Different Perspectives about the Clarke Library

Last year, 3,622 people used the Clarke Library. What brought them to walk in the door, send an email, make a phone call or, in the case of 56 individuals, actually write an old fashioned letter? “I Used This Because…” the current exhibit in the Clarke Library, asks users why, in a world full of information resources, did they come to the Clarke?

In discussing the library’s holdings, user comments naturally grouped themselves around the three major themes documented by the library: Michigan history, children’s literature, and CMU history. Researchers identified many things that were important to them in each area.

**Michigan History**

Most frequently mentioned were items linked to our state’s history. For example, Professor Timothy Hall of the CMU History Department called out one of the library’s oldest treasures, the collection of bird’s-eye views. A nineteenth and early twentieth century phenomena, bird’s-eye views were illustrations of a community drawn as if the artist were a bird flying over the community.

*Continued on Page 2*
Different Perspectives about the Clarke Library

Continued from Page 1

My reason for choosing the bird’s-eye views would be the capacity of these documents to capture an image of the physical landscape of Michigan cities at a point in their history when such depictions are rare. A historian can recover a sense of the townscape and the countryside around it, as well as gaining important visual confirmation of the economic activity that drove the development of Michigan's communities and the patterns of residential and business development that those activities stimulated. The bird's-eye views proved valuable documentation of how Michigan's physical landscape developed in the later nineteenth century.

Timothy Hall

The Clarke’s collection of Michigan bird’s-eye views is the largest in the state and, nationally, second in size only to the Michigan views held by the Library of Congress.

Another important way the Clarke Library tells the story of Michigan communities is through its local newspaper collection, usually preserved on microfilm and increasingly available online in a digitized format. Professor Robert Knapp pointed to the importance of this resource.

Newspapers are an essential resource in a wide range of research projects. The Clarke Library’s CMU Online Digital Object Repository (CONDOR) provides web-based access to this important material. The searchable issues, delivered to your home computer through the miracle of the web, revolutionize our ability to investigate family history and local history. The focus on newspapers from Clare, Mt. Pleasant, and the surrounding area, opens up exciting avenues of discovery for professional historians and amateur researchers alike.

Robert Knapp

Since 1967, the Clarke Library has preserved on microfilm over 5,000,000 newspapers pages and more recently has begun to place this trove of local history material online at the Michigan Digital Newspaper portal found at http://condor.cmich.edu.

Although the bird’s-eye views and the Library’s collection of newspapers give researchers a summary picture of community history, many Clarke users selected manuscript collections that allowed them to drill down to a very personal piece of history. For example, Catherine Murray, a CMU community member, selected the Alexander B. Weeks papers.

These [Alexander B. Weeks] diaries were written in the 1850s by an itinerant Daguerreotypist. They include a wonderful account of a voyage to South America. As I worked through the transcription I discovered that he either worked for or partnered with two of the big names of the American Daguerreotype era, Jeremiah Gurney and Charles DeForest Fredericks.

It got even better when I realized that my transcripts were of interest to others. This led to correspondence with researchers and collectors in the US, Uruguay, and Brazil.

Catherine Murray

Peggy Brisbane, for many years one of CMU’s photographers, identified the Joan Memering Papers as a personal collection that held a deep value.

The Mt. Pleasant community came together starting in 1979 to sponsor more than 20 Cambodian refugee families. Joan Memering, a community journalist and adjunct professor at CMU, was a point person for helping the families and interviewed four of the refugees in great depth. Her interview and writing tell the international political story through their voices, about fleeing refugee camps, and coming to a welcoming new community.

Peggy Brisbane
A third personal collection, selected by CMU student Casey Kreiner, is the Russell Kirk Papers and, of course, Kirk’s deeply influential book, The Conservative Mind. Despite being over 60 years old, The Conservative Mind by Russell Kirk remains one of the most powerfully intellectual histories of an ideology. This piece of Michigan-based literature follows the evolution of conservatism from some of its earliest points with Edmund Burke during the French Revolution to the mid-1900s in the United States. The Conservative Mind is one of the greatest pieces of literature to ever emerge from Russell Kirk and his home of Mecosta County.

Casey Kreiner

Along with his many books, a substantial quantity of Russell Kirk’s papers are found in the Clarke, with the balance remaining at the Kirk Center in Mecosta, Michigan. Manuscript collections like the Kirk Papers, the Memering Papers, and the Weeks Papers, as well as the more than 4,800 other manuscript collections in the Clarke, play an important role in telling the personal histories of Michigan’s people.

Professor Robert Kohrman emphasized a different aspect of the Clarke’s holdings about Michigan: the important role played by corporate publications, such as those of the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad.

Michael Federspiel also used the Clarke’s collection to discuss the theme of leisure, but from a different perspective:

In the post-Civil War era, an increasing proportion of the country’s population was afforded more leisure time. . . . The Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad (GR&IRR) was among the first to recognize that there was great opportunity to market itself as presenting “superior attractions to the invalid, the tourist and the sportsman.” This booklet was one of the first of many that followed that promoted sporting activities and travel to some of Michigan’s more outstanding tourist destinations. In many ways, this booklet anticipates much of the locations and activity that dominate Michigan’s tourism-based economy today and also provides a taste of the rich collection of angling literature found in the Clarke Library.

Robert Kohrman

For generations summer vacation pictures have filled family photo albums, and my favorite [Clarke Historical Library] item is such an album. While this one shows activities familiar to all of us, it also documents the inspiration for the best Michigan-based fiction ever written. Compiled by Grace Hemingway for her daughter, Ursula, the album captures the Walloon Lake summers that her brother, Ernest, used as the basis for the timeless Nick Adams Stories.

Michael Federspiel

Continued on Page 4
At one level, the Hemingway material gathered together in the Clarke, made possible in part by support from the library’s Michigan Hemingway Endowment, is yet another group of “personal” collections, about a family of “summer people” who built a cottage in northern Michigan and returned year after year to enjoy their rural retreat. But this particular family counted among their children a future Nobel laureate in literature, something no one could have imagined when “Dr. Hemingway’s son Ernie” roamed the lakes and woods around Petoskey.

Ernest Hemingway’s *Nick Adams Stories* give a powerful and frequently read view of “Up North” in particular and Michigan in general. That it is fiction is in many ways unimportant. Many people have come to understand Michigan not through carefully researched volumes but through fictional accounts. Ernest Hemingway’s fiction is but one contribution to this large body of work and the large collection of Michigan fiction collected and preserved by the Clarke.

The historical items identified by our users, and other parts of the library’s historical holdings, taken together, create:

- A picture of the people who have lived in Michigan.
- A picture of the rich diversity found in the region.
- A picture of how the region has been understood, both by those who lived here and those who wrote about living here.

**Children’s Literature**

Beyond state history, several of the library’s users spoke about our children’s books, known collectively as the Lucile Clarke Children’s Memorial Library. Dr. Anne Alton captured well the sense of learning mixed with the sense of fun found in these books.

**Dating from the 14th century (though the Clarke’s is probably c. 1700s-1800s), the Hornbook was an early device used in reading instruction, its parchment being printed with the alphabet, the Lord’s Prayer, or a short syllabary and attached to a paddle-shaped piece of wood and covered with a thin sheet of translucent sheep’s or goat’s horn for protection. Children also used it for playing shuttlecock, an early fore-runner of badminton, and so it truly represents both instruction and delight, as well as embodying a sense of tangible history to hold in one’s hand.**

*Anne Alton*

As Professor Alton points out, learning and fun are both found in many parts of the collection, although not always so tightly linked as in a Hornbook. Professor Alton’s colleague, William Spruiell, points to a more “serious” volume, George Fisher’s *The Instructor, or, American Young Man’s Best Companion (1812):*

**The author is most likely a pseudonym. A quite similar book, The Instructor; or, Young Man’s Best Companion, written by a Mrs. Slack, had achieved wide popularity after being reprinted as The American Instructor by Benjamin Franklin’s publishing company in 1748.**

*William Spruiell*
If *The Instructor* focused on the practical side of life, Professor Susan Stan pointed to a different side of children’s books, with a very different content:

> Very seldom do young people realize that some of their favorite childhood characters first originated in books published in another country in another language. They assume, quite naturally that Pippi Longstocking, Heidi, and Pinocchio are somehow American inventions. Instead, these classic characters were first known and beloved by children in Sweden, Switzerland, and Italy.

The collection of nominees for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, sponsored by the International Board on Books for Young People [IBBY] . . . consists of almost one thousand children’s books from countries across the globe.

Susan Stan

If the IBBY collection helps students understand the origins of children’s literature, with a generous dollop of beautiful illustration, the Francis and Mary Lois Molson Art Collection take the wonder of illustration to new heights. Prior to the current exhibit, Dr. Francis Molson had written that “I believe in the quality of children’s books and art.” They are, he added, “incredible and beautiful.” “It’s much different to see the original artwork, than just the prints in books. Surely it will benefit students.”

The use of children’s books by students is exemplified by CMU student Casey Gamble, who, when asked to select a highlight from the library, picked a copy of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, illustrated by Arthur Rackham. Irving writes Sleepy Hollow with frightening and funny details that capture the image of the characters and setting perfectly, keeping your interest throughout the whole book.

Casey Gamble

Combining the Clarke’s extensive collection of Arthur Rackham’s illustrated publications with a classic such as *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* ties together many of the themes found in the children’s library:

- A representation of the best in children’s fiction, with an eye toward art as well as story.
- An international perspective.
- In a narrow sense, a collection that explains how a child learns to read but more broadly it shows the user what lessons we choose to teach children and how they are taught.

**Continued on Page 6**

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Please see pages 8-10 for a complete listing.
Different Perspectives about the Clarke Library
Continued from Page 5

University Archives

CMU’s University archives are also an important component of the Clarke Library. Robert Barclay described the extensive collection of University photographs the Clarke holds, the vast majority of them taken by himself and Peggy Brisbane.

During my 33 years photographing all aspects of the CMU faculty, staff, students and alumni, from 1980-2013, I have learned how photographs record CMU history. I worked with seven CMU presidents, four athletic directors and thousands of athletes. Along the way there were buildings that were demolished and so many new ones constructed.

Clarke Historical Library has the CMU photo archive. Peggy Brisbane and I photographed so many famous visitors to campus including former President Gerald Ford, Rev. Jesse Jackson, journalist and alumnus Lem Tucker, businessman Art Van, children’s TV host Captain Kangaroo (Bob Keeshan), actor and alumnus Jeff Daniels and so many others. We documented the groundbreaking, construction and ribbon-cutting ceremony of the Student Activity Center, Indoor Athletic Complex, Health Professions building, the medical school, Industrial Engineering building, College of Education building, etc. We are pleased to have our work archived at the Clarke.

Robert Barclay

And Something More

Added to the many observations of our researchers, two other voices, from the library staff, stand out. They speak to something that goes beyond the utility of the collection.

Bryan Whitledge, the library’s reference assistant, writes about a volume describing New France:

Histoire et Description Générale de la Nouvelle France [published in Paris in 1744] is among the most beautiful examples of the artistry and craftsmanship of the book that the Clarke holds. The speckled-calf bindings are the first indicator that this work is special. Opening the books, one touches the high-quality, hand-made paper. The text is the next sign of the exquisiteness of the tomes – perfectly registered and boldly printed. The tipped-in maps and other engravings are another sign of how the craftsmen incorporated functional information into the luxurious form of these books.

A reader of this work is aware that they are holding an important piece of history, simply because of the craftsmanship of these volumes.

Bryan Whitledge

Evelyn Leasher, the Clarke Library’s retired public services librarian, picked a different book, Ittolitologia Veronese del Museo Bazziano ora Annesso a quello del Conte Giovambattista Gazola e di altri Gabinetti di Fossili Vernosi (1796), chosen because of its beauty.

I think this book is beautiful. The plates are individually printed on each page and each plate is a work of art. The paper is laid. The book and its subject matter are indicative of their age. Altogether it is a wonderful example of the art of the book.

Evelyn Leasher

As the University approaches its 125th anniversary in 2017, interest in the school, and its history, are certain to grow, as will the use of this fabulous visual resource.
During the spring semester the Clarke Library will sponsor four presentations. We hope you can attend some or all of what we believe will be very interesting talks.

**Monday, February 24:**  
Patricia Lay-Dorsey: Exhibit Opening and Presentation *Falling Into Place*  
(Exhibit on Third Floor, Park Library)

In 1988, metro-Detroit artist Patricia Lay-Dorsey was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Over time, she noted that most of the stories about the disease were told from an outsider’s perspective: portraits painted of MS victims as tragic, brave, and fundamentally “other.” It was a viewpoint she both resented and resisted. In 2008, she turned her camera on herself, with the intention of showing the day-to-day life of someone with a disability from the inside. What she discovered was an emotional rollercoaster where she suddenly began to view herself as “other.” Eventually she came to realize that the viewpoint that was changing was her own. The exhibit and the presentation discuss this transformation, as does Patricia Lay-Dorsey’s website: http://www.patricialaydorsey.com.

**Wednesday, March 5:**  
Don Faber, author of *The Boy Governor: Stevens T. Mason and the Birth of Michigan Politics.*

The book is the definitive biography of Stevens T. Mason. At twenty-four, Mason became Michigan’s first governor and remains the youngest person in the nation’s history to serve as a state’s governor. George Weeks, a longtime Michigan political columnist and former member of the Clarke Board of Governors, described the book this way:

> With exhaustive research and engaging writing, Don Faber weaves an extraordinary account of one of Michigan’s most extraordinary political figures, the Boy Governor who led Michigan to statehood. Stevens T. Mason, branded ’Young Hotspur’ by President Andrew Jackson, achieved young and died young in the 19th century but remains a compelling story today for those who follow and pursue politics, with all its highs and lows.

Mr. Faber’s presentation is made possible by the John and Audrey Cumming Endowment.

**Monday, March 17:**  
William Rapai, author of *The Kirtland’s Warbler: The Story of a Bird’s Fight Against Extinction and the People Who Saved It*

At a time when the world is seeing its species rapidly go extinct, the Kirtland’s warbler is not just a survivor, it’s a rock star. The Kirtland’s warbler is the rarest warbler species in North America and will always be rare because of its persnickety nesting preferences. But in the 1970s, when the total population fell below 400 birds, a small group of dedicated biologists, researchers, and volunteers vowed to save the Kirtland’s warbler despite long odds.

The Kirtland’s warbler is often described as a “bird of fire” for its preference for nesting in areas cleared by wildfire. But it also warrants the name for the passion it ignites in humans. Both tragic and uplifting, the story of this intriguing bird is a stirring example of how strong leadership, vision, commitment, sustained effort, and cooperation can come together to protect our natural world.

*Continued on Page 8*
Continued from Page 7

Monday, April 14:
“Gentle Friday: A CMU Tradition” discussed by Marcie Otteman, Cynthia Drake, and Bryan Whitledge

“Gentle Friday,” a CMU tradition going back to the 1960s, was invented to help relieve tension on campus and continues to serve as a unique reminder to CMU that all of us benefit from a culture built on the concepts of civility, good will, and a free ice cream cone. Cynthia Drake, editor of CMU’s Alumni publication Centralight (which will feature an article about Gentle Friday in its Spring issue), Marcie Otteman, the Executive director of CMU Alumni Relations and Executive Editor of Centralight, and Bryan Whitledge, the reference assistant at the Clarke Historical Library, will each contribute to the discussion.

The reception for this event will be co-sponsored by the CMU Alumni Association and the Clarke Library.

Please join us for these presentations!

Thanks to Our Donors!

In 2013, almost 200 individuals generously supported the Clarke Library, either through a financial gift or through the donation of items to be added to the Library. We would like to acknowledge and thank each of the individuals whose generosity has helped advance the Library’s work: Thanks to all those who are listed below (an * denotes a memorial gift):

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**Michigan Hemingway Endowment Campaign**,

allowing us to approximately triple the size of the Endowment and thus increase the funding available to document this important aspect of our state's history.

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*Continued on Page 10*
Continued from Page 9

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A Final Word

An exhibit asking people to pick what they find important in the library is a wonderful way to celebrate the Clarke’s sixtieth anniversary. A tremendous amount of energy and time, not to mention a good deal of money, has been expended to develop the library. Asking people who make use of the result of that work to discuss what they find important is an interesting way to view the collection, and take stock of our progress.

The exhibit makes clear that the results of sixty years of collecting have been many, multi-faceted, and in some cases, truly spectacular. Indeed looking at the exhibit I am struck as much by what is not present as what was selected. There are wonders in the stacks that are equal to any of the items on display, but which did not have the good fortune to be selected for the show. It was an act of self-restraint to not call up a person or two and “suggest” that they pick a few other items.

What might I have asked to be included? Rich Native American material remains in the stacks. Michigan’s logging heritage failed to be mentioned. A deep collection of early printed material, including the first book printed in the Old Northwest Territory and the first book printed in Michigan, are still on the shelf. Certainly, I would have thought someone would select the first edition of the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Selections from the Reed Draper Angling collection and the Presidential campaign biography collection both certainly are candidates for display, as are some wonderful pieces of fiction set in Michigan. And there is always the bronze cast of Abraham Lincoln’s hand that has delighted school tours for literally generations. Asking a fourth grader if he or she wants to shake hands with President Lincoln never fails to work its magic (and get a few groans when the bronze cast is actually produced).

The depth of the library is so deep no single show truly can do it justice.

Much of the public’s awareness of the library rests in our exhibits, the speakers the library regularly brings to campus, and our growing online presence. In professional circles, we are well known for our newspaper microfilming and digitizing programs that first saved and are now making available online a rich heritage of local history. These are all important aspects of the library’s activities that I firmly believe we need to both continue and grow. But the library’s heart, the core of what Dr. Clarke founded so many years ago, is the collection. Everything else we do draws upon and develops out of the collection.

The library is, fundamentally, about the stuff, stuff capable of doing amazing things. The library is about finding, acquiring, preserving, and making available for use a wonderful array of material that tells the stories and explains the lives of the people who live in Michigan or which helps us understand the way children come to learn about the world. That material is a unique tool that allows knowledge and wisdom to cross boundaries of time and space, bringing together individuals separated by generations or even centuries in a very personal and intimate way. To read a letter, to look at an enclosed photograph that was attached to that letter, is to enter into the life of someone who may no longer walk among us, but whose voice, captured in these documents, we can still hear.

As the article about the exhibit makes clear, researchers have found a wide range of material important, and have used items in ways I suspect Dr. Clarke never envisioned. But planting a seed, as he did sixty years ago when he founded the library through a gift to his alma mater, was an act of faith, faith that the future would continue to value and use things he believed to be important. Over the past sixty years, his act of faith was richly rewarded, and I believe it will continue to enrich and ennoble those who make use of the library and its collections far into the future.

Frank Boles
The CMU Friends of the Libraries is a membership organization that supports, through financial and other gifts, the programs of the Charles V. Park Library, home to the University Library, the Clarke Historical Library, and Global Campus Library Services.

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