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The First Ten Years Of The Colby Library Associates

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Rainer Maria Rilke, and on March 9, Professor Gordon W. Smith presented a critical discussion of the poems of Paul Valéry. On April 13, Mr. Kermit Schoonover, of Harvard, gave a lecture on "Arabic Literature," illustrated by early Persian books and manuscripts lent by Harvard. Finally, on May 11, Professor Katherine Gatch, of Hunter College, gave a delightful address on "Shakespeare and Shaw."

The Class-of-1941 Book Prize for 1945 was awarded to Georgia J. Brown. Last year's winner, Frances Shannon, sent $5 from the earnings of her first year out of college to increase the size of the 1945 prize.
sort you are always gathering fruits from seeds planted thirty or forty years before; in other words, that the substantial benefactors of a college give in terms of what they have been made as undergraduates to feel the greatest needs of the institution to be. The ostensible and immediate object of the Associates was to add to the Library budget a fund for the purchase of important books of rather limited interest, especially books that would enable members of the faculty and occasional undergraduates to carry on research, but it was never expected that we should raise a large amount of money by our modest annual subscriptions. The more important goal was to build up slowly and without pressure a group of serious and loyal alumni who could be counted on to testify with increasing clarity to the central importance of the library in an institution of learning. If that could be accomplished, I had no doubt that I might live to see the library at Colby in possession of a really generous income and an outstanding general collection.

The task would have been pretty much hopeless if we had not had something worth talking about to begin with. The general collection, in view of the amount of money spent on it, was surprisingly sound, and in the special Hardy collection we had a group of books which was beginning to attract very wide attention. We had not only the Hardy collection but also the man who assembled it: one of the shrewdest, ablest, and most persistent library collectors in the country. How Professor Weber managed with the funds at his disposal to get that amazing lot of books together will never be quite explicable. It is to him also, and not to the Colby Library Associates, that we owe the fine Robinson collection and the most striking of our other gifts of rare books and manuscripts since the Associates were founded. I hope there will never be any tendency to forget that the huge task of pulling the library out of obscurity was his accomplishment, and that we climbed on the wagon after it began to roll.
After I became a trustee of the college I kept on preaching the importance of the library until in decency I had to do something about it. As an experiment I decided to try to get together twenty-five alumni or friends of the college who would be willing to subscribe five dollars apiece. At this point my fellow-trustee Edward F. Stevens gave me expert and generous help. A distinguished librarian himself, chairman of the Trustees' Committee on Library and founder of the Friends of the Colby Library, he knew better than anybody else who was likely to support such a project. In response to an appeal for a short list of alumni and others who might be approached as charter members, he sent me what was probably the best list of prospects that any solicitor ever had to work with, requesting that he himself be entered as Number One, a position he has always retained. I started down the list, writing personal letters as I could find the time, and soon had my twenty-five. We held our organization meeting in the Librarian's office at Commencement in 1935. Dr. Stevens came and brought Charles Hovey Pepper (another charter member), and Dean Marriner came with me. The five of us elected officers. I was president, Dean Marriner vice-president, and Professor Weber treasurer.

For some years I continued in the same way, trying to increase my list by twenty-five each year. It meant writing a good many letters, but there was never anything like general solicitation. Once, I got a list of all the graduates of the college who had gone on to graduate and professional schools and sent appeals to the first half of the alphabet. The returns were almost flat zero. I found, as I had suspected, that it worked much better if I wrote only to alumni that I knew or who were recommended to me by other members. I did not succeed in adding twenty-five each year, but by 1941 I had got the membership up to one hundred. The correspondence by that time had got beyond me, and I turned over to Mr. Rush most of the labor of soliciting memberships. I regretted deeply losing the personal in-
timacy of the former relationship, and have tried to send personal notes of acknowledgment as memberships were reported to me. This year, with no secretarial help, I am badly behind, but hope to catch up before the end of June. It was inevitable that as the organization grew, it would become more impersonal: in fact, its healthy and continuing growth demanded that before too long I relax the parental bonds and let the organization prove that it could shift for itself.

It was my hope from the first that an undergraduate group of Library Associates might ultimately be formed, and this was accomplished by the officers in Waterville in 1938. Such groups, if made up solely of book-collectors and bookish students, are likely to be precious and anemic. It was wisely decided to create instead a general undergraduate group interested in addresses on literary subjects, and to make the whole thing as informal and social as possible. The success of the scheme has greatly exceeded my expectations. From what I have heard and seen I should conclude that the Library Associates are the most vital general undergraduate organization on the campus. Regular meetings are held with interesting speakers, many of them from beyond the campus; the general public is invited, and the attendance is excellent. Since this is where we get the seeds planted, it may well prove that the undergraduate group is the most important portion of the Associates. Certainly we can be pleased here in having succeeded in a venture which other colleges have attempted with discouraging results.

For the Colby Library Quarterly we owe another great debt to Professor Weber. Other organizations like ours had periodicals, and he was eager to found one. I held inflexibly to the position that no part of the money raised by membership subscriptions should be used to finance machinery for raising more money: that all of it except for a trifling outlay for postage should be spent for books. We are perhaps the only organization of the kind in the country that
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has never printed any letter-heads. It was my conviction that a good part of the resistance that alumni funds run into is due to a not unjustified suspicion on the part of those solicited that too much of the money raised goes to support elaborate machinery and too little of it gets through to the proposed beneficiary. He finally made a proposal which I found irresistible: that he do all the work of editing and raise all the necessary funds himself by personal appeal. The arrangement is outrageously unfair, for the magazine has undoubtedly increased our membership, and is becoming more and more the normal means of solicitation. As to its excellence, I need only point to the high praise it has received in literary columns throughout the country. I hope several readers of this article, when they learn the real state of affairs, will be moved to offer Professor Weber some financial assistance.

I have stressed so much the long-term plans of the Associates that I may seem to have disparaged the immediate results. Actually, I am very proud of the books we have purchased. It should be obvious that a group which began with twenty-five members and now has something like five times that number cannot in ten years have raised any colossal sum. But we have received nearly four thousand dollars, exclusive of the sums contributed for the support of the Quarterly, and during the ten years have purchased 233 books (576 volumes) and 42 manuscripts, at prices ranging from $203.23 to eighteen cents. The card-catalogue of the library begins already to reflect significantly the results of our labors. Our book-plate will become more and more noticeable on the shelves as succeeding decades pass. May we all, at the end of our first ten years, wish ourselves a very happy birthday and unlimited longevity?