FIRST IMPRESSIONS

In a letter that appeared in the April 1910 issue of the Smith Alumnae Quarterly, a graduate of the Class of 1900 described her visit to the college late one evening in January: “I was prepared for any degree of shock. As a matter of fact, I could have clapped my hands with delight over the effect of the campus as it spread out into a sort of great quadrangle with Seelye Hall on the south and the new library edging it on the west….” The next day, she examined the changes more closely. “The new library came in for unqualified approval. I heard it accused of over-plainness and severity; I found it a thing of joy to my personal taste — beautifully situated, well-proportioned, restful — and oh, so inviting in its great, quiet, uncrowded interior, with its dark wood work and splendid lighting.”

Florence Homer Snow, 1904, reported on the opening of the library in the Smith Alumnae Quarterly in January 1910. “The first transfer of books from the old library in Seelye Hall was begun Monday morning, November 22. The moving was completed Saturday, and Monday, November 29, the doors were opened to the college. Painters and carpenters were still in the building, but, as the President said in chapel, the only way to drive them out was for the college to move in.”

FALL 2009 UPDATE

The Libraries Celebrate 100 Years!

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THESE EVENTS:

Thursday, October 15, 2009, 4:30 p.m.
Neilson Library Browsing Room
Ensuring Equitable Access to Knowledge: The Role of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century by Eszter Hargittai ’96

Eszter Hargittai will discuss her research into skill differences in Internet use among students and various efforts in higher education to overcome the digital—social divide. Hargittai is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University where she heads the Web Use Project. She received a Ph.D. in sociology from Princeton University in 2003. Her dissertation, How Wide a Web? Inequalities in Accessing Information Online, won the National Communication Association’s G.R. Miller Dissertation Award in 2004. Hargittai continues to conduct research on the social and policy implications of information technologies. She has also studied the evolution of search engines and the organization and presentation of online content, political uses of information technologies, and how these technologies influence the types of cultural products people consume.

Thursday, November 12, 2009, 4:30 p.m.
Book Arts Gallery, Level 3, Neilson Library
The Heart of Our Place of Learning: The William Allan Neilson Library Gallery Talk and Reception.

Join us as College Archivist Nanci Young shares her vast store of facts and anecdotes about the history of Smith’s flagship library.

Monday, November 30, 2009, 4:30 p.m. | Neilson Library Browsing Room
‘Moving-In Day’ Library Tea

The Monday after Thanksgiving was the day the Neilson Library opened its doors in 1909. Join us as we briefly step back in time and enjoy period refreshments with music provided by Mando Mucho, a western-Massachusetts mandolin and guitar ensemble, playing classical and popular music of the early 1900s. Period costumes encouraged!

Wednesday, October 21, 2009, 6:00 p.m. | Asia Society, 725 Park Avenue, New York, NY
A Special Alumnae Event: Fifty Years of Speaking Out

The college will host an evening of celebration and conversation between President Carol T. Christ and Gloria Steinem ’56. This alumnae event will mark Steinem’s 75th birthday and recognize her many contributions to Smith, especially her ongoing partnership with the Sophia Smith Collection in the Voices of Feminism Project. For registration information, see http://alumnae.smith.edu/gloria.
Looking Forward, Looking Back

by Christopher Loring, Director of Libraries

100 Years Old! It’s not usually the case when one turns one hundred that one looks forward rather than back, but I am going to chance that on behalf of Neilson Library and all of the Smith College Libraries. Over the past hundred years we have seen incremental change in the world of libraries and at Smith but one thing has remained constant: libraries have, at their core, been about the printed word—books and journals—about collecting physical objects with text and making them accessible to students and faculty.

The rise of the Internet in the past two decades has shaken us out of our evolutionary course. It has fundamentally changed the nature of our work, just as it has done for much of our society and culture. We are redefining what it means to be a library. Today, access to scholarly journals and articles is almost entirely electronic; the scholarly monograph is soon to follow with print copies available “on demand” as well as “just in case.”

I have no doubt that we will still be buying books for a long time to come, but the mix between print and electronic formats is changing rapidly, as are the many technologies and services we offer students. These forces demand that we continuously ask how our libraries should be changed, updated and renewed to insure that students have the learning environments they need in order to explore the vast world of knowledge, to engage in quiet reflection, or to actively collaborate with their classmates to create new knowledge—in a nutshell, to become scholars.

Margaret Storrs Grierson ’22 wrote in 1942 that a “library is the heart of a place of learning and on its excellence depends, in large measure, the quality of scholarship afforded by the institution.” She also wrote that a great library “stimulates the undergraduates by affording them a glimpse of the vast fields of the human intellect.” Neilson Library has done that for Smith students for one hundred years. We, all our libraries and all our staff, will continue to do so going forward, as we realize our vision of the Libraries being the intellectual crossroads of the campus.

NOTEWORTHY ACQUISITIONS

The Werner Josten Performing Arts Library was able to acquire the series Mozart Operas in Facsimile, as well as a facsimile edition of Handel’s Messiah thanks to a bequest and memorial gifts honoring the late Adrienne Auerswald, AB ’43, MA ’62, Iva Dee Hiatt Professor emerita of music and voice. These additions honor Professor Auerswald’s love of opera, choral and vocal literature.

In June, Hillyer Art Library received the library of Nancy Stephenson Nichols ’66 as a gift from the Nichols Family in her memory. Nichols’ academic specialization, Islamic art and architecture, is reflected in the collection of over 550 books and catalogs. The gift is especially strong in works about Turkey and thus complements the art library’s strong holdings on the Islamic visual culture of Iran and South Asia.

The papers of philosopher, theologian, radical feminist, and long-time Boston College professor Mary Daly were recently donated to the Sophia Smith Collection. Daly is the author of many books, but is perhaps best known for Beyond God the Father (Beacon Books: Boston, 1973).

The Mortimer Rare Book Room recently received a major gift of over 50 twentieth-century French and American artists’ books, including works illustrated by Picasso, Braque and Leger. The collection was assembled over four decades by Ryda Hecht Levy ’37, with advice from then-curator of rare books Ruth Mortimer ’53. The Levy Collection features several of the greatest works in the French tradition of livres d’artistes, and will form the foundation for the course The Artists’ Books in the 20th Century, taught by Martin Antonetti in the Mortimer Rare Book Room.

A 50th Anniversary Reflection

by Mary Ellen Chase

Writing in the Smith Alumnae Quarterly in November 1959, Mary Ellen Chase writes “Our wonderful library, the nucleus, even the soul of our life at Smith, owes its being, on this its fiftieth anniversary, more to the Alumnae Association than to any other single source. The story of its growth... is largely a story of alumnae zeal, devotion and dedication. It was the alumnae who... raised the money to meet the Carnegie challenge, who paid for the collection to be classified and catalogued, paid for most of the original furnishings and down through the decades gave gifts of books and funds to build the collections and address other needs.”
One Hundred Years of Spectacular Growth

Smith's flagship library—known for years simply as “The Libe”—was funded by a gift from Andrew Carnegie and by matching gifts from alumnae and friends. Prior to 1909, Smith students used the private Clarke Library, then Forbes Library, as well as a reference collection (located first in College Hall, then in Seelye) and departmental collections scattered through academic buildings. Thirty thousand books were carried into the new library in time for opening day, November 29, 1909. Such was the pleasure and excitement among the greater Smith community that a determined effort began immediately to build up the collection. Gifts poured in. The library, so grand and spacious, nevertheless used up all available shelf space by the mid-1930s, and the building was enlarged in 1937. The Friends of the Library was formed in 1942 to help fill the new shelves, and, as special projects, to develop a collection of rare books and a collection documenting the historical experiences of women. When William Allan Neilson died in 1946, the building, so closely associated with his efforts to strengthen the academic core of the college, was named in his honor. Other expansions and renovations followed in 1962 and in 1982, when the College Archives and Sophia Smith Collection moved into the now adjoining Alumnae Gymnasium.

During the 1960s departmental libraries were consolidated along the lines of today's branch libraries, and new homes were built for these collections: Werner Josten Library for the Performing Arts in 1968, Hillyer Art Library in 1972 (renovated in 2002) and, after three decades in Sabin-Reed, the science collection moved into the Anita O’K. and Robert R. Young Science Library in 1991.

By 1992, with a collection of over one million items, the Smith College Library became the Smith College Libraries. The college is justifiably proud of its library resources: the largest physical library collection of any undergraduate college in the United States, with certain subject strengths so substantial they are said to rival those of some research institutions. These days, counting books or manuscripts, maps or DVDs is no longer a pre-occupation; but the Libraries remain dedicated to advancing teaching, learning, research and discovery by offering access to information worldwide, collections in multiple formats and services that are responsive to users' needs. The centennial celebration will span the academic year.

FSCL News by Ann Shanahan ’59, Chair

The first order of business in this dispatch from the Friends of Smith College Libraries executive committee is a giant burst of applause for the many, many donors who assisted in the completion of fundraising for the renovation of the former periodicals room, which will become a handsome, comfortable and welcoming reading room, just inside Neilson’s main entrance. Among those who were instrumental in putting the project over the top was Lucy Wilson Benson ’49, who spurred a number of her 60th reunion classmates to make a very special contribution to this project. Library staff and a soon-to-be-named architectural firm will now be able to proceed to the development of working plans for the renovation. We will continue to update you on progress.

In the meantime, life goes on. Although the Friends of Smith College Libraries executive committee meets but twice a year, it packs a lot into its day-long meetings. The sessions usually begin with a public event—this fall that event (on Thursday, October 15) will be a talk by Eszter Hargittai ’96, whose background and exceptionally interesting and timely topic are described on the first page of this newsletter. The following day's meeting of the Friends group will include discussions and decisions about programming, and outreach activities. At recent meetings we have focused on expanding our presence on the Web—on the Smith home page and on our Friends of the Smith College Libraries Facebook site. I invite you to visit us there.

At this fall's meeting we will continue to consider new initiatives.
Library Treasures (Continued)
by Ann Shanahan ’59

And now for the final episode in my long-running tour of Smith’s branch libraries and special collections, which, in this issue, focuses on the Sophia Smith Collection (SSC) and College Archives.

The SSC, founded in 1942, is a distinctive contribution to the college’s mission of educating women. It has evolved from a collection of works by women writers into a distinguished historical research archive documenting the lives and activities of women—an internationally recognized repository of manuscripts, archives, photographs, periodicals and other primary sources in women’s history.

Sherrill Redmon, SSC director since 1993, tells me that among the “most used” of the more than 560 collections (and a number of others waiting to be processed) are materials from the YWCA, U.S.A., Planned Parenthood, the Margaret Sanger Papers, the National Women’s Health Network and Gloria Steinem’s papers. According to a 2003 article in Impressing Evidence, the SSC annual publication, the YWCA gift is the largest addition (some 850 cartons) ever made to the collection. The YWCA “did so much over such a long time,” Redmon says, establishing a pioneering tradition of attention to issues of racial, gender and class inequality, even establishing temporary Ys at “relocation camps” in the United States for Japanese-Americans during World War II. Materials come to the SSC by different routes. For example, with encouragement from its Praxis intern, Ada Comstock Scholar Lori Harris, the Black Women’s Health Imperative made a major addition to the small amount of material they had previously donated to the SSC.

In addition to Redmon, there are a number of full and part-time SSC staff members, including a reference archivist, curator of manuscripts, digital resources archivist and an associate curator of special collections, who work on—among other projects—research, processing material and exhibitions that are installed in the SSC’s home in Alumnae Gymnasium, elsewhere in the library and online. Finding the money to support these activities is one of the ongoing challenges, says Redmon, noting that, among generous benefactors, the Ford Foundation has been a long-time supporter.

The SSC’s neighbor in the Alumnae Gym is the College Archives, where archivist Nanci Young has presided since 1998. The archives, which document Smith’s life through a variety of materials related to students, faculty, administrative and departmental staff (as well as a blog!), offers an array of items ranging from the history of student houses to international education. While some materials, like personnel files, Board of Trustee minutes and Tenure and Promotion review files are restricted, most of the vast collection of archival material is open to the public. Anyone interested can learn about the history of Smith from the viewpoint of the administration, faculty, students and staff. The archives include digitized materials, including the founding documents, as well as research guides in areas ranging from student diaries and letters to physical education and sports. Archive records can offer answers to specific questions or help researchers understand broad social and cultural issues.

Young does a lot of outreach aimed at expanding the collection. (She did twenty-one “tea talks” in college houses this past year.) “My desire is to be out there everywhere. People don’t realize that what’s around them is their archive,” she says.

Although much of what the SSC and the College Archives are about is looking backward, they will be looking forward as well, through participation in a new Smith program, Archives Concentration. The program, which students may opt for instead of a minor, has been in the works for some time and will begin in Spring 2010. The Archives Concentration, which includes two internships for each participant, “is designed to make our local, regional, national and international histories public through research projects and professional training… combining academic coursework, practical experience and independent research projects” aimed at understanding “our pasts through the collection, preservation, interpretation and display of artifacts, manuscripts, and representation of historic sites.” Internships may be local—on campus, at Forbes Library, Old Deerfield—or further afield at such institutions as the Swarthmore Peace Collection or the International Information Center in Amsterdam. But wherever the internships may be, certainly they will encourage students to understand that “what’s around them is their archive.”

2009-2010 FSCL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ann E. Shanahan ’59, Chair; Elisabeth Doucett ’80; Jenny Frost ’78; Julie Iatron ’97; Susan Novick ’81; Lizanne Payne ’74; Elisabeth Morgan Pendleton ’62; Bethanne Patrick ’85; Ex-Officio: Carol Christ, President, Honorary Chair; Christopher B. Loring, Director of Libraries; Carrie Cadwell Brown, Ed.M ’82, Executive Director, Alumnae Association; Sherrill Redmon, Coordinator of Library Special Collections; Mary Irwin, Executive Secretary.
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF NEILSON!

by Leslie Fields ’95, College Archives

As a student, staff member, and alumna, Neilson had been a part of my Smith experience for many years. I have had the great pleasure this past summer of researching the history of Neilson Library for the centennial exhibition to open in November. I knew the carrels on the third floor from evening study; I knew the Browsing Room from special lectures and staff parties; I knew the stacks of the College Archives and Sophia Smith Collection from a summer as a student intern and later as a records services archivist. But I did not know the history of the physical building and the many, many people who contributed to the shape and scope of the Library as it is today. I hope the centennial exhibition will help you to learn something new, too. (An online exhibition is also planned for those who cannot visit the campus).

Here are a few questions I learned the answers to during the course of my research. Do you know the answers?

1. Which buildings were moved to make way for Neilson Library?
2. Which Smith President was laid out in the Library’s Little Chapel?
3. Who was the first Executive Director of the Friends?
4. What were the interior colors used in the 1962 building additions?
5. What was the date of the fire in the Seelye Reading Room?
6. Which poet read from her work at the re-dedication of the library on November 6, 1982?

Bonus! What is the title of alumna J. Courtney Sullivan’s novel, published this summer, in which a Neilson Library faculty office plays a key role?

Answers:

1. The College’s first gymnasium and Hatfield House.

2. William Allan Neilson, Smith’s third president, died on February 13, 1946 at the College Infirmary. He lay in the Little Chapel until the funeral service in John M. Greene Hall on February 16. The Little Chapel was added with the 1937 expansion and served the College until 1955, when the Helen Hills Hills Chapel was built. It was a popular site for alumnae weddings.

3. This one should be easy for all of you! College Archivist Margaret Storrs Grierson ’22 was appointed both Executive Director of the Friends of the Library and Director of the newly-formed Sophia Smith Collection, a special project of the Friends, the purpose of which was to document the historical experience of women in the United States and abroad. She had been College Archivist since 1940 having previously taught in the Philosophy Department until 1936. An all-around Smithie!

4. Teresa Kilham, color consultant for the library architects, O’Connor and Kilham, worked out a color plan of “surf blue, Adriatic blue, kingfisher blue, caenstone, teak and walnut, Cathay green, pumpkin, harvest gold, and bittersweet.”

5. October 23, 1975. The fire is thought to have been caused by an electrical short. It spread rapidly to engulf the room giving off intense heat. Fortunately, the fire was doused before it spread to other parts of the building.

6. Margaret Atwood.

Bonus! Commencement (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2009)
FALL EXHIBITIONS

August 25 – October 30

Unconquered by Flames: The Literary Lights of Yaddo
Selections from the papers of Lola Ridge, Newton Arvin, Sylvia Plath’54, and Constance Carrier ’29. The exhibition focuses on the legendary artists’ colony in upstate New York that hosted some of the most illustrious music composers, writers and visual artists of the 20th century—including those with ties to Smith College.

Book Arts Gallery and Mortimer Rare Book Room, Level 3, Neilson Library; Alumnae Gym, Level A

November 4 – December 23

Sergei Rachmaninoff and Sophie Satin at Smith
This exhibition commemorates the centennial of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s North American debut at Smith College. It celebrates both Rachmaninoff and his cousin and sister-in-law, Sophie Satin, who served as a visiting associate professor of botany with Albert Francis Blakeslee and his Genetics Experimental Station.

Morgan Gallery, Level 1, Neilson Library

November 4, 2009 — April 3, 2010

Book Arts Gallery, Level 3, Neilson Library

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