

## *Obituaries*

### KEYES DEWITT METCALF

Keyes DeWitt Metcalf, who had been a member of this Society since 1937, died on November 3, 1983, in his ninety-fifth year. Since he was active in the affairs of research libraries from 1905, when he decided to become a librarian at the age of sixteen, to the very end of his life, nearly eighty years later, it is safe to assume that he had one of the longest library careers on record. No assumption, however, is needed to state that he was surely one of the most productive and influential library administrators of this or any other century.

Keyes was born in Elyria, Ohio, on April 13, 1889, the seventeenth of eighteen children. When he was fifteen the family moved to Oberlin, and Keyes's work in libraries began in earnest, for he worked in the Oberlin College Library throughout his high school and college years. At the same time he played varsity football and was captain of the Oberlin track team. Near the end of his life Keyes was to write, 'While I received a good liberal arts education at Oberlin, my experience in athletics, especially in football and track, stood me in better stead in library administration than any of my college courses.'

Keyes married an Oberlin classmate, Martha Gerrish, in 1914. They had a daughter and a son. His wife died in 1938, shortly after they had come to Harvard University. Several years later, in 1941, Keyes married his Boston colleague, Elinor Gregory, the librarian of the Boston Athenæum. This happy partnership brought him joy for his remaining forty-two years.

After his graduation from Oberlin in 1911, long since certain of his professional direction, Keyes enrolled in the first class of

the new school of librarianship in the New York Public Library. Except for two periods when he was called back to Oberlin to serve as acting librarian of the college, he spent the next twenty-six years in the New York Public Library. On his way to becoming chief of the Reference Department (now called The Research Libraries) in 1928, Keyes held assignments in most of the library's divisions where his ingenuity and enterprise left lasting marks. He was influential in organizing the vast book stacks in the library, in introducing the use of microphotography for scholarly purposes, and in forming an outstanding corps of librarians, an accomplishment of which he was justifiably proud. During these years in New York, two of Keyes's lasting interests began to evolve. One concerned the subtleties of building encyclopaedic research library collections and ensuring their accessibility to scholars. The other was the provision of space for library purposes, both in new construction and in renovations.

In 1937, President Conant called Keyes to Harvard, where he remained as director of the University Library and librarian of Harvard College until his retirement in 1955. These were uncommonly fruitful years for the Harvard Library and for the scholars and students who depended on it. Keyes immediately tackled the critical space problem in the Widener Library, and, with his customary inventiveness, succeeded in extending the life of the building indefinitely through a number of changes: by building the Houghton Library to house rare books and manuscripts (1942); by sending 300,000 volumes to the New England Deposit Library, an interlibrary institution which was itself proposed by Keyes (1942); by providing the Lamont Library for the use of undergraduates, with underground stacks for Widener volumes (1949); and finally, by the removal of several subject classes of books from Widener to more appropriate special libraries within the University. In addition, the Pusey Library, opened in 1976, provided additional underground stacks as Keyes had proposed.

During his Harvard tenure, Keyes was assiduous in his efforts to broaden the professional range and competence of the staff. The effectiveness of this abiding enthusiasm is evident in the number of librarians—well over a dozen—who spent some time at Harvard during the Metcalf years and who have since gone on to head other major research institutions. During his directorship Keyes also did much to strengthen the administrative organization of the library, based on the university's principle of 'coordinated decentralization.' Keyes readily understood this system, which is unique to Harvard, and he succeeded in efficiently ordering the affairs of the University Library, which comprises nearly one hundred separate library units. It is fair to say that at the time of his retirement the overall operation of this complex organization was running more smoothly and more effectively than it had at any time previously.

Keyes Metcalf also made notable contributions towards broadening the collecting policies of the library. One of his outstanding accomplishments was the appointment of William A. Jackson to develop the collections of rare books and literary manuscripts and the appointment of Philip Hofer, who came to the Harvard Library to establish the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts and to build up its incomparable holdings. Another far-reaching step that Keyes took was to establish on an official basis the Harvard University Archives, the records of the university that form the oldest continuous archive in the United States. To accomplish the formidable task of organizing these university-wide records into an efficient operation, Keyes asked Clifford K. Shipton, then librarian of the American Antiquarian Society, to come to Cambridge on a part-time basis. Thanks to Shipton's work, this large collection is readily accessible to scholars.

During Keyes's eighteen years at Harvard he was active on the national library scene in many enduring efforts. In view of the chaotic state of the book trade in Europe following World War II, he early saw the need to ensure some means by which

at least one copy of every important European publication would reach an American library. Accordingly, he and a few colleagues founded the Farmington Plan, an interlibrary cooperative agreement. Under this arrangement, publications from Europe and elsewhere were acquired and catalogued over a twenty-four year period. As a result, library resources that would otherwise not be available have been provided for research. Keyes was also one of the leaders in establishing the Midwest Inter-Library Center in Chicago, an institution that houses and makes available to libraries the infrequently consulted research materials transferred to it by member libraries. The center, expanded to include libraries throughout the United States and Canada and renamed the Center for Research Libraries, is a principal component in the national organization of bibliographic resources for research in all fields of study.

Through the Archibald MacLeish and Luther Evans administrations of the Library of Congress, Keyes was a central figure in organizing a number of federal libraries, including the National Library of Medicine, the Pentagon library system, and the Congressional library itself. In these years, he also worked with his usual zeal in the affairs of the American Library Association and the Association of Research Libraries, of which he became respectively president and executive secretary.

In 1955, Keyes became librarian emeritus of Harvard College. After a library career already half a century long, he then launched himself into a new vocation of quite extraordinary dimensions, work that was to occupy him for his remaining twenty-eight years. His lifelong interest in library design dominated this period. His monumental *Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings* appeared in 1965 (the standard work ever since, it is now under revision for a new edition). That work was followed in 1970 by his book *Library Lighting*. After 'retiring' from Harvard, Keyes accepted some 600 invitations to act as a consultant on library building projects in nearly every state in the Union and in every continent but Antarctica.

Alas, even Keyes Metcalf could not make time to accept another thousand invitations.

In addition to the two books on library construction, he published his autobiography through the New York years, *Random Recollections of an Anachronism* in 1980. He completed a second volume covering the Harvard period, which is to be published by the Harvard College Library. A bibliography of Keyes's publications, compiled nearly thirty years ago in 1955, lists two major volumes and nine monographic reports in addition to 162 articles and other works.

This Society was among his favorite associations, and Keyes held his membership in the American Antiquarian Society in very high regard. From the time he became a member in 1937 to nearly the end of his life, he was active in the affairs of the Society and attended meetings faithfully. He was elected to the Council in 1954 and remained in this body for many years. He was a vice-president from 1971 to 1973, when he was appointed secretary for foreign correspondence, a post he held for three years. One of his most important Society tasks, and one to which he was devoted, was the work he did while chairman of the Library committee, serving as advisor on the construction of the building expansion in 1969 and 1970.

In thinking of Keyes Metcalf's life and achievements one remembers a man whose personality comprised an unusual array of distinctive features. He combined a gentle mien with evident power. His skill as a persuasive advocate was strengthened by his cheerful optimism and ready smile. His professional accomplishments—as well, indeed, as his success in his garden—were marked by sureness of purpose, remarkable ingenuity, and hard work. Keyes was clearly a presence in any surrounding. He was also a steadfast colleague and friend.

Douglas W. Bryant

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