2 SR Visits

4 The Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology

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Opened in 1946, the Linda Hall Library in Kansas City, Missouri, is world renowned for its collections in science, engineering, and technology. Just as well known is the strong user orientation of its dedicated staff. While the library certainly collects all types of materials, including books, patent specifications, engineering standards, maps, and more, a particularly strong emphasis is placed on the collection of current journals. The library, a privately funded public library, is situated on fourteen acres surrounded by the University of Missouri-Kansas City, although there is no affiliation with that institution. Serials Review made a visit on a lovely spring day in June, as the day lilies and other flowers were in full riot. Serials Review 2005; xx:xxx–xxx.

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21 Introduction

The clientele or user population served by the Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology is unusual—the world. The last sentence of the mission statement brings that home: “The library supports local, national and international inquiry, education, and research and development.” And in these days of online reference chats, Web-based journals, document delivery and the like, the library’s users do, indeed, come from all over the world. The users range from primary school children to university professors and researchers to engineers, contractors, and lawyers. The library tries to fulfill the needs for scientific and technical information for both the local and global communities it serves. Walk-in traffic currently numbers around sixty people per day, but increasingly the users are remote. The library accepts queries from people who walk through the door, call on the telephone, and send faxes or e-mails, but the bulk of the work these days comes in over the Web. Statistics indicate that the library has served people in more than seventy countries, and collecting is done in over forty languages. Because the library has always had such strong collections in the sciences and technology, it has long been a primary lender institution. Throughout its history, it has provided a well-used document delivery service. Today, the library is currently the only remaining privately funded public library devoted to the sciences in the United States. Until it merged with the University of Chicago in 1981, the John Crerar Library was the other U.S.-based, privately endowed public library devoted to the sciences.

52 History and Physical Facility

The opening of the Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology was made possible through the generous funding of Herbert F. and Linda S. Hall. Herbert Hall, who made his fortune in the grain business in Kansas City, Missouri, and Linda Hall were childless, and they left their estate for the establishment of a local public library. Mrs. Hall preceeded Mr. Hall in death, and the library is named for her. A board of trustees was formed, and they, along with a consulting council of library experts, surveyed the needs of the region. Fine public, art, and medical libraries were already serving the public, but the board and consulting council determined that there was a crying need for resources in the areas of science, engineering, and technology. They believed that these types of resources might be particularly useful in bringing defense contracts to the area.

The original library was located in the former Hall residence. The surrounding seventeen acres were maintained by the Halls as an arboretum, a function it still serves today. Presently, the fourteen-acre urban arboretum (three acres were sold to the University of Missouri-Kansas City; UMKC) contains over 165 species of trees and over 100 varieties of tree peonies, for which the library is well known. Some of the trees have been lost due to inclement weather and construction, and not all of the trees are native to the area. Groundskeeper Scott Reiter collects widely.

Ten years after the opening, the library had outgrown the Hall home, and a larger facility (the present-day main building) was added in 1956. The Hall home was torn down in the early 1960s, and in its place an annex to the main building was added in the mid-1960s. Some elements from the Hall home were saved and have been used throughout the two buildings. These include the interior stair railings, now used in the outdoor courtyard that houses a relatively new dwarf conifer garden; a grandfather clock that is housed in the reading room; Mrs. Hall’s china and crystal, which are on display in a drawing room outside of the auditorium; and a curved brick wall, formerly the gateway between the back and front yards, that was incorporated into the connector between the main library and the annex.

Today visitors enter through the 1956 building. Walking through the entryway and into the main reading room, one cannot help but be drawn to the statuesque and impressive malachite tazza in the center of the room. It was a gift of Russian Czar Nicholas II to a friend in 1910. In 1972 Mrs. Kenneth A. Spencer gave it to the library. The room itself invites quiet study and reflection. The parquet floors, wooden bookshelves, windows, and ample lighting all provide an environment suited for study. Scattered throughout the building, busts of noted scientists provide inspiration.

The library is currently involved in the construction of an addition that will extend to the south from the annex. The addition will contain sixteen and one-half miles of shelving space, which is slightly more than the current capacity. One of the interesting alterations being made to the present facility will be the addition of a geothermal field to provide energy for the library. This calls for the drilling of 100 holes in the south lawn of the library. Each hole will be 62.5 feet deep. The use of geothermal energy is an economic and environmentally friendly way to provide electrical power for both heating and cooling.

Historical Highlights

Because of its unique nature, the library has received many interesting and important visitors. Richard Rhodes, author of The Making of the Atomic Bomb (for which he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize), did much of his research for that book at the library. He has also recently published a comprehensive biography of John James Audubon but interestingly enough did not do any research for that volume at the library.

Quentin Keynes, adventurer and grandson of Charles Darwin, has visited the library as a lecturer on at least half a dozen occasions. A world traveler who visited places that are not regular tourist destinations, Keynes enjoyed discovering new things and then sharing them with audiences. As Gayle Van Auken, serials services librarian, noted, great adventures make for great stories.

In April 2003, the library was one of the hosts for the Sally Ride-UMKC Science Festival. Sally Ride, the first American woman to travel in space, founded Sally Ride Science, which is “dedicated to encouraging and
empowering girls in their exploration of the worlds of science, technology, engineering and math..." The event was promoted to girls in the fifth through eighth grades throughout the Kansas City area. Several staff members of the library participated in the festival, and Sally Ride herself participated in the opening reception and festival.

The Paul D. Bartlett, Sr. Lecture Series was named after the library’s first Chairman of the Board of Trustees, who served from 1941 until his death in 1964. Herbert Hall was a cousin to the Bartletts, and there have always been Bartletts on the board. The series “was conceived as an annual event to bring distinguished individuals in science, engineering and technology to Kansas City.” The inaugural lecture was held in January 2003 as one of several lecture series sponsored by the library with many distinguished and renowned scientists, scholars, and researchers serving as lecturers.

**Collections**

In 1947 the first important acquisition of the library was the collections of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (founded in 1780 by John Adams). These collections laid the groundwork for what has become one of the premier collections of science, engineering, and technology resources in the world. In 1985, a portion of the Franklin Institute’s library was transferred to the library from Philadelphia. That addition increased or completed the holdings for nearly 600 hundred serial titles. Another enormously important addition to the library was the transfer of the Engineering Societies Library (ESL) in 1995. The ESL was founded in New York City in 1908, and that acquisition increased the holdings and added depth to the research collections.

The library has arrangements with various societies to serve as a depository for their collections, and those resources are made available to the public as well as to the members of the societies.

When adding materials to the collection, the library staff is in a uncommon position. Mary Moeller, library operations officer, comments that having “no captive audience is a double-edged sword.” They are not subject to direct user demands, but they also do not get many opportunities to receive expert guidance from users in fields where they may not have expertise. In general, the library tries to hire librarians with “meaningful” science or engineering backgrounds, but it is not always possible to attract people with those kinds of backgrounds or degrees. When expertise in a particular field is lacking, the library tends to seek direction from faculty at area colleges and universities. Recommendations are also taken from other library patrons, which are then passed along to the collection development librarian. Library staff read book reviews and publisher advertisements and take into account data, such as publisher, price, subject fit, local holdings, and indexing information, before making purchasing decisions. The library does maintain an approval plan for monographs with a major book jobber. The collection development librarian and the head of monographic services review and update the profile regularly. The library staff relies heavily on the collection development policy, which was written over a number of years by a senior librarian, who was assisted by an advisory group. The policy was finalized in 1994 and is currently being examined, reviewed, and revised.

Generally, the library seeks to add books and journals in newly emerging fields of research, as well as “reference works that support understanding of other materials in the collections.” There is an emphasis placed on journals and other serial publications.

The library’s budget and collection is under constant review, but there have not been any large serials cancellation projects in recent years. By focusing the collections a number of years ago, the staff were able to reduce collections in various areas. In general, the library tends to collect research materials, but not applications materials. For example, they might buy a book on how to build a plow, but not on how to use one. Another example is the subject of medicine. The library has very strong collections in the disciplines that underlie the study of medicine, but not in the applications of those disciplines in the various medical fields.

Except for current issues of more than 500 journals, and monographs published after 1969, many of the resources of the library are in closed stacks, so the library has virtually no problem with theft or damage to the volumes. In fact, most of the collection is in meticulous condition. To address preservation needs, the library established a preservation unit.

A simple but efficient system is used for retrieving requested books, journals, or other materials from the closed stacks. On-site patrons fill out a request form and submit it to the reference desk. The request is then sent, via pneumatic tubes much like those used at drive-in banks, to staff in the closed stacks. The requested item is located and sent upstairs in a lift to the reference desk. Journals, conference proceedings, technical reports, and microforms are not loaned to patrons. Monographs may be borrowed by approved local patrons for a limited time.

**Electronic Resources**

The library subscribes to a small number of databases, especially subject-specific ones such as INSPEC, EI Village, and others. These are available on an internal network but not accessible outside of the physical facility. Currently, the library subscribes to a little over 100 electronic journals. Access to e-journals is being added as quickly as possible. Because of its exceptional user population, some publishers have a difficult time determining how to charge the library and how to give them access to e-journals. Publishers just cannot seem to come up for a good model for a unique institution.

**Automation**

The library uses the Horizon system by Dynix-Sirsi, which is available on computers within the library and on the library’s Web site. The online catalog for the
library, called Leonardo, is a cooperative project with the
Spencer Art Reference Library of the nearby Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The serials module is used for
checking in current issues of journals, but payments are
still recorded on kardex records. The system was chosen
in part because it could accommodate a large collection
of serials. One frustration the serials staff experience is
that the displays between public and staff views are very
different. Serials at the Linda Hall are not classified; they
are shelved by main entry.

Dynix was the first system used by the library, beginning in 1995. Moeller believes that it is prudent
for libraries continually to monitor the effectiveness of a
library system. Because of the cooperation with the
Spencer Art Reference Library, the needs of two very
different libraries must be considered. Horizon has
grown and improved, and so far the active review
process indicates that both libraries are satisfied.

History of Science Collection

A particularly important and impressive part of the
library is the History of Science Collection of rare
books, which is currently housed in the Trustees’ and
Spencer rooms in the main building. Entrance to these
rooms is through an almost hidden door in the main
reading room. The rooms are attractively and appropria-
tely furnished with antique writing tables, chairs,
rugs, and an unusual round bookcase. The collection,
in part based on the foundation of books
received from the American Academy, will move to the
new addition. The collection includes printed materials
that go back to the fifteenth century and contains more
than 6,000 volumes. There are over 3,000 journals that
date prior to the twentieth century, and important issues
of some journals have been pulled from the regular
stacks to be placed in the collection. Some examples are
the Watson and Crick article about DNA in a 1953
issue of Nature; German journals that contain Gregor
Mendel’s notes on genetics; and a run of Transactions
of the Philosophical Society that date back to the
seventeenth century. There are particularly strong
collections in astronomy, geology, herbal, botanicals,
and bestiaries.

Bruce Bradley, History of Science librarian, and Dr.
William B. Ashworth, History of Science consultant,
select and add about 250 volumes annually to the col-
lection. A recent prize acquisition is the Narratio Prima,
published in 1540 by Georg Joachim Rheticus. The book,
one of only five known copies in the United States, was a
preliminary announcement and “the very first appear-
ance in print of the new Copernican astronomy.”

Conclusion

As long as the Linda Hall Library continues to acquire
and maintain print, there will be a need for a physical
facility. There are still some precarious elements to the
electronic world, such as orphaned publications and
technology failures, so the library prefers to continue to
collect and hold onto its print collections and those of its
partners for the time being. There will always be esoteric
publications for which the library will serve as a
repository. In fact, library president C. Lee Jones states
in the library’s 2002 annual report that one of the key
elements of the strategic plan is to “expand the Library’s
role as a depository for societies and publishers and
intensify support for fulfilling preservation obliga-
tions.” An example of one of those relationships is the
library’s role with BioOne, a database of biological and
environmental science journals. Not only was the library
a founding member of this collaborative project which
brings together scholars, society publishers, libraries, and
a commercial publisher, but also it has agreed to serve as
the print archive for all BioOne journals. While the
library will continue to pursue access to electronic
publications, the current administration sees no reason
to duplicate efforts being made by other local libraries.
Print collections will continue to be a primary focus for
the Linda Hall Library. And with a collection of over
47,000 serial titles, who would want to see them stop?

Notes

7. Ibid.
9. E-mail from Gayle Van Auken to author, August 10, 2005.