

LIBRARY HISTORY

The American Academy in Rome began in 1894 as the American School of Architecture in Rome. During the intense period of creativity and collaboration that created the World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago, 1893), Charles Follen McKim conceived the idea of sending young American architects abroad to perfect their education and to maintain a high level of design in the beaux arts tradition. The first director was Austin Lord, and the school's first home was in the Palazzo Torlonia near the Spanish steps, fitted out with makeshift drafting boards. "A hallway recess accommodated the Library," wrote student Harold Van Buren Magonigle, "which consisted of a single copy of Middleton." This was probably John Henry Middleton's *Remains of Ancient Rome*, in keeping with McKim's intention that the young architects draw their inspiration from classical antiquity. By February 1895, Magonigle was able to say: "we have the beginnings of a good library and Mr. Lord is adding to it all the time, besides the best casts that we can find."



Library anteroom

More significant for the future direction of the Library was the founding of the American School of Classical Studies in Rome a year later (1895). For one year, the two schools shared joint quarters in the Villa Aurora on the Pincio and discussed a merger under the name "American Academy in Rome," but relations broke down and the classicists moved out, taking their library with them. They settled first in the Villa Cheremetoff (Via Gaeta, 2) and later (1901) in the Villa Bonghi (Via Vicenza, 5). The architectural school, now including painters and sculptors, went ahead and changed its name to the American Academy in Rome in 1897 and moved to the Villa Mirafiori (on the Via Nomentana) in 1907. The classicists' library, established with a gift of \$3000 from E.D. Morgan, grew rapidly. In 1904-05, it received an especially valuable deposit of books on art history from Mr. and Mrs. Edward G. Brandegee.



The Arthur Ross Reading Room in 1914

By the time the two schools finally merged in 1913 and moved to the Janiculum Hill, into a splendid new McKim, Mead, & White building, it was the classicists' library, now over 8,800 volumes, that was installed in the handsome new vaulted wood-paneled Library, while the "architects' library" was relegated to a smaller room off the library entrance. The southwest reading room was used for the collection of photographs (almost 6,000). The "School of Classical Studies" retained its name and its identity in the merger, while the architects, painters, sculptors and landscape architects (and later, composers, writers, designers, and preservationists) adopted the name of "School of Fine Arts." The subsequent history of the Academy is very much a story of the creative dynamic between these two entities, whether in collaboration or in competition, but in the Library, the needs of the scholars usually prevailed. The Librarian at the time of the merger was Albert van Buren, an

archaeologist and graduate of the School of Classical Studies. Stanley Lothrop, assistant librarian, was responsible for the collections of Medieval and Renaissance art history. The two librarians devised a new decimal classification scheme, published as a pamphlet in 1915.

In the introduction, the Library's collection policy was stated optimistically as "everything that has to do with the history of human life in Italy from the earliest times, and also with the history of human life in other countries in so far as that may be expected to throw light on Italian civilization...". In his annual report for 1911-12, Van Buren had expounded his belief that "...a library should be more than a depository of books. It should be a laboratory...the contents of which should become as familiar to the scholar as are the furniture and fittings of his own house." Indeed, the design of the new library, while drawing some features from the Piccolomini library in Siena, had more in common with the library of a typical American gentlemen's club. Three separate entrances ensured easy accessibility, while open shelves, comfortable alcoves and abundant light created an ideal environment for study.



Periodical room

By 1920, the book collections had already outgrown the main reading room and overflowed into the first of several underground stacks. The photograph room had become a periodical room, and the arrival of the first Fellows in musical composition led to the founding of a music collection, beginning with a gift of scores by Kate Freeman Carter, widow of Director Jesse Benedict Carter. Other benefactors to the collections in the Library's first quarter-century included William Wetmore Story, J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr., Thomas Spencer Jerome, Eleanor de Graff Cuyler, Elihu Vedder, Jesse Benedict Carter, and William H. Herriman.

The Library entered a new phase in 1926 with the resignation of Albert Van Buren as Librarian (although he continued to serve as Professor of Archaeology until his retirement in 1946 and to work in the Library until his death in 1968). His successor was Milton Lord, who brought technological innovation to the Library: the use of Library of Congress catalog cards and subject entries (though not the LC classification), the adoption of standard printed forms for book orders and periodicals check-in. In his four years at the Academy, Lord also introduced a simple system of reserving books on tables, established a reference desk, improved signage, and gave orientation tours to Fellows.



An early view of the stacks

The new card catalog was used for a periodical index as well as books, while a new "Purchase List" recorded the locations of copies of desiderata in other Roman libraries. A balcony was built in the periodical room to bring all the periodicals together for the first time. Lord carried out the first systematic evaluation of the book collections in comparison

with published standards. Not satisfied with revolutionizing the American Academy Library, he also took part in the effort to modernize the Vatican Library's catalog, under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The collections were enriched during the 1920s and 1930s by the gift of significant personal libraries, including those of Professor Moses Stephen Slaughter, Edwin Collins Frost, the Rev. H. de Nancrede, Dr. Samuel A. B. Abbott, and Esther Van Deman, FASCSR 1909. Two major grants from the Carnegie Corporation in the 1930s permitted the librarians to focus once again on the collections, with the aid of such eminent scholars as Michael Rostovtzeff and Lily Ross Taylor in Roman history and Charles Rufus Morey and John Walker III in the fine arts. Back runs of periodicals and monographic series were filled in and new subscriptions added, and Festschriften were acquired and indexed. The Library participated in a collaborative *Bibliography of Roman Studies*, under the direction of the *Istituto di Studi Romani*.

The Academy and its Library were closed during World War II. When Italy declared war on the United States in 1941, the Academy properties were placed under the protection of the Swiss Legation. Four Academy staff members remained at their posts, including Albert Van Buren, FASCSR 1906, and the acting librarian, Peter de Daehn. Frank Brown, FAAR'33, RAAR 54,55 (later Director of the Academy) called Van Buren "an unforgettable symbol of quiet but unbending resistance to barbarism as he daily made his courteous way on foot across the city from Via Lombardia to the Janiculum."

The post-war years brought new fellowships, expanded activities, and longer hours for the Library. In 1961, an association of Friends of the Library was founded by Lily Ross Taylor FAAR'18 and Josephine Dodge Kimball, to help offset the rising cost of books and periodicals. Despite their efforts, the Library, like many of its counterparts in America, lost significant purchasing power in the late 1960s and 1970s. A section in Rome of the Friends of the Library was initiated in 1971-72. Major gifts to the Library in the late 20th century included books from the personal libraries of: Gisela Richter, art historian and curator; Eugene Berman RAAR'59, painter and stage designer; Oliver Strunk, musicologist; Frank Brown FAAR'33, RAAR'54,55 archaeologist; and Richard Krautheimer RAAR'56, 68, art historian. In 1991, the Library was renovated as part of the general renovation of the entire McKim, Mead & White building, completed for the Academy's Centennial in 1994. The main reading room, the traditional heart of the Library, was rededicated as the Arthur Ross Reading Room.



The main reading room, 1990's

From its earliest years, the Library had extended reading privileges to Italian and foreign scholars resident in Rome, while the Fellows of the American Academy had enjoyed similar privileges in the Italian state libraries, the Vatican Library, and the libraries of other foreign academies and institutes. Under the auspices of the *Unione Internazionale degli Istituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell'Arte in Roma*, a union list of periodicals was published in 1975 and revised in 1985. Only at the end of the 1980s, with the advent of the first computers in Roman libraries, did serious planning begin for a collaborative database on a larger scale. The result was URBS (*Unione Romana Biblioteche Scientifiche*), a consortium formed by the American Academy and four other libraries in 1992. With support from the Getty Grant Program and the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, the American Academy automated nearly all its catalog, including back holdings, into the new URBS database in the mid-1990s. The Academy also joined the Research Libraries Group (RLG) as a Special Member in 1993.

The year 1996 marked the opening of the Barbara Goldsmith Rare Book Room, designed by Michael Graves FAAR'62. The new room provided an elegant solution to the long-standing problem of protecting rare and fragile volumes in an open-stack collection that has been chronically cramped for space. Thirty years earlier, with the donation of rare books on art and architecture from the collection of the Hon. Lewis Einstein, as well as funds for housing them, a special "cage" had been constructed for the Library's rarest volumes, but by the 1990s this area had itself become overcrowded and difficult to use. The Barbara Goldsmith Rare Book Room, in contrast, offers ideal climate controlled storage conditions and ample reading space.



Barbara Goldsmith Rare Book Room, designed by Michael Graves, FAAR 1962, RAAR 1978.

The study collection of photographs, part of the Library since the early 20th century, was enriched periodically over the years by the donation or purchase of special collections. These include photos taken by or for John Henry Parker (late 19th c. images of Roman antiquities), Romualdo Moscioni (Etruscan art and monuments), H. Ess Askew FAAR'32 (Arch of Septimius Severus); Esther Van Deman FASCSR'09 (Roman architecture), and Georgina Masson (Italian gardens). In addition, the photographic record of Fellows' Works (individual and collaborative projects at the Academy) became part of the Library collections ca. 1932.



Photoarchive Study Room

In 1956, the Academy agreed to house the collection of over 3,000 photographs of Roman topography and antiquities donated by Dr. Ernest Nash to the *Unione Internazionale degli Istituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell'Arte in Roma*. This collection became known as the “*Fototeca Unione*.” Under the leadership of Karin Einaudi, who became its director after Nash's death, the *Fototeca Unione* grew to over 30,000 photos and was published in microfiche form, with the aid of the National Endowment for the Humanities and other foundations. In 1996, the *Fototeca Unione* and the various historical collections housed in the Library were brought together in a new Photographic Archive, under the auspices of the Library but with its own staff. New efforts were undertaken to preserve the older collections and to catalog them in the URBS database. In 2001, a new **Photographic Archive**, designed by Cinzia Abbate and Carlo Vigevano, opened in the former garden house at Via Angelo Masina, 5B.

In the 21st century, the Library once again outgrew its quarters, and a new space planning effort was begun in 1998 under the leadership of Christina Huemer, Librarian 1992-2007. The first phase entailed the installation of compact storage in the building known as “5B,” next door. This storage area is used for older periodicals and lesser used books. The space plan, approved in 2001 and completed in 2007 included the renovation of existing spaces, creation of new folio shelving, provision of additional reader stations, and integration of the Stack and Reading Room collections.

With the appointment of Rebecka Lindau, Drue Heinz Librarian 2007-2011, the focus shifted away from the physical space of the Library and technology came into the forefront. The Library enhanced its online presence, acquired new databases, e-books and e-journals, and initiated select digitization projects, including the digitization of the [Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum](#), in conjunction with the German Archaeological Institute and the *École française de Rome*. The Library also initiated a feasibility study aiming at barcoding and radio tagging the collection and converting to the Library of Congress Classification System.

In 2012, Sebastian Hierl joined the Library as its newly appointed Drue Heinz Librarian. In 2013, the Library launched its first independent online catalog at library.aarome.org. In 2014, the Library's collections were radio tagged and reclassified to the Library of Congress Classification System. In 2015, the Library co-founded and launched together with five foreign academies the new URBiS (*Unione Romana Biblioteche Internazionali Specializzate*) catalog at <http://www.urbis-libnet.org/>. In 2015, the Library's first automated circulation system based upon RFID (Radio-Frequency Identification) went live for all readers and the Academy's *Digital Humanities Center* (DHC) was launched at dhc.aarome.org with the support of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation to unite, preserve and provide access to the Academy's unique archival resources. In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the temporary closure of the Academy, with the Library reopening in November 2020. In 2023, all images on the DHC were migrated to the IIF

standard, enabling high-resolution, direct access to the Academy's digitized collections. That same year, the Academy's long-standing oral history project was revitalized, with previous and newly recorded interviews added to the DHC. Originally initiated in 2019, plans for expanding the Library regained momentum following the pandemic. In 2023, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded a challenge grant to support the extension of the Arthur & Janet C. Ross Library into the adjacent Villa Chiaraviglio. Fundraising for the \$2 million initiative was completed by 2024, and in June 2025, the Academy inaugurated the new Chiaraviglio Library. The state-of-the-art facility adds 600 meters of shelf space to accommodate circulating collections as well as rare and semi-rare materials, affirming the Academy's commitment to excellence in scholarship and access.