

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

NATHAN VAN PATTEN (1887 – 1956)

Nathan van Patten, Professor of Bibliography, Emeritus, and for twenty years the Director of University Libraries, died on March 17.

Dr. van Patten was born at Niskayuna, New York, on March 24, 1887, attended Union Classical Institute, and in 1936 was granted the degree of Doctor of Letters by Dartmouth College. He was a teacher in the public schools, 1907-1917; librarian, Wolcott-Gibbs Library, College of the City of New York, 1917-1920; reference librarian, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1920-1921, and assistant librarian, 1921-1923; and chief librarian, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 1923-1927. In 1927 he came to Stanford as Director of University Libraries, the post that he held until 1947 when he became Professor of Bibliography. From 1952 until 1955 he was Professor of Bibliography, Emeritus, and Curator of the Memorial Library of Music.

Throughout his long and productive career Dr. van Patten was active in many bibliographic organizations. He belonged to the Library Association (Great Britain) of which he was a Fellow, the American Library Association, the Bibliographical Society of America, the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, Theta Chi, the Roxburghe Club of San Francisco, the Grolier Club of New York, and the Rowfant Club of Cleveland. He founded the Arthur Machen Society and, in addition to having what is probably the most complete collection of the Welsh novelist's works, was considered an authority in the field. He was also one of the founders of the Association of Research Libraries.

His professional activities included the publication of many articles in bibliographic, chemical, and medical journals. In addition he was the author of "Bibliography of the Corrosion of Metals", "Literature of Lubrication", "Index to Bibliographies and Bibliographical Contributions Relating to the Work of American and British Authors (1923-1932)", "Printing in Greenland", and "Catalogue of the Memorial Library of Music at Stanford University". Under the imprint of the Yerba Buena Press he also published several items of Californiana.

During his twenty years as Director of University Libraries, a period that spanned the great depression and the Second World War, the book collections of the University more than doubled in size. His great contribution to Stanford was the building of the library collections. His special interest in the Lane Medical Library was reflected in the growth of its splendid collections of medical history. As a result of his acumen and foresight the University Libraries possess many outstanding and valuable research collections, such as the Charlotte Ashley Felton Memorial Library (American and English literature from the mid-nineteenth century to date), the Sir Isaac Newton Collection, and the Memorial Library of Music.

As a librarian Dr. van Patten devoted himself primarily to book collecting. He was a bibliophile with an affinity for the unusual, the curious, the unexpected, and the little-known. He was a collector along the bypaths of literature. Scholars have often noted that, while Stanford sometimes lacks the more or less obvious resources, it is often extraordinarily rich in unique and remarkable ways. Thus, in a manner that might be fully appreciated only by those faculty members who are closest to the book collections, Dr. van Patten imprinted his personality upon the future scholarship of the University.

Dr. van Patten's contribution to the University was both subtle and lasting. The generations of the faculty pass, and the students come and go, but the library stands. Nothing else in the University is more lasting than the library, without which even the creations of the faculty could not survive. In a thousand ways, over nearly three decades, Dr. van Patten helped to shape the future of university research.

R. C. Swank, Chairman
Charles O'Malley
George Parks