

**A Brief History of the Libraries of The Claremont Colleges**  
**Carrie Marsh, Director of Special Collections and Libraries**  
**May 25, 2018**

The dedication of Carnegie Library, Smiley Hall, and Brackett Observatory was held as one ceremony in 1908<sup>1</sup> during Pomona College's twentieth year. Perhaps the most significant of the three was the Carnegie Library, funded by a grant from Andrew Carnegie's library building program with matching funds raised by a trustee-led campaign, because it signaled the college's growing maturity. At its opening, Carnegie housed approximately 8,000 books drawn together from campus locations; by 1923 library holdings numbered 40,000<sup>2</sup> (with thousands more distributed among several departmental libraries) including significant special collections.<sup>3</sup> In 1925, Willis Kerr was hired as Carnegie Librarian; his recruitment was consequential for future library development for the consortium.

By the mid-1920s, Pomona had arrived at a crossroads: keep Pomona a small liberal arts college or succumb to pressure to grow the campus, the student body, and the curricula. President Blaisdell felt Pomona must preserve its community and ideals by keeping small and select. He proposed a plan to establish, over time, a number of small, distinctive, independent colleges that would share Pomona's high standards and ideals. He wrote, to wit, "My own very deep hope is that...we might have a group of institutions divided into small colleges—somewhat on the Oxford type—around a library and other utilities which they would use in common."<sup>4</sup> The Board of Trustees was persuaded and approved Blaisdell's plan in 1925, forming the entity they called Claremont Colleges that would focus on founding new colleges and establishing shared services. Dr. Blaisdell resigned the presidency of Pomona to become the first president of Claremont Colleges. Claremont Graduate School (1925) then Scripps College for Women (1926) were founded.

In 1932 a second library in Claremont, the new Ella Strong Denison Library at Scripps College, was dedicated, with Hazel Johnson as the first Denison Librarian, but the new library did not address growing concerns about the Carnegie Library. Nearly 25 years after its dedication Carnegie was full; stacks crowded out study spaces, and there were continual student complaints.<sup>5</sup> Pomona College and Claremont Graduate School also were pinched for office space and classrooms, and there was an expressed need for "a more imposing physical presence...for the Claremont Colleges administration."<sup>6</sup> Ellen Browning Scripps was approached and she generously provided funds for Harper Hall, named for Miss Scripps' man of business and Pomona College trustee, Jacob C. Harper. The building was sited between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets with the Harper Hall Library wing facing 10<sup>th</sup> Street. At the dedication of Harper Hall, the combined holdings of Pomona, Scripps, and Claremont Colleges was reported as 100,000 volumes.<sup>7</sup> Willis Kerr, in addition to his duties as librarian at Pomona, assumed Harper Hall Library's management.

In the years before Claremont Men's College was founded in 1946, there had been stalled conversations about following through on Blaisdell's vision of a central library for the Claremont Colleges. The establishment of the fourth college in Claremont brought the consortium to another crossroads: how to best support the scholarly pursuits of four Claremont colleges. In 1946 Kerr presented a plan for one central library, first envisioned by Dr. Blaisdell twenty years earlier, in which he laid out the advantages of centralization of collections and services. Later that spring, Mr. and Mrs. William L. Honnold announced their intention to give a library to the colleges. Mr. Honnold, a former Pomona College trustee and founding trustee of Claremont Colleges, had championed the central library plan for many years previously. From these two events, Honnold Library was realized. Embracing Willis Kerr's plan, Pomona

---

<sup>1</sup> The dedication ceremony for the three buildings was held on November 1, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> E. Wilson Lyon. *The History of Pomona College, 1887-1969*. Claremont: Pomona College, 1977, p. 217

<sup>3</sup> Mason Collection of Western Americana and the Westergaard Art Collection, to name two.

<sup>4</sup> President James Blaisdell, 1923.

<sup>5</sup> Lyon, p. 441.

<sup>6</sup> Lyon, p. 281.

<sup>7</sup> Lyon, p. 282.

College's Board of Trustees joined with the Board of Fellows of Claremont College<sup>8</sup> to approve the central library plan. Gordon Kaufmann, who designed the beautiful Scripps College campus, was selected to be principal architect. Land was acquired contiguous to the existing four colleges, plans were drawn up, orange groves were uprooted, and construction was begun.

Honnold Library for the Associated Colleges, "a university-type library of great distinction,"<sup>9</sup> was dedicated at 10 a.m., October 23, 1952, in the presence of Mrs. Honnold, who'd generously given \$1,000,000 for the library. Mr. Honnold, who had died May 6, 1950, did not see the building that bears his name. Harvey S. Mudd, Chairman of the Board of Fellows, said at the ceremony that the library was as Mr. Honnold would have wished, "a simple building...designed for enduring use, and to promote sound scholarship..." Dr. David W. Davies, Honnold Library's first Head Librarian, stated, "I am probably the only librarian in the United States who has been given all the equipment and the kind of equipment he has asked for."

When Honnold opened its doors, 297,000 volumes, comprising the collections formerly housed in Carnegie, Harper, and Denison libraries and collections from Claremont Men's College, were available for use. In 1965, a \$5 million Ford Foundation grant greatly increased the collection, and by 1971, inventory in the four libraries of the Claremont Colleges stood at 727,000 volumes. In 1979, the libraries' first computer system was activated, in time for the one-millionth volume to be added the following year. It took only six more years to reach one and a half million volumes. In 1990 an integrated library system, including Blais, the online catalog, named for Dr. Blaisdell, was brought online. Today the library's collections include more than 2 million items, access to articles in more than 133,000 print and electronic periodicals, and thousands of print, manuscript, digitized, and born digital primary sources.

The library building itself has been expanded three times. First, to gain much needed collection and study space, in 1956, a South Wing was added to the original Honnold building. Seeley W. Mudd Library, joined to Honnold by a pedestrian bridge, was dedicated in September 1970, again increasing book stacks and study space. In 1987, an addition was constructed to unite the Honnold and the Mudd buildings, and a seven-level Multi-Tier Stack was added inside the Mudd building. These additions created the current Honnold/Mudd Library of The Claremont Colleges, a 353 foot long complex joining old and new.

While Honnold/Mudd was growing, two libraries devoted to the sciences were built on two campuses organized along the science strengths of the two colleges at which they were located; Sprague focused on engineering, math, computer science, and physics, while Seeley G. Mudd focused on the natural sciences. The Norman F. Sprague Library was dedicated on the Harvey Mudd campus in 1972, and the Seeley G. Mudd Science Library on the Pomona College campus was dedicated in 1983. Science materials from Honnold were moved into these libraries as well.

The 1971 Library Agreement created a centralized library system, bringing the management of 10 libraries at the colleges--Honnold, Denison, Seeley W. Mudd, Sprague, and six departmental libraries at Pomona--under one administration, and Richard Johnson, Director of Honnold, was named Director of the Libraries of the Claremont Colleges. The purpose of this organization was to "provide and maintain library facilities and services capable of supporting instructional and research programs such as are found in universities of comparable size and scope."<sup>10</sup> From 1972 to 2009 the Libraries of the Claremont Colleges served as a model for other higher education consortia for organizing and managing shared library services and collections.

The Libraries of the Claremont Colleges, as many institutions across the U.S., had to evolve as a result of the impact of technology and the World Wide Web. Also, the recession of 2008/09 wrought more changes

---

<sup>8</sup> The title of the central services for the consortium has changed several times over ninety-three years: Claremont College, Claremont Colleges, Claremont University Center, Claremont University Consortium, and now, The Claremont Colleges Services.

<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Bernard, *An Unfinished Dream. A Chronicle of the Group Plan of the Claremont Colleges*. Claremont: Claremont University Center, 1982, p. 357.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard, p. 676.

administratively and physically. In 2009, the Council of Presidents and the CEO of Claremont University Consortium struck the 1971 Library Agreement and closed the two science libraries, largely for economic reasons and because of lack of use by college scientists, who had fully moved from the physical library and print books and journals to digital research and publishing practices. In the aftermath of their closing, the science libraries' print books, journal holdings, and special collections were transferred to Honnold/Mudd, and the buildings were repurposed by their respective colleges. In 2010 governance of Denison Library transitioned to Scripps College; Denison's circulating materials moved to Honnold/Mudd, while Scripps-owned special collections were retained in Denison.

More impactful changes happened in quick succession. The Council of Presidents created a Joint Governance Agreement for Honnold/Mudd, now called the Claremont Colleges Library, in 2012, under the lead college model. Executive authority for the library rests with the Lead College and the Dean of the Library; responsibility for administration rests with The Claremont Colleges Services. Claremont Graduate University was the library's first lead college; in 2016, Pomona College became the library's lead college.

Students who used Honnold Library in 1952 would find many changes in the 21st-century Honnold/Mudd. The massive card catalog is gone; instead students connect to worldwide library holdings from their laptops and mobile devices. In place of the 1952 brown linoleum and metal furniture there is carpeting and colorful, flexible furnishings; among stacks of print books are technology-rich study rooms and classrooms, a Collaborative Commons, and a Digital Tool Shed. But beyond the changes wrought by technology and expansion, the library is still, in many ways, the same place it was when it was newly opened. It is a place to study, a place to learn, a place to collaborate, a place to find research help, and a place to absorb the scholarship of the centuries, whether on a computer screen or in the pages of a print book, as vital to the success of students and faculty today as it was in 1952.

*Honnold/Mudd Library's Architects:*

- *Honnold:* Gordon Kaufman, Los Angeles.
- *Seeley W. Mudd:* Flewelling and Moody, Los Angeles.
- *New Library:* Maris Peika for Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, Los Angeles.

## **Sources**

Bernard, Robert J. *An Unfinished Dream. A Chronicle of the Group Plan of The Claremont Colleges.* Claremont, CA: Claremont University Consortium, 1982.

Lyon, E. Wilson. *The History of Pomona College, 1887-1969.* Claremont: Pomona College, 1977.

Vertical files on the Claremont Colleges' libraries. Special Collections.