

Job ^{of a} Lifetime

Ann Wheeler

A cataloger and an archivist: Katherine Ryner and St. Mary's College of Maryland

In today's libraries, traditional job descriptions sometimes don't fit the goals or budgets of the institution. St. Mary's College of Maryland realized this when they created a new position of catalog librarian and archivist in 2001, with two sets of job duties needing two different skill sets. Happily for all involved, Kat Ryner turned out to be the perfect person for this unique job of a lifetime.

A cataloger at heart

Ryner began cataloging in the early 1990s. "Cataloging really appealed to me because it is so well structured. I thought MARC was fascinating, really elegant, and ingenious. I liked learning what a 245 meant, what a particular subfield might mean, and what the fixed fields meant. When I first started working with MARC, I didn't make the connection between all those codes and fields and how they got translated into the public view. When I learned about that, it made it even more fascinating, because you could manipulate things with MARC to help the public better discover the information they need."

Although she didn't have archives experience, she decided to apply for the catalog librarian and archivist position. "I graduated from St. Mary's and I loved it. I've lived in all sorts of places since I left here, and when I saw this job opportunity, I thought, I could go back St. Mary's. I love St. Mary's! As it turned out, they weren't really expecting to find someone with experience in both areas, so

the fact that I didn't have archives experience wasn't necessarily a negative."

Rising to the challenge

From the start, it was a challenging position. "On the cataloging side, I immediately jumped into learning about the new University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions consortial catalog, involving 16 different libraries and three different ILS systems, all merging into one system. It was another two years before it went online, but there was a lot of planning and preparation for that. On the archives side, I went to the Modern Archives Institute, an immersion program to learn everything you wanted to know about archives. From literally the



Katherine Ryner

first day, the library director said you need to split your time half and half. Don't get distracted, don't let catalog work cut into time you need to spend on archives, and vice versa. It was hard, and it still is hard sometimes to stick with the thing I'm supposed to be doing on any given day, especially when I have deadlines in one area or the other. It really helps to be flexible."

In addition to being new for her, the archives were new to the college. "The college never had an official archive. There were

Ann Wheeler is the librarian at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Have a story idea for Job of a Lifetime? E-mail Ann at awheeler@dnr.state.md.us

people who cared that material be preserved somehow, so there was material tucked away in places all over campus and in an off-site storage facility, but there was no public access to any of it. Much of it was not organized, and none of it was available to anybody who wanted to study the college's history."

Ryner established a climate-controlled room in the basement of a college building and began organizing, describing, and digitizing the collection. The response on campus has been very positive. "In the seven years I've been here, and especially in the last two years since I moved the archives into a useable space, the archives are being used more and more. One group of students is researching the history of a 50-year-old building on campus that's going to be torn down, and they're using the archives to study the history and development of the building. There's a student writing his senior honors thesis on the history of St. Mary's County in the 1960s, and he's using the personal papers of former Maryland state senator J. Frank Raley Jr. as primary source materials. Another student is using the archives to design a series of museum-quality exhibits that tell the history of the school for her senior honor's thesis. Use of the archives and archival research has been integrated into various parts of the curriculum more and more by individual faculty members who intentionally plan to use the archives for projects."

Growing and learning

By getting out of her comfort zone, Ryner has learned a little more about herself. "One thing I'm surprised I like as much as I do is working with the public. When I first became a catalog librarian, it never occurred to me that I would be doing reference and instruction at all. It's a big part of my job now via the archives, and I really enjoy it. I like working with the students, faculty, and staff from the various offices around campus. That was a surprise."

Participating in the University System of Maryland consortial catalog has also been a rewarding experience for Ryner. "I had never worked with a consortial catalog before, so that was new and it's been great. I've learned so much from these people. It's been a really good experience to be involved in dialogue with librarians at different institutions of all different sizes.

"Even though I like being involved, I also really like it when I can have a day just to work on my own, although it would probably drive me crazy to work alone all the time. Ten years ago I probably would have thought *that* was my dream job."

With only so many hours in a day, Ryner has learned to find a balance. "I would say there's enough time for the catalog part of my job, but the archives could be a full-time job, easily, given the growing amount of

material we have, and the growing number of people on campus who want to use the material, and the growing amount of material to digitize. It took me a while to realize that there's always going to

be too much, but I can do what I can do, and try to go with the flow. I'm also lucky enough to have a great director who's very supportive of both sides of my job, and understands what I'm trying to do."

What's next

As for the future of libraries, Ryner believes changing technology will play an important role. "I think technology will drive both the archives and cataloging fields. It already has, and will continue to do so in new and different ways. I think any librarian, no matter what [his or her] specialty, has to be aware of what's going on and potentially be a part of the new ideas and new ways of making information available." With one foot firmly planted in both cataloging and archives, Ryner has plenty of challenges, and exciting opportunities, ahead of her. ♪

Catalog librarian and archivist

What: Dual job duties

Where: St. Mary's College of Maryland

For more information, visit:

www.smcm.edu/library/index.html