

**President's Library Dinner
After-dinner Speech on the Future of the Book
OSU Faculty Club, December 10, 2002**

Introduction

Good Evening. I want to thank President Holbrook and Jim Holbrook for hosting this evening's dinner for our many friends and supporters of the University Libraries. I also want to take this opportunity to welcome Karen and Jim to Ohio State and to Columbus. Like a good librarian, I checked my sources at the University of Georgia, where I too once worked, and got glowing reports on the Holbrooks – and also a little friendly anger that we were stealing them away from Athens, Georgia. I have spoken several times with Bill Potter, the Director of Libraries at the University of Georgia, who chaired the search committee that selected Karen to be their Provost. Bill says we could not have made a better choice for our Presidency. Karen was an outstanding Provost at Georgia, and Bill Potter has been asked again to chair the search committee for a new Provost and find someone just like Karen Holbrook.

A Vibrant Library and Information Services Community

We welcome the Holbrooks, and I want to tell them that they come to a very vibrant library and information services community. Not only do we have a great University Libraries system at Ohio State, but we are fortunate

- to be surrounded and enriched by some of the best public libraries in the country (in the latest rankings of public libraries, Ohio overall ranks number one as a State for the quality of its public libraries, and the Columbus Metropolitan Library is ranked as the second best large public library system in the country)¹,
- we are part of two effective library cooperatives celebrating their anniversaries – OhioNet its 25th and Ohiolink its 10th year of service,
- and we are served by two of the world's most successful non-profit, information service organizations – the Online Computer Library Center (better known as OCLC) and Chemical Abstracts Service.

Tom Sanville, the Director of OhioLINK; Michael Butler, Director of OhioNet; Robert Massie, Director of Chemical Abstracts Service; and Jay Jordan, President and CEO of OCLC, are with us tonight.

As Governor Taft seeks to improve Ohio's economy through his Third Frontier program that aims to bring high technology and knowledge-based industries to the State, I think he has a perfect model right here in central Ohio with our very vital university, library, and information service industry partnerships.

¹ Thomas J. Hennen, Jr., "Great American Public Libraries: the 2002 HAPLR Rankings."
<http://www.ala.org/online/archive/hennen2002.pdf>

A Community that Loves Libraries and Reading

But for those of us who are employed in information services, the real distinction and the real joy of working here come from our wonderful community of users and supporters. Karen and Jim, I can assure you, you come to a community that loves libraries, loves reading, and thrives on an information-rich environment. My mother-in-law reminds me all the time that I married a book-worm. (“She was reading books before she could walk.” She even wears clothes with books on them, if you noticed her blouse tonight.) But even the prodigious reading skills of my wife Anita are tested by the two very active book clubs to which she belongs in Columbus. (And I know Mildred Chavos, Kay Jones, Sally Blue, Sally Bloomfield, and Dareth Gerlack among others here tonight can verify this Ohio book club rigor.) On a weekly, and often on a daily, basis in our community, you can find groups gathering to discuss books or to hear from authors, authors like Karen Harper, Charlie Cole, or Pete Franklin who are here tonight. This is a community that demands the best in library and information service and that makes active use of these services.

When I asked Pat and Thom Robinson, who have made the lead gift towards the renovation of our Main Library, why they support us, they gave me two interrelated reasons. First, they told me the Main Library building must be improved. As the central academic building on campus, at the head of the Oval, it should be a show place and a destination on campus for students, faculty, and the community. Second, they told me that reading is very important to them and it was very important to Pat’s father Paul Duke. They want a Main Library that will encourage young people to become lifelong learners through reading.

Progress Report on the Renovation of the Main Library

Well, I am pleased to tell all of you that we are making good progress toward the renovation and restoration of the William Oxley Thompson Memorial Library at Ohio State. Thanks to your generosity and help in so many ways, we have now raised \$11 million dollars towards our \$30 million dollar development goal, and we are a top priority within the University for as much as \$70 million dollars in State capital funds. This would not have happened without both strong external and internal support. And I want to acknowledge the University leadership that Provost Ed Ray, Vice President Jerry May, Dean Michael Hogan, and distinguished emeritus professors John Mount, Al Kuhn, Arthur Adams, John Gabel, and Charles Babcock have brought to this major capital project.

I want to tell you that I and the members of the Libraries Campaign Board – and from the Campaign Board, Jo and Bob Winzeler, Pat and Thom Robinson, Dareth Gerlach, Teckie Shackelford, Jared Nodelman, Tally Krumm, George Foster, and Paul Watkins are here tonight – we are serious about getting this project done on time and on budget. I am pleased to announce that just last week, we interviewed and selected the architect of record for this historic project, and with us tonight is our architect, George Acock with

his wife Deb. George and his architectural firm have a stellar reputation, and I know they will apply great quality and passion to the design and reconstruction of the Main Library.

George, by the way, is also a noted watercolor artist, and one of the telling comments he made in his interview was that he has been sketching the eastern façade of the Main Library that faces the Oval for years, but never the other facades of the building. Now, he will be responsible for making us a beautiful building inside and out and from every direction. George, we all look forward to working with you and selecting the rest of the team that will include the national architect of design, the engineering firm, and the construction manager.

The Future of Libraries

An aspect of the Main Library renovation project that I find particularly interesting and challenging is trying to predict the future. What we do, will have to last a long time, maybe a hundred years or more. (The original section of our Main Library is, in fact, now 90 years old.) What is the future of libraries? Is it wise to invest \$100 million dollars in physical space in the Internet age? Here quickly is how I answer these complicated questions.

Of this I am certain:

1. Physical space and place will always be important to us as human beings. You cannot go wrong in investing in beautiful, functional, and flexible places. Virtual, networked digital space is of growing importance, but it is very different from and will not replace the need for real space and place.
2. New digital information technology is in constant development and is highly changeable. You can be certain that any hardware or software you install will be obsolete in three to five years. Space design for digital technology applications, therefore, has to be extremely flexible.
3. Ink on paper (call it “print” or the “book”) is a mature, established information technology that is likely to be around for quite a while. Gutenberg started using movable type in book production more than 500 years ago (The Gutenberg Bible is dated 1454). Still today, people particularly like print books for concentrated reading, and print materials for “making sense” of information and for dynamic interaction in group work.

Books Remain Important

According to *Publishers Weekly* more print copies of popular books are being sold than ever before. In 1975, E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* sold almost a quarter million copies in hardback; in 2000, John Grisham’s *The Brethren* sold almost three million copies, an increase of more than 1,000 percent. There are now almost two million copies of Alice

Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* in print, one of the books Anita's book club has read this year; it is a best seller and a serious work of fiction.²

Paper production and paper consumption continue to grow in this country and around the world. Between 1995 and 2000 office paper consumption in the United States increased by 20% (uncoated free-sheet paper increased by 14.7% and by 21.3% for coated free-sheet paper used for more expensive advertising materials).³

This is an RCA e-book reader purchased by our library several years ago. I remember at the time debating how many of these e-readers we should buy: 10, 25, 100? Luckily, we decided to wait and see what the demand would be. The e-book reader as a consumer product has thus far been a real bust with little demand to access digital text in this manner. So it's easy, print versus digital. Print wins. The future of the book is assured. Hurray for us bibliophiles!

A World of Paper and Digital Information

Of course, it is not that simple or clear cut. While paper consumption may have increased by 20% over the last five years, the growth of digital information is almost immeasurable. OCLC has attempted to measure the size of the World Wide Web, and this year (2002), they estimated that there are now more than 9 million web sites on the Internet, which is an eight-fold increase over the last five years. Interestingly, the growth of the World Wide Web does appear to be slowing down, from a growth rate of 53% in 1999, to 32% in 2000, to only 6% last year.⁴

Almost all textual information today is created and stored in digital form. This book, *The Lovely Bones*, was most likely produced by its author on a personal computer with word processing software, and the master copy of the text is stored in digital form on the publisher's computer system. Lawyers, doctors, scientist, and most of our faculty and students today retrieve their factual information from digital databases networked through the Internet. Most reference tools (the kinds of tools that Chemical Abstracts Service, OCLC, and OhioLINK create) and scientific journals are now in digital form, and for the last two years we have actually been building an online e-book collection that now numbers 12,000 titles and is very popular. Digital access through the computer, we find, is used for reference, fact-finding, and answering specific research questions. If the information is going to require concentrated reading, users like to print it out or look for the print copy in the stacks.

Two recent books – *The Social Life of Information* by Brown and Duguid and *The Myth of the Paperless Office* by Sellen and Harper– are excellent studies of the complex information world we live in today. All four authors are technologists by profession, and their publishers are MIT Press and the Harvard Business School Press. They predict a

² Dinitia Smith, "In Book Publishing World, Some Reason for Optimism," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2002, p. c2.

³ *The Future of Paper: Executive Summary*, CAP Ventures Report, Norwell: MA 1995, p. 22.

⁴ OCLC, Office of Research, "Web Characterization," <http://wcp.oclc.org/>

future for the office and the library that is both paper and digital-based, and I think they are right. For practical and economic reasons, we will rely more on digital technology to help us create, store, and access vast amounts of information and multimedia. For important tactile and psychological reasons, when we use this information intensively to create or share knowledge through serious reading, discussion, or collaboration, we will often want to work with information in paper form and in a book format.

Closing

If this is true, our challenge, then, is to design a library for the 21st century that is beautiful, functional, and flexible enough to bring paper and digital based information services together in a complementary manner. We want our renewed Main Library to be a place that pays tribute to the enduring value of books, paper documents, and human interaction in the creation of knowledge, and we want it also to be an exciting place for the use and application of new digital information technology in support of learning, teaching, and research.

Librarians have always tried to bring order to a chaotic universe of information. Give me a book, and I will show you where it belongs. It has its place in the classification system and a space on the library shelves next to books on the same subject or by the same author. We all can understand and visualize this in the traditional library. Now librarians have the new challenge of doing this organizing for digital information: making an orderly place in virtual space for digital objects. I know this is harder to visualize, but really it all comes down to architecture. Whether it is the architecture involved in the renovation of our grand Main Library or the architecture of digital information systems, in both cases we are trying to design beautiful and orderly space and place that helps our community read and learn.

I wish all of you a very happy holiday season filled with books and reading time, and a new year free of chaos and chock full of time in beautiful spaces. Thank you so much for your continuing support of the University Libraries.

Joseph J. Branin
Director of Libraries