



THE FLYLEAF

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FRIENDS OF THE
FONDREN LIBRARY
AT RICE UNIVERSITY
HOUSTON, TEXAS

SPRING MEETING OF THE FRIENDS
THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 8 P.M., FONDREN LECTURE LOUNGE

The speaker of the evening will be Dr. Edward Norbeck, Professor of Anthropology at Rice and editor of the FLYLEAF. He is an authority on Japanese life and culture and spent the year 1964 in Japan engaged in research on Japanese religious sects.

Dr. Norbeck's topic at the FRIENDS' meeting will be "Life in Japanese Colleges and Universities."

A new slate of officers will be presented by the Nominating Committee. FRIENDS and their guests are cordially invited to attend. Another notice of the meeting will be mailed early in March.

Do not weep
Little
Keeper of books
That your charge is
Spattered
Worn
Torn

Books
Are not
Things
To stand on
Shelves
They
Stagger
Warp
Molder
Fold

Books are safest
In units
In bands
Lying close
Lying opened
or
Cradled in hands

Josephine Smith
Catalog Department
Fondren Library

O PIONEERS: THE OLD RICE LIBRARY

The new addition being planned for Fondren Library will be, no doubt, light, modern, and functional. But that is not how architects planned their buildings sixty years ago. The first library at Rice was dark, medieval, and accidental. It occupied a great hall (really meant for other uses) on the second floor of Lovett Hall--the space now functionally, if not quite artistically, chopped up into offices for the President, the Chancellor, the various deans, their secretaries, and others in the administration. The old library made a clean sweep of this area, from the stair just off the Sallyport to the stair at the north end of the building, and the entire width of Lovett Hall, from the windows looking out over the quadrangle to the opposite windows looking out toward the city.

It was an impressive hall, even if a bit dim and shadowy, heavy and overpowering. The general tone of it (and the feeling it gave anyone entering it) was dark brown. The floor was of dark brown cork; the doors and window facings were stained dark brown; chairs and tables were dark brown, the chairs upholstered in dark brown leather; the ornate chandeliers were dark brown, and gave off, through their old-time electric globes, a strange yellowish-brown religious light. Most overpowering of all were the massive bookcases of solid dark brown oak, extending as high as a man could reach, and built into place by obviously master cabinet-workers. Their shelves were deeply recessed, and backed by dark oak partition-walls running down the middle of the bookcase and separating the shelves on one side from those on the other. There was no such thing as a book being pushed through the bookcase from one shelf to another, as in the light metal cases the library has today.

These vast bookcases jugged out from the walls like precipices into a dark sea. Within the bays between each two of them a table with its chairs was

islanded. And on the outward face of each precipice hung a large framed parchment document--the frame being dark brown, of course. Most of the documents were elaborately lettered and illuminated scrolls that had been sent by other universities hailing the opening of Rice in 1912, or appointing some delegate as a representative to the opening. There were, among others, scrolls from Spain and Poland, Rome and the Royal Society, along with a copy of the first Ph.D. diploma ever granted by Rice--to Hubert Evelyn Bray, now Trustee Professor of Mathematics at Rice.

The circulation desk--a mere small office desk with a chair--stood originally just inside the library door nearest the Sallyport, but was later moved to the opposite end of the hall. The Librarian's office, the cataloguing department, the order department, the preparation and repair areas, and the shelves for rare and restricted books (an incredible number of books deemed naughty were restricted in those dear Puritanical days!) were all encompassed in two small offices that were located just off the large pillared porch on the town side of Lovett Hall, and that communicated with the library itself through French doors that were always slamming in the wind.

As with almost everything else at Rice in the early years, the library's first books were ordered personally by President Lovett; but later on, three or four of the faculty organized an informal committee that ordered books. An undergraduate, Miss Alice Dean, was employed part-time to mother the volumes as they trickled in. Even after she graduated she retained the job while she worked on her M.A. in mathematics; and still later she was officially appointed Acting Librarian--a temporary position that she held for nearly thirty years.

In this old library room the bound periodicals were separated from the other books, and were shelved on the side next the academic court; and the current

periodicals and newspapers were kept in the alcove at the north end of the building, in front of a handsomely ornate fireplace (still to be seen in the Chancellor's office) that, so far as living memory goes, never contained a fire. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference works rested nearby. Bound volumes of science periodicals accumulated so fast that they were shortly banished to another room (also dark and imposing) in the Physics Building. This room, which was kept locked to all but a few chosen scientists, lay right across the width of the building at the end of the short corridor just to your left as you enter the main door of the Physics Building.

As time passed, and books accumulated, more and more space was filled in the main library hall. The tables and chairs were moved out of most of the alcoves, and replaced by new wooden bookcases, jerry-built but substantial (and stained dark). Eventually the room grew inconceivably crowded, so that readers could hardly wind their way among the shelves, and it had a sad, cluttered look that ruined the old impressiveness. Of course, all this was of minor consequence, since the library was occupying only temporary quarters anyhow--a matter of some thirty-five years.

Until the early 1920's the area now occupied by the Registrar's establishment was another cavernous hall, empty except for big square sustaining pillars and some scattered tables and chairs. It was the men's alleged study-hall. But the men were summarily turned out, and the space given over to the expanding library. About a third of the area (along the wall next to the cloister) was reserved for study tables and an aisle, and the other two-thirds for bookcases (metal at last) with, for the most part, volumes on history. The private office now occupied by the Registrar did not exist; but at that spot a space was reserved for librarians to work. It was separated from the table-area by a breast-high counter.

Here book-repairing and minor book-binding were done, and books were checked out to users. Not long after this new room was incorporated into the library demesne, a classroom that filled the area now occupied by the Admissions Office was commandeered for still more history books, with another breast-high service counter just to the left of the entrance, and a further expansion of book-repairing facilities.

At this point it may be worth mentioning that the library chased students out and closed its doors promptly at five o'clock every afternoon. For a while in the 1920's an experiment of keeping the library open in the evenings was tried. A graduate student (man, of course, since no girl was supposed to be caught on the campus after six o'clock) unlocked a library door after seven o'clock, and presided over the library till ten o'clock. But, maybe because no girls were allowed, only a few select souls especially eager for knowledge (or about to flunk out) ever patronized the library in the evenings. Furthermore, a few books disappeared, and, worst of all, students wandering through the almost deserted building got into some sacrosanct places (even the President's office) where they did not belong. Therefore the experiment was called a failure, and the library was closed again at five o'clock.

From the first floor of Lovett Hall, the library's next step was downward. Some carpenters, whose shop was just below the present Registrar's offices, were rousted out, and the overflowing collection of bound periodicals was shelved here. Soon afterward, the part of the basement (hitherto a storeroom) under the cashier's wing of Lovett Hall was taken over by the all-devouring periodicals. There was nothing elegant about these basement stacks. The metal shelves were crowded together, the few tables and chairs were battle-scarred, dirt from the ground-level open windows sifted in, the light was poor, the plaster walls

were bare and flaky, the floor was cement, and flooding of the floor was not uncommon when something went wrong with an ancient sump pump.

Meanwhile, the late 1920's, the Chemistry Building had been constructed. Immediately the library took advantage of the new situation. Books on art and architecture were shunted over to a former classroom adjoining the quarters of the Architecture department (which had been moved from the Physics Building to the Chemistry Building); and a major branch of the library, consisting of books and periodicals in chemistry and technology, was established on the second floor of the wing nearest the present Biology Building. This room, with books around the walls, large windows on both sides, a wide space for study tables in the center, and light-colored (even if not very handsome) furniture managed, unbelievable, to look something like what a library should be: a well-lighted functional area with good working space and books ready at hand.

The very last resort of the expanding library was to take over a classroom that then existed just to the right of the main entrance as you enter the Physics Building. The back half of this room was walled off with hardware cloth, and two floor levels were installed behind this screen. A narrow little companionway connected the two levels. The front half of the room was occupied by a clutter of study tables, chairs, and small desk for the student librarian who supervised the place. Books in biology and medicine were stored here. To tell the truth, this establishment, with its wire cage, its narrow stairway, its entire makeshift appearance, was pretty shabby looking.

The coming of World War II slowed the library's growth; but when the war ended and growth resumed, the question dominated all others on the campus: where was the library to expand next? Most people thought that there simply wasn't any other place for it to go. Not even Miss Dean's resourcefulness and

imagination could create library rooms out of nothing, or find vacant areas in old buildings already bursting at the joints with the post-war influx of students.

But then, almost as in a T-V melodrama, with the U.S. Cavalry galloping on scene in the nick of time, rescuers appeared. A new and vigorous President was appointed; new faces appeared on the aging Board of Trustees; and Mrs. Fondren came forward with a royal gift of a million dollars earmarked especially for a library. In 1949 the new great library building, its ground floor larger than a football field, was finished and ready for the takeover; books were gathered in from all the dark halls, dank basements, converted classrooms, and wire cages; and the present Fondren Library began its active existence.

George Williams

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