

RESEARCH ARCHIVES

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The year just completed has been a most precarious one for the Research Archives. It began with a critical threat to the integrity of the physical existence of the collections as we have known them and proceeded through a serious discussion of the conceptual existence of the Research Archives and its place in the Oriental Institute. I am happy to inform you at the outset of this report that, despite the anguish of the process, the Research Archives remains a vital, central component of the Oriental Institute.

As readers of previous reports from the Research Archives are fully aware, we have been facing a critical shortage of space for a number of years. By the summer of 1992 our book stacks were completely full, and we were in the process of ordering substantial additional shelving to accommodate some of the overflow and to allow us additional space for approximately two years of routine acquisitions. It was at this point that the central event of the year began to unfold.

In June, a routine inspection of the Persian Gallery of the Museum by structural engineers led to the conclusion that the floor of the Research Archives was very seriously overloaded. The bulk of our collections at that time was shelved on seven banks of free-standing, eight foot high book stacks at the southern end of the reading room of the Research Archives in an area almost exactly spanning the Persian Gallery and consequently un-reinforced by pillars from below. The inspector's report gave us only one option: to reconfigure the reading room book stacks, so that their height did not exceed four feet. We considered the various choices this left us. To accommodate the collections within the existing perimeter of the library under these terms we would have had to remove all the tables from the reading room. By removing all work space in the Research Archives, we would have had to permit books to circulate and effectively banish graduate students and visiting scholars from the building because of the limits of available office space. We decided that such a solution required an unacceptable compromise of the style, function, and principles of organization of the Research Archives.

We therefore decided that it was necessary to move more than half of the books on the reading room floor entirely out of the confines of the Research Archives, and the remaining book stacks and study space had to be reconfigured to reduce the load on the floor by half. Having made this decision we were presented with the added prospect of complying with the new Americans with Disabilities Act, the terms of which required us to reduce the number of banks of stacks from seven to six, to allow for the free passage of wheel-chairs. This increased the proportions of the collection for which we needed to find new space.

Two alternatives presented themselves. The books either would have to be removed to remote storage or space would have to be found elsewhere within the

Oriental Institute. Those members of the faculty and staff who had been required to cope with paging books from remote storage in the old Oriental Institute Library and at other institutions urged us to avoid the first option if it were possible. With the full support and cooperation of William Sumner, Director of the Oriental Institute, and the staff of the Oriental Institute Museum, we came to the conclusion that the only viable solution to the problem was for the Research Archives to retake possession of the mezzanine (i.e., third floor balcony), used by the original Oriental Institute Library, and the two offices adjoining the mezzanine on the third floor. For the past two decades the mezzanine was used to house a portion of the Museum Archives—field records, director's files, collections of scholar's papers, and so on. John Larson, Museum Archivist, performed extraordinary duty under extreme circumstances by dropping all his plans for the summer and moving the Museum Archives materials into utterly inadequate new quarters in the object storage areas in the basement (see p. 129). As if this were not enough, we also had to clear out the two offices adjoining the mezzanine, which were occupied by Professor Walter Farber (room 302) and the editorial office of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (room 303). Walter Farber, in turn, bumped Research Associate Abbas Alizadeh out of room 304, who was forced to triple up in a single office with Research Associate Tony Wilkinson and Visiting Professor Israel Eph'al in room 212. The editorial office of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* has still not found adequate office space. As you might imagine, I suffered for a time as the least favorite person at the Oriental Institute. I must again offer my profoundest gratitude to all the faculty and staff who have accommodated the inconvenience resulting from this disaster.

Some minor remodeling of the new space was required. We needed to reopen the connecting stairway between the reading room and mezzanine that had been blocked from both sides for many years, to rewire the lighting in the new space on the third floor, and to construct a doorway across the third floor corridor to enclose the new library space. We also took the opportunity to give the whole area a new coat of paint. While this remodeling proceeded, Terry Wilfong and I reassessed the shelving categories of the collections, designed the new configuration, and planned and ordered the new low shelving required for the reading room. During the two weeks of this phase of the move we were able to keep the Research Archives open to the public, but all routine business—office work, ordering processing, cataloguing of books, and research—ceased from the end of July until the academic year began in October.

The organization of any move is a tricky business. Moving a library is additionally complicated because books have to be kept in correct shelf order. In this case we were fortunate that the move was short-distance, so we were not faced with packing and transporting the books by vehicle, and the inevitable loss and damage suffered under such circumstances. Despite this small consolation, we still had to remove all the books from the existing tall shelving before that shelving could be dismantled, moved, and reassembled in the new space on the third floor. The books were moved to every available surface in the reading room, and the tall stacks, some of which had sat in place for more than thirty years, and for which there are no available spare parts, were disassembled. Once the shelving was reconfigured and reassembled on the third floor, we could begin to move

portions of the collection selected to be shelved in the new space, freeing a small area in which to maneuver on the reading room floor. This having been achieved, we again had to consolidate all the books remaining in the reading room in the southern end, in order to accommodate the installation of the new low stacks in the center of the room. By the end of the process, we had moved each book in the Research Archives five different times.

The final configuration of the Research Archives is, in the short term, very satisfactory. We solved the critical issue of the overloaded floor; we were not forced to reduce the space available to users; we were not forced to make use of remote storage; the office and storage areas were not sacrificed; and the physical accessibility of the collections was not compromised, indeed, it may have been improved.

While the planning and execution of the move were being carried out by the library staff, we were also engaged in a discussion of the even more serious issue of the future of the collections. As of last summer, additional space for the Research Archives was not included in the developing plan for an expansion of the Oriental Institute; at the time the plan was limited to providing additional space for various departments of the Oriental Institute Museum. The staff of the Research Archives had long been warning of the approaching critical mass of the collections and advocating, from the beginning of the expansion project, the inclusion of the library in the plans. After the structural problems had become apparent and the encroachment of the library perimeter into office space on the third floor made the space problems a personal issue for members of the faculty, there was an accelerated interest in the future of the Research Archives and a number of ideas were proposed. Among the proposals were that the Research Archives cease acquiring materials for the collection or that remote storage should again be considered, but these ideas were again rejected as being in opposition to the basic principles of the Research Archives. After much thought and discussion it was finally decided to include the future space requirements of the Research Archives in the plans for building expansion. This suggestion received unanimous support and scores of letters from scholars outside the Oriental Institute were written in support of the plan. The schematic design phase of the building expansion, including additional space for the Research Archives, passed the first stage of the formal process in late September 1992 with its acceptance by the President of the University of Chicago.

Most of the activities of the staff of the Research Archives during the past year have been consumed by efforts to learn the new layout of the library, to teach it to our users, and to catch up with the routine activities—ordering, processing, and cataloguing of books—suspended during the move. At the time of this writing, we have regained virtually all the territory we lost during that eight week hiatus.

We have been able to continue, without interruption, the publication of the Oriental Institute Research Archives Acquisitions List [RAAL]. We have revised our publication schedule, probably permanently, from four times per year to twice per year. Two of these double issues appeared during the past year:

Numbers 3–4 appeared in October 1992 (442 pages, including 989 catalogued items with an indexed analytical list of 4,229 essays, articles, and

reviews, covering acquisitions in the Research Archives during the period February–July 1992)

Numbers 5–6 appeared in May 1993 (396 pages, including 798 catalogued items with an indexed analytical list of 3,568 essays, articles, and reviews, covering acquisitions in the Research Archives during the period August 1992–January 1993)

We expect that the next double issue will appear on schedule at the end of the summer of 1993.

Our on-line catalogue continues to develop as an index to the collections of the Research Archives and as a free standing research tool. It now holds 24,608 records, of which 9,541 were added this year. Approximately another six thousand records also prepared during the past year will be loaded into the database later this summer. The crisis of last summer kept us from making virtually any substantive progress on the retrospective cataloguing project. In the coming year we will establish the procedures that will allow us to make steady and deliberate progress on this most important area of development. We are also optimistic that we will be able to develop a support for a wider variety of access platforms for the on-line catalogue. Currently accessible only on Macintosh platforms with connections to the University of Chicago's computer network, we are working on developing access software to broaden our base to include DOS and Windows operating systems, and to make the catalogue available to the wider audience with access to the Internet.

One of the most exciting developments in the Research Archives during the past year represents an entirely new component of the resources of the library. Scholarship in the Humanities, and particularly in Classics, has begun to recognize the extraordinary power, flexibility, and complexity of digitally based resources. Already available commercially on CD-ROM (in addition to the various encyclopedias and 'trade' publications that are more widely known) are the central groups of classical and biblical texts. Other projects are developing the publication, also on CD-ROM, of large pictorial databases of ancient art. Other databases of visual and textual material are being constructed in many locations around the world with free direct access being granted and encouraged by the proprietors. Communication between scholars over the various networks is becoming a regular and necessary part of daily business. It has been my pleasure to work in close cooperation with John Sanders, Head of the Oriental Institute Computer Laboratory, to acquire and to make available the hardware required for access to these resources. In addition to the two terminals now dedicated to the on-line catalogue, we now have a public access Macintosh dedicated to serving a number of resources resident on hard disk and on CD-ROM, and an IBM-compatible computer giving access to another series of hard disk-based resources. We are now in the process of acquiring the equipment to provide two full service public access work stations. To complete these work stations we need two Macintosh Centris computers, one IBM-PC (or compatible), three large screen monitors, one CD-drive, one laser-disk drive, and a one- or two-gigabyte hard disk drive.

The development of local and network-based digital resources has added an interesting and challenging component to the already manifold duties of the staff

of the Research Archives. Because of the accessibility of many of these resources from remote locations, it is no longer the responsibility of the librarian to acquire actual physical copies of many documents. It is of utmost importance, however, that librarians are aware of the existence of the resources and that they act as intermediaries between the local consuming community and the electronic information sources. The staff of the Research Archives finds itself spending an increasingly important proportion of time investigating, cataloging, citing, and distributing information on network resources. We are indeed at the beginning of an information revolution. As the year ended, the Oriental Institute Computer Laboratory and the Research Archives are in the final stages of implementing a pair of important international scholarly tools. By the time this report appears in print, ANE, the on-line academic discussion group on the ancient Near East will be operating, and our archive of documents will be available internationally over the Internet.

It has been my exceedingly good fortune to have had the help and advice of Terry Wilfong and Paul Cobb during the past year. Both performed extraordinary duty under miserable circumstances during the crisis last summer; but more importantly, they provided the users of the Research Archives the benefits of their astonishing knowledge and expertise. Paul has left us to spend a year or two continuing his study of Arabic in Cairo. Terry will continue, in various capacities, to work in the Research Archives next year while completing his dissertation.

Finally, this summer is something of a milestone, both personally and corporately. In May, I celebrated the completion of ten years as Research Archivist, and at the end of the summer we completed the second decade of the Research Archives itself. In these first twenty years, the library has grown from a small local reference collection to a resource of international repute. I urge all friends of the library to stop by for a visit.

In the year ending March 1, 1993, the Research Archives acquired and catalogued 2,120 items with the following results:

	<i>April 1992–March 1993</i>	<i>Total</i>
Monographs and Series	979	18,905
Journals	219	8,456
Total Books	1,198	27,361
Maps	72	
Pamphlets	192	
Data files	1	