

Miller Library

The Beginnings — An Intellectual Resource for the Academic Community

At the request of President D.W. Bittinger In 1964, the McPherson College trustees recommended that planning begin for a new library-classroom building. In November 1965 McPherson College inaugurated Jack Melhorn as president and announced an MC Development Program. Phase I, planned for 1966-69, included a new library.

The Library Committee included President Melhorn, Dean Merlin Frantz, professors Dayton Rothrock, Gilford Ikenberry, and Leland Lengel, librarian Virginia Harris and business manager Gordon Yoder. They stated, the library is “the most important intellectual resource of the academic community.” They visited other new libraries, including Manchester College, and employed Dr. Edmond Low as a library consultant. Robert Husmann of Houston, Texas, was selected as architect. Grants and federal loans were applied for. The new library was projected to cost nearly \$1 million and provide 40,000 square feet of floor space, which would accommodate the projected student growth for the next 20 years.

Fundraising included applying for grants and federal loans. In 1968 M. Claire Miller became a trustee, and he and his wife Sadie gave a \$100,000 naming gift. Miller, who was born and raised in McPherson and attended McPherson College for two years, saw a great need for a new library. A Higher Education Facilities Grant of approximately \$326,000 was contingent upon the college raising over \$662,000. The Alumni Board pledged \$82,000 to equip the library, and the telephone drive raised \$34,000. The Kresge Foundation, the Mabee Foundation, and others all made significant gifts. Trustees broke ground in December 1968, and construction began in January 1969.

Miller Library — the Completion, the Move, the Dedication

Miller Library was originally scheduled for completion on January 1, 1970. Carolyn Harnly, a student library assistant during 1969-1970, remembers Miss Harris in a hard hat spending much time at the new library site as it was being built. Because of labor problems beyond the college’s control, the opening was delayed. Meanwhile Miss Harris drew up elaborate moving plans involving “two complete loops of people each carrying a small handful of books or periodicals on every trip.” On Monday, April 27, “M Day” (moving day) arrived. Classes were not dismissed but many professors brought their classes to help carry the 45,000 items across campus from the old library in Beeghly to Miller. Many former students remember passing or walking armful of books to Miller, and Caroline Harnly also remembers using book trucks. KARD-TV of Wichita along with area newspapers covered the move. The McPherson College Dames (a group primarily composed of faculty wives) served refreshments. A large, steady stream completed the work in one day, and Miller Library was open the next.

The library dedication was on Sept. 20, 1970. Senator James B. Pearson delivered the address, “Priorities for the Seventies.” “It is on the college campus,” he said, “that we recognize the union between the seeds of thought and the seat of power.” An open house and tours followed. By October, Claire Miller proclaimed, “Miller Library has become a home for nearly everyone on campus.” For him, it was a “big thrill” to have a library named after him thinking of “the hundreds and hundreds of kids that will be using it in the future and because of its use in the next 100 years.”

Miller Library serves through the years

Miller Library included an audio-visual center to serve the college's audio-visual needs, and Herb Johnson was hired as Director of Learning Resources. The center housed and maintained all the media equipment for the campus and included the language lab, established in Beeghly in 1966. In 1973-74 McPherson College became the active coordinator for the local CATV educational channel and aired over 225 hours that year. Students produced shows including a news program and stock market report, and athletic, music and drama programs were aired. In 1977 student Mike Roberts wrote and produced a weekly puppet show, "Grandpa Willoughby." Also that year the Media Center facilities were updated. The Audio-Visual major with two-year and four-year degrees began in 1973, and 1976 saw its first graduate, but the major was dissolved in 1988.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the library participated in various cooperative ventures increasing library services and resources. Some of these included the Kansas Union Catalog, the South Central Kansas Rotating Books collection, the Kansas State AV Center for Films, the Kansas Library Network Inter Library Loan Program, and the Associated Colleges of Central Kansas courier.

Rowena Olsen was hired as Reference Librarian and Cataloger in 1970 and upon Miss Harris' retirement in 1975 became library director. Under her leadership for the next 27 years, many technological changes occurred. In 1981 the first computer, an Apple II, was used for circulation and bookkeeping. In 1989 the library adopted the Winnebago circulation system and eventually added complete records, becoming the library's first online catalog in 1991.

In 2000 McPherson College employed Performa for a space utilization study, and the most extensive remodeling of the building occurred in stages thereafter, beginning in 2002. The renovations aimed to provide a more welcoming, visually pleasing area for both students and faculty. Changes included new carpeting in much of the building, furniture reupholstering, painting, lighting, acoustical ceiling tiles, and a free coffee bar. Also included were handicapped-accessible restrooms and an outside ramp on the north side. Computer work stations replaced the physical card catalog.

Throughout the 1990s libraries added computerized indexes, catalogs, and eventually full-text databases. But as more—and often less reliable—information became available online, the library began to stress bibliographic (also known as) library instruction. While Susan Taylor was librarian, a general education information literacy competency was adopted and library instruction became more intentional and pervasive. In 2011 librarian Mike Upson, along with student assistant and illustrator Mike Hall, produced a graphic novel "Library of the Living Dead." The 20-page guide featured students under attack by zombies. Students survived by finding their way through the library to various information resources, with architectural and other features of Miller Library clearly represented.

While Mary Hester was director, the main floor of Miller became a more open meeting space and lounge area with the upstairs reserved as a quiet study area. Major weeding and reduction of the print collection took place during this 2010s. Many Brethren Room resources were digitized. Also, the library online catalog was lost which necessitated a major recataloging project which continues today.

The year 2020 brought the Covid19 epidemic. During Jamie Makatche's first semester as library director in Spring 2020, the campus moved to remote learning. Digital reference services, a chat feature, and online instruction were popular. Back on campus during the

2020-21 year, many safety measures including a mask requirement and social distancing were enacted. Library services moved their offices to the upper level. Despite the pandemic, library services to students grew as the library was recognized as an important resource for learning.

Miller Library is known for two special collections. The Brethren Room houses materials related to Church of the Brethren and McPherson College history. It is a repository for one-of-a-kind and rare items such as a Christopher Sauer bible and recorded minutes relating to the founding of McPherson College as well as other materials such as campus publications, dissertations by college faculty, and genealogy books. The Auto Restoration Collection, established in the early 2000s, began as a place to keep old periodicals, automotive brochures, indexes to automotive literature, and other rare materials in a secure location. As the program has grown in stature, donations to the collection have exponentially increased. In the fall of 2021, a new, larger space encompassing the entire south side of the upper level will bring together all of the automotive material from the general collection and the special collection. Both the Brethren and the Automotive Restoration materials are in high demand through interlibrary loan.

Miller Library became the home for many other campus departments over the years, and collections moved to accommodate needs. In the 1970s the Learning Skills Lab was established in the lower level. A computerized writing lab was set up in the lower level in 1994. The Jamison Center was created in the lower level to house the Education Department and classroom in 1998. The Royer Center on the main level was first established for career and academic support services in 2002, and in 2011 it became home to the Student Affairs office. The Brethren Room began on the Upper Level, west middle section. It moved to the Main Level, northwest section, and later to the Lower Level, southeast section. At that time an archives room was established separate from the Brethren Room in the very southeastern room. The Auto Restoration Collection, mentioned above, has moved from the main level to a larger space on the upper level. These moves highlight the adaptability of the building made possible by good planning.

Miller Library today is largely the product of two forward-looking librarians who for 58 years directed McPherson College's libraries, including Miller's first 32 years. Virginia Harris, library director from 1944-1970, spent years planning the new library, and it is to her credit that the facility has stood the test of time, despite all the changes in librarianship. High quality furnishings, likewise, remain. Much of the library furniture including the famed Herman Miller chairs are still in use today, and the original green carpet still covers about one-sixth of the floors. Rowena Olsen, director from 1970-2002, was a technological innovator. McPherson College was one of the first colleges in Kansas to have an online catalog. She was also a leader in Kansas libraries, serving as president of the Kansas Library Association in 1996. She received the Kansas Library Association presidential award in 1998.

Susan Taylor, who had previously served as assistant librarian and dean of academic resources, served as library director from 2002-2009. She was followed by Matt Upson (2009-2011), Mary Hester (2011-2019), Jamie MaKatche (2020-2021), Lindsey Loucks (interim 2021), and Kristie Sojka (2021-).

With many of its resources available online to patrons anywhere in the world, the library building has become a welcoming place for students. Miller Library offers personalized research assistance, quiet places to study, and comfortable spaces to collaborate and visit with others. It has also welcomed other campus departments and services, making it a recognized academic and student center. This beautiful facility will in all likelihood, as Clair Miller predicted, serve

students for another 50 years.

Prepared by Susan Taylor

Miller Library Library Directors

Virginia Harris 1944-1975
Rowena Olsen 1975-2002
Susan Taylor 2002-2009
Matt Upson 2009-2011
Mary Hester 2011-2019
Jamie MaKatche 2020-2021
Lindsey Loucks, interim 2021
Kristie Sojka, 2021-

Others professional librarians

Herb Johnson Director of Learning Resources 1970-1988
Caroline Harnly 1975-78 Assistant Librarian
Joan Johnson 1979-1988 Assistant Librarian

Paraprofessionals/clerks/aids (incomplete list)

Kathryn Bechtel
Jill Brax
Judy Butler
Roger Carswell
Sharon Chass
Susan Cox
Janice Cross
Ann Flory
Ella Frantz
Vincent Goerl
Gayla Green
Norita Gumm
Barry McMillan
Rebecca Rothrock
Ray Santee
Pat Schrecknisse
Leah Shrinivas
Lisa Snell
Don Stinnette
Kathy Vaughn
Drucella Whitham