Erie Canal Exhibition Coming to the Folsom Library

The Folsom Library is delighted to provide space for an exhibit the School of Engineering is sponsoring as part of the 175th anniversary of the Department of Civil Engineering. “Re-Inspired, An Artistic Navigation of the Erie Canal” is an exhibition that combines engineering and art into a creative account of the development of the Erie Canal, the first and grandest of the four canals built that comprise New York State’s Canal System, which passes through 25 counties and nearly 200 towns, villages, and hamlets.

The exhibition, composed of 24 panels of vivid images and illustrative text, tells the story of the Erie Canal and the pioneering contributions engineers made to America’s first major civil engineering project. Regional artists were commissioned to employ their unique vision and skill to create paintings that capture their interpretations of the mechanical structure of the canal and which define the diverse landscape of Upstate New York.

Middlebury, Vermont artist Doug Lazarus is the curator. According to Lazarus, the exhibition recounts the story of how “self-taught men plunged into a wilderness and forged a dream into a reality. The virtues of true grit, feisty optimism, hard work and ingenuity were the real tools that dug the canal. They are also what built our country. The number of nostalgic appearances of the Erie Canal in the collective memory, reaching back in difficult times, to the bedrock of the American character, more than ever, we need to re-group around the energizing force of the frontier spirit.”

Along with the paintings celebrating the canal is an impressive eight and one-half foot sculpture of Leonardo da Vinci by artist Dennis Sparling. In the 15th century, da Vinci invented the canal lock as we know it today and, according to Lazarus, da Vinci “is the most famous example of an artist/engineer in Western Civilization. He is proof positive that not only did these two disciplines coexist in one person, they drew equally upon his creativity. His genius as both engineer and artist makes it appropriate that … he serves to link the canal’s history to canal-inspired art.”

Initially conceived to accompany the 2010 World Canals Conference that took place in Rochester, NY, this September, the exhibition will be on display on the bottom floor of the Folsom Library from October 3rd until December 4th. From Rensselaer, it will travel to The Italian Cultural Institute on Park Avenue and 69th Street in New York City, where it will reside until December 29th. For more information, visit the exhibition’s website at http://canal-reinspired.com.
Luncheon Talk Focuses on Rensselaer’s Alumni Architects

Over 60 people attended the May 18th luncheon, “Architects: Designers of Today’s Campus Buildings,” held in the Russell Sage Dining Hall. Featured speaker and Professor Emeritus David Haviland ’64, with researching assistance from former Rensselaer Alumni Director Carl Westerdahl and Assistant Archivist Amy Rupert, entertained attendees with stories of a number of Rensselaer graduates who designed some of the buildings that make up our picturesque campus.

The first Rensselaer building that was planned by a Rensselaer graduate was actually designed by a group of Rensselaer graduates who worked for The Wilson Brothers of Philadelphia firm. This building was located in downtown Troy and housed Director of the Institute Palmer C. Ricketts’ office. The Wilson Brothers went on to design the Alumni Building, which was completed in 1893. In addition to offices and lecture rooms and a library, it also housed the extensive and valuable fossil collection that was given to the Institute by James Hall of the Class of 1832, who was the founder of the Alumni Association. The building was sold in 1915 to the Young Men’s Hebrew Association and is now part of First Niagara Bank.

After the 1904 fire that destroyed several Rensselaer buildings, Ricketts, now President Ricketts, headed an expansion resulting in a campus now referred to as the Ricketts or Green Roofed Campus. At least ten of these new buildings were designed by the firm of Lawlor and Haase. Joseph Lawlor, a member of the Class of 1888, had a hand in designing Amos Eaton, the ‘87 Gym, Russell Sage Laboratory, Greene Building, Ricketts, “The Quad,” North and E-dormitories, the Club House (now Lally), and the Russell Sage Dining Hall.

According to Westerdahl, “Today, it is impossible to imagine the Ricketts campus without Joseph Lawlor….” At this point, Rupert introduced three special attendees who journeyed from New Jersey—Charlotte and Ron Martyn and their daughter, Jennifer Saxton. Charlotte is the granddaughter of Joseph Lawlor and Jennifer is his great-granddaughter. They were invited to the luncheon by Rupert when Jennifer contacted her a few months ago while researching information on her maternal great-grandfather. Jennifer and her parents were eager to come to campus to see firsthand their ancestor’s architectural designs.

(continued on page 3)
Evan Douglass, Dean of the School of Architecture, presented the guests with copies of *Rensselaer, Where Imagination Achieves the Impossible: An Illustrated History of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute*, written by Thomas Phelan, D. Michael Ross, and Carl A. Westerdahl. The special guests were later given an escorted tour of the Lawlor and Haase buildings.

The Pittsburgh Building was another structure designed by an alumni architect. William G. Wilkins, a member of the Class of 1879 and a founder of the Pittsburgh firm, Lockhart, Wilkins, & Hunt, led the design project. The building opened in 1912. Haviland noted that when the building changed from an administration building to the home of the Lally School of Management and Technology in 1998, it underwent a major renovation under the leadership of another Rensselaer alumnus: Lee Harris Pomeroy ‘54. Pomeroy has achieved international acclaim designing buildings and doing preservation, transportation, and planning projects in Europe, China, and India.

The Troy Building, which was dedicated in 1924 on RPI’s 100th anniversary, was designed by M. F. Cummings & Son of Albany. The younger Cummings, Frederick Marcus, was a member of the Class of 1886. When the Troy Building underwent a renovation in 1997, the Albany firm of Woodward Connor Gillies & Seleman Architects was selected for the project. All four principals are Rensselaer graduates (‘75, ‘83, ‘89, and ‘73, respectively) and are widely recognized for their corporate architecture and interior design. The firm has been ranked among the “Top 150 Interior Design Giants” in North America by *Interior Design Magazine*.

The most recent alumni to be involved in an architectural project is John G. Waite ‘64, whose firm, John G. Waite Associates, worked on the exterior restoration of West Hall. This historic building restoration garnered Waite his 50-something building preservation award. Haviland also noted numerous other alumni who were the recipients of prestigious awards for design.

To date, the American Institute of Architects, considered the profession’s highest honor, has been awarded to 17 Rensselaer alumni. Haviland also remarked that his fraternity brother, Peter Bohlin ‘58, is a 2010 recipient.

Haviland mentioned numerous other Rensselaer alumni who were either designers, project managers, or owners of firms that were responsible for work on other campus buildings, such as the Center for Biotechnology and Interdisciplinary Studies (2004), the Chapel and Cultural Center (1968), the Jonsson Engineering Center (1977), Barton Hall (2000), Academy Hall (2003 renovation), and the Commons Dining Hall (2003 renovation). He stated that several Rensselaer projects were designed by Rensselaer faculty and staff employed in the School of Architecture and in the Campus Planning & Facilities Design Department.

It is clear that Rensselaer and its School of Architecture, which opened in 1931, have produced many talented architects who have been successful in structural design or project management regionally, nationally, and internationally. The Institute is fortunate that many have been able to employ what they learned here to give back to their alma mater and made a lasting impression on our campus.

This was the third in a series of special programs on the history of the Institute. Another program is planned for sometime next year on a topic yet to be determined. Stay tuned!
On January 18, 1977, then-President of RPI, George M. Low, wrote to the President of the Atlantic Richfield Company, applying for a grant. In this typewritten memo, President Low explains that educators at RPI “have been giving serious attention to programs which emphasize the social and human impact of the engineering and related disciplines we teach here.” One of the new programs he proposes is “a communication referral center,” which would be “part of a larger program designed to confront the so-called ‘literacy crisis’ in higher education.” ARCO granted the request, and in the Spring of 1978, The Writing Center began to offer all RPI students assistance with all types of writing, from formal letters or academic essays to engineering reports and graduate dissertations.

A Library Home: The Writing Center evolved in response to RPI’s own experience of the national literacy crisis, documented in research conducted by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (H & SS). The school reported that both humanities and engineering faculty agreed: (1) RPI students needed to develop stronger written and oral communication skills, and (2) all disciplines should require some courses that demand writing. The School of H & SS and its Dean, Thomas Phelan, charged the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication with creating the Writing Center and proposed locating it on the fourth floor of West Hall.

Fortunately for the students and the Center, Dr. Jennie Skerl, the first Writing Center Director, argued for a more central location. The brand-new Folsom Library accepted the fledgling Center, and Rooms 332 B and C became the Writing Center’s first home—complete with a beautiful view looking west, over Troy! From this very accessible site, the Center quickly attracted a wide variety of students, from every school on campus, though between 60-75% came from Engineering. After only one year, almost 300 students had come to the library to work on writing and returned multiple times, for a total of almost 700 visits!

After only a few years, the Writing Center was moved from its library home to a larger suite of offices in Sage Lab, in the middle of the LL& C Department. Under Dr. Skerl’s successor, Dr. Karen LeFevre, a nationally-recognized scholar, the Writing Center quickly expanded. Its staff assisted a record number of over 2000 students in some semesters, in addition to visiting classes to lead writing workshops.

Unfortunately, upon Dr. LeFevre’s retirement, funding became scarce, and

(continued on page 5)
her position was left unfilled. A succession of very capable LL&C graduate students kept the Center running, expanded its online resources, and even offered online consultations. However, without consistent leadership, the numbers of students using its services fluctuated.

**Flash forward 28 years to Fall 2005:** By Fall 2005, funds had dwindled, and the Center was again in need of support and in search of a new home. At the same time, the School of H & SS and Dr. Lee Odell, its Associate Dean, were reviewing the existing writing requirements for students. Dr. Odell recognized that as innovations in technology had become increasingly sophisticated, the tools and genres professionals and students used to communicate had changed. Writing is only one type of communication practice that students need to master: they also must learn to design excellent PowerPoint slides and web pages, and to present clear and coherent oral presentations.

In order to provide the kind of support RPI students needed as they wrestled with these new demands, Dr. Odell and his colleagues proposed a renovation of both the Writing Center and those courses in all disciplines that aimed to teach the communication skills students would need for their careers in academia and beyond. As RPI incorporated a new “Communication Intensive” requirement for all students, effective Fall 2006, a new grant allowed the School of H & SS and the Department of LL&C to re-establish the Writing Center’s mission to include support for this new Communication Intensive curriculum, and to hire a new Director to work with both programs. The school also rechristened the Center to reflect its new, broader focus, naming it the Center for Communication Practices (“the CCP”).

**Homecoming:** It seems especially fitting that when space became tight on campus and the Center found itself with an expanded mission but without a home, Folsom Library agreed once again to house the Center, its books and its staff. The CCP offices are located in Rooms 154A & B; its tables, bookshelves, and comfortable chairs are clustered in the adjoining first-floor corner, looking out on the Quad. As we approach the end of the fourth year of this very happy collaboration, there is plenty of evidence that points to its success.

Although the CCP is working with a smaller staff and has not yet approached the “2,000-students” mark, the number of students using the Center’s services is generally increasing each semester. Librarians refer students to the CCP for help composing papers and presentations, and the Center’s consultants refer students to librarians for research assistance. The Center frequently holds workshops in the first-floor computer lab, occasionally co-presenting with a reference librarian, and the CCP Director and one reference librarian collaborated with a professor on a conference paper.

It has been 32 years since President George Low recognized the importance of effective communication in all disciplines, and his call for a “communication” center now seems prophetic! As the CCP enters its fifth year of working in partnership with Folsom Library, we look forward to collaborating in new ways to help students develop into more effective communicators.

**The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.**

~ Mark Twain
The computer lab, located on the first floor of the Folsom Library, was refurbished this summer with all new power wiring, cabling, and Versteel desks. The individual tables have PCs that were new last summer. A new overhead projector was installed, saving users from having to check one out and transport it on a cart to the lab.

**PC Lab Gets Refurbished**

The Friends of the Folsom Library is an active service organization comprised of Rensselaer faculty, staff, alumni, retirees, and interested community members dedicated to enriching the collections, services, and events provided at the Folsom Library.

**Passing of Chuck McKeown**

Long time Friend and retired Rensselaer staff member Charles McKeown died on May 29, 2010 after a lengthy illness. Known to everyone on campus as Chuck, he worked in Media Operations as a Machine Shop Specialist in the Department of the Chief Information Officer for many years before retiring in 2002.

Chuck was very involved with the Rensselaer Federal Credit Union. In 1977, he was instrumental in forming a steering committee to investigate the formation of a credit union on campus and was elected to serve on the first Board of Directors the following year. He continued to serve on the Board and the Credit Committee for decades and was one of the financial cooperative’s biggest proponents.

The RPI Employees’ Federal Credit Union made a very generous donation to the Friends in memory of Chuck. Our condolences to the McKeown family.

---

Yes, I want to be a...  

Friend ($50 suggested)  
Enclosed is my contribution of $____________________  

Please make check payable to:  

Friends of the Folsom Library  

Please list your name(s) exactly as you wish listings to appear in print:  

Name(s):_______________________________________  
Class:_________  
Address:_______________________________________  
City:__________________________  
State:_________________________ Zip:_____________  

E-Mail ________________________________________

Thank you!
The Rensselaer Libraries Bid Adieu to Two Longtime Employees

A luncheon was held in the library on July 22 to honor and bid farewell to two library staff who retired after having worked in the library for a combined employment of over 70 years.

Irv Stephens retired from Rensselaer on September 8th after 41 years of service. Irv had been working for the Rensselaer Libraries for six years when the present Folsom Library was constructed. He authored the specification for RPI’s initial circulation system, the first in the nation to provide users with access to personal records and the ability to request online book services and the first in the nation with a web-based electronic reserves system. Irv led one of the first electronic interlibrary loan installations and played a lead role in the Rensselaer Libraries’ electronic theses project. In his most recent position as Manager of Public Services, he was instrumental in the Rensselaer’s RapidILL (interlibrary loan) implementations. In retirement, Irv is pursuing becoming a “Master Gardener” with the Rensselaer Cooperative Extension and devoting more time to tennis, birding, reading, and traveling to the West Coast to visit his two sons.

Rita Martinoli worked in the Folsom Library for 22 years, first as a Senior Secretary and then as an Administrative Assistant. She came to the library after having worked in the Physical Plant for 11 years. Prior to that, Rita spent a few years in the typing pool. In her long-awaited retirement, Rita’s plans include spending time with her family, working in her gardens, and taking day trips with her only grandchild, Renee.

This December, Rensselaer will be honoring Jacqueline Novogratz, Founder and CEO of the Acumen Fund, as the 2010 Rensselaer Entrepreneur of the Year (EOY). Acumen Fund is a non-profit global venture fund that uses entrepreneurial approaches to solve the problems of global poverty.

This year’s honoree is not only an entrepreneur, but an author of a New York Times best seller. The Blue Sweater is the inspiring personal memoir of a woman who has spent her life on a quest to understand global poverty and to find powerful new ways of tackling it. In the book, Novogratz shows, in ways both hilarious and heartbreaking, how traditional charity often fails, and how a new form of philanthropic investing called ”patient capital” can help make people self-sufficient and change millions of lives.

In preparation for her visit and acceptance of the award, The Severino Center for Technological Entrepreneurship and the Office of First Year Experience are organizing book discussion sessions that will dive into the journey depicted in the pages of The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World. Those interested in attending these discussions need to contact Kelly Reardon in the Severino Center at scte@rpi.edu. Those who attend will be invited to meet the author in a small group setting during our EOY celebration on December 1st. Friends of the Folsom Library are covering half the cost of the first 100 softcover editions of The Blue Sweater sold in the campus bookstore. For more information and to RSVP for the December 1st event, visit http://www.lallyschool.rpi.edu/2010EOY.
Friends of the Folsom Library is pleased to invite the public to a reception celebrating the history and art exhibition

“Re-Inspired, An Artistic Navigation of the Erie Canal”
as contemporary artists salute America’s first great work of civil engineering

Thursday, October 14th
4:00 pm
Folsom Library—Bottom Floor

Introduction by
Dr. Jose Holguin-Veras,
Rensselaer Professor,
Civil and Environmental Engineering

Special guest speaker
Bill Estes,
General Counsel,
New York State Thruway Authority
and Canal Corporation, will address “Big Ideas”

Costumed interpreter
Bernard C. Schmieder, P. E., L.S.,
will present
“Surveying the Western Route”

This is a component of the 175th Anniversary of Civil Engineering at Rensselaer celebration. See page one for more information on the exhibition.