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Library Profile: William H. Hall Free Library

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William H. Hall Free Library (WHL) Cranston, Rhode Island

by John Long <john-long@worldnet.att.net>

...reading teaches us to take a more exalted view of the value of life, a value at the time we did not know how to appreciate and of whose magnitude we have only become aware through the book.

— Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Vol. III*

Marian Sachs' fascinating book, *A Library Is Born*, (2000), calls our attention to the completion of WHL and a *Providence Sunday Journal*, article, November 20, 1927:

...the new **William H. Hall Free Library**...is a building of rare beauty, approached on every side by wide terraced lawns and girded by rows of elm and pine trees....designed after the Georgian style of limestone set upon a base of granite. The front entrance suggests the 15th century architecture of the Italian Renaissance with the grace of its curved arches over the loggia...and its slender white pillars.

I've found that once I'm inside WHL, I quickly become preoccupied perusing new books and I tend to overlook WHL's superb architectural features such as individual "stained glass printer's marks over" twelve alcoves in the main reading and children's reading rooms. These original printer's marks date back around the time of Gutenberg and are worth a few moments of your attention. Also, a truly wonderful feature of WHL is that all Rhode Island libraries are interconnected and patrons have access to a *vast statewide collection* through integrated systems and ILL.

Like so many other Pawtuxet Village and Edgewood residents, my wife, **Linda**, and I enjoy WHL visits, and I thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to speak with WHL's knowledgeable and energetic Head, Librarian, **John Bucci**. Here are highlights of my conversation with **John** both in person at WHL and remote via the Internet:

JL: *I think all the library patrons of the WHL love the architectural look of the library. Could you comment on that?*

JB: Clearly the **William H. Hall Free Library** holds an architecturally prominent place in the Edgewood area. And it actually, it was built to do just that! The architecture and size of the library represent knowledge and learning and the idea that this repository of knowledge was a great and noble idea that would withstand the test of time. This resonates from the long front walk and the imposing and impressive climb to the front entrance.

Just as important is the fact that the Hall Trustees are a dedicated group of individuals who insist on maintaining the architectural integrity and status of the building.

They are mindful of the Library's place in Edgewood and since the renovation in 1989 have continued to invest in the upkeep of the building.

JL: *When did you decide to become a librarian and what attracted you to WHL?*

JB: I actually didn't start out with the idea of becoming a librarian. I was looking for work in the teaching field when I applied for the Library Assistant position at the Oak Lawn Branch. After a while I just felt very comfortable in that environment and I could still use my background in history and education in conjunction with serving the public.

The Hall Library is certainly a very special place to work, especially since the Trustees renovated the building to better serve the patrons of Edgewood. Every Librarian comments to me what a great facility it must be to work in. I have never disagreed. In addition, many Librarians and their Trustees have visited the Hall Library to see how to meld a traditional building with modern services and technology.

JL: *Seems like a incredible diversity of library patrons visiting the library: All ages, from many different jobs and professions, etc. Could you talk about that?*

JB: It's true, we do have quite a diverse group of library users, both in age and in background. Because of that diversity, the staff is exposed to new ideas all the time. It's wonderful to see that libraries are important to all people, and it's a testament of our freedom that information is available to all people without judgment or intimidation.

After working in public and academic libraries for thirty years, twenty at the Hall Library, you start to learn what people appreciate and require. We think the collection reflects the diversity of the readers, the education of the

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population and the depth of intellect of the Hall Library users. While popular materials will always be needed for recreational reading, there is a niche for the unusual and the slightly more esoteric book. It's easy to buy the "Best Seller" list, but the challenge is having available materials that are not so popular, and that includes music, movies and books-on-tape. I think it's great when someone takes a more challenging work of fiction or nonfiction, and frankly, I hope it will always be like that.

JL: *Another thing that I love about the WHL is in just seeing the grounds: the magnificent old trees, the way the library is set on the grounds. These things don't happen by accident—could you comment on that?*

JB: I think the grounds definitely add to the imposing architecture of the building. Again, the Trustees should receive applause for the work they've done maintaining the property. They've had all the trees on the property cataloged in addition to starting a program to preserve and maintain them. They are also quite active in maintaining the exterior of the building, even installing railings that replicate the originals. Recently, the flagpole was refurbished and the memorial that was lost behind the flagpole hedges has been relocated. While these are major expenses, the Trustees are committed to maintaining, and in many cases, improving the property so that it adds to the beauty of Edgewood.

JL: *I have to laugh every time that I hear "the book is dead" because it certainly doesn't look that way at the WHL or at various Rhode Island bookstores like Borders, and our own village bookstore, Twice Told Tales.*

JB: I think there's been a slight reduction in the number of book readers over the past few years, but not a significant amount. Many people are also reading other materials, such as periodicals and newspapers, eBooks and doing serious research on the Internet. I think it's great to be able to access newspapers from across the country at 1 AM at your home computer. However, there's a reason why people and books have a unique relationship. It's so much more personal, there's a physical closeness when using a book that no piece of hardware can match and there's a familiarity that breeds respect and comfort. The more troubling aspect of any discussion of this nature is, I believe, the over-reliance on Internet sources that students are using for research. The need to weigh various sources and their reliability, the authors' credentials and the critical view of these works has been reduced or eliminated by simply downloading some information that may or may not be correct. Libraries are important in this regard because we can direct and assist with Internet searches and their appropriate use.

JL: *Do you notice a change in the way that WHL's patrons are using the library as compared with 10 years ago? Is it a generational equation?*

JB: I think technology is a wonderful tool for all people of all ages. We've seen significant increases in the use of the Internet by older people as well as younger people. It's how the technology is used that's important. I think older people exploit the technology for research and communication. However, they still identify with the book as a great source of enjoyment, education and relaxation. Children are more into the speed of everything. Sitting down quietly and enjoying a book or magazine, with no remotes, sound prompts or flashy graphics is alien to many of them. This is where we need to promote reading as a pleasurable activity, particularly when one considers the pace of everyday life.

JL: *When I visit the WHL, I'm always aware that the librarians here are going above and beyond the profes-*

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library facts

About Acquisitions and Collection Development at William Hall Library:

Number of volumes: 46,000 (Adult and Children)

Number of periodicals: 75 (Adult and Children)

Electronic Resources: CLAN Database, E-Library Plus, Gale Indexing Services, Links to Academic Institutions through Helin and Josiah.

Budget for Materials: \$26,500 Print and \$10,200 Nonprint.

Interlibrary Loan: Statewide Holds System through the Dynix Database. Out of state requests through OCLC and the OLIS office at the state level.

Special events, William Hall Library Auditorium: Mayoral Debates, Light opera, plays and works of drama, music recitals, Garden club shows and special programs of information and learning.

Chairperson of the Board of Trustees: Jeffrey Lanphear.

editor's note

sional requirements! These folks want to help each patron. Could you comment on that?

JB: It's important that each patron feels that he or she received the best possible service and we tried as hard as possible to help that person. We don't always succeed, but the effort put forth is very important. We want our patrons to be repeat customers. It's noteworthy that the library is one of many activities our patrons participate in. As in any business environment, poor service results in patrons going elsewhere for their library needs. Good service, fulfilling patron expectations and quick problem resolution ensures patrons will come back.

JL: Finally, could you talk about plans for the future at WHL?

JB: Immediate plans revolve around enhancing the children's Internet units with new workstations and modular walls. This will allow us to do some renovations in the computer room, add another PC there and make the room more accessible and comfortable. Some of our other plans include increasing children's programs, collaborating with other agencies to provide some unusual programming and continued use of the library as a civic and cultural center.

JL: On behalf of ATG's readers, thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedule, providing us with a brief in-depth look at an invaluable and delightful community resource.

This profile, *William Hall Library* and interview with WHL's John Buccci was adapted from an article in the Pawtuxet Village, Rhode Island, newspaper, *The Bridge*, May 2003 issue. Pawtuxet Village was founded in 1638. Divided by the Pawtuxet River, the village's north side is in Cranston (including Edgewood), and the south side is in Warwick. — JL

WEBWORTHY

Column Editor: **Pamela M. Rose, M.L.S.** (Web Services & Library Promotion Coordinator, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo; Phone: 716-829-3900 x129; Fax: 716-829-2211) <pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu> wings.buffalo.edu/~pmrose

Webworthy has reviewed 286 Websites to date! Websites selected for broad appeal, depth of information, functionality and ease of access. Sites are organized by broad subject area and are visited just prior to publication. Please let the editor know of any sites that are not accessible.

*Comments and suggestions welcome to Pamela M. Rose, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo, 3435 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14214-3002; 716-829-3900 x129; <pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu>. Unless otherwise noted in square brackets following the description, Internet addresses were published in *Science's NetWatch* column. — PR*

Anatomy

If you've decided to donate your body to science, you might want to check **The Heidelberg Institute for Plastination** first — they have a specific body donation programme, part of **Runter von Hagen's** patented "plastination" process for preserving corpses, and the subject of his famous **Body Worlds** exhibit. The real human and animal bodies are preserved so they do not rot or smell, and maintain the same texture and color of the original tissue. Exhibited are startling combinations such as a cadaver holding his peeled-off skin, a basket-

ball player in mid-dribble with fileted muscles trailing behind as if blown by the wind, and a human rider mounted on a horse. Not for the faint of heart, the exhibit is scheduled to travel to Munich this Spring. — <http://www.bodyworlds.com/>.

Archives

Profiles in *Science* documents the history of 20th century biomedical research through a growing collection of lab notebooks, letters, audiotapes, diary entries, photographs, and a few video recordings. Watch an interview taped in 1996 with **Joshua Lederberg**, who shared the **1958 Nobel Prize** in Physiology or Medicine with **Edward L. Tatum** and **George W. Beadle** for studies on the genetics of bacteria. Or view the actual lab notes of **Julius Axelrod** on his study of "Caffeine Analysis of Various Commercial Brands of Soluble Coffee" in pdf format. Each entry includes a biography and timeline, as well as a complete record of original input date and all subsequent updates. — <http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/>.

Although **Charles Darwin** often suffered from illness, his love of and devotion to his botanical observations regularly "recreated" his ability to continue. A fascinating look into his day-to-day life is now available to all at the **Cambridge-based Darwin Correspondence Project**. The Project "exists to publish the definitive edition of letters to and from **Charles Darwin**, the most influential naturalist of the 19th century." Currently 12 volumes have been published online,

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