Clarke Celebrates 50th Anniversary

On October 29th the Library celebrated the 50th anniversary of Dr. Norman F. Clarke, Sr.'s, signing of the deed of gift that donated his collection of material to Central Michigan College and founded the Clarke Historical Library. The event was celebrated in a variety of ways.

The intellectual component of the celebration centered on a symposium exploring the changes, challenges, and opportunities for special-collection libraries in Michigan. Dr. William Anderson, director of the state's Department of History, Arts, and Libraries delivered the keynote address. Responding to Dr. Anderson's address were Sharon Carlson, director of Western Michigan University's Archives & Regional History Collections, Larry Wagenaar, executive director of the Historical Society of Michigan, and William Wallach, associate director of the Bentley Historical Library, located on the University of Michigan campus.

Excerpts from Dr. Anderson's speech appear elsewhere in this newsletter.

At the close of the symposium, those who had attended the event, along with other guests, were invited to visit the Clarke for a festive reception and to view the Library's anniversary exhibit. The exhibit featured a wide variety of treasures found in the Clarke. A sixty-four page, full color exhibit catalog accompanied the exhibit. The catalog includes a history of the Library, illustrations of several of the Library's treasures, and most importantly, lists of those individuals who have served on the Library's Board of Governors, worked as Library staff, or whose generosity has helped support the Library over the years. For those outside of Mount Pleasant, many parts of the exhibit and the catalog can be viewed on the Library's website, found at www.clarke.cmich.edu.

It was a wonderful day of learning and celebration.
Keynote Address Delivered by William Anderson

In his address, "Evolving Changes, Challenges, and Opportunities for Special Collections Libraries," Dr. William Anderson identified five topics that are among the most important facing special-collection libraries such as the Clarke:

- The impact of technology
- The ever-broadening topics explored by historians
- The potential to broaden the user base of special libraries
- The increasing value of oral history
- Capitalizing on a more inspiring research experience

Dr. Anderson discussed these challenges at some length, making memorable observations about each one. Regarding technology, Dr. Anderson asserted that "Technology promises to shape the future of special-collections libraries more than any other influence." He noted that libraries, rather than resisting the intrusion of technology, have embraced it as a means to establish public outreach. But technology has its limits. As one library director noted, "To assume that we are going to digitize all our records is science fiction." Dr. Anderson discussed how email promises a way to record conversations in a method reminiscent of nineteenth-century letters; in that era before telephones people communicated by "writing it down in a letter." "Born digital" documents, however, pose serious preservation challenges.

Dr. Anderson noted that not so long ago written history was about elite members of society. It was produced by elite authors for highly educated, elite audiences. Time has changed this narrow focus, and today history is broadly based. As one person quoted by Dr. Anderson put it, "Historians can write about darn near anything." Special-collections libraries have moved with the times. Instead of documenting only elite members of society, such libraries have begun to adopt a broader view of what needs to be documented. Ann Arbor's Clements Library, for example, has moved from an emphasis on the papers of Revolutionary War figures to what was once considered ephemeral: "sheet music, play scripts, cookbooks, advertising materials, prints, and other visuals." While affirming the need for local history, Dr. Anderson also addressed the challenge of documenting local communities by asking the provocative question, "Is a town still a town when there is no school, church, general store, bank?"

Discussing the potential for special libraries to broaden their user base, Dr. Anderson noted both the importance of technology in disseminating information and the aura of the original as important components in attracting users. Dr. Anderson discussed oral history's value, noting that librarians and historians are divided on this subject. Some see oral history as a tool to document the otherwise undocumented. One library's staff, for example, does "exit interviews" of labor-union leaders. Others note that people's memories can be flawed and unreliable. Memory is a peculiar instrument that, unlike contemporary documents, changes over time. Whatever its limitations, however, oral history is certainly here to stay.

Finally, Dr. Anderson addressed the subject of developing an inspiring research experience. On this topic he said, "I believe the opportunity to do research on site may well be an increasingly attractive experience for veteran researchers. I believe that there is intrinsic value in touching the document that the originator created. There is I believe an inspirational value that stimulates creativity." Anderson mentioned one archivist who related that "people actually cry because they have discovered something very special."

In his remarks, Bill Anderson acknowledged change, while clinging to tradition. "Special-collections libraries will continue to reinvent themselves and adapt to the challenges and opportunities afforded by technology, by rising expectations fostered by electronic media, and by the need and opportunity to collect and preserve new sources of history once considered off the radar screen. Yet some things will not change, and the old way of serving researchers will still be appreciated and preferred by some." In closing, Dr. Anderson reminding the audience of the words of David Donald, author of Lincoln, who acknowledged his debt to librarians: "To the blessed librarians everywhere my obligation is great."
An Interview with Craig Fox

Craig Fox looks a bit like a young musician whose British accent might give him an edge on the stage. However, his trip to America was funded by the United Kingdom’s Arts and Humanities Research Board. A graduate student in history at the University of York, Fox came to America to study social movements of the 1920s, particularly the Ku Klux Klan.

“I have always been fascinated by clandestine and secret societies,” Fox said. “I’m particularly interested in themes of exclusion and inclusion — who gets in, who doesn’t, and why. These questions become even more interesting when a secret organization extends its boundaries beyond the more traditional male-only fraternal membership to embrace women, children of both sexes, and even infants. The Klan in the 1920s was just this type of organization, offsetting an undeniable political bigotry and intolerance with a grassroots appeal to the ideals of morality and family values.”

A substantial literature about the 1920s’ Klan exists that details activities at both the national and various local levels. Thus I asked Fox why there is need for yet another study: “Increasingly in more recent studies there is a shift toward documenting the movement from the community, rather than the national, perspective. This is a particularly useful way to proceed when there are national studies already in existence which can be used as a reference point from which to compare local events. Before coming to America, I surveyed the existing literature and found a curious gap in local studies of the Klan. The state of Michigan was a neglected area in this respect, and seemed to offer the potential to confirm or challenge studies written at the national level or about Klan organizations in other states.”

Local history has always been one of the Clarke’s strong collecting emphases. The Library’s holdings include several membership rolls of Klan county chapters in Michigan, but it seemed reasonable to ask how a researcher in England discovered these holdings. “It really wasn’t that difficult. I used the OCLC database [an international computerized database that includes the holdings of the Clarke Library] and began searching for institutions that might hold materials potentially useful to me. Locating Klan records represented a challenge in that local units themselves tended to destroy their records, and people happening upon old Klan records today often perceive them as negative and think twice about preserving them. But even negative material plays a role in understanding the past. You can’t hide history, even unpleasant history. And the Clarke had found, and preserved that history.”

Over the course of several months, Fox hopes to use the Klan records in the Clarke to look at various aspects of the local movement. One approach will be to look at the recruiting techniques used in various areas. Although the Klan often defined “Americanism” by exclusion — that is, 100 percent Americans were, among other things, not black, not foreign, not Catholic and not Jewish — recruiters emphasized different aspects of this message in different areas. What recruitment methods worked in rural Michigan is a question of great interest to Fox. So too is the question of money. The national Klan leaders have often been accused of using hate as a way to enrich themselves through membership dues. The same question might be asked about the motives of state and local Klan leaders. Did they truly believe their own rhetoric, or were they simply entrepreneurs hoping to personally profit by selling fear and hate? Or both?

On a personal note, Craig related that he was “impressed with the Library and its staff” as well as by Mount Pleasant. “The staff” he added “works hard to serve researchers with efficiency and friendliness.” As for the city, “Mount Pleasant’s scale is friendly to walkers,” something important to a man without a car. “The Clarke staff has been great, making every effort to make an outsider feel welcome, both inside and outside of ‘work,’ including even a few rides to the grocery store,” he added, with considerable appreciation.

Ann Arbor Railroad Exhibit

The Library’s current exhibit features the history of the Ann Arbor Railroad. The Ann Arbor, which once carried passengers and freight through Mount Pleasant, was one of many railroads that served Michigan for more than a century. It was unique, however, because this railroad actually had more miles of water route, plied by its Lake Michigan ferries, than it had track mileage.

Today, lines such as the Ann Arbor either have been abandoned or operate in greatly diminished circumstances. We invite you to learn about the history of transportation by visiting the current exhibit. The Ann Arbor Railroad exhibit will be on display through July 15.
Funds Available to Subsidize Newspaper Microfilms

The Michigan Newspaper Project has funds available to subsidize community-based projects that focus on microfilming local newspapers. Supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project will subsidize the filming of approximately one hundred thousand pages of Michigan newspapers. Community groups interested in having their local newspapers microfilmed will be required to pay the first $100 of costs for each reel of film. NEH funds will pay the balance. Typically, a reel of microfilm contains 850 to 1,000 newspaper pages.

Organizations interested in taking advantage of this program are requested to complete and submit a short application form. Forms must be postmarked by February 14, 2005. The form requests basic information about the applicant, the title (or titles) of the newspaper(s) to be filmed, and the approximate number of pages to be filmed. In addition the applicant will be asked to write a brief explanation (no more than two pages) regarding the newspaper’s historical importance. The form can be obtained from the Clarke Historical Library’s website, (www.clarke.cmich.edu, click on the “Newspapers” link) or by writing the Clarke Library (Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859).

After receipt of the application, the Michigan Newspaper Project Steering Committee will review the forms, and if necessary, select from among competing applicants. Sponsors of projects selected for microfilming will be notified by March 18. Within thirty days of notification, successful applicants will be asked to submit a cash deposit equal to approximately one-half of the anticipated community contribution or make other satisfactory financial arrangements.

A separate grant application has been submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities by the Library of Michigan to begin digitizing selected newspapers that have been previously microfilmed. Word regarding the success of this proposal will not be received until May 2005; however, it represents an important next step in making local newspapers available to users within the state and throughout the nation. The Michigan Newspaper Project Steering Committee:

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**Cookbook Collection Donated to the Clarke**

One of the most memorable donations recently received by the Library is the two thousand five hundred cookbooks found in the Maureen Hathaway Michigan Culinary Archive. Ms. Hathaway has greatly enriched the Clarke through her generosity. Over the past generation cookbooks have changed from a genre of publications scorned by academic researchers into documents avidly used to document social history. Most cookbooks are published by community organizations. This adds to their appeal since they often represent real food eaten by real people.

In the fall of 2006 the Clarke tentatively plans to mount a major exhibit based on the Hathaway archive. For now, however, we offer something from the "lighter" side of the collection, the "Soda Fountain or Restaurant Reducing Diet" published in 1959 by the Union School Parents Club of Owosso. Sample entries include:

**Day 1**

Lunch
Ham Sandwich with Lettuce
Ice Cream

Dinner
Vegetable Soup
Hamburger on a Bun
Ice Cream

**Day 2**

Lunch
Tomato Soup
1 Bran Muffin
Ice Cream

Dinner
Chicken Soup
Egg and Lettuce Salad with Russian Dressing
1 Slice Buttered Toast
Ice Cream

The complete diet is available upon request.

We salute the Union School Parents Club for developing the first, and likely the last, ice cream every day, twice a day, diet, and thank Ms. Hathaway for sharing it, and a treasury of other culinary information, with the Library.
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A Final Word

It was a wonderful celebration, but I have to admit I am glad it’s over.

Preparing for the anniversary was a humbling experience. Selecting the 70 or so items that could be displayed from the wealth of more than 101,000 cataloged “units” was difficult. So much to choose from, but so little space to display our treasures. Researching the hard work of the staff, the contributions of the university, the thoughtful guidance of the Board of Governors, and the generosity of the Library’s many friends reminded me of how this Library was not the creation of one person but the result of the diligence of many. I was struck, over and over, by the collection of events and people that made this Library possible.

People who use special libraries often take institutions such as the Clarke for granted. It is as if a law of nature ordained that such a place should exist. But there is no such law of nature. Special libraries earn their title because they are just that, special. In truth the vagaries of personal interest, institutional policies, and financial shortfalls have doomed many promising special libraries. As a result there are only a handful of such institutions in the country.

Among that handful of institutions is the Clarke. In Mount Pleasant the elements of a successful library came together, stayed together, and made it possible for the Library to succeed. That good fortune we do indeed celebrate. But if one can learn anything from studying the Clarke’s past it is that the past is merely the prologue for the future. Through the anniversary celebration we honored our past, but we also used the occasion to take stock of the present and to glimpse, however dimly, the future. We have accomplished much, but there is still much to do. There are still treasures to be collected. There are still undergraduates who need the world that preceded them opened for their exploration. There are still senior researchers with important questions to be answered. There are still wonderful ways to reach out and share awareness of the Library and the knowledge found in our collection.

Over the years I have often compared the growth of the Library to a journey and invited our friends to come along for the trip. Like any grand adventure, the outcome of the journey is not preordained. As we move into unexplored land, the signposts are few and the possibility of the occasional wrong turn is always present. But any adventure has a certain amount of risk in it. And with good friends, good advice, and occasionally a bit of good luck, adventures can lead to good outcomes. Join me for the trip and help share the adventure. I can’t promise exactly where we will end up, but I can promise that it will be a journey worth taking.

Frank Boles
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