Cliff Anderson’s account of how we managed to empty Speer Library and move all operations into Luce leads off this issue of the Luce Library Bulletin. More than a few people on campus were pessimistic about whether we’d be able to get the job done in the time allotted. We surprised a lot of people—including a few library staff. I’m on record as saying that this past summer was enjoyable and, yes, even fun. That doesn’t mean it was easy. It wasn’t. But the importance of the work, the urgency of the schedule, and the ability to watch our progress on a daily basis made this a summer to remember. Also in this issue, read a feature article by Ken Henke telling the stories behind the construction of Speer Library, including the controversy it generated at the time, and an article about progress on the John A. Mackay Collection. These remind us that even with all the commotion surrounding the new building, library work and services continue. Don’t let our smaller quarters keep you from visiting us. We have great facilities in Luce Library, and we’re eager to serve you.

Moving with Agility

How do you completely empty a 70,661-square-foot building in approximately three months while still remaining fully operationally? Carrying out a project of this scale would seemingly require meticulous long-range planning. But time was not on our side. The Board of Trustees approved the new library project on July 1. We had to get started almost immediately to complete emptying Speer and moving the library to Luce before the opening of the fall semester.

We decided to coordinate the process using agile project management. The concept of agile management arose out of software development. In 2001, a group of prominent software engineers published the “Manifesto for Agile Software Development” (see http://agilemanifesto.org/). They recognized that change is constant in technology projects, and that long-term planning can prove detrimental to getting the right things done—as they put it, “we have come to value … responding to change over following a plan.”

(continued on page 2)
Moving with Agility

Agile project management comes in many varieties. This summer, we adopted a form of agile called Kanban (or 看板 in Japanese). The concept is derived from the lean manufacturing principles applied at Toyota. A Kanban board is at its simplest a signboard with three columns: “Ready,” “Working,” and “Complete.” Our library and information technology staff posted “stories” on the board—like “Move Boxes from Pipe Tunnel”—and then moved each story across the columns to track its progress toward completion. Every morning, the staff gathered at 9:00 o’clock for fifteen minutes to answer three questions: “What did I do yesterday? What am I planning to do today? What roadblocks am I facing?” These meetings provided the opportunity to track progress, reevaluate priorities in response to shifting circumstances, and clear away barriers to progress.

This way of managing our move helped us move forward rapidly while also allowing for quick course corrections. Our daily meetings provided camaraderie, and watching stories move from one side of the Kanban board to the other gave us a growing sense of accomplishment. Of course, it also helped that we served coffee and donuts after each morning meeting.

We met our goal of emptying Speer Library by the beginning of the academic year. The moving project may be completed, but we continue to explore ways to apply agile principles to our daily work and projects at the Seminary library. Perhaps we will set up our next Kanban board when we move everything into our new 90,000-square-foot library!  

Remembering the Robert E. Speer Library

When John Alexander Mackay entered his office as the newly elected president of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1936, he found in a desk drawer a number of architect’s drawings sketching out ideas for renovating and expanding the Old Lenox Library, built in 1843. “All these designs,” he wrote, “had apparently been rejected by my distinguished predecessor, Dr. J. Ross Stevenson, and by the Trustees of that day, as quite unsatisfactory.” But the need for improved library facilities was clear. Even the New Lenox Library, constructed in 1879, was running out of space, and both nineteenth-century buildings had become inadequate, antiquated, and inefficient. Only the 1925 annex to the New Lenox Library was fireproof, putting most of the Seminary’s outstanding collections at high risk if a fire should ever break out. Whenever there was a heavy rain, the basement of Old Lenox would accumulate three to four inches of water. As this water evaporated, the humidity of the building would increase, inviting the growth of mold.

During the next few years, as John Mackay began to work at strengthening the Seminary to meet the demands of the mid-twentieth century and beyond, he never gave up the hope that “the new library which the Seminary so much needed would become a reality before 1962, the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of its founding.” The eventual construction of the Robert E. Speer Library, completed in 1957, was the culmination of these hopes and dreams and of much hard work, planning, extensive fund raising, and not a few hard-fought battles.

Although the need for a new library had become crucial, the outbreak of the Second World War delayed the possibility of all major building projects through the mid-1940s. By the early 1950s, the number of students who needed space to work in the library had increased, along with the number of books. With the collection split between two buildings, students had to run back and forth between the buildings to find the books they needed. The library staff needed to be enlarged, but staff work areas were too small and cramped to allow it. Study spaces were poorly lighted and somewhat noisy because of the overcrowding. Areas for small group library work were inadequate, and there was no proper storage area for rare books and manuscripts. John Mackay had been continuing to share with others his dream of a new library for the Seminary.

Robert E. Speer was the former secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and a member of the Board of Directors of Princeton Seminary and then of the re-organized Board of Trustees from 1914 until 1947. John Mackay had served under him at the Board of Foreign Missions and Speer had chaired the committee that called Mackay to Princeton. Upon Speer’s death in 1947, Mackay wrote to Speer’s widow, “When I see you I wish to talk over a little project that has been taking shape in my mind to perpetuate Dr. Speer’s memory in a worthy way on our Seminary campus. He was a lover of books. I would like to see our new library called by his name.”

The architect George A. Licht had been involved in the restoration of the Seminary’s Miller Chapel in 1933 and together with his architect son, George T. Licht, had been called on again in the early 1950s to design the Seminary’s new Campus Center, with its dining...
halls, lounges, and auditorium. A note in George T. Licht’s diary dated September 26, 1951, marks the official date on which they also began preliminary sketches for the future library. The building was designed to hold 400,000 books, with room for expansion. In the final version, the exterior walls were faced with four-inch-thick Alabama limestone laid in random ashlar pattern, with Indiana limestone trim. Above the main entrance to the library were two columns of sculptured symbols, beginning with the outstretched hand of God the Creator—“who brought into being and sovereignly controls all things that exist”—and ending with the crest of John Calvin, a heart grasped in a human hand and offered back to God. “Through an act of personal commitment, which is the soul of true religion,” wrote John Mackay in interpreting this symbol, “an individual human being is caught up into God’s great scheme of things and becomes a member of the Church Universal.”

Kenneth Gapp, the Seminary’s head librarian at that time, took a strong part in overseeing many of the architectural details. He insisted that the new building be wheelchair-accessible, aware especially of the difficulties experienced by wounded veterans who had come to the Seminary after serving in the war. Although the Mercer Street entrance was designed with steps, the Library Place entrance was designed to allow wheelchair access, with a special corridor inside the building leading around to the front entrance. Additional features of the new building included a spacious, well-lit reading room with study spaces for 115 persons and display shelves designed to hold about 400 current periodicals; a generous lobby area faced with Neshobe gray marble from Vermont and featuring a large walnut-paneled circulation desk in semi-circular shape; a beautifully appointed Board Room where the Board of Trustees and the faculty could hold their meetings; recessed display cases on both the first and second floors; a graduate study, a faculty study, and a general lounge on the second floor; large classroom spaces along the Library Place side of the building and smaller seminar rooms, private study rooms, and typing rooms in other parts of the library; a rare book cage and locked storage area in the basement; an expanded staff working area and lounge, with offices for the head librarian at that time; and—seldom noticed but very important—a state-of-the-art fire alarm and fire detection system. The cost of the building at the time was estimated to be about $1,700,000. The Building Funds Campaign also aimed to raise an additional $1,000,000 as an operating endowment. Major funders came from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., with the remaining $350,000 raised by alumni/ae and friends of the Seminary.

While there was general agreement that Princeton Seminary’s nineteenth-century libraries were inadequate, the decision about where to locate the new library turned out to be a highly controversial matter. One study concluded the best site would be on the main campus, approximately where Hodge Hall stood, but the Seminary was not about to tear down one of its major dormitories. In the long run it was decided the only feasible option was to tear down the two older libraries and build on the traditional library site on the corner of Mercer Street and Library Place, land that had originally been specifically donated to the Seminary by James Lenox as a location for the Seminary library.

As the Seminary’s plans for replacing the 1843 library with a new library became more generally known, active opposition was organized. Letters were written, especially to the local papers, one such accusing the Seminary of “wanton vandalistic designs against a sacred community landmark.” A petition was circulated and letters even appeared in The New York Times and Life magazine. A graduate student in architecture at Princeton University drew on his historical studies, reminding readers that “Napoleon sold the great Medieval Abbey Church at Cluny to be used as a stone quarry, and for that vandalism, he will never be forgiven.” The Old Lenox Library was seen by some as a “rare and valued example of early Neo-Gothic architecture.” John Mackay countered by offering the building at no cost if the community would like to relocate it to some other site, but there were no takers, even when he offered in addition to contribute the money it would cost the Seminary to tear the old library down.

In the end, the old buildings were dismantled, to be replaced by the new Robert E. Speer Library. A plaque inside the door noted that the building had been erected to the memory of Robert Elliott Speer, “a lover of books and of the Kingdom of Christ,” and had been dedicated “to the hope that within its walls the light of learning may illumine the life of piety, in the service of Jesus Christ the Truth.” When the service of dedication was held on October 8, 1957, the main speaker of the day was Nathan Pusey, president of Harvard University. The dedicatory prayer was offered by Eugene Carson Blake, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and president of the National Council of Churches. In a New Year’s letter in January 1957, John Mackay wrote that the new Speer Library was “greater than anything that inspired my fondest dream.”

For more than fifty years Speer Library has served the Seminary well and faithfully, not only its students and faculty who learn and teach here, but also scholars from all over the world who have come to use it and appreciate its holdings, as well as clergy and laity engaged in active service in the church. May the new library that now will take its place continue in like manner to serve in its day.
Thanks to a grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, processing the John Alexander Mackay papers is once again underway in earnest. The collection consists of approximately 175 cubic feet of materials pertaining to the life, work, and interests of John A. Mackay, missionary to Latin America, third president of Princeton Theological Seminary (1936-1959), and a leading proponent of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement.

Mackay's published and unpublished writings are a rich and insightful collection of his thoughts, from his earliest days as a student at Aberdeen University, through his time as a graduate student at Princeton Theological Seminary and in Spain (where he met such leading Spanish intellectuals of the day as Miguel de Unamuno), his many years of service in Latin America, his years as a missions executive in New York and as president of Princeton Seminary, his service as moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and his productive retirement years. In addition to Mackay’s writings, the collection holds extensive correspondence, documents pertaining to the many organizations and committees with which he was associated, and files of materials on topics in which he had a special interest.

The current work on the collection is the identification and sorting of materials in approximately fifty boxes of unsorted papers. Each item is being identified, described on an inventory sheet, and, where necessary (as in the case of old newspaper clippings that are beginning to crumble), preservation copies are being made. Materials will then be placed into acid-free containers by series and a final finding aid written. In addition, a bibliographic database will be created so that researchers can easily locate Mackay’s published and unpublished writings. It will be searchable by title, date, language, and type of writing (e.g. book, sermon, article, book review, etc.).

In a preface to Stanton R. Wilson’s *John Mackay: Bibliographical Resources for the Period 1914–1992*, former James Lenox Librarian James F. Armstrong wrote that “John Alexander Mackay was reluctant to call attention to himself and to his own extensive achievements. We offer this collection not to commend Mackay against his will, but rather to make more accessible a range of ideas, commitments, and prophetic insights that formed the core of his ministry and that brought him more than occasional opposition, but never embarrassment.”

The work now being done on the Mackay Collection, together with the new finding aid, will make this collection even more accessible to future researchers. Among the projected uses in the near future is a special seminar on the life and thought of John A. Mackay being planned by Darrell Guder, Princeton Seminary’s Henry Winters Luce Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology.