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The Library Associates: Nineteen Supporting Years

Benjamin J. Lake

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The
Ernest S. Bird Library
Dedication Issue

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The Library Associates: Nineteen Supporting Years

by Benjamin J. Lake

The love of books may accurately, if somewhat pedantically, be termed “bibliophilia,” since the book lover and collector is often called a “bibliophile.” One English writer went even so far as to entitle a work about book collecting *Bibliomania*, leading to the rather extreme terminology of “bibliomaniac” for the man or woman who is, in the vernacular, “crazy” about books. Be that as it may, it was with such people in mind, people who loved books and who also had a special feeling for the welfare and future of the Syracuse University Library, that Syracuse University Library Associates was organized in 1953 under the aegis of Chancellor William Pearson Tolley, with Professor Phillips Bradley as its first Executive Secretary.

An excerpt from the preamble of the organization’s constitution reads:

At the heart of a University’s intellectual resources stands its library. From this center of its academic work stem its purposes of conserving knowledge, transmitting knowledge, and advancing knowledge. . . .

The Syracuse University Library Associates will promote the objective of increased library resources. Through the interest and support of friends of the University, alumni and non-alumni alike, the existing facilities of the Library should be expanded more rapidly and effectively than could be hoped for otherwise. The Associates will be concerned with the University’s future development and so participate actively in assuring the University’s continued academic leadership.

Library Associates was officially launched on October 1, 1953 by a meeting of its first Board of Trustees, who were appointees of the Chancellor; since then trustees have been elected annually in three classes for three-year terms. At the end of its first year of operation, Associates could boast 160 members and approximately \$2600 raised for special library purposes. Important gifts-in-kind during that initial year were received from many

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donors, especially significant among these being Stephen Crane materials from George Arents, a Samuel Clemens collection from Adrian Van Sinderen, and a complete set of his public papers from former Governor Herbert H. Lehman. Also during the 1953-54 year of operation, Library Associates made grants to various colleges and departments of the University for the purchase of research materials, and added to the rare book collection.

Significantly for us in this season of celebration of the dedication of the Ernest S. Bird Library on the University campus, as early as its annual meeting in 1955, the Board of Trustees of Library Associates passed the following resolution:

RESOLVED: that the Committee is unanimously of the opinion that the single most outstanding requirement of Syracuse University is a modern library building which can properly serve the needs of undergraduate and graduate students and the faculty. The University's present laboratory of books cannot cope with the demands of the campus and by no means provides the material for research necessary to our extensive program of studies.

And, be it further resolved, that we, the Associates, desire respectfully to urge this vital matter upon the Board of Trustees of the University, with the fervent hope that they will initiate definite action promptly to secure the funds for this project.

At that meeting, Chancellor Tolley announced Mr. Arents' generous gift to the University Library of the Lena Richardson Arents Rare Book Room. At the same time the *Syracuse Post Standard* presented its first Library Award (described elsewhere in this issue) to Dean Wharton Miller, who was retiring as Director of the University Library.

During 1955, while membership in the Associates rose only modestly (to 180), contributions increased to about \$4300. The chief contribution to book purchases from the Associates this year went toward acquisition of the renowned William Hobart Royce Balzac Collection.

In 1956-57 it was reported that gifts-in-kind made through Library Associates totaled 6500 volumes and 1800 manuscripts, conservatively valued at \$30,000. For the year 1960-61 a membership of 227 was reported, an increase of 62 new members.

The chief excitement of the 1964-65 Library Associates year was the arrival and installation of the Edith S. and John S. Mayfield Library. Mr. Mayfield served as Curator of Manuscripts and Rare Books from 1961 until his retirement in 1971, and has held the post of Secretary of Library Associates since 1961.

Each year saw the organization growing in numbers and in service to the University Library. During 1965 new members in several categories totaled 184. An overall membership of 1,359 was reported for that year, as



Interested trustees of Library Associates tour the unfinished Bird Library by way of the main staircase, May 1972. Photo by Harry Bosch.

well as \$10,600 in gifts of books. During the period covered here so far, the phenomenal growth of the library was demonstrated by its expanding budget. The library's expense budget in 1952 had been \$244,000; in 1965 it was \$1,267,000.

At the dedication of the Arents Rare Book Room in 1957, Dr. Adrian Van Sinderen, distinguished New York lawyer and book collector, who served as first chairman of the Board of Trustees of Library Associates, reiterated the purposes of the organization as follows:

1. To acquire for the University by gift and purchase important books and special collections.
2. To stimulate student interest in books and in reading.
3. To improve the physical facilities of the Library.
4. To dramatize the importance of the Library in University life.

Dr. Van Sinderen added the comment

I trust that Library Associates, supported by loyal Alumni and friends, will continue their efforts in building up the number of volumes on our shelves, to the end that the books which constitute the record of mankind, the books which contain all the knowledge of the world, may be available to those who come to Syracuse to study and prepare themselves for service to the people of our great country.

Our organization was profoundly saddened by Dr. Van Sinderen's death in 1963. His successor as President of the Board, 1963-1970, was Syracuse attorney and bibliophile David A. Fraser. I succeeded Mr. Fraser in 1970.

1958 was a high point in our development since it witnessed the launching of the Library Associates quarterly journal, *The Courier*. This publication, which contains articles of scholarly and popular interest, information about the University Library and its collections, and many other interesting matters, has received increasing recognition and praise from institutions and individuals receiving it. It was first edited by Dr. Wayne S. Yenawine, Director of University Libraries; then by Mr. John S. Mayfield; and most recently by Miss Arsine Schmavonian. All these people, working with a skilled and dedicated editorial board, have served the Associates and *The Courier* with distinction.

During the annual meeting of the group in 1968, the need for adequate library space for all university collections was again the chief subject of discussion. Also at that meeting it was reported that from 1954 through 1968 Library Associates had contributed in excess of \$113,000 to the University.

In succeeding years there were many changes in categories of membership, and increased financial pressures caused the Library Associates Board of Trustees reluctantly to discontinue a number of categories, particularly complimentary memberships. In 1968 the reported membership was 502. As this article is being written, our membership stands at 533. We are proud to report that from its inception until the present time, Library Associates has contributed to the Syracuse University Library approximately \$150,000 in funds plus many times that amount in gifts-in-kind. We have had meetings at least twice a year and occasionally more often. Among the eminent speakers at some of these meetings have been Sir Frank Francis, retired Director of the British Museum; Philip Hofer, Librarian of Harvard University; and Roger McDonough, New Jersey State Librarian.

This brief report brings us to the present moment and to the question of the future of Library Associates. Over the years the University has frequently assumed many or most of the Associates' operating costs, so that all funds donated to or through the organization could be used for the purchase of books and other research materials. Because of financial stringencies, this generous support is no longer possible and Syracuse University Library Associates has been directed by the university administration to become self-supporting during calendar year 1972. To this end, and with much appreciated help from the Development Office of the University, we have embarked upon a massive membership campaign. We hope that many friends will respond with enthusiasm, because it is our belief that Library Associates should continue to serve a useful and significant purpose in the university family, in the larger Syracuse community, and beyond. We welcome the agreement of our readers in the form of the enlistment of new members and increased financial support.



Jessie B. Watkins, Natural Sciences Librarian at the time of her retirement this year, receives the 1971 Post Standard Award from Robert C. Atkinson, Managing Editor of *The Post Standard*, May 5, 1972. Photo by Harry Bosch.