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Remarks on the Occasion of the Exhibition

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Remarks on the Occasion of the Exhibition

The exhibition of BOOKS RECENTLY ACQUIRED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATES was opened with a reception attended by nearly a hundred Associates and friends. Melvin A. Eggers, Chancellor of the University, could not be present that afternoon but provided the statement which follows for this issue of *The Courier*. John James Prucha, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, welcomed those attending, and his remarks also follow.

I commend the membership of Library Associates for its unstinting efforts on behalf of our libraries and I thank each member for associating with Syracuse University. I can think of no group of friends that benefit the intellectual life of the campus more directly.

One of my first pleasant experiences as Chancellor of Syracuse University was participating in the dedication of the E. S. Bird Library building. It seems only days ago, but it has been almost 10 years. In that time we have accumulated a decade of new information, new monographs, new students and scholars. Year after year Library Associates has made a major contribution to acquisitions and knowledge. The work has been done quietly, steadily, and generously. Without it, we would not be as complete as we are nor would our future look as bright.

The support role that Library Associates plays is an essential element in sustaining a vital, useful, and current intellectual resource for the Syracuse University community. Members of the organization understand, perhaps better than anyone else, the frustration of keeping library resources up to date and the extreme financial hardship associated with expanding them.

That members of Library Associates are willing to share often limited resources to provide students and scholars with the opportunity to learn and to do research is our good fortune and our sustained hope.

Melvin A. Eggers
October 15, 1981

This afternoon, on this very nice occasion, I would like to share with you some ruminations that have been going through my mind, today particularly, but also for the last several days.

My train of thought stems from recent conversations with students and with faculty members. We talked about the resources of the University and, as is all too commonly the case, our general theme was that resources either were inadequate, or the cost of using them was too high. But it really hadn't occurred to me until that point, and it certainly hadn't occurred to the people with whom I was talking, to ask: From whence did all these resources come? Why are they here? How do they get here? It's an interesting question to ask yourself and to mull over in your mind because, regardless of what their limitations might be, or what it costs the student in the way of tuition, let's say, to have access to these things, their present worth is incalculable. No price tag could be assigned for access that could even come close to stating the true worth of these materials.

In this afternoon's context it's easy to think of it in terms of rare books, and manuscripts, and paintings, but also other things in the University must be included—the total working collections, buildings, traditions, all of these things. They were put together over that last one hundred and eleven years as a result, principally, of selfless and dedicated commitment on the part of people just like you. These treasures that are so beautifully displayed here and which are so fascinating to us become contributions to the resources of this University, and a hundred and eleven years from now, their users will find that the value of these gifts that you have accumulated and made available to the University is enormous.

That idea has led me to another. So often, as we work to increase the resources available to our students and to scholars at the University, we fall into the habit of talking about it in a kind of a “we-they” mode. Sometimes those of us who are here at the moment as a kind of transient steward for the University's resources will say to others outside the University, “We'd like you to help *us* with this project,” whether it's by donating money or gifts in kind. That reflects an incorrect way of looking at it. What we should be saying is not, “Will you help us?” but “Boy, have I got a deal for you! I can help you fulfill your commitment to the University.” I think the conscientious citizen at large has exactly the same responsibility to build and maintain such an important institution in our society, a living organism that lives and works on behalf of the common good, as those of us who just coincidentally earn our living by working here, as the stewards and functionaries of the process. So you, in pursuing your interest and commitment to books, to the Libraries, and to the University, are also fulfilling your obligation as citizens, and as stewards also of a resource of incalculable worth to our society.

Thank you for letting me enjoy this splendid occasion with you.

John James Prucha
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
October 23, 1981