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Society for Advancement of Poynter Library.

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A night at the movies

SAPL’s Annual Meeting on April 26th was a great success, with attendance of about 60 members and guests. The high point of the evening was the showing of a remarkable historic film of St. Petersburg in 1929, given to the Poynter Library by Mrs. Phyllis Jordan, the daughter-in-law of the photographer, Mr. John Jordan.

The film had been reproduced in Super VHS form and was narrated by Mr. Charles Kaniss, long time resident and political leader, who was 12 years old at the time the film was made. His insightful observations and humorous descriptions of early St. Petersburg were delightful. The audience joined right in with enthusiastic responses and comments. Scott Hartzell’s article on the evening is reprinted in this issue.

The other business of the meeting was the election of new officers for the next year. Betty Jean Miller will serve as our new President for 2002-2003, and other officers include: Sally Poynter, Vice President; Marlene Mock, Secretary; Marc Jacobs, Treasurer; and Margaret Tappan, Historian.

Many thanks must go to those

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1929 St. Petersburg comes into focus in historic film
courtesy of Scott Taylor Hartzell and the St. Petersburg Times

A steamboat glided within sight of the Vinoy Park Hotel. Seconds later, the Million Dollar Pier emerged. The year was 1929.

Nearly 50 people were at the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library Friday to watch a little history - a home movie of the city taken by a regular visitor more than 70 years ago.

The scenes were reminiscent for some. “Very nostalgic,” Mary B. Christian said. “My brothers and I used to swim in the Vinoy basin.”

Said Betty Jean Miller, newly elected president of the Society for the Advancement of Poynter Library: “It’s a treasure to have this (film) fall into our laps. Just a flood of memories came back.”

The SAPL learned of the film last August. Phyllis Jordan wrote historian Ray Arsenault about her father-in-law, John P. Jordan, a New York City engineer who loved to visit St. Petersburg.

He had shot the 16mm movie with one of the first Kodak movie cameras sold for public use, and now Phyllis Jordan wanted to know if anyone was interested in the film.

“Ray passed the letter on to me, and of course I contacted Mrs. Jordan immediately,” said Kathy Arsenault, director of the Poynter Library at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg and wife of the historian.

University librarian Jerry Notaro researched film preservation companies and chose Cinema Arts Inc. of South Sterling, Pa., a company noted for duplicating old, fragile and deteriorating film. Cinema Arts has handled film dating to the 1890s and determined the age of John Jordan’s movie.

“This movie is so old it smelled of mothballs,” Miller said.

There was fear that passing the fragile film through a projector might damage it.

Notaro said it would have cost nearly $5,000 to copy the movie frame by frame, with 18,360 frames in all. Cinema Arts ultimately reproduced the film in three forms: a 1-inch standard broadcast copy and Betacam and Super VHS versions.

“It was a four-month endeavor,” Notaro said. “Our major concern is to preserve it as an archive and present it to the public. It was all very, very, very inexpensive: $239.”

Cinema Arts returned the original film after the university had received the copies, avoiding the possibility of losing everything in one shipment,

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New academic year brings new beginnings to campus

By the time you read this column, USF St. Petersburg will have a new interim Vice President and CEO, Dr. Ralph C. Wilcox. Vice President Wilcox, a native of England with a PhD from the University of Alberta, comes to us from the University of Memphis. He is no stranger to USF, having spent last year at the Tampa Campus as an American Council on Education Fellow.

I was delighted to hear that Dr. Wilcox has a long-standing love of libraries and plans to make the library one of his fundraising priorities.

As we welcome Vice President Wilcox and anticipate a seamless transition for our students, we also look back with gratitude to all that Vice President Bill Heller has done since 1992 to make Poynter Library the thriving “heart of the campus,” as he was fond of saying.

Along with development of a four-year, more autonomous campus, Heller presided over the construction and dedication of the 1996 Poynter Library and worked closely with my predecessor Lanny Greaves to retain campus control of library staff and services. As one of his last gifts to the library, Heller changed the title of Library Director to Library Dean.

As many of you have experienced, Heller worked tirelessly to share his pride and vision for USF St. Petersburg. His friends and colleagues are grateful that he will remain part of the campus community as a chaired professor in the College of Education.

Bill Heller’s leadership will be missed, but we in the library enthusiasts-

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New dean has vision for library’s future

Unassuming by nature, it’s typical of Kathy Arsenault to downplay her new role as the first ever library dean at USF St. Petersburg. She is cautious about accepting accolades for her promotion. “I don’t feel it’s really a personal consideration,” Arsenault said. “It’s really more a recognition of the place the library has in the university structure.”

Her latest position, she notes, follows a template established by Arizona State University West. That university, one of the first autonomous regional campuses in the United States, was the model for USF St. Petersburg’s fiscal and administrative independence.

Arsenault will use her new position to work with faculty more closely, to make sure that students’ information skills are increased in academic programs. These skills are often taken for granted, she said. Research skills are essential to any job, she notes, but “a Google search does not necessarily provide the best research.”

“I believe that libraries have to think of themselves as a boutique as well as a K-Mart,” she said. Libraries have to create unique collections, such as local history collections, that “contribute to the intellectual conversation.”

Arsenault was special collections librarian from 1982 until being named director in 2000.

Now that she will be a dean, Arsenault will be better able to lobby for the library’s needs. “This is a very important part of it,” she acknowledges. “I get to sit at certain tables.”

-Buddy Baker

Nelson’s Nook

by Jim Schnur,
Special Collections

Nook Highlights Film

Welcome to Nelson’s Nook, an occasional article that highlights acquisitions and activities in the Special Collections and Archives at the Poynter Library.

Since the showing of the 1929 St. Petersburg film at the SAPL annual meeting, we have continued to receive requests to show and narrate the film for university and community events. The library, with SAPL’s co-sponsorship, offered two public showings of the film, along with commentary, the evening of May 22 and as a brown bag program May 23.

Both events were well attended, and WSPF-TV videotaped the May 23 performance for rebroadcast over the air (channel 35; cable channel 15 in St. Petersburg). Nearly 120 patrons also enjoyed the film, along with a lively conversation by USF historians, Ray Arsenault and Gary Mormino, in their stellar “Tale of Two Cities” event, a June 2 program sponsored by the library, the Tampa Bay History Center, and the USF Florida Studies Center.

Recent community showings also drew large crowds. Approximately sixty antique car buffs enjoyed the film at the August 6 PINMAR (Pinellas County Model-A Restorers club) meeting at Heritage Village in Largo. Crowds thronged to five standing-room only viewings on

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who made this Annual Meeting possible: Librarian Jerry Notaro - who handled all the details regarding the film; staff members Barbara Reynolds and Lois Bryce - who handled invitations, responses, name tags, and a whole lot of other details; and, of course, library director Kathy Arsenault - who provided advice and wisdom when needed. Thanks also to Marlene Mock, SAPL secretary, who handled all the arrangements for the wonderful reception and refreshments.

In closing, I'd like to thank all members of the SAPL Board of Directors for their support and enthusiastic response to all my calls for help during the past two years.

My very best wishes to Betty Jean as she takes over the leadership of SAPL in 2002-2003.

Robert Arsenault opens the evening's festivities.

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Notaro said.

"The fact that someone was able to take this film and digitize it is a miracle," said Charlie Kaniss, who narrated the 17-minute movie.

In 1925, four years before the film was made, Kaniss came to St. Petersburg. He was 12. He later served as a City Council member (1951-1955) and a county elections supervisor (1967-1989).

"When Betty Jean Miller asked me to narrate this, I said, 'Why me?' " Kaniss said. "She said, 'Why not?' and so I'm here." The former jeweler and the father of five children grew up around many of the sights featured in the film.

"If you had the money, you could buy one of those cars there for under $600," Kaniss said as the film rolled. "The deluxe models were $600. But all many had to live on then was love, a pale moon and fish."

As Kaniss continued his narration, pelicans flew over water. A boy dressed in knickers appeared and fed one of the long-billed birds.

The sight of saurians resting at the alligator farm at Coquina Key brought "Oohs" from viewers.

Then came a well-known sign of the times: people sitting on green benches downtown. "We had green benches from Ninth Street to the waterfront," Kaniss said.

In subsequent frames, Spanish moss cascaded from trees at Williams Park. Beneath the trees, a crowd relaxed, all wearing hats. "The moss here was marketed and used to stuff mattresses," Kaniss said.

During final scenes, viewers vicariously experienced the muscle of a local tropical storm.

"The film looked so pristine," said Christian, a St. Petersburg native. "It was so special to see the city again in its infancy. This was a wonderful place to grow up."

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...tically look forward to working with Ralph Wilcox and his permanent successor in the years to come.

I will be proud to show off our excellent staff, wonderful facility, and, of course, our dedicated Society for the Advancement of Poynter Library!

NOOK from page 2

...the mezzanine of the elegant Vinoy during that hotel's tenth anniversary gala held on August 10.

SAPL member Fran Risser's donation that funded the preservation of this film and the generosity of the Jordan family for sharing this piece of our early history have certainly made an impressive mark on our community.

Special Collections continues to expand and improve as we add and process new collections. If you wish to visit Special Collections, please call (727-553-1094) or send us an email (schnur@nelson.usf.edu) and we will arrange an appointment at a convenient time.
Society for Advancement of Poynter Library

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