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Friends of the Library History

University of Mississippi. Library. Friends

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Friends of the Library History

When classes began at the University of Mississippi in the fall of 1848, the third floor of the Main Building (later named the Lyceum) “was occupied . . . by the Library and similar rooms....” However, there was a big problem: the Library had very few books. President Holmes compared it to “Polphemus without eyes.” Fortunately, an individual by the name of Jacob Thompson soon donated a collection from his own library and even assisted in the purchase of others. If posthumous honors were possible, Mr. Thompson would be named an honorary member of Friends of the Library. Sadly, the University still maintained only “a humble collection of books” by the time Dr. Frederick Barnard arrived. The Library would come to depend greatly on the generosity of Friends, and it still does.

It was 1889 before the Library secured a separate building (Ventress Hall), which it occupied until 1911 when Bryant Hall was constructed. The first section of the current library building was constructed in 1951.

Dr. David Horace Bishop joined the University of Mississippi faculty in 1904 as Chair of the Department of English. Dr. Horace went on to serve as Dean of the Faculty, Dean of the Graduate School, and Vice Chancellor. According to the diary kept by long-time faculty member and administrator Dr. Christopher Longest, on July 1, 1940, “A meeting was called by Prof. Bishop to discuss plans for forming a Friends-of- the-Library Association.” Those present at the meeting were “Milden, Davis, Bishop, Guyton, Longest, Morse, Coulter, McCarter, Tinsley, Eckels, Silver, Bell, and Spelt.” Most of these individuals were well-established and highly regarded members of the University faculty or administration. Longest continues: “After some discussion, it was agreed to appoint a committee to make plans for such an organization to report one week hence.” On the following day, Longest wrote, “I am asked by Prof. Bishop to be one of the special committee to make the report on the 8th.” On July 3, “The special committee (Bishop, Longest, McCarter) met and agreed we will recommend that a Friends-of-the-Library association be formed with an executive committee consisting of some 15 or 17 members. They are to take further steps in organizing.”

On July 8, 1940, there was a “Meeting of some 18 people interested in the organization of a Friends-of-the-Library Association. The committee

provided for in the meeting a week ago report giving a list of about 18 people who are set forth as executive committee of the proposed Friends-of-the Library association. The report is approved.” On July 9, 1940, it was agreed to expand the organization beyond the University: “Invite Will Lewis and Mack Reed to be members of the executive committee of Friends-of-Library.” Both were outstanding Oxford citizens.

The fall semester began, and the first “meeting of the Exec. Com. of the Friends of Library was held on November 20, 1940. Christopher Longest was named Chair, Calvin Wells was Vice Chair, and Pete Kyle McCarter was named Secretary. A subcommittee met on November 18, and on November 20, 1940, Dr. Longest wrote: “Pete Kyle McCarter and I meet in my office and talk over plans for further details of the organization of Friends of the Library.”

University activities slowed down considerably during the World War II years. Dr. Longest occasionally mentioned committee meetings but did not comment on Friends of the Library. On one occasion, he stated that the task of running his department “is made more difficult because a good many teachers are in the service.”

The Friends organization became more active in 1946 when the influx of World War II veterans vastly increased the student enrollment and faculty ranks. Dr. T. A. Bickerstaff of the Department of Mathematics joined Dr. Longest as a leader of the organization. The purpose at the time was to purchase books that the Library could not afford from its institutional budget. No dues were charged, and money donated to Friends was deposited in the First National Bank in Oxford, Mississippi, or in an agency account with the University.

On December 9, 1951, Longest wrote: “I called a meeting for today of Friends of the Library. Those who were present: Bryant, Coulter, Davis, Howerton, Hartin, Dunham, Cabaniss, Harrison, Lyon, King, Robinson, Tatum, Willis, Savage and Longest.” Obviously the group had been active, for a number of new people were now shown as members. Although he did not indicate as much in his diary, Longest might have explained to the group that he would be retiring from the University soon.

In 1953 Friends of the Library was reorganized under the leadership of

Mrs. Mary McClain as president and Dr. John Pilkington as Secretary-Treasurer. This reorganization was prompted by an event destined to have a lasting influence upon the organization. Dr. David Robinson, the archaeologist responsible for the discovery of the ruins of the Greek Olympus, was traveling in the Mideast when a dealer offered him a unique set of material for \$5,000. It consisted of a book in Coptic and a number of papyri. No other book of this kind existed, and Dr. Robinson bought it without delay.

Dr. Robinson, then retired from Johns Hopkins University and teaching at the University of Mississippi, returned to Oxford with the Coptic book and papyri. A group of University faculty - Dean Dudley Hutcherson, Dr. W. Alton Bryant, Dr. William Willis, Dean Victor A. Coulter, and Dr. Longest - then secured a loan from the First National Bank of Oxford to purchase the material from Dr. Robinson. This same group, known as the Executive Committee, subsequently reorganized Friends of the Library with its primary objective being to solicit funds to underwrite this purchase. Mrs. McClain and Dr. Pilkington were selected by the Committee to carry out this objective as well as to obtain funds for other purchases for the benefit of the Library. Dr. Bishop's daughter, Vasser, was also an active member of the Executive Committee.

For the next several years, Mrs. McClain and Dr. Pilkington sent letters to various persons in Mississippi seeking donations to support Friends of the Library. In addition to funds for the Coptic material, Friends sought money to purchase the *New York Times* on microfilm. This would be the first considerably large purchase of microfilm and was based upon the premise that microfilm was the best approach for extending the research capabilities of the Library. The debt for the Coptic book and papyri gradually retired, and Friends of the Library soon had complete ownership of the material. Shortly thereafter, Friends gave the material to the Library. Meanwhile, enough money had also been received in donations for the purchase of the *New York Times* on microfilm.

Classics professor William Willis later left the University to take a position as professor at Duke University and borrowed the Coptic material to take with him, but eventually the material was returned to the University of Mississippi. Some years later when Porter L. Fortune was Chancellor of the University, a decision was made to sell the Coptic materials to Yale

University. With the proceeds from this sale, the University could then purchase the newly found Faulkner papers (found in Rowan Oak) from Faulkner's daughter, Jill Faulkner. However, after the Faulkner papers were purchased, there was still a considerable sum remaining. Since the money had actually originated from the efforts of Friends of the Library, Chancellor Fortune utilized the remaining funds to establish an endowment in the University Foundation to fund the administrative expenses of Friends. This endowment was (and still is) called the "Library Development Fund." It was and continues to be used for such items as postage, stationary, and promotional materials. Furthermore, it enables Friends to assert that no overhead charges are deducted from gifts and dues paid to it.

Friends of the Library continued under the direction of Mrs. McClain and Dr. Pilkington, who wrote donation request letters and maintained financial records. Money continued to be deposited at the First National Bank and the agency account at the University. Friends of the Library was, and still is, an organization separate from the University, although it does purchase books for the benefit of the Library.

Eventually, the University employed Hugh Clegg to seek large donations from wealthy donors. He was assisted by George Street. At that time, it was agreed that Friends of the Library would not solicit funds from possible wealthy donors but would receive small gifts in memorials for deceased persons or in honor of living individuals. This was called the "Memorial Book Plan". In return for donations, Friends of the Library promised to purchase appropriate books and insert a bookplate in each to show that the named donor had given it in memory or in honor of a person.

When Mrs. McClain retired in 1972, Dr. Pilkington became President. During his terms as President, the Librarian (later called Director of Libraries) was first Whitman Davis and then Sykes Hartin, whose tenure (1952-1976) embraced most of the period. After Dr. Hartin retired, the Directors were Calvin James Boyer (1976-1980), Robert Grey Cole (1981-1983), Jean Major (1983-1993), John Meador (1993-2003), and Julia Rholes (2003-2016), and Cecilia Botero (2016-).

With the establishment of the University Foundation, administrators in Mr. Clegg's office wanted Friends of the Library to close its account in the First National Bank and deposit all of its funds into the Foundation account. The primary argument in support of this arrangement was that all donations

deposited into Foundation accounts would be considered tax exempt.

In 1983 Friends of the Library underwent another reorganization. This time a constitution was adopted and an Executive Board was created. Officers at the time were Dr. Pilkington, President; Dr. Ann Abadie, Vice President; Dr. Gerald Walton, Secretary-Treasurer; and Dr. Charles E. Noyes, Membership Chair.

These two accounts and the Library Development Account continue to operate today. A representative of Friends of the Library (typically its President) serves as a budget officer for these accounts; although, at times a representative of the Library (usually the Dean or Chair of the Acquisitions Department) has been added.

Currently, Bibliographers employed by the Library recommend books to Friends of the Library for purchase. The President of Friends approves or disapproves the recommendations and determines which fund to use for purchasing. Purchases are also made due to faculty requests for research material. Occasionally, Friends of the Library submits proposed items to be purchased to the Library, but at no time does Friends purchase books without the approval of the Library.

Although Friends of the Library is an independent organization, it has ties to the Library and has been one of its strongest supporters. Since 1983 Friends of the Library, through its approximately 500 members, has brought approximately \$1,000,000 to the Library and purchased between 400 and 500 books each year, along with considerable microform, to add to the Library's holdings. Purchases by Friends of the Library have added significantly to the reference collection and to such areas as English, modern languages, political science, music, and the fine arts. In addition, purchases made from the Friends of the Library membership endowment have added important items in philosophy, the sciences, and general biography. The membership is proud of its achievements and aspires to do even more in the future.

We have very few records about how the work of Friends, especially in its early days, was handled. Dr. Pilkington did a great deal of work from his home. Friends' records and supplies were kept in the office of the Library Director, and a secretary in the Director's office provided services such as maintaining membership records, sending checks to the First National Bank and (later) to the Foundation, and typing/sending dues reminder letters.

During his term as Director, Gray Cole asked the Executive Committee for permission to utilize certain of the operating funds for employing helpers since Kathy Laurenzo was expending so much of her time on Friends' activities.

Shortly following his retirement from the University, Dr. Charles Noyes agreed to become Membership Chair of Friends. He wrote numerous letters asking people to join. At one time, there was a Friends Membership Committee, with members C. E. Noyes, Mrs. William L. Lewis, Jr., and Mrs. Patrick Scanlon. Upon becoming Membership Chair, Dr. Noyes began keeping membership records, sending dues reminder letters, coordinating work with Dr. Pilkington, forwarding notes and checks to the Foundation, etc. He approached Gerald Walton, who had replaced Dr. Noyes as Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, about the possibility of obtaining secretarial help from the Vice Chancellor's office. Walton agreed, and Ms. Billie Jones began working with Friends. It was she who designed the current spreadsheet for membership data, initiated the procedure for merging addresses with letters, and mailed letters and memoranda.

At that time, Friends had a post office box at the University. Dr. Pilkington or Dr. Noyes would check it regularly and stop by the Vice Chancellor's office to drop off mail and give directions. Eventually, since the two lived across the street from each other, Dr. Noyes and Dr. Pilkington would take things to each other as needed.

When Billie Jones announced her plans to retire, several members talked and agreed that Brenda Brannan, who also worked in the Vice Chancellor's office, would assume the duties. As Brenda explains, "[Billie] taught me the ropes on 'her system' and it was a great one. When Billie or I prepared the letters Dr. Noyes would normally stop by and pick them up. He was always so gracious and appreciative. As his health began to fail and he didn't drive as much, I offered to take them by his house as it was on my way home. We did that for a number of years and it worked out great. Chancellor Khayat began using Carolyn Staton [Associate Vice Chancellor and, later, Provost] in so many projects we were so busy and I usually stayed late and struggled with getting the letters ready and to Dr. Noyes on a timely basis. Anyway, I gave up that job, and [Gerald Walton] took it over. Martha Lynn Bowles helped both Dr. Noyes and Dr. Pilkington, but she mainly worked with Dr. Pilkington. When he had a special letter or request he would always come to her. We all were especially blessed to have had that working

relationship. And I think they appreciated the courtesy and respect and kindness we had for them as retirees. Not everyone has a few extra minutes to spend with folks who are retired! We treated them like rock stars sometimes! At least we always tried to!”

Dean John Meador eventually located a room for Dr. Gerald Walton in the Library, and the current Director of the Library has allowed him to utilize it to this day. Dr. Walton acquired all of the Friends’ materials and began maintaining the membership records, writing renewal letters, sending checks and memos to Lee Ann Cooper at the Foundation, etc. Just as Brenda Brannan had done earlier, he would now drop off and pick up materials at Dr. Noyes’ house. He would, for example, address the envelopes, write the letters, insert a return envelope, and deliver them to Dr. Noyes. Dr. Noyes would then sign the letters, seal the envelopes, put postage stamps on the envelopes, and mail them from his home. At that time, there was actually some triple bookkeeping taking place with Noyes, Pilkington, and Walton often keeping the same information. There were membership lists indicating membership dues payment dates, membership categories, addresses, templates for letters, etc. (Dr. Walton began simplifying some of the procedures, but he did so without advising Pilkington and Noyes.) After Dr. Noyes passed away, Dr. Walton continued performing the same duties but began making trips to Dr. Pilkington’s house instead. Mona Simpson, Administrative Coordinator for the Library, also agreed to deliver items to Dr. Pilkington’s office after he stopped driving to campus.

Following Dr. Pilkington’s death, Dr. Walton began signing the dues reminders as Secretary-Treasurer. Dr. Walton later learned that Dr. Abadie was the Vice President, however, and started having her sign the letters. Pam Rogers, Administrative Assistant to the Dean of Libraries, also offered her assistance with Friends’ activities, and she created labels, put them on envelopes and stuffed the envelopes with return envelopes.

On January 14, 2010, a number of people met to discuss certain of the procedures used by Friends. For example, someone had to check the mail at the University post office, remove the checks and send them with a cover note to Ms. Cooper at the Foundation, make a record that the dues had been paid, etc. It was decided that a lot of excess work could be avoided by simply having the dues sent directly to the Foundation’s post office box instead. Now Ms. Cooper and the staff at the Foundation open the letters, enter the necessary member data, send acknowledgements, etc. Furthermore, the

Foundation periodically sends an updated list to Dr. Walton advising as to the status of the payment of membership dues. They also handle memorial/honor letters and contributions in the same manner.

During Dr. Pilkington's terms as President of Friends, he took a very hands-on approach. Budget statements were sent to him, and he knew at any given time how much money was available in both the endowment account and the memorial account. Further, working with persons in Technical Services in the Library, he purchased all of the books bought by the Friends of the Library endowment and the Memorial Book Plan.

For a number of years, some members of the Executive Committee sponsored a cocktail party around Christmas time. It was hosted by Dr. and Mrs. Beckett Howorth, and following Mrs. Howorth's death, one party was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Will Lewis, Jr. For several years, the cocktail party was followed by a dinner meeting on campus wherein the President and Secretary-Treasurer would give a status report, and an invited Library authority would speak to the group.

Each December Dr. Pilkington would write a letter to all members. The letter was, in effect, an annual report noting such matters as the funds received through both accounts, the numbers of books purchased, and other related matters. He then encouraged members to make a "Christmas gift" to Friends.

After Dr. Noyes passed away, Friends did not have a membership chairman, and no President was elected following the death of Dr. Pilkington. Only small efforts were made to recruit new members (though many ideas were kicked around), and several members died each year. Therefore, if Friends was to remain an active organization, immediate action had to be taken.

In 2014, Ann Abadie, Mary Ann Fruge', and Gerald Walton, longtime members of the Friends executive committee, revitalized the group by adding an advisory board and selecting Dr. Stephen Monroe as president and Dr. Jennifer Ford to serve as secretary. In 2018, Sarah Frances Hardy took over as president.