

# History of Van Wormer Library

## *“A Look Back: The History of University of Cincinnati Libraries”*

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As University Libraries celebrates the 25th anniversary of Langsam Library this fall, we thought it appropriate to share the history of libraries at UC, starting with the University's founding in 1819 and ending with the modern-day library filled not only with books, but also with technology. Following is Part I of a three-part series titled “A Look Back: The History of University of Cincinnati Libraries.”



*Van Wormer*

### **(Part I) The Beginnings of the UC Libraries**

When the University of Cincinnati was founded in 1819, a library was not seen as a necessary part of an academic institution. Today, the University of Cincinnati Libraries\* contain over 2.8 million volumes and serve as both a research, and often social, hub of life on campus. This change did not come about suddenly. Rather, it was a gradual process that can be traced through the various buildings the library has occupied.

Starting in 1875, a selection of books could be found in the various class and lecture rooms of the University Building, located on McMicken Avenue. These materials were selected for daily reference use and were acquired through funds appropriated to the various departments. The number of books selected must have been limited, as students were advised to make use of the local public libraries for their study and research needs. In 1883-84, a small working library was established in the Academic Department (College of Liberal Arts), and in 1892-93, mention is first made of departmental libraries, collections that no doubt developed from the small numbers of books located in class, seminar, and lecture rooms. Also in 1892, William Everett Waters, professor of Greek and comparative philology, was appointed the first University Librarian, serving until 1894. He was succeeded by Frederick Leopold Schoenle, professor of Greek and comparative philology.

In 1895, a University Library was established with the opening of the General Library on the third floor of McMicken Hall. Three librarians presided over this stage in the Libraries' development. Schoenle continued to serve as librarian until 1896 when another faculty member, Thomas Herbert Norton, professor of chemistry, who

served from 1896 to 1900, replaced him. From 1900 to 1901, the General Library housed a collection of approximately 20,000 volumes. Departmental libraries were located in seminar rooms adjacent to the classrooms of their respective departments. The student population at UC had grown to about 500, and increasingly the need for a new library was felt.

In 1898, the University Board of Directors took the first step toward building this new library by accepting a generous gift from Asa Van Wormer of 1,000 shares of stock in the Cincinnati Street Railway Co., worth \$50,000. This was used to build the Van Wormer Library, on which was placed a stone tablet with the words “erected with the money given by Asa Van Wormer in memory of his wife, Julie Van Wormer, and himself.” This library, with a final cost of \$60,000, opened in the summer of 1901.

Van Wormer was designed “in accordance with the most approved modern plans of library construction” with the intention that the building would serve the university for many years. On the main floor, the reading and periodical rooms were located on either side of the rotunda, in which was placed the delivery desk. Connected directly with the rotunda were the librarians’ office and the cataloging room. A five-story book stack with metal shelving and glass floors was in the rear of the building. The stack area was accessible from the rotunda and the cataloging room. On the upper floors were the quarters of the Ohio Historical and Philosophical Society, as well as research and seminar rooms. On the bottom level were seminar, receiving, and packing rooms.

The Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio maintained a separate collection in Van Wormer. This collection, consisting of 20,000 volumes and 40,000 pamphlets, was moved to the library in 1902 as the result of an agreement between the University Board of Directors and the Society. Another separate unit in Van Wormer was the University’s first bookstore. In 1904, the Board approved the request of three students, Isabella and Ruby Sears and Sarah Bedinger, to establish a bookstore. Their store sold textbooks, pencils, notebooks, and other related materials. It thrived so that the shop was moved to McMicken Hall in June 1905 where it continued its success.



*The former lobby and service desk in Van Wormer*

The seminar rooms were also a new feature of Van Wormer. They had been considered essential by the faculty of various departments, since graduate study was expanding at that time. At the turn of the century, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy had been added to those conferred by UC. Also in 1900, the departments of French and German were added. Furthermore, in 1901, the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) established a graduate fellowship in American history with a \$100. All of this

contributed to greater use of the new library, which was open 8 am-5 pm on weekdays.

The move into Van Wormer meant more to the library than just a change of buildings. The first permanent full-time librarian, Harriet Evan Hodges, was appointed in 1901. In addition to the library director, eight other library staff members worked in Van Wormer when it opened in 1901: assistant at the delivery desk, head cataloger, assistant

cataloger, accession assistant, classifier, assistant in library, student assistant, and messenger boy. The library salary budget was increased five-fold and the book fund was quadrupled.

By 1904, a student body of approximately 600 and a faculty of about 150 had a library containing about 40,000 volumes at their disposal. Though only a few years old, the library was already feeling the need for more space and for increased book funds. The 1903 annual report of the University Board of Directors reported: One of the great needs of the University continues to be books for the several departments. There is on the library waiting list of each department a large number of volumes which were urgently needed to supply the students of the University with the reference works necessary to adequate completion of the courses now offered in the University. Great effort should be made to supply this need.

Charles Albert Read succeeded Hodges as Librarian in 1906, continuing until 1922. In the Archives and Rare Books Department is a list of "Library Rules" in effect during Read's administration. They cover such areas as hours, registration, circulation, reserves, books, and reference materials. Rule number 6 is entitled "Silence," and states: "In order that the work in the Library may go on without interruption, it is necessary to observe silence in the Library. Anyone who disregards this request may be barred from all rights and privileges of the Library."

The size of the Library collection grew steadily, with the library owning 20,000 volumes in 1900; 40,000 in 1904; 70,000 in 1915; and 108,699 in 1930. In addition, the collections of the college, departmental, and other special libraries added to the number of volumes held by UC libraries. In 1930, these libraries reported their holdings: Applied Arts: 4,532 volumes; Engineering and Commerce: 9,316; Nursing and Health Library: 1,815; Observatory Library: 5,031; Chemistry Library: 9,9094; John Miller Burnham Library of Classics and Romance Philology: 9,772; YMCA Night Law School Library: 4,500; and eight other unspecified departmental libraries: 4,500 volumes.

During this early period of library development, the donation of several collections substantially added to the Libraries' growth. In 1898 William A. Procter, of Procter and Gamble, donated the Robert A. Clarke Collection as the core for building the new General Library. Rich in Americana, the Clarke Collection, which consisted of 6,759 volumes, was appraised then at a value of \$50,000. In 1899, Procter donated the Enoch T. Carson Shakespearian Library together with the chemistry library of Professor T. H. Norton. Other donations to the library were received from Eugene F. Bliss, Judge Moses F. Wilson, Matthew Thomas, Laura Seasongood, William E. Merrill, Judge M.F. Force, Professor E. M. Brown, Alexander Hill, Leon de Gisbert, and John Miller Burnam. A local German author, Gustav Bruehl, donated a valuable collection of Americana and travel literature. In 1909, one of the first endowed book funds, the Hillebrand Fund, was established for the purchase of German and French literature. To be continued in the next issue of Source.

*\* Count includes University Libraries plus the Law and Medical Center Libraries.*