

JILL THRASHER SHERMAN LIBRARY DIRECTOR, ADVOCATE & STEWARD

By Janice Billings

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When asked what she would like her legacy to be, the new director of Sherman Library, Jill Thrasher, said, "When I walk away one day, I want to be remembered as a staunch advocate for the library. That I kept the books, the archival collection, and artwork safe for future generations." Jill emphasized that preserving the library's unique regional history is of the utmost importance to her. She said she also dreams of the day when someone might ask her where she worked and she replied, "The Sherman Library," and that person would say, "You mean THE Sherman Library! That place is incredible! So many respected authors researched their books there! Wow!"

As is often the case, life can be serendipitous.

Prior to getting her master's degree in English at California State University, Long Beach, Jill managed a retail store for two years and taught English at several two- and four-year colleges in Southern California. Adding to her work resume, she was sent by an employment agency to Sherman Library to help as a part-time secretary over the summer. She met with William O. Hendricks, the director of the library at that time, and he enthusiastically offered her a part time position, which she accepted. She also continued to teach until Hendricks, noting her many skills, offered her a full-time position as librarian in 1998. She happily agreed and has been at the library ever since.

Jill reflected on the ways her earlier jobs prepared her for the directorship. She said that her retail management helped her immensely. She was trained by a district manager who demanded excellent customer service from her employees. That experience comes into play every day at the library. She is always interacting with patrons, visitors, and the community, and the retail experience of managing a staff of 30 people at a young age taught her invaluable skills as a manager, communicator, and leader.

Being a college instructor of English composition was also important training, Jill said. It sharpened her writing and communication skills which she also uses every day at the library. Teaching opened her up to learning continuously. "If I didn't have all the answers, I learned more than ever how and where to find them. A good teacher is always a good student." And the library requires both. Realizing this, coupled with her love of all that is the Sherman Library, Jill, the student, decided to enroll at San Jose State University to earn her Masters of Library and Information Science degree.

Now, as the new director of the Library, Jill is building on the many achievements of those who came before her. She is creating her priorities by drawing upon her 22 years of experience at the library, knowing the community, gathering input, and using her considerable skills in technology. Jill underscored the need to build a digital catalog. She is currently researching different systems and hopes to have a digital catalog on its way by the end of the year. The goal is to have the books, archival collections, photographs, maps, and ephemera all in one collective catalog. This is a major priority to bring Sherman Library into the future.

The outstanding artwork collection led Jill to work with Meg Linton, a noted curator, to create a new approach to exhibiting the artwork. They transformed the front main library room into exhibits of oceanscapes; the upstairs into California landscapes; and the back office into a portrait room. They now have a new art brochure, as well. She is also working with the new librarian, Lauren Healey, training her to be a "Jill of all Trades" – that is really what the librarian must be. She will be cataloging, working on archival practices and reference techniques as the first set of goals.

And finally, to continue to be on the cutting edge as an institution for the modern researcher, a necessary priority is to build connections with other academic institutions. The richness of the library's holdings – books, archival resources, artwork, photographs, and primary source documents are a treasure trove for both the serious researcher writing a book as well as for those who just love being a history "explorer." Jill's priority is to have an inviting learning atmosphere for all who have grown to respect THE Sherman Library as another jewel in the "Crown of the Sea" we call Corona del Mar.