

William J. (Bill) Kurmey

b. Mar. 7, 1940, Hedley, BC; d. Nov 25, 2015, Edmonton, AB

Education:

BSC (University of British Columbia)

MLS (University of Chicago)

Positions:

Library and computer management positions in British Columbia, New York and Illinois

1967-1980 Associate Professor, Faculty of Library Science, University of Toronto

1980-1984 Dean, School of Library and Information Science, University of Alberta

1984-1992 Professor, School of Library and information Science, University of Alberta

1992- Research Consultant, University of Alberta Libraries. Information Technology Services (ITS) Division

Publications:

Kurmey, William J. (1964). An evaluation of automatically prepared abstracts and indexes. Chicago: Dept. of Photoduplication, University of Chicago Library. MLS thesis.

Kurmey, William J. (1967). Education of librarians and information specialists: brief for the study of scientific and technical information in Canada, Science Secretariat. Toronto: University of Toronto, School of Library Science.

Kurmey, William J. (1970). MARC II applications programs. Toronto: University of Toronto, School of Library Science.

Kurmey, William J. (1970). Guide to System/360 job control cards. Toronto: University of Toronto, School of Library Science.

Kurmey, William J. (1971). Data processing in a library science curriculum. [Toronto: s.n.]

Kurmey, William J. (1972). Study of traffic density and expenditures in STI: final report. Toronto: [s.n.]

Peel, Bruce and William J. Kurmey (1983). Cooperation among Ontario university libraries. Toronto: Council of Ontario Universities.

Kurmey, William J. (1990). COBOL programs for libraries. Metuchen, N.J. Scarecrow Press.

Comments:

"In his early years at the Toronto Faculty of Library Science he developed many of the first FLS courses in information systems (what was termed automation during this period) and information and retrieval. In order to teach the University of Toronto FLS library school students about computers and computing (most of whom had no experience with, nor affinity for, computers), Bill designed a very simple programming language and had the students write machine-level programs to perform some basic library processes, such as sorting. The students then encoded their programming routines on punched cards and then submitted their jobs to the mainframe input/output room to see if the programmes would compile, run, and most importantly, get the desired output. It was an innovative challenging and novel way to introduce the students to the concepts of computing, and it reflected Bill's idiosyncratic and unique approach to teaching and it also illustrates the important emphasis he placed on self-discovery and exploration in the learning process."

As Dean at the University of Alberta, his greatest success, in his own words, "was achieving recognition on the part of the profession that we were there, and were willing to work with the profession and involve them in our program." He also viewed as a significant achievement the reorganization of the curriculum, and he worked to introduce technology into all the courses as well as to initiate courses to meet the concerns of the profession with regard to management training.

"He attended many formal and informal symposiums and conferences as a representative of the School. As an aside, Bill's amazingly spirited dancing at the Library Association of Alberta's annual conferences at Jasper Park Lodge was an annual highlight!"

"Bill was generous with his technology enthusiasms, securing computer hardware from California for his friends and colleagues and donating countless hours of time to helping many of those less "techy" set up, configure, and troubleshoot their computers. The computer doctor (i.e. Bill) would show up at one's house with his black satchel ... and then proceed to perform his arcane 'alchemy' setting up or restoring one's computer into good working order."

His private life took some interesting turns. He was the youngest in a Ukrainian family, care giver for his widowed mother and generous support for his siblings and their children and built computers for his nephews. He was a partier extraordinaire at conferences, a witty participant at student beer bashes and single malt scotch tastings and escaped academia in the summers by panning for gold in the Yukon. Post-retirement activities included travel, gold panning and an `avid and accomplished activity that was almost on a par with his passion for computer technology - knitting. Bill was an avid and accomplished knitter for many years, in fact as an undergraduate student at the University of British Columbia, he earned money by teaching classes in knitting and in ballroom dancing!`

Bill never achieved the PhD. One writer has indicated that "his doctoral-thesis attempts to create a linguistic translation program were thwarted by the day's technology." (i.e. he was ahead of his time where the state of technology was concerned)

Sources:

"Lives lived." Globe and Mail, April 26, 2016.

In memoriam: William J. Kurmey. Compiled from the writings of Robert Brundin with contributions from Gretchen Brundin, Robin Inskip, Aaron Kurmey and Doug Poff.

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