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Jerome Library Celebrates 40 Years



One of the greatest changes to take place on the Bowling Green State University campus during the building boom of the 1960s was the construction of a new library. The campus was being transformed with new residence halls on the edges of campus and new classroom buildings located in the center. Athletic facilities like the Ice Arena and Doyt Perry Stadium were built on the east end of campus, with a view to accommodating parking for large crowds. The perfect place for the new library was in the very heart of the campus.

When the University first opened in 1914, classes were held in the National Guard Armory downtown, with the few books gathered for the library housed in the basement of the Methodist Church across the street. Robert Overman, then

instructor in mathematics, was in charge of this service, open from 4:00-5:00 p.m. He once recalled, "The entire collection in the Library could be depleted by the students in [that] one hour, and it often was." The following year, an administration building (now called University Hall) was completed, and the new professional staff moved the library to the third floor, where it remained until a separate building was erected in 1927.

The first library on the BGSU campus was the building known today as McFall Center. The Graduate College and other administrative offices are now housed here.

The old library, designed to serve the needs of 800 students, featured large windows for natural lighting and rows of tables and chairs in huge reading rooms. Students consulted the card catalog and filled out request slips for the books they wished to use. The books and periodicals were stored in secure stacks, not open for browsing. As the teachers' college expanded to become a university, the shortcomings of this system for



general undergraduate use were clear. Despite a limited acquisitions budget, the library was soon bursting at the seams. By the mid-1960s the situation was critical.



Jerome Library under construction in 1965 shows the importance of concrete as both a structural and decorative element in 20th century architecture. The building was designed to take advantage of "the latest concepts in library services." Open stacks and study carrels allowed students to explore the collections on their own.

Ohio voters approved funding, and in 1965 construction began on a new facility whose total cost was \$4,614,000. Designed by State Architect Carl Bentz, the library had eight public floors and a mechanical plant. The first floor was sunk below ground level, allowing for a broad terrace to create an inviting "plaza effect." The "College Library" was to be housed on the first floor, for use by undergraduates, the second floor was intended for an honors study room and reference and circulation services, while the upper stories would serve as the research library, intended primarily for use by graduate students and faculty.

Complementing the modern architecture were abstract murals on the east and west faces of the building, as well as on much of the terrace, highlighted by concrete sculptures. This artwork was created by artist-in-residence Donald Drumm who was also responsible for a number of other sculptures around the campus. Originally outlined in paint and then sandblasted one half inch below the smooth concrete surface, the murals were intended to be visually interesting, rather than symbolic. Still, the *BG News* was filled with letters asking what they were supposed to mean, and Drumm was grateful for the support of President William Jerome, which helped to settle the controversy.

Once controversial, the library murals had become a point of pride some thirty years later. The campus community wanted the now-weathered murals "restored," so the designs were highlighted in black.



In the forty years that followed, the student population doubled. Programs and research collections that were only dreams when Jerome Library opened its doors are fixtures of the university curriculum. A remote storage facility built to house seldom-used

materials only briefly eased the space-crunch and is now filled to near-capacity. Special collections areas like the Center for Archival Collections, Browne Popular Culture Library, and the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives find space at a premium in Jerome. The building designed with the best construction techniques in the mid-20th century faces the 21st century with a list of long-term maintenance challenges.

Library service, too, has changed. The internet has a long way to go before it can replace printed works with their thoughtful analysis of complex topics. While the internet opens vast new sources of information with just a few keystrokes, students still need the one-on-one help of professional staff to sort out the useful from the useless, or to introduce them to the unique resources in special collections. Individual mentoring and class instruction, educational exhibits, as well as a dedicated location for conferences and study will become more important in the years to come, even as it becomes more difficult to adapt our existing building to our present needs.

What will the library of the future look like? We can only wait and wonder.

—Lee N. McLaird