Moving-in Day

On Monday, November 30, guests gathered in the Browsing Room, listened to music of the early 1900s performed on mandolins, guitars and bass by the local ensemble Mando Mucho and, with their tea, nibbled such period refreshments as Winnington-spice cookies and chocolate-glazed shortbread. The event was a celebration of Moving-in Day, the Monday after Thanksgiving in 1909, when Neilson Library opened.

Mando Mucho’s music reflects the mandolin orchestras so popular in the early twentieth century. The group’s mandolins range in date of manufacture from 1916 to about 2000, according to a member of the group, Barbara Blumenthal ’75, book arts specialist in the Mortimer Rare Book Room. She describes their music as a mix of “Americana, Italian songs and light classical, as well as Klezmer, ragtime and tango.”

The event featured remarks by Christopher Loring, director of libraries, and Thomas Derr, professor emeritus of Religion and Ethics, who is donating a collection of major scientific books to the Mortimer Rare Book Room (see page 2 for more on this gift). Derr spoke of his forty-two years on the faculty at Smith and his ties to the college that educated his grandmother, his mother, his two sisters, his aunt and his daughter.

Shake It Up, Baby! The Future of Academic Libraries

Wednesday, April 14, 2010, 4:30 p.m.
Neilson Library Browsing Room

A lecture by Sarah Thomas ’70, Bodley’s Librarian & Director of the Oxford University Library Services.

Sarah Thomas is the first woman and the first non-Briton to assume the top library position at Oxford. There she is responsible for the operation of one of the world’s premier research libraries. From 1996 to 2006, she served as Carl A. Kroch University Librarian at Cornell. Her previous experience includes positions at Harvard’s Widener Library, Johns Hopkins, the National Agricultural Library, the Library of Congress, and the Research Libraries Group.

Thomas has received many accolades for her work over the years including the Melvil Dewey Medal, presented in 2007 by the American Library Association for her “extraordinary leadership in the advancement of research libraries in general, and cataloging and bibliographic practices and standards in particular, both nationally and internationally.”

A long time member of the Friends of the Smith College Libraries’ Executive Committee, she served as chair from 2001 to 2006. Thomas received the Smith College Medal on Rally Day this year.
NOTEWORTHY ACQUISITIONS

In honor of the Libraries’ centennial, Thomas Sieger Derr Jr., Smith professor emeritus of religion and ethics, has donated a first edition of Isaac Newton’s *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. The *Principia*, published in 1687, is regarded as one of the greatest scientific achievements of all time. Newton provided an all-encompassing synthesis of the cosmos, a grand conception that produced a revolution in human thought, equaled perhaps only by that following the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Professor Derr plans to donate a collection of major scientific works to the Mortimer Rare Book Room over the next several years.

The Mortimer Rare Book Room has received an important collection of early printed books by the great Flemish philologist Justus Lipsius, one of the greatest scholars of the sixteenth century. Prized even in their own day as examples of fine bookmaking, most of the books in the Morford Collection are deluxe editions of Lipsius’s works, printed in large format, illustrated with engravings and still covered in their original bindings. Mark Morford, professor emeritus of classics from the University of Virginia (and Kennedy Professor at Smith in 1995), collected these books over the course of a highly productive career; they were the primary sources for much of his own research and will now be valuable resources for the Smith College community.

For the past eight years, Professor Morford has been the Salloch Fellow in the Mortimer Rare Book Room. He has been engaged in cataloging the college’s incunabula, or books printed in the fifteenth century, and he also serves as its honorary curator, offering expertise on a wide array of subjects, ad hoc translations from a half-dozen modern and ancient languages, and a warm smile of welcome to visitors.

FSCL News
by Ann Shanahan ’59, Chair

Once libraries were for books, well, actually once they were for papyrus scrolls, but now they’re also for maps, audios, videos, music and manuscripts; once they were for bookshelves, tables and chairs but now they’re also for computer terminals, Internet databases and electronic classrooms. Once they were for passing notes or whispering so as not to disturb others. Now they’re for Facebook.

About a year ago, the Friends of Smith College Libraries executive committee decided that the Libraries should have a Facebook page, and although it’s not the raciest Facebook site you’ve ever visited, there is some interesting content there: News about Sarah Thomas’70, who received a Smith Medal on Rally Day; a note about the incredibly generous and totally unexpected $50,000 contribution to the Libraries from an anonymous donor; and a description and photo of the meticulous repair of the huge Persian Mahal rug in Neilson Browsing Room. I invite you to become a fan and post comments, and while you’re there, tell us what good books you’ve read lately. (Be sure to look at the YouTube video sponsored by the New Zealand Book Council; it’s exceptional.)

I had the good fortune to attend a luncheon on March 29, hosted by Women’s eNews at the Down Town Association in lower Manhattan. Sherrill Redmon, director of the Sophia Smith Collection, talked about twenty-one “trailblazers”—women who made history by championing social justice and gender equality and whose papers are housed at the SSC. She gave particular attention to Dorothy Kenyon and Constance Baker Motley, both civil rights advocates; Grace Dodge, head of the YWCA; Carmen Vasquez, director of public policy for the LGBT Community Center in New York City; Martha Lamb, historian and publisher; and, Sara Parton (aka Fanny Fern), journalist. The event began with a preview of “Opening the Way: A Women’s History Walk in Lower Manhattan,” also a project of Women’s eNews. Smith’s participation in the program was coordinated by Kate Kelly, a member of the Friends of the Smith College Libraries Executive Committee.

And finally, we are in the process of brightening up our Web site, and have added a new feature: Smith faculty book recommendations. We will add new faculty book lists on a monthly basis throughout the year. The Web site has links to centennial and past events (some with text or audio you can download). You can see (and order) Neilson Library centennial notecards, and you can find out about library needs and how best to support the libraries by being a Friend. Visit www.smith.edu/libraries/info/friends.

2009-2010 FSCL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ann E. Shanahan ’59, Chair; Elisabeth Doucett ’80; Jenny Frost ’78; Julie Iatron ’97; Susan Novick ’81; Lizzanne Payne ’74; Elisabeth Morgan Pendleton ’62; Bethanne Patrick ’85; Ex-Officio: Carol Christ, President, Honorary Chair; Christopher C. 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.
In conjunction with our centennial year, Leslie Fields ’95 has curated a delightful exhibition that narrates the development and history of the Libraries. Included in the exhibit are pictures, letters and the stuff of our history, ranging from the 1909 Library Regulations, to the remnant of a lamp burned in the 1975 fire that destroyed the interior of the Seelye Reading Room (now the Mair Room), to buttons and appeals from the 1976 campaign to save the Alumnae Gym, when the historic gym was slated for demolition to make way for another library extension.

Throughout the exhibition, a recurring theme is, not surprisingly, collection building. In 1910, the college owned 35,000 books; by 1917 the collection had nearly doubled, due largely to the generosity of alumnae. By 1936 the count stood at 240,000—the largest collection of any women’s college in the country. This commitment to build a truly great library continued and expanded in the 1940s with the formation of the Friends of the Library.

In 1936, the Andrew Carnegie Foundation granted the college $175,000 for accessions and maintenance – a wonderful gesture but with one problem—it didn’t fund what was really needed: new space for books. Undeterred, President Neilson forged ahead and planned an extension to be funded from the college’s operating funds. What is particularly interesting about “President Neilson’s library wing” is how it was conceived to do much more than simply provide more stack space. Of course there was to be more shelf space, enough to accommodate some 250,000 new books, but there would also be ten seminar rooms, thirty-two faculty offices, rooms for special collections, maps, the drama collection, a chapel, space for the College Archives, a faculty lounge and an astronomy observation deck on the roof. The latest in new technologies were to be included—microphotography, projection devices and a large projection screen. Neilson’s vision was for the library to be a central locus of campus activity, a vision we continue to have today!

More expansions followed in 1960-62 and 1980-82, each reflecting a need to provide yet more space for books and materials as well as cater to contemporary trends in libraries. Thomas Mendenhall wrote in a 1961 letter to an alumna “Apparently, all one can do is plan for a quarter century and hope one doesn’t ruin things too much for those who come after.” When Jill Ker Conway rededicated the library in November 1982, she likened “the aspirations for the library to our aspirations for the future of the college,” mentioning specifically the intellectual environment and the quality of Smith's faculty.

Currently, architects from Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott are drafting a master plan for the Libraries, with the goal of providing a framework within which the college can “grow, reconfigure, reinvent and transform the libraries within the larger institutional vision.” While the need for more stacks has abated with the increasing use of electronic formats, there are other continuing challenges that need to be met, such as providing a high level of service to faculty and students, providing a variety of learning environments for group and individual study, adequate teaching spaces to support research skill development and ever more space for burgeoning manuscript collections in the College Archives and Sophia Smith Collection.

As the exhibit so clearly shows, Smith has from its early years always sought to have its libraries be “the heart of a place of learning”, as Magaret Storrs Grierson put it. The college and the Libraries remain committed to that vision.
Whose Vision?

A centennial anniversary brings with it an assessment of tangible accomplishments: the evolution of facilities, the development of collections and the expansion of services. But who were the planners, who had the ambition and persistent determination to grow a great library? Here is a list of head librarians and others who had a hand in the library’s development.

Head Librarians

1890 – 1895: Mary Etta Gorham, 1879.
1896 – 1907: Louise Whiting Lyon, 1892.
1907 – 1919: Josephine Clark, 1880.
1920 – 1942 Mary Dunham.
1948 – 1968: Margaret Johnson.
2000 – present: Christopher B. Loring.

The accomplishments of these librarians lie in part on the shoulders of talented and dedicated staff members. A few deserve special mention:

Eunice Wead ’02, initiated the use of rare books in the curriculum with her course on the history of the book and the book arts in 1945–46. This course and continues to be taught by the curator of rare books.

Margaret Storrs Grierson ’22 led the Sophia Smith Collection (SSC) for over 30 years. Under her leadership, the SSC began to document the historical experience of women. Grierson secured many of the SSC’s most notable collections.

Ruth Mortimer ’53 was curator of rare books from 1975–1994. She was renowned for her bibliographic scholarship, and revered for astute collection building and for teaching and mentoring students. The rare book room was named for her in 1994.

Would you rather be an eFriend?

If you would rather receive membership renewal letters, newsletters or all correspondence via email in the future, please send an email or a note to Mary Irwin.

The FRIENDS NEWS UPDATE is published twice yearly, in the fall and in the spring. Comments and suggestions may be addressed to Mary Irwin, Executive Secretary, Friends of the Smith College Libraries, Neilson Library, Smith College, Northampton, MA 01063, Telephone: (413) 585-2903 or email: mirwin@smith.edu.

FSCL MEMBERSHIP FORM

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE SMITH COLLEGE LIBRARIES BY JOINING OR RENEWING YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY. Your tax deductible gift helps purchase library materials and enhances the services offered to the college community. Members of the Friends receive this newsletter, invitations to events, and other benefits – for more information, see www.smith.edu/libraries/info/friends.

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Address ____________________________________________

Please make your check payable to the Friends of the Smith College Libraries and mail to the FSCL Office, Neilson Library, Smith College, Northampton, MA 01063 or, if you prefer, enroll on-line at www.smith.edu/friends.