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Patience, Thanksgiving, and Opportunity for Learning

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Chancellor Emeritus William Pearson Tolley presents
the Dedication Address

THE COURIER

A COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE
on the
DEDICATION OF THE ERNEST S. BIRD LIBRARY

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Patience, Thanksgiving, and Opportunity for Learning

by William Pearson Tolley

When I was a college dean at Drew University, Dr. Charles Thwing, President of Western Reserve University, was asked what it was that a college president needs most. His answer came as a surprise. At the age of 27 I found it difficult to believe. For his reply was, "Patience." Today, forty-six years later, as we dedicate this long awaited library, I believe it.

It took more than half a century to gather the funds for the Women's Building at Syracuse. The campaign for our recently dedicated Student Infirmary was one of twenty-five years of patient, persistent, dedicated effort, as so many here can testify. All of our new classroom and laboratory buildings, including the Law School and the Field House, required years of organized fund raising.

One of the first things I was told when I came to Syracuse as chancellor in September, 1942, was that the University had outgrown the Carnegie Library built in 1907. The Director of Libraries, Dr. Wharton Miller, informed me in one of his early reports that it would serve no useful purpose to increase the budget appropriation for new books when there was no space for the books we already had. I did not follow his advice but I understood the problem.

The nation was at war in 1942. Because of the loss of male students that fall, it was a difficult period for privately endowed universities. At best we could find only a temporary answer for our library problem. Because we were determined to build our book collection as rapidly as possible, much that we did only increased the size and the gravity of our space and service problems.

The temporary answer was a better utilization of space and an explosive expansion of branch libraries. At various times in the nineteen forties our libraries extended in distance from Auburn to Baldwinsville, from Thompson Road and the State Fair Grounds to the Russian Language School at Skytop, from Endicott to Utica, and from the old Law School and University College in downtown Syracuse to more than a dozen branch libraries on the main campus in addition to the Carnegie Library, the Forestry College Library and the Library of the Medical College. Later the situation was eased to a degree by the addition of the storage facilities of the Building and Grounds Department at Ainsley Drive and the Continental Can Building on Erie Boulevard. But by the nineteen sixties we knew the new library would be built. There might be delays because of site problems, but the years of

planning by faculty and student committees, the University Design Board, consultants, architects, engineers, librarians, trustees, and library associates were coming to a close. I might no longer hold the office of chancellor but, unlike Moses, I had only to live a little longer to see and enter and enjoy the Promised Land!

In a culture grown soft and flabby through affluence and permissiveness, and in a period of mindless impatience, there is a special sweetness about this dedication. Our sense of appreciation is deeper because of the long years of struggle and effort. The fact that it did not come easily or quickly adds a spice, a savor, a refreshing quality, and extends the range of our joy.

I will not press the point, but I might observe that it is not only college presidents who need patience. We all need it. America needs it. It would be good for our soul.

If the first word that crosses our minds this morning is patience, the second is thanksgiving. We owe so much to so many on this happy day. How do we find the words to express our thanks? Where do we begin? Where do we end? How can we be sure that no one's part is minimized and no one is left out?

We can't pay tribute to everyone by name, but even across a century there are those we should not forget on this memorable occasion. The first is Charles Wesley Bennett, Professor of History, who became Librarian of the University in 1875. When appointed, he assumed the direction of a library of 2,300 books and no budget for new ones (actually his budget was about twenty-six dollars per year). Within a few months, however, he had won the interest and support of Dr. and Mrs. John Morrison Reid, and they proved to be two of the best friends the library would ever have. In the first summer after his appointment as librarian, through the generosity of the Reids, Professor Bennett purchased 4,500 volumes in Edinburgh, London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Berlin, Leipzig and Paris. And before he returned he had learned that the great library of his revered teacher, Leopold von Ranke, might some day be sold, and he determined that it must come to Syracuse. It was Dr. Reid, of course, whose gifts would make this possible. But it was Bennett's dream, Bennett's persistence, and Bennett's persuasion. Even after Professor Bennett left Syracuse to teach at the Garrett Biblical Institute, he played an indispensable role in the acquisition of the von Ranke Library.

Nor can too much be said of Dr. and Mrs. Reid. They did not advertise their gifts. Because they gave anonymously we know only a part of what they did. We do know that several of the special library collections, the Ranke Library, their own library of several thousand volumes, and a sizable endowment fund were among their many gifts.

Henry Orrin Sibley and his wife, Mary J. O'Bryan Sibley, also deserve our thanks today. Dr. Sibley was the Librarian, Mrs. Sibley the Assistant Librarian. Their combined salary was \$1,275 in the year ending May 31,

1894. After Dr. Sibley's death Mrs. Sibley took over the direction of the library, although with the title of Assistant Librarian for many years, and she served as Professor of Library Economy until 1913. Theirs is a story of outstanding, unselfish devotion and service. They gave their lives to the library.

After the turn of the century there were many friends of the library. Andrew Carnegie ranks at the top of the list. John Archbold was another. William J. Peck, Henry Danziger, Manly S. Hard and James J. Belden were others. Congressman Belden, a trustee of the University, gave the Belden Economics Library, but we remember him today for the gift of the elephant folio of *The Birds of America* by John J. Audubon, one of the greatest treasures of the library (at a recent auction a copy like ours brought a sale price of \$186,000).

There is not time to recite the whole history of the library. I must move on to friends of the library closer to the present time. The first of these was a chairman of the Board of Trustees, the late George Arents. Mr. Arents was one of the great book collectors of his day. His Tobacco Collection at the New York Public Library is one of the most extraordinary collections of that magnificent institution. He was my mentor in the collection of rare books; he was my friend; he was my advisor. I loved him dearly. It was George Arents who persuaded me that we must begin a rare book collection. It was George Arents who gave us the Lena Richardson Arents Rare Book Room. It was George Arents who assured me that there would be a million dollars in his will for the new library.

That was a memorable day in my life. I shall not forget it. It was the first promise of a major gift to the new library and it came at a time when I was discouraged. I should have felt greatly encouraged when later, after a lengthy session, he agreed that his gift would be two million dollars. But college presidents are never satisfied. I recall that I returned to Syracuse feeling that I had failed to tell the story of our need as it should have been told. I felt that, had I been more persuasive, the gift would have been much larger. Today, however, I am deeply grateful. George Arents was one of our greatest benefactors. We owe him more than we can say.

There are interesting stories about many of the friends of the library. They are a remarkable group. I think of Sol Feinstone—one of the most interesting men I have known; Adrian Van Sinderen, who, like George Arents, was my teacher, guide and friend in the world of book collecting; John Mayfield, *suis generis*, here today with Edith and her sister, Bea—they are our deeply beloved patrons and friends. To these I would add Frank Piskor and Bernie Singer, John Crawford, Finla Goff Crawford, Harry King, Jim Latorre, Newell Rossman, Frank Wingate, Ken Bartlett, Dewitt LeFevre, Len Gorman, Walter Welch, David Fraser, Dorothy Thompson, Mrs. Lyman Spire, Mrs. Cornell Blanding, Bertha Walsworth, Joseph and Sol Spector, Benjamin Lake, Frances Singer, Staff Ellithorpe, Doss Witherill, Dave Winter, Agnes Meyer,

Charles Bollinger, Chester Soling, Sidney Davison, Frank Love, Allan Coughlin, Sarah Auchincloss, Reed Rotunno, Pete Terhune, Murray Salzberg, Donald Bean, Dick Underwood, Abby Harper, Sam Mehlman, J. Wesley Warner, Eugene and Grace Howard Smith, Morse Dellplain, Ignatz and Yanka Wohl, Arthur Wohl, Foster Post, Bob Cutler, Charles and Rosanna Batchelor, John Reifert, Warren and Edith Day, John O'Connor, Charles Merrill, William Tatham Calder, the Rosamond Gifford Foundation, and hundreds who have given their personal papers, their libraries or special collections.

How do we thank the members of the faculty, Mary Marshall, chief of all, but also the many members of the English Department and colleagues like Eric Hemmingsen, Harley McKee, Tony Pace, Ted Barck, Park Hotchkiss, Phillipps Bradley, Bruno Green, Douglas Haring, Morris Hurley and Horace Landry?

How do we thank adequately the librarians and their staffs, the Yenawines, the Boes, Lester Wells, Mrs. Newlove, Phoebe Ferris, Terry Bender, and Howard Applegate. Warren Boes deserves a special accolade. Almost as much as the architects, Warren can say, "This is my building. I had a part in all you see." In a recent letter to Horace Landry, Steve Bird wrote: "Please give Warren a pat on the back. He deserves it."

How do we thank Chancellor Eggers, Lachlan Peck, Harry Yeiser, Newell Rossman, and all the members of Vice Chancellor Rossman's staff?

And let us not forget the architects, King and King. Russell King is here to represent them. He, his father and his associates are all a delight to work with. The engineers and the builders also deserve the highest praise.

I have left two names to the last. They are Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Stevenson Bird. Steve and Marie Bird are warmhearted, generous people who shrink from any public recognition or thanks. It would have afforded us great pleasure if their health had permitted them to be here today.

Steve Bird was a member of the Class of 1916. He came to Syracuse with about \$6.00. He was given a scholarship. He earned his way washing dishes, tending furnaces and setting pins in the university bowling alleys. He could have been an outstanding member of the track team had he not had to work so hard simply to stay in school.

As a senior he was the head cheerleader, then called cheermaster. He was a member of the Senior Council. He was also a member of Pi Kappa Alpha, my own fraternity. He was warmly respected and loved. He was the friend and fraternity brother of Frank Love and my older brother Harold.

Some day I hope Steve and Marie Bird will pay an unannounced visit and will enjoy a quiet guided tour of their beautiful building. It will be a proud day for them and a wonderful day for us. This morning we simply send them our love and say again that we are immensely grateful.

In addition to our thoughts about patience and thanksgiving, let us think finally of opportunity for learning. The significance of this building is the increased opportunity it provides for learning. It is a new opportunity for the city and the county, for business and industry, for old and young, for

everyone in the community as well as university students and members of the faculty. It is a community resource of the highest importance. It adds a new dimension to the cultural life of our city. It opens doors of opportunity to learn that we have not had before.

This is a learning center designed for people to use. It is very unlike the libraries of an earlier day. It is a learning center in music and art as well as in the world of the printed page. This is a building that makes real the spirit of learning. Here one comes to understand the University's threefold aim to conserve, transmit and advance knowledge and learning. Here is expressed both *lehr freiheit* – freedom of teaching, and *lern freiheit* – freedom of learning – the two requirements of a university truly free.

Perhaps more than any building on the campus, this sets the tone of the University, expresses its hopes and aspirations, indicates its values, tells the order of its priorities, exemplifies its spirit, and reaffirms its purpose.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this building to the members of the faculty. It will contribute immensely to their growth and usefulness. But it is an even greater boon to students. What we have here is an extra faculty, an additional faculty – not only in the books and manuscripts, but in the trained library staff. It is a supporting body of teachers and friends available day and night to learners at every level of age, interest and ability. Again, what a host of instructors stand ready to help us each time we approach the library shelves or use the tapes and records and films, information retrieval systems and computer-stored lectures and lessons. By the opening of a book, the turning of a dial or the flick of a switch, we have instant access to a faculty greater than that of any university in history.

We hear a good deal today about the absence of any increase in productivity in education. There appears to be little to match the increase in productivity in business and industry. Indeed the charge is made that there has been a sharp decline in productivity in higher education. Critics say that teachers teach too little, have classes that are too small, and resist the introduction of the new learning technology. True or false, the charge should be faced and answered.

It is answered in this building. Here is a demonstration of the value of the new learning technology. Here is the opportunity for an enormous increase in student and faculty productivity. Indeed the record of student use since the library was opened – a four or five-fold gain – is all the evidence we need that productivity in higher education can be greatly increased.

But if the significance of this building is opportunity for increased learning or increased productivity, that opportunity should be pursued, developed and used. Now that we have the Bird Library we could achieve an immediate increase in faculty productivity and a corresponding reduction in instructional costs and the size of the faculty if we increased organized faculty consultation with students, added to independent study and learning opportunities in the library, and added to the hours of credit per course or

reduced the hours of classroom instruction while leaving the course credit the same. To tie hours of credit to the number of hours spent in class is as bankrupt and outmoded as the Penn Central. In many doctoral programs this is now well understood. But we have yet to learn it in higher education as a whole.

Even if this were not a time of rising costs and financial pressure, we should make much greater use of the new learning technology and increase both the opportunity and the responsibility of students for their own learning. Whatever increases the rate of learning and the maturity and independence of the students improves the quality and the productivity of education.

Students are now treated as adults in their personal behavior and living arrangements. They play an important role in the governance of the University through their membership in the University Senate. Until this library was opened, however, there was little evidence that students were taking any larger responsibility for self-education. In most of our colleges, academic advising of students by members of the faculty is as impersonal, chaotic and meaningless as ever. Courses of instruction are still dull, poorly organized and indifferently taught. Many of the academic innovations of the past five years are a retreat from reason and disciplined learning.

Again, the blunt truth is that far too many young people, already enrolled in college, are not ready for academic work at the college or university level. One wonders whether it is twenty percent or as high as forty percent that should not be in college at all. But since they are there, and so long as they are, they must be fed by spoon, for they cannot feed themselves.

More and more, however, higher education should be organized not for the student who should not be there but for the mature student ready and willing to learn. Students will always need personal attention, personal interest, personal friendship and understanding. They will also need good instruction. Indeed the role of the teacher will be more important, not less. But we must use all the tools of learning, all the fruits of advancing technology, and students who are adults must behave as adults in assuming responsibility for self-education. They should also behave as adults in this library. The penalty for any malicious mischief or vandalism should be quick and quiet separation from the University.

As we dedicate this library we turn our faces to the future. There is so great a challenge to break new ground in American higher education. There is so great an opportunity to narrow the gap between theory and practice in higher education. There are so many vistas of *lern-freiheit* – students motivated to learn, excited by learning, mature and responsible, who can travel under their own power.

We have spoken of patience and thanksgiving and opportunity for learning. It is appropriate to think of all three. But the significance of the Ernest Stevenson Bird Library – and the promise of this memorable day is *new opportunity for learning*.