Providing effective reference service to all patrons in the busy reading room of the Bentley Historical Library is one of the library’s most important functions. Today, the library’s reference staff consists of two full-time archivists, two part-time reference assistants, and numerous student employees. Prior to the mid-1960s, when daily research visitors numbered two or three, and letters received would often be answered on the same day, reference was everybody’s responsibility. There was no one staff member assigned desk duty. Divided responsibility of course has had its drawbacks especially as the library’s holdings became known through the Warner/Brown Guide to Manuscripts in the Michigan Historical Collections of the University of Michigan (1963). As the reference traffic grew, so too did the realization that there should be someone assigned to the work of assisting researchers and answering reference queries. Accordingly, in 1967, Janice Earle was hired as the first full-time reference archivist. She was replaced in 1968 by Thomas Powers, who held the reference position for a brief period before becoming curator of manuscripts. Mary Jo Pugh succeeded him in 1969.

Mary Jo Pugh epitomized to many what a reference archivist should be: professional, knowledgeable, and an advocate for effective access tools. Through her writings, Ms. Pugh virtually defined the notion of reference service in a research archival repository. Hallmarks of this philosophy have been equal service to all users no matter the nature of their questions, active promotion of use of the archives to University of Michigan students and faculty, and careful processing of duplication requests and copyright permissions. Above all, she challenged those on the staff responsible for cataloging materials and creating finding aids to do more in order to better meet researchers’ needs. Her work combined with that of her successors, Nancy Bartlett, Anne Frantilla, Kathleen Marquis, and Karen Jania, has resulted in a continuity of knowledgeable, effective and efficient service to the many researchers who rely on the resources of the Bentley Library.

Statistics on growth

Over the years, the Bentley Library’s reference division has experienced tremendous growth in terms of researcher activity. While the absolute number of in-house users has increased by 25% between the late 1970s and the early 21st century, research requests from remote users have swelled dramatically over the last decade. The growth in usage by researchers who visit the Bentley and those patrons who submit research requests via phone,
fax, letters, e-mail, and web requests has caused us to expand the staffing for the reference division to meet our user demands. In addition to raw numbers of researchers, the intensity of use can be measured by looking at the services they request; for example: numbers of photocopies ordered, number of photographic duplications requested, number of archival boxes retrieved from the stacks, requests received from remote researchers, or number of university classes making use of the library’s holdings.

In the 18 years spanning 1985 to 2003, the number of photocopies ordered by researchers increased by more than 260%. Similarly, between 1985 and 2000, the number of photographic reproductions made in response to patron requests grew by almost 350% from 769 reproduced images to over 2,600 images. The increased call for photographic orders reflects a trend experienced by many archives across the nation and can be traced to at least one major influence: the creation of the World Wide Web. The web has allowed people to easily share information electronically through digital means. The web, though, is dependent upon interesting or useful content that will draw visitors to specific websites. While textual materials at first dominated the web, increasingly it has become a haven for visual images. The Bentley has encouraged its users to visit and use the library’s website by mounting thousands of digitized images from its visual holdings. The existence of these images online has resulted in the rapid growth in photographic orders as the graph to the right demonstrates.

**Digital Catalogs (RLIN/MIRLYN)**

The digital revolution has enhanced the capacity of the Bentley Library to communicate more efficiently with users through the library's websites and e-mail. In 2004 as a part of the project to add space to the building, the reading room was completely wired to permit use of laptop computers at each table. Moreover, each table was provided with Internet access. The library’s first foray into the electronic world occurred in 1985 when the library cooperated with several peer institutions to help develop and implement machine-readable cataloging records. The eighteen-month project to enter collection-level descriptions of the library’s manuscript and archival holdings into the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) replaced the library's card catalog system. RLIN, a national database operated by a consortium of universities and other institutions known as the Research Libraries Group, contains bibliographic and related information on archives, manuscripts collections, books, serials, maps, scores, visual material, and machine-readable records. Later these descriptive records were also loaded into OCLC, another bibliographic network. The RLIN and OCLC databases have allowed researchers at institutions from across the country and around the world to have remote and on-site electronic access to information about the library’s holdings. In February 1994, the library began entering its RLIN records into MIRLYN, the online public access catalog at the University of Michigan. By June 2000 all of the Bentley’s descriptive records had been entered. With the advent of the web-based version of MIRLYN, any individual, anywhere in the world, can access the bibliographic information of the entire holdings of the Bentley Library.
**Website**

The Bentley presence on the web began in 1995, as the result of a student project. Bill Landis, who was a graduate student in the U-M School of Information and Library Science, created a visual tour of the campus using the 1906 Rummel lithograph as his point of departure. This interactive lithograph allowed users to view and read about various campus buildings as they appeared during that time period. Shortly after the Landis project, a team of Bentley archivists developed the first official website. The World Wide Web provides the Bentley staff with a powerful tool to reach user communities and present information about the library’s programs, policies and holdings to U-M administrators and staff and to scholars, students, family historians, church historians, Civil War buffs, and other users of archival records. On the web, the library continues to inform potential users about the library’s archival mission, provide guidance about archival holdings, explain reference policies and services, report on new acquisitions, offer online assistance to units whose records are transferred to the Bentley Library, and mount digital exhibits. Use of web applications at the library has provided an effective means to connect users and historical records, to encourage an unprecedented level of outreach to researchers, and to promote collaboration among archival institutions, including cross-institutional sharing of archival information in a digital environment.

**EAD (Encoded Archival Description)**

After the library’s successful retrospective conversion of catalog information, Bentley archivists sought other opportunities to enhance researcher access to library holdings. The library became an early adaptor of coding archival finding aids into a searchable electronic database. In collaboration with the University Library’s Digital Library Production Services unit, the library is marking up finding aids using Encoded Archival Description (EAD), an SGML-based resource. This encoding standard permits sophisticated searches and displays and provides detailed information about collections over the web. These finding aids have since been linked directly to the MIRLYN entry for the collection. Thus far, more than 700 of the library’s finding aids are encoded and available online for examination through the library’s homepage or MIRLYN.

**Bentley Image Bank**

Early in 1999, administrators of the Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, the Bentley Library, the Digital Library Productions Services and Library Technical Services of the University Library each selected members of their staffs to meet together to develop a strategy for the conversion of, access to, and electronic merging of visual resource collections that they believed would have enhanced and complementary value to the participating repositories and to the campus community at large. This group began implementing this vision to digitize
certain categories of visual materials for the BHL and the Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, which have complementary holdings in the area of architectural history and the work of individual architects. The committee’s proposal was the first step in a long-term collaboration involving many units across the campus that possesses visual resources. Underlying the cross-campus effort is the belief that there are different units on campus that maintain collections of visual materials and that, through technology, access to the different collections can be consolidated or brought together in a centralized system. The Bentley’s contribution to this overall database of visual images is now known as the Bentley Image Bank. The image bank contains approximately 4,000 images that are accessible through the library’s website.

Promoting Research on the State of Michigan and the University of Michigan

In 1990, the Bentley Historical Library established a fellowship program to encourage research and publication based on the library’s holdings. Funding for this program was generously provided by gifts from and on behalf of Ruth Bordin and Genevieve Gillette, and by a grant from the Alvin M. Bentley Foundations in honor of the foundation’s longtime board member Mark C. Stevens. The named fellowships that constitute this program, the Bordin/Gillette Fellowship and the Mark C. Stevens Fellowship, provide financial aid to support travel to Ann Arbor and to underwrite research related expenses. Since its inception, the program has awarded travel fellowships to nearly 100 established scholars and dissertation-level doctoral candidates.

The rationale for the program grew out of a conviction that the history of the state of Michigan and the University of Michigan were underrepresented in scholarly literature. While many scholars and doctoral students had mined the library’s rich research resources for their articles, monographs and dissertations, the Bentley staff knew that the holdings were capable of sustaining the scholarly interests of a much larger research community, whether those interests centered strictly on the state of Michigan or were part of multi-state studies. The scholarly output of the Bordin/Gillette Fellows and the Stevens Fellows has time and again validated the initial assumptions in forming the fellowship program. Faculty and doctoral candidates from dozens of universities across the nation and around the world have come to the Bentley Library to conduct research on diverse topics such as U.S. diplomatic policy in East Asia, rural tourism, the political economy of U.S. tax policy, American identity in the colonization of the Philippines, curriculum “wars” in 20th century American schools, capital and political culture in the Old Northwest, literary re-imaginings of the Northern forest, religious disestablishment, water policies and politics in cleaning up the Great Lakes, and American medicine and the changing definition of disease. A complete listing of fellows and their projects can be found on the Bentley website.

Notable Publications
Over the nearly seventy years since the founding of the Michigan Historical Collections hundreds of books, articles, and dissertations have been completed using the resources now housed in the Bentley Library. In the early years the research upon which these writings were based focused primarily on local history and the history of the state of Michigan. However, as the years progressed and the discipline of history became more conceptually far-reaching and diverse, the range of topics resting on the holdings of the library has become quite varied. The holdings of the library have been central to a wide variety of studies national and international in scope. Scholars have come to the library to explore issues relating to gender, diversity, and the changing role of the military, policies in higher education, international relations, social and economic policy, and the environment.

Some of these works have come from U-M faculty, most notably the many important works by Prof. Sidney Fine of the Department of History, who wrote on the sit-down strike, on the 1967 Detroit riot, and, most notably in a three-volume work, on the career of Frank Murphy. In more than a dozen volumes and in many articles, Prof. Fine had substantive reason to cite the resources of the Bentley Library. Some researchers visited the library for biographical studies of Gerald L. K. Smith, Chase Osborn, Senator Philip A. Hart, and Civil War soldier Charles B. Haydon. Others published thematic monographs. For example, Olivier Zunz mined the library’s demographic sources for his ethnic studies of Detroit neighborhoods. His study was released by the University of Chicago Press as: The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920. Others have examined the library’s environmental collections, and gubernatorial and senatorial papers for various studies. Brian C. Kalt, for instance, used the papers of Senator Hart and other collections for his Sixties Sandstorm: The Fight over Establishment of a Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 1961-1970.

Other publications have resulted from the Bordin/Gillette and Mark C. Stevens Research Travel Fellowships (described elsewhere in these pages). Recipients of these awards, often engaged in multi-state studies, have been encouraged to include Michigan, and thus the resources of the Bentley Library, in their research. Others grant recipients have come because of the “critical mass” of complementary sources on a given topic. One, Thomas Sugrue, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, was awarded the Bancroft Prize of the American Historical Association for his book The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit that relied heavily on such Bentley sources as the Detroit Urban League records, collections of African-American churches, and the papers of different public figures. Another, Martin Hershock, professor of History at the U-M Dearborn, cited scores of small and mid-sized Bentley Library collections that were important to the research for his The Paradox of Progress: Economic Change, Individual Enterprise, and Political Culture in Michigan, 1837-1878.

Some works made extensive use of the library’s photographic holdings. Here we include but a few examples. Ruth Bordin, historian and longtime associate of the Bentley Library compiled *A Pictorial History of the University of Michigan* (1967) and *Washtenaw County, An Illustrated History* (1988) based heavily on MHC images; George May, Eastern Michigan University professor of history, used scores of Michigan-related images in his two-volume *Pictorial History of Michigan* (1967-1969); and Marilyn McLaughlin in 1995 published *Ann Arbor, Michigan, A Pictorial History* based largely on Bentley Library materials.

Other Uses of the Collections

In addition to the many established scholars who come to the library to use its wide range of collections, many others consult the holdings for a variety of purposes. Most notably are the many students, mostly but not all from the University of Michigan, who have come to work on papers and projects assigned by their professors and instructors. The collections have informed a broad range of activities from historical study to the role of historical images in advertising. U-M staff have also used and continue to use the collections for administrative purposes to document past decisions or to provide analytical information. Staff also uses the wealth of historical images and documents as a way to recover the history of departments and programs. Researchers who come from the fields of law, public relations, journalism, and other walks of life come to the library to seek photographs and other materials for documentaries, free-lance articles, church histories and other projects. Citizens of the State of Michigan and beyond come to research their family history or the history of their home. Many come to trace their University of Michigan roots or connections through the extraordinary records of early alumni of the University.

Exhibits - Actual and Virtual
When the Michigan Historical Collections was located in the Rackham Building, there was little space to display choice items or to mount a thematic exhibit for the general public and the university community. Small, table-sized exhibits were presented, but for a limited time only. Perhaps the first exhibit was presented in the Michigan Room of the Clements Library. Here, Dr. Vander Velde put out for display some time in 1936 or 1937 university items such as student letters and diaries, some photographs, and volumes of minutes of early faculty meetings. On the wall of the Michigan Room for this exhibit was the painting done by Jasper Cropsey in 1855 of the U-M campus. On special celebratory occasions, the library was able to mount exhibits within one of the Rackham display galleries or in other university buildings. Examples of these more elaborate exhibits included enlarged copies of university-related photographs to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the founding of the U-M (1967) and an exhibit commemorating the centennial of the admission of women to the U-M (1970). With the move to new facilities in 1973, the Bentley Library had more space for on-site exhibits, as well as for larger off-site exhibits intended for wider audiences. Exhibits in this period included celebrations of the Presidents of the University of Michigan (1980); a commemoration of the founding of the Michigan Historical Collections (1985); “Goin north’: Black Detroit and the Great Migration” (1991); and an on-going display on student life at the U-M Welcome Center.

The internet, the World Wide Web, and the digital revolution of the late 1990s has made possible the mounting of virtual exhibits. Accessed through the library’s homepage, researchers and other interested individuals may examine photographs and documents on such disparate subjects as images of the Huron River over the years, the seals of the University of Michigan, U-M men and women in the Olympics, and the football rivalry between the U-M and Ohio State. With the Internet, there is no such thing as not enough space or distance from the exhibit. For most people, these exhibits are at hand, just a click or two away.