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# The Information Edge - Library Newsletter - Fall 2006 Issue

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**PACE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

## Centennial Miscellany\*

Rey P. Racelis, Associate University Librarian for Systems Integration & Ellen Sowchek, University Archivist

Tucked inconspicuously on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor of the landmark 41 Park Row building, among the different offices lining the floor, is a special collection of memorabilia belonging to the founder of Pace University, Homer Pace and his son Robert. This wonderful collection consists of books in several distinct genres: travelogues and travel journals, dictionaries, history books, atlases, biographies and other miscellaneous titles. Among the prized pieces are rare books with imprints as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1572), 17<sup>th</sup> century (1609, 1658, 1681, 1697, among

others) and a good number in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1700 onwards).

The room also contains approximately two dozen *objets d'art* of various provenance collected by the Paces (father and son) in their travels around the world. The entire collection is housed in the Robert Pace Study, which served as the President's office prior to the construction of 1 Pace Plaza building. It is now used for important social functions, such as those tendered for donors and other prospective patrons of the University. Books and art objects are displayed on shelves built on the wall.

The Pace Study collection bears witness to the far-ranging interests of the senior Pace and his son. It demonstrates the intellectual breadth as well as the international outlook of the Founders, disproving the idea that they were concerned only with business and business education.

As the University celebrates its Centennial and breaks ground to reach out globally in its operation, the Pace Study collection is testimony that in their own time, the founders embraced knowledge and culture far and wide to satisfy their own interest

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**\* This short miscellany is based on a proposal prepared by the authors for the preservation, inventory, and digitization of the said collection.**

## Learning Commons Initiative Edward & Doris Mortola Library

David T.S. Leighton, Associate University Librarian Westchester

**Note:** *The following proposal by the Library and its strategic partners to create a student-centered learning commons in the Mortola Library remains under active consideration by the University Administration, pending the resolution of critical funding issues.*

**Executive Summary:**

The Pace Learning

Commons is a bold, imaginative, and transformative initiative that will dramatically and visibly impact the future of Pace University. More than just repurposing space and realigning service functions, the Learning Commons seeks to "transform the Library from a warehouse to a meeting house." The Learning Commons will

provide a variety of physical and virtual spaces, resources, and services that will make the facility an inviting mecca and academic crossroads for the Pleasantville campus.

The Learning Commons project is a joint cooperative venture involving all major academic support

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## Pace University Library Excellence in Research Awards

Sarah Burns-Feyl, Assistant University Librarian for Instructional Services

“The purpose of the Excellence in Research Award program is to reward undergraduate students who make valuable and creative use of the print and electronic collections of the Pace Library as well as other available information resources.”

In conjunction with the English Department and Writing Center’s Annual Writing Recognition Luncheon and Ceremony held on May 3, 2006, the Pace University Library awarded “Excellence in Research Awards” to four deserving and talented students, two on the Pleasantville campus and two on the New York campus. Awards were presented to:

- Stacy DeJonge, PLV - “Africa: A Look Into Kenya’s World”
- Jessica O’Reilly, PLV - “Improvements of Special Education”
- Jaissy Lorenzo, PNY - “Hey Little One, Understand Your Part in All This?”
- Natalie Page, PNY - “Peal Harbor”

The purpose of the Excellence in Research Award program is to reward undergraduate students who make valuable and creative use of the print and electronic collections of the Pace Library as well as other available information resources. All undergraduate, currently enrolled students at Pace University - all class levels and all majors included - were eligible for the awards. Eligible projects or papers were those that had, at some time, been assigned and were submitted to the Library with an original description of the assignment as well as a reflective piece written by the student demonstrating why they thought their project was deserving of the award.

Research projects were reviewed by a committee of librarians using the following criteria:

1. demonstrate creativity in the use of research tools
2. demonstrate thoroughness in the research process
3. demonstrate accuracy and attention to detail
4. demonstrate use of a broad range of research tools

The Library hopes to continue the Awards program in the 2006-2007 academic year, so get your research questions and thesis statements ready, and keep an eye out for announcements regarding the Award!



Dr. Janetta Rebold Benton discusses one of her books during the book signing event.

## Faculty Staff Authors Collection Book Signing

Harriet Huang, Collection Development Librarian, Mortola Library

On September 25th, Provost Joseph Morreale began the Faculty Staff Authors Collection Book Signing at the Mortola Library. This is a special collection of publications by Pace University faculty, emeriti, and staff which is housed at the Mortola Library. Authors are actively encouraged to contribute copies of published works, including monographs, article reprints, and

audiovisual materials to this nascent collection. Several of our Pace University Authors signed their works during this week long event.

To see which books are included in this special collection, try an author search in the library catalog at <http://innopac.pace.edu>. We currently have 225 books and many articles listed. If you have published a work

and do not find it in this collection, please contact Harriet Huang at [hhuang@pace.edu](mailto:hhuang@pace.edu). We are always looking to add to this collection and would like to display your work in the Mortola Library.

A similar book signing event will be held at the Birnbaum Library in November for authors who were not able to attend in September.

## Book Review: Edison and the Electric Chair by Mark Essig

Eileen Gatti, Head of Information Sources and Resources, Birnbaum Library

In the pantheon of great American legends, there are few that match the mythical power of Thomas Alva Edison, inventor of the light bulb. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his story has held up as one of the finest examples of industriousness and determination, the inspiration of schoolchildren everywhere. A less commonly known story today is that of the combination of public relations savvy and cutthroat business practices that helped make Edison a household name and shunted other electrical entrepreneurs onto the sidelines.

After he introduced it in 1879, Edison envisioned his incandescent lamp illuminating every home in America, and he set out to make this a reality starting with Manhattan. The path

was not an easy one, as he fought propaganda wars with gas lighting and arc lighting companies over the relative safety of each form of lighting. Several accidental deaths caused by electric arc lights (which had begun displacing gas lights on streets and in factories) caused a sensation in the newspapers and gave Edison an opportunity to tout the safety of his own system, which involved burying cables underground and eliminating dangerous overhead wires. Another benefit to Edison's system was that it required relatively low voltages. With his flair for promotion, Edison created huge demand for home lighting, but his direct-current system relied on the use of very thick, expensive copper wiring, and was limited in its range. George Westinghouse, who had already introduced his own electrical system in several American cities, came

into head-to-head competition with Edison. His much cheaper system was one of alternating currents, permitting the use of thinner wires, and covering greater distances, though using potentially more dangerous higher voltages.

While electrical technology was promising to transform our everyday lives, America was undergoing another sort of transformation as well. There was a new "humanitarian sensibility" which decried as uncivilized and barbaric formerly acceptable practices, such as child labor, animal cruelty and the death penalty. Newspaper accounts of botched hangings and the sufferings of the condemned at the end of the rope helped fuel the sentiment that hanging was

(continued on p 10)

## Centennial Miscellany\* (cont.)

and curiosity about the world. If their personal collection is any proof, it may be safe to say that they would heartily approve of the global initiative being undertaken by the University to reach out to other cultures and peoples and establish footholds in other places, to better understand the world and, conversely, to let others understand us.

Sadly lacking at the moment, however, is any ongoing initiative or funding effort to preserve these materials in a more systematic way. While the collection is housed in a quiet wood-paneled room evoking understated gentility, the large windows that face City Hall Park are not adequately filtered to eliminate UV (ultraviolet) light, a constant threat to historic materials. There is no adequate technology in the

room to provide proper room temperature and humidity controls. The collection is therefore in danger of slow deterioration.

Undertaking a more systematic preservation of this collection would be a most worthwhile initiative. The Pace Study is the closest thing to a museum at Pace. It is a worthy showcase for the collections of our Founders and can be a wonderful starting point for conversation during the important social events held there. *It also has the potential to be one of those rare spots on the University's New York campus where students, faculty, staff and visitors alike can get a glimpse of the human side of our Founders and to marvel, at the same time, at the displayed books and art objects that are of great historical value and significance to Pace University.*

What better way to commemorate the Pace Centennial than to highlight a collection that will shed light on the personal taste and interests of its Founders? By doing so, we would provide a glimpse at what fascinated and captured their interests in those moments when they were not engaged in the business of educating people in downtown New York, or absorbed in the civic engagements to which they were committed in order to improve the life of many downtown New Yorkers.

**\* This short miscellany is based on a proposal prepared by the authors for the preservation, inventory, and digitization of the said collection.**

## Learning Commons Initiative

### Edward & Doris Mortola Library (cont)

services at the University. Its purpose is to provide a user-focused, service-rich, and technology-infused environment for the net generation students. Spaces are created to foster collaborative inquiry, social interaction, independent research, and project development. An interlocking support system, consisting of librarians, technologists, learner-support specialists, and multimedia development professionals provide expert assistance in a one-stop shop environment.

The Learning Commons integrative service model has been successfully implemented in higher education institutions both large and small, including several of Pace's official benchmark institutions. Many institutions have adopted the model specifically to promote student persistence and retention. The variegated learning activities and programmatic offerings of the Commons assist students in becoming critical information consumers, thereby improving the quality of academic work. Improved academic performance translates into higher rates of student retention and optimizes employment opportunities for Pace graduates.

The Learning Commons model is closely aligned with the University's strategic agenda, the new Core Curriculum, and the

revised Middle States Criteria for Re-Accreditation. It emphasizes the University's strong commitment to student-centered learning and addresses the needs of net generation students – digitally literate, multi-tasking, experiential, collaborative, and mobile. A recent American University Library Symposium held in Washington D.C. predicted that by 2010, the Learning Commons model will be commonplace in academic libraries throughout the country.

A Core Management Team, comprised of representatives from the Pace Library, Center for Academic Excellence, Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology, Dyson Writing Center, and Division of Information Technology unanimously adopted a shared Mission-Vision Statement to guide project planning. Student and faculty survey responses also factored prominently in ranking the desired attributes and features of the Pace Learning Commons.

The University engaged the services of the Boston-based architectural firm of Perry Dean Rogers & Partners to develop a conceptual design for two learning commons on the Westchester and New York City campuses. The firm has an extensive portfolio of completed projects at more than 100 academic, government, and cultural

institutions, including award-winning installations. Their special forte is designing modern libraries and technologically sophisticated learning centers.

Given the overwhelming consensus of the Core Management Team on the different types of services and resources that should be included on the main floor of the proposed Commons, the architects responded with a comprehensive master plan for the Mortola Library and prepared detailed cost estimates and a multi-year phasing timetable. Since the projected construction costs (\$3.6 million) greatly exceeded the preliminary estimates for a much simpler version contained in the June 2004 Library Consultants Report, we are now presenting a revised proposal at a substantially lower figure (\$1.5 million), more attuned to prior expectations.

The revised proposal, however, is coupled with a very strong recommendation that we aggressively pursue fund-raising opportunities to augment the authorized institutional allotment in order to preserve some of the nice features and attributes of the original design. The architects have also pledged their willingness and determination to appropriately rework various aspects of the design within the revised

financial guidelines.

**Mission:**

The mission of the Pace Learning Commons is to provide expanded and enriched opportunities for student-centered learning by creating a scaleable operational model for integrated service delivery combining flexible instructional settings, collaborative venues, pervasive yet unobtrusive incorporation of technology, and high impact academic support services within a coordinated organizational framework. The Commons exploits the robustness of information technology, the convergence of physical and virtual learning spaces, and the synergistic expertise of trained service professionals. It enhances the quality of the undergraduate experience, thereby promoting student persistence and student retention, and helps produce information literate graduates who can become active civic participants, productive workers, and self-directed lifelong learners.

**Vision:**

- Information Hub and Catalyst in Technology-Based Learning
- Campus Crossroads for Academic and Social Engagement
- Dynamic Interactive Learning Environment
- Gateway to Globally-Linked Knowledge & Information Resources

**Knowledge Creation  
Workspace**

Exemplar of Best Practices  
in Teaching & Learning  
Modes and Integrative  
Service Delivery

**Goals:**

1. Deliver more focused and personalized services to fully engage students in the learning process.
2. Build a sense of community, foster connections, nurture creativity, and encourage collaboration.
3. Provide teaching and learning development activities through information technology and integration.
4. Support course redesign and curriculum renewal efforts.
5. Reinforce the University's commitment to advance student-centered learning, enhance Value-On-Investment, and attain Tier II status among the nation's colleges and universities.

**Objectives:**

1. Promote a student-centered environment that accommodates diverse pedagogical approaches and affirms the social dimension of learning and diversity of learning needs.
2. Offer a compelling one-stop destination and immediate referral for students and faculty.
3. Create technology-enabled spaces configured for independent study, collaborative activities, one-on-one consultation,

and formalized instruction.

4. Provide a variety of information and technology resources, and production capabilities in support of the Core Curriculum, the Pforzheimer's Honors College, and interdisciplinary learning.
5. Provide proactive library, technical, and production support, and performance skills development and enhancement.
6. Serve as an incubator for testing new technologies, teaching and learning methodologies, and assessment.

**Revised Proposal:**

The revised proposal for creating the Learning Commons within the Mortola Library would be implemented in three phases spread over three fiscal years. The University's commitment would be \$500,000 for each of the three years.

**Total Project Cost:**  
\$1,500,000.

**Phase 1:**

Flexible Electronic Classroom, Adjacent Student Workspace & Infrastructure Upgrades

Year 1 Budget: \$500,000

During Year 1 the main priority will be the transformation of the Birnbaum Conference Room into a prototypical learning space capable of supporting multiple modes of learning, facilitating face-to-face encounters and online discussions, equipped with wireless connectivity and videoconferencing capability, easily reconfigurable, and

ADA compliant.

The newly renovated space will promote experiential, collaborative, and active learning. New equipment and furnishings will make the room functional, comfortable, and attractive. When not in use for formal classroom sessions, the room can flexibly accommodate small to medium-sized groups working either individually or collaboratively on class assignments and projects.

A limited number of student workstations equipped with high-tech hardware and production/presentation software will also be established in areas surrounding the classroom. These configurations will include pods or clusters with enlarged work surfaces to promote collaboration and multi-media development.

Based on the detailed building site analysis conducted by the architects, funds will be earmarked to upgrade existing MEP [mechanical, electrical, plumbing] systems on the main floor. It will prove the least disruptive and most cost effective to address these infrastructure issues in the initial and perhaps 2<sup>nd</sup> phase to avoid having to re-enter ceilings and walls or trenching the concrete floor during the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase. It would also be financially advantageous to the institution if the architects produced one set of construction documents for the multi-year project, rather than 3 separate sets of documents corresponding to each phase of work.

**Phases 2 & 3:**

Expanding the Resource & Service Offerings of the

Commons

Year 2 Budget: \$500,000

Year 3 Budget: \$500,000

The dynamic student-centered classroom represents a visible, palpable, and dramatic expression of the University's strong commitment to the long term Learning Commons project. Progress during the second and third phases will be marked by the creation of a wide variety of open access and enclosed learning spaces configured for independent study, collaborative activities, one-on-one consultation, plus a consolidated frontline service desk. Seamless service, leveraged professional expertise, and shared academic resources are the hallmarks of the emergent Commons.

**Proposed Additional Work Contingent on Supplemental External Funding:**

To make the new millennial Learning Commons truly outstanding and highly competitive, we will work with the Office of Philanthropy to explore potential outside funding sources including foundation grants, corporate sponsors, and prospective donors. The primary objectives would be to secure funds to incorporate key learner-support functions (i.e., Tutorial Services and the Dyson Writing Center) on the main floor and underwrite construction of the Courtyard Café. Much information has been forwarded to the Director of Philanthropy to assist her and her staff in launching this important effort which has already commenced in earnest.

Expanded quarters for the CTLT operation, relocation of

## Learning Commons Initiative

### Edward & Doris Mortola Library (cont)

library offices to accommodate Tutorial Services and the Writing Center, and renovation of the third level mezzanine would be funded through external funds. The proposed café, the number 1 priority of Pleasantville students in a recent survey, is rapidly becoming one of the most requested features of academic commons design in colleges and universities. The Courtyard Café could conceivably replace the existing satellite food service in Miller Hall and potentially generate more revenue as the Commons increasingly becomes the intellectual heart and central gathering spot on campus for students and faculty.

With expanded computing facilities coupled with expert assistance and extended hours, it may be desirable and cost effective to close some computing labs elsewhere on campus. This situation has already occurred at UMASS-Amherst where the new Commons has become an extremely popular 24/5 operation. Finally, the new Tutorial/Writing Complex, Café, Electronic Classroom, and other collaborative work spaces and service points present exciting naming opportunities.

**Keys to Success:**

The Pace Learning Commons will:

- promote active, independent, and collaborative learning

facilitate the development of information literacy competencies, embodying a key finding of the Boyer Commission Report: “The skills of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis will become the hallmarks of a good education, just as absorption of a body of knowledge once was.”

empower net generation students, focusing on their needs, preferences, and work patterns

provide a continuum of service offerings and centralized point of referral, a diversity of learning spaces, and access to abundant information resources

foster connections and encourage community-building, both in-person and virtually

bridge the gap between campus life and academic culture.

**Competition:**

The literature abounds with success stories of the Learning Commons integrative service model being implemented in variant forms throughout North America and abroad. Three benchmark institutions – University of Southern California, University of Miami, and New York University – have already established an Information or Learning Commons. Hofstra University is presently

planning such an installation. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that many of today’s “Best National Universities-Doctoral” have increasingly adopted the Learning Commons Model.

**Risks:**

The Pace Learning Commons can surpass the competition and become the pre-eminent teaching and learning center in Westchester. By postponing indefinitely or abrogating the project entirely, we lose the competitive advantage, jeopardize the library’s acknowledged designation as a “pocket of excellence” within the university, and forfeit an opportunity to become a vital strategy for student recruitment and retention.

**Conclusion:**

The Association of American Colleges and Universities has identified five outcomes of a Liberal Education:

Strong analytical, communication, quantitative, and information skills

Deep understanding and hands-on experience with the inquiry practices of disciplines that explore the natural, social, and cultural realms.

Proactive sense of responsibility for individual, civic, and social choices.

Intercultural knowledge and collaborative problem-solving skills.

Habits of mind that foster integrative thinking and the ability to extrapolate skills and knowledge from one setting to another.

As Phillip D. Long and Stephen C. Ehrmann assert in “Future of the Learning Space: Breaking Out of the Box” (*Educause*, July/August 2005, p.53-54):

“If institutions are to achieve demonstrable gains in these five outcomes, students and faculty will require facilities to support several fundamental activities that will occupy much of their time: space in which to practice such activities, alone and in teams; space in which to receive coaching and assessment; space in which to acquire knowledge – explanations gained through some mix of reading, listening, watching. Spaces also need to be attractive and inspire a sense of drama, excitement and anticipation as students enter them. Spaces should promote connection and belong to the culture and past of the institution and to the professions or disciplines under study.”

The Learning Commons phenomenon is a widespread recognition that the convergence of technology, pedagogy, and space can lead to exciting new models of campus interaction. The model also

provides answers to the questions raised by Diana Oblinger in her article entitled "Leading the Transition from Classrooms to Learning Spaces," (*EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, no.1, 2005, p.15):

"Does your learning space enable learners to get to know each other and engage in dialogue, work on group projects, interact in a variety of ways, such as collaborative or cooperative learning, present their work publicly, teach others, or

give feedback? Do your learning spaces enable learners to work together to address real-world problems, interact with people and information outside the classroom, debate, research, inquire, and solve problems, engage in simulations, virtual field trips, role playing?"

A View of the Proposed Courtyard Café as envisioned by Perry Dean Rogers & Partners.



LC Project Funding Model

<b>Total Project Cost:</b>	
Construction:	3,650,000
Furniture/Equipment, Fees, etc.	600,000
<b>Total:</b>	4,250,000
<b>Total Funds Needed:</b>	
Pace Institutional Commitment:	1,500,000
	[over 3-years]
External Fund Raising:	2,750,000
<b>Total:</b>	4,250,000

<u>Size of Gift</u>	<u># of Donors</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1,000,000	1	1,000,000
500,000	1	500,000
100,000	3	300,000
50,000	5	250,000
25,000	10	250,000
10,000	20	200,000
5,000	20	100,000
2,500	20	50,000
1,000	40	40,000
500	60	30,000
250	60	15,000
100	80	8,000
50	90	4,500
25	100	2,500
	<b>Total:</b>	2,750,000

“There were over 40,000 full text downloads from the Digital Commons in the past year.”

## Systems Updates

Rey P. Racelis, Associate University Librarian for Systems Integration

**Digital Commons** (<http://digitalcommons.pace.edu>)

There were over 40,000 full text downloads from the digital commons in the past year.

Searching across more than 50 Proquest-supported digital repositories is now available.

Eugene Lang Fellows Research Projects are now included in the Digital Repository in full text.

Author’s personal page is now available.

Law School is now showcasing articles in the Digital Commons.

RSS feed is available.

Remote access to doctoral dissertations has been integrated into the Digital Repository.

**Innopac Products to be installed (within the next 2 years) –**

**RSS FEED**

**Patron Review – Community Reviews**

Will allow libraries to

include reviews written by library patrons.

**Spell Check**

Includes 2 modes of suggestions: “Did you mean [link to best search guess]?” and ability to get additional suggestions and a “More” link which displays dropdown menus to select the appropriate alternate suggestions.

**Other Services**

Two features have been added to the Additional Information button in the catalog:

Criticas (review of Spanish materials)

Kirkus Reviews

**CISTI:** The only self-mediated document delivery service that is subsidized by the library. Account is setup by the ILL staff before patrons can do self-mediated ordering.

**Ingenta and Infotrieve**

are still available as citations sources only. Subsidized document delivery is ordered by the ILL library staff. There are still deposit accounts remaining in these 2 services.

We have cancelled our subscription to WEBFEAT.

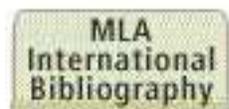
**ConnectNY** now has 13 members of the consortium: newest member is [Cazenovia College](#)

**E-Books**

We now have access to over 10,000 e-books (total from NetLibrary, Books 24 x 7, and Gale Virtual Reference Library)

*NOTE: Due to some budgetary constraints, operational projects and services may be temporarily suspended or subscriptions ended.*

## Subscription Database Changes



MLA Bibliography can now be found in the Literature Resource Center database.

The database offerings from the library will be changing over this year. Due to budgetary cuts, the Database Resources team had to select several subscription databases that would not be offered by the university during this budget year.

The databases that will not be offered during the 2006-2007 academic year are:

**Hoovers** subscription access. You will still be able to view the general information in this database from off campus.

**Stat USA.** Most government documents are freely available on the web.

**Brittanica Online.** There are several free online encyclopedias.

**Business and Management Practices.**

We have several Business databases that contain similar information.

**Literature Online (LION).** MLA Bibliography is now available through Literature Resource Center.

## Blogs and the Pace Library

Brian Jennings, Instructional Services Librarian, Mortola Library

This semester we have created two blogs to help improve the library collection and our reference services.

The collection development blog - <http://pacecollection.blogspot.com/> - highlights new purchases for the collection which reflect new scholarship, current events, and/or new curriculum at the University. We are in the developing stages of this new initiative, so it will hopefully evolve into something that is able to quickly react to student and faculty information needs. Our first posting addressed American concerns about illegal immigration. The second posting addressed Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans. We took a broad view of the topic and included two books on Louis Armstrong's life in

New Orleans: *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* by Thomas Brothers and *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*, a memoir by Armstrong. We also dusted off and displayed the classic *New Orleans city guide*, written by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. In response to the need for a variety of formats, our posting on immigration also included the DVD *Farmingville* which examines the immigration debate in one Long Island town. Our blog has also posted persistent links to databases and web sites which are relevant to these topics.

The Mortola Library Reference Desk Blog - <http://libtech.typepad.com/>

[mortalareference/](http://mortalareference/) - serves as a forum for reference librarians in Pleasantville. All reference librarians may post and varied topics address anything from the most commonly asked reference questions of the week (books on resumes and books on topics in Ancient history were popular the week of Sept. 18-22); a local meeting for the Special Librarian Association's Hudson Valley chapter; and where to look up the room schedule online.

As these forums develop, one may work in response to the other, with the collection development blogging about the library's latest purchases on resumes and Ancient history in response to postings in the Reference blog.

"The Mortola Library Reference Desk Blog serves as a forum for reference librarians in Pleasantville."

<http://pacecollection.blogspot.com/>

Next Blog>

### Pace University Library Collection Development

Subscribe to this blog:



OCLC Worldcat Search

Search for an item in libraries near you:

Enter title, subject or person

GO



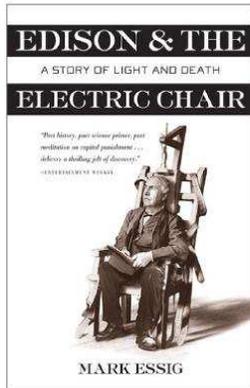
FRIDAY, AUGUST 11, 2006

#### Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans

Many new books address the tragic events of August 2005 related to the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. These publications deal with many aspects of the disaster: the failed federal response, the environmental impact, the cultural significance of New Orleans, and the role of race in government's failure to evacuate the citizens of New Orleans.

The most popular book on Hurricane Katrina is Douglas Brinkley's *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. Brinkley is a highly successful author, a history professor at Tulane University, and a resident of New Orleans.

## Book Review: Edison and the Electric Chair (cont.)



“Edison and the Electric Chair is a well-researched, thoroughly enjoyable glimpse at a dynamic time in our history.”

inhumane. But rather than ending executions, this argument became a challenge to death penalty advocates to find a new, more scientific way to kill.

A Death Penalty Commission was formed in New York State in 1886 to explore alternatives to hanging. The Commission wrote to Thomas Edison to ask his opinion on whether electricity could be a reliable method of killing. Edison, an erstwhile opponent of capital punishment, wrote back that indeed, electricity could be a humane method of killing, and the most effective machine would be the alternating-current dynamo made by George Westinghouse. The Commission considered the words of the great inventor as sacred, and New York State soon passed the first electrical execution law.

Thus began a long and rather unsightly chapter in the Thomas Edison saga. He was determined to have alternating-current viewed as so dangerous to human life, that not only would Westinghouse machines become associated with the death penalty, but the government would ban the use of alternating current in American cities. A man with veiled connections to Edison put himself forward as an expert advisor to the state. He conducted

gruesome animal experiments in Edison’s lab using Westinghouse machines to determine how much alternating current would be necessary to kill a man.

Westinghouse fought back in the court of public opinion, as well as in the courts of law. When a man named William Kemmler was sentenced to death under the new law, his case was appealed on the grounds that the method of death was as yet untried, that the state was experimenting on Kemmler, and that electrocution was therefore cruel and unusual punishment. The lawyer who appeared for Kemmler was a man who himself had veiled connections to Westinghouse. A major argument in the appeal was that the electrical execution law had been passed, not for the good of humanity, but for the purpose of benefiting one electrical company and harming another.

When the execution finally took place, it was horribly botched, through a combination of mechanical and human error. Subsequent criminal executions were no quicker or smoother, and it was beginning to look like electrocution was not the humane solution to hanging everyone had hoped for. Thomas Edison was called

upon again, this time to advise on improvements to the electric chair apparatus.

There were true safety concerns with alternating current, but George Westinghouse was counting on technological improvements that would make them negligible. Edison continually protested the dangers of the alternating system, until it became clear he could not convince the government to ban its domestic use. Since Westinghouse remained a viable threat, advisors began telling Edison he needed his own alternating current system. With that, the great inventor began to soften his rhetoric.

Edison and the Electric Chair is a well-researched, thoroughly enjoyable glimpse at a dynamic time in our history. Mark Essig takes the reader on a fascinating journey through centuries of electrical experimentation and discovery. He explores the public fascination with violence and death and the efforts of the ruling class to exploit and control it. Finally, he presents us with the biography of a truly fascinating and complex man and a reminder to always look for what lay beneath our mythology.

Visit the New Library Homepage at <http://library.pace.edu>

The screenshot shows the Pace University Library homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Site Map', 'A-Z Index', and a search box. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for 'Admission', 'Academics', 'About Us', 'Student Life', 'Alumni And Friends', and 'MyPace'. The main header area includes the Pace University logo and a yellow banner with the word 'Library'. Below the banner are three search buttons: 'Search Catalogs', 'Search Databases', and 'Search Reserves'. The main content area is organized into several sections: 'THE LIBRARY' with sub-sections for 'Find Resources' (Catalog, Databases, Reserves, Print & E-Journals, More), 'Services' (Interlibrary Loan, Renew an item, Alumni Access, More), and 'Help' (Ask a Librarian, Frequently Asked Questions, How Do I...?, Subject Guides, More); 'About the Library' (Locations, Hours, Staff, Learning Commons, More); and 'News & Events' (Newsletters, Displays, Events, More). A 'LIVE HELP OPEN' button is located in the 'News & Events' section. At the bottom, there is an 'UPDATES' section with a featured article titled 'Library of the Future Award' and a 'Centennial Celebration: The Mortola Years' section. The page footer includes the text 'Last update: Mon, 28 Aug GMT-0400 2006 13:46:56'.

Our homepage was simplified over the summer to make it easier to find the links to the Catalog and the Databases. Click on the More link on the bottom of each section to find additional links and explanations.

When the Live Help button is green, you can also IM (Instant Message) a librarian with a question.

<http://library.pace.edu>

Birnbaum Library  
One Pace Plaza, New York, NY  
10038  
212-346-1331

Mortola Library  
861 Bedford Road, Pleasantville,  
NY 10570  
914-773-3505

Graduate Center Library  
1 Martine Avenue, White Plains,  
NY 10606  
914-422-4384

The Information Edge is published semi-annually by the Pace University Library. Please direct comments and submissions to the editors: Janell Carter [jcarter3@pace.edu](mailto:jcarter3@pace.edu) or Karen DeSantis [kdesantis@pace.edu](mailto:kdesantis@pace.edu).

## Hours

### **Birnbaum Library**   **Mortola Library**

Monday - Friday  
8:00AM - 11:00 PM

Saturday  
10:00AM - 8:00 PM

Sunday  
12:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Monday - Friday  
8:30 AM - 2:00 AM

Saturday  
9:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Sunday  
10:00 AM - 2:00 AM

### **Graduate Center Library**

Monday - Thursday  
12:00PM - 10:00PM

Friday  
12:00PM - 5:00PM

Saturday  
10:00AM - 5:00PM

Sunday  
CLOSED

Any change in library hours will be noted on the library website and posted on the doors of each library.