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History of the Sen. Claiborne deB. Pell Marine Science Library

Alexander Burnett

The Pell Marine Sciences Library is located on the Narragansett Bay Campus of the University of Rhode Island in Narragansett, RI. The Narragansett Bay Campus is the home of the Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO), and the origins of the Pell Library are strongly connected to the history of the Narragansett Marine Lab, which is now the Narragansett Bay Campus.

Husband and wife, Charles and Marie Fish founded the Narragansett Marine Lab at the current location of the Bay Campus in 1937. At the time, the lab consisted of a single building where the researchers were based. In the early days of the lab, because there was not a large amount of research material available, there was not really a designated library. Any research materials were probably stored by the individual researchers, or may have been stored in a collective area in one of the labs. The Narragansett Marine Lab was not affiliated with the University of Rhode Island at the time, and remained a fairly small operation (Smith, 1950).

During the period of World War II, the area acted as Fort Kearney, a Navy fort. The multiple concrete bunkers still visible around the campus and surrounding areas are evidence of this brief period.

It is unclear when a dedicated library began, but probably starting in the 1940's and lasting until 1959, there was at least a library area located in what used to be a house on campus. This building included both a major laboratory and the library itself. The library housed all of the lab's research materials along with researchers' publications and other related material. On January 6, 1959, however, on a brutally cold night, a massive fire broke out in the building. The fire was most likely due to an electrical malfunction from faulty wiring, and because of the frigid weather, the firefighters were unable to save the building. The library burned to the ground along with all of the valuable ship logs and research records in it (Geissler, 1959; "Priceless marine data," 1959; "Fire destroys," 1959; Davis, 1959; "Clocks stopped," 1959; "Lab fire laid to wiring," 1959).

While there were a few materials that were

saved because they were not in the library at the time of the fire, including some of Dr. Fish's documents, basically the entire collection was lost. There was an estimated \$100,000 worth of damage, however this figure did not include the many valuable and irreplaceable library materials that were lost ("Priceless marine data," 1959; "Some marine documents," 1959). While it is difficult to estimate this value, librarians certainly understand the immensity of this loss, as these materials might be part of the Pell Library collection today.

After the devastating fire, the laboratory headquarters moved to the former Washington County Jail, near the Kingston URI campus ("Some marine documents, 1959; Davis, 1959). This temporary location was less than ideal as researchers worked out of cells and around iron bars. What was left of the collection was eventually moved into the Fish Building on the Narragansett Bay Campus. This office building, named after Dr. Fish, served as another temporary location for the campus library until a permanent location could be found. This surely proved to be a more accessible location than the jail. (This piece of information is largely absent from sources about the Pell Library and was provided by Judy Barnett, who used to work full-time as the Pell Library Cataloger).

In 1961, The University of Rhode Island hired John Knauss, who was a professor in the Scripps Institute of Oceanography at the University of California-San Diego, to become the first Dean of the Graduate School of Oceanography (Leinen, 2001). This would officially connect what is now the Narragansett Bay Campus to the University of Rhode Island. Dean Knauss is often credited for starting the GSO because he was the school's first Dean.

Dean Knauss sailed his research vessel, The Trident, with his car on deck, all the way from San Diego to Narragansett in order to start the GSO (Burbank, 1961; Leinen, 2001). The Trident would serve as the GSO's first research vessel, and would later be replaced by The Endeavor, which is still in operation (Ventronne & Hanson, 1962; "URI research vessel," 1962). In the proceeding years, the campus would begin to be built up to resemble the layout of today's campus ("URI expansion," 1969). A birds-eye

view is shown below, with the old Pell Library circled:



(<http://www.gso.uri.edu/about-gso/about-gso>)

This layout would include a new designated library building that would serve the GSO and URI in general. Work on the new two-story building began in 1966 (Frederiksen, 1968). This library was named the Sen. Claiborne deB. Pell Marine Science Library, after the long time U.S. Senator, Claiborne Pell, from Rhode Island. The new library building was finished and dedicated in October of 1968 (Frederiksen, 1968; "Library to be named," 1968). It became a leading marine sciences library in the United States and served a vital function supporting the growing GSO.

In 1971, URI became a National Sea Grant College, one of only four in the entire country at the time, including Texas A&M University, Oregon State University and Washington University ("Three other schools," 1971). This designation, much like the National Land Grant designation that URI also holds, ensures long term funding of the GSO from the government. Claiborne Pell, who was the author of the Sea Grant legislation that led to the Sea Grant Program, pushed for URI to be a part of the program ("Three other schools," 1971). There are now thirty colleges associated with the Sea Grant program. Because URI was the only Sea Grant college in the Eastern United States, the Pell Library served not only a vital role to the GSO, but to the entire region, and continues to do so today (<http://nsgl.gso.uri.edu/>).

After this designation, the National Sea Grant Library became housed in the newly opened Pell Library building. From 1971 to 2009, the Pell Library, the Sea Grant Library and the GSO computer center were housed in this building. Pell Library continued to build its collection and

services in parallel with the growing GSO during this period. The Sea Grant Library and the Pell Library continue to share space in their new location.

In early 2009, the old Pell Library was torn down to make way for the new Ocean Science & Exploration Center, which would house the new Pell Marine Sciences Library along with several other facilities. This new building is located just next to the old Pell Library location. It is shown below:



(<http://isc.gso.uri.edu/about/facility>)

The New Pell Library and Services:

The new Pell Library is located on the second floor of the new Ocean Science & Exploration Center. This center is a 40,000 square foot building that also houses the Inner Space Center that "enables researchers and students to monitor, track and disseminate information from oceanographic expeditions and remotely operated vehicles in real time" (<http://www.gso.uri.edu/about-gso/about-gso>). It shares the second floor with the National Sea Grant Library. The National Sea Grant Library, however, is not part of the Pell Library, and their collections and catalogs are separate. The new library facility allows the library to best serve these different patron groups along with being able to adapt to the rapid changes in technologies and in libraries in general.

The Pell Marine Sciences Library is a leading marine sciences library in the United States and the world. It serves the research and instructional needs of the faculty, marine research scientists, and graduate students in the GSO along with faculty. While focusing specifically on serving the GSO, the library also

serves the staff and students at the Kingston and Providence campuses. It also serves the neighboring Environmental Protection Agency Laboratory and the Northeast National Marine Fisheries Service Laboratory. Pell is also open year-round and is open to the public.

The library is an open and welcoming 10,000 square foot area with the main room with many large windows. This allows for a breathtaking view of the Narragansett Bay and Pell Newport Bridge. This main area overlooking the bay has many tables and chairs to relax in while enjoying the scenic view. A photo of this room is shown below:



(Photo taken by Alexander Burnett 11/12/09)

The collection consists of over 66,000 total volumes that include books, journals, theses, maps, atlases, CD ROMs, VHS and DVDs. Pell Library subscribes to 228 journal titles along with 179 journals available electronically. This number is shifting towards an increasing amount of electronic journals like many libraries these days. The maps and atlases consist of United States coastal and bathymetric charts, historical charts of Narragansett Bay, and other worldwide atlases.

The library strives to have a collection that encompasses all oceanographic disciplines, including, but not limited to: biological, chemical, geological and physical oceanography, marine biology, fisheries, marine and atmospheric chemistry, marine geology, coastal habitats, geosciences, and the newest discipline, archaeological oceanography.

There is also a unique special collection room that includes many diverse, rare and old sources. This Special Collection includes the Challenger Collection, which contains many rare books and key oceanographic and polar expeditions dating

from the early 1800s. The Special Collection also includes the Narragansett Bay Collection, which includes over 1000 titles pertaining to the Narragansett Bay specifically, and also the GSO Archives, which is a collection or reprints published by GSO faculty, scientists and students dating from the 1950s. The Special Collections room is shown below:



(Photo taken by Alexander Burnett 11/12/09)

The Pell Library has access to several research databases along with full access to all of URI's databases. Some of these include:

ASFA (Aquatic Sciences & Fisheries Abstracts): This is provided by ProQuest and is a leading database aquatic resources reference.

MGA (Meteorological and Geostrophysical Abstracts): Provided by ProQuest, this is a premier database focusing on meteorological, geostrophysical and related sources.

GeoRef: Provided by ProQuest, GeoRef focuses on geosciences literature from all over the world and includes journals, books, reports, maps, theses and conference papers.

Web of Science (ISI Web of Knowledge): Published by Thomson Reuters, this is a great database for tracking scientific topics and finding cited papers and papers that have cited those papers.

National Sea Grant Library Database: Pell Library provides access to this free Sea Grant Database. Sharing a building with the National Sea Grant Library also allows the Pell Library easy access to the Sea Grant collection.

EI Village (Engineering Village): This is another

online database specializing in the applied sciences and engineering fields.

Other Online Databases through URI include:

Environmental Abstracts: This is a database with journals related to the environmental studies

Oceanic Abstracts: An international database of literature related to marine environments.

This wide array of databases covers the majority of the research that happens at the GSO. This shows that the Pell Library is able to provide its patrons with the best research sources available. Further, like most databases these days, these databases are online, and many can be accessed remotely allowing for the easiest use possible. This also shows that while the Pell Library may appear quiet, many of the library's users do not need to actually set foot in the library.

The Pell Library is also a part of the Rhode Island Higher Education Library Information Network (HELIN) that includes universities and colleges around Rhode Island and New England. The Pell Library catalog is accessible through the HELIN Online Catalog along with the catalogs of the other libraries in the consortium. Belonging to this consortium allows the Pell Library access to the resources of the other libraries through interlibrary loan. This helps to keep costs down while continuing to provide the best service possible to the GSO community.

Despite tough economic circumstances where the staff has been cut from three full-time staff to one, the Pell Library continues to be a vital part of the GSO. It will continue to be a leading marine sciences library for a long time. Continuing to be a leading library will help ensure the prosperity of not only the library itself, but also the GSO and URI in general. Further, because URI is so important to the state of Rhode Island, this has implications for positive effects in the state in general.

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