The R.G. Menzies Building is the first permanent building dedicated to the library of Australia’s first research-only university. The University Library had its beginnings in the borrowed temporary accommodation, Wyselaskie Hall in Ormond College, at the University of Melbourne in 1948. The 40,000-strong collection was relocated to what were then the Old Canberra Hospital buildings on the university site in 1950. It took another thirteen years before the collection was moved into the R.G. Menzies Building.

In his proposal to the Prime Minister for the erection of the library building, Vice-Chancellor Sir Leslie Melville wrote, “[the] library is an essential part of the University…[and] will be a building of special significance in the University. It is the laboratory of the [various schools and departments of the University]” (dated 31st January 1956).

Upon amalgamation with the Canberra University College in the early 1960s, it was decided there would be “two separate libraries, one for research [namely in the R.G. Menzies Building]…and the other for undergraduate [later known as J.B. Chifley Building]” (Foster & Varghese 2009, 157). This decision has repercussions throughout the history of the Library.
The opening of the R.G. Menzies Building marks off the beginning of this era. Its importance lies in its significance in the development of the newly-established national university: the completion of the University’s first permanent library building.

This period of the Library’s history converges on two issues: consolidation and reorganisation, particularly as the result of the long-term implications of the amalgamation and the decisions taken. The earlier distinction of ‘Institute’ and ‘School’ or ‘research’ and ‘undergraduate’ was abandoned in favour of what, the University Librarian, J.J. Graneek termed as “coordinated decentralization”.

As a result, the Library administration was restructured, and the Library of Congress classification system was adopted in the attempt to “bring a sense of unity to the Library system” (Vidot 1996, 51).
The University Librarian wrote in the ANU Annual Report in 1974, “Libraries are entering an era of change brought about by the pressures of rising costs… Automation now seems to be the only means” (p. 35). Much of the library systems were gradually automated over the course of this period: acquisition, cataloguing, and circulation; conversion of card shelf list to machine-readable catalogue, retrospective computerisation of the card catalogue, and the implementation of AWA (Amalgamated Wireless of Australia) URICA system. A significant event related to this was the international conference on Chinese bibliographical automation in which ANU Librarians played a major role.

Other events of note were the beginning of a substantial and systematic development of the Southeast Asian collection and a proposal for a New Central Library Building. The latter was not successful.

A Library review was conducted in 1982 and one of the recommendations was to extend the R.G. Menzies Building and a rationalisation of materials between the three major library buildings (R.G. Menzies, J.B. Chifley and the Life Sciences Library Building later renamed W.K. Hancock Building).
With the establishment of the Reader Services Coordination Committee, the Library renewed its priorities for “reader education programmes, access to on-line services and staffing priorities” (Library Annual Report 1986). Further, in recognition of the “global networking potential in relation to library and information activities” (as reported in ANU Annual Report 1991), the Library was set on a course towards the information and access age. The following projects were initiated as a result:

- URICA database was networked to terminals outside the Library
- Installation of a satellite dish on the roof of J.B. Chilley building to receive international news and programmes
- ELISA (Electronic Library Information Service) to provide framework for individual academics and students to free-of-charge access to networked information and databases

Possibly as a result of the 1996 Library Review and the convergence of Library with information technology, the idea of a single division of information incorporating both library and IT was flagged.
In 2001, the Library became part of the newly formed Division of Information, and changed its name to Scholarly Information Services. The purpose of the Division was to “[ensure] that the University benefits from an advanced information infrastructure, and [to support] research and education through responsive information and educational technology services” (ANU Annual Report 2001).

The 1996 Library Review Committee wrote in its report, “the university library building which is often described metaphorically as the “heart of the university” is now more than the physical entity with its collections. Over the past ten years, most university libraries have been transformed to become gateways which link scholars to information either in other physical storehouses or in electronic format.” (Report of the Library Review Committee 1996, 25)

In response to this, several major initiatives were undertaken:

- ANU EPress (2003) to make ANU scholarship more accessible and visible
- Information Literacy Program (2001) to develop the information literacy skills “appropriate to [all members of the University’s] learning, teaching and research needs” (ibid.)
Roxanne Missingham took over the reins with established experiences from the National Library of Australia and Parliament Library. As with other University Librarians in the past, her leadership is founded on recognising the technological environment libraries find themselves in and setting new directions in response to it. In the short time she has held this position, Missingham has set the course of forging further into the digital unknown with the advent of social media technology, ebooks, digital resources and data commons.

For more information on the history of the University Library, visit anilib.anu.edu.au/menzies-50th