

## *Obituaries*

### EDWIN WOLF, 2ND

One of the great American bookmen of the twentieth century, Edwin Wolf, 2nd, died on February 20, 1991, at the age of seventy-nine. For three decades—about half of his long and productive career—Wolf was librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia. He was also a bookseller, scholar, biographer, bibliographer, book collector, and bibliophile.

Wolf was born in 1911 in Philadelphia, where his father Morris Wolf was an attorney. The young Edwin graduated from the William Penn Charter School when he was fifteen and then went to England, where he attended the Bedales School for three years. In his autobiographical sketch written in 1987, Wolf recalled that on his return to the United States following his ‘polishing’ at Bedales, ‘college . . . was out of the question. By American standards I had too much education.’ Wolf told a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1979 that the lack of a college degree ‘never bothered me. For the very simple reason everybody assumes that I have a Harvard Ph.D., and as long as they assume it, why do I have to have one?’

Wolf began a long career at the Rosenbach Company in 1930, shortly after he returned to Philadelphia. Morris Wolf helped his son find a job in the rare book establishment of A.S.W. Rosenbach (1876–1952), a cousin. Rosenbach was one of the leading rare book dealers in America, and, during the twenty-two years that Wolf worked for ‘the Doctor,’ as Rosenbach was known, he learned the intricacies and eccentricities of rare books,

the trade, and collectors. Wolf's principal responsibilities were to write descriptions of rare books and prepare the company's catalogues. Soon Wolf was pursuing his own bibliographical interests on the side, though with little encouragement from his employer. In 1941-42, Wolf held the post of lecturer in bibliography at Bryn Mawr College. He also wrote. Eight articles and exhibition catalogues emerged from Wolf's pen between 1937 and 1943, the year he was drafted into the United States Army. In his autobiographical sketch, Wolf gave a wry account of his wartime service, which included being sent to language school to study German, although he was assigned initially to a military intelligence post in France and then, at the end of the war, to Germany to hunt for fugitive Nazis. Concurrent with this work, he was able to track down the Fulda Gutenberg Bible and a group of twelfth-century manuscripts that had been hidden during the war, and ensure their safety.

Wolf returned home to his wife Margaret and their children late in 1945, and he was soon back at work for the Rosenbach Company. His principal job was still to prepare the company's catalogues, but he found the business had changed. The Doctor, by then nearing seventy, had developed numerous health problems. Furthermore, Rosenbach's older brother Philip was increasingly involved in the business. In time, Wolf was made manager of the Philadelphia branch of the Rosenbach Company, but his position was awkward because of the Doctor's failing health and increasing depression, and perhaps even more because of the difficulties of working with 'Mr. Philip.'

Meanwhile, between 1946 and 1952, Wolf advanced his own scholarship and began to shape his own identity as a bookman. He produced more than twenty-five articles and exhibition catalogues and began to develop lifelong friendships with librarians, book dealers, book collectors, and scholars around the country. Among them was Clarence Brigham, director of the American Antiquarian Society, with whom he had corresponded intermittently since the 1930s on Rosenbach business. In 1946 Brigham

had contributed an essay to the *festschrift* honoring the Doctor on his seventieth birthday, prepared as a surprise for Rosenbach by Wolf and two Rosenbach Company colleagues, John Fleming and Percy Lawler.

During the late 1940s Wolf's correspondence with Brigham became somewhat more regular, as Wolf's role in the Rosenbach Company's business with the AAS library expanded. For many years, the Society had been both a customer and beneficiary of the Doctor's generosity, although many of the items donated had turned up in the company's basements and garage. A notable set of gifts was the manuscript records of McCarty and Davis, the Philadelphia booksellers and publishers that Rosenbach began to send piecemeal to AAS during the late 1940s. These were, in a sense, the records of the 'family business': after Thomas Davis's death, Moses Pollock, Rosenbach's uncle, owned the firm. The Doctor's first job was in the Pollock bookshop. Wolf eventually assumed the task of parceling out the company records to AAS. By 1948, when he sent a batch of 1837 correspondence, Wolf told Brigham, 'I know each time I tell you I think that this is the last but now though I may think it I shan't say it any more.' More did turn up, but it was after the Doctor's death in 1952, and the newly formed Rosenbach Foundation decided to keep the remainder of the manuscripts.

Wolf resigned abruptly from the Rosenbach Company in April 1952, after a dispute with Philip Rosenbach. When he stopped on his way out of the building to tell Dr. Rosenbach what had occurred, the latter responded, 'I know; I don't know how you stood it this long.' This was one of the incidents Wolf described in the extensive 1960 biography of Rosenbach on which he collaborated with John Fleming. A new and exciting opportunity presented itself immediately when Wolf was hired as a consultant by the Library Company of Philadelphia to survey the collections housed in its old Ridgway Branch. The Library Company's needs seem to have been a perfect match with Wolf's talents. From Wolf's survey came his appointment as curator in 1953, and with

the help of recommendations from four librarians, including AAS's Clifford K. Shipton, a plan was developed to focus the Library Company's collecting on American history and culture to 1880, recatalogue and reorganize the collections, and plan for moving to a more modern building. The rest of Wolf's career was devoted to realizing this plan for the development of the Library Company. Construction of a new Ridgway Library next door to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania was completed in 1965, and under Wolf's care the institution flourished as a great research library with one of the most important collections of early Americana. In 1981 Wolf presided over the festivities for the 250th anniversary of the Library Company, including a series of events, a major exhibition, and a handsome exhibition catalogue. The thirty-two years of Wolf's own leadership of the Library Company were commemorated at his retirement in 1984 in *The Wolf Years: The Renaissance of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1952-1984*, by AAS member Marie Elena Korey.

Wolf was elected to the American Antiquarian Society in October 1953. Accepting his membership, Wolf wrote, 'I am extremely pleased, and feel very honored that I have been asked, and the invitation certainly is a high spot in my life.' In the same letter Wolf wrote, 'you will probably find, in the course of the next months, that few people will ask more questions of the Society than I, for problems in cataloguing and identifying occur with great frequency.' However, in the years that followed, Wolf supplied far more information—and books—to AAS than he ever asked for in return. In his time, Edwin Wolf was, as Ted Shipton described him, 'the ideal member of the American Antiquarian Society.' About the time of Wolf's election, AAS was laying the groundwork for a major project of its own, Early American Imprints. This ambitious project was undertaken by AAS in conjunction with Albert Boni's Readex Microprint Corporation to produce a microprint edition (still available reformatted on microfiche) containing copies of every book, pamphlet, and broadside printed in America before 1801. Late in 1954, Shipton sent

Wolf a copy of the prospectus for the nascent undertaking, asking if the Library Company might be included in the list of cooperating libraries. 'For the immediate future we shall not have to impose upon you to a greater extent than to ask from time to time for microfilms of your unique items.' Wolf responded that the project was 'rather staggering,' but pledged his cooperation. This marked the beginning of much work on Wolf's part to aid in the project's microfilming and bibliographic research. In the AAS archives are dozens of letters spanning the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, dealing with the Library Company's participation in the project. Almost all of them reflect Wolf's own labor. Wolf sent Shipton corrected lists of the Library Company's holdings of works listed in Charles Evans's *American Bibliography*; he located volumes and answered questions about collation and possible variants; and he made arrangements to have volumes microfilmed, and in some cases refilmed, as the project proceeded and then was later extended to cover the 'Shaw-Shoemaker' period through 1819. Three years into the project, Shipton wrote, 'You will have to stretch your imagination to know how grateful I am for the aid you have given our project.' A letter written by Shipton in January 1964 proposed that Wolf be listed as coeditor for the second series, but this was apparently never acted upon.

Other important ways in which Wolf cooperated with AAS during these years enhanced the collections and the scholarly reputation of the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*. As the Library Company continued its cataloguing of rare materials, large groups of duplicates were identified and offered for sale, many to AAS for very modest prices thanks to a special arrangement that Wolf had made with Brigham. One of the first of these purchases was a very rare copy of Bernard Romans's *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (1775) that AAS purchased in 1953 for \$450. The paper that Wolf delivered at the semiannual meeting in April 1958 on the library of William Byrd of Westover, subsequently published in the *Proceedings of the Ameri-*

*can Antiquarian Society*, included a census of more than two hundred surviving volumes that Wolf had located. A supplement published twenty years later added about a hundred more. His 1963 paper on the library established in 1823 at Allegheny College that was published in the *Proceedings*, together with the lengthier report by Wolf upon which it was based, are underutilized sources for understanding the significance of the library of the Reverend William Bentley, one of the college's chief early benefactors. On one occasion when Shipton wrote thanking Wolf for a gift, he catalogued all the roles that this ideal member played: 'You are scholarly, you read papers, you attend meetings, and you labor like a slave to help our publication problems, and now you become a benefactor, too.'

After Marcus A. McCorison was appointed AAS librarian in 1960, he and Wolf developed a close friendship that lasted beyond Wolf's retirement in 1984 until his death. A friendly but real competition existed between AAS and the Library Company for acquisitions, and Wolf and McCorison both regularly wrote annual reports drawing attention to their triumphs. Wolf served on the AAS membership committee in 1969-70 and in 1976 hosted the AAS semiannual meeting at the Library Company. In 1983 he agreed to serve on the advisory board for the AAS Program for the History of the Book in American Culture. Many of his contacts with AAS in the period after his retirement related to his study of early American bookbindings. There was also a running joke between Wolf and McCorison about the walking sticks Wolf carved as a pastime. Wolf often threatened to bequeath the collection of sticks to AAS with an endowment of \$3.78 for their perpetual care. But when the time came, Wolf was able to make a significant monetary gift after selling his father's collection of Nelson-Lady Hamilton materials at a Christie's auction in London in 1990. Although in the note accompanying the funds, he told McCorison that he made the gift 'because of my high affection for you,' the Society responded by establishing the Edwin Wolf, 2nd Fund for the purchase of Americana.

Wolf produced many significant pieces of scholarship in his long career. The bibliography published by the Library Company after his death lists nearly three hundred articles, books, reviews and other published writings. *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (1957) reflected his interest in Jewish affairs in his native city. Among his prodigious output are several major works, including *Rosenbach: A Biography* (with John Fleming, 1960); and *The Book Culture of A Colonial American City* (1988). He served as president of the Bibliographical Society of America in 1966-67 and was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1974. In the spring of 1986, he presented a series of lectures at Oxford University titled 'Books, Bookmen, and Booksellers: Philadelphia as a Pattern of Study of Colonial American Culture.' Wolf helped encourage younger rare book librarians in Philadelphia with regular gatherings, which he called his 'kindergarten.' He was honored for his active role in his city's cultural affairs with the prestigious Philadelphia Award in 1981, and the following year he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. Wolf's active retirement culminated in the publication of his study of book bindings, *From Gothic Windows to Peacocks: American Embossed Leather Bindings, 1825-1855*, in November 1990.

In 1934 Wolf married Margaret Gimbel Dannenbaum, who died in an automobile accident in 1964. Their children are Ellen R. Wolf Gettelman, Mary Wolf Hurtig, and Anthony E. Wolf. He is also survived by his second wife, Mary Paxson Matthews, whom he married in 1965, and four stepdaughters, Sandra M. Wolf, Barbara M. Wolf, Ann M. Wolf, and Jean Farnsworth.

Thomas Knoles

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