1968 was a year of political upheaval and demand for change. In Canada, Lester Pearson was replaced as Prime Minister by Pierre Trudeau, and Trudeaumania was at its height. In the rest of the world, we had the Tet offensive in Viet Nam (leading to the resignation of President Johnson), the murders of King and Bobby Kennedy, riots at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, a student revolution in Paris, and Soviet tanks rolling into Prague.

On the whole, all this political turmoil seemed to bypass the Douglas Library, where things went on much as they always had. I do however remember some changes that the NPA (Non-Professionals Association, forerunner of the union) had brought about, although it had only come into existence the previous year. For one thing, a comprehensive new staff manual was drafted, and for another, employees were allowed to see their own evaluations. In the past, evaluations would go straight from the supervisor to the Chief Librarian, but now you were permitted to see your performance review, discuss it with your supervisor, and possibly have some input into it before it was sent to the Chief Librarian.

There were also some changes to the job classification of non-professionals, which resulted in the walls between “clerks” and “library assistants” (who had degrees but not a library degree) coming down. Senior Clerks were converted into Library Assistants, as their jobs overlapped almost completely in duties. The old terms “Subprofessional Library Assistant” (sometimes known as “Subbies”) and “Senior Clerk” disappeared, and they were merged into “Library Assistant 3”. The “3” came from the Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (CACUL) draft report on position classification, which started Library Assistants 1 with the grade covered by Junior Clerk at Queen’s.

This change meant that clerks with enough experience could merge into the library assistant classifications of those with university degrees, and seemed more fair in terms of equal pay for work of equal value.

In October, there was a library staff meeting regarding the possibility of organizing a single staff association to replace the two current ones, PLAQ (for librarians), and NPA (for non-professionals). Mr. Ian Wilson, who is now the Provincial Archivist for Ontario, but in those days was the President of the Douglas Library NPA, chaired the meeting, at which Professor John Archer, University Archivist, spoke about the McGill Library Staff Association, which included both professionals and non-professionals. Although the proposal was debated for several years, in the end this combining of the staff associations did not take place.

The big newsmaker in 1968 was Mr. Peter Girard. The year began with the celebration of his 40th birthday in January; then we heard that he was taking a leave of absence to travel around the world, so there was an international pot-luck in April, to show off the culinary talents of the various ethnic groups represented in the Order Department, and to bid farewell to Peter. We kept receiving postcards from him throughout the summer; then in the fall we had a note from
Australia to say that he was returning to be married. On October 26th, 1968, he was married to Miss Katherine Walmsley, and in December he returned to his position as Order Librarian.

Two librarians joined the staff of the Order Department in 1968; Miss Dianne Cook, a graduate of the University of Western Ontario and the University of Michigan (Master of Arts in Library Science), arrived as Assistant Order Librarian on January 2nd. In February Mrs. Indra David (B.A. from Madras, India, and M.S. in Library Science from Syracuse) came to help with the Order Department during Peter’s absence. Mrs. Nan Craig started work in the photocopying office in April, and Mrs. Kye Dalziel returned from the University of Toronto library school in July to take charge of Periodicals. Also in the summer, Miss Elinore Brown came as Librarian in the Reference and Research Division, and Mrs. Joanne McAuliffe joined the staff of the Serials Department as a junior clerk.

Mrs. Irene Borys (later to be Mrs. Irene Bessette) arrived in the summer as Chief Law Librarian and Assistant Professor of Law. She held law degrees from the University of Bourdeaux and the New York University Law School, and had most recently been working in the New York University Law Library, where she had been Head Cataloguer.

Changes to Cataloguing included the June arrival of the new Assistant Head Mr. V. Mahalingam (B.A. University of Calcutta, B.L.S. McGill, and a candidate for a Ph.D. in library service from Columbia University). Two new typists arrived in Cataloguing: Miss Ruth Huegi (now Ruth Hughes), on February 19th, and Miss Patricia Dorey (now Pat Hitchcock of Special Collections), on August 19th. Mrs. Anna Matsof started as a Library Assistant in October, replacing Mr. Robin Ryan. Mrs. Margaret Asselstine, who had joined the Douglas Library staff in 1962, was promoted to Senior Library Assistant, and Mary Oliver and Amy Wang were promoted to Library Assistant 3.

The rapid turnover of staff continued in 1968. In the July/August 1968 Factotum, Mr. Redmond was quoted as saying that “anyone who has been on our fast-turning staff longer than I (earlier, that is, than the beginning of 1966) certainly ranks as a veteran”. Frequent resignations in 1968 prompted a D.A.R. memo, stating that “there is a moral obligation to provide as much notice of resignation as possible, with two weeks as an absolute minimum”.

Mr. Peter Greig and Miss Helen Coffey left in September for the University of Toronto Library School. Helen was the recipient of the first annual scholarship offered by the Queen’s Library to a staff member. The scholarship, which was offered for several years, consisted of $2,000 plus tuition, and was given on the understanding that the winner, on completion of the degree course, was to return to the Queen’s University Libraries for at least one year. So not only did you have library school paid for, plus $2000 (quite a sum in 1968), but there was a librarian job waiting for you when you returned! Mr. Redmond encouraged library staff to go on for further professional training, and stated in the September issue of Factotum that he hoped “that staff members who might be considering librarianship as a career would let one of the senior staff know their plans and ambitions, as the professional staff are always glad to cheer the new recruit on”.

In April of 1968, Professor Charles Pullen, who had already been involved in acquiring the "Gothic Fantasy" collection for the Douglas, discovered in Ottawa a cache of precious Dickens
works, including special editions, first editions of 23 novels and other works, two weekly journals conducted by Dickens, contemporary illustrations of some of Dickens’s characters, and three letters signed by the great author. These were acquired for the Special Collections Department.

In May I was sent, as one of the Queen's Library representatives, to a conference at McMaster University in Hamilton regarding “blanket orders”. Does anyone remember blanket orders? It was a policy of systematic book procurement whereby certain academic publishers would send us all the books they published in a given year, on the understanding that the library had the right to return the items not wanted. In these days of cutbacks, it seems a tremendously spendthrift thing to do, but the argument was that it would save our having to order the books individually. Books were cheaper then, and the exchange rate was much better (the Canadian dollar was worth well over 90 cents U.S., and for a time in the early 1970s it was actually worth more than the American dollar). Also, in those days academic publishers didn't seem to turn out as much material in an effort to make a profit. It was assumed that all books put out by certain publishers would be needed in the library at some point.

The other three staff members who attended that conference were Dianne Cook, Wilma Kearns, and Indra David. We travelled there by train, and stayed in the McMaster student residence. Expense accounts were submitted to the library, and I still remember Mrs. David’s look of mock-horror when she found out that I’d received 25 cents more on my expense account than she had, because when we ate a meal at the Union Station I’d chosen to have dessert (jello), and she hadn’t. She teased me about that 25 cents for the rest of the time I knew her.

After Queen’s had decided to participate in blanket orders, the incoming books were catalogued, after which the books for the Douglas Library were sent to the stacks and the science and engineering books were stored in the Order Librarian’s office (later to be David Wang’s office). It was here that the science and engineering branch representatives would come once a month to select books suitable for their libraries. I remember them lining up outside of the office at the appointed time, armed with flags representing their library, and then dashing in and flagging the appropriate books as quickly as possible, that is, before they were flagged by a rival library rep. One particularly memorable day, the Physics rep. and the Chemistry rep. almost came to blows over a book with "physical chemistry" in its title. I’m not sure if it was as a result of such episodes, but not long afterwards the selection for the various branches was taken over by the Acquisitions staff at Douglas, using the LC classification.

Although less impressive than today’s total library budget of $12.8 million, the 1968 library budget had more than doubled since 1962. At $1.75 million, it represented 8 1/2 % of the total operating cost of the university. The lower cost of books in those days is illustrated by the fact that the book budget then represented only 35% of the total budget, as opposed to almost 50% thirty years later, even though almost three times as many books were being ordered in 1968.

In 1959/60, the number of new titles catalogued by Queen’s was 3041. It had been estimated in 1962 that by the late 1960s, 12,000 volumes would be added to the Queen’s library system annually. In fact, in the 1967/68 year the number of books catalogued was 54,121.
And the books kept coming. Cataloguing was facing a space crisis. This was in large measure because Industrial Relations was still occupying the area on the first stack level (present entrance level) that had been designated for Cataloguing. All of technical services was squashed together in the south wing of the main floor, and books to be catalogued were piling up in every available corner. A stop-gap solution was found in the form of the notorious “Cage”.

In January 1968, books from PZ to Z on 4S were shifted forward to make room for a large wire mesh cage, to be occupied by the Cataloguing Division. Filled for years with “received not catalogued” books, the Cage was at first given a wide berth by unsuspecting students. Prominently displayed on the locked gate was a large sign:

PLEASE DO NOT FEED.

The Education Library was still on the third floor of the Douglas Library, where its now 20,000 volumes had filled the alcove in the Old Reserve Reading Room to overflowing, necessitating moving about 7,000 volumes to the attic above the Blue Spruce Room. Education staff members had increased from 4 in 1966 to 10 in 1968, one of the new members being Mrs. Barbara Astbury, who joined the staff in April.

The branch libraries were at this time under the jurisdiction of Assistant Chief Librarian Ted Phillips. It was his belief, shared by many before and since, that there were too many branch libraries at Queen’s, and one of his first projects was to close the Mining and Metallurgical Engineering Library in Nicol Hall. This was accomplished in August of 1968, when the M and M books and journals were transported to Dupuis Hall, where they were integrated with those of Chemical Engineering and the Computing Centre, and added to the domain of Mrs. Trixie Walls (mother of Lucinda Walls of Bracken Library).

The close of that year, just over 30 years ago, was celebrated by a Christmas party on the Douglas Library third floor, where there was a buffet of sandwiches, cookies and cake, and a program, with Mrs. Lin Elliott (later to be Mrs. Lin Good) as M.C., that featured Tony Frazao on the electric organ, Santa Claus who arrived with gifts for all good staff members, and some well-acted and humorous skits involving and concerning library staff, including Chief Librarian Donald A. Redmond, who was played by Assistant Chief Librarian Ted Phillips.