Magill Library: A Working Collection Through Time
by Margaret Schaus

With Magill Library fast approaching its 150th anniversary in 2013, it seems useful to think over the events and decisions that have brought us to this point. In reading Haverford histories and Librarians’ annual reports, I was struck over and over again by the differences individuals made. The profiles that appear later in this article document a faculty member, donor, and librarian who acted at crucial moments to build the Library’s collections and services.

When the College began classes in 1833, the Library was located in a room of 456 square feet in what is now Founders Hall. Three years later a catalog of the Library’s collection appeared, which included 770 titles (the digitized catalog and additional details about this early collection are available at <http://www.haverford.edu/library/special/exhibitions/fewbooks/index.php>). For some years thereafter interest waned; students did not find the books appealing, gifts slowed, and Library access was limited to once a week. The collection did not have assigned uses in classes. In 1863, Thomas Kimber, Class of 1842, donated half the funds necessary to build a library and associated meeting hall. This space, known today as the Philips Wing, remains a centerpiece of Magill Library. When the new Library opened in 1864, the collection numbered some 3,000 volumes, and was carefully arranged and labeled by topic. Library hours jumped to six days per week, and included late-afternoon hours. Leisure reading was provided for the first time by the Loganian Society’s collection of English literature. In 1865 the Library began subscribing to journals, with 14 orders mostly for scientific titles. It did not take very long for space needs to develop. First, shelves were added high up on three of the four walls. When a collection of 7,000 books was added in 1880 (see profile on J. Rendel Harris), shelving was put on top of the alcoves running the entire length.

(Continued on the following page)
Magill Library (continued from previous page)

of the west wall. Yet the goal at this time and later was to create a working collection, one of use for the courses taught at the College.

The Library acquired more space in a series of additions: south wing for books (1898), the old audience room from Alumni Hall (1902) — now the reference room — and a fireproof book stack (1912). At the end of the nineteenth century, faculty, beginning with the English and Political Science departments, began asking their students to read and reference books in the Library’s collection. In 1932, the Library owned 120,000 volumes, 19,445 of which were circulated by students during the year, an average of more than sixty books per student. During the College’s centenary the following year, Librarian Dean Lockwood envisioned a new era in remarkably prescient terms: “The Library thus becomes the laboratory of the humanities, and a building must be built which will accommodate faculty and students together in this more intimate cooperative investigation and research” (Haverford College Centenary, 1933: 51).

Although the College did not proceed with Lockwood’s ambitions for a new library, in 1941 a series of renovations, including new stacks, a “Treasure Room” for rare materials, a catalog room, staff work areas, and an improved electrical system, were added to the building, which then housed close to 150,000 volumes. Twenty years later, the report of the Librarian was once again identifying building deficiencies, particularly stack space and comfortable rooms for study. In 1961, the collection had grown to over 220,000 volumes. Librarian Craig Thompson noted there were few possibilities for making space, and warned that soon action would need to be taken.

The Library had only two well-lighted, comfortable areas for reading. This resulted in desperate overcrowding much of the time. Thompson argued that an addition doubling the floor space of the current building would resolve these problems and prevent the need for constructing a new library for many years. In response, the Board of Managers set up a committee in 1963 to plan and raise money for a library expansion. The committee was headed by James P. Magill, Class of 1907 (profiled on the following page). The committee advocated an extensive addition, including stacks on four floors (with a new basement dug to hold 100,000 volumes), a totally redone main floor with new public areas, an enlarged rare book room and vault, study carrels throughout the book stacks, small group meeting areas, new staff work areas, and an air conditioning system. The plan was laid out in a twenty-page publication, “The Future of the Haverford College Library,” complete with architectural visualizations and floor plans of the new structure. When the project was completed in January 1968, virtually all of the Library’s 260,000 volumes needed to be moved to new
Magill Library (continued from previous page)

locations within the building, but there was shelf capacity for 500,000 volumes. Magill Library currently holds 595,000 volumes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Volumes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>220,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>387,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>595,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are there commonalities throughout this history of an ever-growing collection and a building expanded by necessity? There are the needs for services: reading areas, consultations with librarians, shelves for books, protection for rare materials, small group meeting spaces, and upgrades to the latest technology (whether electric lights or flat bed scanners). These needs are balanced against limited resources. The 1892 history of the College admitted that there were “great gaps” in the Library collection, but concluded that “much has been done with little means” (*A History of Haverford College for the First Sixty Years of Its Existence*, Porter & Coates, 1892: 621-622).

The people who grappled with service needs and financial challenges worked long and hard. Many of them had the foresight to plan ahead, even when fiscal conditions were grim.

We are the recipients of their legacy. How will we leave Magill Library for the future?

J. Rendel Harris

New young faculty member J. Rendel Harris (1886-1891), added luster to the College with his degree from Cambridge University, teaching experience at Johns Hopkins University, and knowledge of arcane languages. The courses he taught in ecclesiastical history and New Testament studies were popular not only for his erudite learning, but also for his energy and humor. He involved himself in the life of the College, writing letters to the school newspaper while traveling in the Middle East and Armenia during a research leave in 1888-1889. Upon his return he presented 47 manuscripts, a combined gift from Walter Wood Class of 1867 and himself, to the Library. He had bought the Hebrew, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and Ethiopian manuscripts in Cairo and other cities during his travels. One of the most breathtaking volumes in the group was a Hebrew Bible written in Spain in 1266 and decorated throughout with abstract illustrations. This was not the only contribution Harris made to the Library. He led an effort to raise money to buy the library belonging to German scholar Gustav Baur, professor at the University of Leipzig. The 7,000-volume collection included not only German literature and theology, but also material in Arabic, Persian, Syriac, and Italian literature.

(Continued on the following page)
Esther Ralph

Esther Ralph was hired by the Library in 1941 as an assistant cataloger while still enrolled in Drexel University’s Library School. She later worked in the Bindery, and managed, on separate occasions, Circulation and Cataloging. She worked with four head Librarians and was instrumental in many of the changes that took place from the 1940s until her retirement in 1984. Last year she recorded her memories of Library work and campus life (available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/1636>). In 1941, the Library employed an all-female staff (with the exception of the head librarian, who was also a faculty member) and held around 150,000 volumes. Twenty years later Esther Ralph was in the midst of plans for doubling the Library’s floor space, working with Head Librarian Craig Thompson to minimize for students and faculty the disruption caused by the construction project.

Esther is most proud of her later work to introduce computerized cataloging to the Library. She was an early adopter of this technology. She worked through the process herself, taught the innovative method to other catalogers at Haverford, and served as a resource for local libraries. This exemplified Esther’s “can do” attitude throughout her career; taking responsibility for needed improvements, learning new skills, and working hard to achieve results are all qualities that colleagues, faculty, and students had come to appreciate in her.

— Margaret Schaus is Bibliographer & Reference Librarian
Magill Library Today

by Laurie Allen

Over the past 150 years, the Magill Library has gone through several periods of strain and pressure. Each time, the College responded by constructing additional stack space or opening new reading rooms. Now, forty years since the last expansion of Magill, we once again find the building struggling to provide the kinds of spaces that a modern academic library needs. In one respect, we face a familiar problem – insufficient shelf space for collections, most notably our rare and unique materials. Despite efforts to remove low use books and journals where feasible, our stacks are reaching capacity. Shelves full of books and journals, however, no longer constitute the entirety of our Library holdings. Growing collections of digital images, journal articles, datasets, indexing and abstracting databases, music, and media files proliferate at a much faster rate than the physical collection, and possess their own array of challenges. In addition, as students know well, the Web extends far beyond the Library, and offers more information than any person could catalog or count.

This flood of new information has changed library services. In the age of Google, librarians are rarely called upon to answer basic factual questions about the world, and the reference desk is no longer the focal point of activity. Instead, librarians partner with students and faculty to identify useful resources for expanding and contextualizing research questions, and they help students learn the skills needed to navigate the vast world of information at their fingertips. Libraries should provide spaces that facilitate these kinds of collaborations.

A modern college library should still provide room for students to work with printed materials, but now they must also support students bringing materials together in creative ways. Such a library should include teaching spaces for use by librarians and faculty; technology-rich centers within easy access of the collection in its many forms; and spaces for students to work together in groups, or alone (perhaps with a cup of coffee).

Mindful of the technological and structural requirements needed to transform Haverford’s Library into the twenty-first century, we must not lose sight of the important connections a library provides to the knowledge and traditions of the past. We look to the College’s recent Master Plan as a way to help Haverford build a library that will continue to serve, in Dean Lockwood’s words, as the “laboratory of the humanities.”

— Laurie Allen is Coordinator for Research, Instruction, and Outreach

Magill Library Reading Room

The College Information Resources Newsletter is available on the Web at

http://www.haverford.edu/library/about/news
Staff News & Notes
Compiled by Mike Persick

On October 18, 2008, Sarah Gray, Technical Support Liaison, married Brian Lyttle at Plumstead Friends Meeting in Bucks County. Following the ceremony, a reception was held in the Elkins Gallery at the Mercer Museum in Doylestown. The newlyweds spent their honeymoon travelling in Spain. Brian and Sarah met at a computing professionals group in 2004, shortly after Brian moved to the U.S. from Northern Ireland.

Matt Nocifore, who had served as Director of Networking & Systems, left Haverford in December after more than thirteen years to take a position at Drexel University.

Jen Scales, Helpdesk/Public Computing Lab Coordinator, gave birth to a baby boy in October. Shawn Kimber Staneruck was born on October 14, 2008, at 12:48 AM. He was 9 pounds, 3 ounces and 21 inches long. Jen calls him “Our little bundle of cute :-)” (with emoticon included!).

— Mike Persick is Acquisitions Librarian & Assistant Catalog Librarian