

Creating a university Library of excellence: the road to first million volumes

Marta Chiba, a former Library director and branch manger, continues her history of the Library.



The size and quality of a library collection is an important measure of its excellence. This was recognized by the first University Librarian and his team of professional librarians, as well as the Monash University Council. There was general agreement between librarians and academics that the library collection needed to grow as fast as possible. The aim was to build a research collection of national and international significance.

The strategy to grow the library collection was carefully planned. Determination, hard work, creativity and absolute dedication by all involved were needed to meet the challenges. The first of these was to find adequate means at a time when faculties, the library and new buildings were competing for a share of the budget. It was clear from the start that the University could not finance the creation of a research collection from its own resources. The Librarian informed the Monash University Council in 1962 of the difficulties the library faced to adequately provide books for existing and new departments. It was decided to draw the media's attention to the difficulty of establishing a university library, pointing out the value of gifts and donations and it was suggested that the Library approach professional societies, institutions and embassies for possible support.

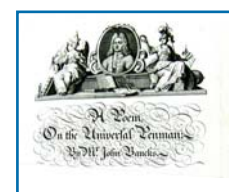
The press report proved effective. The Library received financial assistance from companies, institutions and societies and donations of publications. Major donors included the Kellogg Foundation, The Law Institute of Victoria and companies such as Merck and Sharp. In addition embassies provided foreign language titles. Encouraged by the response, Monash University mounted a Public Appeal with a target of 350,000 pounds. Other libraries assisted with donations of early materials. The Friends of the Library and The Monash Parents Group were formed. The Friends were major benefactors towards the purchase of rare and early publications, while the Parents assisted with the acquisition of reading materials for students. This multi-pronged approach to funding allowed the Library collection to grow much faster than would otherwise have been possible.

A major change occurred in growth when the Australian Universities Commission, AUC, in 1973 recognised basic book materials as analogous to expensive equipment and allowed the use of the AUC Equipment Fund to establish collections for

new courses. Despite the combined approach to fund raising, competition between priorities became severe and led to formulation of a firm collection development policy.

Creating a research collection before the electronic age was a challenging task. Purchasing titles worldwide from publishers, learned societies, institutions, governments, and universities required a combination of approaches. Exchange of publications and regular checking of duplicate lists and catalogues of international sales of out of print titles, backsets of periodicals and rare books was very time consuming. By 1967 the library had exchange arrangements with 93 institutions worldwide and received items from 161.

Staff resources for collection building were in short supply. A relatively small number of staff provided collection development, collection access, reference and information services. By early 1970 the library, in partnership with faculties and departments, offered instruction in the use of the library and subject literatures. The pressure for collection building was severe. It was not uncommon for professional library staff to take home selection tools for ordering titles, or to have tea break with a copy of Winchell or Walford to order urgently needed reference publications. The dedication of staff to the task of creating a research library was exceptional. There was a sense of purpose shared by all.



An elaborate heading from *Mammotrectus Super Bibliam* (1476), the millionth book. It was donated to the Library by Blackwells

This dedicated approach led to the Monash University Library taking its place in the community of major libraries much sooner than expected. Reliance on other libraries through interlibrary loans rapidly declined. By 1973 the Librarian reported to the Council that: "We are clearly contributing to the book resources of the nation." Loans to other libraries were almost twice as many as borrowings. Monash University Library in 1980 acquired its one millionth volume. The book selected as the millionth was a fine early book, *Mammotrectus Super Bibliam* by Johannes Marchesinus Venice, 1476. The occasion was celebrated at an informal meeting with the Friends of the Monash University

Creating a university Library of excellence continued

Library, Monash University Bookshop, Blackwell of Oxford, The Monash Ex Committee Club. All presented books of rarity, value and visual delight.

The appearance of electronic information resources heralded the age of the borderless library. Before that, a variety of alternatives to the printed format came on the market, but they all had to be acquired and held in a physical location. The Monash University Library holds today over 3 million volumes in its physical collection, and a rapidly growing number of electronic information including books, serials and databases. In just 50 years the Library achieved national and a international importance.