

## RALPH ROBERT SHAW

Ralph Robert Shaw, librarian and bibliographer, was born in Detroit on May 18, 1907, son of Max and Pauline (Sandburg) Shaw. He graduated from Western Reserve University in 1928 with an A.B. degree and took a B.S. from Columbia in 1929. Having worked as an assistant at the Cleveland Public Library while in college and at the NYPL while in graduate school, he then took a job as a bibliographer with the Engineering Societies Library in New York. He studied in spare time and took an M.L.S. at Columbia in 1931. He remained in the city until the mid-thirties when he went to Gary, Indiana, as head of the public library and returned to Columbia a couple of summers to teach. In 1940 he went to Washington as director of the massive library system of the Department of Agriculture where he was responsible also for the monthly *Bibliography of Agriculture* in those years when he was not away during the War in the medical department of the Army Air Force. Out of uniform he helped in the founding of UNESCO in 1945.

In 1950 he took his doctorate from the University of Chicago Library School and in 1954 he left government service to take a professorship at the Library School at Rutgers where he was dean from 1959 to 1961. In 1964 he went to Hawaii where he was dean of library activities until 1968 and professor until 1969, the year when he retired. Here also he had a private press, Nokaoui. Although inventing many mechanical aids to librarians including a photocharging machine, a microform selector, and a trailer-type bookmobile, his major concerns were bibliographical. In 1933 his *Engineering Books Available in America Prior to 1830* was published by NYPL, and this Society was in touch with him by mail on the subject with long lists of engineering titles. The next year his *Theory and History of Bibliography* was published. In 1958 his monumental preliminary checklist, *American Bibliography . . . for 1801* was published by Scarecrow Press, his own operation, and in suc-

cessive years the period through 1819 was covered in this fashion. He wrote in his preface to the first volume that he and his friends 'approached several foundations for support of the work, and obtained enthusiastic moral support.' In the launching of this massive project he noted that when Clifford K. Shipton, our then librarian, 'offered to lend the American Antiquarian Society records of some 20,000 items for 1801-1819, the project was launched.' One of his volunteers in the work, Richard H. Shoemaker, 'undertook this work with such zeal and industry that he soon became a full partner in the undertaking, as indicated on the title page.' During the following five years the volumes came from the press with staggering regularity, culminating with a series of indexes. We here continued to help in the work. At the April meeting in 1959, Shaw was elected to membership in this Society. At the April meeting of 1960, Shaw spoke on 'Bits and Books,' a paper that dealt on the effect of mechanical innovations on book publishing. It was very well received by the hearers. During the sixties he was busy with bibliography but also with his presses, bringing out Mini-Print editions of Sabin and of Evans in a reduced type-size offset, continuing to translate German works on bibliography, and in other ways he kept himself busy. He was extremely active in professional groups, served as president of the American Library Association, and was a consultant for a very large number of international and national, regional and local library groups.

On October 14, 1972, Ralph Robert Shaw died of cancer in Honolulu at the age of sixty-five. On the occasion of his being made an honorary member of the American Library Association, the citation read, 'As much as any individual, he opened the present era of librarianship.'

J. E. M.

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