RESEARCH ARCHIVES

Charles E. Jones

The mission of the Research Archives is to provide quick and easy access to the corpus of published scholarship on the ancient Near East. During the year ending in June 2000 we have been able to push forward two projects that support the goals of this mission in new and interesting ways: the renovation of the reading room and the development of the on-line catalog.

Renovation of the Reading Room

Through the initiative of the Elizabeth Morse and Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trusts, and supported with ample and generous matching funds from a multitude of friends, we were finally able to proceed in December 1999 with the long-awaited renovation of the Elizabeth Morse Genius Reading Room and the electrical systems in the Research Archives.

For much of the autumn, electrical contractors worked behind the scenes, inching their way through basements, attics, hollow walls, and ceilings to find ways to bring new sources of power and acceptable wiring up to the library. Working in many cases with the original (and not always well charted) seventy-year-old systems they were able to replace and update all of the wiring serving this area of the building, and to prepare for the installations that would take place in later phases of the renovation project.

Some components of the Research Archives collection had been packed and stored last summer in anticipation of the project, but it was on the first day of the winter vacation that the serious work began. In order to remove the decaying cork floor, it was necessary to evacuate the reading room entirely: books, shelves, tables, and chairs. In addition, the library offices had to be packed and moved, and temporary office space claimed and set up on the upper level of the library — and all of this in a single week! Despite the time pressure, we were able to accomplish this job on schedule to allow the contractors to encase the built-in shelving in plastic sheeting and begin the machine shredding of the floor.

It was an interesting process to observe, and I'm pleased to say that we had a hard-working and imaginative crew on the job — they were able to offer interesting and useful solutions to many of the problems encountered along the way.

Once the wiring was installed, the flooring crew, plasterers, and painters were able to complete the projects in time for us to rebuild the bookshelves, replace the books, install the tables and chairs, unpack, reconstruct the offices, and prepare for the reopening as scheduled on 19 January.

The result is superb! The new cork floor, matching the original pattern of the floor, shines under its coat of wax. It brightens the room in a way I had not anticipated. It is also much cleaner — the old floor was so badly worn in many places that the cork was disintegrating and producing mountains of dust. The new appearance greatly enhances the pleasantly cool silence of the reading room. It is a joy to work here.

More importantly however, we are now able to offer users in the library a reliable and properly grounded electrical source at each table as well as 10baseT Ethernet connections. This gives readers in the Research Archives full and speedy access to the world of information and to the tools available in their own laptop computers, in the Oriental Institute's file servers, in the University of Chicago's resources, and in the world at large. It's a great leap forward. Getting up to walk into the reading room as I write this, I see nine such computers connected and in use, as well as the two public access terminals we provide.

Of the reading room renovations there remains a single component to complete. We await the reduplication and redesign of the original lighting fixtures (which are now installed in the ground floor corridor of Harper Hall) to replace the unattractive fluorescent fixtures installed some decades ago.

Development of the On-Line Catalog

As we announced in the last *Annual Report*, we were then prepared to begin the installation and testing of the new Internet accessible version of the on-line catalog of the Research Archives. As users of the Research Archives will remember, we have had a locally accessible electronic catalog available for nearly a decade. It was a nice piece of software, easy to use, and reasonably easy to maintain, but it was platform specific (Apple), slow, and we were hampered by procedures we had developed to work around local cataloging problems. We had recognized for some time that we needed to develop the catalog to address these and other issues, and a year ago we had the machinery and the software in place. Shortly before the closing of the reading room for the renovation, we were finally able to install the server in the newly developed — and finally secure — server room of the Computer Laboratory. With John Sanders' usual energetic and indispensable assistance we put the catalog on-line, got it operational, and prepared for testing while the library was closed. Following quite a lot of work, we were finally prepared to announce it publicly at the beginning of February. It has been more successful than we had anticipated. To date the server had processed more than 125,000 queries from more than six thousand visitors (of whom about a thousand are repeat visitors) from seventy-eight countries. Clearly we are fulfilling a need. I urge you to visit the Research Archives on-line catalog at http://oilib.uchicago.edu/oilibcat.html. I welcome any and all comments on how we can make the catalog more useful.

It is likely that we will be able to double the number of records in the on-line catalog in the year to come. We are currently developing the procedures for more rapid data editing, entry, and indexing.

Taken together the rewiring of the Research Archives and the new accessibility of the on-line catalog are significant advances in both the consumer and supplier ends of the information revolution. Together they tend to increase the abilities of the scholarly communities served by the Research Archives and the Oriental Institute to interact with the resources available. The solid establishment of an electronic infrastructure also prepares the way for the development of new tools such as those discussed at last October's conference on Electronic Publication in ancient Near Eastern Studies.

Publications and Projects

In addition to the six publications listed below, several long-term publication projects are underway. We have nearly completed the initial editing of the first volume of *The Oriental Institute Archaeological Newsletter*, appearing between 1950 and 1973, which was the predecessor to the quarterly newsletter *Oriental Institute News & Notes*. These newsletters, usually letters from the field, give us a fascinating glimpse at the history of many of the Oriental Institute's projects overseas since the Second World War. I hope we will have this project complete within the next year or so. Several additional dissertation proposals are also in the works. We hope also to have a web-based version of the Oriental Institute Arabic Manuscripts Project, described in last year's *Annual Report*, available in the not too distant future.

1. Abzu: Guide to Resources for the Study of the Ancient Near East Available on the Internet. By Charles E. Jones. Oriental Institute Research Archives Bibliographical and Informational Documents, Supplements to Oriental Institute Research Archives Acquisitions List 3. Chicago: Oriental Institute Research Archives, 1994–2000. We have added more than 700 entries to Abzu during the past year, and this index remains the most complete guide to on-line materials relating to the ancient Near East.

   http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/ABZU.HTML

2. Archaeology and Historical Problems of the Second Intermediate Period: A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Division of the Humanities in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. By Bruce B. Williams. December 1975. Thanks are due to Bruce Williams for his efforts in making the image files of his dissertation available. We believe he still holds the record for the longest dissertation in the Humanities at the University of Chicago — the paper version of this encyclopedic dissertation covers some 2,143 pages.
   Available exclusively on-line at:

   http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/BBW/BBWIntro.html

3. Plant Ornament: Its Origin and Development in the Ancient Near East: A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Division of the Humanities in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Oriental Languages and Literature. By Helene J. Kantor, March 1945. We are all indebted to Peggy Grant and Mary Shea for their extraordinary effort over several years in transcribing, editing, and checking the references in this enormously difficult manuscript, and to John Larson and the Museum Archives, which have custody of the papers of the late Helene J. Kantor, for making the dissertation available.
   Available exclusively on-line at:

   http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/HJK/HJKIntro.html

4. Research Archives Catalog
   Web version of the Research Archives Catalog.

   http://oilib.uchicago.edu/oilibcat.html

5. Research Archives Recent Acquisitions (RABooks) Mailing List: This new list offers monthly postings of lists of acquisitions in the Research Archives. There is no discussion on this list. We welcome your membership. As of mid-July 2000, membership stands at exactly three hundred subscribers.
   To subscribe to the RABooks mailing list, send an e-mail message to:

   majordomo@oi.uchicago.edu

   In the body of your e-mail message, include the following line in the body of the message:

   subscribe RABooks

   You will receive a return e-mail confirming your subscription.

6. Virtually all on-line publications of the Research Archives are under constant revision and updating; a list of such publications can be found at:

   http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/Research_Arch.html

RESEARCH

Acquisitions Lists

For many years, lists of recent acquisitions in the Research Archives were produced periodically and distributed informally. For a period in the 1990s the acquisitions lists were published more formally, but that ambitious project was abandoned in 1995. The development of electronic media offers us new opportunities to distribute acquisitions lists widely and in a timely and inexpensive manner. In June we announced the availability of the Research Archives Acquisitions List monthly — free of charge — by means of an automated e-mailing list called RABooks. We hope also to use this list to distribute topical lists, lists of dissertations, and other useful material from time to time as they are developed here. For information on how to subscribe to RABooks, see above.

Current Acquisitions

Following are the acquisitions statistics for the past year.

	May 1999 – April 2000	*Total*
Monographs and Series	613	23,977
Journals	272	9,954
Total Books	**885**	**33,931**

This year's acquisitions statistics are consistent with the trends of the past few years. In our acquisitions policy, we continue to be committed to the mission statement articulated at the beginning of this report. We try to acquire all the basic published resources for the study of the ancient Near East.

Staff

I am honored to have three excellent graduate student assistants this year. Katherine Strange, second-year graduate student in Archaeology returned for a second year in the Research Archives. In addition two new assistants, Jake Lauinger, first-year student in Assyriology, and Mark Saathoff, first-year student in Egyptology, joined us last fall. All three of them shared office duties and covered weekend and evening hours for me. It is always a pleasure to acknowledge the help of excellent assistants, and this year is no exception. Each of them has taken on specific (and often odious) tasks with energy and imagination. This library simply could not function without them.