



"Foreword" in "The first 350 years of the Harvard University Library: Description of an exhibition"

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Foreword

The Harvard University Library is one of the world's great conservators of the written word, but the institution itself has not been conservative. Its history is not just a story of oaks from acorns. John Harvard's bequest, which created the first library in the English colonies, did not preordain the library's present contribution to learning. That has come about because generation after generation of men (and since 1859, women) have changed the library. Numerous and diverse individuals — young graduates who were "library keepers," modern professionals, Harvard faculty, loyal Harvard alumni, lovers of learning throughout the world, booksellers, Harvard presidents, and more recently foundation executives and government officials — have fostered, along with growth, creative change in response to problems and opportunities. Growth and change have gone together.

Size has been a major incentive to innovation and creative response. But today, the pressures on the Library stem from much else besides size, and Harvard's library problems and opportunities are shared by libraries throughout the world. Effective responses will sometimes demand joint efforts fostered by national organizations or governmental bodies. In other instances, the common good may be well served by an individual librarian who perceives a possibility for creative change and acts on it. But whatever the source of initiatives and whatever their demands, I, like my predecessors, believe that the Harvard Library must participate in solving its generation's library and information problems.

This book illustrates the innovative and influential changes that have taken place in the Harvard Library, from the development of card catalogs and pioneering efforts to foster their use, through new paths in collecting and buildings planned for new purposes, down to

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the development today of advanced computer programs for library functions. It is my belief that the forces that made possible both growth and change are still at work in the University today. As the Library begins its second 350 years, my charge is that it contribute to scholarship through continuing to form great collections and through continuing to deal creatively with this generation's library problems and opportunities.

DEREK BOK

President, Harvard University