

features

Bult: benevolent bastion of booking

by Michael Borgert

One of the most familiar faces to many students here at Calvin is that of Conrad Bult. He has probably helped all of us at one time or another either by finding a book, showing us how to use the computerized Readers Guide, or giving a library tour. But how many of us know what he is really like and what exactly he does while not helping students find their way around the library?

Mr Bult was born in 1934 in Grand Rapids and lived in the area

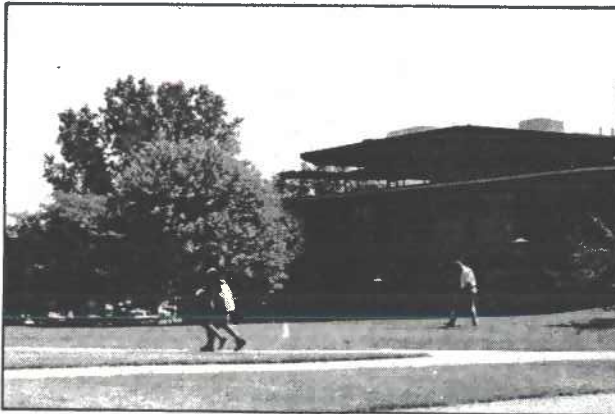


photo by Kroese

Conrad's dwelling place.

until he was in the ninth grade. His father, who was a minister, pastored a church in Godwin Heights and later in Moline. It was during his childhood in Grand Rapids that Bult first became interested in books. "Back then," he recalls, "Baker Book House had a store on Wealthy Street where they sold used books. My father would take me there with him, that's when I first became interested in books."

When he was in the ninth grade, his father accepted a call from a church in Munster, Indiana and

Bult graduated from Illiana Christian High School in 1952. In the fall he came north to Grand Rapids to attend Calvin. While at Calvin, Bult majored in history which remains one of his interests today. Some of his favorite professors were Gertrude Slingerland, Earl Strikwerda, who taught American history, and William Radius who taught classical history and Greek. He still enjoys studying World War II and also reading historical fiction, particularly Herman Wouk, the author of *The Winds of War* and *The Caine Mutiny*.

Bult graduated from Calvin in 1957 and joined the US Army for two years. He was stationed at Ft Carson, Colorado and later at Ft Meade, in Maryland. "I was classified as an airplane mechanic," he said with a chuckle, "but ended up doing mostly typing and clerical work." After he was discharged from the army in 1959, Bult returned to school, this time to the University of Michigan, where he earned his MA in history in 1962.

In the fall of 1962 Bult accepted a position at Chicago Christian High

School, teaching English. Along with his teaching responsibilities he was given duties in the library. "It was during this time," he remembers, "that there was a drive on in the Christian schools to have professional librarians," so Bult again returned to the University of Michigan and in 1965 was awarded a Master of Arts in Library Science (MALS). In 1965, he accepted a position on the library staff at Calvin and returned to Grand Rapids. His new responsibilities included reference materials and periodicals. He continues these responsibilities today along with taking care of the Rare Book room and the Cayvan Collection.

During the summer of 1970, the library finally moved out of the Hekman Memorial Library at the old Franklin Street campus and into its new facility on the Knollcrest campus. With the move the Seminary and College libraries were housed in one building. The new facility continued to serve the needs of College and Seminary students, but in the late seventies it became apparent that the library was beginning to outgrow its present facilities. The new fifth floor is a result of this need and is the first real physical growth the library has experienced since the move from the Franklin Street campus. "The new floor will alleviate the currently overcrowded shelves," said Bult. Another change Bult witnessed during his tenure at the library is the advent of computers, a change Bult says, "has had a big impact on our generation as the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century."

When asked about changes in students and their attitudes over the years, Bult commented, "students today are more concerned about practical life and being able to get a job after graduation. That is not to say though, that they have

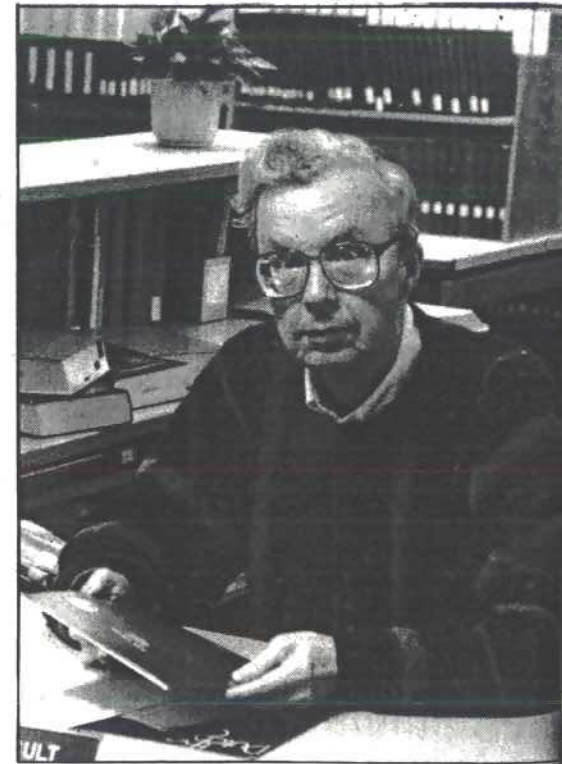


photo by Lu

Conrad the Librarian.

become crass materialists, basically, students tend to remain about the same." He enjoys working with students and finds, "it keeps me on my toes, keeps me buoyant and happy." An encouraging change Bult has been witness to is the increasing diversity of the student body. "When I was a student, the only minority students were Canadian seminarians," he commented jokingly.

Bult has worked in the library since 1965 and will be eligible for retirement in 1999. He does say though, "if the opportunity to work

part-time presents itself after that would be interested." Upon retirement he looks forward to spending more time on his hobbies which include studying the history of Dutch in America and collecting old books with his wife Dee, particularly children's books published before 1920. He also enjoys watching Knights basketball, and has been an avid fan of the men's women's teams since coming to Calvin. "I get some vicarious pleasure from watching people who are tall like me, but well-coordinated," he said with a smile.