

The University Librarian as Bookman and Administrator: A Symposium

The following four papers were presented at a meeting of the University Libraries Section, ACRL, Chicago, Ill., February 2, 1954. The title of the panel discussion was "Roasting an Old Chestnut—The University Librarian, Bookman and/or Administrator?" Dr. William S. Dix, librarian, Princeton University, presided.

By PATRICIA PAYLORE

The Chief Librarian and Book Knowledge

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THE SMALL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY has a particularly urgent interest in securing as its librarian one who can and does read, one who recognizes a book from a form, one who likes the feel and the sight and the smell of a book beyond all other sensory experiences, one who can summon up from that experience which alone can serve him well in this capacity—reading—the know-how and the knowingness implicit in earning a living with books.

Why is it particularly urgent for a small university library to have such a librarian? Because his responsibility for his library is more widespread throughout all its operations than is the librarian's of a large institution where such responsibility is cut up and apportioned out to more or less autonomous departments. In a small university library the chief librarian has the opportunity and the obligation not only to know his collection first hand, but to examine and appraise gifts, and to cooperate personally with his faculty in the enrichment and growth of his library resources. These are responsibilities in the small university library which cannot and should not be delegated wholly to the chief librarian's subordinates. No other of his duties should claim his attention as should these particular ones which have to do with the very reason for his being a librarian at all—books, their acquisition, use, and care.

Such a chief librarian will find that other problems of administration, such as staff personnel, relations with university authorities,

physical plant maintenance, and budgetary agonies, inevitably will impinge upon his preoccupation with books, and they should, for let me be the first to admit that a small university librarian who neglected these aspects of his position would be a poor one, indeed, and that all the bookishness in the universe would not make up for a lack of attention to such problems. My contention here is only that his skill in handling his staff and his president and his faculty, his ability to maintain his building adequately, his acumen in dealing with students, public, press, and his eloquence in pleading for more money—none of these things will make him a good librarian if he does not also possess those qualities I mentioned earlier, in short a bookman's recognition and appreciation of books.

The kind of university librarian I am concerned with is in a position where he will have to do most of the examining and appraising of gift collections. He must be able to go to the private library with the executor, the heirs, or possibly the owner himself, scan it, evaluate it in terms of his own collection and his library's acquisition policies, estimate the percentage of duplicates, and recognize the usefulness of materials he may not want for himself through sale, priced or piece-for-piece exchange to others. The small university librarian has a responsibility not only to handle intelligently the gifts offered him but to seek out desirable gifts in advance.

But to do these promotional jobs, the librarian of the small university library must be more than a hearty fellow who knows how to address a luncheon club or project his circulation figures on a piece of graph paper. He has to be a

bookman. I say it again: he has to know books, their peculiar value to him, how to ferret them out, how to convey to the donor his pleasure at the transfer of their possession to him. I remember the astonishment with which Elliott Arnold, author of *Blood Brother* and *The Time of the Gringo*, greeted my personal request for the original manuscripts for the University of Arizona Library. They were not only Arizona and Southwest novels, but they had both been written in our library from our source materials. His reaction, coming from the big reserved man who is chary of compliments, was, in effect: "Why Pat, I didn't know you cared." I had a similar experience with Dr. Joseph Wood Krutch: a kind of shy pleasure that I had found his *Desert Year* manuscript valuable for posterity.

I should like to say just a word about the importance of a chief librarian's book knowledge in building a book-minded staff. Even in a small university library it is the staff which deals most directly with the faculty and students. They will be better and more useful librarians in this daily intercourse if they have derived from their chief the feeling that books are important and that in this relationship whereby the librarian is the instrument in fulfilling the old cliché about bringing the man and the book together to work its wondrous alchemy, they are playing a knowing and intelligent part. But it has to filter *down*. I never have known of a case where it *rose* to the top like cream.

In the same way, a staff responsible for the physical care of a collection will cherish its books only insofar as the librarian has imparted his book wisdom and love to them. Every library has some books of surpassing interest and value to it which it treasures. If books are considered only statistically by the librarian, as so many volumes in anthropology, for instance, instead of being recognized as Shirokogorov's practically-impossible-to-secure *Social Organization of the Northern Tungus* or Nordenskiöld's *The Cliff Dwellers of the Mesa Verde* or the magnificent folio plates of Curtis' *North American Indians* for the distinction these titles give to a collection of anthropological books, these volumes are going to be treated by the average library staff exactly as they treat the latest edition of Kroeber's textbook bought in multiple

copies for the reserve book room. In a small university library, the librarian and he alone can convey to his order librarians, his catalogers, and his public service librarians the respect due the physical book. If he does not care, or does not know, or is not interested, he will destroy his staff's book morale as surely as if he were no more than an industrial plant manager brought in to manage the library. I have seen catalogers treat fine books with diffidence and scorn, and I have seen stack superintendents whose philosophy, for lack of a better one, was the expedient one "books are expendable." Many books are, the good Lord knows, but where the chief librarian has stated his belief unmistakably that some books are *not*, there is little chance for the staff to be what the late Randolph Adams grievously called "enemies of books."

We have talked among ourselves in the last few years a good deal about recruiting for librarianship, and we have a great many committees functioning all over the country on various levels to promote this cause. The bookmen-librarians do their recruiting forty-eight hours a day without benefit of committees, pep talks, aptitude tests, or vocational counseling. But it is effective dynamic recruiting. For librarianship is books, and to sell it as a career to the non-professional people who usually far outnumber the professionals on a small university library staff, the librarian can succeed only in proportion to his own belief in the importance of books and all the ramifications of their use in libraries as basic. Is there any other factor we can recognize in recruiting for librarianship? Certainly not salaries, academic rank, favorable working conditions, or even the delights of handling microfilm!

I have been lucky. I was brought up in the profession by two great bookmen-librarians. When I was an accessions clerk in 1932, recording in medieval fashion in a great 20-pound ledger, author, title, publisher, place, date, price and source, Rudolph H. Gjelsness came to Arizona to be the librarian. From the moment this tall young sandy-haired Norwegian shook my hand as the staff went into his office one by one that hot summer morning, until he left five years later with all of us in tears, I was to live in a world I never dreamed of. Books, books, books—not just

recording them mechanically, stamping them, lettering them, shelving them, handing them out over the desk—but reading them, learning to love the sight of them, learning what they meant, how to judge them, how to use them, how to convey to others their wealth and richness, learning for the first time why I was a librarian—this is only a feeble attempt to analyze what this bookman did for one librarian. And I am gratified that if Mr. Gjelsness had to leave Arizona it was to teach hundreds of other librarians the lore and love and meaning of books in librarianship.

I remember, and he will probably never forget, that we had no money in those mid-depression days. I worked for \$90 a month and got paid in warrants that nobody would cash. Some university departments got as little as \$15 a year for their book allocation. But Mr. Gjelsness's five-year term at Arizona saw the beginning of our climb from an undistinguished, undernourished, undeveloped state to something approaching respectability twenty years later. He was a good administrator. He built up a professional staff and elicited from them a kind of fierce loyalty; he was a scholar by reputation and he won from the faculty a recognition that the library was more than an appendage of the University; he fought with determination for adequate support with all the ways known to librarians. But he will be remembered the longest and with the most respect and admiration for what he did with books at Arizona. He ransacked the duplicate collections of the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library for us; he built up the best pipeline to the public of the whole state of Arizona through his newspaper stories that we have ever known, and the gifts which came to us as a result are the foundation of more than one of our present areas of book strength; and he persuaded the university authorities to enlarge their publication program in order that the library might benefit from ensuing exchange arrangements. These things he did without money. But if he had not known books, what they were worth, where to find them, what to do with them, in short if he had not had the bookman's passion for books, not all the administrative talent conveyed by all the library schools in all the 48 states would have accomplished what he did *con amore*.

We liked particularly his instantaneous and combustible interest in Arizona materials. In 1932 the University Library had exactly two of the imprints from Arizona's first private press. They were Kirk La Shelle's *Poker Rubaiyat* and Will Robinson's *Her Navajo Lover*, printed in Phoenix in 1903 by Chicago's Frank Holme on the Bandar Log Press. After Mr. Gjelsness left in 1937, we had six of the seven scarce items issued in Arizona in very limited editions by this press. Here was an outlander, urbane, scholarly, bookman, who had to come to Arizona all the way from New York City to show us what was important in our own domain. Would a mere administrator ever have electrified us with the excitement of the search for the missing titles of George Ade's "Strenuous Lad's Library" which appeared under this imprint? Would such a librarian ever have dared spend a library's meager depression-year funds for a copy of *Clarence Allen, the Hypnotic Boy Journalist*? Would our efficient expert administrator, with his dependency on group results of questionnaires asking "how do you do it?", ever have had the imagination to uncover in an obscure Columbus, Ohio, bookshop what was probably the only remaining market copy of *Rollo Johnson, the Boy Inventor, or The Deamon Bicycle and Its Daring Rider*? I doubt it. It took a bookman librarian, for which we can be everlastingly thankful.

The librarian who followed Mr. Gjelsness at Arizona was William H. Carlson. He too was a bookman, a reader, a knower of books, a librarian who knew the book tools of his trade; whose knowledge of our collection and its lacks, combined with a skill not yet equalled for putting the library's dollars to the absolute maximum use, taught us a new aspect of our profession.

It was a strange and heady experience to have a little money to spend. The faculty, too, gaunt and lean from its starvation rations, was paralyzed. But Mr. Carlson was not. "To live is act," sayeth the poet; and this, now in retrospect, seems to me to have characterized his five years at Arizona. He surveyed our resources, field by field, went to the faculty with a bookman's plea to use the departmental allocations in pursuit of a scholarly and meaningful growth rather than the lazy popular haphazard frittering away of

funds without perceptible plan or regard for use and need. He sought and secured from his staff, from the faculty, and from the administration, a new awareness of the potentialities of a library to a university. In his careful meticulous way he bought books for Arizona, beginning with our bibliographical and reference collection, going on to strengthen our Southwest collection to which Mr. Gjelsness had contributed so greatly, and collaborating with the faculty in planning the library's book expansion so that it bore some relation to the curriculum.

He read the antiquarian catalogs daily as they came across his desk and his order librarian felt the dynamic impact of his selection policies instantly. He did not waste his time choosing among best sellers and the engulfing flood of second-rate current stuff, but husbanded our financial resources and his own book perspicacity for the important acquisitions that will distinguish certain parts of our collection forever. And another thing I remember about Mr. Carlson, a simple thing you may say, but few chief librarians do it nowadays: he used to go into the stacks. Often he went to look up something for his own information, or sometimes he took one of us along to discuss something, or occasionally he roamed up and down the aisles just looking, absorbing the peculiar atmosphere of

thousands of books. We never knew when we would run into him there, but it always made us feel good when we did. Now by this I do not propose that the small university librarian run his library from the stacks, but I do maintain that neither can he run it exclusively from the sanctuary of his office.

Mr. Carlson grayed considerably in our service, but I think he loved us nonetheless, for we had responded to his philosophy of bookmanship. (Show me a staff who loves the bright young mechanical man whose bible is his time and motion studies and whose badge is his organization chart, and I'll walk back to Tucson reciting chapter headings from all the books ever written on university library administration as penance.)

What does all this add up to? The observations of one assistant librarian about different kinds of chief librarians do not make a handbook for guidance. Yet these experiences are probably typical of a small university library. I would say at least, if someone should ask me which librarian I would like most to be marooned with in a library, that he should, if possible, happily be both administrator and bookman. But with female stubbornness, I reserve the final right to insist that if he can be only administrator, and not bookman as well, he forsake librarianship and leave me alone with the books.

By MAURICE F. TAUBER

Librarians as Bookmen

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ROASTING AN OLD CHESTNUT is an appropriate title for this meeting. If one goes back into library literature, in fact, to the first number of the *American Library Journal*, issued September 30, 1876, he will find in Melvil Dewey's discussion of "The Profession" reference to the problem under discussion. He wrote as follows:

It is not enough that the books are cared for properly, are well arranged, are never lost. It is not enough if the librarian can readily produce any book asked for. It is not enough that he can, when asked, give

advice as to the best books in his collection on any subject. All these things are indispensable, but they are not enough for our ideal. He must see that his library contains, as far as possible, the best books on the best subjects, regarding carefully the wants of his special community.

Dewey continues with his thesis that a librarian should know books, and that he should use them as a teacher.

The time *was* when the library was like a museum, and a librarian was a mouser in musty books, and visitors looked with curious eyes at ancient tomes and manuscripts. The time *is* when the library is a school, and the librarian is in the highest sense a teacher,