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Renée Heyum 1916-1994

Renée Heyum was curator of the University of Hawaii Pacific Collection from 1969 to 1987. At the time the University recruited her, she had already earned some renown as a Pacific bibliographer at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Under Miss Heyum's guidance, UH's Pacific Collection grew from a few thousand to tens of thousands of items. Every two years, she would travel to Pacific islands on acquisition trips, returning each time with materials for the collection and new connections in the region. Begging, demanding, and bribing (with macadamia nut chocolates) her way across Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia, she tirelessly collected as much as she could each trip. She was active in library development in the region, particularly in the area of bibliography. She touched many lives through her work and was known for the support and encouragement she offered to students and colleagues. Pacific scholars around the world have held Miss Heyum and her passionate commitment to Pacific studies in high esteem. UH's Pacific Collection is widely considered to be the finest general collection of Pacific materials in the world – a direct result of her focused, devoted efforts.

Chronology

1916	Born July 6, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
1933	Emigrates with family from Nazi Germany to France
1942	Eluding Gestapo, falls from bike permanently damaging knee
1954	Began library school
1956	Received Diploma, Ecole des Bibliothécaires
1958-68	Works as bibliographer for the National Scientific Research Council, with an office in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris
1969	Began work as Pacific Collection curator at the University of Hawaii
1987	Retires from the University of Hawaii, but continues to work part-time
1990	Made Chevalier de l'Ordre Nationale du Mérite (France's highest civilian honor)
1993	Made Honorary Fellow, Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania
1994	Dies December 14, Honolulu, Hawaii

Selected References

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Journal for 2nd Presentation - Renée Heyum

Since I selected a topic for my major research project that is not Hawaii-focused, I thought it would be a good idea to explore a topic related to Hawaii for this presentation. I began by searching for the combined truncated terms “librarian?” and “Hawai?” in the University’s Voyager library catalog. I had already decided I’d prefer to research a person than an institution, and it seemed a good place to start looking for a librarian.

I spotted Renée Heyum’s name in a few entries, and I later located those materials at the library. I then did some Googling (web search and book search) and searching within Hamilton Library’s web site to see if I could find additional hits. This confirmed that she was indeed a likely topic. I searched for “Heyum” in the library-related databases in Hamilton Library’s electronic resources. This was not particularly useful, probably because most of Miss Heyum’s work life pre-dates database coverage. I considered looking in print periodical indexes for articles written by her, but realized that even if she had authored articles (which I have some doubt about, given her focus), reading them would actually be beyond the scope of this particular short biographical project.

Realizing that local databases should be more fruitful, I searched the Hawaii Newspaper Index and the Hawaii Pacific Journal Index. These searches led me to several obituary pieces and essays *in memoriam*, as well as a Honolulu Advertiser article written after Miss Heyum received the Order of Merit from the French government.

I e-mailed two Hamilton librarians that Miss Heyum worked with – Karen Peacock and Lynette Furuhashi. They were both exceptionally helpful and gracious, pointing out sources and setting aside materials for me to peruse. Lynette met with me and showed me an album she had compiled for Miss Heyum’s retirement. The album has

dozens of letters from around the world - scholars, researchers, former students, UH faculty and librarians all fondly recalling their interactions with “Madame” and wishing her well in her semi-retirement.

I also e-mailed Jim Cartwright in University Archives. Jim doubts that Archives has anything of interest on Miss Heyum. Lynette thought the album of letters was in Archives, so I made an appointment to view it there, but she (or Jim) realized that the album was actually in the Pacific Collection room, so I viewed it there.

I had found a photo on the art in Special Collections page on the Hamilton Library web site that I surmised was of Renée Heyum, but I thought I’d ask at that room to be certain. Ellen Chapman confirmed that I was correct, and we chatted a bit about Miss Heyum. Ellen particularly recalled her wit and generosity. Bron Solyom overheard us, and by lucky chance for me, she was quite happy to talk about her good friend Renée. Bron supplied me with the text of the talk she gave at Miss Heyum’s memorial service.

This research project has been an interesting experience. It’s been twenty years (undergraduate days) since I’ve done much research with primary sources. I’ve had plenty of occasions in the years between to point people to them for their own research, but other than a bit of family history, I’ve been out of the game. I think it’s far less common to feel that a biographical subject “comes alive” when using secondary sources than when using primary sources. I almost feel as if I’ve met Renée Heyum through my research.

If I were to expand my scope, I’d look into print indexes for earlier articles. I would try to contact people outside of the University that were influenced by Miss Heyum. I would also have to find some assistance with the French language sources that I’m not able to read!