



Her Mantra is: *access*

Q&A WITH MEGHAN HAYS

BY SUE STARRETT

HAYS PHOTOS BY JANET CENTURY

The pictorial history of the Shaker Library in this issue was spearheaded by Meghan Hays, the enthusiastic caretaker of the Library's Local History Collection. Housed at the Shaker Heights Public Library's Main Library, the amazing collection is on the first floor, in a room protected by glass doors, directly behind the reference desk.

Though the material is non-circulating, access is easy. This welcoming attitude is championed by Hays – a Balkan historian, Russian major, and professional librarian. She helps patrons arrange to view an array of primary materials, including old photos, yearbooks from the public and private schools, and plat map books that list the names of Shaker's homeowners dating back to the 1920s.

The Local History Collection began in 1995. Then-Library Director Fran Buckley organized it as a collaborative effort bringing together the resources of the Library, Schools, Shaker Historical Society, and the City. The collection was funded initially by the John P. Murphy Founda-

tion, the Cleveland Foundation, and the George Gund Foundation and later folded into the Shaker Library's budget. Kristen Pool was the Library's first local history librarian/archivist.

As part of her responsibilities, Hays, who has been on the job for eight years, maintains a relationship with the Shaker Historical Society. Her position as a liaison trustee allows for a natural dialogue and cooperation. Hays also collaborates with other area organizations, such as the Cleveland Archival Roundtable, Cleveland State University's Cleveland Memory Project, the Society of Ohio Archivists, and Ohio's Heritage Northeast to learn what others are doing, as well as give visibility to Shaker's collection.

Moreover, she helps with outreach to local authors and local history, historic house preservation, and genealogy events at the Library.

Hays is grateful for the help that volunteers have provided during her tenure with filing, database creation, and other labor-intensive tasks. She works only 20

hours each week, and part of that time she wears her “adult services librarian” hat, on duty at the adult reference desk, continuing to do what she loves best: finding information for eager learners.

What brought you and your family to Shaker Heights?

We have been in Shaker for 10 years, and we moved here for the schools. My husband David Crampton and I came from Ann Arbor, where we had been in graduate school. He was offered a job teaching social work at Case Western Reserve University, where he is now an associate professor and helping to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system. Our daughter Hazel went through the sixth grade in the Shaker Schools and then transferred to Hathaway Brown; she just graduated and is attending Oberlin College. Henry, our son, is a sixth grader at Woodbury Elementary School.

Where did you grow up and attend college?

I grew up in Maine, though my family moved to the Washington D.C. area before I started high school. I earned a bachelor’s degree in Russian at Grinnell College, and three master’s degrees [Russian and Eastern European Studies, History, and Library Science] at the University of Michigan. I also finished most of my work on a Ph.D. in history. As a graduate assistant, I did a lot of teaching and loved interacting with the students and helping them find information.

However, I really disliked the grading process. Then I had an epiphany and decided to become a librarian. As a librarian I help people learn about ideas and information, but there’s no grading involved. I realized I had wanted to be a librarian since the sixth grade, but hadn’t been paying attention to that desire. It really is a perfect fit.

How long have you worked at the Shaker Heights Public Library? Where did you work previously?

I was hired as the Local History Librarian

Shaker Heights Public Library: Serving the Community for 75 Years

A Photo Essay by Meghan Hays with Margaret Simon

Shaker Library’s commitment to its community is one of its greatest hallmarks. Being community-based and community-responsive is perhaps the Library’s most effective technique for building loyalty. This is evidenced by high voter approval ratings (between 75 and 78 percent) and a circulation that is well over the one million mark (1,281,980 in 2011) – which represents a circulation of 45 items per capita. The Shaker Heights community loves and uses its Library.

To fully reflect the history of the Library and include all the people and events that shaped it would take more space than this magazine allows. Therefore, we selected photographs from the Local History Collection that capture the essence of the eras. Many residents will recall the wooden card catalogs, while the newest generation’s Library experience is based as much on a connection to the Internet as on books. Some residents may not know that the Community Building was once the Main Library, and others will recall when the Bertram Woods Branch opened in 1960.

Many more photographs are available in the Local History Collection and its online collection at www.ClevelandMemory.org/shakerheights. The Library welcomes additional donations from its residents.



Ellen Ewing and staff inside storefront library, 1938. Ellen was the library director from 1938 to 1949.



Top: Ellen Ewing with children at library storefront door, 1943. **Bottom:** Exteriors of the new Lee Road library building under construction in 1950 (inset), and at completion in 1951. It is now the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Community Building.

in September 2004. When we first moved to the area, I worked for local historian Virginia Dawson, on a contract for NASA, archiving engineers' files for the Rocket Engine Test Facility. Working at the NASA Glenn Research Facility was an incredible experience. After that project was completed, I was a substitute reference librarian at the Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights-University Heights libraries for about a year, during which time I learned about the job opening at Shaker.

Do other communities have local history collections like Shaker's?

Many communities have historical societies, but fewer have extensive local history collections in their public libraries. Ours not only offers information to the public, but also provides a way to connect Shaker's different institutions. Staff from the City, Library, and Schools share material, ask and answer questions, and in the pro-



cess, collectively provide a better understanding of our community.

The Local History Collection operates in a gray area between the preservation-minded world of the archives and the access-oriented world of the public library. Our purpose is to provide access to rare and irreplaceable materials in a way that is as convenient to patrons as possible, while also protecting the material from loss or damage.

Access to the Local History Collection is my mantra. Above all, I want people to know that I am available to answer their questions. I try to respond promptly, am creative about finding answers, and do a lot of reference by email and phone. People are trying to learn about their community, and I want to make primary sources available to them, especially through electronic means.

Let's talk about the Centennial. How have you and the collection been involved?

We just finished the Building Card Database, which really streamlined the process of providing our patrons with access to primary documents. This was a huge effort and something we've wanted to do since I started my job. Stored in filing drawers at City Hall were about 10,000 index cards, containing the official building record of every house in Shaker Heights. More than 20 volunteers worked weekly for hours and hours, scanning all the cards and entering all the data. They are the true heroes of this project. They came to us from all walks of life including nursing, law, computer programming, and teaching – everyone from high school students to retirees. I got to meet lots of wonderful people.

The online database has been live at shakerbuildings.com for several months, though we are still dealing with a few details. We were fortunate to work with the City's Planning Department and to receive grants from the Ohio Historical Re-



Virginia Robinson in 1949. Virginia was library director from 1949 to 1969.

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ords Advisory Board and Ohio Historic Preservation Office to fund this project and its companion, the Shaker Heights content on the Cleveland Historical mobile app.

I also have assisted the Centennial's history subcommittee, and I sang on the Centennial video along with the Shaker Historical Society, the Schools, and the City in commemorating this milestone. We work with Shaker Life all the time, especially this year. It's great to both work and live in this community.

What's the next big project?

We have over 120 rolls of microfilmed blueprints of Shaker's homes, given to us by the City's Building Department to offer greater access to these building plans. I hope that we can digitize these in the next few years. The largest part of what I do is to help architects and homeowners with housing research, and sometimes I assist out-of-state people looking for a parent's childhood home. Many want to see blueprints, but for houses built before 1945, unfortunately, we have neither the microfilm nor the originals.

What sorts of activities do you enjoy when you aren't at the Library?

I love biking, reading, gardening, hanging out with my family, and appreciating everything that Cleveland has to offer, in particular the shows at Playhouse Square and the museums and festivals at University Circle. I also serve on Shaker's Landmark Commission and enjoy volunteering at the schools – especially in the libraries at Fernway and Woodbury elementary schools.

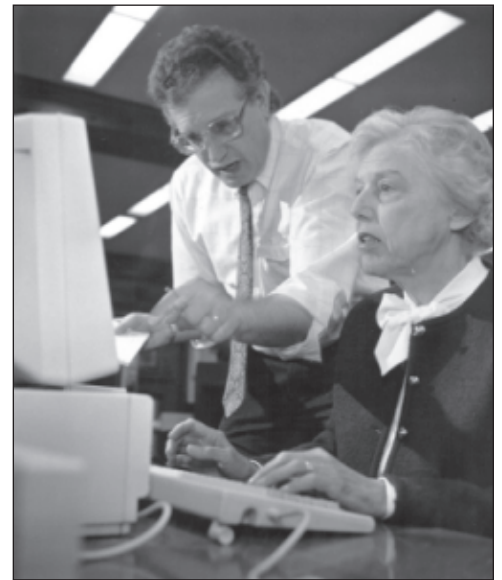


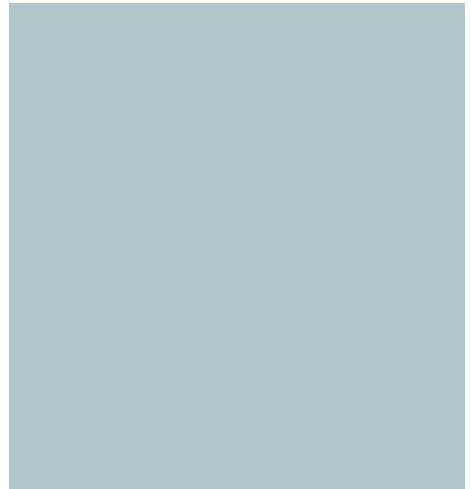
Margaret Campbell at Bertram Woods Branch in the 1960s (top). Margaret was the library director from 1969 to 1975. **Story time** in the 1970s (middle). **Director Barbara Luton** and officials at the former Moreland Elementary School for the new library groundbreaking in 1992 (bottom). Barbara was the library director from 1975 to 1994.

Library Technology



Advancements in technology: Boys checking card catalog at left; below left, librarian Phyllis Harper and a patron using the new automated catalog; below right, librarian Bob Silver helps a patron with early public catalog; bottom: the new computer training lab.





Clockwise from top: Fran Buckley with Nancy Moore at one million circulation celebration, 1996. Fran was library director from 1994 to 1998. **Edrice Ivory**, director from 1998 to 2005, at the opening of the second floor renovation in 1998. **Library Director** Luren Dickinson and Library Board President Jeanne Shatten flank winners of the 2012 MLK Writing Contest. Luren became director in 2005.



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