

time the largest undertaken by an American university. His services to education were recognized by honorary degrees from the University of Chicago, Yale University, and Wabash College.

When he retired from active business life in 1977, R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company published in his honor *To Be A Good Printer*, his reflections on the company and his commitment both to it and to his trade. His ambition to serve both well were amply realized. He was a good printer and a good businessman; moreover he was a good citizen, a good friend, and a good companion. He will be sorely missed.

Mr. Donnelley is survived by his widow, Dorothy, by three children, Elliott, Strachan, and Laura Donnelley-Morton, and by ten grandchildren.

James Wells

LAWRENCE WILLIAM TOWNER

Lawrence William Towner, the late president and librarian of the Newberry Library, was one of those individuals who come along but once in one's lifetime. He was possessed of an exceptionally acute mind, a fine historical sensibility and conscience, indefatigable courage and energy, an irrepressible and earthy humor—all clothed in an all-encompassing affectionate nature. Bill Towner swept all before him as he led his family, his colleagues, and his institution to expanded goals and high achievement. The impulses toward those goals and achievements were propelled by his dynamism, his evangelical commitment to justice for all, and his deep conviction of the crucial value of historical perspective in the making of a fulfilling personal and national life. He was not an overtly religious person, but his sense of stewardship in promulgating values that preserve and extend spiritual and humane values lay at the bottom of his life and work.

Towner was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on September 10, 1921, to Earl Chadwick and Cornelia (Mallum) Towner. He grew

up there and in Des Moines, Iowa. Matriculating at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, Towner graduated from that institution in 1942 with concentrations in history and in literature. Following his collegiate experience, which was greatly enlivened by the presence of Rachel Bauman, the daughter of a Methodist minister, Towner served from 1943 to 1946 in the Army Air Corps as a pilot assigned to the perilous China, Burma, India Theater. Prior to going overseas Rachel and Bill were married at Joliet, Illinois, on November 28, 1943, an event in Towner's life that was pivotal, for Rachel proved to be the very rock on which Bill built his life.

After the war the Towners went to Chicago, where Bill began work on an advanced degree in American history at Northwestern University while teaching the same at the Chicago Latin School. At Northwestern his mentor was the irrepressible Ray Allen Billington, whose own penchants for learning and limerick-making were a match for Towner's. In 1955, his course work completed and possessed of an M.A., Bill and family went to Boston on a Northwestern research fellowship to begin work on his dissertation. The next year he was hired as an instructor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, later becoming an assistant professor. The trip east was a hilariously memorable one according to former Sen. George McGovern, in whose old automobile, with an overloaded cargo of Towner household goods trailing behind, the two young scholars wended their way to Boston and to fame and fortune.

Towner's dissertation was entitled 'A Good Master Well Served: A Social History of Servitude in Massachusetts, 1620-1750.' Billington encouraged Towner to undertake this innovative study of the 'underside' of American history, which was prompted also by Bill's own commitment to social justice. But if it was Billington who urged Towner on, it was Clifford K. Shipton of this Society who pointed the way to success with Bill's dissertation. Towner wrote in his 1974 memoir of Shipton how Ted, to whom Bill had turned for help when his work was bogged down, had set him on

the right path by telling him to scan each issue of every Massachusetts newspaper and to search the manuscript records that lay in the vaults of each of the county courthouses in the Commonwealth, because, as Shipton correctly said, the only sources to the lives of colonial servants were to be found in public records, not in private ones.

In 1955 with Ph.D. in hand, Towner took Rachel and family (now numbering four children: Wendy, Kristin, Larry, and Elizabeth) to the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Virginia. Bill served as editor of *The William and Mary Quarterly* until 1962, under the guidance of Lester Cappon, the third major professional influence in his life. Bill turned the *Quarterly* into the premier scholarly journal of early American history, a reputation that it still holds. Then in 1962 Bill and Rachel Towner moved their family back to Chicago (immediately after which their twins, Michael and Peter, were born) to take up the responsibilities of director and librarian of the great Newberry Library. (Incidentally, without attempting to claim too much, it is possible that Shipton was instrumental in Bill's appointments to both the Institute and the Newberry. In 1954-56 Ted was a member of the Institute's Council, and Ted told this writer he had recommended Towner to Everett Graff, chairman of the Newberry board.)

The Newberry Library, then as now, possessed great collections in the humanities that could be used to delineate the history of European, English, and American cultures in all their aspects from the Renaissance to the present. Building on that foundation, Towner led the remaking of the Newberry Library into an institution unlike any other independent or university research library. Imagination and boldness were Towner's hallmarks. He entranced his board with his enthusiasm and with Rachel's seemingly boundless hospitality. He plunged for great collections of research materials—in 1964 he snatched Chicago's Louis H. Silver collection of rare books from the very grasp of John Fleming and the University of Texas, causing a furor in the international book world (and the

threat of a lawsuit, too); Frank Deering's collection of Americana went to the Newberry, to the disappointment of other Americanists (including the writer); the Novacco and Sack cartographic collections followed—all immeasurably increasing the Newberry's holdings.

Driven by his sense of the obligations of his institution to its several communities—scholarly, lay public, local, international—and by his determination to increase the Newberry's contributions to historical knowledge, Towner sought ways to interject the Newberry into the life of other entities. In recognizing that the library had a responsibility to local readers, Bill brought peace to the scholars and the genealogists. Towner invited Chicago secondary schools to hold their history fairs at the Newberry. He served as chairman of the statewide Illinois Humanities Council, which established an award, named in his honor, for the most risk-taking annual application for support.

Bill was an alumnus of one of a group of small midwestern colleges that used to be known as the 'Little Ten,' but latterly, in these more sophisticated times, as the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, or ACM. One of his earliest moves was to encourage the institutional members of the ACM to establish semester-long residential seminars in the humanities at the Newberry. The seminars were led by ACM professors and were open to students from such member colleges as Grinnell, Carleton, Ripon, and Knox. Also for a time, the office of the consortial organization for the 'Big Ten' was located at the library. Not long after these initiatives were in place, Bill planned centers of learning around which scholars and others could coalesce. The centers were based on specific strengths of the library's holdings. Genealogy and local history formed the core of the Family and Community History Center, which broke new ground in America in the writing of social history. Maps and atlases and related sources became the focus of the Hermon Dunlap Smith Center for the History of Cartography, out of which came the superb *Atlas of Early American History*, edited by Lester Cappon, who came to the Newberry as Senior Fellow following

his retirement from Williamsburg. The Edward E. Ayer Collection on American Indians and the Everett D. Graff Collection on the American West served as the catalysts for the D'Arcy McNickle Center on the American Indian. Thus Bill's vision of making history broadly useful worked to transform traditional uses of collections of traditional research materials into sources for innovative and illuminating works of historical scholarship. Towner's greatest achievement was, with himself as its welcoming and vital center, the transformation of the Newberry into a community of scholars and place of learning, freed from the inhibiting bounds of academic politics and disciplines.

In addition to leading his own institution to new heights of excellence, Towner became a national leader as well, serving as a model to his colleagues among research libraries and as a spokesman for the humanities before the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Congress. Bill, in concert with the late O. B. Hardison of the Folger Library and this writer, in 1971 established the still casual, but influential, Independent Research Libraries Association and was its third chairman in 1975-77.

Towner's formal relationship with the American Antiquarian Society began at our April 1963 meeting when he was elected a member; to his great delight he reported that and his election to the Massachusetts Historical Society as being among his most cherished ambitions. He attended a half-dozen meetings thereafter and at the 1979 semiannual meeting, held in Chicago, he and Rachel were our hosts. Earlier, Towner served as a member of our first Committee on Fellowships, and in 1975 he sent to AAS a large number of issues of miscellaneous American newspapers that we found useful. On another occasion, however, when one of his staff members proposed to send us a sizable collection of printed broadsides, Towner put his foot down—much to our disappointment—we thought we had bagged them! Our closest connections came through our mutual machinations as leaders of the Independent Research Libraries Association by which we attempted to improve the lot of our own institutions through presentations made in

behalf of all fifteen members. In those efforts we met with no little success, in large measure through Towner's eloquence, determination, and well-placed connections, as well as through the skillful enthusiasm of O. B. Hardison, who also was fully involved in those efforts.

But at the Newberry Library Bill Towner's health broke not long after he initiated an ambitious and very costly program to renovate the massive, ninety-year-old library structure facing 'Bug House Square.' His plans, which were ultimately successful, included the addition of a book stack that met every condition for the safekeeping and preservation of the collections, new, sophisticated heating and ventilation systems, the reorganization of the library's public services and staff work spaces, and new exhibition spaces. However, because of his health, the last five years of Bill's twenty-four-year tenure as chief executive of the Newberry were fraught with personal and institutional problems, during which Towner found it increasingly difficult to meet the fiscal goals and obligations that he had set for his library. That this should be so was unfortunate to the greatest degree, for Towner's enormous contributions to his own institution and to the state of the humanities in general deserved no cloud to obscure their brilliance and effectiveness.

Bill Towner retired from office in 1986 at age sixty-five, at which time he was elected president emeritus (and shortly afterwards life trustee) of the Newberry Library. Under normal circumstances his colleagues might have expected several more years of service from Bill as a senior advisor and colleague; but it was not to be. Emphysema had so sapped his energy that Bill was unable to participate in the activities and concerns as he would have liked and had anticipated doing. Lawrence William Towner died in Chicago on June 12, 1992.

The friends of Bill Towner have published a volume of his addresses and writings. It is entitled *Past Imperfect: Essays on History, Libraries, and the Humanities*. Alfred Young, one of Bill's oldest friends, wrote an appreciative introduction to the volume and

readers are referred to it for an account of Towner's life and accomplishments more full than that presented here. However, this writer wishes to record his abiding affection for Bill Towner. He is grateful to Bill for friendship so fully shared and for the example and leadership that Towner gave to all of us who are enmeshed in the care and sustenance of the great independent research libraries of our nation.

Marcus A. McCorison

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.