



The Changing Face of Reference Service

"I got 17,954 hits on my Alta Vista search for 'Edward Said' but none of the sites look good, and my paper's due tomorrow. Can you help me?"

Ten years ago this question would have been *almost* unintelligible to a reference librarian. Neither "Alta Vista" nor "website" were in our vocabulary. The Internet was still a text-only universe haunted by a few early adopters (including librarians) laden with Telnet addresses and passwords. But the request for help with a paper would have been familiar! Academic reference departments have been serving library users for many years by helping them find the scholarly information they need. But reference service is facing serious pressure to change or it will become irrelevant. Since research material is being transformed, researchers' needs are changing and reference must respond accordingly. As the author of a recent article said "This isn't a paradigm shift—it's a shove." (Karen G. Schneider "The Distributed Librarian: Live, Online, Real-Time Reference," *American Libraries* November 2000 <http://www.ala.org/online/netlib/il1100.html>)

Research Materials Being Digitized

Major scholarly tools such as library catalogues and periodical indexes have moved to the web; many traditional 'quick reference' facts previously found only in reference books are readily available from public websites; and e-books and e-journals are being published in growing numbers. All this means that research is increasingly conducted outside of

the physical library building. The Internet is radically changing the nature of scholarly communication, and the way students and faculty do research.

Researchers' Needs

The Web is a complex universe which overwhelms many users. Their need for help in using the web is partly due to hyperbole and partly a function of reality. The hyperbole exaggerates and obfuscates the reality of the web with claims like: everything is on the Web; everything on the Web is free; Search Engine X (take your pick) is the only tool you need; all search engines retrieve the same results; all information on the Internet is reliable. The reality is more complex. People looking for scholarly information such as peer-reviewed journal articles, bibliographies, and statistical data need help at each step of the research process to: identify the appropriate source from among thousands of possibilities (electronic index, library catalogue—local or worldwide, e-journal, Search Engine); access the source (How do I get a McMaster Proxy ID? Why can't I get into this e-journal? What does this error message mean?); search the source using the search syntax it requires (How can I look through 17,000 hits? What is Boolean? Do I use the + sign here? How do I limit by language?); obtain the information or document (How can I download/email/print this article? Can I borrow this book? How can I get this book I found at the The American University in Cairo Library?) and finally, cite the source for a bibliography (Who is the author of this website? Is this website

a scholarly source?). The research process is essentially unchanged but the kinds of challenges presented by the technology of the web are new.

Reference in a Digital World

The paradigm shift—or shove—for academic reference departments is this: instead of thinking of the *users* as remote, we must recognize that from the users' point of view it is the *library* which is remote. We can no longer expect that all students and faculty will come into the building for our assistance. They are looking for help where they are doing their research: on their desktop. The library's website is one aspect of digital reference. It must be designed in such a way that it becomes the site of choice for students and professors looking for scholarly materials. In collecting and organizing reference

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websites, reference staff face stiff competition from a vast array of commercial services such as Refdesk.com (<http://www.refdesk.com/>) and Ask Jeeves (<http://www.aj.com/>).

Other aspects of reference service in a digital world which we are pursuing include: making a commitment to research-based practice, forming partnerships with teaching faculty, contributing the users' perspective to systems development projects such as the library's website, and emphasizing outreach. Outreach involves moving out from behind the reference desk to assist people at library workstations instead of making them come to the desk. It means getting out of the library and into classrooms to share our expertise. It means striving to develop, tailor, market, and deliver the services that will best serve our users.

Academic reference departments have come a long way in the past decade. We are fully buzzword compliant and terms like "Alta Vista" and "website" trip off our collective tongue with ease. We have had great success thus far in applying our traditional reference skills, knowledge and service values to the electronic environment. In the days to come the challenge will be to rise above the din of competing claims and be perceived as the best people to teach the McMaster community how to find scholarly information. ■

B. McDonald, Reference Services Manager

John Connell Robertson Awards

Scholars are invited to apply for grants to undertake research using the archives of John Connell Robertson (1909–1965). Eligible projects are those which will result in scholarly essays, books or biographies for publication, with preference given to applications for assistance to produce a major academic, literary or biographical study of Robertson.

Under his pen name, John Connell,



Luncheon for Library Retirees

In late September, library retirees attended a luncheon hosted by University Librarian Graham R. Hill in the West Room of the University Club. Guests enjoyed the opportunity to reminisce, and to catch up on news of the past year.

Graham spoke briefly about the new and exciting directions in which the Library is moving, as we build upon the successes of the past and look forward to the challenges of the future. As always, it was a pleasure to welcome our retirees back to campus. We hope to see them again next year. ■

Robertson was a journalist, novelist and biographer. He began his journalistic career as a reporter for the *London Evening News* in 1932, became Chief Military Censor in India during WWII, and directed British propaganda efforts in the Middle East. His archives provide extensive resources for the study of Connell's life and career. The papers include typescripts, research material and correspondence relating to his work, including his novels and his biographies. Also available are typescripts of articles, reviews and broadcast pieces, family correspondence, and extensive professional correspondence with literary, political and military personalities. Connell's writings are important perspectives on British conservative thought and policy in the 20th century.

Applications for funding will be considered by the John Connell Robertson Trust Committee. For further information, write to Charlotte A. Stewart, Assistant University

Librarian, Collections Management and Development, McMaster University Library, 1280 Main St. W., Hamilton, ON, Canada L8S 4L6, enclosing a one-page proposal. ■

Russell's Odyssey

Until January 7, 2001, McMaster's Museum of Art will host an exhibit sponsored by the Faculty of Humanities, University Library and the Museum to celebrate the creation of the University's new Bertrand Russell Research Centre. The study of Russell at McMaster first began when University Librarian William Ready acquired the archives in 1968.

Russell's papers richly document over a hundred years of prodigious activity from the Victorian era of Russell's grandfather, Lord John Russell, to the troublesome and violent decade of conflict and protest of the 1960s. The Library takes great pride in preserving the Russell archives and in making these papers

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accessible to students and faculty and to researchers from every part of the globe. The papers consist of 250,000 original documents supplemented by Russell's own library, a supporting library of secondary literature, and cognate papers.

The documents and artifacts chosen for the exhibition illustrate Russell's life-journey. Russell is shown in a series of still photographs and artwork, from the pencil sketch his mother drew of him as a toddler in 1874, to a grouping of stunning colour and black-and-white photographs taken by Canadian entrepreneur, Lloyd Tough Chandler, in the summer of 1966 when Russell was ninety-six. Notable art works include a bronze bust by Jacob Epstein and a red-chalk sketch by Augustus John. Other photographs depict his parents, wives, and children. His life-work is represented by posters and photographs of his political and activist campaigns from the Wimbledon by-election in 1907 to the anti-nuclear movement of the 1960s. Russell was often caricatured by political cartoonists and some of their work is also displayed.

Russell's achievements were recognized in many ways. Most notable are his Order of Merit and accompanying citation from George VI, the father of Elizabeth II, in 1949 and his Nobel Prize for Literature medal and citation, awarded in 1950. Other selected awards and honours are also included. Supplementing all these objects is an audio-visual component allowing visitors to view Russell and hear him speak. Together, the art work, photographs, posters, medals, and furniture create a powerful testament to the life of a great man. ■

S. Turcon, C. Spadoni

University Librarian Recognized for Leadership

At the 137th Association of Research Libraries Membership Meeting held 17-18 October in



Graham R. Hill & Glen Chambers

Class of '50 Celebration

As part of Alumni Weekend, McMaster's Class of '50 celebrated the 50th anniversary of their graduation with a dinner in Convocation Hall. At the dinner, University

Washington, DC, University Librarian Graham R. Hill was among 16 ARL Directors recognized for the distinction of contributing 20+ years of leadership within the research library community. ARL is a not-for-profit organization consisting of leading research libraries in North America. McMaster has been a member of ARL since 1976. ■

Patron Information in MORRIS (WebPAC)

The Library now has "Patron Information" available through MORRIS (WebPAC), the Library's web-based catalogue. MORRIS (WebPAC) can be searched by remote access and through the Internet stations in Innis, Mills and Thode Libraries.

The "Patron Information" feature allows you to look at your own record of books checked out, renew your own books, review the status of any recalls you have placed, and see a list of problems. Reserve materials cannot be renewed by remote access.

An information leaflet is available at the Circulation and Reference Desks in all libraries. ■

Librarian Graham R. Hill accepted a commemorative plaque on the Library's behalf from Class member Glen Chambers.

In 1995 the Class generously pledged to raise \$100,000 for the Library Gateway as their fiftieth reunion project. The adoption of this project by the Class of '50 and their executive testifies to their vision and commitment to McMaster's future students and to the Library. The Library Gateway is being developed to make information on all library holdings and services, including access to a virtual "library of electronic resources" available to all McMaster students and faculty. ■

Campaign News

Thank you to all those donors who have made pledges or gifts during the first year of our campaign to build the *Library of the Future Endowment* through the University's Major Campaign. With your help we are making good progress toward our goal of raising \$7 million over three years to endow a fund to increase our purchases of electronic and printed resources for McMaster's students and faculty. We hope that you will continue your support and that many others will join you. We will report more fully in our spring issue.

C.A. Stewart

Preservation Tip: Promoting Longevity

In the last issue we discussed how elements such as light can compromise the physical integrity of paper-based artifacts. This column will focus on how temperature and humidity can also endanger your treasures. Humidity is simply water vapour in the air. When there is an excess of humidity,

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(Preservation Tip — cont'd from p.3)

you may notice structural changes in some of your materials; parchment, paper and photographs are susceptible to fluctuating levels. Documents stored in an unfinished basement could develop mold or mildew because of high humidity and the lack of circulating air. Those stored in an attic could become brittle because of the opposite conditions: dryness and heat. Ideally the temperature should be kept at 20°C and the relative humidity maintained at 50%. These conditions may be difficult to attain at home, but by avoiding conditions like those mentioned above, it is possible to increase the longevity of valued items. ■

A. Schell

Recent Notable Gifts

The Library has received the following gifts from:

- ❖ Richard Allen, former MP and Professor of history, the 3rd accrual of his papers.
- ❖ Malcolm Baird, books on chemical engineering.
- ❖ Walter H. C. Boyd, a collection of books on various topics.
- ❖ Bertram N. Brockhouse, Professor Emeritus, Physics and Nobel Prize winner for physics, archives pertaining to his experiments, research, teaching, and administrative work.
- ❖ John Doherty, archives to be added to the National Federation of Canadian University Students fonds.
- ❖ Steven C. High, a copy of his doctoral dissertation along with 8 videos of interviews conducted with displaced workers in Hamilton.
- ❖ B.A.W. Jackson, Professor Emeritus, English, files and correspondence concerning the Shakespeare Seminars at the Stratford Festival.
- ❖ Jessie Kaye, documents to be added to the Tools for Peace fonds.
- ❖ Eugene McNamara, archives related to his teaching, creative writing, and the Sesame Press.
- ❖ Farley Mowat, the 10th accrual of

his papers consisting of correspondence, manuscripts, personal material and journals.

- ❖ George Paul, funds to purchase the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*.
- ❖ Jack Whorwood, a reproduction of a photograph of E. Pauline Johnson's father, George Johnson.

We are grateful to all donors for their generosity to the Library. ■

Grants

As a part-time lecturer in Women's Studies, archivist Dr. Kathy Garay shared an award of \$210,000 from the Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund. A portion of the funding assisted in the completion of a six-part television series: *Mystic Women of the Middle Ages* (shown on Vision TV in October and airing again on WTN in January 2001). \$135,000 was provided for co-sponsorship (with McMaster University) of a web site: *Medieval Women: An Interactive Exploration*, (<http://mw.mcmaster.ca>).

Preservation Management Grant, Canadian Council of Archives (CCA), \$8,940 for the purchase of a vacuum suction table. ■

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