History of Hiram College Library: Part 1

How could the College survive for fifty years without a library? This is the question frequently asked when people learn that, although Hiram College was founded in 1850, the Teachout-Cooley Library was not built until 1900. The answer is that, before 1900, Hiram College had several libraries, each owned and maintained by individual literary societies. Records indicate that five societies had their own libraries: the Alethean, Delphic, Eclectic, Hesperian, and Olive Branch. Books in the Library today still bear the bookplates of these groups.

Four of the literary societies were founded in the 1850s, while the Alethean was a relative latecomer in 1895. Alethean and Olive Branch were female groups, while the Delphic, Eclectic and Hesperian were male. However, they all managed their libraries along the same principles. Books selected by the membership or by a designated person were purchased with revenue from dues and literary fundraisers. They were then available for loan free to society members, and for a fee of 25 cents per year to others, for brief periods of time. The booklists that survive, as well as the society books still in the Library’s collections, indicate that these were books students needed for their studies. Ephemeral or recreational reading was not high on the list of acquisitions. Some representative titles from the Eclectic Catalogue are Macaulay’s History of England in five volumes, Women of the Revolution by Mrs. Ellet, and the works of Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and James Fenimore Cooper.

The new centralized library was named for its two donors, trustees Abram Teachout and Lathrop Cooley. Teachout was a staunch Disciple very interested in educational affairs, so his connection with Hiram was natural. A successful industrialist in northeastern Ohio, he had the funds to make the new library a reality. Cooley was a life-long friend who supplied the Warner & Swasey telescope for the observatory in the building. Until the library fire in 1939, when the observatory and telescope were moved to the new Stephens Memorial Observatory on Wakefield Road, students regularly studied the stars from atop the library.

The exact number of books in the consolidated library is not known, although one source gives the number as 8,800. A booklist published on the occasion of the library’s dedication states, “While the number of volumes in these various libraries is creditable, their combined number appears small in the large building. To partially obviate this difficulty, Hon. C. B. Lockwood and Mr. H. R. Newcomb gave their checks each for five hundred dollars for the purchase of new books. These gifts are the largest ever made to the library from any source or at any time.” Thus, Lockwood and Newcomb could be regarded as the first Friends of the Hiram College Library.

Emma Olive Ryder was the first Librarian of Hiram College. She graduated with an A.B. degree in 1890 and an A.M. degree in 1894. She taught for several years before taking charge of Hiram’s new library. While not a trained librarian, she had worked so successfully with the various literary society libraries that she was the universal choice to take charge of the new central library. After attending the Chautauqua Institute in New York State to learn the Dewey Decimal System of classification, she and a helper classified all the books into one catalog with cards written in longhand. The books themselves were arranged
on shelves that reached the ceiling so that the highest ones could only be obtained by use of a stepladder. But Miss Ryder’s first love was language teaching and she was appointed a full-time faculty member in 1911. Then **Jessie J. Smith** became the building of the library’s first addition in 1923, which more than doubled its space; directed the rebuilding of the library after the devastating fire of 1939; and ultimately became nationally known for her library assistant training program. She was especially good at bringing efficiency to library functions. Having no budget with which to purchase books, she established a library fee for this purpose. By 1916, she had a budget of $500 a year for acquisitions. Through planned purchasing, she added an average of 1,500 books per year to the collection. Miss Jessie also devised an efficient reserve book system; enhanced the reference and periodical collections; highlighted the government documents collection; and further refined the cataloging system.

Jessie Smith was a difficult act to follow. In the years since 1944 there were two more additions to the library, and a new, state-of-the-art library was built in 1995. Budgets and collections have grown. The Library is fully automated and is now part of OhioLINK, accomplishments not even dreamed of in Smith’s time. But Miss Jessie, through diligence, a commitment to service, and efficient use of her organizational skills, laid the foundation for today’s Hiram College Library.

—Joanne Sawyer

Part II of this capsule history will look at how the Hiram College Library has evolved in its second half-century. See the Spring, 2001 issue of *The Flyleaf*.

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**Directors of the Hiram College Library**

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History of Hiram College Library: Part 2

Ruth Whitcomb followed Jessie Smith as Head Librarian in 1944. The widow of Ward Whitcomb, the popular Dean of Men who died unexpectedly in 1939, Ruth Whitcomb became Assistant Librarian in 1940. Whitcomb presided over an addition to the south side of the Library, which alumni will remember as the Reference area and basement Periodicals Room. This addition was again funded by the Teachout Foundation.

In 1952, Whitcomb made a slight departure from her librarian duties when she assumed the additional responsibilities of Assistant Dean of Students. Research into the Whitcomb years also yielded evidence of a Friends of the Library group in 1955. Spearheaded by faculty member Edith Scottron, this original Friends group was chaired by Caspar Green '36. Unfortunately, there is no documentation of how long this group lasted. Do any readers remember?

When Whitcomb retired in 1958, Thelma Bumbaugh '49 was named Head Librarian and Associate Professor of Library Science, having previously served as Assistant Librarian. Bumbaugh oversaw the creation of the Geidlinger Music Listening Center on the Library’s second floor in 1959 and the major addition to the west side of the Library in 1963, which effectively doubled its floor space. With this addition, the Library’s name changed to “Teachout-Price,” since funding was provided by Mr. and Mrs. Harley C. Price, who also were major contributors to the College’s Price Gymnasium complex.

During the '60s and '70s, Hiram became involved in two movements that were at the forefront of library progress: OCLC and “bibliographic instruction.” The Ohio College Library Catalog was founded as a consortium of Ohio libraries for the purpose of shared cataloging.
The Periodicals Room in the old Library.

This concept is taken for granted now, it was revolutionary thirty years ago. Again, Hiram’s library staff quickly jumped on the bandwagon, and a cadre of enthusiastic faculty attended Fair’s workshops along with the librarians.

Bumbaugh’s tenure also saw the relocation of the Circulation and Reference areas to more efficiently serve patrons and the implementation of consistent book ordering practices by the faculty. Upon her retirement in 1979, Bumbaugh received the Alumni Association’s Distinguished Service Award.

By the time Barbara Nead was named Head Librarian in 1980, the Library’s “new” addition was well on its way to being filled. Library services had increased and the staff had grown to accommodate more specialized library functions such as acquisitions, periodicals control, increased reference service, government documents, the music collection, archives, and special collections. Although many alumni felt that the older portions of the Library had a great deal of charm, the numerous physical changes to the building had created areas that were inconvenient and even unworkable for state-of-the-art library methods, such as automation and the systematic preservation of materials. The 1981 “Report on the Status of the Hiram College Library,” submitted cooperatively by Snead and Library Committee chair Professor of English David Anderson, made the first cogently argued plea for a new building.


Their hard work culminated in a special Charter Day program held in June. This occasion marked the beginning of the highly successful Friends group presently led by Professor Emeritus of History Wilson Hoffman. In the intervening 16 years, the Friends have raised more than $20,000 annually during the past several years in support of Library collections while attracting an average of 400+ members per year.

In August of 1984, the Library welcomed Dr. Gorman Dufrét as both its first male director and its first director with a doctorate in the field. He earned his Ph.D. in Library Administration from the University of Pittsburgh. Under Dufrét’s direction, changes in Library organization and interaction with the College community took place. Foremost among these changes were the redefinition of staff positions; a strongly proactive stance for the staff regarding their place in College governance; and the first steps toward automation with the appearance of staff computers, internet connections, non-paper databases, and the retrospective conversion of card catalog records to an automated environment.

Dufrét also brought the Media Center, which had been physically housed in the library building for some time, under the Library’s administrative umbrella. In addition, staff members were encouraged to contribute to the College’s general curriculum by teaching courses in adjunct faculty if they wished to and were qualified to do so.

By the time Dufrét left Hiram in 1992, it was clear that Hiram’s library needed a new building and full automation of its processes. Under Director Patricia Lyons Basu, the Library accomplished both challenges simultaneously in 1995, when Hiram’s new library was dedicated and the staff plunged into the complexities of automation with its new Innovative Interfaces system. In 1997 Hiram College joined OhioLINK, the consortium of Ohio institutions which has created a shared collection equal to those of a top ten research institution.

Current Director David Everett, who came in 1998, oversees a library of nearly 200,000 volumes with 885 journal subscriptions, access to 3,000 more journals through OhioLINK’s Electronic Journal Center, and more than 100 databases, many of them containing the full-text of journal articles. Students can access the online catalog from their dorm rooms. Circulation for the 1999-2000 academic year was 24,000, including items borrowed through OhioLINK. Everett is enthusiastically leading the staff deeper into the increasingly electronic world of librarianship.

If all this sounds far removed from the cozy library alumni remember, nothing could be further from the truth. The new building has many comfortable spaces for study or pleasure reading, and the Library sponsors many interesting programs in its beautiful Pritchard Room, such as the monthly Library Forums and Friends of the Library speakers and events, as well as the Book Sale every fall. The staff provides cookies and hot chocolate for students during finals week, and staff members are always available to assist students with their research or just to chat. Judging from the history of the Hiram College Library over the past 100 years, it will be ready to face whatever challenges the next century may bring. — Joanne Sawyer

(See the Fall 2000 issue of the Flyleaf for Part I of the Library History.)