Margaret Eleanor McCann’s contributions to librarianship and the role of women leaders in academia are nothing short of impressive. From her work record at Duquesne University, to her contributions to the Catholic Historical Society, to her active membership roles in associations locally, regionally, and nationally, her remarkable professional life is well documented.

Born on August 4, 1904, she lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania until her death on February 10, 1994 at the age of 89. A member of St. Paul Cathedral Parish, she is buried in Calvary Cemetery in Hazelwood. There is much about her personal life we cannot know, the details that made her uniquely Eleanor. The comments we have from a few people who knew her personally describe an intelligent, well-read, witty woman, a lover of Irish quips, and an exceptional dresser who sewed many of her outfits. The attention to detail required for sewing fashionable and beautiful professional suits was abundant in other areas of her life, including her professional calling as a librarian.

Eleanor McCann became a librarian in 1927 upon receiving a B.S. Certificate from the Margaret Morrison Carnegie Library School. The Thistle Yearbook for 1927 lists her activities as “Pittsburgh Honor Scholarship; Margaret Morrison Senate 1, 3; Treasurer 3; Student Council 3; Guild 1, 2, 3, 4; Scribblers 2, 3, 4; Sophomore Chairman of Freshman Regulations.” These activities demonstrate her leadership and collaborative traits (Student Council and Senate) as well as her orderly nature (Regulations). After graduation, she began working that year at the South Side Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP) as a reference assistant. Over the next eighteen years, she worked in multiple CLP branches, culminating in a leadership position as Head of the Central Lending Division in 1942. Several years later in 1945, McCann transitioned from public librarianship to higher education when she accepted a position at Duquesne University where she would remain until her retirement, 24 years later.

Professional Accomplishments
During her time at Duquesne, Eleanor McCann saw enormous transitions including the renovation of the library building, enhanced library services, development of a University Archive, and growth of diversity among staff. Upon her retirement, she was lauded for giving “unfailing service to the University and its students, filling a position vital to any institute of learning.”

The Library at Duquesne underwent a large renovation during McCann’s tenure, adding 32,000 square feet and costing an estimated $600,000. The addition would provide much-needed space for collections, enhanced service points for faculty and graduate students, spaces for special collections, such as the African Collection, space for library instruction, and “the entire building will be air-conditioned.” On a cold day in February 1961, the groundbreaking for the new addition occurred. Photographs of Eleanor McCann, bundled up stylishly in a long tan coat, light-colored gloves, topped with a pill-box hat, her hand on a shovel in the ground and Fr. McAnulty riding a tractor graced the front pages of the Duquesne Duke, the student newspaper. In 1962, the incoming freshmen class was welcomed as the “first to have at their disposal the completed facilities of the new University library.” The library is described in detail, with each room and its intended use explained. Enhanced services included more staff positions, greater hours, new technologies, and more space for study and books. Reviewing current library services and making modifications is an ongoing process in libraries, especially when there are significant changes such as a new building. In a 1961 memo to the University Budget Committee, McCann acknowledged that services would be reviewed and new policies formulated, with the intention “of providing the best service possible, within the limits of our resources of staff and material.” The total proposed library budget was $165,725, a 4 percent increase from the previous year, and was approved.

Technology was making its way into libraries during this time. Announcements about new typewriters and microfilming machines were made, as well as audio-visual equipment. In 1952, the Alumni Association presented the library “Visual Aid Equipment” including a record player and projector. The Women’s Guild at Duquesne University raised money for a listening-viewing room in the new library addition in 1961. McCann was a member of this group of women staff and faculty that was part social club, part fundraising group. In addition to a delightful photo of McCann and two other members of the Women’s Guild listening to the
library’s sole tape recorder, she is quoted as saying the room is “a cooperative effort on the part of the Women’s Guild and the faculty to provide a new support for the curriculum.”14

A large microfilm machine was installed in the library in 1962 and an article in the Duke quoted McCann, “It is not a gimmick. There is a purpose behind both microfilm and microcards.”15 Preservation of content and space conservation were primary purposes. New technologies and new library spaces were at the forefront of library service during McCann’s tenure.

In his history of the University, and more specifically, the new library addition, Joseph F. Rishel speaks critically of Eleanor McCann and other library staff, noting that they were “determined to test” the capacity of the new building space by buying books. He also argues that there were conflicts over library space being open or closed, stating “Sections of the ground floor, for instance, McCann ordered to be roped off as closed stacks when these had originally been intended as open stacks. Students who defied the rope – it could easily be ducked under – did so at the risk of being caught and scolded.”16 This negative portrayal stands alone among other university and historical records.

Two documents in the archival files demonstrate a few other areas where McCann grappled with tensions as an administrator and a librarian. They are interesting to revisit, given that tensions still exist today. First, she acknowledged the need to justify the importance of the library, stating:

There will be greater emphasis on selling the library to its users by direct sales methods, and the promotion of “the library as an educational force on campus” will be in full swing. This is contrary to the old – and I believe, the better – order in which the library was considered to be the handmaid in the academic process.17

Indeed, today there are many books written about marketing libraries and strategies shared for documenting their impact on the educational process. McCann discussed other tensions, including low salaries, lack of prestige, and communication challenges with faculty. The second document included a lengthy discussion of book thievery and mutilation that seems to be the result of an inventory that found instances of both. She stated:

Of the two crimes, for they are crimes, the mutilation of a book is far more serious than the theft of the same volume. There is always a chance that a stolen work will find its way back to the library sometime, even after the lapse of many years. But the wanton destruction of a book places the person responsible for it in a special category and merits a most severe punishment.18

McCann continued by explaining the new security measures and controls to be enacted to thwart such behaviors. In addition to these few examples from her own writings and words, we learn more about Eleanor McCann from articles in the school newspaper and several people who knew her.
McCann’s positive work with the library was acknowledged in a *Duke* article that stated “The library at Duquesne is not all shelves, books, and card catalogues, however, Eleanor McCann, librarian, has made it much more.”19 The article encouraged students to take advantage of the library collections, spaces and services, “to experience the vast wealth of knowledge” and to “enjoy the fruits of this endeavor.”20 Other articles advised students in the use of periodicals21 and microfilms22 to strengthen papers and learning.

Dr. Paul Pugliese, a former colleague of McCann’s, recalls that she had an ability to see upcoming trends in contemporary librarianship. She was regularly aware of and planning for changing needs in library service and of library users. For example, she regularly added subjects to the curriculum before they became majors, thus being able to meet information demands of students at their point of need. This forward thinking approach was evident in both her library leadership and professional relationships.

McCann was described as ecumenical in spirit and tolerant of differences. She accepted a rare Jewish book collection donated to Duquesne University. Dr. Rabbi Herman Hailperin, who was an expert on the history of intellectual relations between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages, gave his personal collection of books to the library in 1969.23 It took several years to be processed and was finally made available in 1972.24 Perhaps related to the Hailperin donation, McCann also accepted a gift of twelve books on Judaism from the Jewish Chautauqua Society.25 She was also very tolerant of people from different backgrounds than her own and hired people of different ethnicities and abilities. Pugliese knew her to be “one of the most considerate and kind” people that he had ever met.26

Some documentation exists about Eleanor McCann that demonstrates her engagement with students. Probably most telling is a sweet article about her in a 1951 issue of *Physics Notes*, which is included in her file in the University Archives. Titled “Our Library” it begins:

This time instead of reporting to you about books and magazines we have obtained for you the exclusive of an interview with Miss McCann, prepared by Miss Theresa O’Neil:

The grey head was bent over a neat, yet work-filled desk. “Uh, Miss McCann, are you busy?” “I am always busy” and she smiled, but took off her glasses ready to listen and to help. “We would like an interview with you for our *Physics Notes*.” The charming Mona-Lisa-like half smile appeared again. “Well, our library here has much to offer. The students should become more acquainted with….” “But, Miss McCann, we are interested in you.” “Oh, there’s really nothing much about me you would want to know. A librarian must submerge herself as an individual. Now these new Physics books….”

This is our chief librarian, Miss Eleanor McCann, the attractive, eager-to-assist figure who graces the center reference desk. Never underestimate the knowledge of this woman, for she can tell you all about the library, from the position of the 600’s on the back balcony to the rate of flow of the water fountain at the front.27

An additional paragraph lists McCann’s academic credentials, work history and her service positions in library associations. This brief article in a department newsletter tells us much about McCann as a person and a librarian, as well as how that particular student author looked up to her.

There is a long-standing philosophy of librarianship related to the adage of “teaching a man to fish” rather than simply feeding him. Librarians strive to teach students how to effectively find and
use information, rather than simply providing the information outright. This view is employed to varying degrees, depending on the information requested and the librarian. McCann’s own philosophy on working with students is outlined in a presentation she gave titled “Lo, the Poor Librarian.” She stated:

A major part of the university and college library service … consists in untangling the student from the snarl of his assignment, in helping him clear his wits after this experience, then in showing him how to proceed with the work in hand. This is a time-consuming process, and it is an individual one … the library must start with the person, with the individual student and his particular problem. 28

While every student has individual information needs, there is a lot of general library information that students can learn on their own.

It seems that the Duquesne library took seriously the role of teaching students to find information, and particularly library basics, through the publication of a library manual. An announcement in the Duke quoted McCann urging “every student on campus to obtain a copy of this manual because it is completely revised.”29 Furthermore, “The library staff feels it is the student’s responsibility to obtain a manual and become acquainted with this data instead of relying on the personnel to do the reference work for him.”30 The language surrounding the Library Manual was a little more customer-service oriented a few years later, in an article stating “The Student Library Manual, issued to each new student, provides a detailed plan of the library and instructions for the use of all its facilities.”31 McCann even mentioned the Library Manual in a letter to the editor, reproduced here in its entirety with her original bolding.

Dear Editor,

A report on a recent questionnaire, that was distributed to our Alumni indicates a well-defined interest in “continuing education.” The “life-long process of self-education” called to their attention long ago in the modest preface to their Duquesne University Library Manual has at least been made clear to them, and they are now finding out themselves that education is a continuing process. As Mr. Besse says, “An education can survive … only if it is continuously maintained. It cannot be maintained without the book reading habit.”

National Library Week is a good time for us to call this important fact to the attention of those who read the DUKE.

Sincerely,

Eleanor McCann
University Librarian32

Her love of libraries and reading was very apparent in this letter. In addition to the variety of tasks and accomplishments she achieved as the university librarian, she was also a person who loved reading.

Promoting Reading

McCann, a true librarian at heart, held a profound love of information and literature, and helping students and others find the best information possible. She was an avid reader of books, magazines and newspapers, and according to her nephew, maintained her subscription to and relished reading The New York Times until her passing.33 A former coworker mentioned that she also loved The New Yorker magazine and insisted on reading it in order of publication.34 McCann’s commitment to reading was evident in her frequent quotes in the student newspaper about the library and book recommendations. In 1954 she launched the Students’ World Collection of Books, “intended to further development of the individual along social lines”35 that included titles such as How to Get a Job and Keep It and Selective Record Guide. McCann said about the collection, “The angle is really to provide a kind of extra-curricular collection not tied in at any given point with academic subjects.”36 Promoting a love of reading outside the classroom is still a goal of academic libraries today. Furthermore, McCann’s creativity and stewardship of financial resources was evident in the development of this collection, funded by fines paid for overdue materials.

In a column titled Student Book Shelf, she presented a list of ten books “chosen on the basis of their general appeal and value.”37 Looking back at the titles 55 years later, they appear to represent a

An exhibit during Lent in 1963 demonstrated McCann’s own deep devotion to Christian literature. As a true librarian, she promoted reading and stated that the books in the Lenten display were selected to provide “a worthwhile activity during Lent.” Furthermore, she mentioned a book recommended by Bishop John J. Wright, *Imitation of Christ*, as being very rewarding. The article stated “Miss McCann stressed that it is not the type of book that is simply read and put aside. Its value comes from the fact that it deals with topics such as man’s inward feelings, how he knows himself, the love of solitude and silence, etc.”

A 1956 exhibit was developed on the theme “Christian Reading – Building Minds for Tomorrow.” The exhibit of books and periodicals was prepared by Duquesne members of the Legion of Mary in celebration of Catholic Press Month and to promote reading. McCann stated: “College prepares the students for further self-education and one of the most important aspects of this education is the development of wise reading habits, especially in areas which should have special meaning for them.”

As much as Eleanor McCann promoted reading for academics as well as pleasure, as a true librarian and faithful person, it seems McCann wanted people to read *good* literature. There is no evidence in any of the documentation of her own opinions of what constituted “bad” literature, however stories remain about her enforcement of rules related to the infamous Index. Several former co-workers shared stories about the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* – Index of Forbidden Books – that was present in many Catholic libraries until 1966 when the list was suppressed. With a history going back to the 1550s, the Index represented books that were thought to be theologically or morally corrupt. Librarians in Catholic libraries were often asked to prohibit students from viewing and borrowing books from the Index. At Duquesne, students and faculty needed permission from the bishop of Pittsburgh to check out books listed on the Index, according to the recollections of two former librarians. One shared a story that a local Jesuit priest was not permitted access to books on the Index and was required to get authorization from the bishop before it would be given. Because that was the rule established locally, McCann adhered to it.

**Professional and Personal Service**

McCann was respected by her professional peers and often spoke at regional and national conferences on topics of importance to libraries. In 1949, she spoke at the Colleges and University group of the Pennsylvania Library Association on the topic “Integrating the Library with the College Curriculum.” In 1950, she addressed the College and Reference Division of the Pennsylvania Library Association at their conference in Reading, Pennsylvania. The topic was “The Methods of Freshmen Orientation in Library Practice at Duquesne.”

In 1960, she was invited by the University of California at Berkeley, School of Librarianship, to present a case study “showing the plan, theories and procedures underlying the University’s practice in the selection of materials for the library.”

In addition to giving presentations, she also served in local and national associations and assisted with regional and national conferences. In 1951 she served as chairman of the College and University section of the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Special Library Association and served on their board of directors in the late 1960s. The year 1957 was busy for McCann, as she was president of the tri-state chapter of the Association of College and Research Libraries, was elected to the executive council of the Catholic Library Association, and was one of the chairmen at the Pennsylvania Library Association conference. She was the publicity chairman for the Catholic Library Association conference held in Pittsburgh in 1962. McCann enlisted 25 Duquesne University journalism students to help with reporting conference activities in a daily conference publication. She seemed gifted at bringing people together. A former colleague mentioned that she was active during the formation of the Pittsburgh Regional Library Consortium, a precursor to PALINET and the Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc. (PALCI), established in 1996. Back in the 50s and 60s, library directors in Pittsburgh met informally to discuss important issues of the day. The importance of these conversations and regional collaboration was recognized and later formally organized into a state-wide group that still exists today.

Eleanor McCann’s professional service went beyond libraries and librarians. She was active for several decades in the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (CHS). In the history of the CHS, McCann’s name first appeared in 1950 when it was announced that the archives of CHS would be housed at Duquesne University. The official rosters listed her various service positions over the years: 1950 – Archives Committee; 1956 – Director; 1960-1963 – Secretary. The establishment of the Archives of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania at Duquesne University was an enormous affair. A front-page
Eleanor McCann

proclamation in *The Pittsburgh Catholic* announced the partnership with Duquesne and invited people to submit items to the archive. A special request was made for “correspondence and photographs of any Bishop, priest or ‘old-timer’ of the dioceses of western Pennsylvania; books, letters, newspaper clippings and any other items pertinent to the history of the Church here.”53

At this same time, the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, and CHS launched a project to microfilm past issues of *The Pittsburgh Catholic*. This visionary and worthwhile project that started under the leadership of Eleanor McCann still resides in the library at Duquesne. Gumberg Library continues the project with its ongoing commitment to digital preservation of the paper and making it freely available through the Gumberg Library Digital Collections and the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA) Catholic News Archive.54 As the membership of the Catholic Historical Society waned in the 1960s, the importance of laity to its survival was mentioned. For example,

> The only constant in this period was the presence of both aging Monsignor Campbell and Eleanor McCann, librarian at Duquesne University, McCann, a strong personality, exercised considerable influence due to her role as secretary to the Board, her position as Duquesne University librarian with control over the Society’s archives, and as the host for the Society’s meetings starting in 1944.…55

Colleagues who knew her during this period recalled her commitment to CHS, both the archives and the Society in general. She was just as active providing service to CHS at the end of her career as she was at the very beginning when she served in the student government during library school.

Dedication and Recognition

Eleanor McCann lived her life dedicated to her job. Being a librarian was her calling and her life. Her obituary listed two surviving relatives, a sister and a nephew. This author was fortunate to be able to speak with her nephew, Kevin P. McCullough, about his relatives, a sister and a nephew. This author was fortunate to be able to speak with her nephew, Kevin P. McCullough, about his relatives, a sister and a nephew. This author was fortunate to be able to speak with her nephew, Kevin P. McCullough, about his relatives, a sister and a nephew.

> Colleagues who knew her during this period recalled her commitment to CHS, both the archives and the Society in general. She was just as active providing service to CHS at the end of her career as she was at the very beginning when she served in the student government during library school.

WHEREAS: Eleanor McCann, Librarian Emeritus of Duquesne University, per-

herited to high office in their professional associations; and,

WHEREAS: through her efforts and accomplishments as librarian and her personal dedication to scholarship and undeviating pursuit of knowledge, Eleanor McCann has in her years of service given inspiration and aid to Duquesne University as its University Librarian; and,

WHEREAS: her daily presence will be sorely missed by one and all;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that the Board of Directors, President, Officers and Faculty name Eleanor McCann, Librarian Emeritus of Duquesne University, perpetuating both the gratitude and affection she has earned from students, alumni, faculty and administration alike and Duquesne’s claim on her in spirit, wherever she travels in pursuit of truth.60

Clearly, Eleanor McCann’s contributions to Duquesne University, the library profession, and the Catholic Historical Society were great. From her earliest days in library school student government, she demonstrated leadership and service to others. Her career illustrates a trajectory working through the library ranks into administration, breaking the glass ceiling and serving as one of just two women on the Dean’s Council. Her participation and leadership in professional library associations exemplify service to other librarians and libraries regionally and nationally. The Catholic Historical Society recognizes her service as a lay leader and her devotion during a pivotal time of the association. Those who knew her personally recall her tenacity, strict adherence to rules and order, and professionalism. They also recall her intelligence, curiosity, sense of humor, and kindness. Her life was one of service and it was very well lived.

Author’s Note

This is submitted with heartfelt appreciation to my colleagues – Duquesne’s University Archivist Thomas White for his assistance with the historical records and photographs, and Amy Lee Heinlen, Assistant University Librarian for Access Services, for her editorial expertise. I am also thankful for the invitation to write this article about Eleanor McCann. I now hold the position of University Librarian that she had for 24 years. In researching for this article, it was a pleasant surprise to discover a few other similarities in our experiences. First, like McCann, I too served on the Executive Board of the Catholic Library Association for eight years, culminating in the presidency 2013-2015. Whereas she was instrumental in starting the library collaboration that grew into PALCI, I now serve on the Executive Board of PALCI, representing Duquesne and other medium-sized private institutions in this state consortium. Finally, some of the same issues McCann dealt with in library administration 55 years ago are still present today. Her life of leadership and service is a wonderful example and one I try to achieve daily.
Endnotes:
2 Eleanor McCann is buried in Calvary Cemetery, Section M, Lot 660, Space 3 according to the Catholic Cemeteries Association of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.
3 Eleanor McCann was proficient at sewing and was known for her sense of style. According to Paul Pugliese, McCann's reply to a compliment on her impeccable suite was that she sewed many of her outfits using the same pattern and added embellishments such as fancy collars and sleeves, hats and jewelry. The photographs selected to accompany this article illustrate her professional fashion sense which matched perfectly her chosen profession. In this author's mind, she looks like a perfect librarian. Personal interview by author of Paul Pugliese, August 2018.
4 John Greeno, assistant vice president and chief human resources officer, Duquesne University. Information from a “Personnel card that was scanned and saved.”
10 Ibid.
13 Eleanor McCann, “Memo to the Budget Committee,” April 19, 1961, Eleanor McCann, Librarian 1945-1969 File, Duquesne University Archives.
17 Eleanor McCann, “Lo, the Poor Librarian,” 1949, Eleanor McCann, Librarian 1945-1969 File, Duquesne University Archives.
18 Eleanor McCann, “Remarks and Events,” 1949, McCann, Librarian File, Duquesne University Archives.
20 Ibid.
26 Personal interview by author of Paul Pugliese, August 2018.
27 Eleanor McCann, “Physics Notes,” March 12, 1951, McCann, Librarian File, Duquesne University Archives.
28 McCann, “Lo,” Duquesne University Archives.
30 Ibid.
33 Kevin P. McCullough, personal communication to author, August 28, 2018.
34 Paul Pugliese, personal communication to author, August 13, 2018.
36 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
43 Pugliese, to author, August 13, 2018; Vicki Hartung, personal communication to author, July 18, 2018.
44 McCann, “Remarks and Events,” Duquesne University Archives.
47 McCann, “Physics,” Duquesne University Archives.
49 “Miss Eleanor McCann, university librarian…,” Duquesne Duke, October 4, 1957, 8.
51 Pugliese to author, August 13, 2018.
52 John Bates, The History of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, December 2017, MS, Duquesne University Archives, 60.
53 Ibid, 61.
54 Gumberg Library provides access to the scanned microfilm of The Pittsburgh Catholic March 16, 1844-March 9, 2001 through the library digital collections at http://digital.library.duq.edu/cdm-pc/. The years 1957-1973 are available digitally through the Catholic News Archive at https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/.
55 Bates, History, 96.
56 McCullough to author, August 28, 2018.
58 McCullough to author, August 28, 2018.
59 McCann, “Lo,” Duquesne University Archives.
60 “Resolution,” September 30, 1969, McCann, Librarian File, Duquesne University Archives.