
Creating exhibits in the smaller academic library

By Jane Kemp

*Bibliographic Librarian
Luther College*

*You don't need huge special collections to have
an effective exhibit.*

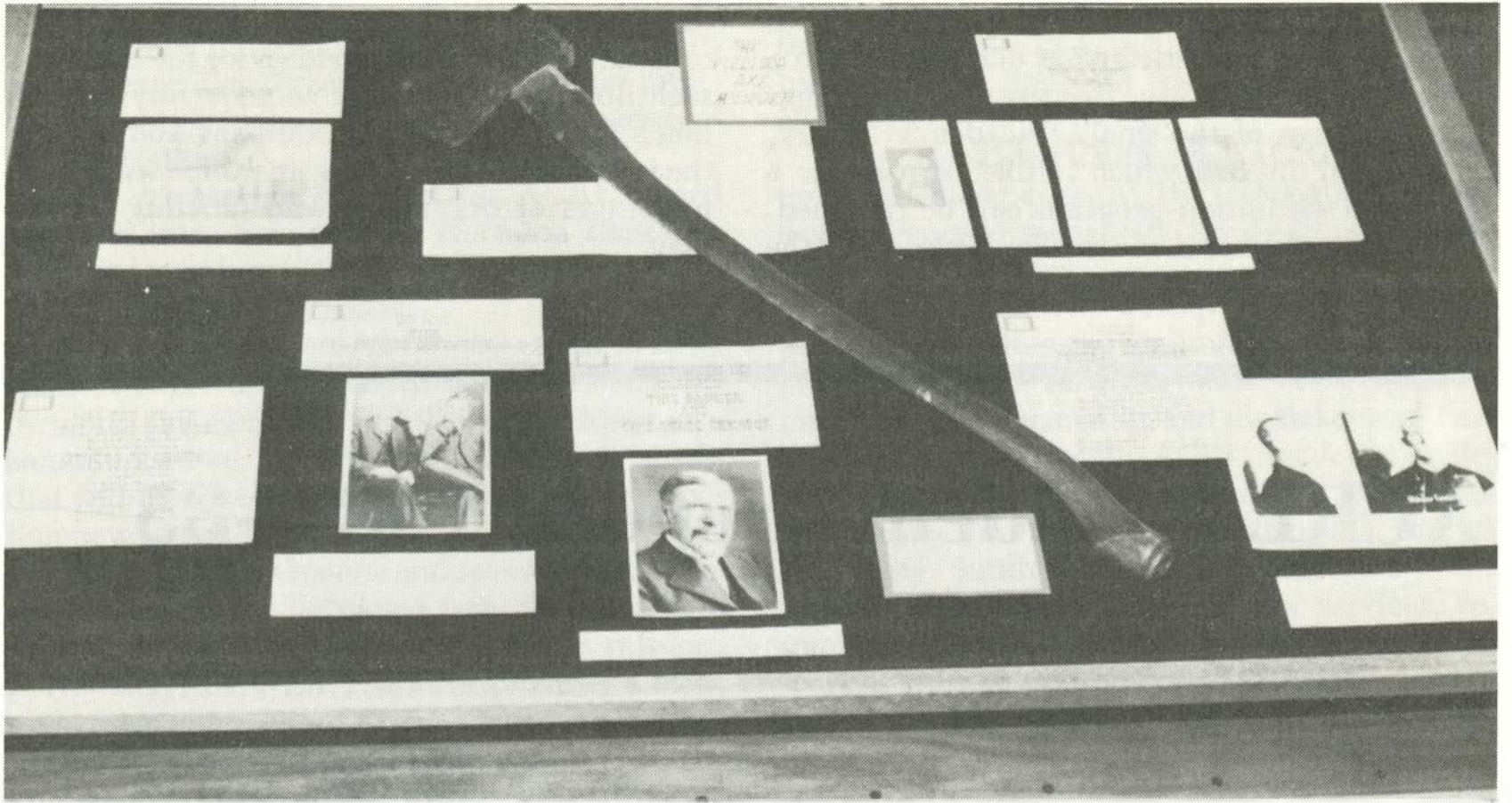
Creating effective library exhibits is indeed labor intensive and time consuming as Caswell suggested in her article, "Building a Strategy for Academic Library Exhibits," *C&RL News*, April 1985, pp.165-68. It is particularly challenging to plan and design exhibits in the smaller academic library where resources are minimal. The strategy for creating exhibits in smaller libraries is similar to that used in larger settings but the exhibits themselves frequently possess components much different from those produced in larger, more fully endowed institutions. While the exhibit ideas expressed in Caswell's article were fitted more realistically to libraries at the university or large college level, the suggestions made here will be tailored to the situation found in most smaller academic libraries.

As Caswell suggested, the traditional reasons for creating exhibits in college and university libraries are education, increased use of materials, and public relations. A fourth goal for an exhibition program, collection development, is also valid for academic libraries of varying sizes. Successful, effective exhibits in the smaller academic library can be designed which meet these objectives, but they require the planner to focus creative energies in ways typically not addressed in the literature on exhibit strategies.

Perhaps most importantly, the smaller library often has few if any significant collections suitable

for display. The library may have several collections relating to an ethnic group close to the college, including manuscript and archival materials. It may perhaps have a rare book room with several hundred books, some uniquely bound and illustrated. Or a donor may have given the library a sizeable, intact collection on a single theme such as music or records of a certain period. However, these resources are limited and do not lend themselves to an exhibit schedule requiring change and variety.

Rather than focus on exhibits which depend on collections owned by the library as a basis for display, the planner in the smaller library may more realistically look toward other sources for exhibits. Collections owned by faculty, students or community members may be effectively displayed, especially if linked to classwork in progress. Displaying a biology faculty member's collection of bison statuary in a variety of media, for example, can be of significance to an art class, thus fulfilling the objective of education as a goal for a successful exhibit. It can also bring increased use of the library when a display of books featuring the artistic medium of some of the statuary accompanies the exhibit. In addition, the exhibit enhances public relations for both the library itself and the faculty member by demonstrating the depth of the library collection in art and revealing the faculty member as a person



A recent exhibit at Luther College showcases the Villisca, Iowa, axe murders of 1912, a notorious episode in local history.

with an unusual, well developed but little known interest.

Collections can also be originated by the librarian responsible for displays. These may be created with little expense, particularly if planned well before the exhibition dates. The magazine *Serials Review*, for example, often contains articles and annotated bibliographies surveying the journals published in a particular regional area or state. These journals can run the gamut from small specialized publications which circulate nationally but are relatively unknown, to magazines which are part of a multi-million dollar corporation. An especially interesting exhibit can be planned by requesting single copies of the journals for the area in which the library is located. These can be arranged by topic for display, showing the range of subjects covered by the publications.

Although collections of some kind are customarily used as a basis for academic library exhibits, effective displays may be planned where the collection is of secondary importance to the display. In the following exhibit examples, the collection is utilized primarily to highlight the theme of the display rather than provide the predominant focus of the exhibit. Striking exhibits can be designed which call attention to upcoming campus events. A lecture series with a common theme on 19th-century English authors can generate an interesting exhibit of books and pictures. The campus visit of a professional dance or theatre company can be a basis for an exhibit on dance or theatre, using books from the library collection along with publicity provided by the visiting company. The deadline for submission to the campus literary publication may be near and a display of old issues of the publication from the library archives may be of interest. Infor-

mation about the publication combined with a historical look at past issues would publicize both the request for submissions and the library archives.

Commemorating important occurrences is a common way to create an exhibit for a short but meaningful time period. Historical events of international importance, such as the recent celebration of Johann Sebastian Bach's 300th birthday, can be highlighted with scores, books, records, and clippings of articles about the occasion. Events of local or campus interest can be promoted in a similar manner: a campus-wide wellness day, featuring books on wellness juxtaposed with advertisements for liquor, junk food, tobacco and over-the-counter drugs can make a thought-provoking display. In this example the library capitalizes on publicity not only for its books but also for its periodicals, an often overlooked resource for library exhibits.

An electrifying exhibit

The University of California, Berkeley, Library had an exhibit this past spring on "Lightning, the Fire of Zeus" in two display cases outside their Periodicals Room. Photographs captured the magnificence of an unusually intense and protracted electrical storm that rolled through the Bay Area in September 1984. Also included was a general discussion of lightning and some details regarding the influence of fire in local forests and its effect on plants and animals. The exhibit was prepared with the help of Robert Martin, a specialist in fire ecology in the University's Department of Forestry and Resource Management. —*CU News*.

In many of the examples cited here the exhibit is perhaps not as sophisticated as one mounted in a larger academic library. However, with the limited resources of the smaller academic library, meaningful displays which fulfill the goals for a successful exhibition program can be designed. The exhibit planner in the smaller library faces the

challenge not only of arranging a display but also of originating the foundation ideas for the exhibit. In such libraries the planner consequently exerts as much if not more creative thinking and talent in the initial stages of building an exhibit as in the final stages of organizing and labeling the display. ■■

ACRL President's report, 1984-85

By Sharon Rogers

ACRL's 46th President

ACRL's past year in perspective.

Every once in a while, organizations, like people, need to take "time-out" for reassessment and renewal. 1984-85 has been ACRL's year to focus on internal goals, so that the mission of the association and the needs of its members may be achieved with enhanced efficiency and effectiveness.

This keynote emphasis began with the design of the ACRL President's Program for 1985. "Priorities for Academic Librarianship" was announced as the theme of a year-long activity. ACRL members were asked to invest in the association by providing their advice on the desirability and feasibility of moving forward with the many projects and activities recommended in the 1982 Activity Model for 1990. Six hundred ACRL members received a survey for their responses. They were also asked to provide demographic information about themselves. Responses to the survey were presented as background



Sharon Rogers

information for the final priority-setting activity during the annual program meeting in Chicago in July. The goals of the President's Program were to:

- 1) establish priorities for association activities;
- 2) collect demographic and attitude information from a random sample of members and from participants at an annual meeting to compare similarities and/or differences between the general membership and the activists within the association;
- 3) provide basic information needed for the first stage of ACRL's strategic planning activity; and
- 4) experiment with a prototype ACRL membership survey, to be considered for implementation on a scheduled basis.

The President's Program is not the only example of the ACRL emphasis on investment in the association itself. Other illustrations, hardly exhaustive, include the following:

- At the June 1984 annual meeting the ACRL Board created a Strategic Planning Task Force to draft a five-year plan to cover 1986-1990.

- The Planning Committee is continuing its review of ACRL committees and sections to ensure the vitality of the existing units of the Association.

- ACRL members have just voted on a constitutional change which, if approved, will allow for greater Board representation by activity sections