

THE DOUGLAS LIBRARY IN 1975

by Hilary Richardson [originally published in 2003]

The year 1975 at the Douglas Library opened on some sombre notes. First of all, Dr. Steve Mohan, Librarian in Central Information/Resource Services, and editor of the Douglas Library monthly magazine Factotum since 1966, suffered a heart attack at the end of 1974, and was off until March of 1975 recuperating.

An even greater shock was the most unexpected death of Miss Diana Blake, Assistant Chief Librarian (Public Services) in Hotel Dieu Hospital in February of 1975. Diana had been in the Circulation department of the Douglas in the 1950s, and had rejoined Queen's in 1966 as an Administrative Officer in the Library. Her bubbling personality, wry sense of humour, and common sense approach to administrative problems were invaluable assets, and her sudden death left a huge gap.

In June, Mr. V. Mahalingam, "Maha" to everyone in the library system, was appointed to replace Diana Blake as Assistant Chief Librarian (Public Services). Maha had come in 1968 as Assistant Head of the Cataloguing Division, and since then had served both as Acting Head of the Documents Unit for a short time, and as Acting Law Librarian for one academic year.

Among the people now reporting to Maha were the staff of the branch libraries. The organization of the branches also changed, with Phyllis Bray (replacing Vi Greer) becoming Branch Supervisor for "Area B", which was in general branch libraries west of University Avenue, including Geography/Map, Mathematics and Physics among others. Amelia Laing retained responsibility for Civil Engineering and the branches east of University Avenue ("Area A"). Sylvia Spasoff, Librarian for Art/Music, was also to report directly to Maha.

Among many others, the following new personnel started as LT1s in the first two months of the year: Barbara Jackson (now of the Law Library), Helen Cobb, Francesca Creet and Linda Deano (now Linda Cahill of Bracken). In April Linda Prest (now of Orders) came as a secretary in the Law Library, Pam Manders (now of Special Collections) as an LT1 in the Serials Unit, and Karen Craik (later Karen Lavin) as an LT1 in Reserve.

In the summer, Karen Wilson joined the staff, and Mary Mayson, who had been coming and going for the past 15 years, rejoined the staff permanently. Marcia Stayer (Sweet) returned to the Serials Department in September after a year's leave of absence.

Since 1966, when a D.A.R. memo (memo from the Chief Librarian, Mr. Donald A. Redmond) forbade leaving the building for coffee breaks, all of the Douglas employees had to be accommodated in the staff lounge. In 1975, the Douglas Library itself, not including the branch and faculty libraries, employed about 165 people. A further memo from Miss Elizabeth Skeith at the beginning of 1975 requesting that people refrain from taking their coffee break at the Student Union (later the JDUC) across the street sparked some lively discussion regarding the difficulties of taking breaks in a staff lounge which only seated approximately 51 people. The memo had said that a person would need to be an Olympic runner in order to go to the union for coffee

break and come back in 15 minutes, but it was pointed out that at times people would have to be masterminds to figure out where they were going to sit and have their coffee, when they walked into the staff lounge.

With the exception of the Art Library (and Education as of the summer of 1976), none of the Queen's University libraries had tattletaped their books, so a commissionaire still had to check purses, bags, and knapsacks of people leaving the Douglas. Security was more lax at the branch libraries, where a sort of honour system was in place (especially for libraries which provided faculty and graduate students with keys).

In April of 1975, Mrs. Eva Cox (formerly Eva Ryce), retired as Matron, after being employed in the Douglas Library for 30 years. Duties of the Matron included keeping the staff room tidy, and making sure that there was always coffee, tea, milk and sugar available. She had several reminiscences of her time in the D.L., including one of being stuck in the elevator early one morning before staff arrived. (This by the way is the same elevator currently used by the staff of Special Collections in Douglas to access their stacks.) She was luckily rescued after half an hour by Mr. Boomeister, the janitor. Most of her memories were happy ones, however. Since there were only 18 people on the entire staff when she started in 1945, there was a warm and friendly atmosphere.

In May of 1975, the Queen's University Libraries reached the 2 million item mark - there were in its collection about one million two hundred volumes, and about 800,000 other items such as documents, microforms, pamphlets and the like.

1975 was International Women's Year, when women were striding forth into areas of endeavour not usually noted for feminine participation. The Cataloguing Unit, on the other hand, embarked in this year on a series of noon-time sessions to learn, relearn, or just plain admire, some of the more traditionally feminine occupations. Cataloguing staff would eat a quick lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays and then dash back to their unit. At first, 12:15 to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays was reserved for crotcheting, and the same time on Thursdays for needlepoint. Sessions on crewel embroidery, rug hooking, macramé, Fair Isle and Aran Isle knitting followed, and the staff at Scheepje's was reportedly reeling from the shock of the invasion by enthusiastic Cataloguing staff. The end result was that the Cataloguing Unit, long renowned for its cooking, also became the "craftiest" unit in the library.

It was in 1975 that the Gael committee first asked for an orientation program that would include student participation in locating library materials. Thus a Monday morning "treasure hunt" was conceived and ably planned by Sandra Casey, Jane Wright, and the Orientation Task Force. This turned out to be a great success as far as the students were concerned, and about 1400 Frosh were in and out of the library, picking up treasure hunt booklets, and later collecting lollipops as prizes. The snag was during the first hour, and involved "the case of the missing signs." The Frosh had to look up a book by author or title, then find the spot in the stacks where it would be shelved and report back with a saying posted there. Thirty little signs had been put up the previous Friday, but the blunder was in assuming that no one would notice them before Monday. The unsuspecting staff working at the Circulation desk and in the stacks were horrified and

mystified to find such slogans as “You are a genius”, “Congratulations!”, and “I am impressed” etc., scattered throughout the stacks. Some mean person or persons had to be insulting them! When the first group of Frosh on Monday reported back without finding any slogans at all, the organizers frantically dashed around replacing signs. Finally, after communication with the shelveers, the signs stayed in place, to be picked up by the enthusiastic Frosh.

In the summer of 1975, a project was undertaken to organize the material in the Documents Unit, which until then had been in a relatively uncoded state. The decision had been taken in January to adopt the OULCS (Ontario Universities Library Cooperative System) method of coding, in which seven other Ontario university libraries participated. Gail Moores was appointed Head Cataloguer/Coding Supervisor in April, and worked together with Alan Kirby in assigning code numbers, and, it was hoped, clearing up some of the confusion, which was partly a result of the mixture of four or five incomplete “systems” in the collection.

The Dupuis Hall Library, which had housed Chemical Engineering and Computing books since 1966, and Metallurgy and Mining books since 1968, was becoming quite full. It was decided to move the Computing material from Dupuis to the Douglas Library in the summer of 1975, to free up some shelves in Dupuis for the expansion of the other collections. The peripatetic Computing books and journals would move twice more, to the John Reid Bain Library in the Walter Light Hall in 1988, and finally back to the Douglas Library in 1997.

Another library that was desperately short of space was the Health Sciences Library. Groundbreaking for the new Health Sciences complex finally started in December of 1975, but the library was not able to move into the newly completed Botterell Hall until 1978. In the meantime, the H.S. Library had long ago overflowed its 8,465 square feet in the Theological Hall, and was going through exactly the same growing pains that the main library had suffered in the very same spot just over 50 years earlier, before the completion of the Douglas building. Of the collection of 53,400 volumes, 10,000 (19%) were in storage in the Douglas Library, and another 3500 were transferred to storage in December. The Dervis Library of Internal Medicine and Psychiatry, consisting of about 8000 books and journals representing European authors whose works appeared between 1890 and 1950, had also been added to the Health Sciences Library in 1975. The problem of reading space was partially solved by the sharing of the Theology Reading Room. Twenty-six new carrels and chairs had been ordered so as to provide more seating space in this area, but the problem was that it could serve as a reading room only, since it was not connected to the library, and materials used there had to be signed out from the library first.

Budget estimates for 1975/76 revealed that the Queen’s library system would purchase about ½ as many titles as it purchased in 1971/72. Because of high inflation in the early 1970s, the dollars spent were about the same, which lay behind the often-heard statement that “the book budget is constant.” Constant dollars in the 1970s meant that the number of titles acquired was decreasing rapidly, as the inflation index in book and serial prices had begun to loom large on the horizon, and there had also been some equally significant changes in currency value.

Following the publication of the Report of the Principal’s Committee on Financial Constraints, it was rumoured that the library magazine Factotum would be done away with as an economy

measure. (Incidentally, this publication has been invaluable to me in compiling these articles about the history of the Douglas Library.) Library staff at the time were also upset that administration was inclined towards axing a publication that only cost \$700 a year, and had presented articles of high intellectual and bibliographical worth to the university community. Not only was it very useful to library staff, it was also well thought of outside of Queen's. For example, the February 1975 issue, on International Women's Year, was proclaimed by several other university libraries to be among the best publications dealing with women. Other librarians from both Ontario and Quebec remarked that Factotum was always a pleasure to read and indicated good spirit on the part of its contributors.

The upshot of it all was that it was decided that Factotum would continue without a break on a bi-monthly, instead of monthly, basis, restricted in size (around 8 pages) and on a selective distribution list (200 rather than 350 copies). This would bring the annual cost down to approximately \$300, and for the time being at least, Factotum was saved. Sadly, every year it became smaller and less and less frequent, until the publication eventually died in the early spring of 1979.