

## *Obituaries*

### JOHN ELIOT ALDEN

John Eliot Alden, a complete Yankee, was one of the notable figures in American bibliography during the second half of this century. He was born in Brockton, Massachusetts, on February 14, 1914, and died on October 23, 1991, in a nursing home in East Providence, Rhode Island. A direct descendant of John Alden and Priscilla Mullens both on his father's and on his mother's side, he was the son of A. Eugene Alden and Nellie P. Whiting. John took pride in being a Plymouth Colony man, *not* a Massachusetts-Bay man. Although amused by his genealogy (he took pleasure in an Irish grandmother), he was ambivalent about it and dropped his middle name completely while still being proud of the fact that it had the correct number of l's and r's.

Attending Williams College he majored in modern languages. Elected to Phi Beta Kappa he graduated cum laude in 1935. It was at the suggestion and urging of Clarence Sherman, librarian of the Providence Public Library, that John explored a career in library work and, in 1936, took a job as a reference assistant in the City Library Association in Springfield, Massachusetts. After that experience he entered the graduate school of Brown University and received an M.A. in Romance languages with a thesis entitled 'Aspects of the Peasant Novel Since the World War.' Although he was clearly destined for a career in some aspect of the academic world, the state of the economy did not encourage him to continue on to the Ph.D. Apparently pleased with his library experience he enrolled in the University of Michigan Library School in 1939.

In those days the library school made all candidates become undergraduates because the degree offered was an A.B. in library science. Further, the curriculum required that candidates take

non-library courses in the college. John chose American history, which led him to an anonymously printed Loyalist pamphlet in the William L. Clements Library. Noting that the printer had run out of lowercase q's and substituted upside down d's John discovered that the printer was William McAlpin of Boston, who had printed the piece for John Mein. The attendant had been quite suspicious of John because the library did not encourage undergraduates, but one day while passing through the reading room the director, Randolph G. Adams, asked the young man what he was up to. The result was an invitation to deliver a paper to the Bibliographical Society of America and John's debut as a bibliographer.

After receiving his library degree John went to the Library of Congress as a reference assistant from 1941 to 1943. It was during these years that William A. Jackson was building the Houghton Library and reorganizing the rare book scene at Harvard. He conceived of the idea of appointing a promising young man to serve as his personal assistant for a limited time as a kind of apprenticeship in bibliography. In 1943 he selected John as the first person to fill that position. When his term was up, John stayed on at the Houghton as a cataloguer under William McCarthy, whom Jackson had brought from the University of Texas to head the cataloguing department and create new standards for rare book cataloguing. Thus John was in at the beginning of the most exciting new developments in rare book librarianship of the time. During this period he published a number of stimulating studies: extending his work on John Mein, editing some letters of Henry Adams, and identifying the beginning of printing in Micronesia. In 1943 the Bibliographical Society of America embarked on a program to prepare a series of state imprint bibliographies exploiting the earlier work done by the various WPA inventories. John was asked to undertake a revision of the 1915 study for Rhode Island, originally edited by George Parker Winship. Applying the most rigorous bibliographical procedures, John produced, in 1949, *Rhode Island Imprints 1727-1800*, a work that stands today as a model of its kind.

Many years later, when he ended up in Rhode Island, John found that the librarian at the Historical Society so venerated the book that she assumed the author must be dead.

Following the war a number of American libraries realized that the administration of their rare books required a treatment that was separate from normal library routines and they looked to existing rare book libraries such as the Clements and the Houghton as models. At the University of Pennsylvania the library was being vigorously revived by Charles W. David, who assembled a group of able and promising librarians. In 1946 John was invited to become the first curator of rare books. The task was a challenging one. Although the more obvious rarities had already been locked up, there were in the stacks, which had recently been opened to readers, collections and individual books of substantial importance ranging from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. The significant strengths had to be identified so that directions for future growth could be charted. Procedures had to be developed for making transfers to locked stacks while still keeping control of their location. Rare book cataloguing standards needed to be applied so that the full importance of the books could be recognized and made accessible, and remodeled quarters in the old building had to be brought into being. This was the era when many members of the library profession regarded rare books as an esoteric and elite activity that had little to do with serving the public. There was the inherent danger that, unless resisted vigorously, the rare book collection would become a dumping ground for all the difficult material that did not fit easily into library routines, such as the emerging microforms. Faculty and staff all had their own pet interests they wanted pursued regardless of whether they contributed to the overall strength of the collection. John was well equipped to resist these pressures. At the end of four years not only was the administrative structure in place and running but ambitious programs of acquisition had begun. Two notable achievements were the extensive purchase of Restoration plays building on the already distinguished collections of the Fur-

ness Library, and the growth of the American fiction collection in support of the distinguished faculty in American literature and the newly created Department of American Civilization. In a word, the rare book collection in the University of Pennsylvania was not only well established but had achieved a national recognition.

With all of his achievements John's insistence on his high standards did not meet with an entirely sympathetic response either within the staff or among the faculty. All recognized the great range of his abilities and the importance of his achievements, but the tensions that developed in Philadelphia led him to feel that the time had come to move on. John was also going through a personal transition. It is not clear what his early church affiliation was, but, given his 'Plymouth Colony' background, it is not unreasonable to assume that it was either Congregational or Unitarian. At some point he became an Episcopalian and by the time he arrived in Philadelphia he was attending one of the 'High' churches. From there he made the understandable transition to the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, in 1950, when hearing of an opening as assistant librarian at Georgetown University he applied for and got the position.

During his time at Pennsylvania, through Charles David, John had come to know the director of the British Museum Frank Francis. Francis was bothered by the fact that Donald Wing in preparing his short-title catalogue of English books, 1641-1700, had missed the substantial number of Irish imprints in the museum. Together they cooked up a scheme by which John would get a fellowship to identify them. Soon after he got to Georgetown John received a Fulbright Research Fellowship and was granted leave. He spent February to December of 1951 working on the project whose results were published by the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia. He not only became a confirmed Anglophile but also became deeply involved with the Benedictines. Upon returning, he resigned from Georgetown, went back to England and became a Benedictine novice on the Isle of Wight. In so doing he resigned from many of the organizations to which

he belonged. Clarence Brigham, however, would not accept his resignation from the American Antiquarian Society. In later years John attended meetings as frequently as he could. He took pride in his membership and made it clear that the only published notice of his death he cared about would be the obituary in these *Proceedings*.

At the end of fifteen months John concluded that the monastic life would not suit him and he returned to America. It was a difficult time. Although he was well recognized as a brilliant bookman, his peripatetic career had made libraries reluctant to hire him, certainly not in a position commensurate with his talents and experience. One thing John was sure of was that he wanted to return to Boston. Thus it was that he took a position at the Boston Public Library as bibliographer under Zoltán Haraszti, the keeper of rare books.

The importance of the books and manuscripts in the Boston Public Library's rare book collection was well established. Their organization, condition, and housing, however, left much to be desired. John was to spend the next twenty-two years addressing those problems. He brought to the task his superb skills as a cataloguer, creating tools that brought out many of the hidden strengths of the collection which he emphasized further by his writings about the library's collections. His abilities were now so widely recognized that he was invited to be a consultant and lecturer on book preservation in India for four months in 1958. This no doubt led to being asked to edit the fourth edition of Lydenberg and Archer's *The Care and Repair of Books*, in 1960. Haraszti retired in 1962. John was the obvious successor but the library seemed to hesitate. Much to the probable annoyance of the librarian, Milton Lord, a campaign was mounted under the leadership of Bill Jackson and Rollo Silver which took the public form of a gift to the Library in John's honor. He was made keeper of rare books and participated in the planning and construction of the collection's quarters in the new addition to the library. Throughout all these years his scholarly publication continued unabated. His achievements had now become so well recognized that in 1976 he

received from the University of Michigan School of Library Science their Distinguished Alumnus award on which occasion he delivered a paper on 'The Humanism of Bibliography.'

By 1976, then sixty-two years old, John decided that he had done all that he could for the Boston Public Library and decided to retire. At that same time a project that had been incubating at the John Carter Brown Library for about forty years came to fruition. It was the publication of a chronological bibliography of European books about the Americas, designed to replace, in part, Joseph Sabin's cumbersome, alphabetically arranged *Bibliotheca Americana: A Dictionary of Books Relating to America*, published in twenty-nine volumes between 1868 and 1936. The groundwork had been laid and the funding was at hand. John accepted the position of editor, came to Providence and began work. Initially heading a team of six workers, he took the concept, gave it a concise bibliographical form, provided an elaborate series of indexes, laid out a work plan, and by 1980 had published the first volume, for the years 1493 to 1600, of *European Americana: A Chronological Guide to Works Printed in Europe Relating to the Americas*. This was followed in 1982 by the volume for 1601 to 1650. All his work slips were done in his elegant calligraphic hand from which the typesetters worked with no difficulty. With the project well launched, John retired a second time, leaving the work in the highly competent hands of his assistant Dennis C. Landis. By 1993 the work will be completed covering the years through 1750. As the volumes appeared they received almost universal approval from reviewers. More to the point, they appeared just as preparations were being made for the Columbus Quincentenary. Accordingly, they were immediately put to use and thus given the most rigorous kind of testing by the world of scholars, which has given it the highest praise for not only providing a basic reference source but in opening up new avenues of investigation. Among John's last bibliographic activities was participation in the publications of The Howe Society being carried out by Sidney Ives at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Plagued by circulatory problems during his last days, John maintained his crusty cheerfulness until the end and was eager to talk about what was going on in the world of books. Among the things on the table beside his bed when he died was volume three of Katherine Pantzer's edition of the STC with its extensive indexes. John was one of those people who enjoyed reading bibliographies. He was a complete bookman until the very end.

Thomas R. Adams

### KARL JOHN RICHARD ARNDT

Karl John Richard Arndt (1903-91) began a correspondence with the American Antiquarian Society in 1942 over matters of mutual interest and became a member in 1962. In a letter to AAS Director Clifford K. Shipton at that time, he wrote, 'I am, of course, quite thrilled to be a member. There is only one thrill that will come up to it in the future, I hope, and that will be when St. Peter opens the gates and says "Welcome! A.A.S. members go to the Library on the right."' That, of course, is where he must be now, continuing his research.

Professor Arndt died in his sleep on October 25, 1991. The night he died, he asked Hedi, his wife of forty-one years, to look up some information connected with the project on which he was working, and to read it to him. He urged her to read more rapidly, as if he knew that time was running out for him and that he had much yet to do. That work, and so many other scholarly efforts for which he had already prepared background material, may now never see the light of day unless taken up by other hands. But no one, as he may have realized, would bring the dedication, the knowledge of the subject, or the enormous energy to them that he would have. Karl Arndt worked hard, and fast, and devotedly, and well. But eighty-eight years were simply not enough for him to

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