

Dr. Merrill G. Berthrong
Director of Libraries, 1964-1989

STATE & LOCAL

BOOK BUILDER: WFU Head Librarian

By Rachel Stiffler
JOURNAL REPORTER

When Merrill Berthrong took over the library at Wake Forest University 25 years ago, it was a good deal *louder* than it is now.

Back then, books were on only two of the building's eight levels, and a steady stream of students came through the library to get to classrooms on the other floors. As the classrooms gradually were moved to other buildings, their spaces were filled with more books.

The drama department and the university theater were on the top two floors right up to the late 1970s.

"That was sort of fun when they were there," Berthrong said last week. "Whenever they were doing a musical, they would rehearse up there, and we'd know the entire score by the time it opened."

The "we" is the staff that Berthrong started out with, and the same staff that he ended up with. When Berthrong retired in June as director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, joining

him in retirement were six people from his staff — most of whom had worked at the library at least 25 years.

The new retirees are Jessie Anthony, a member of the cataloging staff since 1965; Minnie Morris Huggins, a U.S. government documents librarian who had been with the library since 1959; Anne McLendon Nicholson, a catalog librarian, and her husband, James M. Nicholson, a circulation librarian, both of whom worked at the library from 1952 to 1954 and from 1961 to the present; and Mildred S. Smitherman, the head of the binding and marking section, who joined the staff in 1961.

The new director, Rhoda K. Channing, will take over Sept. 1. Ms. Channing now works at the O'Neill Library at Boston College, where she is the assistant university librarian for information resources and collection preservation.

Under Berthrong's guidance, the Reynolds library more than tripled its holdings, and the quality of the holdings improved from those

of a small college to those necessary for extensive graduate research.

Berthrong credits his staff with much of the library's growth. While the Wake Forest administration emphasized acquiring more materials during the past 25 years, the number of staff positions remained about the same, he said.

"Traditionally, the library has been understaffed and overworked," Berthrong said. "The emphasis was on building the collection instead of putting money into salaries and services. . . . But I think there will be a shift now to emphasize services and staff."

Faye Edwards, who was a bookkeeper in the acquisitions department for most of her 24 years with the library, said that the image of a library being a dull place to work did not fit the Reynolds library.

"We felt we were part of something exciting," Mrs. Edwards. "It was exciting, seeing young people learn and grow and being able

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WFU LIBRARIAN

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to find the research materials they needed. The excitement compensates for the lack of income."

Berthrong said that when he took the job as director, the Wake Forest administration charged him with the task of increasing the library's holdings. The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation donated \$3.5 million for use as endowment, and Nancy Susan Reynolds added \$1 million to that.

Those gifts allowed the library to step up its acquisitions dramatically, Berthrong said. In 1964, the library had about 253,000 volumes and a budget of \$175,000. This year, it has 850,000 volumes and a budget of \$1.1 million.

But the most important change was in the quality of the holdings, Berthrong said. During his tenure, the library began specializing in certain areas, collecting works of certain authors along with the critical essays that accompanied them.

Those collections included British and American literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, featuring writers such as William Somerset Maugham, Thomas Wolfe, T.S. Eliot, and Mark Twain; Irish authors of the late 19th and early 20th century such as William Butler Yeats, as well as modern Irish poets; and a collection of 300 of Voltaire's works published during his lifetime.

THE LIBRARY ALSO acquired about 300 of the 400 books published by Hogarth Press, which was begun in 1817 by Virginia Woolf and her husband, Leonard Woolf. Berthrong said that the Woolfs' endeavors were monumental because they concentrated on publishing new writers, such as Eliot, who had not yet built a following.

"Their stable of writers looks like a Who's Who of American writers," Berthrong said. "They were the first to publish Sigmund Freud in English, for example. The Hogarth collection is one of my pride and joys."

Another change was the conversion of the library in the early 1960s from the Dewey Decimal system to the

Library of Congress classification, a process that took more than four years, Berthrong said.

The library started computerized cataloging of its books in 1970. It signed on to data bases that linked its cataloging system with other area universities, and compact-disc systems such as InfoTrac now allow students to find many research materials without the cumbersome card catalogs.

For Mrs. Edwards, the new technology meant that bookkeepers in the library two years ago put away the ledgers that they filled out line by line and began using computer software.

And the students changed over the years as well, Mrs. Edwards said.

"The student of today is no longer pushing for causes," she said. "They study more, and they want to do well so they can move into high-income jobs once they leave Wake Forest. They dress much more neatly, I would say more conservatively."

JOHN E. VIA, THE library's assistant director for technical services and the acting director of the library, said that the students who come to the library a few years from now will be able to study and do research in a four-story addition to the library. Construction on the building, which will have 50,000 square feet and include a large atrium and skylights, could begin as early as this spring, he said.

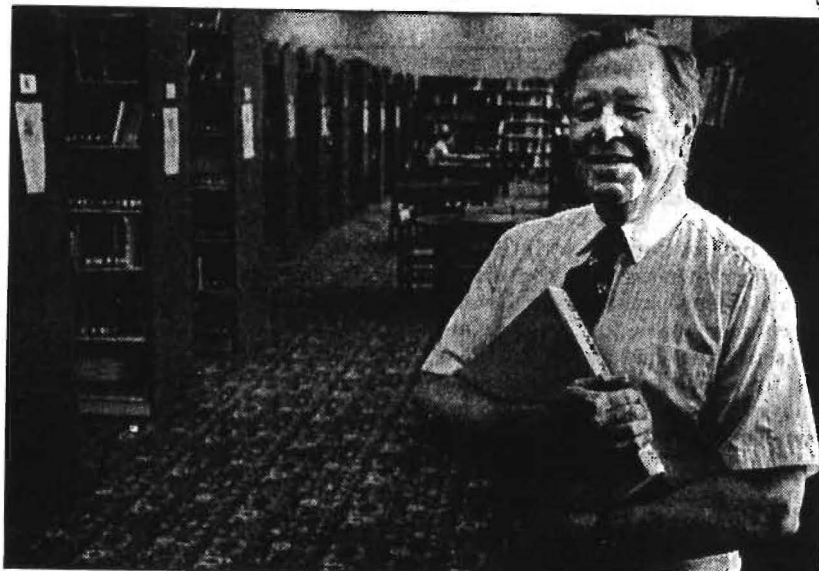
The \$7 million for the project includes some money for fresh paint and minor renovations to the existing building, he said. The library's main entrance will also be moved to the ground level to make the main entrance accessible to handicapped people.

All books and other resources will be listed through on-line computers, Via said, making the card catalogs obsolete. An experimental on-line catalog may be put into use as early as this fall, he said.

During Berthrong's tenure, Via said, the library laid the groundwork for improvements still to come. He said that he likes to compare those years with Berthrong's experience as a fighter pilot.

"Dr. Berthrong was an aviator in World War II, and I like to think that he has done a great job of getting the plane ready for take-off."

Retires After 25 Years



JOURNAL PHOTO BY SCOTT MARTIN

MERRILL BERTHRONG: "A shift now to emphasize services and staff."

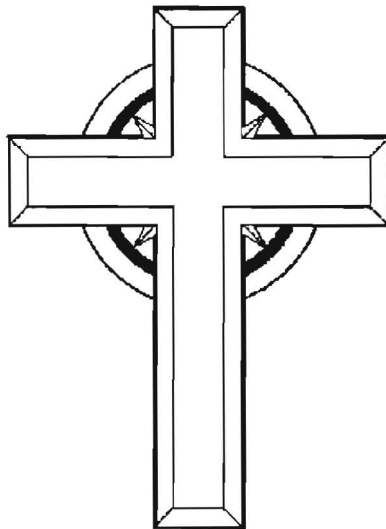
Saint Paul's Episcopal Church

A Service to the Glory of God
and in Loving Memory of

MERRILL GRAY BERTHRONG

JULY 18, 1919 — JANUARY 14, 2003

January 18, 2003
10:00 a.m.



520 SUMMIT STREET
WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA 27101

DONALD P. GOODHEART, RECTOR
JOHN E. SHIELDS, ASSOCIATE
GRAYCE M. O'NEILL, ASSOCIATE
FRED L. HORTON, JR., THEOLOGIAN-IN-RESIDENCE
CARIN DELFS, DEACON
E. DUDLEY COLHOUN, JR., RECTOR EMERITUS
BARBARA C. BEATTIE, DIRECTOR OF MUSIC
JACK MITCHENER, ORGANIST

MERRILL GRAY BERTHRONG

JULY 18, 1919 — JANUARY 14, 2003



CLERGY

The Rev. Donald P. Goodheart, Rector
The Rev. John E. Shields, Associate Rector

ORGANIST

John Mitchner

USHERS

Marvin Ferrell
Fred Uphoff

ACOLYTE

Liz Stafford

A SERVICE TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN LOVING MEMORY OF

MERRILL GRAY BERTHRONG

JULY 18, 1919 — JANUARY 14, 2003

THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD & HOLY EUCHARIST RITE I

PRELUDE

HYMNAL

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

ANTHEM IN PROCESSION *(stand)* 469

OPENING COLLECT 470

180 HYMN: He is risen, He is risen! *(Unser Herrscher)*

THE FIRST READING: Isaiah 25:6-9

PSALM 23 473

THE SECOND READING: Romans 8:14-19, 34-35, 37-39

608 HYMN: Eternal Father, Strong to save *(Melita)*

THE GOSPEL: John 10:11-16

REMARKS FOR THE FAMILY: Dawn Marie Berthrong

HOMILY: The Rev. John E. Shields

THE PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION 480

THE PEACE

552 OFFERTORY HYMN: Fight the good fight *(Pentecost)*

THE HOLY COMMUNION

SURSUM CORDA 333

PREFACE 349

SANCTUS 334

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION 334

THE LORD'S PRAYER 336

THE FRACTION 337

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

THE POSTCOMMUNION PRAYER 482

THE COMMENDATION 482

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL 483

688 HYMN IN PROCESSION: A mighty fortress is our God
(Ein feste Burg)

POSTLUDE



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12 Pico x 15 1/2 Pico
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Dr. McNeill
Berthong
Delivery

59



Berthrong
Dir. of Libraries

21 Project 26 Project



Dr. Merrick Berlman, Rare Books room - 2/73

Photo by H. Jones

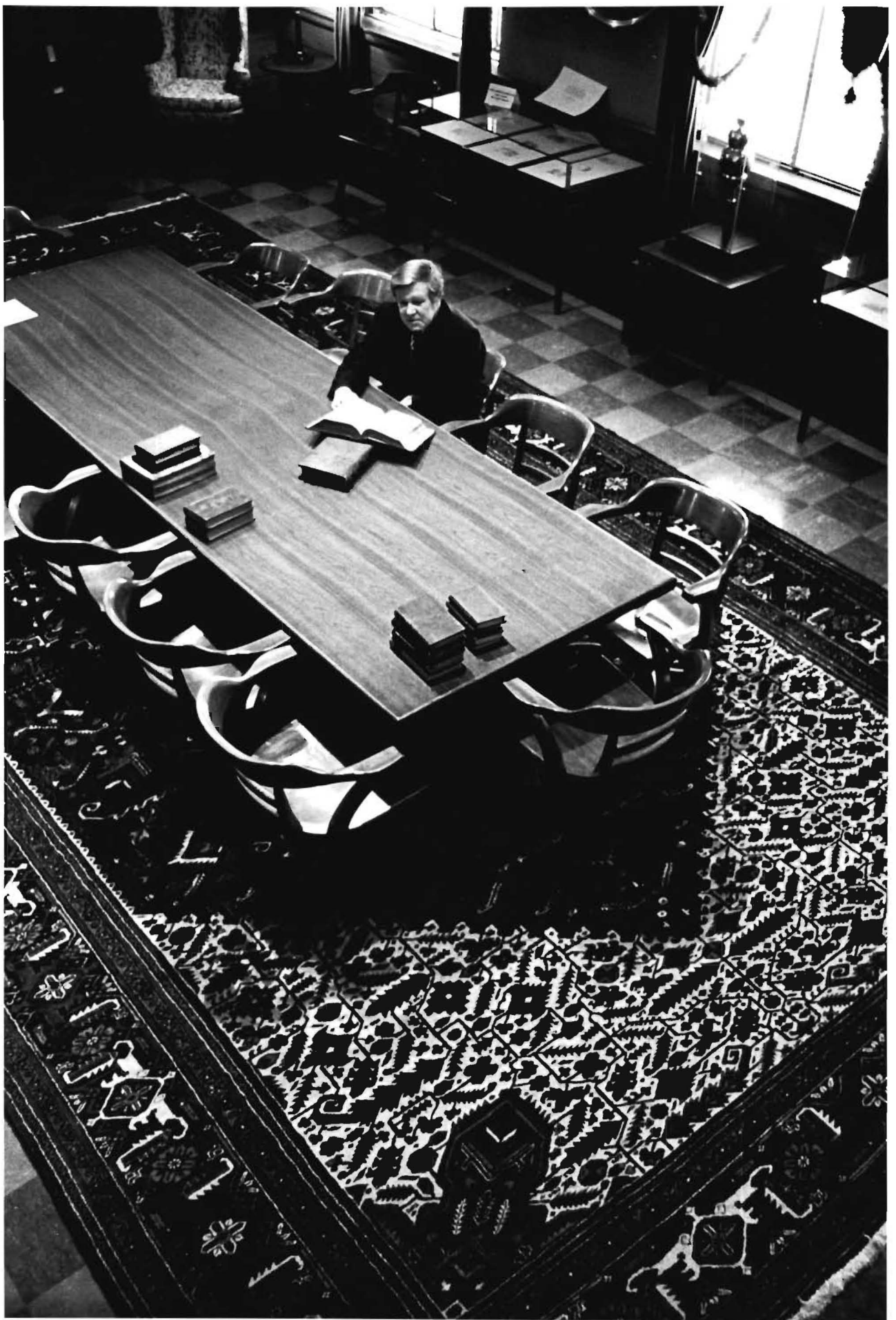


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