

A History of Armstrong's Library

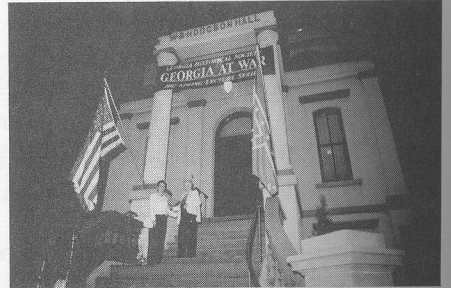
by Helen Woodward Fentress

Armstrong's library has come a long way since 1935 when the college first opened its doors as Armstrong Junior College on the corner of Bull and Gaston Streets in downtown Savannah.

In those early days small was beautiful, as anyone will realize who talks to Mrs. Dorothy Horton Miller, the college's first librarian. In the handsome white brick building which had been given to the city by the family of George F. Armstrong, the library occupied two elegant rooms, panelled in walnut, on the first floor; and here everyone, it seems, pitched in to help get the library, and the college, off to a good start. Savannah's mayor, Thomas M. Gamble, to whom goes much of the credit for the founding of the college, gave unstinting support and encouragement, as well as many fine books from his own collection; and other notable Savannahians, among them Miss Ola Wyeth, for many years librarian of the Public Library, greatly assisted with advice and help of various sorts in the establishment of the Armstrong Junior College Library. Prominent citizens-- friends of the college-- went out of their way to make the young faculty feel at home, and there were often invitations to lunch at the Oglethorpe Club across the way, or trips down-river on one of Captain Frank Spencer's tugboats (his daughter, Margaret Spencer Lubs, was on the faculty), not to mention picnics and parties at the Amfico Club at the beach.

And everyone gave books! The initial collection of only about 4500 volumes, many of them donated, was quickly supplemented by purchases of works requested by the faculty to support the curriculum; and the hardworking librarian herself kept the library open 13 hours every day except Sunday, and then took books home to catalog. A few student assistants worked for small pay (30 cents an hour, or \$3.00 a week). These were still the pre-war days of The Great Depression. Mrs. Miller remembers one incident where one of her student assistants who badly needed a pair of shoes, nonetheless spent his first paycheck to take a girl out on a date. What makes this a poignant memory for her is that this boy was not too long afterwards lost in the Battle of the Coral Sea.

In the first ten years of its existence, the library grew to not many more than 6,000 volumes, and had a series of four librarians in three locations. Mrs. Miller's two-year stint as librarian was followed by the four-year tenure of Miss Lulie Henderson. During its first six years the library remained on the first floor of the Armstrong Building, but in 1942 Miss Mary Elizabeth Mayo came from Virginia to be librarian, and the library, needing larger quarters, was moved to the third floor which had formerly been the ballroom of the home. This move provided not only more spacious quarters within, but added the use of the large balcony which ran the length of the building, affording a marvelous view of Bull Street and Forsyth Park, and of course, room in which students could study while enjoying the sunshine.



In March 1943 Miss Helen Woodward (now Mrs. Helen Fentress) became librarian, and in the late summer of the next year the library was moved two doors down Gaston Street to the Lane Building which had been the gift in 1935 of Mr. Mills B. Lane, one of the college's most important benefactors. (Two intervening buildings have since been torn down.) In the Lane Building the library occupied the first two floors, formerly used for classes in Business and Commerce. Now the third floor was still reserved for classroom use, while the basement housed the offices of the Veterans' Administration.

These were exciting times in the library's and the college's history. World War II was well underway, with students constantly going off to war. Troop trains moving through Union Station usually carried contingents of Armstrong students headed for the war zones, or brought the lucky ones back when the war was over. All too many did not return.

Occasionally at this new little college something out of the ordinary would occur to create a diversion, such as the arrival from New York one day of a famous photographer from *Harper's Bazaar*, Richard Avedon, with two models whom he posed on the steps of the Lane Building. The photograph which resulted subsequently graced the cover of the magazine.

The Lane Library itself was an attractive and a lively place, with its spacious and well-lighted reading rooms, and with its special collections (e.g., the Gamble Collection). Maps and paintings adorned the walls. Though its budget was small, imaginative planning and careful buying kept the book collection up-to-date and adequate for the needs of the very able and dedicated faculty.



The faculty was still small and close-knit, a family, almost. Among its members in those days, in addition to Mrs. Lubs, were W. Orson Beecher, Mrs. Margaret Fortson Stephens, Dr. Martha Fay, and Dr. Everett Bishop, to name a few. Joseph Killorin, still in school, but soon to join the faculty, was very much a member of the group. President Foreman M. Hawes and his wife, Mrs. Lilla Mills Hawes, not only supported the faculty in every way, but were close friends and advisors as well. As Director of the Georgia Historical Society, Mrs. Hawes was of great help to students and faculty alike, and the fact that the Historical Society building, Hodgson Hall, was only across the street from Armstrong was of tremendous advantage to the college, both as a place for study, and for the location of important resource material.

During 1947-1949, when Helen Woodward was away, Miss Elizabeth Colson served as librarian, with the library still located in the Lane Building on Gaston Street. In 1949 when Miss Woodward returned, Armstrong's library was again moved, this time into Hodgson Hall where its collection was interfiled with that of the Georgia Historical Society which numbered 10,000 volumes, making a total of 16,000 books available to students and faculty of the college. In addition, a hundred periodicals were now subscribed to, augmenting the Society's collection of 80 magazines, and newspapers dating back to 1763.

Armstrong's phonograph record collection was also beginning to grow, and students could come to the basement of Hodgson Hall which housed the college's periodical and record collections, as well as the librarian's office, and listen to their favorite music.

It was about this time also that a small branch of the University of Georgia housed at Hunter Field closed down and gave its library to Armstrong. An amusing story related by Mrs. Barbara Anchors (who became acting librarian in late 1950 when Helen Woodward left) was that when she requisitioned an electric eraser to change the Library of Congress call numbers on the University of Georgia gift books to the Dewey Classification, the college's financial officer rushed over to find out what this electric eraser business was all about, but when he saw the stack of cards to be revised, and realized what an electric eraser was, he quickly agreed to the purchase.



For 15 years, 1949-1965 the Armstrong Library remained in Hodgson Hall, utilizing the resources of that library along with its own. In those years the collection of this junior college library grew to 17,000 volumes.

Among the librarians who served in the years 1949-1965 (in addition to those already named), and their terms of service, were Walter Johnston (who served only a few months), Ray Rowland (two years), Muriel McCall (five years), Ruth Smith (three years), and Reglana Yoast, who began at the Hodgson Hall location in 1964 (the year Armstrong became a four-year college), moved with the library to its new location on the present campus in late 1965, and remained as librarian until 1974, a total of ten years.

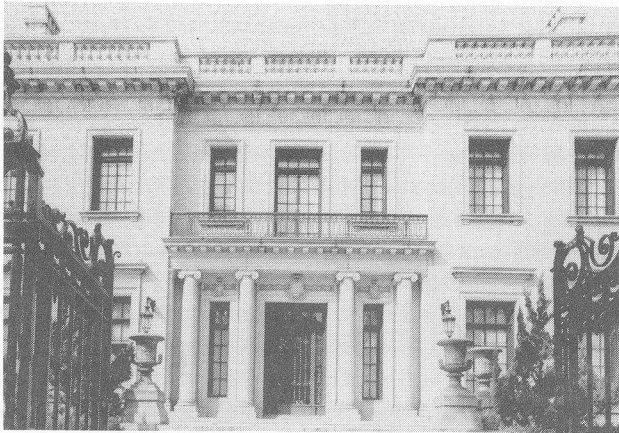
In its new location the library again became the Lane Library and it grew by leaps and bounds. Its holdings had grown to 30,000 volumes by the year 1966-67; 55,000 by 1969-70; and by 1974, when George Sloan came as librarian, holdings included 83,000 books, 750 periodicals, 2400 reels of microfilm, and 21,300 microforms. During the year 1975-76 the library building was greatly enlarged and a television studio added. The library now joined SOLINET.

George Sloan left in 1976, when total resources numbered 140,000, including 92,000 books. By now the library employed, in addition to the Director, a staff of seven.

Gerald Sandy came to the library as acting director during the year 1976-77, and became director the following year, leaving in 1980 to get his doctorate in library science. During that year Ethel J. Miller was acting director with a staff of ten.

Dr. Sandy returned during the school year 1981-82, and served as director until 1985, for a total of eight years. During these years the library's resources increased to a total of 500,000, including 140,000 books and bound periodicals. An online database for bibliographic research was acquired, and in 1982 an archive was established with the opening of the Minis Room (endowed by the family of Florence Powell Minis). This archive collection contains material pertaining to the early history of Savannah and of Georgia (such as *The*





Colonial Records of Georgia, and *The Confederate Records of Georgia*), as well as books by and about Georgia authors, and of course, a complete collection of Armstrong College publications, including copies of *The Inkwell*, *Geechee*, and college catalogs all dating back to the school's earliest days. Rare books are also housed here.

After Dr. Gerald Sandy left, Kristina Brockmeier served as library director until 1987 when Everett J. Dennis came from South Carolina to serve in that capacity. Serving with him is a staff of 12, six of them professional librarians. The library's total resources now number 600,000, including 14,000 books;

35,000 records, slides, video tapes, and motion pictures; over 400,000 microforms; and more than 800 magazine and newspaper subscriptions. Library services offered include bibliographic instruction for classes or individuals on demand and computer-assisted information retrieval, or bibliographic searching, called *CARL* in our library (for Computer Assisted Research in the Library). This system gives access to over 300 databases in the sciences, education, and other fields, and is handled through the library's reference department. Also online is the *INFOTRAC* system, with access to thousands of periodical articles which can be called up by subject or keyword.

An important library service is interlibrary loan, now greatly facilitated by the library's newly-acquired FAX machine, which transmits or receives printed material via a telephone-activated system.

The library's A-V department is of particular importance. Its resources include software of all kinds, and machines for utilizing this material (including compact-disc players), listening equipment for foreign language tapes, and other kinds of tape players and overhead projectors and slide projectors, to name but a few. A-V materials are circulated, and A-V production is encouraged.

But perhaps the library's (and the college's) greatest claim to fame is the very intellectual activity which takes place periodically in the library's television studio when the Conrad Aiken lectures are taped. Noted scholars from around the world come to Armstrong from time to time, and here, with the help of special staff and the A-V department, these scholars read and have their important lectures recorded on film.

The Armstrong Library has grown up in the 53 years of its existence. It has, indeed, come a long way. (Written by request for publication in *The Inkwell*, January 1989)