the Library virtually 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Subject content of the collection was broadened in this era by President Bronk's decision to purchase new categories of non-scientific books, including fiction, under the guidance of an appointed seven-member reviewing committee, and further diffused by the bequest of the 6,000-volume library of Dr. A.E. Cohn in July of 1958. The Cohn Library is kept separate and intact in special quarters in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall.

But by far the greatest change in the character of the Library was to be the result of the change in status of the Institute to a full-fledged graduate University in 1954. In order that the Library properly should come to terms with the expected new demands, Mr. Herman Henkle of the John Crerar Library was engaged in February 1958 as Consultant on Library problems. His careful and extensive report was to be the guide for the deliberations of the first Faculty Library Committee, appointed by President Bronk in March of 1958, and chaired by Dr. James S. Murphy.



Mr. Henkle's report praised the past and worried about the future. His main concerns were the inadequacy of the collection in meeting the expanding needs of the Faculty and the students, and the lack of any formal corrective procedures; a diffuse arrangement of materials by author, which hampered accessibility; and lack of information for users about the collection and the library services offered. He recommended corrective measures such as careful delineation of an acquisitions program and establishment of a Faculty Library Committee, to assist in improving the collection; arrangement of materials in subject categories and establishment of special bibliographic and reference sections to facilitate use; and dissemination of Library guides and user-manuals.

The Faculty Library Committee appointed in 1958 included in its roster the members of two book committees already in existence: the Committee on Scientific Collections and the Committee on General Collections. This Faculty Committee functioned well until 1964, meeting formally from two to three times a year, and providing, as can be seen from their detailed reports, valuable guidance, support and advice to the Librarian.

Attacks on other problems pointed out in the Henkle Report were launched as promptly as in the formation of the Faculty Library Committee, except in relation to a general Library Handbook, a major undertaking not yet completed.

Reclassification of the entire collection into the subject categories advised by Mr. Henkle and provided by the Library of Congress Classification Scheme was begun in the early months of 1958, and completed in May of 1960, using only existing Library staff, a truly remarkable achievement. The monumental task of revising the Card Catalog to conform to the reclassification was accomplished by Sonya Wohl, who had done the same task in the amalgamation of the animal and plant pathology libraries in 1952, and of the Cohn Library in 1958, and was to undertake a further reclassification of books on medical subjects into the National Library of Medicine System in late 1960. Miss Wohl became Associate Librarian, a new designation, in 1960, and Mrs. Alfred E. Mirsky in 1967.



A broad Acquisitions Policy was outlined by the Faculty Library Committee in 1959: "no reasonable request, as defined by the Chairman of the Library Committee and the Librarian, by a member of the Faculty or student body should be turned down". By June of 1959 annual acquisitions had increased by 10% over the previous year, amounting to more than 3,000 items per year. In 1961, two major collections were purchased intact, in earth sciences and astronomy and in mathematics, and an intensive buying spree in mathematics and physics was launched, both to meet the needs of the graduate education program. The collection tripled in size between 1959 and 1969, but, while President Bronk insisted on thus increasing rapidly the size of the collection, he resisted all efforts at providing adequate physical space for its housing and use.

As acquisitions activities increased, the Library began to bulge at the seams: the accepted ratio of space to number of volumes housed, including adequate space for readers and ancillary services, is 30,000 square feet for each 100,000 volumes. By June of 1968, Welch Hall's 27,500 square feet of library space was filled to 150% of capacity with more than 128,000 volumes, the Library staff depending on very large circulation of books as a means of ensuring shelf space for the volumes actually in the Library. In the early 1960's, some degree of relief was found through various stratagems. In 1960, a special room was equipped as a library adjacent to the relevant Faculty in the newly-constructed South Laboratory to house the bulk of the books in mathematics and physics. The core stacks on level 3 of the basement of Welch Hall were taken over from the Publications Division in 1961. The "River Room Study" on level 3, created with pride and to acclaim in 1959 was dismantled and altered to accommodate 3200 linear feet of steel stacks where scholars at individual study desks had held peaceful but brief sway. Throughout the Library, book shelves encroached on floor space, eliminating study tables, and on ceiling space as tiers were added to existing stacks, creating Alpine conditions for the serious book-hunter. More reader space was pre-empted by the need for additional card catalog installations as Miss Wohl created a Union Catalog, listing all the Library books on the campus, rather than just those shelved in Welch Hall as previously had been the case.

The increasing richness of the collection, combined with the new information services listing periodicals received, and the bimonthly acquisitions list, Notes from the Library, published from 1958 to 1964, and with the extended open hours instituted in 1954, brought in more and more readers to use fewer and fewer reading spaces. The graduate education program also drove the students to the Library to complete extensive reading assignments for seminars, and in the production of term papers and theses. The year 1958/59 saw a 60% increase in circulation over the previous year, a high level which has not since declined. Thus, a collection increasingly more suited to the information needs of its community was housed in a physical setting not conducive to its effective use. Although stack capacity had been increased from 38,500 volumes in 1929 to 50,000 volumes in 1960 by the various means already mentioned, the collection numbered more than 60,000 volumes by 1963, and by 1970 the 100,000-volume mark had been passed. Reading spaces had shrunk to ninety, few of these being truly satisfactory, and volumes had to be shelved in physically-separated groups according to publication date, rather than in consecutive runs or subject groups, and shelves frequently were overcrowded vertically as well as horizontally, with volumes piled flat above other regularly-shelved volumes.

Despite the overcrowding and lack of reader space, pressure from non-University people desirous of using the effective collection had resulted in somewhat limited issuance of permission to outside users, for in 1960 the Faculty Library Committee was discussing the advisability of requiring a University sponsor's signature on the authorising permit, as well as the signature of the user. In 1968, however, access to the Library by outside users further was restricted by curtailing the number of guests of University staff granted Library privileges through requiring Presidential approval. Borrowing privileges were granted only to full time members of the University community, not including spouses, and guests approved by President Seitz. Holders of the Cornell University Medical College Library Card were granted on-site use of the Library, but not borrowing privileges. Cornell reciprocated in this arrangement, but, in addition, frequently accorded borrowing privileges to holders of the Rockefeller University Employee's Identification Card on a transaction basis as approved by their Librarian. This reciprocity actually opened up the Rockefeller University Library wider than had been intended, as the Cornell Library Card was issued, under various special arrangements, to several other neighbouring institutions, including, by 1972, New York Hospital, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center School of Nursing, Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, the Hospital for Special Surgery, the New York Blood Center, and the Institute for Muscle Disease.

In 1959 one of the first significant inter-library cooperatives came into being with the chartering by the Regents of the State of New York of the Medical Library Center of New York. Initial funding included large grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Sloan Foundation. Membership is by institution, the Founding Members being the medical schools of Columbia, Cornell, New York and Yeshiva Universities, the New York Medical College, the Rockefeller University, the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, the New York Academy of Medicine, and the medical libraries (2) of the Department of Health of the City of New York. These sponsoring members, which now include the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry and Mount Sinai School of Medicine, pay an annual fee of \$10,000. Participating institutions pay an annual membership fee of \$5,000 ( there are now 17), and commercial firms may participate for an annual fee of \$5,000.

The philosophy behind the establishment of the Center is to complement, not duplicate, the holdings of the member libraries, and to provide coordinating and facilitating services designed to expand the information capabilities of the member libraries. Its collection includes materials that are "less used" by reason of age, language or type, medical dissertations, Public Health Service publications, subscriptions to journals in relevant fields that are not received by member libraries, and miscellaneous government documents and institutional reports pertinent to the health sciences field. Much of the material is donated by member libraries. The services provided by the Center, for the most part free to members and available at nominal charges to non-members according to need, include the compilation and maintenance of the Union Catalog of Medical Periodicals, which lists holdings of sixty-eight medical and para-medical libraries in the New York City area; participation in a telecommunications network which links, by TWX, the MLC and its sponsoring members, and links this TWX network through various programs of the National Library of Medicine with other telecommunications systems in the City, State, and nationally; rapid interlibrary loan, generally utilizing photocopies rather than original materials; and daily truck and messenger service.

The Medical Library Center of New York was launched officially in 1961 by Mr. Erich Meyerhoff as its first Director, guided by a Board of Directors drawn from the administrative staffs of the sponsoring members. Mr. Meyerhoff resigned in 1966 to become Librarian at the University of Buffalo Medical School, and later Librarian of the Cornell University Medical College, and was succeeded by Mrs. Jacqueline Felter.

Dr. Mirsky remained in charge of the Library until July of 1972, having consented to act for an additional year beyond his retirement to enable selection of a suitable replacement, and his administration was marked by greatly increased and diversified acquisitions, systems studies which transformed and revitalised Library organisation and procedures, creation of a formal Archives Program, and formulation of long-needed plans for improvement of physical facilities. This revolution was essential to the survival of the Library as a viable service, and was made possible by the administrative strength of Dr. Mirsky, the professional expertise of Sonya Wohl Mirsky, the importance accorded to feedback from the Library community, and the informed leadership and active support of the University Administration.

During these years the collection almost doubled, from 80,000 to nearly 158,000 volumes, and changed radically in character. In 1956, 79% of the collection was made up of periodicals, with the books distributed 3% humanities and social sciences, 7% physical sciences, 9% life sciences and medicine, and 2% applied science and technology. By 1972, the balance was quite different, with 58% periodicals and the books distributed 18% humanities and social sciences, 9% physical sciences, 14% life sciences and medicine, and 1% applied science and technology. The Acquisitions Policy adopted during this period, and still in force, is to aim for a comprehensive research collection, which would include the major portions of materials required for dissertations and independent research in the relevant subject areas of the University's teaching and research activities.

The Archives Program was launched in September 1970, with the appointment of Ruth Sternfeld as Assistant Librarian for Archives. Although the usual business papers, administrative and financial reports, and other institutional records carefully had been kept from the beginning, and in some kind of order, chiefly through the efforts of Edric Brooks Smith, Business Manager of the Institute/University from 1922 to 1955, no attempt had been made to secure the personal papers of the scientists. By the end of 1972, Mrs. Sternfeld had organised the nucleus of the Archives, built the necessary foundation of specific classification and indexing schemes, and had begun an active campaign of personal interviews with full time Faculty, articles in campus publications, and displays in the Library of interesting Archival materials, to ensure the adequacy and useful future life of the Rockefeller University Archives.

Since the late Fifties the desperate need for more space for the Library had been obvious, and several alternate means of acquiring more space had been proposed from time to time, but it was not until President Seitz took office in 1968 that things began to happen. The University community actively was brought into discussions of various alternatives and development of necessary criteria, through meetings with the student body, and through the appointment of a new Library Committee composed of Faculty and students, chaired by Dr. Purnell W. Choppin. This Committee presented its report and recommendations on April 8, 1971, and the student representatives on the Committee presented a supplemental report on May 28, 1971. In November of that year, Assistant Librarian Jay K. Lucker of Princeton University made the first of several site visits as Consultant on Library Development. His January 1972 report strongly recommended the immediate renovation of Welch Hall, while insisting that this could be only a temporary remedy to the space needs of the Library, which must be met in the immediate future by the construction of a totally new building. Mr. Lucker's recommendations and his analysis of the best ways of using the additional space made available in Welch Hall through the process of renovation accorded closely with the recommendations of the Library Committee and the Librarians, and were accepted by the University Administration. A three-stage Library development program was announced: renovation of Welch Hall to get additional space as a necessary temporary expedient; completion of new quarters for the bulk of the books in mathematics, physics and philosophy contiguous to the offices of those Departments in the Tower Building; and construction of a totally new Library building in the immediate future.

With the opening of the Tower Cafeteria in the summer of 1971, the first step towards the fulfillment of this development program was taken, by closing the dining rooms on level one and the first floor of Welch Hall. The stage now was set for an era of physical development of Library facilities, pending the selection of a new Librarian to carry out the program.

Mr. C.R. LeSueur, Librarian,  
The Rockefeller University.  
March 10, 1973.