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George C. Gordon Library 50th Anniversary Celebration Program, October 25, 2017

George C. Gordon Library

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SPECIAL THANKS
Ian Anderson (memento)
Prof. Kristin Boudreau
Provost Bruce E. Bursten
Rachel Burton (logo, exhibit)
Scott Hadley (memento)
Stephen Knapp
James Loiselle (memento)
Kathleen Markees (exhibit, music)
Rev. Dr. Barbara Merritt
Peter Thomas
Gordon Library Staff
Gordon Library Student Assistants

Image credit: iStock
I dwell in Possibility (466)

I dwell in Possibility -
A fairer House than Prose -
More numerous of Windows -
Superior - for Doors -

Of Chambers as the Cedars -
Impregnable of eye -
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky -

Of Visitors - the fairest -
For Occupation - This -
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise -

*Emily Dickinson (1862)*

### October 25, 2017 Program

**Welcome to our anniversary celebration!**

4:30 p.m.     Gather for birthday cake

5:00 p.m.     Welcome, Anna Gold  
                University Librarian, WPI

5:05 p.m.     Remarks, Rev. Dr. Barbara Merritt, Minister Emerita,  
                First Unitarian Church of Worcester

5:10 p.m.     Remarks on the Gordon Library at 50 years, Provost  
                Bruce E. Bursten, WPI

5:20 p.m.     Closing remarks, Professor  
                Kristin Boudreau, Department  
                Head, Humanities and Arts,  
                WPI
Welcome, to all our honored guests, students, faculty, and friends. Thank you for joining us today. We have a brief program for you, with three wonderful people, who will share some of their thoughts on the occasion of Gordon Library’s 50th anniversary. Last week, one of them asked me, “Why do we celebrate anniversaries, anyway?” The answer is pretty much the same, whether we're celebrating a family birthday, or a wedding anniversary, or a library’s 50 years: anniversaries give us a chance to recall fond memories, celebrate milestones, and make a wish for the future.

I’ll begin with memories. I remember 1967 as a year of exhilarating artistic creativity: Sergeant Pepper. Are You Experienced. “Respect.” It was also a year of radical social upheaval: the Summer of Love, and a summer of race riots; the March on the Pentagon; Thurgood Marshall was confirmed for the Supreme Court; and Gene McCarthy announced his run for president. What I didn’t know — and what most of us didn’t know yet, was there was a digital revolution brewing. It was in 1968, that BBN won the ARPANET contract that would bring us the internet. And the same year, Doug Engelbart would give what was later called the “mother of all demos” - He demoed an “experimental online system” with hyperlinks and a “strange pointing device” that someone jokingly referred to as “mouse.” So, the year the Gordon Library opened was quite a year!

In its first five decades, Gordon Library’s four walls and four floors have been not only a library, but a home - to the campus computing center, to WPI’s president, and to Mass Academy, and more. Most of these library residents have gone on to other quarters. But Gordon Library has stayed true to the idea of being open to our entire community. That’s because being open is a core value of libraries. As it happens, in a fine coincidence, this week International Open Access Week is celebrating the Open Access movement. That movement is inspired by what’s possible, if we connect the world and transform it, by sharing our knowledge. So – I’ll end with a wish. I propose this as our birthday wish for Gordon Library: let’s wish for knowledge to be open, in order to realize what is possible: more transformational discoveries, and more positive social change.

And now to say more about the possible, it’s my honor to introduce my friend, the Reverend Dr. Barbara Merritt. For three decades, Barbara has also been a friend of Stephen Knapp, the extraordinary Worcester area artist who created our lightpainting, The Definition of Possible. The work honors his father Walter Knapp, who was a WPI alumnus of the class of 1938, and an advisor to Phi Gamma Delta. This beautiful work was installed in 2014, over the entrance of the Gordon Library. When you leave tonight you’ll be able to look up and see it in all its nighttime glory. Barbara has offered to share Steve’s thoughts with us, and add her own, as a friend of Steve’s and as a lover of libraries.
Remarks by Rev. Dr. Barbara Merritt, Minister Emerita of the First Unitarian Church of Worcester

As we gather this afternoon to honor this wonderful library, I am grateful that Anna Gold invited me to speak on behalf of Stephen Knapp. Steve is the artist who created the extraordinary lightpainting that graces the front of Gordon Library. Steve would have very much liked to be here himself to talk to you, but a serious illness prevents his being with us. So, as his friend, and as his former minister, I have been given the privilege to share with you some of the origin story; how this WPI lightpainting was created for you by an amazing and internationally celebrated artist. Last week I sat down with Steve for a few hours and this is what he told me.

**First:** This lightpainting (and the work and love he poured into it) is in honor of his father Walter Knapp, a graduate of WPI in the class of 1938. Walter stayed active as an alumnus for the rest of his life. He loved this school.

**Second:** The reason Steve feels that WPI is such an appropriate place for his art is that over the years, this University has become known as a place where science and technology have embraced creativity and problem solving.

The lightpainting on the façade of Gordon Library appears as a changing pastel palette throughout the daylight hours, and then it turns into brilliant sabers of intensely colored light at night. Steve’s artwork was created using small pieces of dichroic glass, a glass developed by NASA. Each piece has the unique property that, like a prism, when light passes through this glass, it displays the complimentary color. Stephen Knapp is the inventor of this new, 21st century art form called lightpainting. As an innovator, he knew that a bold, groundbreaking and pioneering art would be welcome at WPI.

**Third:** The title of this lightpainting is “The Definition of Possible.” Steve explained to me that he and his father had to listen to words of advice from his grandfather. What he told them frequently was that *there is no such word in the English language, as 'can't'.* Because that phrase is too long of a title for a lightpainting, Steve shortened it to “The Definition of Possible.” For Steve, it means the same thing. Learning, the advancement of knowledge, research, and new ways to approach old challenges; it can be done! This library holds the keys to the future. Everyone gathered here today, and everyone who will pass through these doors in the days and years to come can expand the boundaries of what is possible. All of us are called to be agents of transformation. This world is very much in need of what is possible, and even of what might seem improbable.

**Finally,** an important technical aspect of Lightpainting. While the glass and the brackets are what you see fixed to the wall, what creates the painting itself is the light that pours through the glass. Light itself is constantly changing the artwork.

We are here to celebrate the 50th anniversary of an important WPI building. But much more significant than the bricks and mortar are the students and faculty, the administrators and visitors who move through this facility in search of what is true. May that energy that animates our curiosity, and our hearts, minds and souls, continue to flow through this great repository of knowledge. And when you see Stephen Knapp’s lightpainting, I hope that you will be reminded that you, yourself, are the definition of what is possible.
Remarks by Provost Bruce E. Bursten, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

I have a lifelong personal love of libraries. For so many of us, who grew up more comfortable with books than with classmates, libraries were our fortress of solitude, our fountain of knowledge, our friend. As I told Anna, I am deeply honored and very nervous about nominally being in charge of the library—I am a fan, a devotee, an advocate, but I know nothing about the operations and leadership of a library. It is part of the reason that the position of University Librarian is so special at WPI, and how we have been so fortunate in having such great library leadership. I appreciate Anna’s remarks on 50th anniversaries, and the connection to music (another passion of mine). Those of you who have been in my office in Boynton may notice a prominent display of the album cover from Cream’s Disraeli Gears—released November 2, 1967. That album cover connects to a long story about a book—too long to tell, but you can always check out QD31.3 B765 2015. Now let’s get back to the celebration at hand!

What makes WPI unique is its capacity for renewal in its 150+ year history. The WPI Plan was born out of that capacity and resolve to become a different kind of institution, one dedicated to making a difference in the world. An institution willing to try significant experiments, to embrace change, to take chances, and to trust students with managing their learning.

The Gordon Library was born of the same moment and same spirit as the WPI Plan— as a space bringing the community together to learn, to manage and share their learning: in 1969 as the WPI Plan was hammered out, WPI leaders wrote about the library: “a library is not just a collection of books to be loaned; it is a learning center, an integral part of the educational process.”

In 50 years WPI, the Plan, and the Library, have all grown and evolved as they’ve been shaped and worked on by the people who have taken up the WPI adventure. WPI has been and remains a very human institution. At the heart of our curriculum and our research, we wrestle with questions and challenges that will make a difference for people in our world. Just as WPI has continually renewed its mission, vision, and community, the Gordon Library has renewed and evolved, always improving.

Today the Gordon Library is visited nearly half a million times a year by students who fill our 700+ chairs, clamor to use our Tech Suites, work out problems on our whiteboards, find information and use it, and master new abilities, and realize their possibilities. What doesn't change is the library’s role in fulfilling WPI’s mission: helping each of us find and hone those abilities, and feed the better angels of our nature, so that we can each make a difference for others. That’s a definition of possible.

So, on this August occasion (in October!), we celebrate our Gordon Library. Indeed, it is a fortress of solitude, a fountain of knowledge, and a friend. But at WPI, it is so much more—it is a place for our enthusiastic students to learn from our amazing and dedicated faculty members and library staff, a place to learn how to learn, and, part of what makes us so special, a place that fosters great individuals turning into extraordinary teams. Bravo, Gordon, and thanks for all you have done for so many during this past 50 years. Thanks very much.

And now, it’s my pleasure to introduce Kristin Boudreau who will provide closing remarks. Kristin received her BA from Cornell University and her PhD from the University of Rochester, joining us in 2009 as Head of the Department of Humanities and Arts. She merges brilliance in American and African-American literature with a passion for infusing the liberal arts into the engineering curriculum.
Poem on the 50th Birthday of the George Gordon Library

Our first silos were libraries, do you recall?
Housed in departments, disciplined well
Till generous George Gordon said "These serve us ill.
Here's money; please fashion a hall on a hill.
Where all Techies have access, regardless of major.
Let them not segregate. Be they not strangers.
Scientists, engineers, humanists, all—
Even business belongs in this library hall!
Imagine a space for quiet reflection
With carrels, soft seating, a browsing collection,
And space to put people together as well,
Soundproof group rooms where teams can excel
At solving the world's greatest problems, you know.
And give them a mainframe computer to show
That 'memory' means not just thoughts of the past
But something to sit on a punchcard, and pass
Through a reader—oh joy—because readers there'll be
And two tape units, printers, and disk drives—three.
Oh, memory prodigious, the units so vast
These Techies shall work at a pace unsurpassed!"

So the building was built, and a leader selected:
Albert Anderson, Jr., the greatly respected
Director of Libraries, he who decreed
That librarians partners in teaching must be,
Who placed in the building, beneath the Two Towers
A study room open all 24 hours!
Van Doren was awed by the changes he'd seen
In how knowledge was handled. That mainframe machine
Was beyond him, he said; he'd known books, nothing more.
And we've seen changes since in how knowledge is stored:
Compact shelving, e-journals, e-projects, and such,
But technology's not what has mattered so much.
It's the people, the teachers, who've worked in this place
And shown us how inquiry might be embraced:
Helen Shuster, who talked like a pirate, and yet,
Made knowledge accessible by internet.
Leger-Hornby led Gordon the next seven years
Her team staunchly continued to teach engineers
Not to fear information, but bravely pursue
What they need, how to find it, how to know if it’s true.
And the many librarians who’ve worked in these rooms
To show us the shape selfless labor assumes:
Lora Brueck, Carmen Brown, Betty Goodrich there were
Debbie Wright, Debbie Bockus, Joan Dickert, and more,
Judith Fallon, Joanne Beller, Diana Johnson were here,
Don Richardson served many years with good cheer.
Anna Gold sets our standard; she saw what we lacked,
And decreed we shall have a Librarian of Impact!
Our archivists, Kathy and Margaret and Jess,
Helped us find dusty documents, faded, distressed.
Mike Kemezis, Lynne Riley, Laura Robinson served
And treated us better than we might deserve,
McGourty, Obien, and Gunnarson, too.
And dear Christine Drew, had us writing haiku.
Paige, Jess, Rebecca, Teresa and Lynn,
Samantha and Amy, Diane and Robin,
Rachel, Emily, Steven, and Lori work here,
And there’ll be more to come as year follows year.

What is possible, now? Well, we knew—or we thought,
Until Stephen his color, his artistry brought
To the building’s façade, and put figures to dreams.
Rubin and Knapp are the gods of those beams
That glow for each mind that walks through these doors
And marvels at how many questions there are.
Through changes and losses and gains, we have seen
The heart of a campus, the life of a dream,
A place where a people can come to explore
The mysteries of nature, unsolved heretofore,
To tackle the problems so grave and so grand.
Happy birthday, dear Gordon; Long may you stand.

With thanks to the library’s “terrific staff. It occurs to me that what happened today is so typical: I asked for help late in the game, got lots of help, and don’t even know the identities of most of the library staff who pitched in. You guys are great!”