

July 2014

## When disaster strikes

Linda Sprauer  
*Woodburn Public Library*

Karen Chase  
*Oregon Institute of Technology*

Anne Van Sickle  
*McMinnville Public Library*

Anne Billeter  
*Jackson County Library*

### Recommended Citation

Sprauer, L., Chase, K., Van Sickle, A., & Billeter, A. (2014). When disaster strikes. *OLA Quarterly*, 2(1), 15-17.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1400>

© 2014 by the author(s).

*OLA Quarterly* is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

---

*The building is built. Time to sit back, relax, and enjoy — until disaster hits. In the case of Oregon in recent years, library buildings have been struck by earthquakes and floods. — the editor*

---

## When Disaster Strikes

---

### Thanks, Earthquake!

*by Linda Sprauer  
Library Director  
Woodburn Public Library*

The Scott's Mill Earthquake of March 1993 left the Woodburn Public Library staff feeling smug. Other than a damaged fireplace chimney in the Carnegie Building (about a dozen bricks), the only other apparent result was a couple dozen books shaken off the shelves. Compared to damage to other buildings throughout the city, that was nothing. When the aftershocks died down, some cracks were noticed on the walls. Although staff members suspected they had been caused by the earthquake, the cracks didn't amount to enough to qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds.

Six months later, we were forced to reassess the damage. Twice on the same day in September, staff members were surprised when the heel of their shoe broke through the carpet into a crack in the floor. After inspecting the floor under the carpet, we found that the crack extended across the library's main lobby. It was about two inches wide and five to eight inches deep. Further inspections revealed cracks of various sizes on both building levels. So much for smugness.

Inspectors and engineers bustled about inspecting the building, writing letters, asking questions, scratching their heads, and deciding what to do. The repair project qualified as a "small project" with FEMA and was estimated at about \$50,000. When the bids were finally opened, they ranged from \$175,000 to \$202,000. So we went back to the drawing board, and put together a whole new bid package. (They don't teach you this in library school.) Project specifications included moving all books, materials, and furnishings; removing and disposing of old carpeting; repairing cracks in the floor and walls; repainting the walls and ceiling; installing new carpeting; and finally, returning everything to its place. The bids came in at about \$100,000, so the contract was signed with the low bidder in July 1994, more than a year after the earthquake. Because the contract omitted a must-start-by date, work didn't commence until Sep-

tember, which required a request for an extension from FEMA.

The project was completed in three phases: the mezzanine, the youth services area, and the adult and reference areas. Except for two days when work was being done in the main lobby and entry way, the library building remained open to the public during repairs; only the area being worked on was closed.

The end result is that the interior of the library is completely renovated and looks almost new. One of the biggest benefits is that the old carpet is now gone (It dated back to 1978 and was very orange). The Friends of the Library—all 8 or 10 of them—paid to have the chairs reupholstered by Uni-Group, a company whose employees are inmates of the Oregon State Penitentiary. New signs are in place and the library is proudly displaying the donation of art prints received just prior to the earthquake. With any luck, Woodburn won't have a repeat of the "Spring-Break Quake"—once was enough!

### Earthquake!

*by Karen Chase  
Head Librarian  
Oregon Institute of Technology Library*

The day before classes started at the Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT) in September 1993, a series of earthquakes shook Klamath Falls. The most serious occurred at night when the library was closed, and the lone custodian didn't wait around for the roof to fall in.

The library building, a reinforced concrete beam structure with brick facing built in 1980, took severe damage. Other buildings on campus suffered little damage other than broken ceiling tiles. Less than fifteen years after the library's construction, an earthquake forced us to renovate.

A brick stairwell cracked so severely it had to be closed. During the stairwell's reconstruction, we used a plywood substitute that looked like a ski jump when it was covered with snow. A lot of the exterior brick peeled away from the walls as well, and some of it crashed through clerestory windows into the library. Fortunately, the bricks landed in an aisle between the ends of the stacks and the wall, and no books were damaged. We were amazed when we found that few books had fallen off the shelves.

We discovered that the concrete slab floor had broken in a couple of places, and a large chunk—about 12 feet square—was cut out and replaced. The other major damage was done to the windows. Although only a couple of clerestory windows and one large plate glass wall window at the front of the building broke, almost every window

---

in the building had to be replaced because the seals around the double panes had been ruptured. Doors on the upstairs loading dock were warped and had to be replaced, but the large glass front doors were undamaged.

Aside from the stairwell, the lighting fixtures took the worst damage. We had beautiful oak ceiling fixtures over the reference and circulation areas and in the upstairs hallways. One of these crashed down in front of the doorway to our Academic Support Center. Because they were heavy, we removed them all and replaced them with lightweight metal fixtures. We lived with ugly, temporary fluorescent fixtures for two years before all the fixtures were replaced.

Initially, we had to move out of the building completely until the structural engineers and the architects declared the building habitable. We had just installed our automated library system, and although nothing damaged the server or the terminals, we couldn't access the catalog from our temporary quarters in a drafting lab. Fortunately, we still had our CD-ROM book catalogs, and we moved a couple of them and our CD-ROM magazine index stations into the lab for student use. We also retrieved a minimal reference collection, reserve materials for classes, and a copy machine. The copy machine pulled us through the month we were forced to live in temporary quarters.

Librarians in hard hats were allowed back into the building once a day to retrieve requested books and magazines. The fire marshal sealed off the building until inspections revealed no severe damage in the library area itself. After the smashed light fixture was cleaned up, the Academic Support Center could also reopen. Faculty offices on the second floor were shaken enough to topple freestanding bookcases and file cabinets, so there was a lot of mess to clean up.

Because the interior walls of the library are brick, the structural engineers and the architects directed a construction crew to grind down or saw off an inch of brick from the tops of all the walls to prevent them from rubbing against the concrete ceilings. This long, dirty, noisy process took much of the first year to complete. We lived with black plastic tarps draped around the ends of the stacks; they blocked off more than half of our study area. Three years later, we still find grit and concrete dust in places we thought had been cleaned up.

All decorative brick on the building's exterior was replaced with Dryvit, a styrofoam-like substance that is coated with stucco and painted. Dryvit is light, and it is a good insulator. This material was also used on the student union building, which was designed and built by the same architect and construction company as the library, and which sustained similar damage to brick walls and light fixtures.

Now that the aftershocks have stopped and things are as normal as they ever were, we can look back on the experience and realize how lucky we were. Most of the shocks came when the building was closed, so nobody was hurt. We had no specific plan for providing library services in the event of an emergency, nor was there a well-publicized campus emergency plan. These grew, ad hoc, with the occasion. We are better prepared now than we were, but when so much depends on electronic equipment a relatively minor disaster can slow operations or even bring things to a halt quickly. As a small library, we can cope with paper circulation records if we have to, but a larger operation would have major paperwork problems. We rapidly developed telephone calling "trees" so we could alert student aides and staff of any schedule changes, plans to evacuate the building and regroup outside in an open area (not the parking lot where emergency vehicles might converge on us) and lists of senior administrative staff responsible for various campus functions.

In retrospect, we probably would not have acted differently, except that we would have retrieved all of the photocopy machines for the temporary library instead of just one. The fact that we are a very small staff worked in our favor because we could make decisions quickly and act immediately. Despite noise, dirt, and general inconveniences, we kept up morale and managed to provide all the usual library services for our students and faculty, a feat that impressed the campus administration.

## Building Woes

by Anne Van Sickle  
Library Director  
McMinnville Public Library

McMinnville's Carnegie Library dates from 1912. By the late 1970s, the 5,120-square-foot library had grown dense with new staff and burgeoning collections. A new building was a necessity. As the community raised the funds to expand the library, local sentiment dictated that the Carnegie building be preserved intact as part of the new facility. Since the library was located in Upper City Park, public opinion was also in favor of preserving the beautiful old trees and the fountain between the Carnegie building and the swimming pool. The vision was to create a library that would draw the park outside the walls into the facility itself.

The 14,800 square foot addition, called the "new building," opened in 1982. Its cathedral ceilings stretched upward; and its large, wood-framed windows and its skylights filled the large open spaces with light. It was beautiful. Thriving plants added a finishing touch to the dream of bringing the

"outside indoors." The town was proud and pleased, the staff ecstatic.

Unfortunately, the lovely new library had severe design flaws. The big, two-story structure surrounded by trees was mounted by residential gutters and downspouts with insufficient flashing. From the beginning, water poured inside the walls as the gutters overflowed. Because the problem was never properly addressed, by 1993 the "new" library was in serious trouble. Staff had become proficient in draping black plastic to divert water from materials, computers, and equipment. The wooden window frames were rotten, as were parts of the walls. The floors in some areas literally crumbled in your hand. The skylights leaked, the ceilings had several prominent holes, a "well" developed in the children's room because there were no outside drains to funnel off ground water, and the lovely wooded exterior doors were badly warped and had lost their stain. The earthquake of March 1993 added to the damage, creating the need to implement seismic retrofit in the Carnegie building to the tune of \$340,000. On top of all this, the library provided inadequate work space, the collections were out-of-date, and the technology was light years behind demand.

In the summer of 1995, the city funded a new roof, a new gutter and downspout system, elimination of one skylight, and replacement of another. In the process, workmen discovered that the three sky-bridges connecting the two buildings had virtually no support and the insulation in the roof was pressing against the rooftop. The entire 171-foot rooftop had to be raised an inch and a half. Despite noise and dust, customers and staff worked around the construction and kept smiling. By November 1995, the library was dry.

The water damage, however, was still extensive. Plans were developed to complete the seismic retrofit, renovation and remodeling in the summer of 1996. Most of the collection would be stored, and staff were set to operate out of a couple of rooms in the Community Center. Collections were measured, patterns were cut of furniture and equipment and pushed about on graph paper to see what would fit in the new quarters, and staff was scheduled to work part-time at the nearby Yamhill County libraries in Newberg and Sheridan. Blueprints had been drawn and studied to find the best place for some badly needed offices, a newly designed workroom, and improvements to the reference and circulation areas. The staff worked for months on a reallocation of space to make collections more accessible and to get the most use of existing space.

In spite of all the planning, at this writing it appears that the renovation won't happen this year. The city budget cannot stretch to cover such an expensive project. We will continue to move

collections and try to eke out space for staff and hope for completion of the library. Maybe next year.

## **The Flood of 1996**

*compiled by Anne Billeter  
Adult Services Coordinator  
Jackson County Library*

### **Clatskanie Public Library**

*from LTLO, March, 1996*

Three feet of water flooded the Clatskanie Public Library in Columbia County. This resulted in loss of about 2,000 books and damage to furniture, walls, and landscaping. Estimated cost of recovery is between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

### **Mapleton Branch, Siuslaw Public Library**

*from LTLO, March, 1996 (from information provided by Susan Gale, assistant library director)*

When mud slides and flood water prevented staff members from reaching the Mapleton Branch of the Siuslaw Public Library, community members broke a window to get inside and move books on low shelves to safety. The Mapleton Branch is perched directly above the Siuslaw River, but because of community members' efforts, no books were damaged. The underflooring and carpet took some damage from flooding.

### **Tualatin Public Library**

*from LTLO, March, 1996 (from information provided by Ruth Kratochvil, library director)*

Despite being completely surrounded by the Tualatin River, damage to the Tualatin Public Library was limited to water entering the storytelling pit.

### **Vernonia High School Library**

*from OEMA Newsletter, March, 1996 (from information provided by Dan Sevig, librarian)*

The Vernonia High School Library in Columbia County lost 60 percent of its books and materials when the water level in the library rose to 3 feet.

### **J. W. Long Law Library, Willamette University**

*from Movable Type, spring 1996 (from Larry Oberg, University Librarian)*

Heavy rains caused Mill Stream, the normally placid creek that flows through the Willamette University campus, to overflow its banks and flood several buildings, including the J. W. Long Law Library and the new Olin Science Building. Because an embankment that controls the flow of water to the campus gave way, the stream's level fell, and the library escaped with a few square yards of soaked carpet. 