



# LIBRARY PERSPECTIVES

A Newsletter of the  
Oberlin College Library

NUMBER ONE

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## The Friends Take Off!

"You ought to write this up as an article for publication. Call it 'The ideal way to start a Friends group.'" Those words by one of the participants in the inaugural Friends of the Library events may sound overstated, but there's no question that they reflect the enthusiastic response of those who took part in the founding of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library on November 2.

Faculty, students, townspeople, and alumni who returned to Oberlin from as far away as Arizona and Massachusetts participated in various ways in the

inaugural events. Activities of that day included tours of the libraries, a panel discussion on "Oberlin's Library Today," a membership meeting, a gala reception and dinner, and a celebration of some of the library's special friends. The highlight of the day was provided by Geoffrey C. Ward who delivered the Harold Jantz Memorial Lecture to an appreciative audience of over 200 people.

It's clear that the Friends are off to an enormously successful start. We hope you'll enjoy reading more about their activities in the following pages.

### Membership Approaches 350

As of December 1, a total of 348 people have become founding members of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library, and \$27,900 has been received in membership contributions and pledges.

## Douglass Gift of Books on Organ History and Construction

As both student and Conservatory faculty member, Fenner Douglass spent more than thirty years at Oberlin. He earned the BA in 1942, BMus in 1943, and the MMus in 1949. He began teaching at Oberlin in 1946 as an Instructor of Organ, attaining the rank of Professor of Organ in 1962, while also performing as harpsichordist with the Oberlin Baroque Ensemble. In 1974 he became Professor of Music and University Organist at Duke University.

Active as a performer and respected as a teacher, Fenner Douglass has also been extraordi-

narily productive as a scholar, focusing particularly on the history of the organ in France. Writing that "old organs are our most important link with the great organ music of the past," Douglass has done much to clarify and illuminate that link for organists of our time. His book *The Language of the Classical French Organ: a Musical Tradition Before 1800* (Yale University Press, 1969) provides organists with a thorough knowledge of French organs from the mid-sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. His other major study, *Cavaillé-Coll and the*

*Musicians: a Documented Account of his First Thirty Years in Organ Building* (Sunbury Press, 1980) is a monumental study of the major organ builder in nineteenth-century France, Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (1811-1899).

Fenner Douglass recently donated his library of books relating to the organ and its literature to the Oberlin College Library. These materials complement an already strong area of the Conservatory Library collection, an area that was built in no small part by Professor Douglass's own work at Oberlin.

## From the Director

I hope you enjoy this first issue of *Library Perspectives*. We think it fills an important need to improve the ways in which we communicate news about the library to Oberlin students, faculty, and staff and to those in the larger Oberlin community who are interested in and supportive of the library.

It's obvious to anyone who knows Oberlin that the library plays a central role in the educational life of the College. Perhaps not so obvious, at least to the casual observer, is the fact that our library is rapidly changing, developing, and growing.

Given the dynamic nature of the environment in which we operate, it's essential that we find ways to communicate the nature of the challenges we face as a library, the ways in which we are working to meet the needs of the Oberlin community, and the tangible improvements we make, often as a result of the generosity of others. Hardly a day goes by without my thinking about something that I wish library users and friends could know more about. The addition to OBIS (our online catalog system) of bibliographic records for the microfiche collection of *Early American Imprints* and the fine collection of first editions of Upton Sinclair donated by Janet and Howard Gest, parents of alumni Ted and Don Gest, are but two examples.

As one way of letting you know what we're up to, this newsletter will regularly feature articles on specific library departments. In the next issue, for example, Conservatory Librarian Dan Zager will write about the Conservatory Library, which is unquestionably the most heavily-used facility in the library system.

The recent founding of the Friends of the Library provides an ideal occasion to launch this newsletter. The initial success of the Friends demonstrates the tremendous potential of that organization for providing strong, sustained annual support for the library. There's no doubt that the ongoing assistance of the Friends will markedly improve our ability to support Oberlin students and faculty in their study, teaching, and research. As a regular feature of future issues, we'll keep you informed about the activities of the Friends and the assistance, both tangible and intangible, that they provide.

Please share with us your reactions to *Library Perspectives*. Your comments and suggestions are most welcome.

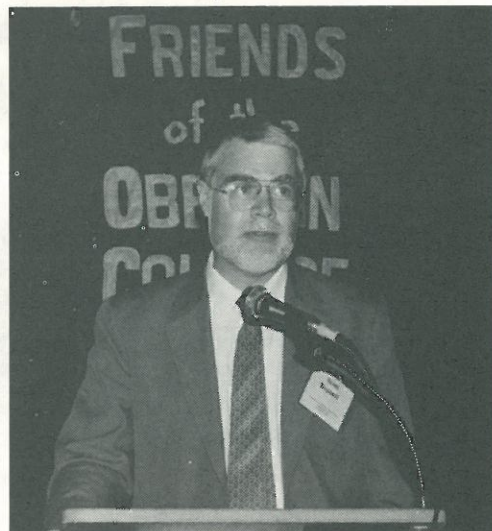
Ray English  
Azariah Smith Root Director of Libraries

*Library Perspectives*, a newsletter for users and Friends of the Oberlin College Library, is published three times a year.

## Friends Officers

The conveners of the Friends of the Library chose Scott Bennett and Mike Haverstock to serve as President and Secretary of the organization during its first year.

### Scott Bennett, Friends President



Scott Bennett, Class of 1960, is the Sheridan Director of the Milton S. Eisenhower Library at the Johns Hopkins University. After majoring in English at Oberlin, he received his M.A. and Ph.D. in English from Indiana University. He subsequently completed an M.L.S. at the University of Illinois. Bennett has held teaching and library positions at St. Paul's College, the University of Illinois, and Northwestern University. A member of the Oberlin College Library Visiting Committee, he took a leading role in convening the Friends of the Library.

### Mike Haverstock, Friends Secretary

Nathan (Mike) Haverstock graduated from Harvard with a major in Latin. A journalist by training, he has been a writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* and an evaluator for the Peace Corps. Haverstock, who lives in Oberlin, is the author of *Visual Geographics*, a series of textbooks on Latin America, and is a contributing writer for *The World Book Encyclopedia*.

## Oberlin's Library Today: A Panel Discussion

As the Friends of the Oberlin College Library convened for the first time on the afternoon of Saturday, November 2, a panel discussion with faculty, students, and librarians provided a context for the day's events. Director of Libraries Ray English, reference librarians Cynthia Comer and Jessica Grim, Associate Professor of Religion Paula Richman, and Peter McCracken, Class of 1991, presented their views of the Oberlin College Library, focusing on current strengths, challenges and directions for the future, new information technologies, and the use of the library by students and faculty members.

In providing an overview of the libraries, Ray English noted that Oberlin is one of only three primarily liberal arts colleges having a library with over one million cataloged volumes. He noted that historically strong collections such as those in art and music "would be the envy of institutions much larger than Oberlin." Through the collaboration of librarians and faculty members, some 20,000 volumes are added to the collections each year. Continuing care for these collections is provided by an exemplary preservation program featuring educational efforts for staff and library users in the careful handling of materials, continual monitoring of environmental conditions for the collections, and a sophisticated mending laboratory that repairs some 3,000 volumes per year. English also cited strengths in the quality of access to these collections, particularly through OBIS (Oberlin Bibliographic Information System), the library's online system. Finally, he noted the quality

of the library staff, individuals with strong educational backgrounds, extensive library experience, and "an unquestioned commitment to public service."

Looking to the future, English stressed the need to maintain strong support for library acquisitions, particularly in the face of an inflation rate for library materials that is higher than normal inflation, a problem that "will likely continue until technology provides alternatives to

printed journals." Like other academic libraries, Oberlin will also have to find the resources to deal with many nineteenth- and twentieth-century books and journals that are disintegrating due to the heavily acidic nature of their paper. While there is much about library facilities that is praiseworthy, English noted that the College must rectify severe space shortages both in the Science Library, which has been at capacity for more than ten years, and the Conservatory Library, whose 1988 addition is only half completed. Finally, English stated that "the libraries must be more fully integrated into the academic mission and educational process of the College, and we must do more to help Oberlin students use libraries and electronic information to the fullest possible advantage."

Commenting on her reasons for recently accepting a position in the Main Library Reference Department, Jessica Grim noted that



*Paula Richman, Associate Professor of Religion*

in her previous position, at the University of California - Berkeley's undergraduate library, seven reference librarians served 22,000 students. At Oberlin the ratio of reference librarians to students makes it a much more realistic proposition that a reference librarian will, in fact, become closely involved with students who are learning how to use library materials and electronic information in pursuit of their research papers and projects.

Associate Professor of Religion Paula Richman illustrated just how such close collaboration between librarians and students is actually taking place, describing the involvement of a reference librarian as an "affiliate member" of her senior seminar. Early in the course of the seminar the librarian discusses the concept of a search strategy with members of the seminar, who then subsequently make individual appointments

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## Friends Business Meeting Convenes

The first business meeting of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library convened at 3 p.m. on November 2, following the panel discussion on the library.

Scott Bennett, Librarian at Johns Hopkins University and Chair of the meeting (see "Friends Officers"), summarized the success of the Friends membership drive, noting that 319 members had joined, a 20% response to the 1,600 letters initially sent out. About half of the members responded during the period of William Roe's membership challenge. As of that day, over \$25,000 had been raised for the Friends.

Asked about some of the ways in which the Friends might want to consider spending this sum, Ray English mentioned the need for funding preservation projects, acquiring such important electronic reference sources as *Historical Abstracts* and the *Religion Index*, and the need for another terminal for LEXIS/NEXIS, a full-text resource which is heavily used. He

also noted that there are a number of major cross-disciplinary microform sets which would significantly enhance the library's collections, and that there are major reference books or book sets which would be important complementary tools for Oberlin's reference collection. He also mentioned the possibility of instituting a Friends of the Library acquisitions endowment.

Scott Bennett next introduced Will Bridegam, Director of the Amherst College Library, where a very successful Friends group has been established for 16 years. Bridegam led a discussion on the purpose of the Friends group, noting that the creation of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library provides an "opportunity to make a truly fine library even better." A lively discussion ensued, and there were many suggestions from the members as to what the purpose and goals of the Friends might be. The ideas brought forth included purchasing rare books for the library's collection, soliciting gifts-

in-kind, supporting professional advancement for library staff, and creating an endowed librarian's discretionary fund. There appeared to be a strong consensus that Friends funds should be used in ways that would address the most pressing needs of the library and that would benefit students directly.

Mary Rosenbloom, an Oberlin alumna and reference librarian at the University of Kansas, then led a discussion on possible activities and programs which the Friends might sponsor. Ideas included holding regional events for Oberlin alumni, sponsoring a variety of programs on campus, planning activities that would increase student interest and membership, and sponsoring Friends publications, such as a newsletter or a dictionary of Oberlin authors.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Friends unanimously adopted the proposed Constitution and Bylaws of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library.

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### Panel Discussion *continued*

with the librarian for further consultation and clarification of their research work.

From the point of view of her own research, Richman had words of praise for the "indefatigability" of the interlibrary loan staff.

Cynthia Comer, Head of the Main Library Reference Department, traced the virtual explosion of electronic information resources in the Oberlin College Libraries, noting that in 1982 the public had access to only one computer terminal, for the OCLC library network. Today one finds in OBIS a fully automated library catalog for

the majority of Oberlin's collections, twelve CD-ROM (compact disc-read only memory) reference products in the Main Library (with others in the branch libraries), and the ability to search the online catalogs of many other academic libraries without ever leaving Oberlin. Looking to the future, Comer noted that the rapidly expanding world of CD-ROM technology must bring with it more standardization of searching protocols as well as a local area network that will make such products more widely available to our library users. One sensed that the

exciting developments in electronic information technology will continue to transform teaching and research in ways that we can only begin to imagine.

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of this panel discussion was the sense of balance between the rapidly evolving electronic technologies and the more traditional concerns of acquiring and preserving such printed materials as books, journals, and musical scores. Peter McCracken, an English major, noted that the Oberlin collections have consis-

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## Special Friends Honored

As part of the November 2 inaugural events surrounding the establishment of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library, the evening dinner and Friends Celebration included the presentation of life memberships as well as honorary memberships in the Friends group. According to the bylaws passed earlier in the day, life memberships may be awarded to individuals who make significant contributions to the Friends or to the library. Honorary memberships may be awarded for outstanding services or extraordinary contributions.

Provost Sam Carrier designated **William G. Roe**, Class of 1964, the first life member of the Friends. Bill Roe provided a marvelous challenge for the Friends of the Library when he offered to match the total of all membership contributions made between October 11 and the inaugural Friends events. During the period of his challenge, 173 members, or just over 50% of the total membership, joined the Friends. Roe's challenge has proven instrumental in the initial success of the Friends.

Provost Carrier also awarded a life membership to **Frederick G. Marks**, Class of 1940. Fred Marks donated his carefully assembled collection of first editions, autograph letters, and secondary literature focusing primarily on the life and works of Richard Wagner. The collection contains a first edition of the full score of *Die Meistersinger*, a first edition of the text of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and an autograph Wagner letter. Editions of Wagner's prose writings, correspondence, and a variety of secondary literature are in-



*Former Librarian Eileen Thornton receives Honorary Friends Membership from George Bent, Chairman of the Board of Trustees*

cluded as well as autograph letters of Franz Liszt, Hans von Bülow, Cosima Wagner, and various performers connected with Wagner's music dramas.

George Bent, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, awarded honorary memberships to **Benjamin A. Custer**, Class of 1931, and **Eileen Thornton**, Librarian of Oberlin College from 1956 to 1971.

Ben Custer enjoyed a distinguished career as a librarian, holding positions at New York Public Library, the Detroit Public Library, the University of California at Los Angeles, and the Library of Congress. From 1956 until his retirement in 1980 he was editor of the Dewey Decimal Classification at the Library of Congress. Ben Custer has been a member of the Library Visiting Committee from its founding in 1989. In that same year he and his wife Emiko Custer, who is also a librarian, established a life income trust which represents the single larg-

est gift to the library by a single party. This trust will eventually become a discretionary endowment fund.

During Eileen Thornton's distinguished fifteen-year tenure as Librarian, the Oberlin College Library enjoyed a period of remarkable expansion and growth. By the time of her retirement in 1971, planning for a new central library, now housed in the Mudd Center, was nearing completion, and branch libraries for the Conservatory of Music and for the sciences had been constructed. Other major accomplishments resulting from her leadership included the establishment of a collection supporting East Asian studies; the pioneering of computerization in the library; the founding of the Oberlin College Archives; the addition of subject specialist librarians for music, art, and science; and the general expansion of reference and other public services.

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## Gests Donate Upton Sinclair Materials

Janet Olin Gest and Howard Gest, parents of Ted Gest, Class of 1968, and Don Gest, Class of 1974, have recently donated their collection of books and pamphlets by Upton Sinclair to the Oberlin College Library. A virtually complete collection of Sinclair's writings, it contains numerous first editions and many volumes that are signed by Sinclair. Mrs. Gest's father, Benjamin N. Olin, 1886-1969, met Sinclair in 1912 and became his secretary in 1913 in Biloxi, Mississippi, later moving with Sinclair to Pasadena where he continued as his secretary for several years. The Gests' son Ted, a senior editor for *U.S. News and World Report*, is a founding member of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library. Given Sinclair's stature as an American novelist, this collection is a welcome addition to the library's Special Collections Department.

## Early American Imprints on OBIS

Oberlin College Library is now in the process of loading over 36,000 bibliographic records for the microfiche set "Early American Imprints" into its online catalog, OBIS. According to Gary Kornblith, Associate Professor of History, this set "is considered to be the single most important collection of primary sources by researchers in colonial history." The collection, commonly known as "Evans" (after Charles Evans, the compiler of the list), contains the full text of all books, broadsides, and pamphlets published in the United States prior to 1800. It includes such important works as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and the Bay Psalm Book.

Until recently these materials, though readily available in the library, have been difficult to access because they have not been individually cataloged. The availability on OBIS of full cataloging records for the collection means

that library patrons will be routinely alerted to the existence of individual titles in the set when they search the online system.

Library users will also be able to search for these materials using "Boolean" logic, which allows very precise and flexible searching. For example, a patron can search the subject word "tea" and limit the date of publication to 1770-1776, to find the record for *A Sermon on Tea* or a song in six stanzas extolling the Boston Tea Party of 1773 entitled "Tea, Destroyed by Indians." Early broadsides on slavery can be found using the keywords "broadsides" and "slavery" and limiting the search to pre-1800 publication dates. Kornblith calls this new access "revolutionary," and notes that he will now be requiring all students in his class on Revolutionary America to use these materials. There is, he says, "no substitute for Evans" as both a teaching and research tool.

## The Friends: Looking Ahead

Now that the Inaugural Events have been successfully completed, the Friends of the Library will focus their attention on consolidating the organization and planning its activities.

### Friends Council

The Friends Constitution and Bylaws, which were passed at the business meeting on November 2, call for the establishment of an Interim Council, which will serve as the governing body of the Friends until the fall of 1992 when the first duly-elected Council will be installed. The Interim Council, which will be composed of those people who played an active

role in convening the Friends as well as others who are appointed by a nominating committee, will appoint committee members and establish the initial direction of the organization.

### Membership survey

All members of the Friends have been asked to complete a survey regarding their interest in participating in the Friends and their preferences for various kinds of programming activities. The survey results will be used to plan future Friends programs and to select additional members of the Interim Council and members of committees.

### Friends Committees

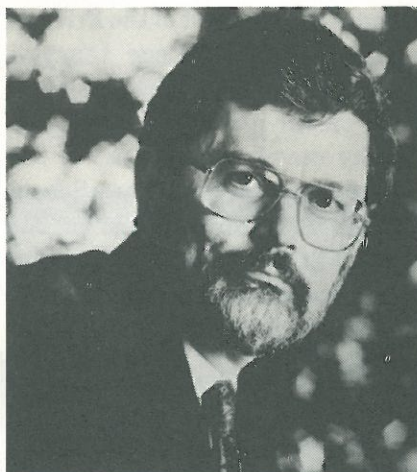
In the near future three committees will be established to carry out the ongoing work of the Friends. The **Program Committee**, after considering the membership survey responses, will develop a series of programs that are responsive to the interests of the membership. Once programs have been scheduled, they will be listed in this newsletter. The **Acquisitions Committee** will make recommendations on purchases for the library from Friends funds. A **Membership Committee** will be formed to develop further the membership of the organization.

## The Harold Jantz Memorial Lecture: “FDR: Builder and Bibliophile”

A full day of inaugural events for the Friends of the Oberlin College Library culminated with **Geoffrey C. Ward**'s delivery of the Harold Jantz Memorial Lecture, “FDR: Builder and Bibliophile.” Mr. Ward, who graduated from Oberlin College in 1962, is the author of two books on Franklin Roosevelt and the principal writer of the Civil War Series which was aired on PBS last year. In his Jantz lecture, Ward explored a little-known aspect of Roosevelt's life and personality, his obsession with collecting, housing, and maintaining his very significant store of books, correspondence, and memorabilia.

Ward began his fascinating and entertaining lecture by noting that, in contrast to his cousin Theodore, Franklin Roosevelt had very little talent for writing. He tried his hand, again and again through the years, at sustained writing projects, but without success. His lack of accomplishment in writing was deeply disappointing, and it was this disappointment which Mr. Ward believes helped fuel FDR's obsession with **collecting** books. Roosevelt was, in fact, incapable of throwing **anything** away, as his collections of everything from stamps, to ship models, to walking sticks would attest.

It was this extraordinary bent for collecting which drove FDR, in 1937, to begin to consider what might be done with the wealth of material he had accumulated. No president prior to Roosevelt had succeeded in placing all the relevant official and unofficial documents from his presidency together in one location for posterity. But



*Geoffrey C. Ward*

for FDR the desire to secure a permanent and singular home for his papers and artifacts was extreme, and he would stop at nothing to accomplish that end. As he exclaimed at the time, “We have a mine for which future historians will curse as well as praise me.” No biographer ever **has** cursed him, Ward noted, for the 16 million pages of personal and official papers which were eventually to be stored in the FDR library.

Roosevelt's efforts to build this library, to be located in his boyhood town of Hyde Park, NY, were not without setback, however. Not only was there significant public and political outcry over the plan to use government funds to maintain the library, but FDR met a major obstacle in the form of his own 84-year-old mother. Sara Delano Roosevelt, it seems, did not feel she had been sufficiently consulted, and had sailed for her annual visit to France without signing her name to the deed of gift for the land on which the library was to be built. Roosevelt, undaunted, went through the charade of the public signing of the document, and then tracked his mother down

in order to coax and plead with her to sign the deed — which, of course, she did.

The ground was broken for the library in 1939, and it was formally dedicated in June of 1941. The library contained exhibit spaces and an “oddities room” for the strange gifts and trinkets FDR had amassed over the years, as well as space for 45 tons of official papers. The war years found FDR frequently at his desk in the library, carefully poring over recent arrivals and additions to his collection.

Scholars to this day find the visit to Roosevelt's library a richly rewarding experience. Not only are the tons of official papers there for perusal, but so are the oddities and miscellaneous personal collections of FDR. It is often these “relics,” noted Ward, which the scholar finds more telling than the somewhat circumspect tone of Roosevelt's written communications. Ward, on his visits to the library, has been particularly struck by such personal objects as a trunk full of old navy capes which FDR loved to parade around in, his old felt fishing hat stuffed into a box, a drawer containing the contents of FDR's desk on the day he died, and (in a box on a dusty upstairs shelf) five pair of the heavy steel braces FDR had to wear as a result of polio, the leather straps cracked and worn. The vividness with which Ward conveyed FDR's character and personality by portraying his interest in book collecting and his determination to build the first presidential library underscored Ward's closing statement that “to get to know (the library) is to get to know its builder.”

**Panel Discussion cont.**

tently provided him with the materials he has needed for his coursework and research. He cited the high quality of the collections and services of the Oberlin College Libraries as the major factor that kept him at Oberlin when he had considered transferring to another college.

The panel discussion successfully provided the Friends a frame of reference for the Oberlin College Library today. The quality of the collections, the various means of electronic access to information, and the experienced and committed staff of librarians were constant threads running through the presentations and questions. It seems obvious that the overall quality of the Oberlin College Library is exceptional. More importantly, it is clear that with the help of our Friends the library is poised to become increasingly responsive to the academic and research needs of Oberlin College.

**Special Friends continued**

George Bent also named **Erwin Griswold**, Class of 1925, Honorary President of the Friends of the Oberlin College Library. Erwin Griswold's distinguished legal career included service as a faculty member and Dean of the Harvard University Law School and as Solicitor General of the United States. Griswold has also been a staunch and steady defender and supporter of the Oberlin Col-

lege Library for many years. In 1945 he established the James H. and Hope E. Griswold book fund in honor of his parents. This major endowed fund now generates an annual income that supports the purchase of virtually all books which the library acquires in the field of government and politics. Griswold has been a member of the Library Visiting Committee since its inception.



*Erwin Griswold appointed Honorary Friends President*

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