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History Of Central Washington University Library

Speech delivered by Beverly Heckart in slightly altered form to the Legacy Society, May 7, 2007

If you visit the Brooks University Library--or access the Library's Web site--you will encounter in the atrium a tall totem pole painted in vivid colors of red, aqua and black, donated in 1999 by Chief Tsungani, or Fearon Smith, Jr. The pole celebrates the myths and legends of the Pacific Northwest's Native American coastal tribes and is an appropriate metaphor for a library. Portrayed on the pole are the grizzly bear who gave song, dance and freedom to his family; the Salmon Woman who supplied life-giving fish to the region's rivers; and the Raven, who discovered mankind. These symbols represent the gifts--freedom, sustenance and humaneness-- that the university library, through books and other materials, grants to students, faculty and the general public.

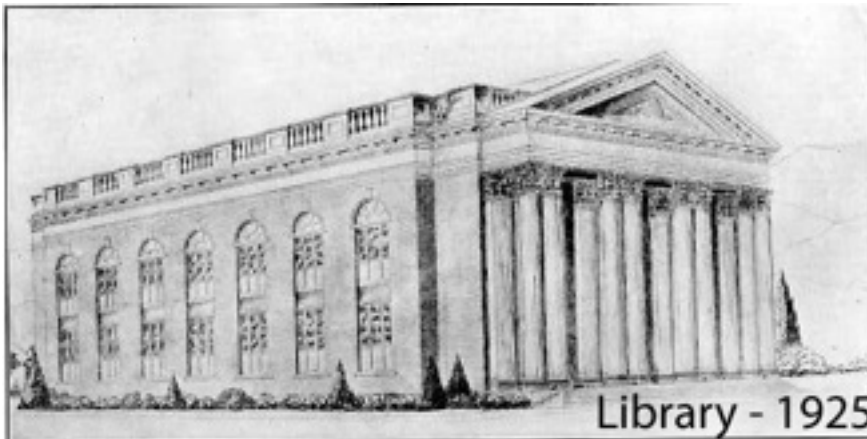
Central Washington University's library began with Mr. Benjamin Franklin Barge, first principal of the Normal School, who donated his personal book collection for use by the students. This small fund of books was housed in the assembly room of the building that is now Barge Hall.



From these humble beginnings, the library began to grow. By the 1920s, the collection was large enough

to warrant a separate library building. By today's standards, the acquisition of a separate library was amazingly swift. The legislature appropriated \$100,000 for the building at the beginning of 1925, and by October 1 of that same year, the large brick, fireproofed structure was completed. Its neo-classical facade of six tall columns topped by a ridged pediment introduced students to a modern temple of learning. Inside, two rows of ten large windows, facing west, shed natural light on the 30 large study tables in the reading room. An old photograph of the room shows every table occupied by circles of students studying and

socializing, just as they do today.



As the Normal School became a College of Education in 1937, the library continued to grow and, by the 1950s, it contained 90,000 volumes. The lady who presided over the library's growth was Margaret Mount, head librarian from 1929 to 1959. Her biography illustrates the professionalism and

dedication that made Central a premier teacher training college.

Miss Mount hailed from St. Paul, Minnesota and received her B.A. degree from Macalester College. Subsequently, she earned her Certificate of Librarianship from the University of California, Berkeley in 1928. From Berkeley, she came to Ellensburg, where she stayed. Under her direction, Central's library not only acquired books, its staff increased from two to seven; and it began to offer courses in librarianship that equipped students to offer that specialty when they went on the job market. Miss Mount's professed creed was to serve the curriculum of the college, to select books of quality for the library, to interest students in scholarly as well as recreational reading, and to promote students' "intelligent use of library resources." It was both a practical and an idealistic agenda that continues, in slightly altered form, to this very day.

Recently Jerry Williams of Jerrol's shared with me an anecdote revealing of Miss Mount's character and personality. At one time after the store opened on 8th Ave. (now University Way), Jerry's father could not understand why he frequently found the comics from the Sunday edition of the Seattle Times missing from the papers for sale on the rack outside the store. The mystery was solved when, one Sunday



morning, he discovered Miss Mount systematically removing them. When asked what she was doing, she proclaimed that the students really shouldn't be exposed to such trashy reading as the comics. They needed to concentrate on the more serious articles in the news and editorial portions of the paper.

Margaret Mount's success in expanding the collection meant, of course, that the old Library, located in what is now Shaw-Smyser Hall, no longer contained enough space to house the materials and services needed by a growing student body. Planning for a new facility began in the mid-1950s, and the new library, named for long-time Ellensburg banker and trustee Victor Bouillon, became a reality in 1961.

Designed by the Seattle firm of Bassetti and Morse, its lattice-work facade reflected the intertwining academic interests of Central Washington State College, a change of name that occurred just as Bouillon was completed. Central was no longer confined to the training of teachers; its primary mission had expanded to prepare students for a full range of occupations, including accounting, business, government and medicine.



Bouillon's entrance hall matched the youthful spirit of the times by welcoming students and faculty alike with a sculptured cherub posed against a screen of carved green, grape leaves. Attached to the ends of bookcases were colorful enameled plaques, designed by a group of Pacific Northwest artists, that bore wisely whimsical sayings such as "Remember the whistle doesn't pull the train"

and "If your head is wax, don't walk in the sun." Some of those plaques made the move from Bouillon to the current Brooks library, and you can view some of them on the Friends of the Library Web site.

When it was planned, Bouillon was intended to house not only books but the media center that promoted audio-visual learning. The floor plan encouraged students to use books by scattering informal reading areas among the stacks. The tables and chairs that furnished these areas were custom-designed, comfortable and roomy. Students who visit the Brooks Library still gather round the highly-polished, circular tables that once called Bouillon home.

With the new library came a new Director of Libraries named Clarence Gorchels, whom everybody called Corky. Quite soon after he arrived, he founded the first Friends of the Library organization. Corky was a thin man, slightly balding, and wore glasses with thick lens. To look at him, you would never have imagined that he could generate the enthusiasm that accompanied the first fund-raising campaign of the Friends of the Library. Students from the veterans' village and from the dormitories made substantial donations; the conflict between town and gown disappeared as faculty and prominent civic leaders gave generously to the fund. The library acquired a larger and more diverse collection than it had previously enjoyed.

Bouillon was planned to accommodate 250,000 volumes for an enrollment of 800 students. By the mid-1960s, Central was bursting at the seams with baby-boomers, and projections foresaw enrollment growing to 12-15,000 students within the next two decades. Thus, Central's leadership felt compelled to acquire land covering several city blocks to the north of the old campus. One of the buildings destined to occupy this land was, yes, another new library.

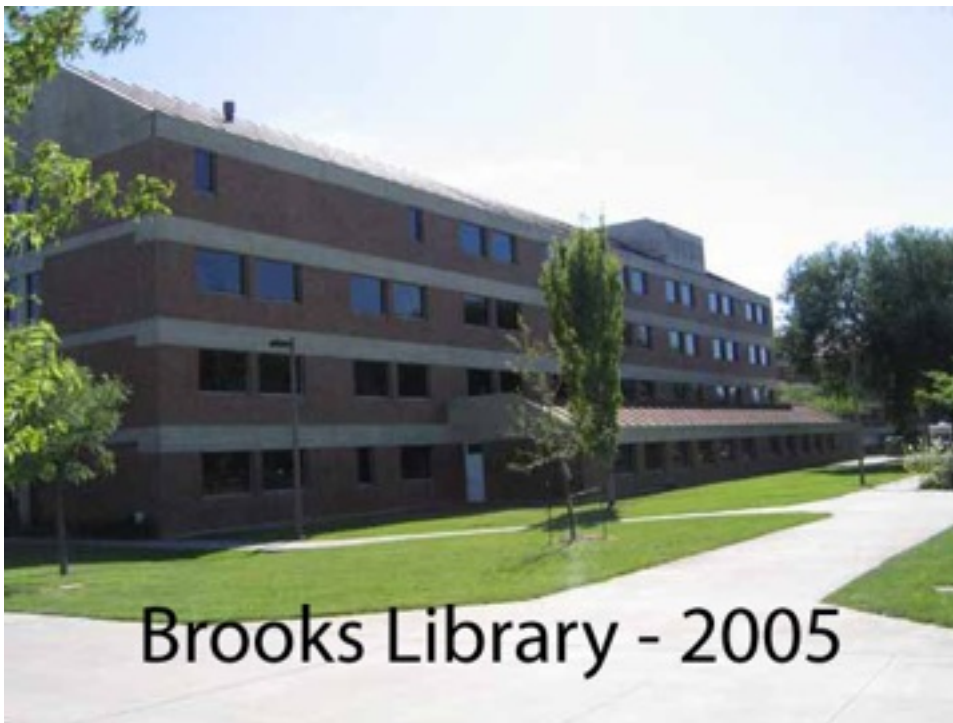
Once again, planning for the new library extended over



several years, and the chief agenda was to construct a building large enough to house 1 million volumes, accommodate the numerous periodicals needed by growing undergraduate and graduate programs, and include space for the various specialized departments such as maps, documents, and music. The latter two particularly needed space for equipment. By 1975, libraries had discovered that a host of materials could be supplied by accumulating microforms of all kinds--ranging from back runs of periodicals to the memoirs of important personages. Microforms, of course, needed microform readers. In the music library, not only were phonographs still required, but cassette players as well. By the late 1980s, compact discs were coming on the market, requiring more new equipment.

This library of 1975 happened to be completed just as a round of hard times arrived for higher education. As baby boomers graduated, enrollments plummeted, and the twin vicissitudes of high inflation followed by sharp deflation meant that budgets shrank. For a time, academic libraries were not high national or local priorities. Just as budgets began to recover, "computerization" swept the land.

I was myself surprised, in doing research for this talk, at how early the computer began to invade the library. Even before the move from Bouillon, the library had a data processing unit. In his annual report for the academic year 1974-5, the Dean of Libraries was anticipating a shift from the card to an on-line catalogue, an event that didn't actually occur until two decades later. At the beginning of the 1980s, the library instituted a micro-computer laboratory. These innovations facilitated the work of librarians, faculty and students alike.



But the tidal wave of computerization that has occurred since the early 1990s has had a deleterious effect as well. Many people thought then and still think that the computer has made libraries obsolete. It is quite true that much information is now available on the Internet, and all of us, including me, access our browser for reference

materials that we used to visit the library to discover.

At the same time, the publishing world continues to flourish. Last year, more books appeared in print than ever before in history. The publishers of scholarly periodicals, while making their wares available electronically, do so by subscription. These subscriptions are expensive, and students as well as the general public need to be patrons of the library before they can access these journals. Databases of all kinds not only facilitate the work of scholars, they are usually only available in libraries that subscribe to them. Library materials are still so important that the Brooks Library operates a courier service to supply the students of the West Side centers with the materials that they need. In other words, libraries will not expire anytime soon.

Now, more than ever, libraries need friends. After his retirement from the faculty in the early 1990s, former university president, James Brooks, revived the Friends of the Library organization. When he was president, Brooks considered the library to be one of the primary pillars of the university's academic purpose, and it was fitting that the library was finally named after him in 2003. The Friends of the Brooks Library promote its mission in a variety of ways. Above all, they seek to augment the monies available to library. The Friends are currently conducting a campaign to raise an initial sum of \$100,000 for their endowment fund. The increasing earnings of this fund will be annually transferred to the Brooks library budget for the purchase of materials.

In closing, I want to return to the metaphor of Chief Tsungani's totem pole. At the very top of the pole sit three Watchmen, representing the guardian chiefs of the tribe. I like to think of the Friends of the Library as the watchful protectors of the library's legacy from the past into the future. The Friends are convinced that sustaining a quality library is essential to the ongoing mission of the university.

