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Judy Keeth oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, June 3, 2003

Judith Keeth (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Mrs. Keeth came to USF in September of 1960 as a clerk II.

Circumstances that brought Mrs. Keeth to USF

She is a native of Tampa. She had a neighbor who mentioned that USF was a wonderful place to work. Mrs. Keeth decided to get a job at the library.

What did the campus look like in 1960

She does not remember many sidewalks on campus. Referring to the campus, Mrs. Keeth says, "It was called the desert. There was not a lot of shade. It was pretty barren at that point."

Educational background before working for USF

She graduated from high school with a business diploma and worked downtown for a private business doing bookkeeping.

Where was the library located in 1960

When she came for an interview the library was moving to its first location as a collection. The library moved to the ballroom on the second floor of the University Center, now the Marshall Center. This was the first location where the library had books. The library collection was housed in the ballroom, while the library staff was housed in a little house that is now the police station. When Mrs. Keeth came to work for USF she worked in the acquisitions department of the library in the little house.

The library collection in the USF ballroom

Book shelving was put up in the ballroom. The ballroom was more of a reference collection. Students had access to encyclopedias.

What was she hired to do as clerk II?

Mrs. Keeth did clerical work, such as typing. She set up records and payments. She answered phones, ordered books, and worked with periodicals and serials. She processed invoices and approved payments.

The different jobs in the rooms of the library house

In the little house that was the library, Mrs. Keeth worked in the living room. Books were kept in the garage. Cataloging was in one of the bedrooms, and physical processing was in the kitchen.

Where did the library get its first books?

Mrs. Keeth says most of the books were old and had been gifts and donations. Some books for the library had been ordered, but the majority were gifts from other libraries and individuals. These people gave books in order to build a collection of books for the USF library.

The book receiving and shelving process in the early days

Mrs. Keeth says when a book would come in it would go to the acquisitions people, who would make sure the book had been ordered. The book would go to the cataloguers so it could be cataloged. The book would then get labeled and sent over to the ballroom. The call numbers were hand written on the spine. If a mistake was made, the staff used an electrical eraser to fix it.

How people checked out books in the pre-computer days

The books had a pocket with a check out card. The librarian would pull it out and stamp the date the book was due.

Why was the library staff housed in the little house?

Classes began about the time Mrs. Keeth arrived. USF wanted to have some collection of books for students. So the collection was housed in the ballroom while the staff was in the little house. In the house there was not enough room for a collection. Also, the library building was not yet finished. The ballroom was the only space available.

Working in the little house

“It was fairly crowded, but it was a neat place to be. Being a small staff you got to know everybody well,” says Mrs. Keeth. The employees would go out and play badminton at lunch. There were picnics after work. Mrs. Keeth says everyone got to know each other’s families. The house was the only office space that was available. She says it was an actual house on campus and people must have lived in it before.

How many staff members were working in the house

There were about ten to twelve staff members working in the house. Mrs. Keeth says it became more crowded as time went by.

The house floods

Mrs. Keeth says the house was located in a really low area. She recalls one major flood where the staff of the library could not get in and out of the house for a few days. Mrs. Keeth recalls that the books were protected because it was just the outside of the house that flooded.

Who was the library director in 1960?

Elliot Hardaway was the director. He was the first person that President Allen hired. “He was a wonderful person,” says Mrs. Keeth. She says he was a people person and was close to his staff. “He was very involved in his staff. Even when we moved into the big building he was not a director that stayed in his office. Everyday you would see him walk through your office area. He knew staff personally, and was involved in your personal life,” Mrs. Keeth states.

The second director of the library

The second director was Mary Lou Harkness. Mrs. Keeth says Mary Lou had an invested interest in the library and in seeing it grow. She took on more of the public service aspects of the library. She thought the library should be the center of the university. She was very focused and in tune with the staff.

The library moves in 1961

In 1961, the library moved into its new building in what is now called the Student Services building. Mrs. Keeth says at first the library did not occupy all of the building. Mrs. Keeth says other offices were there. There was a staff lounge, which was originally run by the library. The library hired a woman to come in and make coffee. Eventually food services took over the lounge. Eventually the lounge was opened to students. She says the building was in a pretty area.

The library offers more services to students once it moves to its new building in 1961

Mrs. Keeth says that library services increased in 1961 when they moved into the library building, now the Student Services building. There was a reference department and a circulation department. Mrs. Keeth says the library collection grew. Also, periodicals were now available in the library building. Mrs. Keeth says in the early days the library outreach to students was nothing like it is today, but the library had the basic services.

Social interaction among faculty and staff in the early days

Mrs. Keeth says the library lounge was the main place where staff and faculty members interacted. Mrs. Keeth says that many faculty members from other areas came to the lounge. Mrs. Keeth says in the little house the staff members would go outside and play volleyball or badminton together.

Mrs. Keeth describes the evolution of periodicals in the library

Mrs. Keeth says faculty members had input about what kinds of periodicals were ordered. The faculty members wanted to make sure that students had access to the kinds of periodicals they would need during their college career. Mrs. Keeth says the collection grows as the university grows. She says that as USF added graduate and doctoral programs, appropriate books were added. Also, Mrs. Keeth says the Latin American collection has been growing recently.

The library moves in 1975 to where it is currently located

Mrs. Keeth says the library moved in 1975 because it needed more space. The library in the Student Services building had eventually taken over all the floors, but still needed

more space. When the library began automated cataloging all the departments could not fit in the building because many computers were needed.

Moving process

A moving company was hired. The windows on the south side of the old library were taken out. The moving trucks had elevators, which were raised to the windows to load books and move them to the new building. She says the moving process was done in a month or so. Mrs. Keeth says coming up with moving plans took a lot longer.

How were the books kept in order during the moving process?

A committee was set up to be in charge of keeping books in order. They had a plan and labeled everything. The committee organized the books on the trucks and knew where the books would be located in the new building. “It went pretty smoothly. The people who planned it did a fantastic job,” states Mrs. Keeth.

How did the library handle students’ needs during the moving process

She thinks it was done during a really slow student time since the library had to basically shut down.

The thoughts of the library staff about the new building

Mrs. Keeth says that most of the staff in the old building did not like the new building. “We thought it was ugly. The people that designed it did not design libraries. They designed offices, and that’s what it looked like—a big office building. The old library had a nice patio and a prettier look. We had to get used to it,” states Mrs. Keeth.

How has technology changed the library?

First the library checked books that it received on little cards. Then the library had visible files, which were file cabinets containing cards. Then the bookkeeping became automated. The library typed the book holdings in a computer and then huge sheets were printed out containing a list of all the books. People had to look at the list to see what books the library had. Mrs. Keeth says now the online library has changed everything. Mrs. Keeth says technology advances have made the work easier and faster.

Problems with mold or dust or flooding in the library

Mrs. Keeth says there have been some flooding problems in the basement of the library and some documents were ruined. Mrs. Keeth says there have been problems with mold as well. She says there were mold problems with the periodicals. She is not sure if there are still mold problems. She also says that the temperature of the building is important in controlling mold. Mrs. Keeth says it cannot be too hot or too cold.

Major changes that Mrs. Keeth has seen in her forty-three years at USF

Mrs. Keeth says that one of the first big changes was when President Allen left and was replaced by President Mackey. Mrs. Keeth says that President Mackey replaced most of the administration with his own choices. She also says his style was so different from Dr. Allen’s. She remembers that this was one of the most dramatic changes to take place. She also recalls the John’s Committee and the protests of the 1960s. Mrs. Keeth says that

as the university gets bigger and bigger it gets less personal. She thinks this is true of the library. She does not know all the people that work in the library. Mrs. Keeth says it is good to grow, but you lose that closeness.

What Mrs. Keeth heard about the university while it was being built

Before Mrs. Keeth came to work for USF, she remembers all the interest in naming the university. Mrs. Keeth says many people in the Tampa Bay area were excited about the construction of a new university. Mrs. Keeth says many people had wondered what was going to be done to all the land where USF is now located. She lived in Temple Terrace at the time and says there was not much in the area. This made people excited about the building of a new university. She says many people could not afford to go away to college and were excited about having a university in their area. She remembers discussions about what the school mascot should be. One option for the mascot was a camel because of all the sand and the flat open land of the area.

Mrs. Keeth describes USF's first president, John Allen

“President Allen was very academic minded. He was not interested in sports at all,” states Mrs. Keeth.

Did Mrs. Keeth have a chance to meet President Allen?

Mrs. Keeth says she personally met President Allen at receptions or at the president's annual speeches.

The first USF Women's Club

USF started the original USF Women's Club. President Allen's wife was the first president of the club. Mrs. Keeth says at first the club mainly consisted of faculty members' wives.

What is Mrs. Keeth most proud of as she heads into retirement (end of June 2003)?

She came to USF as a very young person. She is proud of the fact that she has been able to see USF grow. Mrs. Keeth says she feels very connected to the university. She met her husband and many friends at USF. All her kids graduated from the university.

Where does Mrs. Keeth see the library in the future?

Mrs. Keeth says the library would like to be considered more of a research library. She says that is a huge goal for the library. She thinks the library will eventually need a new building. She says the library is trying to become more global in order to be recognized as a research library.

End of Interview