



Catching sight at dusk the snowcapped Wasatch Mountains for the first time in September, 1945, Priscilla Mayden wondered what it would be like to live in Salt Lake. Born in Boston September 2, 1918, Priscilla Maltby grew up in the nearby working class town of Stoughton where her parents operated a small business school. Upon graduation from the local high school Priscilla spent a year at her parents' Maltby School before enrolling at Simmons College. Not knowing that the decision to attend Simmons would ultimately determine the arc of her professional career Priscilla entertained thoughts at the time of becoming a writer or journalist. With the country emerging from depression and with war looming on the horizon, Priscilla realized her youthful ambitions would never provide her an adequate living.

Simmons had a reputable library school and so in her second year Priscilla transferred into the program. Graduating in 1941 – and saddled with a two-thousand dollar debt from loans secured from her brother and sister – Priscilla accepted a job at the Hartford (Connecticut) Public Library in the Business and Technical Branch where she worked for the next two years. Although she possessed basic skills, much of Priscilla's library expertise had to be acquired "on-the-job." Hartford was a rewarding experience, but earning a salary of only one hundred dollars a month it was hard to make ends meet. At the urging of her sister Priscilla returned to Stoughton in 1943 to assist in the care of her parents.

A not uncommon detour for many women at the time led Priscilla in a different direction that would eventually put her on a course to Salt Lake and its beckoning mountains. The demands of war meant that many women were contributing to the war effort working in war-related industries. The Bendix Aviation Corporation had opened a plant close by to manufacture marine instruments for the Navy. Thinking it might be interesting – as well as the patriotic thing to do – Priscilla travelled the eight miles distance to Norwood and was immediately hired as an apprentice machinist for the princely sum of 55 cents-an-hour. Priscilla wryly recalled that a woman was cheaper to hire than a man who automatically started at 95 cents. Eventually earning the 75 cent maximum for a woman while supervising a line of five machines, "whether wartime or not" Priscilla felt the sting of mistreatment. Bristling at the inequity, Priscilla marched into the executive offices and ventilated her complaint, "I felt that it was more patriotic for me to demand a living wage than it was to give of myself for the cause."

In October, 1944 Priscilla joined the Women's Army Corps and was sent to Fort Oglethorpe (Georgia) for basic training and later to the school at Washington & Lee University (Virginia) for instruction in special services in order to learn how to work with the returning war-wounded. At the end of the six week orientation, Priscilla was transferred to the Army Air Base in Santa Ana, California. Assigned to the library of the rehabilitation hospital, Priscilla dutifully discharged her duties but never felt she was able to put to work any of what she had learned, "I was just a private in the WAC, I did the best I could, and got out as soon as I could." Despite the disappointment, the experience Priscilla recollected, "Put me into the business of hospital libraries."

It was during her time in the Army in California Priscilla briefly married and explained, she always thought, her peculiar name which she kept because she didn't have the twenty-five dollars necessary "to get my maiden name back." Leaving the Army in February, 1946 Priscilla for a time remained in California wondering whether or not she still wanted a library career. Staying with relatives in Los Angeles, Priscilla applied to stewardess school and was to her surprise, accepted. Thinking it would be exciting, Priscilla flew to New York and was soon disabused; "I found the training embarrassingly dull."

SEEDS OF A LIBRARY BEDFORD YEARS

Priscilla's library career path resumed once again when her sister, who was working at the Veterans Administration regional office in Boston, phoned one day to alert her about a job posting for a chief librarian at the VA Hospital in Bedford. "If you took this job," her sister dangled, 'you might even be able to have a car.'" Sufficient inducement that for Priscilla to take the train to Boston, interview, and to her delight be offered the position.

Priscilla never flew landing instead at "an enormous thousand-bed snake pit of a psychiatric hospital." While there, Priscilla encountered many patients traumatized by their experiences in WWII, WWI as well as the Spanish-American War. Something else Priscilla also had to deal with was the influx of young physicians in uniform who had been sent to that "tiny New England town to this great big hospital." The sudden glut of doctors meant not only would Priscilla have to meet patient needs, she would also have to mollify "this group of men furious at being assigned to a psychiatric hospital unable to practice their wonderful skills." That seeming problem provided Priscilla with a golden opportunity to build a medical library "beyond compare." The hospital's clinical director gave Priscilla a near bottomless budget to buy textbooks and journals, and set aside a sizable space in order for her to properly organize the library's burgeoning collection.

After seven years at Bedford, with family obligations no longer an issue, Priscilla felt by 1952 it was time for something new, "I learned a great deal, I built the whole medical library – I'd done a good job; I decided I would get out of the Veterans Administration and get out of the psychiatric hospital field" – or so she thought.

Returning to the west always held appeal for Priscilla since skiing had become a particular passion, "I wanted to live in a new location, I wanted to live close to skiing." Hoping to marry her vocation with her avocation, Priscilla began applying to

places that would match her extramural interest. It was during her job search that Priscilla decided to attend a meeting of the American Library Association in New York. It was at the convention where Priscilla met Foster Mohrhardt who was head of Library Services for the Veterans Administration in Washington. As Priscilla recited her employment conditions – skiing high on the list – Mohrhardt, with some puzzlement asked, "Why didn't you get in touch with me, we just built a new prototype VA hospital in Salt Lake City and we're looking for the right person to be the chief librarian, how would you like to do that?" The snowcapped mountains that had so impressed Priscilla during that half-hour whistle stop years earlier suddenly became the reason to return. Not knowing anything about Utah, Priscilla, revealing her lack of knowledge, answered, "I was thinking of someplace I could ski." "What do you mean? There are all kinds of ski areas there," Mohrhardt chuckled with amusement. It took Priscilla ten seconds: "I'll take it!" With her job prospects settled, with her worldly possessions packed, Priscilla pointed her '49 Ford west that July eager to build a new collection in a new building in a new city.

PROMISE OF SKIING AND MAYBE A JOB SALT LAKE CITY

Arriving in Salt Lake Priscilla found an "absolutely beautiful" hospital and library waiting – and a surprise. The chief librarian at the old Avenues VA facility had already been given the job of medical librarian unbeknownst to Priscilla. The revelation, while "a jolt," was not long lasting. Her new colleague, Priscilla later made a point of noting, was a great teacher and became a fast friend. As a consequence of the misunderstanding, for a time, Priscilla found herself again in a patients' library of a psychiatric hospital. Another individual Priscilla met who also became a close friend exposed her to the academic side of librarianship and set in motion the series of events that led to the final phase of her library career.

Isabelle Anderson was the medical librarian at the Thomas Library at the University of Utah. Located close to the University, many of the "Ft. Douglas" VA doctors held dual appointments at the University. That relationship gave Priscilla the opportunity to observe first-hand an academic librarian deploy the far vaster array of resources available at a first-rate medical library, apply what she learned to her own work, and become acquainted more and more with members of the University medical faculty. By the early 1960s, many of the pieces Priscilla needed to complete her transition to academia began to fall into place.

Construction on the new University of Utah Medical Center began in 1962 and it was realized then that the awkward arrangement of a divided collection (clinical materials housed at the Salt Lake County General Hospital and books and journals maintained at the Thomas Library) would need to be addressed before the building was completed. Robert Divett, the medical librarian at the Thomas Library, had left the University that year leaving director Ralph Thomson with a vacancy to fill. Dr. Leonard Jarcho was a member of the medical faculty library committee who were casting about to make a recommendation of their own to Mr. Thomson.

Priscilla felt she had done everything she was going to be able to do at the VA and not wanting to "ride out" her retirement began thinking seriously about improving her professional credentials with a graduate degree. The VA had begun to offer a six-week leave-of-absence for librarians interested in upgrading their skills by enrolling in courses at a number of accredited library schools around the country. In 1964, Priscilla attended a course offered at Columbia University. The exhilarating experience that summer in New York was transformative, "I decided that if I was going [to continue] I might as well matriculate and get admitted to graduate school." The jocular invitation to move "across the street" from several of the medical faculty Priscilla had gotten to know from her contact with them at the library and on the ski slopes persuaded Priscilla to confront her fear of possible failure and take the GRE. That moment of resolve, Priscilla reflected, "Was the happiest decision I made in my life; to decide to take a new direction in my career."

As upbeat as that first summer in New York had been, Priscilla's second there was less so. Looking at Priscilla's record, Dr. Maurice Tauber, who held the Dewey Chair in Library Science, matter-of-factly told her, "You've got to make up your mind, you've got to take a semester off, come back and finish your degree, because you cannot get a master's degree just coming back summers." Returning to Salt Lake, Priscilla met with her medical director at the VA to request the leave of absence necessary to meet Dr. Tauber's demands. "I know what you're going to do," a suspicious Dr. John Kumagai responded, "you're going back to Columbia, get your degree, quit, and go to the university." It didn't take the talent of a mind reader to divine what Priscilla was thinking. "If you want to do that, Dr. Kumagai insisted, 'you're going to have to resign.'"

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Priscilla approached Dr. Jarcho and explained her dilemma. “I’d like the job, is there any way that you could guarantee that I would have it if I took this time off?” In early 1966, Priscilla was put in touch with Dr. Kenneth Castleton, Dean of the College of Medicine, who tendered her an offer-of-hire. The details (none of which Priscilla was ever made privy to) provided for a temporary staff appointment leading to a full time faculty appointment as Assistant Professor and Medical Librarian on condition of completion of her degree as well as the all-important five month educational leave (without pay). With assurances of future employment settled, Priscilla returned to Columbia where she was awarded her Master of Library Science degree in March, 1967.

EDUCATION LEAVE WITHOUT PAY MEDICAL LIBRARY APPOINTMENT

At the time of Priscilla’s appointment the medical library still remained a department within the general library. The new Medical Center, an order of magnitude better than the decrepit General Hospital it replaced, was still a rather spare structure. Dr. Castleton’s intention was always to have a separate library built to support of the needs of the research laboratories and medical school. Two weeks prior to coming on to the university payroll, Dr. Castleton handed Priscilla a grant application from the National Library of Medicine (NLM). Terrified of Dr. Castleton, and dismayed to the point of distraction at having to fill out pages and pages of a grant proposal that included “plans” for a building program all on her own, Priscilla retreated to friend’s cabin at Brighton. That weekend as Priscilla struggled with the grant application, Dorothy Van Stipriaan, whose family cabin was nearby came to see her soon-to-be library colleague. “Does Mr. Thomson know about this?” Dorothy incredulously asked. “I don’t think so because I’m not working for him,” Priscilla nonchalantly replied. The impolitic answer earned Priscilla a scolding from Dr. Castleton and save for some fast thinking averted what might have been a disastrous first day on the job.

The contretemps was indicative of the tension existing between the Medical School faculty, who never thought they received adequate service, and the Thomas Library administration. Priscilla would later bring that matter once and for all to a head. The state of peaceful coexistence the medical library enjoyed with the general library had become strained as its collection by the mid-60s had eaten up what was little shelving was left inside its oak-panel room and began to fill the large adjacent study space. By the time of Priscilla’s arrival that spring, the new Marriott Library was nearing completion. As the Thomas Library staff was making ready to transfer its collections there later in the summer, Priscilla wrestled with the problem of where to relocate her medical collection.

The clinical collection from the old General Hospital had already been moved to the basement of the hospital when the Medical Center opened in 1965. The B Level “branch library” was located next to the mechanical room. Too small to house all of the books there, and not wanting to “temporarily” integrate them into the life sciences collection at the Marriott Library – where they might eventually take up permanent residence – Priscilla went to Dr. Castleton to request the space diagonally opposite the branch library. The space Priscilla coveted was a dirt floor with concrete walls, “Unventilated, unheated with overhead pipes of every variety dripping hot and cold.” No money had been allocated to move the library to the upper campus much less was there a penny to spend to remodel “that awful basement.” Sympathetic to Priscilla’s circumstances, Dr. Castleton made the rounds of the medical departments collecting three thousand dollars in order to put down a concrete floor and construct a partition.

It was during this difficult period of transition that “the most influential and most helpful person in my professional life” came to work with Priscilla: Elena Eyzaguirre. Elena and her husband Carlos, who was chairman of the physiology department, were natives of Chile. Before coming to the United States, Elena had set up the medical library at the Catholic University in Santiago. Prior to coming to Utah, Elena had worked at the Welch Library at Johns Hopkins (Baltimore) with Dr. Sanford Larkey on an early automation and indexing project for the NLM that was a precursor of MEDLARS which eventually led to the development MEDLINE. A prestigious paper was later published about the implementation of the project crediting Elena’s contribution.

Priscilla, her many years of experience as a VA librarian notwithstanding, found herself overwhelmed by the Byzantine politics, preening personalities, and petty squabbles endemic to a university. “I never knew who to call, I was afraid to ask, I just floundered.” Elena’s adroit knowledge of those inner workings eventually allowed Priscilla to find her way through the maze. The two together that hot August, 1967 set about shifting the medical collection from lower campus – into the bowels of the hospital.

The terrible ordeal of relocation behind her, Priscilla now faced the daunting challenge of completing the grant application Dr. Castleton had left in her hands. “I had to go ahead and prepare a building program which I did not know how to do.” Put in touch with Robert Ensign, Bruce Jensen, and Ralph Thomson’s deputy, Richard Boss, Priscilla worked with the three men putting together “very hurriedly and very sketchily” a building plan. Dr. Castleton’s financial assistant, Clarence Stover, helped Priscilla prepare the funding part of the application. During the writing the question of Technical Services came up. That question would finally determine how the new library, when opened, would operate.

With the deadline for submission met, Priscilla returned to hospital basement to await word from NLM and make arrangements to inspect several medical libraries around the country. It was during the Holiday break when Priscilla was on tour that Dr. Castleton ordered her back to Salt Lake. The site team from NLM were on their way to conduct their own inspection. Priscilla had reworked as best she could the entire building program as well as drawn up a cursory outline on how to address the touchy subject of Technical Services. Returning to Salt Lake with a raging fever, sitting alongside Dr. Castleton, the members of the medical library committee, and a representative of the Utah Medical Society, Priscilla composed herself to face her interlocutors.

In a “tiny, tiny room” with the oil portraits of the founding fathers of the medical school looking down from the conference walls, through a pall of pipe, cigarette and cigar smoke Priscilla made her presentation. It was apparent during the cross-examination that the building program plans would need to be scrapped and started from scratch. Feeling “sicker and sicker,” Priscilla recalled Dr. Castleton wondering aloud “where he was going to get the money” for a library yet to be built to accommodate a hundred-thousand, perhaps two hundred-thousand volume collection. By the afternoon, exhausted and distraught beyond caring, Priscilla listened as Vern Pings, a member of the site team, asked the question on everyone’s mind: “Is it your understanding,” turning to Ralph Thomson, who was determined to retain administrative and economic control, “that there will be a Technical Services department in this new building?” Richard Boss, who had assisted Priscilla with the building plan draft, answered: “No, absolutely not.” Mr. Pings sensing a distinct lack of harmony sounded Priscilla, “Is this your understanding?” “No, that is not my understanding, we cannot build this building without making provision for a separate Technical Services.” Thinking her library lost, Priscilla left that evening in a state of absolute desolation.

Returning to New York several days later, Priscilla met with her Columbia mentor, Dr. Tauber. “Don’t worry, you’ll get another chance and [together] we’ll write a good building program.” As Dr. Tauber predicted, NLM did encourage Priscilla to resubmit a revised proposal. With Dr. Tauber lending his expertise as a consultant, Priscilla worked with the campus planning office and a firm of architects experienced in library planning throughout 1968 to hone a new building program NLM later that year did approve – with a less than cheering note appended. Until further notice, the construction money was under embargo.

NLM, under the provisions of the 1965 Medical Library Assistance Act, had been given authority to award construction grants for new libraries. By the time Priscilla resubmitted the paperwork to NLM, less than two million dollars remained in the Federal kitty. Priscilla, along with University administrators knew the Utah Legislature was notoriously tightfisted when it came to allocating public money. Reluctant to underwrite even a portion of the construction costs for the Medical Center a few years earlier, everyone reckoned state lawmakers would be opposed to the very idea of another outlay of public money for another building so soon. Dr. Castleton, as he had done previously to get Priscilla her concrete floor, set about the far more difficult task of gathering the sum necessary to meet the conditions of the NLM grant uncertain that once accomplished the grant money would even come the University’s way. Dr. Castleton performed miracles.

SPENCER S. ECCLES MEDICAL SCIENCES LIBRARY

Spencer S. Eccles, a well-respected local banker, was a good friend and golf partner of Dr. Castleton. One afternoon while the two were golfing Mr. Eccles, who was aware he had cancer, mentioned to Dr. Castleton that he intended to make a donation by way of his Will to the University stipulating it be directed towards cancer research. Dr. Castleton had the Medical Center and now the one building he still wanted was a medical library. “There is plenty of money for cancer research from NIH and lots of private foundations,” Dr. Castleton assured Mr. Eccles, ‘what I need most is money to support all our research and what I lack most is a medical library.’” Hearing that, Mr. Eccles later expressed through his executors his wishes that one-hundred thousand dollars be directed towards costs associated with the building of a medical library. Two of Mr. Eccles’ children matched their father’s bequest. The state medical society at Dr. Castleton’s urging earmarked a sizable contribution of their own towards construction costs. Finally, The Commonwealth Fund and Markle Foundation provided the remaining total needed to satisfy the three-to-one requirement specified in the government grant. Irrespective of Dr. Castleton’s impressive fund-raising efforts, with the matching monies still frozen, the prospects of ever seeing a library being built still seemed as bleak as a winter’s day.

Recalling it as “the darkest snowiest day” that January Priscilla was summoned to Dr. Castleton’s office. Preparing herself for more bad news Priscilla at Dr. Castleton’s instruction seated herself on the Dean’s sofa. Investing the moment with a degree of drama he thought suitable, Dr. Castleton let the tension rise to an edgy but not agonizing plane. “Priscilla, yes, what was I going to see you about? ... ‘Oh yes, I’ve just received word from Senator (Wallace F.) Bennett that the money for the building has been released.’” Bursting into tears, Dr. Castleton’s words had transformed Priscilla’s gloomiest day into her happiest. The last penny in NLM’s pot was headed west to Salt Lake where last medical library the MLAA would ever fund would be built.

Before ground was broken on November, 25, 1969, Dr. Thomas C. King, the University Provost, made an appointment to meet with Priscilla. The thorny question of whether the medical library would function independently or remain under the control of the main campus library yet to be resolved. Surveying the now-determined site, Dr. King turned to Priscilla and announced, “I’ve decided that the library should be separate.” In a letter dated September 29, 1969 Dr. King made official his decision stating in part: “After careful analysis of the many complex factors involved, I have agreed to remove the Medical Sciences Library from direct administrative and budgetary relationships with the Main Library of the University.” With the stroke of his pen, Dr. King had cut the Gordian Knot.

Throughout 1970, sitting on the south steps of the Medical Center Priscilla and Elena would take their coffee breaks every morning and every afternoon watching the library being built “living for the day they would allow us to go inside” (which they never did). It would be another year before the Spencer S. Health Sciences Library would be dedicated on October 4, 1971. Priscilla would serve as its Director for another thirteen years, retiring in 1984. Although Priscilla would during those years oversee a number of significant projects that would bring her further professional satisfaction and the library national recognition, the true capstone of her career is the building with no one around she sneaked into on that Sunday afternoon of Thanksgiving weekend. “I walked up the stairs to the second floor for the first time, the west wall had not been put in. I stood there on the second floor and looked out over the valley thinking what a lovely sight.”

