



February 2008

A Moment for Grove City College

In my last "Moment" piece I wrote about "things that aren't here anymore" and, of course, I also commented on things that still are.

There is one area and one person, however, that appears to be unchanged for the last 40 years and that is our Henry Buhl Library and our long-term librarian, Ms. Diane Grundy '65, pictured at right. Diane has ably overseen our library, its book and periodical collection and, most importantly, the various adaptations and changes in its use since 1969. As buildings go, if the heart of our campus is Harbison Chapel, then head or mind of our campus is our library. In it reposes the accumulated wisdom of the ages. How to best get at this wisdom and apply it is, of course, the age-old task that we work at so diligently.

If you were to walk into Buhl Library today you might think you were back in school, even if you were graduated in the 1960s. The library was built and opened in 1954, and has pretty much remained physically unchanged. Same study tables and chairs and row upon row and stack upon stack of books.

We all, I suspect, spent a lot of time in the library doing papers, studying, checking out books and perusing periodicals. I have, however, an indelible memory of our library that I wish to share. And when you read what it is, you will know that there is hardly a time when I am in the library today that doesn't take me back to the day and story I now relate.

It was my freshman year, late in the fall on a very warm afternoon. It was just after lunch. We all recall, I am sure, that going into the library on a very warm afternoon just after lunch set up the inevitable dynamic tension: study and concentrate or nod off a bit! I had a lot to study, as many exams were coming in the next week, so I was doing well at not nodding off. I was not in the large main reading room, but just off it at a study desk at the far end of the library. No other students were back in that area, though I could hear the "hum" of 20 or 30 students out in the main reading room.

I was caught up in my studies for an hour or so, but then I paused and noticed the "hum" was gone from the reading room. I got up, walked into the room and found to my puzzlement that absolutely no students were there. That sure seemed strange. I hurriedly walked all the way through the reading room to the circulation desk. There behind the desk was the only person that could be seen in the entire library besides me. I asked her, "Where is everybody?" "Didn't you hear?" she said. "President Kennedy has been shot!" It was, and still is, stunning news.

I walked quickly out the front door and saw the flag at the lower end of the quad at half mast and students streaming into Harbison Chapel. I joined the exodus in that direction. We needed to trust in the Lord and to spend time with each other. It was truly a consequential event for our nation and the world and one of the most memorable and shocking events of my lifetime. So, my memories of Buhl Library go indeed beyond the usual.

Now that I have shared that recollection, let's talk about the library today. For, indeed, the physical building, while looking exactly the same, will fool you. What goes on there today and across campus as it relates to the library and what Ms. Grundy and her staff do is a vastly different, in fact a sea change, from what it used to be. Today, a new story in library maintenance and delivery of the library product, which of course is knowledge, can be told.

To help us gauge some of the great changes, I asked a few questions of Ms. Grundy:

Q: Diane, let's talk about the book and periodical collections at Buhl Library. How would you compare and contrast them between 30 to 40 years ago and today?

A: More and better and often electronic. Book and periodical numbers on site don't mean as much as they used to, as it is difficult to count access. We have about the same number of volumes – 140,000 and growing – as we had 10 years ago, but now they are all books and nearly all of them circulate. We used to have about 600 subscriptions and thousands of bound volumes of journals; now we have full-text access to more than 14,000 journals and very few paper subscriptions. Then there's all the free public information via the World Wide Web, much of which we used to buy and house in the reference section. Particularly useful and reliable are government and university web sites – the census, National Institutes of Health, Civil War records, dictionaries in all languages, human genome database, writings of the early church fathers, complete works of Shakespeare, FDR's fireside chats, virtual telescope and thousands more. Books, journals and web sites work together to provide a rich collection of resources for student papers.

Q: In your previous answer, you introduced technology and electronic means of gathering information. Can you elaborate?

A: Computers and libraries have been a match made in heaven since the 1970s, but Buhl was careful about entering the automated age, although we picked a good time to buy a ticket to the online show, just as personal computers edged out mainframes and made technology affordable at small colleges. Starting with a PC-based online card catalog in 1989, then a LAN (local area network) of CD-ROM journal and reference databases in the mid-1990s, followed by all web-based resources in the late 1990s, we have immersed ourselves in the digital world. (When I say the "digital world," I mean all those library resources we now get to through links on the Internet and World Wide Web rather than in print – from journal and newspapers subscriptions and reference books to manuscripts, atlases and statistics.) We buy them and own them but never hold them in our hands. Yes, we still buy lots of books and plan to continue to do so, particularly for the disciplines



*College Librarian
Diane Grundy '65*

dependent on books – English, history, philosophy, religion, music and art. On the other hand, journals and reference books, items that traditionally must be used within the library, are more useful in digital format as they are available anywhere on campus at any time. Nearly all scholarly literature for science and engineering and much of it for the social sciences is now in journals rather than books.

Q: With an enormous number of sources of information in the world today, how do you teach a student discerning skills so he or she relies on the most accurate sources from which to form an opinion?

A: With great difficulty. The World Wide Web with its embarrassment of riches only reinforces the youthful opinion that anything worth having is digitized and free for the taking. Its ease of use and instantaneous response woos the undiscerning and the procrastinator. Who needs libraries? Since we here at Buhl obviously think every intelligent being does, we work hard to convince our students of the library's worth. In fact, information literacy is an important component of our curriculum at the College. Our library web site is filled with links to resources and suggestions for research. Librarians visit classes to showcase helpful resources and teach students how to use them, and when invited, attend class presentations of their research. We staff the reference desk 75 percent of the hours the library is open. We offer one-on-one appointments with a librarian, can e-mail references and help with citing sources. Those students and faculty who use these services say they are extraordinarily helpful. We just have to find a way to get more of them to take advantage of them. It's a battle that can best be won one mind at a time.

Q: Costs have risen to remain a full-service, competitive major college library, could you explain further?

A: College libraries are big business. Despite the plethora of good free information on the World Wide Web and the students' penchant for starting and stopping there, college libraries live and die on the strength of their book and journal collections. While Buhl doesn't have everything a student might like, it has most of what our students need to complete their papers and projects, and if we don't have it, we can obtain it in a very short time by interlibrary loan or electronically. And it all comes at a price, and a high one. It takes a canny distribution of funds to support all the disciplines we teach with the best and most useful resources and to keep a balance between books and journal subscriptions – and to fit it all within the building space we have. We look at electronic access, for example, as not only convenient for our patrons but as space and time-saving for the library. We don't have to house it, process it, shelve it or disseminate these sources. Maintaining a virtual collection of journal literature allows more space for a growing and robust book collection.

The College has always been supportive of the library. In the very lean years of the 1970s and 1980s, when many college and university libraries begged their book collections to afford the exorbitantly priced journals all science and social science collections required, Buhl's budget was stable with increases – sometimes modest – every year. In more recent years, the library budget has climbed fairly high, in recognition of the cost of doing business in the big leagues. Not the least of our blessings is the ubiquity of laptop computers across campus and the stability and robustness of the campus network that allow us to take advantage of access rather than ownership.

Q: What is the mark of a good, efficient library and how do you and your staff interact today with our students and faculty?

A: First is a commitment to service. Our patrons come first. Everything we buy or do is designed to support the faculty in their teaching and research, and the students in their research and writing. We set no agendas for ourselves, beyond being the best partner in the college endeavor that we can be. Libraries, if well cared for, outlive us all, and librarians build on the efforts of their predecessors. Second is the support – moral and monetary – of the administration and Trustees in the library enterprise. A close third is the partnership of faculty in choosing the books and journals most appropriate for their students and in sending them to us with assignments in hand. And the last is a good dollop of luck.

Q: I have to ask about the demise of the famous Dewey Decimal System. I can remember as far back as the third grade our school librarian, Miss Austin, drilling (and I do mean drilling) her students about the Dewey Decimal System. That system is no longer used and the changeover has just occurred in the last very few years, as I understand it. Why the change? How was the change made at our library and what is the new system and its benefits?

A: The Library of Congress classification system, with its letters and numbers, is much broader and more elastic than the Dewey Decimal System with its 10 and only 10 categories. We had long ago outgrown Dewey but had always thought conversion was beyond our reach. All the stars and planets lined up in 1999 – an electronic catalog, a prior physical reorganization of collections and shelving, a new and radically different edition of Dewey that would require our recataloging a third of the library to be compliant, and a bright, motivated and very persuasive cataloger. Once we committed to the project, we spent nearly three years preparing. An unexpected benefit was our alliance with a group of students from Dr. Bruce Ketler's Teams and Leadership class who provided the logistics for the physical conversion. With their careful detailed planning and their innocent suggestion that we ask for our new labels in Library of Congress rather than in Dewey order – unheard of in the circles of collection conversion – a dozen staff members were able to relabel and reshelve 140,000 books in 12 weeks in the summer of 2002. The transition was nearly painless for students, a very supportive faculty and a very tired library staff.

Q: Diane, any other questions you would like to pose and answer?

A: Just a comment. Libraries are so much more than they used to be. Between the books we own and the access we subscribe to, we have the best of both worlds. Some refer to it as “bricks and clicks.” We can respond to almost every request from the resources we have, and those we don't have we can get, given a bit of time. It's a good time to be a student, and a great time to be a librarian. Stop in when you are on campus and we'll give you a tour.

Thanks, Diane. As I hope all can judge, the College is deeply committed to supporting its teaching and research foundations. We will continue to strongly press forward in this vital area and [that is a promise](#).

Yours for Grove City College,



Dick Jewell '67
President