JOEL SILVER

Rollo G. Silver, in his "The Training of Rare Book Librarians," published in 1961, surveyed the need for competent rare book librarians, and commented on the inability of library schools to provide adequate training for those entering the field. During the same year, the Lilly Library of Indiana University began a program intended to help alleviate this problem and provide intensive practice and instruction to prospective rare book and manuscript librarians. The Lilly Library Fellowship Program was operated throughout most of the 1960s and provided training and experience to fourteen librarians, who, it was hoped, would go on to work in special collections divisions of college, university, and public libraries.

The fellowship program, modest in intention, was an ambitious one for a newly dedicated rare book and manuscript library. Although Indiana University had been collecting rare books and manuscripts for many years, and had established a Department of Special Collections in 1943, it was the gift of the collection formed by Josiah K. Lilly, Jr. in 1956 that spurred the construction of a separate library building to house rare materials. The Lilly Library, named in honor of the Lilly family, was dedicated in October 1960. The recognition of the need to develop new avenues for training rare book and manuscript librarians, the new library facility, and the presence of Lilly Librarian and Professor of Bibliography David A. Randall, together prompted Director of University Libraries Robert Miller, and Associate Director Cecil K. Byrd, to propose to the Lilly Endowment of Indianapolis a fellowship program based at the Library for the training of rare book and manuscript librarians. The Endowment agreed to support for a three-year period a program that would bring two librarians to the Lilly Library each academic year to gain practical experience with rare books and manuscripts, work with the library staff, and obtain exposure to all aspects of the operations of a special collections library in an academic setting.

Joel Silver is Head of Public Services, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.
It was intended from the beginning that the program be open only to those who had graduated from an accredited library school. Although there were (and are) among the most distinguished of rare book and manuscript librarians many individuals who held no library degree, the directors of the program felt that formal training in librarianship would help ensure that applicants possessed a basic knowledge of a number of general aspects of library work, and that their previous studies would allow Fellows to understand in greater depth the functions of a rare book and manuscript library and its role as part of a larger library system.

Announcements of the program were published in various library and rare book journals, and twenty-seven applications were received for participation in the first year. Selection was made by committee, which included Dr. Byrd, Mr. Randall, and later, William R. Cagle, and was based on academic credentials, library experience, and interest in rare books and manuscripts, including that evidenced by personal collecting activities. The sum of money allocated to the Lilly Fellowships allowed a stipend of $5,000 per year for each Fellow, and $2,000 to cover travel expenses for the Fellows and David Randall in visits to bibliographical destinations. The status of the fellowship payments under the income tax laws was a matter of some concern to the Lilly Fellowship administrators. The payments were categorized as stipends, and Indiana University was of the opinion that the fellowships were “non-service, tax-exempt fellowships,” which should be excluded from income. In order to avoid disagreements with the Internal Revenue Service, Fellows were encouraged to set forth in detail on their income tax returns the specific character of the fellowship program, and the qualification of the payments as excluded income under the Internal Revenue Code.

The first two Fellows, William Matheson and Kenneth Nesheim, arrived in the summer of 1961. (See Figure 1 for list of Lilly fellowships.) Although Dr. Byrd was out of the country during the first year and so was not on hand to assist in the direction of the program, he was instrumental in the organization of activities. According to the plan, the Fellows were to be given time on their own for browsing in the collections, which was to be followed by work in several of the library’s departments. A brief period was also allotted each week for guided bibliographical study. Each Fellow was expected to complete a bibliographical project in a field of interest, and work on an exhibition. Finally, each was to participate in book excursions in the company of Mr. Randall. These activities, varying in emphasis from year to year, formed the basis of the “curriculum” throughout the life of the program. Fellows were not permitted to enroll in University courses, but were expected to devote their full time to the program and to their work at the Lilly.

Although the plan as detailed in organizational memoranda may have seemed somewhat rigid, in practice a great deal of flexibility existed. The originators of the program intended that there be some leeway built in to allow for the differing interests of the Fellows. When coupled with David Randall’s relaxed view of
management and administration, the program that resulted was far from rigid. There was thus a large amount of latitude in setting the specific direction and work of each Fellow, and much depended on the initiative and interest of the individual participants.

A recurring theme in Fellows’ written evaluations of the program completed at the end of their terms, as well as in conversations with Fellows twenty to thirty years later, was the lack of formality and rigidity in the program. Many participants viewed this lack of structure as a mixed blessing. A number of Fellows expected more direction than they received, and were surprised at the necessity of choosing so many of their own areas of concentration within the general framework of the schedule. Although this resulted in irregular exposure to some topics germane to rare book and manuscript libraries, and their operation, Fellows’ comments also indicated that the freedom that they enjoyed allowed them to explore old and new interests in greater depth, and to gain perspectives that they otherwise would not have obtained.

The activities within and without the Lilly were designed to emphasize areas that the Fellows were unlikely to have experienced in library school. As the program evolved, Fellows were generally allowed a six-week period for observation and browsing. After this orientation period, time was to be spent in learning about acquisitions, cataloging, and reference work, with the largest block of time devoted to familiarization with practices and procedures relating to manuscripts. A weekly class in bibliography, emphasizing Bowers, and work on chosen exhibitions and projects occupied much of the rest of the time.

The course of activities during each Fellowship term was similar, but individual experiences varied considerably depending on the activities, acquisitions, exhibitions, and publications of the Lilly during the year, as well as the specific library personnel with whom each Fellow was able to work. During the 1960s, many rare book libraries were growing rapidly, and the Lilly was no exception. Major acquisi-
tions of the period included the Mendel collection of Latin Americana, voyages and
travels, and the Boxer collection, emphasizing Dutch and Portuguese overseas
expansion; and several hundred incunabula from the stock of the firm of Lathrop C.
Harper. If the subject matter of a new collection coincided with a Fellow’s area of
interest, there was the possibility of working with that collection, from unpacking and
 accessioning to the preparation of an exhibition catalogue. Individual projects
included the preparation of a list of atlases in the Lilly, together with desiderata, a
survey of the library’s Milton collection, and the compilation of an index to *The
Colophon*. Subjects of exhibitions ranged from the first twenty-five years of European
printing to the War of 1812 to first appearances in print of famous quotations.

Much of this work was done with extensive guidance from members of the Lilly
staff. Fellows worked with Cecil Byrd and William Cagle on bibliography, Doris Reed
and Elfrieda Lang on manuscripts, Geneva Warner on reference, and Josiah Q.
Bennett and David Randall on the cataloguing of early books and the preparation of
exhibitions.

According to the Fellows’ comments, one of the greatest learning experiences of
the year was the opportunity to learn the lore of the world of rare books from David
Randall. Mr. Randall did not meet formally on a regular basis with the Fellows, but
preferred discussions at coffee breaks, lunches, or on the occasion of booksellers’
visits. His experiences in the trade were legendary, his circle of friends wide, and he
enjoyed telling of these to those who were interested. One of the highlights of each
year was the chance to travel to Chicago and to the East coast in Randall’s company.
He enjoyed visiting his friends in the trade, as well as prominent collectors and
librarians. The Fellows’ itinerary would often include stops at book shops such as
Seven Gables, Goodspeed’s, and Hamill & Barker, and visits with collectors of the
stature of H. Bradley Martin, C. Waller Barrett, and Gordon N. Ray. This opportunity
to “see Dave Randall in action,” as one former Fellow described it, and “a startling
introduction to collectors and the book trade,” as another Fellow put it, was the aspect
of the program praised most often by Fellows in their evaluations. The chance to visit
the homes of noted collectors and to be introduced to some of the foremost names in
the trade were opportunities not easily available to many young librarians.

The Lilly Fellowship Program was initially financed for three years by the Lilly
Endowment. After a lapse of two years, the program resumed in 1966 with funding
from Indiana University. The program was by now fairly well-known. Cecil Byrd had
publicized it through speeches and contacts, and his article on the program’s
operation during its first three years was published in 1966.² The reestablishment of
the program brought many applications and inquiries from well-qualified candidates,
including an increasing number from women interested in rare book careers. In
1968–1969, after five years of exclusively male participation in the program, both of
the selected Fellows were women.

The structure of the Fellowship Program under its period of University funding
was similar to that followed in its earlier years. Funding became increasingly difficult to obtain, however, and with the cessation of University financial support after the 1969–1970 year, the program ended. Dr. Byrd has noted that there was a sense at the time on the part of the program’s directors that although continued funding would certainly have been desirable, there was satisfaction that the program had in large part accomplished what it set out to do. Instruction and experience had been provided to fourteen Fellows, and a contribution had been made to the development of rare book and manuscript librarianship.

The Lilly Fellowship Program represented an attempt by one university and one rare book and manuscript library to assist in the training of rare book and manuscript librarians. There was an intention on the part of the program’s organizers not to use it as a means of recruiting well-qualified and trained staff for the Lilly Library, and no Fellow worked professionally at the Lilly after the expiration of his or her term. Although the interests of some of the Lilly Fellows changed, nearly all continued their work in librarianship, and most have pursued careers in special collections libraries, the antiquarian book trade, or both.

The goals and methods of the program reflected the state of professional preparation for special collections librarianship in the 1960s. Relatively few library school courses were taught that focused on the techniques of bibliographical description, the worlds of rare books and manuscripts, and the preservation of fragile materials. One could not yet obtain a library degree that certified its recipient as a specialist in rare book librarianship, nor were there the variety of continuing education opportunities that exist in the field today.³

The Lilly Fellowship Program ceased at the Lilly Library nearly twenty years ago. No other American rare book and manuscript library appears to have adopted a similar program. Funding for libraries is not what it once was, and library school programs for those pursuing careers in rare books and manuscripts have never been better. But something has been lost without the availability of such a program. The variety of experiences available to the Fellows during the single year of their terms is difficult to obtain in the ordinary course of employment in special collections in most libraries today. In looking back at their year at the Lilly, several Fellows stressed the value of daily exposure to the organization and operation of a rare book and manuscript library from the points of view of both the inside staff member and one outside the normal chain of command. The difference that this unique view made in shaping the careers of many of the program’s participants was characterized by William Matheson, one of the first Fellows, as “a sense of opportunity” that emerged from the richness of experience that the program provided. This “sense of opportunity,” echoed in the comments of many of the Fellows throughout the life of the program, does not always emerge from library school coursework or from library career paths and is still remembered by those who were fortunate to benefit from it.
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NOTES


3. A new program at the Columbia University School of Library Service leads to such a certification; the first recipients will graduate in 1991.