

Obituaries

DOUGLAS WALLACE BRYANT

Douglas Wallace Bryant, who was elected to this Society in October 1965, died in Boston, Massachusetts, on June 12, 1994, only a few days short of his eighty-first birthday. He had guided the large and complex Harvard University Library system during a period of great physical growth and rapid technical development, and had served the international library world with authoritative advice and material aid for many years. His links with Great Britain and the British Library (formerly subsumed under the British Museum) were particularly strong and influential.

Douglas Bryant was born in Visalia, California, on June 20, 1913, the son of Albert G. and Ethel (Wallace) Bryant. He did exceptionally well at school and entered Stanford University at the age of sixteen, but before graduation he elected to take a year's study in Munich, where he became fluent in German and incidentally observed at first hand the rise of the Nazi party, a political development that confirmed him in opposition to dictatorial government. He returned to take his baccalaureate at Stanford in 1935 and went on to the University of Michigan to receive the degree of Master of Arts in Library Science in 1938.

While studying at Michigan he began his career in practical librarianship, serving from 1936 to 1938 as assistant curator of printed books at the William L. Clements Library, one of the country's most distinguished research collections in American history. His next post was at the Detroit Public Library as senior reference assistant (1938-41) and assistant chief of the Burton Historical Collection (1941-42). Thus he began his professional career by working with source materials and dealing with scholars and their problems at first hand. He was naturally drawn to those

who shared his interests in literature, history, and good typography and book production.

Not long after Pearl Harbor he received a commission in the U.S. Naval Reserve. By the time of his release to inactive duty in 1946, he had risen to the rank of Lieutenant Commander and was head of the Technical Information Branch, Engineering Division, Bureau of Aeronautics. In that same year he was appointed assistant librarian at the University of California, Berkeley. Three years later he took a position as attaché at the American Embassy in London, where he had oversight of the U.S. Information Service libraries throughout Britain. Here began his close friendship with prominent figures in the world of international librarianship, in particular with F. C. Francis, then Principal Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum and later director of the museum. Out of such contacts eventually grew important cooperative projects that have shaped the course of librarianship in the post-war years. In London, too, he met his future wife, Rene Kuhn, who was press officer at the American Embassy. They were married in 1953.

In 1952 Keyes DeWitt Metcalf, director of the Harvard University Library and librarian of Harvard College, recruited Douglas Bryant as administrative assistant librarian in the college library. Metcalf had come to Harvard in 1937, the first professionally-trained librarian to be named director. Bryant was the latest and probably the most experienced in a succession of outstanding young librarians selected to work with him in the supervision of a system comprising about one hundred separate units, large and small, some of them geographically remote from the core collections: Harvard's famous and sometimes exasperatingly decentralized library. Many of these components served highly specialized constituencies with differing demands and varying perceptions of the role of a library; some were soundly funded, others not; there was no uniform policy regarding personnel, salaries, and benefits for staff; cataloguing practices varied widely, so that it was difficult or impossible to prevent duplication of costly

resources, or to determine whether or not some desired publication was already available somewhere in the system; and most units suffered from the common complaint of libraries, inadequate or inappropriate space for both books and readers.

Metcalf and his colleagues attacked and solved many of these problems, but some remain intractable to this day and may well be chronic in the world of librarianship. Some solutions brought problems of their own. For example, at one time microfilm and microprint were expected to relieve, if not eliminate, the spatial demands of collections and staff; some visionaries dreamed of 'the library in a shoebox.' In the event, microforms expanded and diversified the library's resources, but required the establishment and staffing of a whole new department to manage them. Not the least important of their functions has proved to be the preservation of texts at risk of destruction because of the inferior paper on which they were written or printed. Later, the computer revolution enormously increased (and continues to increase) the library's power to serve the scholarly community, but in its turn it has placed new burdens on the budget and personnel of the institution.

Growing complexity and technological progress inevitably transformed the position of administrative assistant into something resembling the chief executive officer of a large corporation. When Mr. Metcalf retired in 1955 and the University administration decided to return to its former custom of finding directors for its library among its faculty, Douglas Bryant's executive function was acknowledged by his appointment as associate director of the University Library, and in 1964 as University Librarian. In those capacities he worked with former provost Paul Buck and Professor Merle Fainsod, who successively held the position of director. Upon Fainsod's untimely death in 1972, Bryant was appointed director of the University Library and professor of bibliography, titles that he held until he retired in 1979 as professor and librarian emeritus.

During his twenty-seven years at Harvard Douglas Bryant participated in or presided over the addition of ten new library

facilities, involving himself in every aspect of their planning, funding, and execution. He played a major role in establishing the university-wide ranking and appointment system for professional librarians, which was approved by the Council of Deans in 1972 and placed in effect in 1973. He worked hard to maintain the high standards required in the appointment of men and women to head the libraries of the graduate professional schools and to maintain the quality of library staff in general. His regard for staff morale led to the establishment of the Harvard University Librarians' Assembly, which for the first time provided a regular forum where all librarians could air their mutual concerns. The University Library Council, first convened by him in 1973 and consisting of the chief librarians of the several faculties, proved a powerful agency for coordinating the policies and management of the highly decentralized library system.

Such changes and more were dictated by the swiftly changing nature of librarianship in general, the rapid inflation of costs, and the widely differing needs and expectations of the many constituencies that make up the university. Bryant's tenure at Harvard coincided with the beginning and the astonishing growth of the computer revolution. His approach was cautious but steady: instead of plunging right in, he began by advocating the publication of the Widener shelf-list, hitherto kept in manuscript form, in a series that eventually numbered some seventy volumes, each dealing with a Widener subject classification. Thanks to machine sorting, the books could easily be listed in three ways, all useful to readers: by author, by date, and by call-number. The volumes were widely distributed and were also placed beside their several classifications in the book stack as a useful aid to both searching and browsing; and when a machine-readable catalogue was undertaken by a later administration, the published shelf-lists provided a handy (if sometimes rough) source for quickly inputting the classes they represented. Meantime the library was coming to depend more and more on cooperative cataloguing from the Library of Congress and other sources that came through the Ohio College

Library Center and the CONSER (conversion of serials) Project, and to contribute more and more data to these services. Such activities necessitated the establishment of the Data Processing Department, which evolved into the Office for Systems Planning with university-wide application. They also forced the adoption of the Library of Congress classification system, which effectively split the collections in Widener stack as well as the catalogue into two sections, because the labor of reclassifying the older Widener books under the L. C. system was too great to be contemplated; only now is the old catalogue in process of full assimilation in computer form, while the traditional Widener classes and the current L. C. classes will remain separated on the shelves.

But Bryant never regarded the database as more important than the books and manuscripts it represents. He was convinced by his early experience at the Clements Library under the inspiring Randolph G. Adams, and his later curatorship of the Burton Collection, that collection-building is of primary importance in a research library. Undoubtedly he found it frustrating, as he rose in the professional hierarchy, that increasing executive duties prevented him from personal engagement with the process. His compensation lay in seeking out the best available people to manage acquisitions and funding them as well as the budget would allow. He was notably successful in obtaining grants to supplement university funds when necessary. During his tenure the stock of printed books increased from about 7.25 million volumes to 10 million; the manuscript collections, much harder to quantify, grew at least as rapidly.

Meanwhile he was active in the greater world of national and international librarianship. He was a member of the committee that conceived and oversaw the production of the more than 700 volumes of the *National Union Catalog*, a basic reference work inspired in part by Sir Frank Francis's scheme for the publication of the massive record of the British Library by photography and offset printing from its slip catalog. As automation became a practical reality, he took the lead in establishing the national consor-

tium known as the Research Libraries Group (RLG). At one time or another he was an officer or a member of the U.S. National Commission of UNESCO, the International Federation of Library Associations, the International Federation for Documentation, the Association of Research Libraries, the American Library Association, the Center for Research Libraries, among others; he chaired or served on influential committees in many of these organizations. On behalf of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, or by invitation from the institutions themselves, he consulted widely on library matters in Japan, Turkey, England, and Germany.

Having retired from Harvard, Bryant promptly began a new career as trustee and executive director of the newly-established American Trust for the British Library. Before World War II the Library's collection of Americana and American books had serious lacunae, and during the war a bomb destroyed the section of stack where 6,000 of those books were housed. Through the joint initiative of Viscount Eccles and Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., the Trust was founded in order to repair this grave deficiency. The Trust's second objective was to institute, within the British Library, a Centre for American Studies based upon the renewed collection.

Bryant threw himself into this new effort with characteristic enthusiasm and remarkable success. In little more than a decade his efforts were rewarded by generous grants from foundations and corporations and private donations from hundreds of individuals. He recruited a panel of scholars to develop bibliographies of works to be acquired, on the basis of which many gaps in the collection have already been filled. Microform copies of fragile or otherwise unobtainable materials were secured from libraries in the United States, and the strengthening of resources in American history and culture continues. To cap it all, shortly before he retired from this second career in 1990, Douglas Bryant was able to announce the establishment of the David and Mary Eccles Centre for American Studies in the British national library, and to see it open as a going concern.

With such activities and experience, Bryant was a natural and useful member of the American Antiquarian Society. He attended meetings whenever his manifold duties permitted. At the semi-annual meeting on April 29, 1978, he joined Keyes Metcalf and John William Ward to comment on Richard W. Couper's paper about research libraries, 'Quality Survival: The Quasi Institution.' He was always available for sage advice, and he served twice on the Society's nominating committee and once on its personnel committee.

Doug Bryant was a companionable man, with ready wit and a good sense of humor. He loved good company, good food, and good talk. Beyond his professional affiliations he was naturally drawn to other organizations that shared his interests. For more than twenty years he was a member of the Grolier Club in New York, and for more than forty of the Club of Odd Volumes in Boston, duly serving a term as its president. He and Rene were unfailingly hospitable at their home in Lexington, the scene of many memorable social occasions, large and small. They enjoyed a warm family life with their daughter Heather and their son-in-law John Jordan. Douglas Bryant's latter months, marred as they were by serious illness, were brightened by the birth of twin grandchildren, Douglas and Phoebe Jordan.

W. H. Bond

SHELBY CULLOM DAVIS

Shelby Cullom Davis, who died on May 26, 1994, at the age of eighty-five, was elected to the Society in October 1978, but never attended a meeting. Nevertheless, Davis was himself a fine historian, and one of the major patrons of historical research and teaching in the United States. He held honorary LL.D. degrees from Bradley University and Trinity College (Connecticut).

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