

Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Interview

In the PaLRaP Spotlight: Janet Evans

*Associate Director, McLean Library,
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), Philadelphia, PA*

Stephanie Campbell

Stephanie Campbell is a Collection Development Project Librarian at Brodart, scamp1009@yahoo.com



Tell us a little about yourself, your library, and what led you to special librarianship?

My first professional position was that of a reference librarian in a special library -- the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. From there, I moved on to working here. I'm a transplant to Philadelphia and really love this city.

This library is relatively small and the staff consists of me, one really terrific library assistant and some very talented, knowledgeable volunteers. My strategy is to create partnerships and collaborations that extend our reach through various networks.

As a member of the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL), we share a library system with five other Philadelphia special libraries. We're also part of a horticultural library consortium of six garden libraries across the country which enables us to give ebook access to our members. We are participating in digitization projects in partnership with the Biodiversity Heritage Library and with other collaborative efforts. This helps to get our older, public domain material out where users will find it – on Internet Archive or the BHL platform, on the POWER Library PA Photos and Documents Collection and soon, on Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). I'm also active in the Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries – a network of garden and plant librarians across North America. It's a small group, so we all know each other, and help each other with research queries and other collaborations. It's part of a brain trust I've been privileged to be part of over the years.

McLean Library houses an extensive collection of horticultural books. Tell us more about your collection. Who are your primary customers?

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society is a private, non-profit organization, headquartered in downtown Philadelphia. Formed shortly after the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) founding in 1827, the library reflects American horticultural trends both historically and currently. It serves the needs of amateur and professional horticulturists, landscape architects, garden historians, and researchers. It is used by the public and by the Society's members and volunteers. The collection supports the horticultural and urban greening activities of the staff.

The Greater Philadelphia region is known as "America's Gateway to Gardens" and has a long tradition of intense interest in gardens and arboreta of every size and kind. The library's collections reflect this local connection to the region's horticultural history, through a collection of seed and nursery catalogs, books, photographs, and the archives of PHS and the Philadelphia Flower Show. PHS was and continues to be a leader in urban greening and beautification projects, so this material is in our archives.

How does McLean Library contribute to the PHS stated mission to 'connect people with horticulture' and 'create beautiful, healthy and sustainable communities.'

We provide high-quality gardening and greening information in the following ways:

- In-person library use

Our members and the gardening public use the collections to learn about gardening and greening. We also work with the staff at PHS who educate groups: Tree tenders, Garden Tenders, Green City teachers. We routinely lead library tours to student populations, staff, members, and outside groups.

- Library programming

We have a long-standing book club in which we read about gardens, plants, the land, and the environment; a monthly story time for youngsters; and a "Treasures of the PHS Library" short course that addresses some aspect of our rare collections.

- Online presence

We've created over 70 gardening subject guides on topics ranging from beginning horticulture to tree care to gardening with children. I just checked our stats – you would think that the most visited subject guide was our Philadelphia Gardening Guide. But it comes in second to our guide – Movies with Plant and Gardening Themes – who knew?

We also manage AskPHS (our name for Springshare's Libanswers service.) People ask gardening questions, questions about PHS programs, research, and reference questions. During Flower Show season, most of the questions are Flower Show-related inquiries.

- Through research support and writing

I was part of a team that curated an exhibit at the 2017 Philadelphia Flower Show, as well as in past shows. I've written a book on the history of the Philadelphia Flower Show and we routinely stage exhibits here in the library.

- Through changing exhibits

We are now displaying botanical art created by the talented members of the Philadelphia Society of Botanical Illustrators. Our spring and summer exhibit will feature nature print paintings by local artist Laura Bethmann. We also do traditional book exhibits drawing on resources from our rare book collection.

Describe a day-in-the-life at the McLean Library.

A day-in-the-life may include: providing research to our own staff looking for historical information from our archives or current information; exhibit planning and execution; or creating metadata for digitization projects. During Flower show season we are routinely asked for images and information about past shows and flower show history. Recently, someone who attended this year's flower show wanted to know the vendors who were there in 2014. I was contacted by a woman seeking information on a rose named after her grandmother. I worked with a staff member looking for the sites in Philadelphia of our first flower show, our first community garden, our first meeting of the society. I found books on hydrangea pruning for one of our horticultural staff. The library was also a video-shooting location for a project on tree stewardship partnerships. I'm also on an awards committee that judges the year's best horticultural or botanical books so I'm spending lots of time judging and reviewing this year's nominees.

Can you tell us why you became a librarian/why you do what you do?

I've been working in one library or another off and on since I was 14. A library job in high school was definitely better than my waitress-in-a-donut-shop job. I've always liked the vibe of the library and the challenge of helping people find information that has real meaning for them. Information-seeking skills are more important today than ever before. Through years of practice, I've developed a healthy skepticism in evaluating information – where it comes from and on whose authority it's published. Not only does this help me in assessing gardening and horticultural information (of which there is, frankly, a lot of dreck online) but also in shaping my political and cultural values. Seeking the truth is important to me.