THE CENTRAL LIBRARIES

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
Ithaca, New York
The Cornell University Central Libraries

Whether a great library makes or brings into being a great university or whether the converse is true may be debatable, but experience shows that the two are always found together.

Stephen A. McCarthy, Director
The Cornell University Libraries
CORNELL, like other distinguished universities, measures its intellectual resources in terms of a number of factors: its students and faculty and the tenor of their scholarly activity, its physical plant, and, always, its library. Though Cornell has traditionally enjoyed eminence in each of these areas, the facilities for its library, magnificent at the turn of the century, had by 1950 become little more than quaintly archaic. Though the University’s library contained more total volumes than all but seven or eight American university libraries, the limitations of its physical structure taxed the patience of students, faculty, and administrators alike, and made scholarship quite as hazardous as it was potentially fruitful.

With the completion, in 1961, of its modern Research Library, and the renovation, in 1962, of its venerable University Library, Cornell regained, for the most part, the superiority it had previously enjoyed.

Though Cornell’s library system encompasses more than a dozen impressive departmental and college libraries, the heart of the University’s library resources is found in the novel library complex at the southwest corner of the Arts and Sciences quadrangle.

The John M. Olin Library is probably the most modern in the United States devoted specifically to graduate and faculty scholarship. The old university library, now called the Uris Library, although it retains its old facade, has been renovated to meet the needs of a student body that is ten times as large as that for which it was designed.

In architecture the new research library was designed to harmonize with the older buildings that surround it. The aim was to provide a modern structure that would serve efficiently while at the same time preserving the esthetic value of the heart of the Cornell campus.

The contents of both library buildings reflect the astonishing diversity and intellectual vitality of Cornell’s varied colleges and divisions. Their collections and open stack offer abundant resources for virtually every known academic pursuit in both the humanities and the sciences. They are designed to serve—with the greatest possible efficiency—the students and faculty now, and in the years ahead.
A BRIEF HISTORY

When the University opened its doors to students in 1868, the library contained about 18,000 volumes, temporarily housed in two rooms of Morrill Hall. Morrill was the only building on the Quadrangle that had a roof on it at the time.

New library quarters on the ground floor of the new McGraw Hall were occupied in the fall of 1872. By that time the collection had grown to 30,000 volumes.

During the 1870’s, the library grew steadily. In the 1880’s, as the book collections continued to expand, a plan was put forward for the construction of an appropriate building to house the collections.

The old university library building, the gift of Henry W. Sage, was dedicated in October, 1891. Designed by William H. Miller ’72, of Ithaca, it was fashioned to accommodate 450,000 volumes. The University confidently expected that this capacity—four times that actually needed for the collection at hand in 1891—would provide generously for expansion in the future. But both Cornell and its library developed in swift, sure strides that exceeded all expectations. By 1910, the librarian was forecasting that unless more stack space was found, it would be necessary to put part of Cornell’s burgeoning collections in boxes.

By 1955 the old library housed more than twice the number of volumes that it was built to accommodate. Not only that, an additional 300,000 books were in storage. The library had passed the one-million mark in 1938 after just 70 years of operation. The two-millionth book was added in December, 1958. By the summer of 1962, the total holdings of the library had reached 2,278,046 volumes, making it the seventh largest university library in the country.

Through the years, the Cornell library has grown steadily, both in quality and quantity, and in service to readers, despite handicaps of space. Its aggressive program of acquisition has provided for constantly expanding research and scholarship. It has been a bulwark in helping Cornell to maintain its position among the leading universities.
CORNELL’S
SPECIAL
COLLECTIONS

A library must have both breadth and depth in its collections in all subjects. But that is only one strength. Special collections worthy of particular notice, collections that cannot be duplicated elsewhere and that often bring the world’s scholars through the library’s doors, are perhaps equally important. At least five of Cornell’s specialized collections give it national or world pre-eminence.

Cornell’s Wordsworth Collection, assembled largely through the generosity of Victor Emanuel ’19, its Petrarch Collection, the gift of Willard Fiske, its Slavery and Anti-Slavery Collection, and its Witchcraft Collection, probably are not excelled anywhere in the world—either in quality or size.

Its Dante Collection, also the gift of Willard Fiske, is challenged only by that in Florence, Italy. The Icelandic Collection, consisting of about 27,000 volumes, is one of the most comprehensive in the world. The Wason Collection of writings on China and Southeast Asia now numbers almost 100,000 volumes, and its value is being augmented steadily by large additions to the Southeast Asia section, now one of the nation’s principal repositories for such material.
Four smaller but extremely valuable collections relating to modern authors illustrate another side of the Library's resources. The Cornell Joyce Collection, acquired in 1957, is the world's largest collection of manuscripts and correspondence of the great Irish author. Under terms of the will of George Jean Nathan, the library has received his fine theatrical library of 3,000 volumes and an invaluable collection of letters, play manuscripts, and other documents relating to the American theatre.

The library's collection of books and pamphlets by and about Theodore Roosevelt, the gift of the late Willard J. Crawford, Jr. '07, is second in importance only to that of the Roosevelt Memorial Association Library. Research on the Irish dramatist George Bernard Shaw will be facilitated by the important collection of books and Shavian writings being developed by Bernard Burgunder. A special collection of yet another sort is the Collection of Regional History and University Archives.

These collections are representative of a large number of special collections enriching the library. Many of them have been assembled or acquired for Cornell by alumni or by the Cornell Library Associates.

THE JOHN M. OLIN LIBRARY

The completion of the John M. Olin research library in 1961 gave Cornell—for the first time in fifty years—a building large enough to house its principal collections. The fully air-conditioned building provides space for more than two million volumes and has made it possible to bring together books stored in a number of locations on campus. The research library affords, again for the first time at Cornell, space for a properly equipped Rare Book Room and for the larger special collections. It also contains efficient and comfortable facilities for the library administration and staff, whose work had become increasingly difficult under cramped conditions. The library's "technical services" work room is one of the most efficiently arranged in the world.
The primary purpose of the research library was to provide reading, research, and other work space for the University's graduate students and faculty members, as well as for gifted undergraduates. For this purpose the Olin Library provides 350 carrels for graduate students and 100 faculty studies located in the stack areas, where researchers will be near the books they need for their work. There are graduate study rooms, conference rooms, and other special work rooms, a general reading room, a microtext room, and a periodicals section in which Cornellians have access to the most widely used of a total of 20,000 periodicals. In its smallest details, Olin Library shows the care taken by its architects to consider the practical needs of all those who use the building.
Graduate students' study rooms are assigned to floors which contain much of the literature relevant to each field. Typing rooms are included on each floor so that research papers and graduate theses can be prepared in convenient proximity to the source materials.

The first floor of the Olin Library represents a radical departure from traditional design. Instead of an imposing stairway or other architectural decoration, the entrance to the building has glass doors, a minimum grade, and a sweeping view of the lighted interior. Just inside the entrance are reading rooms, the reference and circulation desks, and the periodicals section, as well as a sunlit sculpture court. Also on the first floor are the Rare Book Room and a number of the more distinguished special collections.
THE
URIS
LIBRARY

The Uris Library is an open-stack library with a shelf capacity of more than 100,000 volumes. It seats 1100 readers. The plan of the renovated building makes available a variety of study locations suited to students’ varied needs. The remodeled structure includes reading rooms, study alcoves seating from two to four readers, informal study rooms, and typing rooms.

There are special rooms for the use of phonographs and tape-recording equipment for persons alone or in groups. There is also a lecture room with sound and projection facilities for special library lectures.

A primary aim of the Uris Library is to bring students and books as close together as possible. The stack areas in the Uris Library, except for reserve books in great demand, are open to all readers and have study desks conveniently situated throughout. Thus students are free to seek out their material for themselves and consult it close at hand.
In its carefully selected collection, the Uris Library contains books (many in multiple copies) needed for outside reading in connection with current courses and a general collection of books for exploration, recreation, and stimulation. It contains, too, a reference collection of several thousand bibliographies, encyclopedias, handbooks, and other works, and a collection of about 150 current periodicals. The material in the library is to be kept under constant review—new titles are to be added and old titles withdrawn systematically.

It is hoped that at some time in the student's undergraduate career he will be drawn to the larger collections of the adjacent Olin Library. The two collections are planned to complement each other in service to the University's broad program of study and research.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Cornell's new central libraries are intended to serve as a starting point for a rededication to the Cornell Idea, and to provide for students and faculty new encouragement in the pursuit of truth and wisdom. The library system at Cornell once again is admirably equipped to serve as the fountainhead of all scholarship on campus. Cornell's continued leadership in many disciplines—including a number of new endeavors—appears assured in the years ahead.
FLOOR PLANS
JOHN M. OLIN LIBRARY
245,000 sq. ft.
950 readers
2,000,000 volumes