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# The Walter R. Davis Library

Larry Alford

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On the night of February 6, 1984, temperatures dropped to the low teens. That night two University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill undergraduates, Allen Ashcroft and Scott Jones, camped at the front door of the Walter R. Davis Library so they could be the first to enter the building when it opened at 8:00 the next morning. The official opening of the Davis Library on February 7, 1984, was the culmination of more than four years of construction and over eleven years of planning.

The construction of the Davis Library was the second step in a three-step plan to improve library facilities at the university. That plan, approved in the early 1970s under the leadership of then Chancellor N. Ferebee Taylor, called for construction of a three-floor addition to the Health Sciences Library, construction of a new central library, and the renovation of Wilson Library for special collections.

Money for this construction came from the sale of the university-owned utilities in Chapel Hill. Legislative approval to use the proceeds of the utility sale for library construction was obtained through the efforts of many individuals, led by Chancellor Taylor and former Chairman of the UNC-CH Board of Trustees, Walter R. Davis. The new central library was named for Mr. Davis, who is a major benefactor of the university and a member of the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina.

The Walter R. Davis Library replaces the Louis Round Wilson Library as the central library on the campus at UNC-CH. The Wilson Library, with major additions in 1952 and 1977, has served as the central library at UNC-CH since 1929. After extensive restoration and renovation, Wilson Library will house the Rare Book, North Carolina, Manuscript, and Map Collections. Wilson Library will also be used to store important but lesser-used materials from all of the libraries on the university campus. There will be storage space there for more than one million volumes.

Planning for the new central library began under the direction of Dr. James F. Govan, university librarian, in 1973. With the guidance of the University Planning Office, Dr. Govan and the library staff prepared a building program describing the requirements for the new library. Central to the program statement was the requirement that the primary public service functions of reference, circulation, the public catalog, and current serials be located on the first floor within view of the building entrance. Other requirements included making the building accessible to the handicapped; centralizing the collection development, acquisitions, and cataloging functions on the ground floor to make processing of materials more efficient; and providing sufficient shelf space for the growth of the library's collections through at least 1995. The various operations of the library were analyzed for present and future space requirements. Careful consideration was given to the functional relationships of the various units within the library so that units would be physically close to other units, to the book stacks, and to the public catalog when their functions required such proximity.

Two award-winning architectural firms were selected by the Board of Trustees to design the building. The principal firm was Leslie N. Boney Architect of Wilmington, headed by Leslie N. Boney, Jr. Consulting with the Boney firm was Mitchel Giurgola of New York, one of the founders of the post-modernist movement in architecture and one of the best known contemporary architects.

Mr. Giurgola and Mr. Boney attempted to relate the Davis Library to its surroundings and to keep the massive building from overpowering the surrounding campus. On the north side of the site are several dormitory buildings constructed during the late 1920s and to the south are several buildings constructed during the 1960s. The architecture of these buildings reflects the style of the time they were constructed.

Several design features were used to relate the library to surrounding structures and to reduce the apparent size of the building. The

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On opening day, library staff member Clifton Jones checks out the first book, George Orwell's *1984*, to UNC-CH undergraduate Allen Ashcroft. (Photo by UNC Library Photographic Service.)

library was placed close to the modern buildings on the south side, thereby creating an urban setting in keeping with the character of those buildings. Limestone was used to provide a visual break in the brick facade. The eight-story portion of the building was located on the south side. Limestone was used to create three architectural units from the six upper floors. On the north side, a low, sloping roof with dormer windows and slate trim was used to relate to the traditional buildings. Finally, angles, breaks in the walls, and towers were used to decrease further the visible mass of the building.

The Davis Library is indeed massive. It contains approximately 422,659 square feet, or almost ten acres of floor space. Of that, 277,836 square feet is assignable space. The building and its furnishings cost \$22.4 million dollars. Davis is designed to hold 1.8 million volumes plus a large microform and government documents collection. Seating is available for over three thousand users.

### First Floor

In accordance with the design goals described above, the Circulation Department, the Current Serials and Newspapers Reading Room, the two reference departments, and the public catalog are located on the first floor within view

of the public entrance. All of these units open onto a large central gallery which serves as both an architectural focal point and as a major traffic corridor.

The gallery is three floors high, 25 feet wide, and more than 270 feet in length. Balconies on both the second and third floors open onto the gallery, adding to the openness of the building. Large, colorful banners hung from the ceilings were used to decorate the gallery. These banners, designed specifically for the gallery, depict printer's marks taken from some of the books in the library's Rare Book Collection.

Providing an open, light, and spacious quality in the public areas was one of the major building design criteria. To that end, few interior walls are used in the public areas. Where possible, windows permit natural light to enter the building, creating an open and pleasant atmosphere. Unfortunately, that same openness has led to some complaints about noise, particularly in the areas near the gallery. To accommodate unanticipated organizational or service changes, almost all of the internal walls are non-load-bearing. Thus, all of the building space, public and staff, is flexible and can be easily altered.

One other major architectural feature of Davis is the large reading room on the north side of the building. That room, which houses both

reference departments, features a thirty-two-foot vaulted ceiling with large vaulted windows at either end. Skylights and dormer windows permit abundant natural light to enter the room. Many of the University's alumni associate the library with the ornate and beautiful reading room on the second floor of Wilson Library. The new reading room in Davis is a deliberate attempt to suggest that room in a modern context.

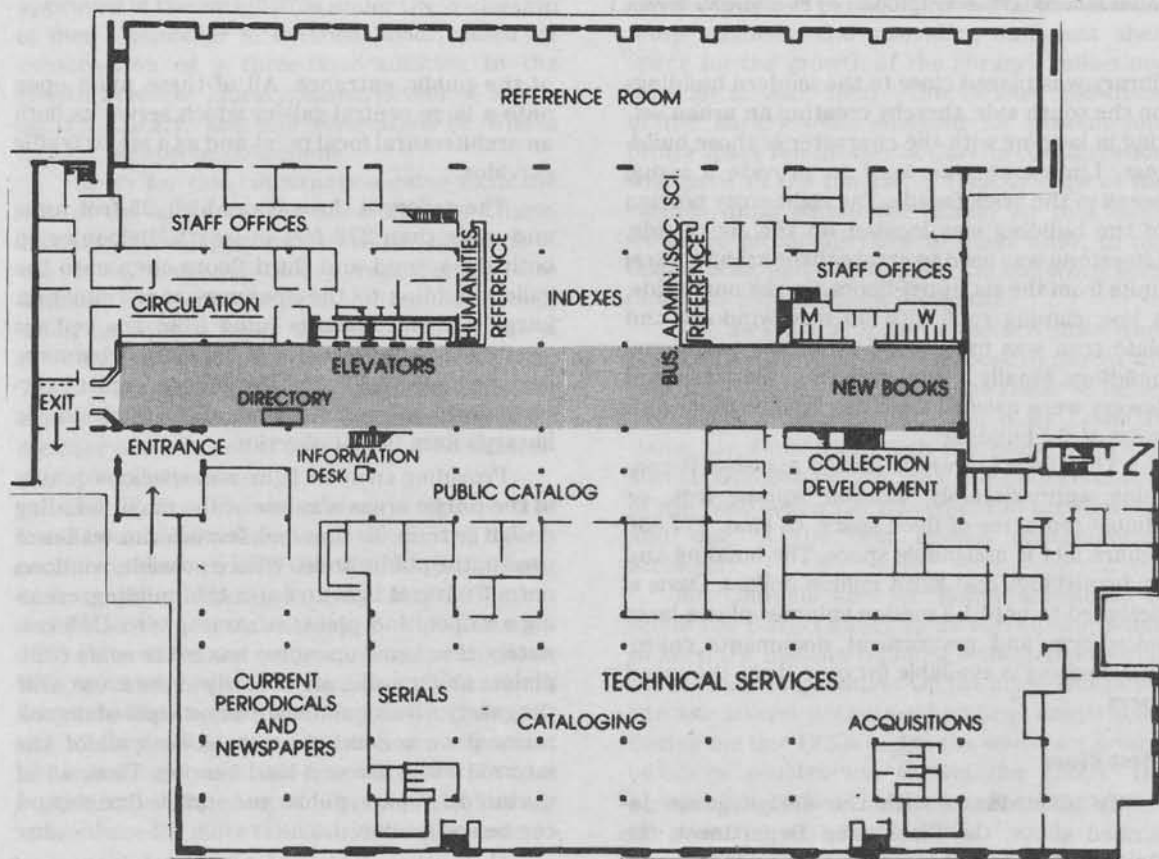
The location of the major service units on the same floor and within sight of each other and the placement of the two reference units in the same room, have made referral much easier. Staff are more willing to refer patrons to another unit, because directions are easy to give and they can see the patron go to the other unit and receive help. Patrons are more willing to cross a room or to cross the gallery for help than to go to another room or floor.

The library's technical services departments are also located on the first floor. Those departments include Collection Development, Acquisitions, Cataloging, and Serials. The technical servi-

ces departments occupy a large room (80 feet by 210 feet) and adjacent office space. The large room is intended to make the flow of library materials through technical processing more efficient. Shelving and movable office panels have been used to break up the space and to provide some privacy.

In anticipation of increasing automation in libraries, an extensive duct system has been provided in the technical services area and in the reference room so that communication lines and electric outlets can be located almost anywhere. In addition, a telephone conduit system intended to accommodate communication lines was provided throughout the entire building. It is, therefore, relatively easy to provide telephone or other communication lines almost anywhere in the building.

There are six stack floors in the Davis Library. The main library collection is shelved on those floors near a large number of reader seats. To make the stack floors pleasant and inviting, a standard height ceiling was used rather than the



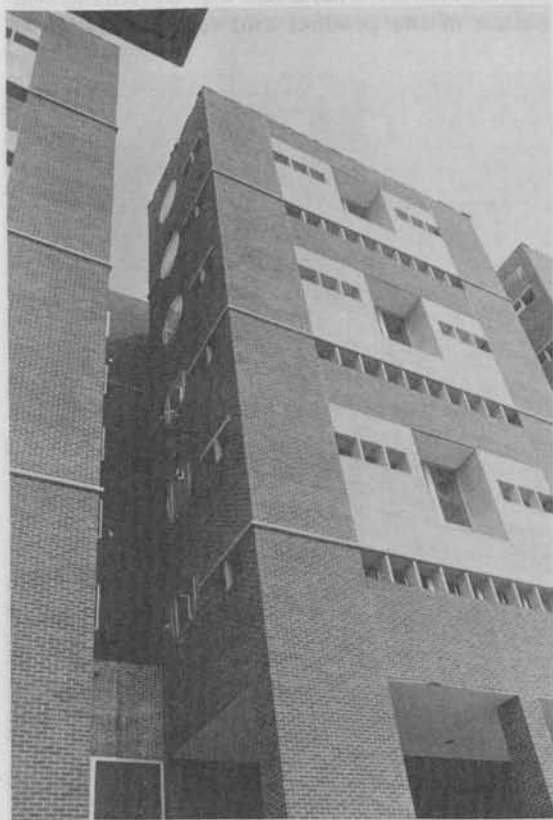
Map of the first floor of Davis Library.

low ceilings often found in the stacks of large research libraries. As noted earlier, as much natural light as possible has been provided. The artificial lighting is mostly indirect to minimize glare. To help reduce energy costs, the level of lighting necessary to each space was studied carefully, and the lowest acceptable level of lighting was used. The shelves, ceilings, floors, and walls are off-white in color to reflect light. Where necessary, individual task lighting is used to supplement the general lighting.

A rectangular floor design was used for the stack areas to permit a logical arrangement of shelving and the classification sequence. Wilson Library was built in successive stages and included a large number of alcoves which created very unusual shelving sequences. Patrons in Wilson Library frequently requested assistance from staff in locating a particular call number. Such a request is a rare occurrence in the Davis Library due to the logical, rectangular layout of the stacks.



A view of the west end of the Davis Library. The entrance to the building is located at the far left under the arcade. (Photo by Will Owens, UNC News Bureau.)



One of the six towers on the south side of the building. The closed graduate student studies are housed in these towers. (Photo by UNC Library Photographic Service.)



The southwest corner of the library. (Photo by UNC Library Photographic Service.)

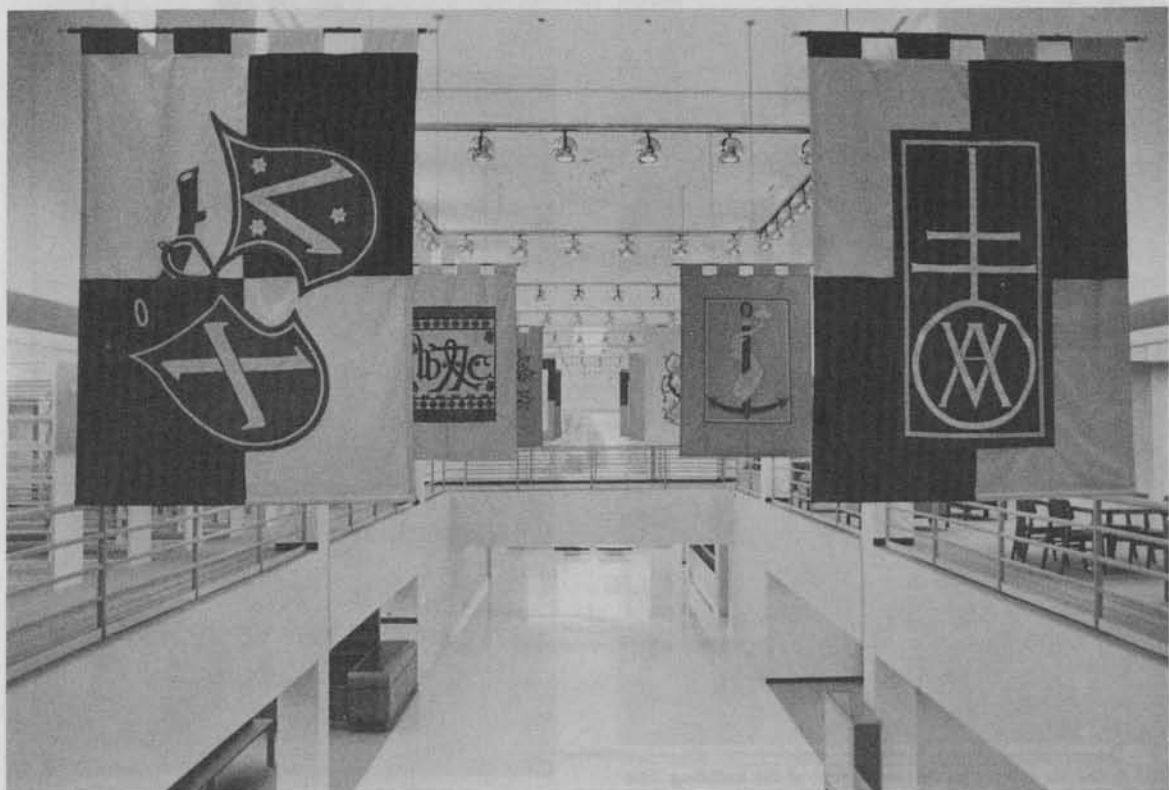
The book shelves in the stack areas are surrounded by seating although there is no seating actually located within the shelving area. At the opposite corners of each floor and on the south side of each floor are comfortable lounges with soft seating. Along the north and west sides of each floor are open, unassigned table and carrel seating. A large number of typing and small group study rooms are located on each floor on the south side of the building. The group study rooms are intended to provide a place for students to talk and study together without disturbing other library users.

There are also six towers on the south side of the building which provide 492 closed carrels which are assigned to graduate students. Each carrel is approximately twenty-five square feet and includes a desk and bookshelves. The tower design was used to extend the available exterior wall space of the building with a minimum increase in square footage. Because of the increase in perimeter space, each closed carrel has an exterior window. The tower lobbies include open carrels with lockers, also for assignment to graduate students. Finally 138 closed faculty studies, each with a window, are located at the east end of the building.

### Equipment and Furniture

Library staff worked closely with the University's Interior Design and Purchasing Department as well as with the State Department of Purchase and Contract in the selection and procurement of equipment and furniture for the Davis Library. More than \$2,000,000 worth of equipment was purchased.

The single most costly equipment item was steel shelving, costing more than \$1,000,000. The shelving installation seemed so complex that a decision was made early in the procurement process to divide the purchase into several contracts. Eventually, bids were sought for four different installations. Three different manufacturers were awarded contracts. Although the decision to separate the shelving contracts did make the initial procurement process much easier, it also complicated the final installation. Library staff had to schedule, coordinate, and supervise the activities of three different installers. Further, since the shelves of one manufacturer will not fit the frames of another, extra shelves must be stored separately. However, we are now able to provide interested librarians with a firsthand evaluation of the product and the installation of



Banners depicting printers' marks hanging from the ceiling of the gallery. (Photo by Will Owens, UNC News Bureau.)

three of the leading manufacturers of steel library shelving.

Most of the office and lounge furniture was purchased from lists of furniture available "on contract" through the State Department of Purchase and Contract. We were particularly interested in providing a variety of lounge seating so that patrons would be able to find comfortable seating according to their personal preferences. More than five hundred lounge seats were purchased, with many different styles, fabrics, and colors. For aesthetic reasons, the library staff agreed to the purchase of some sofas for the stack lounges. However, as we predicted, those sofas are usually occupied by one individual, often for napping rather than study. As the sofas wear out over the years, we will take the more practical approach and replace them with single lounge chairs.

As indicated above, both table and carrel seating were provided throughout the stacks. We were very concerned with durability of the furniture since there is very little money available for furniture replacement or repair. Because of the large number of tables and carrels needed (280 tables and 753 carrels), we were able to specify very pre-

cisely both the style and the construction of the wood furniture. With the assistance of the State Department of Purchase and Contract, detailed specifications were prepared. A North Carolina company, Blanton and Moore of Barium Springs, was awarded the contract for the carrels and tables and, we believe, provided an excellent product.

Most of the reading chairs in the building are wood. More than 2600 reading chairs were needed, and we decided that the library could not afford maintenance on that many upholstered chairs. Again, we specified a particular design and construction. Another North Carolina firm, Boling Chair Company of Siler City, was able to produce a chair in accordance with the specifications. We believe the carrels, tables, and wood chairs are comfortable to use. We also believe the chairs, tables, and carrels will last well into the next century.

Inevitably, in a project of this size, there are problems. Invariably, furniture and equipment installations took longer than either the vendor or the library staff estimated. We have experienced the usual new building heating and cooling problems. Davis includes a number of alarm systems to



The index area in the reference room. (Photo by Will Owens, UNC News Bureau.)



The main gallery with a view of the second floor balcony and the banners. (Photo by Will Owens, UNC News Bureau.)

improve security, and it has taken some time for staff and patrons to adjust to those systems. We discovered during the shelving installation that some of the shelving simply would not fit as planned, and we had to revise extensively some of the shelving layouts. There were construction delays and accidents. At one point, the building was damaged when a large crane fell on it. Construction delays forced delays in the delivery of furniture, and arrangements had to be made to store furniture and shelving that could not be delivered.

Despite the problems, we believe that the Davis Library has been a great success. Perhaps the best evidence of that success is the tremendous increase in use of the facility when compared with Wilson Library. Based on the number of recorded exits, we estimate that the use of Davis Library has

increased by more than 100 percent compared to Wilson Library. Between February 7 and May 1, 1984, almost five hundred thousand people used the Davis Library. While firm figures are not yet available, it appears that circulation, reference transactions, and other indicators of library use will increase significantly. Certainly, the demand for assignment to the graduate and faculty studies has far exceeded our expectations.

The university librarian, James F. Govan, accurately predicted in 1978, while the building was still in the planning stage, that "it certainly will be more convenient for the community to use than is Wilson Library, it will be adaptable within reasonable limits to future changes, and it will be able to serve from the time of its opening as an information clearing house." Clearly, Davis Library accomplishes those goals and much more.



The main stair leading from the gallery near the main entrance to the second floor. (Photo by Will Owens, UNC News Bureau.)