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June 2009: The Sky's not Falling but the Roof Was

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Focus

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The sky's not falling, but the roof was

Among the many challenges of an old—and increasingly aging—building are the varied workarounds required to make everything run smoothly. Dacus, celebrating its 40th birthday this year, now falls into this category. Our challenges range from the very small and trivial, to the somewhat great and monumental. It's one of the many reasons why we began planning for a new building a good many years ago and have renewed our efforts earnestly since 1999. A 40-year-old building puts us in a regular quandary: do we fix this problem—whatever it is—or can it wait until the new building? Some of the time the decision is made for us by the accompanying price tag; if it costs too much, and it isn't mission-critical, we'll generally put it off if we can still function in the customary Winthrop manner. If it is mission-critical, we bite the bullet and go forward, regardless of cost. One such problem—a leaky roof—proved to be in the latter category and was repaired in late summer last year.

For most of my tenure here at Winthrop, Dacus has had various roof problems, ranging from the very minor to the—eventually anyway—very major. Many of the problems were handled quickly and most adequately by our crackerjack facilities personnel. Increasingly over the last two years, however, our roof problems magnified in both intensity and coverage, and repairs would no longer give way to any stopgap measure, however masterfully crafted. True to Murphy's Law—if it can go wrong at the



The Government Documents Office was flooded several times prior to the replacement of the roof.

worst possible time, it will—our roof gave way summer before last while I was away.

I just happened to have taken an extended trip to Italy during the most dramatic moment in our roof's history, a history which had exceeded its maximum longevity by at least 10 years. Our 18-year roof held up well for twenty-seven years. It decided to reach a breakthrough, literally, while I tagged along with my wife after she had won an NEH grant to study Dante in Siena (incidentally, she was chosen as one of 15 teachers in a nationwide competition—and yes, I am quite proud of her!).

Two weeks after we arrived in Siena, I received an e-mail detailing the damage from very heavy rains that had recently fallen, our only substantial rainfall amount during our extended severe drought. (Only

Murphy's Law could have devised a heavy rainfall during a severe drought and my only extended vacation in ten years!) Not only had the rains fallen, but the subsequent pooling on our flat-top roof poured into the second floor and even a little to the first. Thanks to the quick action of those on hand at the time, the rains did very little damage. Fortunately the water came through to an office (and to one below it) rather than to any of our over 600,000 volumes.

This is not to say that the irregular rounds of leaking had not created some book damage over the years. We replaced what books we could and removed what we could not to prevent moisture problems from developing. Our difficulties magnified with each

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Things I Found En Route To Looking Up



Gina White

The syndicated columnist Sydney J. Harris (1917-1986) used to occasionally title his column “Things I Found En Route To Looking Up Other Things.”

These were always my favorites to read. The column would include tidbits of information, interesting stories, astonishing facts, jokes, and other morsels that Harris ran across while researching various topics for his column. Quite often, while searching the Winthrop Archives for information to answer a question or research a specific topic, I come across interesting tidbits that are just too good not to share. I hope you enjoy them as much as I have.

“If an American be asked abroad of what country are you, his first impulse is to answer, I am a New Yorker, a Virginian, a Massachusetts man, or a Carolinian, as the fact may be. Whatever his pride in his nationality, his home instincts and affections are bounded by State lines. And as the English Queen said, that when she was dead they would find “Calais” graven on her heart; so on every American heart there is written the name of some locality, obscure, hidden away from the eyes of historians and geographers, in the nook of some great mountain range, in the cove of some vast river, in the rich valley of some empire State, but the spot still around which all that is truly his life revolves . . .”

W. H. Trescot (1822-1898), American historian/diplomat. From an oration delivered before the South Carolina

Historical Society Thursday, May 19, 1859. *Russell's Magazine*, July, 1859, p. 289.

“M. Mouchot, of Paris, has invented what he calls a solar steam engine, in which a spherical mirror or reflector of a hollow form is placed in such a position as to receive the full strength of the falling sunbeams, the intensified heat of which is communicated to the boiler. A model now on exhibition is said to work admirably. It is believed by the inventor that in inter-tropical climates, such engines will be found the most economical motive power yet known.”

***Rural Carolinian*, Vol.1, no. 1, October, 1869, p. 59.**

“In 1790 in South Carolina, it was against the law for taverns to allow their patrons to play billiards after sunset. The law reads as follows: And if any person keeping a tavern or punch-house and billiard-table, shall permit or suffer any person or persons whatsoever to play at any billiard-table after the Sun hath been set 1 hour, shall for every such offence forfeit the sum of £4 proclamation money, to be recovered as is directed by the *act for the trial of small and mean causes*, 1 half to the informer, the other half toward defraying the expense of the watch.”

The Public Laws of the State of South Carolina, 1790, p. 181, No. 713, An additional Act to an Act, entitled, An Act for the better Regulating Taverns and Punch-Houses, IX.

“One day in the spring of 1884, Mrs. Frederick White of Coventry, N.Y. asked her husband to bring her a sack of flour from a nearby store. He started to do so and that was the

last she saw of him until one day last week, when he walked into the house with a sack of flour on his shoulder, saying as he set it down that he had not forgot the errand. He has been in the far West, has accumulated a good deal of money and will take Mrs. White to his Western home.”

***Yorkville Enquirer*, January 2, 1901 p. 4.**

“About the year 1684, the Legislature of Pennsylvania passed a resolution that ‘no member thereof should come to the House barefoot, or eat his bread and cheese on the steps.’”

***The Carolina Planter*, April 29, 1840 p. 126.**

“In order to take pleasure in the woods, one must understand the language of the woods; for all created things have a language, that is, they are capable of exciting thought. Those in whom the forest quickens thought sufficiently, take pleasure in the forest; and their pleasure is so much the more innocent, as the images produced in their thoughts represent rather the grandeur of God, than their own grandeur. This is the advantage of solitude.”

**Pierre Nicole (1625-1662), French theologian
Russell's Magazine, July 1859, p. 360.**

“The following notice was pasted on a large box which passed over the Pacific Railroad a few days since: ‘Baggage-smashers are requested to handle this box with care, as it contains nitro-glycerine, Greek fire, gun-cotton and two live gorillas.’”

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Other Things

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Rural Carolinian, Vol. 1, no. 1, October, 1869, p. 62.

“‘Doctor,’ said the rheumatic patient, ‘you seem to hunt for the sore spots.’ ‘I know them the moment I put my fingers on them,’ replied the specialist, who was giving his joints and muscles a kneading. ‘I don’t have to hunt for them. That is a part of my education.’ ‘Your fingers become sensitive, I suppose,’ groaned the patient, ‘like those of a postal clerk, who can tell whether a letter has money in it or not as soon as he takes it in his hand.’ ‘Well, hardly so highly trained as that’ replied the specialist, with a slight muscular contraction of his left eyelid. ‘I can never tell, when I take hold of a patient, whether there is any money in him or not.’”

Yorkville Enquirer, January 5, 1901, p. 4.

“A girl, keeper of a toll-gate in England, was asked by a swell velocipedist [bicyclist] how much he had to pay. ‘That, sir,’ replied she, ‘depends upon whether you ride through the gate, or whether you get off your dandy-horse and drag it through; because in that case every two-wheeled vehicle, drawn by a horse or an ass, pay three pence.’”

Rural Carolinian, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 1869, p. 125

All of these items and more may be found in the Archives holdings. For more information please contact the Louise Pettus Archives and have a look at our digitized collections at <http://www.winthrop.edu/dacus/About/Archives/digitizedcollections.htm>.

Gina Price White
Director of Archives and Special
Collections
Louise Pettus Archives

Roof repairs keep Dacus dry until new building arrives

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leak since those leaks rarely if ever occurred in the same place twice. It could have been much worse. Even the offices received little damage, though the most affected ones required a complete rearranging to avoid major equipment lost. (Again, kudos to those quick-thinking library faculty and staff who saved pretty much everything!)

I am happy to report that the new roof has passed its first tests with flying colors. Since its installation in August 2008 we’ve had dozens of significant rains without any leaking whatever. This is good news, especially since by now we would have had to move, reshelve and cover whole ranges had the roof not been so capably repaired. The bad news is that we did have to spend more than \$200,000 to replace a roof that, in the best of all possible worlds, would have been a new building. And of course we cannot be take this roof with us when the new building is erected.

This leads to natural question: when will the new library grace our west campus? I wish I could say when. I wish, desperately so, I could say *next week!* Alas, while you can see the sign indicating its location near the intersection of Alumni Drive and Founder’s Lane, so far no ground has been broken. We have placed the library building as the chief and primary capital academic outlay for the next state bond bill. No ground breaking will take place unless and until a bond bill is passed and that bill includes the library as one of the expenditures. Given the current and most serious economic downturn in decades (and possibly ever in this

country) a bond bill might be many years away.

Our biggest and ongoing challenge is staving off subterranean moisture problems which we do on an ongoing basis. Our heating and cooling unit—itsself a multiple million-dollar project to replace—is simply unable to keep up. We’re keeping a step, probably no more than a step, ahead, but how long that will last is anyone’s guess. Winthrop is made up of very dedicated and creative people and I have no doubt we’ll remain ahead of the problem until the new building opens its doors.

When I came in 1999, the new building carried a \$25 million price tag. Since that time the cost has nearly doubled, one of the downsides of delaying a project this size is that prices increase, especially steel. It can’t be helped, however, especially in these terrible economic times when far too many people are not looking at new buildings, but looking either for new jobs, or even new careers.

One of the many benefits of working at Winthrop is its indefatigable people who work tirelessly in every part of its organization. We’ll get a new building, of that I am certain. What I can’t predict (and apparently no one else can) is when the economy will begin to improve and make possible that illusive bond bill that not only Winthrop needs, but also many South Carolina colleges and universities equally dependent upon it. In any event, we’ll keep working on it and keep you informed.

For now I am happy to report that nothing is coming through our roof, at least not anymore.

Mark Y. Herring
Dean of Library Services

Service in an instant with a message

Instant message reference service was introduced in Dacus Library a little over a year ago and it is already proving a huge success. In the past eight months, we have handled nearly 300 IM questions, almost as many as received via our telephone reference service.

Clearly students are finding this to be a valuable service. Not knowing what to expect in terms of volume or type of questions, we were cautious when we first initiated the service in the spring 2008 semester. Since we decided that the librarian staffing the reference desk would handle IM questions along with walk-in, telephone, and e-mail questions, we wanted to proceed slowly until we had a better idea as to the amount of traffic we would have via this service.

During that spring semester, the IM service was available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. We expanded the hours beginning this past fall semester to include weekday evenings (until 9 p.m.) and Saturdays (1 to 6 p.m.). While there have been bumps along the way, overall the service has worked out well. That is not to say

everything is perfect. There are times when the reference librarian is helping a student at the desk only to have an instant message pop up (or the telephone to ring) at the same time.

There was one time, for example, when I was on duty and began receiving multiple IM questions from several high school students working on a class project. That made for a very exciting – and frustrating – hour on the desk. And some IM questions would be more quickly and thoroughly answered in person or by telephone. It is not unusual to spend 15 or 20 minutes texting back and forth to clarify a question that could be handled in a matter of seconds had the student called or come by the library.

Our experience has led us to make a number of policy decisions. First, the walk-in patron is given priority over email, IM, or telephone. While we try to respond quickly to an instant message, we feel the student who has made the effort to come to the library should not be asked to wait while we answer an instant message. (We will indicate to the IM questioner

that we are helping a patron at the desk and to please wait.) Sometimes this means that the student has gone off-line before we can begin responding to his/her question. And as with telephone or e-mail questions, we will ask the student to drop by the library if it is a particularly complex query that requires face-to-face interaction.

We do find IM to be a nice complement to our other forms of reference service. While it will never replace in-person reference, students seem to appreciate the fact that we have provided them this additional avenue of assistance.

Bob Gorman
Head of Reference

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Active People

Jackie McFadden and **Patricia Stafford**, government documents, presented “The Natural History of the Marsh Tacky Horses of South Carolina” at the Charleston County Public Library on March 15. The program was part of the Friends of the Library Lecture Series.

Gina Price White and **Andrew Johnston**, archives, attended the Palmetto Archives, Libraries, and Museums Council on Preservation

(PALMCOP) 2008 Conference and Annual Meeting on November 13, 2008 in Columbia, S.C. The Conference included sessions concerning HVAC systems, public speaking, and disaster planning.

Gina Price White, archives, was invited to participate in the S.C. State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB) Conference on the Future of South Carolina Records on December 3, 2008 at the S.C. Department of Archives and History. The group’s mission was to

help develop a plan to preserve and provide access to the historical records of the state.

Carrie Volk presented at the Southeastern Innovative Users Group (SIUG) on November 13, 2008. The program was titled “Enhancing your OPAC with Third Party Apps” and showed how Dacus Library has utilized the Meebo Chat system and ColdFusion programming language to implement chat reference services.