

The Legacy of the Ritz: A History of the DCC Library.

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"I believe that the library is the key center of learning at a college." - Dr. James Hall, President, Dutchess Community College, 1957-1972.¹

I was quite pleased to learn, while conducting my interview with Dr. Hall, that he and I share the same philosophy on the purpose of an academic library: everyone, whether they are faculty or students, makes use of the library (or libraries) at some point in their education or during their tenure. From professors that assign reserved readings or structure their assignments based upon library resources, or students looking for a quiet place to study or needing a computer with internet access, the library is a central facility. The library at Dutchess Community College, having existed in several different forms, has been a vital part of the college community.

With the founding of the college in 1957 and the first classes being held in 1958, then-President James Hall and his administration quickly realized that a campus library was required to meet the needs of students and faculty. The first iteration of the campus library was a temporary office in the Little Red Schoolhouse building in August, 1958. About ten days later, library services and the librarian were moved to another office in the Student Center Building. According to a report submitted by the college's first library director, William Nichols, shelving for books consisted of "cinder blocks and wood planks."²

¹ Hall, Dr. James F. Personal Interview. 15, Nov. 2007.

² Nichols, William J. Report of the Librarian of Dutchess Community College to The President. August 4, 1958 – June 24, 1960

The next iteration of the library was located in Bowne Hall. At a cost of \$450,000 and occupying a mere three rooms on the second floor, the facility contained seating for only 141 students and staff consisted of two librarians, one secretary, and four student assistants who contributed approximately 36 hours per week.³

Crowding and congestion quickly lead to various problems, among them students being turned away at the door when the library was filled to capacity. Limited space also meant limited shelving for books; the library's maximum capacity was approximately 12,000 books, a number that virtually exceeded available shelf space.

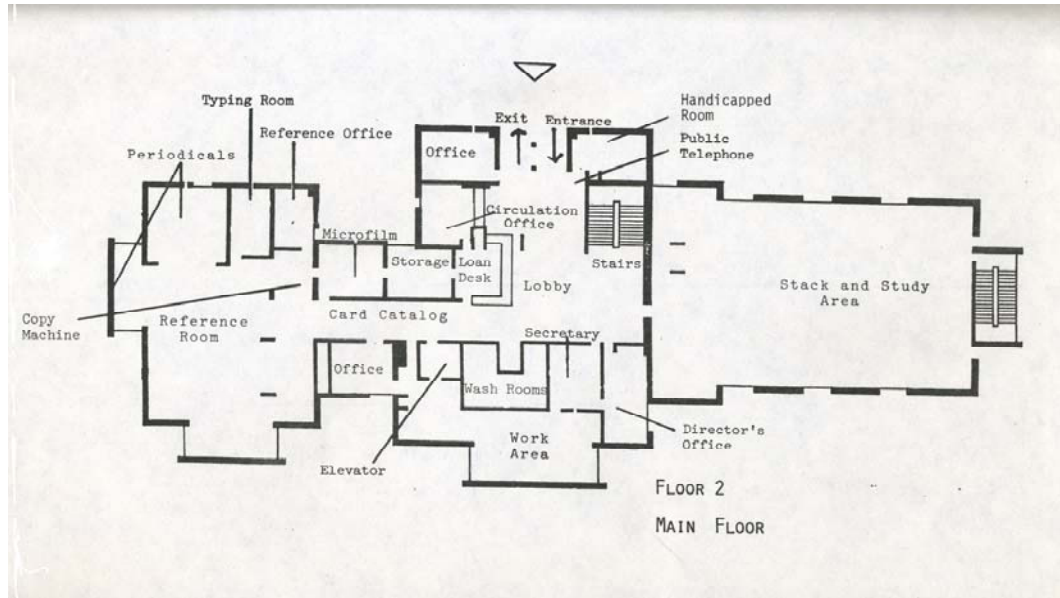
Hall stated in a 1962 proposal that "increased enrollment to 900 students [for the Fall 1962 semester], creates a gross injustice to the student body which cannot count on access to required reading or seating space for study in between classes." Hall went on to say that a new library would be necessary for the college before the Middle States Association would grant the college its certification.⁴

The library building was completed in April, 1966. It was described by then-library director, William J. Nichols, as "combining distinctive architectural beauty with functional efficiency... an outstanding example of contemporary design, construction and furnishing." Nichols went on to say it was "centrally situated on campus... an inviting building because of its air-conditioning, attractive carpeting and color design, and the general feeling of spaciousness." The total floor space of the building was 34,400 square feet, including shelving for 70,000 volumes and seating sufficient enough

³ Hall, Dr. James F. "Program for Proposed Library Building." September, 1961.

⁴ Hall, James F. "Program for Proposed Library Building." July, 1962.

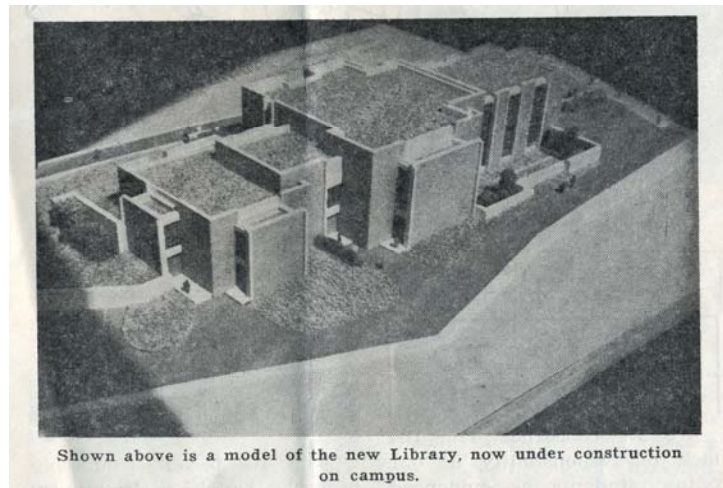
for 425 people.⁵ At the time, the total cost for the construction of the library was approximately \$1,540,000, a figure that included the cost of furniture, library equipment and television equipment for the media studies department in the basement.



The plan above shows the basic layout of the library's main floor. Interesting to note is that the area marked "Typing Room" eventually housed the photocopiers and that the Circulation Desk was then referred to as the "Loan Desk." A model of the eastern face

⁵ Nichols, William J. "A Report to President John J. Connolly From William J. Nichols, Director of the Library." January 15, 1973.

of the finished library building can be seen in the following photograph, taken from *The*



Spectator, the college's newspaper:

One of the lesser-known traditions practiced when a library moves is the planning of a book passing, a symbolic event consisting of a line of people who pass all or a portion of the individual volumes of the collection from the old facility to the new one. Such an event took place in April of 1966. As reported in the Poughkeepsie Journal, the book passers were 150 volunteers who worked during their Easter Break. During the book passing, 21,000 volumes were carried from Bowne Hall to the new library building in canvas bags.



7

⁶ Richlin, Jane. "Construction begins on new college library." *The Spectator*, 10/30/64.

Sometime in the late 1970s a master plan was drawn up for expansion of the library building. The increasing number of books and limited space for additional shelving necessitated an additional wing to be added to the existing structure. The concept would remain in limbo for nearly the next 20 years until architectural plans were presented. However, the original plan of expansion would be discarded in favor of renovation of two floors of Hudson Hall and the transfer of the library there.

In 1996, the Facilities Master Plan for expansion of the library and its relocation to Hudson Hall was approved by the Board of Trustees. Current DCC president, D. David Conklin, said that "the critical need at that time was to increase the size of the library."⁸ In the same interview, Dr. Conklin mentioned that funding for the project came from capital funds included in the 1996 master plan; 50% from the SUNY Construction Fund and 50% from Dutchess County. Construction of the new facility on the second and third floors of Hudson began in 2000. Concerns arose over the existing foundations in Hudson Hall; six inches of concrete had to be laid in the future stack area to accommodate the weight of over 90,000 volumes and their shelving. To reduce the number of books to be moved, library staff weeded much of the collection, looking for books that had been unused or were outdated.

From mid-December, 2000 to January 16, 2001, the entire library was moved to the second and third floors of Hudson Hall. In the last few weeks after the Fall semester ended and before the Christmas holiday, the staff of the library and Arnoff Moving and Storage of Poughkeepsie began a multitude of tasks required to transfer not only the

⁷ 150 move 21,000 Books to New Dutchess Library. Poughkeepsie Journal, 4/11/66.

⁸ Conklin, Dr. D. David. Personal Interview. 13, Dec. 2007.

library's collection of approximately 80,000 books, but also the periodical collection, microforms, computer equipment, and the contents of staff offices. (Existing furniture was to be auctioned off and new furniture would be provided in the new facility.) While the vast majority of the physical labor involved was performed by Arnoff's professional crew, library staff were closely involved in overseeing the proper placement of materials and equipment. The most daunting task was the transfer of the book collection itself into the new shelving, meticulously overseen by then-Head of Circulation, Pat Sheehan. Books were placed on shelved carts, wrapped with large rolls of plastic, loaded onto one of Arnoff's moving vans and driven the short distance to Hudson Hall. The move was a smoothly-run process; it was, however, briefly interrupted by a snow storm that moved through the region the first week of January, 2001. Part of Arnoff's crew and their moving truck were disabled temporarily by the storm when they had gone out for the day's lunch break. Fortunately, they received assistance relatively quickly and the move could continue.

The library officially opened its doors to students on January 16, 2001, the first day of Spring classes. Current library director, Barbara Liesenbein said that the library had been "exceptionally well received by students, faculty and staff."⁹ With the library now in a more central location on campus, and within the sight of Hudson Hall's fourth floor hallway, a primary area for classes and traffic, students now flocked to the library to research their class assignments, make use of the computers in the reference area or simply find a place to study or socialize with friends. Circulation Services reported that

⁹ Dutchess Community College Library Annual Report, 2000-2001.

“a total of 141,342 entries... between June 2000 and May 2001,”¹⁰ more than double the previous year’s statistics.

On October 13th, 2001, a ceremony was held to dedicate the library’s art collection. Consisting of about 25 works by Hudson Valley artists housed within the library itself and a collection of photographs by W. Eugene Smith exhibited just outside the library’s entrance (a collection which later was known as the Martha Reifler Myers Gallery), the collection was the culmination of many hours of research and acquisition, private donations of pieces, and much planning as to the placement of the artworks themselves.

On May 11th, 2002, the library was dedicated to Francis and Mary Ritz, two of the college’s long-term supporters. A ceremony was held unveiling the new name of the library, the *Francis U. and Mary F. Ritz Library*. Attending the ceremony were the Ritzs, their family, the library staff, members of the college’s board of trustees, and several members of the college administration, including President Conklin.

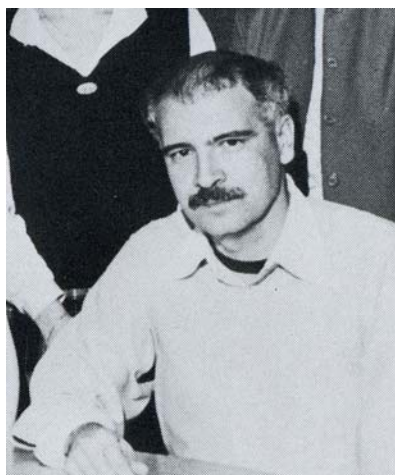
The library’s first director was Dr. William Nichols. Appointed directly by James Hall when the college was founded, Nichols had, according to Dr. Hall, “the proper credentials for the job.” Perhaps the most notable accomplishment of Nichols’ term as director was overseeing the construction and movement of the library from its initial home in Bowne Hall to the separate building where it would remain for 25 years.

¹⁰ Ibid.

However, in a broader sense, Nichols' term saw the building of an academic library



both literally and figuratively from the ground up. Having started with little or no resources, both Nichols and Hall were tasked with creating the primary research center for students on campus.



In the summer of 1974 Nichols resigned his position due to health difficulties. His successor was Michael Pope, previously an assistant librarian, who had returned to the area upon completing his doctorate at Rutgers University. Dr. Pope was appointed “acting” Director. In an interview with Dr. Pope, I asked him to talk about some of his most memorable staff members. Among the librarians that worked under him, Dr. Pope remembers the efforts of Mary Kay Schnare to be “patron-centered” in reference services. Interestingly, Dr. Pope informed me that Mrs. Schnare, upon completing her MBA, left the library, expecting conflict to arise between herself and Dr. Pope over the management of the library itself. Dr. Pope was also quick to mention Schnare’s dedication to the library even after she left; she continued to aid in the selection of books from *Library Journal* after her resignation. Dr. Pope also spoke highly of David Oettinger, a reference librarian, who was also “strongly patron-oriented” and had a pleasant personality that lent itself to the position. Overall, Dr. Pope was committed to “[training] a staff that was strongly geared towards serving the public and providing a collection of materials that was as good as you could get with the money available.”¹¹

Upon Dr. Pope’s retirement in 1995, Barbara Liesenbein became acting director. She later was appointed full director, a position she holds to this day.

Libraries, especially academic ones, are ever-evolving, perhaps with more immediacy than any other campus department. Currently, the Ritz Library meets the Middle States Commission on Higher Education requirements for technology. The Reference Services Department maintains subscriptions to nearly four dozen online databases that provide access to millions of articles, books, and other media necessary

¹¹ Pope, Dr. Michael. Personal Interview. 17, Nov. 2007.

for student, faculty and staff research. Several databases offer books converted to electronic format, allowing students access to them anywhere they use the World Wide Web. Students also have remote access to these databases off campus through the college's web portal, MyDCC.

However, computers and online databases have not been the only significant advancements in the library's history. In my conversation with Dr. Pope I asked him what he believed to be the greatest technological achievement of his term. I found his answer somewhat surprising: the conversion of the periodical collection from paper to microfilm and fiche.

To prevent the theft of books, a 3M security system was installed in summer of 1978. Michael Pope reported that "in most libraries where such systems are used, they have cut down about ninety percent on the theft of books."¹² Pope went on to say, however, that the effectiveness of the system installed in the DCC library could not be fully reported until it had been in place long enough and a full inventory of the collection had been done.¹³ Pope later said in his 1981-82 annual report that the system appeared to be greatly reducing the theft of books.¹⁴

With the rise in popularity of personal computers, academic libraries seized upon the chance to better organize, store, and retrieve information. In the late 1980s the DCC library received its first computer for staff use. According to Jane Simmons, then secretary to Dr. Pope, the computer was used mainly for word processing. It would be

¹² Pope, Michael. Annual Report of the Director of the Library, 1978-1979.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Pope, Michael. Annual Report of the Director of the Library, 1981-1982.

several more years before the use of computers by students to retrieve articles or search for books and by staff to perform circulation functions would be widespread within the library itself as much as it is today.

If we travel even further back to Dr. Nichols' annual report of 1973, we discover that "high-tech" in the library while occupying its own building consisted of equipment that would be considered outdated in our modern age. Nichols makes mention of a room dedicated solely to typewriters, seven in total. The room eventually would house three of the library's photocopiers. In 1973 the library had one photocopier for patron use, made by a company called Apeco. The microform room housed seven standard microfilm readers, one microfiche reader and one microfilm reader/printer. At the time, the cost of printouts from both the photocopier and the reader/printer stood at ten cents per page.

Discussion of the installation of computers in the library to perform many standard tasks first came up about 1984-85. Dr. Pope and his staff drew up a report that was presented to the college administration. The library staff saw the potential of computers being applied to several key functions of the library, most notably for the book and periodical collections. In the area of periodicals, there is a mention of a database on disk called Periodical List. About the same time the library provided a new service called DIALOG, a periodical index database offering access to over 200 indexes and textual databases. Initially, most searches were performed for faculty and administrators.

Budgetary constraints were the driving factor in its acceptance by regional libraries or library systems and was a factor in DCC's decision. The idea of an

automated system would remain in limbo for the next several years while state lawmakers debated the SUNY budget and regional “clusters” of libraries explored the process of moving to a SUNY-wide library system. When Barbara Liesenbein became Acting Director in Fall, 1995, the “Library Automation Committee,” was formed to explore the project further. Matt Finley, then Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, chaired the group, which consisted of Liesenbein, cataloging staff Alice McGovern and Evelyn Rosenthal, then-Head of Circulation Pat Sheehan, and Maureen Mackey of the campus’ Computer Center. Several vendors of library automation systems presented their products to the committee. The system that was selected was called “Winnebago.”



With the migration of the library card catalog to the Winnebago system underway, a new project had to be undertaken: the “barcoding” of the books themselves. The concept of book barcoding (and other automated library circulation systems) had been a standard practice in academic and public libraries for several years by the time the DCC library began their own project in summer of 1996. A large group of volunteers worked on over 80,000 of the library’s 100,000+ volumes, placing barcodes that were later tagged to the electronic records already contained in Winnebago. Immediately following the initial wave of barcoding, there was a large

project charged with "cleanup" of these records (referred to as "no matches") a process that ran over several months. Despite many books missing barcodes or records needing correction, the system was up and running by the time students returned for the Fall 1996 semester.

In Spring 2005 the library's online catalog was upgraded to a new system called "Aleph." Named for an ancient Hebrew character the new system, which was also adopted SUNY-wide, represented an upgrade in efficiency from Winnebago.

The last recent technological advance made to the library was the installation of a wireless internet access system. A college-wide initiative, the wireless system was first introduced in Fall 2004. It has since made student access to the internet more widely available through personal laptop computers.

As the college moves farther into the 21st Century the role of the library in the college community will certainly evolve further. New library-oriented technological developments will emerge and as society moves toward a total wireless-based system of communication the Ritz and its staff will undoubtedly embrace them, whether by necessity or demand. Whatever challenges the college faces, the Ritz Library and its staff will maintain the quality of service the college community requires.