

“Olive B. Jones and You”
Convocation Address for Kent State University, LIS, Columbus 2003

I am greatly honored to stand with you today as your convocation speaker. In the Kent State School of Library and Information Science Program, I have been both a student (graduated 1984) and a teacher of the Foundations of Archives course , about 6 times since 1990. However, I have never been a convocation speaker and this new experience challenged me, to say the least.

You can appreciate that my first efforts focused on trying to find what others have said at convocations. Was there a cook book or a guide to the genre? I remembered in my distant past encountering a book of sermons for all occasions. Alas, neither OhioLink nor the World Wide Web provided information or guidance. Nor has a “Convocation Speeches for Dummies,” appeared in the growing genre of “For Dummies” books that include “Access for Dummies,” Nutrition for Dummies, Golf for Dummies.

Because there is no model, no set of rules (except perhaps brevity), I decided to use this occasion as an opportunity to celebrate in a small way this the the Bicentennial year of Ohio’s statehood by looking back toward the progress of librarianship in Ohio and then forward to some of the challenges facing us now. In doing so, I will draw upon the life and experience of Olive B. Jones, a member of the Ohio Library Association Hall of Fame and the librarian of The Ohio State University from 1887 To her retirement in 1927. In many ways, she stood at a pivotal point in her profession of librarianship, even as you are at a pivotal point in your own professional development. My purpose is not simply to give Ms. Jones the historic attention she so deserves in a particularly historical

year; it is also to draw some differences and some similarities between the issues that faced Olive Jones at the beginning of the Twentieth Century and the ones that you will encounter at the commencement of the Twenty-First Century. My purpose is more than historical. I will be looking at Jones not imply for historical comparison but rather for the insights that her career as a librarian has for the librarian of today and tomorrow.

Olive Branch Jones was born during the Civil War, on October 10, 1863 , one of the three daughters of Reverend Edward I. Jones, who was minister of the Third Avenue Methodist Church in Columbus. As a minister, Reverend Jones had special rights of access to the State Library and sometimes took his daughter Olive. Years later she remembered her feelings of awe at entering the building. At the age of nearly twenty, Olive Jones entered The Ohio State University in 1883 and became aware of the University Library then housed in a room in University Hall. Of the library collection then, it was remarked in the student newspaper “

When General Keifer visited us a few days before his election as Speaker of the House he ased: ‘Is this the library?’ When answered affirmatively, his opinion was: ‘It is a disgrace to anything.’ When the committee on Universities and Colleges from the legislature met here the 23td of January, the query of one of its Senators was : ‘Is this all your library?’ His advice when answered was : ‘Better auctioneer it off and start over again.

In the year of 1883, the University had no librarian and professors rotated the responsibility amongst themselves, usually on the principal of the “least unwilling.” A part-time student assistant took care of some two thousand books, which mostly came from donations rather than purchases.

As a student, Olive Jones made herself known. She joined the Young Ladies Literary Society and was a member of the committee that changed the name of the group

to the Browning Literary Society, in honor of British poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She became Vice President of the group, which hosted readings and scholarly events, often at the home of a faculty member. In addition, Jones joined the staff of the campus newspaper, the Lantern, as one of the editors.

All of the above positioned her well in the competition for one of the few employment opportunities available for women students: Assistant Librarian. Although appointed in 1886, a period of ill-health (a pattern that plagued her repeatedly) deferred her appointment until 1887, at a salary of \$150 for the 10 month academic year. Because the head of the library was a classroom professor, the day-to-day management of the library was in the care of the Assistant Librarian. In fact, those duties were so numerous that the Assistant Librarian had to reduce her classes in order to keep the library open.

Miss Jones arrived at a pivotal time in the history of the OSU libraries. Already in 1883, Professor Carol Derby, professor of Latin who had responsibility for the library, called for the appointment of a full-time and professional librarian because the library was achieving a level of complexity and importance that he could not manage or lead. An appropriation in 1884 had greatly expanded the Library and Derby called annually for a regular librarian. Finally, in 1892, Derby forced the issue by resigning his responsibility for the library. In December of 1892 the faculty approved a resolution "That the most pressing want of the University and one the consideration of which ought to take precedence over any other is the appointment of a professional librarian. There is nothing that hampers so much the work of professors and students as the condition of the library, a condition for which no individual can be held responsible, but which is wholly due to the inadequate force in the library." The President presented the resolution to the Board at its

meting in January and by June the matter had been resolved: Olive Jones was promoted from Assistant Librarian to Librarian with a salary of eight hundred dollars per year. “

Why Ms. Jones rather than a professional librarian received the appointment is a matter of historical speculation. Certain it is that the profession of librarianship was in its infancy; there were relatively few places where prospective librarians could receive formal training and education. Another certainty is that Ms. Jones had been largely running the library for six years already and had received favorable attention from faculty and students. Finally, one suspects that the Trustees found in Miss Jones an opportunity to employ a non-professional librarian for less money than a professional librarian might require and one who could take over immediately.

Even though Jones was not professionally educated as a librarian (in fact, she would not graduate with a bachelor's degree until 1906, she did her part to establish librarianship as a profession in a number of ways. In the course of her thirty-five years as head of the Libraries, her staff grew from one assistant, available one-half day per week, to a staff of forty full-time. Many of these had formal library training as well as experience. Most importantly, Jones made a distinction in her staff between professional staff, who were expected to work thirty six and a half hours per week, versus non-professional staff who worked a forty-one and a half hour week. She expected professional staff to be current with librarianship, even as she was a reader of the literature and contributed to it, albeit modestly.

As a non-professional librarian at a time when the professionalization of librarians was beginning, Jones shared a concern that the profession needed more men. She wrote “It is not too early to sound in the library profession the warning which at this

late date is being sounded in the teaching profession, that the profession is becoming feminized.” In one search, she requested “Please let me hear about him. You notice that I use the masculine pronoun. This is not because I am determined to have a man, but because I object strongly to the present day use of the feminine pronoun in referring to anyone engage in library work .”

As an historical aside, I point out that Olive Jones herself was succeeded by a man, Earl Manchester, in 1928. Manchester was a professionally trained librarian, having acquired a B.A. at Brown University and training in Library administration at the New York State Library School. Before coming to OSU, Manchester had been Director of Libraries at the University of Kansas. Manchester was the first to have the title of Director of Libraries at OSU whereas Jones’s title had been University Librarian. Since the appointment of Manchester, each succeeding director of OSU Libraries has been a man. Of course, I doubt that was the intended legacy of Olive Jones and I hasten to add also that OSU’s current president is a woman.

Certain it is that Jones as the librarian was one of the most prominent women administrator on the campus. (Her peers included Edith Cockins, who was registrar from 1897 to 1944 and the Dean of Women, a position created in 1912. Beginning in 1889 the University created a Library Council to receive reports and make recommendations to the Faculty and to the Board of Trustees for support. The president himself was a member of the Library Council and throughout her lengthy career, Jones had much interaction with the president as well as the faculty. In fact, when in 1927 she ceased being Librarian, the Trustees created the title of “Associate Professor of Bibliography” and had her report to the President.

Finally, Olive Jones helped to shape the profession in Ohio by service in professional organizations. She was a founding member of the Ohio Library Association, became its Vice President, and in 1919 served as president of OLA. Jones had a great interest in supportive relationships between academic and public libraries and worked to end the tradition of political appointments to the position of State Librarian in Ohio. In 1980, in recognition of her service to the profession, she became a member of the Ohio Library Associations Hall of Fame. Jones's work as a librarian seems to me particularly instructive of the values and challenges that continue today and into the future. At the commencement of her service for OSU libraries, cataloging itself was in its infancy. In 1884 Professor Samuel Derby had charge of some 2,000 books and reported that a card catalog, divided by author and by subject had been prepared. Apparently, the work had been done by two student assistants, a sophomore and a junior. Derby himself noted that librarians differed with each other in regard to cataloging practices and users of the catalogs seemed unconcerned "It must be borne in mind that librarians do not agree in all particulars in the difficult task of making a catalog for readers who seldom take pains to understand its plan, and who suppose that topics will necessarily occur to others under that title which is most familiar to them." (Although written in 1884, these words sound like they might have been written only yesterday.)

Originally, the card catalog did not indicate where a book was located. In 1896, an OSU professor of English wrote to the Library Council "I take the liberty respectfully to suggest to you that there is need of a new system of numbering the books in the library. It would evidently be an advantage to have the numbers upon the card catalogue indicate directly the position of each book upon the shelves..." Miss Jones had a better

idea. Rather than record the physical location of the book on the card and the update the cards, when materials had to be moved, Jones proposed to arrange the collections in a subject classification scheme. At first, she contacted Harvard University for its classification schemes and used the schedules to classify books at OSU. Although Jones was aware of both Charles Cutter's Expansive Classification and the Dewey Classification, she rejected them "For the public library, either the Dewey or the Cutter classification does very well. Cutter's classification is undoubtedly the better theoretically, but the system of marking is not so easily understood as the Dewey. For a college library, however, I do not approve of either system. " She noted that many colleges had had to make great changes to the classification system to meet the demands of college work.

Jones and the OSU Libraries continued to experiment with classification schedules, including one in use at the University of California. Finally, in 1902 OSU ordered printed catalog cards from the Library of Congress and adopted the Library of Congress classification scheme. OSU was one of the first institutions to do so and did so for a number of reasons: the soundness of the system, the availability of the cards, and perhaps most importantly, because OSU did not have a full time cataloger. Therefore, it had not invested greatly in older forms of cataloging and classification.

What, you may ask, does the story of Olive Jones and the LC Classification scheme have to do with you? Actually, you need to look at Jones not simply as solving a problem that has marginal relevance to the problems of today but rather examine her methods to learn the lessons available. Jones looked at practices of other libraries, read the available literature, consulted with library colleagues, some of whom she knew from

her travels and from professional meetings, and evaluated the information to arrive at the best possible decision. These are the very same steps you will take in wrestling with the problems of describing and providing access to the challenges presented by both the digital world and that of print. Staying current with the literature, maintaining an inquisitive spirit, and expanding and using your professional networks are a timeless remedy for addressing problems in librarianship. And these are the requirements Jones had not only for herself but also her professional staff.

Many of you in your professional careers will wrestle with library facilities; You will have responsibilities for participating in their design and in renovations. Here, too, the story of Olive Jones is worth telling. One of the reasons that Professor Derby resigned his responsibility as librarian in 1892 was that the OSU library had outgrown its room in University Hall and would move to the newly constructed Orton Hall. This had been built as a geological museum first and as a temporary home for the university library, until funding could be found to construct a separate library building. In part, the decision to put a library in Orton Hall was a political one; it would be easier to persuade the Trustees and the legislature of approving the funding of Orton Hall if it were multi-functional. This temporary library would remain in place for nearly 20 years, and Olive Jones had responsibility for designing the library and overseeing changes.

In the course of planning and then renovating the library in Orton, Ms. Jones spent much time thinking about where a new library should be located and communicated her thoughts to OSU President James Canfield (1895-1899). Canfield had an inquisitive mind, took an interest in libraries, and after his four and conflict-filled years at OSU

ended (he insisted that he was chief executive of OSU, a view not shared by the Trustees or the faculty), Canfield accepted a position as librarian of Columbia University.

As it turned out, Canfield, who was a member of the Library Council, and Jones had a disagreement about planning for a new library. Jones argued that the library should be situated in a location that was close to the center of the campus but in a spot that was not too prominent. She feared that having the library building in a particularly prominent location would cause the University to invest money in making the building monumental. What she wanted was a building that was more functional than monumental and the best place to locate the library building was on the periphery of the Oval, near where the faculty club now stands. From that location, the library could expand into Mirror Lake Hollow as collections grew and more space was needed. President Canfield, on the other hand, insisted that the library was the heart of the university; it should be monumental and should be in the very center of the Oval.

These disagreements were purely academic until 1910. There was no money until then. In that year, an OSU professor, from the College of Law, was a member of the Ohio Senate and persuaded the legislature to appropriate \$250,000 over two years for a library building. Decisions about location became more than theoretical. To assist OSU in the decision, the Trustees hired the Olmstead Brothers, the famous landscaping firm, to recommend a site. Their recommendation, accepted by the Trustees, was to place the building at the head of the Oval, the most prominent location on campus.

Although Jones's ideas about location were not accepted, she was part of a committee of three to recommend an architect and review plans for the building. Consistently, Jones tried to down-scale the monumental aspects of what became the Main

Library, even opposing, unsuccessfully, the addition of the Seal of the State of Ohio to the front of the building as a waste of money. In fact, Jones was very concerned that the money appropriated was much less than what the University had requested (\$250,000 vs \$600,000) and because of this all money should be spent on the functional, not decorative aspects of the building. So disappointed was she in the funding that Jones recommended that President William Oxley Thompson, for whom the library was renamed in 1951, contact Andrew Carnegie, who had assisted financially many academic libraries in Ohio. Unfortunately, nothing came of this important idea. (As it turned out, a Board member was asked to contact Carnegie but did not do so.)

Although Jones lost in many of the discussions in designing the building, in the end she seemed satisfied. In the OSU alumni magazine, which devoted its entire issue of January 1913 to the Main Library, Jones wrote: “Walk up from High Street on some fine winter morning when the sun strikes full against the columns of the eastern facades of the building and the beauty of it is so exquisite that it leaves one speechless; or look up some evening after the lights are lit, and the soft radiance comes down through those great windows of the reference hall and you will feel the spirit of beauty had indeed taken up her abode upon the campus.”

Certain it is that the tale of a librarian in contest with architects and with resource allocators is one that many generations of librarians—past, present, and future—can appreciate. Particularly noteworthy, however, was Jones’s concept of what a library should be. She agreed with an idea proposed by President Eliot of Harvard that libraries should provide for storage areas, (book depositories) where materials infrequently used would be stored away from the library building itself, thereby making more space

available within the central building. Although she doubted Ohio State would acquire land for this purpose, it did fit her sense that providing space for users of the library had a priority. As she put it, “A library building may be looked upon in two ways: First, as a place in which to store books; second, as a place in which to use them. The library of Ohio State University has never been a comfortable place in which to use books, and in planning this new building it has been tried to emphasize comfort in the use of books...The whole building has a feeling of spaciousness and repose which comes from nothing being crowded.”

Looking back upon this era, it is important to identify the theme of the library as a place that fosters learning and that symbolizes the academic mission and the importance of the creation and distribution of knowledge. It was an era of grand library buildings. Currently, there are people who question the importance of a library as a place. In a digital environment, does it matter where the computer sits so long as the information appears on the screen?

At The Ohio State University, we are like many in that we are planning a major renovation of the library that Olive Jones helped to design. Many of the monumental spaces within the building original to the building have disappeared. As an example, there was a grand reading room on the second floor which high ceilings and more than 10,000 books. A student declared...”to see the quite grandeur of the vast Reference Hall, high windows to the east, chaste whiteness of the walls, and the high curve of vaulted arches overhead—this was the climax of impressiveness.” This disappeared when the Libraries inserted another floor to accommodate more students, a decision that one professor would later describe as an “act of barbarism” Currently, we are trying to plan

the renovation in such a way that the monumental aspects of the building are restored but in ways that render the space also functional to users. The situation at Ohio State aside, the larger question that you will face in your careers as librarians will be challenges to balance functionality of library architecture with the aesthetic and symbolic requirements of the library as a central place of learning.

Even as the digital environment challenges earlier paradigms of place, the role of the librarian in information exchange is under review. In the days of Miss Jones, she took an active interest in bibliographic instruction. As early as 1895, Miss Jones took over, at the request of Professor Denny who taught Rhetoric to freshman, the task of orienting them to the library. Under Jones, bibliographic instruction developed to include creating subject bibliographies and lecturing to classes. The first bibliographic course for which credit was earned was “Economic Bibliography” in 1909, given by the librarian responsible for the reference department. OSU’s President William Oxley Thompson observed “The contrast between the old library and the new is very great. The old was a collection of books—the modern a collection of tools; formerly a book depository, now the means to an end.” Clearly, the librarian had become not simply a keeper of information but a teacher and navigator in the exploration of knowledge.

One of the challenges of the digital era is recognition of the primary role of the librarian in the development and exchange of digital information and knowledge. To many users of the Inter-net, Google is the fabled Wizard of Oz; if Google does not have it, then it does not exist. Actually, the digital environment provides enormous opportunities for librarians. One of the exciting projects ahead is the role of librarians in developing and providing access to repositories—Knowledge Banks-- of digital objects.

Another is in the very publication of monographs and serials in digital format as an alternative to the costly but traditional one of commercial publishing. In all of these new ventures, librarians should be perceived by others as teachers and navigators even as the librarians of the Olive Jones era took on those roles.

I want to end this presentation by referring to a book by Steve Covey, entitled SEVEN HABITS OF EFFECTIVE PEOPLE. Habit two is “having the end in sight,” To illustrate this point, Covey asks readers to imagine what it was they would like to have said of them at their own funerals. In 1933, as the memorial for Olive Jones the faculty of The Ohio State University resolved: “Miss Jones held the esteem, loyalty, and sincere affection of the members of her staff, who deeply appreciated her personal interest in them. Her high courage, sound judgment, and stimulating counsel were sources of inspiration.... Her counsel was highly valued by her colleagues in the library profession, and her administrative ability and professional attainments were recognized as being of an exceptionally high order. The present library of The Ohio State University may be truthfully said to be in large part the enduring memorial of the life work of Olive B. Jones.” As you commence your careers as professional librarians, you would do well to have as your model—as your end in sight--the career and accomplishments of Olive Jones.

Thank you and best wishes for continued success.