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Mary Lou Harkness oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, June 10, 2003

Mary Lou Harkness (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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Current Position: Retired in 1991 as Director
Emeritus of the USF Tampa Campus Library
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Mrs. Harkness came to USF in 1958 as a catalog librarian.

Circumstances that brought Mrs. Harkness to USF

When Mrs. Harkness came to interview for the USF position she was a student at Columbia University in the School of Library Science. One of Mrs. Harkness' fellow students was a friend she had known from her days as a librarian at Georgia Tech University. Her friend had worked with Elliot Hardaway at the University of Florida. Mr. Hardaway was recruiting staff for the USF library and wrote a letter to Mrs. Harkness' friend asking if she had any recommendations for a catalog librarian. She recommended Mrs. Harkness. Mr. Hardaway asked her to come down for an interview. Her friend told her the most important thing about the position is not where it is or what it is, but whom you work for. "And she said you will never work for a better person than Elliot Hardaway. Based on that, and the idea of being in a brand new institution was very interesting and exciting, and maybe a little frightening," says Mrs. Harkness. She came to Tampa to interview for the position.

First impressions of Dr. Allen

Mrs. Harkness says she noticed Dr. Allen's enthusiasm and vision for the university right away. The day of her interview she drove out to the Tampa campus with Dr. Allen. She says President Allen could visualize the beginnings of the campus. The buildings for the campus were already designed. They models were on a tabletop. She says Dr. Allen had a vision of what the physical campus would look like. Also, Dr. Allen had visions for the organization of the university and the curriculum. "He was a very distinguished gentleman," states Mrs. Harkness.

First impressions of Elliot Hardaway

Mr. Hardaway was the first person that Dr. Allen hired at USF. Dr. Allen believed the center of the university should be the library. Mrs. Harkness says that Mr. Hardaway was very unassuming and there was nothing arrogant about him at all. The first evening she arrived Mr. Hardaway came to meet her and take her out to dinner. "We had a very interesting visit. He discussed his ideas about the library and the things he felt were important," Mrs. Harkness states. She says that Mr. Hardaway had already decided that

the USF library would use the Library of Congress classification, which was better for a higher education library. They discussed ideas about cataloging. “I think he was favorably impressed with me, and I certainly was favorably impressed with him,” she states. He did not hire her officially during this visit.

Importance of the library to Dr. Allen

Mrs. Harkness says that Dr. Allen believed in the centrality of the library. “The library is the heart of the campus. He truly believed that,” she states. Mrs. Harkness says Dr. Allen knew that a library was essential for higher education. Mrs. Harkness says that during the time Dr. Allen was president, he supported the library financially as well as he was able to. The library building was one of the first buildings in the planning stage.

First impressions of the USF campus

The day of her interview, Mrs. Harkness drove to the campus. “There was nothing here, but oak and palmetto,” she says. Mrs. Harkness says the bareness of the campus gave her no concerns. She had no doubts about her decision to come here once she saw the campus. She was still committed to coming to USF. “I continued to think that it was an interesting and challenging opportunity. I never regretted that decision,” states Mrs. Harkness.

Where did Mrs. Harkness stay when she first arrived in Tampa?

Mr. Hardaway got her a room at the YWCA downtown, but it was not air-conditioned. She arrived in May and soon realized that summer in Tampa was far different than up North. She decided to find an apartment that was air-conditioned. She found an apartment on Bayshore Boulevard. Mrs. Harkness says it was a garage apartment and located in a very nice area.

First USF office is located in Hyde Park

USF’s first office was located in Hyde Park. Dr. Allen, his secretary, and Mr. Hardaway all worked in the office, which was actually a house. When Mrs. Harkness arrived, she worked at the house in Hyde Park as well.

Where did the initial library books come from?

Mr. Hardaway had gathered books by asking other librarians and local people to donate books. USF’s first office in Hyde Park was leased in order to house all the books.

How many years did the library staff stay in Hyde Park?

Mrs. Harkness says the library staff stayed in the house in Hyde Park until the fall of 1959. By that time, the library hired its third staff person. The new staff member was a clerk typist for the catalog department. Also, an acquisitions librarian was hired. Mrs. Harkness says that the office was starting to get crowded as more staff members and books arrived.

A new location for the library staff

Due to overcrowding, in the fall of 1959 the library staff moved into a three-bedroom house on campus. The library staff was the first unit on campus, except for the plants and

grounds people. The library hired two catalog librarians, and Mr. Hardaway hired a secretary. The little house on campus, with some physical additions, is where the University Police station is now located.

Life in the house on campus

“We had an enjoyable time there [house] in many ways as the staff grew. At lunchtime, we would play volleyball or badminton or walk around. We would sometimes have picnics after work,” she says. Mrs. Harkness says it was a nice social atmosphere. She says those were really the good days.

Organizing books in the early days

Mrs. Harkness says books would arrive at the house. They would catalog the books, pack them up, and sort them in the garage. She says there was not a lot of space, but it worked for that period of time.

The atmosphere in the area and on campus from 1958 to 1960 (before USF opened)

Mrs. Harkness says that members of the community were not all in favor of the new institution coming. However, many people were pleased. Maas Brothers sent all new employees of the university a credit card as a courtesy and welcome. A *Tampa Tribune* reporter interviewed Mrs. Harkness about USF. She says there was a lot of interest in the university. The state fair was held in the University of Tampa area during this time. USF had an exhibit at the state fair. Mrs. Harkness says that everyone on the USF staff had to work at the exhibit. One day when Mrs. Harkness was at the exhibit by herself a man came up to the exhibit and said, “We don’t need a university here. There is no one here but old people.” Mrs. Harkness says that generally people were interested and excited. In the few years prior to the opening of the university, deans and department heads were hired. Mrs. Harkness says faculty members were not recruited until the summer of 1960, and some started in the fall along with the students. Describing the atmosphere prior to USF opening, Mrs. Harkness says, “It was a very positive and hopeful point of view of how things were going to go.”

Some community resistance to USF

Mrs. Harkness says that some people in the community were not excited about USF opening for two reasons. First, there were old-time people who had a loyalty to the University of Tampa. Mrs. Harkness says that UT was Tampa’s university. It had a lot of support from the community. “I think they thought why does Tampa need another university?” she says. Mrs. Harkness says the other reason involved suspicion of the faculty. She says there were many people who were suspicious of the radical faculty that was coming in. “This was just after the McCarthy era and a great many people had the idea of college professors not being true Americans. There was that suspicion and opposition,” she says. Mrs. Harkness says the suspicions were intensified because most of the faculty came from other places.

Feelings of the faculty about USF opening

“The people who came felt that it was an interesting opportunity, one that they would not normally have had. They were generally enthusiastic. The deans and the top department

heads really appreciated the opportunity,” she states. Mrs. Harkness says that there was a great deal of working together among the faculty. She remembers an early meeting with deans and departments heads who were discussing the curriculum. In general, they agreed on curriculum plans. Mrs. Harkness says the emphasis on teaching and the importance of students was very much agreed upon by all in the early years.

Controversy over the name of the university

Mrs. Harkness says that USF kept getting confused with Florida Southern College. She says there were thoughts that USF was not correctly named. Some people thought it should be named the University of Florida at Tampa. She says this was not the administration’s idea. “We wanted to be sure that this was known as an individual university. The name was questionable, since it is not really in South Florida. “All of the other things [names] that were thought of were so awkward,” states Mrs. Harkness. She says that Temple Terrace University and West Central University were both suggested names. Mrs. Harkness says that Dr. Allen’s wife sold them on the name South Florida.

USF’s opening ceremonies

Mrs. Harkness remembers the marching of the faculty during the opening ceremonies. She also remembers how hot it was since it was outdoors. She remembers the medallions that the first students received. “It was certainly a day of celebration because this is what we had prepared for and come for. It was like, here it is. It is really real now,” she says.

Idea of accent on learning and its effects on the library missions

Mrs. Harkness says that the accent on learning contributed to the selection of materials for the library. “We just had the freshman class the first year, so the collection was designed as an undergraduate collection primarily,” she says. The first faculty was recruited with the idea that teaching would be preeminent. “It was definitely oriented towards the things for the undergraduate student primarily with recognition of future growth and the need to be moving more into research,” she states. Mrs. Harkness says that Mr. Hardaway strongly emphasized the fact that the library was for the students. She says that he was aware of the concerns and interests of the faculty, but he assumed that the faculty would have the same attitude toward the students as he did.

Johns Committee

Mrs. Harkness says the library could have been affected, but it was not. “I don’t think the Johns Committee ever thought the library might be important in the investigation. What might have happened did not happen to the library itself. The concern was really for the university as a whole. It was a very difficult situation,” she says. Mrs. Harkness says the university was so young and new and not entirely popular with the other universities since it was taking away resources that the universities could have used. She says that innocent people got hurt. “The biggest concern was the fact that the faculty and the president did not see things the same way,” states Mrs. Harkness. She says that President Allen saw that the future of the university was threatened and was very aware of that. “I don’t think the faculty by and large perceived that. And they felt that he was too compliant and did not fight hard enough for the academic freedom issue and all that was involved. But, he had to walk a very delicate line because it was a real threat. The rift

between the president and the faculty was one of the sad things about it,” states Mrs. Harkness. She says that some faculty members understood President Allen, but the majority did not. President Allen had to consider what impact it was going to have on the university. She was not that much involved at the time. One of the things she was impressed with was the fact that the *Tampa Tribune* and the *St. Petersburg Times* were the best and most influential supporters that the university had. Commenting on the Johns Committee, Mrs. Harkness says, “It was very harmful to the university and it took a while to recover. The university came out better than it might have, but it left scars,” she states.

Delays in the construction of the new library building in 1960

Though the library was scheduled to open in the fall of 1960, construction was delayed. However, Mrs. Harkness says that two things happened to cause the delay. First, the builders discovered a big cavity under the intended location of the new building. Mrs. Harkness says cavities existed throughout the campus. Grout had to be pumped into the cavity and sand had to be piled on top. Mrs. Harkness says that delayed the construction. Also, the economic situation of the state was not good at the time. Mrs. Harkness says there had been a lot of rain and cold weather during the winters of 1958 and 1959. A lot of Tampa was flooded. The budget was cut and the library was delayed for this as well. When USF opened in September of 1960 the library building was not finished.

Construction concerns of the weight of the library

She says that engineers and architects had estimates of how heavy the building would be with books in it. The sand pile that had to fill the cavity was calibrated to equal the weight that the finished full library would have. She does not think they quite got it right. She says the building was built for about 250,000 volumes. By the time they moved into the building where the library is currently, they had over 400,000 volumes.

Library moves to the ballroom of the University Center

The ballroom in the University Center, now the Marshall Center, was the first library that students and faculty used as an actual library. Since the new library building was not complete in time for the opening session, the library had to move to the ballroom to provide students with access. The library staff moved stacks of books in to the ballroom. They moved as many books as the ballroom could hold, which was not the whole collection. In the house, all the books were cataloged and placed in a catalog filing cabinet. The staff had to move the catalog to the ballroom. They could not move everything, so they decided to select what would be most useful to students.

Two library staffs and their locations

The first staff of the library was a technical service staff, which included acquisitions, cataloging, book preparation, and serials. In the fall of 1960, the circulation and reference people were hired. The circulation and reference staff moved into the ballroom to work with the students while the technical service staff remained in the little house.

Completion of the library building

The library building, now the Student Services Building, was completed in April of 1961. The library staff moved from the UC and the little house to the new building, where they had the complete collection and the card catalog.

Primary responsibilities of Mrs. Harkness as a catalog librarian

Cataloging involves classifying the descriptive headings on the cards. Mrs. Harkness says the library had the advantage of being involved with the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress had resources that the USF library did not have. The library of Congress had a catalog service where one could purchase the catalog cards with the classification. "There was relatively little original cataloging that had to be done because most of the material that we had already had library classification and cataloging," she states. Mrs. Harkness says a few years later, the library got its first thesis and then later its first dissertation. Mrs. Harkness says that the library would get some material that was not Library of Congress cataloging. She says that sometimes things were delayed. "We would have books on our shelves that we still didn't have Library of Congress cataloging for, but we were sure they were. So we would sometimes delay the processing of them. That was probably a wrong decision, but it was a balancing act," states Mrs. Harkness.

Changes in cataloging over the years

"Cataloging has changed a lot since 1960. We were much more rigid in those days. In some ways it was more thorough and accurate, but less user-friendly," she says.

Any decision that Mrs. Harkness regrets concerning the library

Mrs. Harkness says that she made a bad decision in the early days. The Library of Congress call number reflects the authorship. She thought that USF would never be that big, so she decided to go ahead and abbreviate the number. Cataloging consultants came to the USF library. One of the consultants immediately said to use the number the Library of Congress had and not abbreviate it. "I wasn't thinking big enough. I knew it was going to grow, but I didn't have a vision of how large or how quickly it would grow," she says. She believes the growth of USF even surpassed President Allen's estimates. She says it was just how quickly growth occurred that surprised her and probably many others.

Growth of USF and how the library met the needs of the faculty

Mrs. Harkness says that the library relied on the faculty for recommendations and requests. The library would follow their suggestions. The library did not have a faculty library committee in the early days, so Mrs. Harkness says the library's relationship with the faculty was much more informal. She says that Mr. Hardaway was scholarly and knew literature. He had good knowledge and usually knew what books to get. Mrs. Harkness says that as USF grew the faculty members that came in were more disciplined and research oriented.

Battle of departmental libraries

"Even early on we did have requests for departmental libraries," she says. Mr. Hardaway

had been at UF, which had a number of departmental libraries which most major universities have. Mrs. Harkness says that Mr. Hardaway felt that departmental libraries were a disservice to the students. Mr. Hardaway gave examples from his days at UF. He says that students would come in to the main library at UF and look for a particular title or subject. They would find that the book was not there, but it was over in a departmental library. Mrs. Harkness says that he felt it was a better service to the students and faculty to have the collection all together. She says that the issue of departmental libraries was a battle that was fought in the early days. There are little library collections all throughout the campus. Duplicated books would be needed for departmental libraries. Mrs. Harkness says that library funding was not enough to be able to duplicate books. "We needed to maintain one major central collection. Some faculty accepted it, but others didn't," states Mrs. Harkness.

Mrs. Harkness says there is current talk for a separate music library.

How did Ms. Harkness become acting director and then director of the library?

Mrs. Harkness says there was quite an evolution in the library staff in the administrative area. At the time USF opened, there was an educational resources area, which included things like audio and visual materials and graphics. Mrs. Harkness says the head of the area was very talented, but not very diplomatic with the faculty at times. She says he could be stubborn. President Allen decided to appoint Mr. Hardaway to dean of instructional services. Mr. Hardaway would administer the educational resources area. Mr. Hardaway then became vice president of administration. The library reported to the vice president of administration rather than the vice president of academic affairs. Mrs. Harkness says this was for a combination of reasons. It was partly because President Allen and Mr. Hardaway felt that with a new university, the colleges and faculty were going to need a great deal of support and attention. Mrs. Harkness says the library believed it could function without a relationship with academic affairs. She says that budgeting was very important to the library and budgeting for libraries was different than budgeting for academics. The positions of dean of instructional services and director of libraries were vacant once Mr. Hardaway became vice president of administration. Mrs. Harkness says search committees did not exist in the early days. She says that she had the most experience in the library. When Mr. Hardaway became vice president he appointed Mrs. Harkness as interim library director in 1967. The position of dean of instructional services was still vacant. The library recruited a man that had been director of libraries at the University of Alaska. He filled the position. However, he soon discovered in his first year here that Mr. Hardaway was still administrating the area and that there really was not a position for the dean of instructional services. He resigned and went back to Alaska. In 1968, Mrs. Harkness then became director of the library.

First woman director of libraries in the state university system

In 1968, Mrs. Harkness became the first woman director of libraries in the state university system and one of the few women library directors of universities in the country. Mrs. Harkness says there were many libraries when she arrived at USF where the director of libraries was male and the associate director of libraries was female. She

says that in many ways the library director was the front man. The associate director did a lot of the actual administrative work.

Did Mrs. Harkness feel more responsibility as a woman director?

She felt more responsibility as a woman because there were very few women in administrative positions. She felt it was important that she do a good job for her gender as well.

Communication with other library directors

Mrs. Harkness says the state university system of library directors had good communication. The library directors met on a regular basis with a person from the BOR staff who was appointed as their liaison.

Was Mrs. Harkness accepted as a woman director?

The first meeting that she went to with other library directors, the liaison asked her to take minutes. She asked him if he asked her that because he assumes it is a woman's role. He said no, but go ahead and do it. Mrs. Harkness says that was symbolic, but in general that was an exception. Her colleagues accepted her and saw her as their equal.

Favoritism shown to UF

She had much more difficulty representing USF through UF and FSU than she did being a woman because there was and still is a bias to UF. She says the BOR assumed that UF would take the leadership role and FSU and USF would conform to UF. Mr. Hardaway may not have had quite the same difficulty because he had more experience than she did. The libraries were budgeted as a state library system so funds had to be distributed according to the BOR. As it worked out, the funds favored UF and FSU.

Problems that Mrs. Harkness encountered as director

By this time USF began to have regional campuses. Mrs. Harkness says USF's regional libraries were figured into the budget as though they were departmental libraries. Mrs. Harkness says that was one of the difficulties she had to cope with in the budgeting situation. Mrs. Harkness says the budget was usually not adequate except one time when a legislator gave an extraordinarily large book fund. "We had too much money in the sense that we had to spend all the money in one year. But, most of the time it was a budgetary struggle," she states.

Donald Harkness

She met her husband at USF. Donald Harkness came to USF in the summer of 1960 as charter faculty. He was a professor in the Basic College in the American Idea Program. When Basic College was absorbed into other colleges, he became a member of the American Studies faculty, which was his field.

Faculty and student body in the early years

Mrs. Harkness says in those early years the faculty and student body were small. The faculty members all knew each other. She says it was not departmentalized in the early years. Most of the faculty members were young.

University becomes more focused on research and Mr. Harkness finds this difficult

As the university developed into a research university and there was a greater emphasis on scholarly research and publication, it was difficult for her husband. Research was not the reason he had come to the university. Mr. Harkness came because of the accent on teaching.

Why was the current library building built?

Mrs. Harkness says space was a major issue for building the new library. The new building was completed in 1975. By that time, the library in what is now the SVC had over 400,000 volumes in a building planned for only 250,000 volumes. Mrs. Harkness says the library was using storage space for extra books.

Possible plans for both a research and an undergraduate library

“At the time we began planning the [new] building, the idea of an undergraduate library and a research library was prevalent in the country,” she states. USF was planning on having both an undergraduate and a research library. The current building was to be the research library, and the old library was to continue serving the undergraduates. After President Allen retired, President Mackey replaced him, and an administrative turnover occurred. Mrs. Harkness was one of the few administrators who kept their current position. She thinks that being a woman had something to do with her keeping the position. The women’s movement was really moving along at that time, and President Mackey was very supportive of it. When President Mackey came to USF in 1972, the planning process for the new building was already under way. The library now began reporting to the vice president of student affairs, Carl Riggs. Mrs. Harkness says that Mr. Riggs was very interested in the building process. “He thought the idea of having two separate libraries did not make sense. He wanted to add two extra floors to the plan and just have one library,” states Mrs. Harkness. She says that at the time of moving in to the new library they did not need to occupy all the space on the six floors. The top two floors were actually vacant for some time. What they needed was more stack space.

Process of moving to the new building

Mrs. Harkness says students were suggested to move some of the books to the new library. It was a popular idea because people thought it would get the students involved with the university. The university had a demonstration day. The faculty, students and the administration all helped and participated in moving books. Mrs. Harkness says the demonstration showed that having the students involved was not going to work. The move to the new building was delayed because of a shortage of funding. Mrs. Harkness says this was good because they were able to move between terms. USF hired a moving company.

Who coordinated the moving process?

Mary Lou Taylor, who was the head of the circulation department at the time, did the planning. She planned where everything would go and had everything labeled. “It was very well designed and planned. It worked quite efficiently. The staff worked like slaves. It went quite well,” she says.

How did technological changes affect the library?

Mrs. Harkness says that the library moved slowly into technological changes. “The library got a lot of criticism for not being more up in the forefront,” she says. The technology itself developed slowly. Mrs. Harkness says the first ideas about how automation would be done in the library were stepping stones, and needed a lot of development. “We were not among the first at all to start doing automation technology,” she says. Mrs. Harkness says there is an advantage to being part of a state university system. All the state university library directors worked together. She says the first area that used automation was circulation. Mrs. Harkness says there were automation systems being designed all over the country. When the decision was made that the state university system should have a unified plan, the BOR staff and some library people worked on a bid document. The low bidder was a company that had done circulation systems for public libraries. They got the bid. “Most of us did not feel like the company was the right vendor. The system was fine for public libraries, but not for academic libraries,” states Mrs. Harkness. She says USF went ahead and ordered the system. UF flatly refused to do the system. UF found another system that they liked from Northwestern University. Mrs. Harkness says she remembers thinking that if UF can do it USF can too. USF sent the system back. She says they got together and agreed to convince the BOR staff that the Northwestern University system was a better one. The new system, which began in the 1980s, started with circulation and then moved to acquisition cataloging. Then USF got the LUIS system.

Why did Mrs. Harkness decide to retire (1988)?

The new system in the 1980s was a preview for Mrs. Harkness of all the other automation that would come in the future, such as online information sources. She says that this was going to take a lot more work and knowledge, and she just was not the person to do it. She decided to retire from the library directorship in 1988.

Where do you see the university and the library in the next decade?

“I think the library is going to continue to acquire printed materials. There is going to be more and more information available in the online method. The library is going to continue to be in many ways, as it has been, the center of the university. It’s not the center in that it’s a place people come to, but it’s a resource that [people] use from remote sources,” states Mrs. Harkness.

Library funds

Mrs. Harkness believes the library was better funded in the early days than later on.

How has Special Collections developed over the years?

The first Special Collections librarian was Margaret Chapman. She was a Florida history specialist at UF. Florida history was the first emphasis of special collections at the USF library. The Florida Historical Society Library came here because of Ms. Chapman’s interests and Mr. Hardaway’s interests. Both wanted to have a Florida history collection. Mrs. Harkness says the other areas of Special Collections, such as rare books and unique items, were natural collections for a scholarly library. She felt that the effort to develop a

strong Florida history collection was not very reasonable given the strength that UF had with its Florida history collection. While Ms. Chapman and the subsequent special collections librarian were here USF was slowly getting local materials and history. “I felt that was where our opportunities were and where we really had a responsibility. I think we have done a very good job on trying to collect more and more local history. I’m very proud of that,” states Mrs. Harkness. She says that when a library starts to develop a particular interest the library becomes well known. “I think this was the right direction to go in. Although digitization will make the materials available elsewhere, I think that this [library] will always be a place where people want to come and need to come to see these things,” she states. Mrs. Harkness says Special Collections is also focusing on having a good music collection. She says that the library has some real strengths. Her concern about Special Collections is a concern she has for the whole library. “One of the unfortunate things is that people do not realize that libraries require people. You can have all the online access, but you have to have people to process the material and experts to show people how to use the [equipment]. That is something that we have been short on all through the history except in the very early years. I think the local history in Special Collections is the most important, but all the other collections are very good,” she says.

After thirty-three years of working at USF, what would Mrs. Harkness like to leave behind?

She says her career at USF has had a major effect on her life. “Never when I started librarianship did I expect to be a director of a library, let alone a director of a library at a university this size,” she states. One of her regrets is the fact that the university is still not known as a major research university. Her undergraduate college, which is small, does not recognize the fact that one of their graduates became director of a library that is larger than most of the libraries they know and think well of. “The time is going to come when USF is known and recognized as a research library,” she states. USF greatly affected her personal life. She met her husband at USF, and they had twenty-four years together at USF as a team. “I don’t think I could have done my job as well without his support. It has been a wonderful experience and I hope that many people associated with the university feel the same way about it. I hope the people in the Tampa Bay area and the state of Florida recognize how fortunate they are to have USF in a cultural area. It has had a major impact on the area, and will continue to. There are so many students that never would have gone to college if we had not been here,” states Mrs. Harkness.

End of Interview