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Friends Groups and Academic Libraries

The first university library friends group was founded at Harvard in 1925, in order to provide "the most effective aid" for that library. In all probability, the organization was established to stimulate the flagging enthusiasm of donors, whose benefactions had begun to decline; and it was probably modeled on the first library support organization to call itself a friends group, La Société des Amis de la Bibliothèque Nationale et des Grandes Bibliothèques de France, which had been founded in 1913, and with which Harvard's library director, Archibald Coolidge, had become familiar during a tour and book-buying expedition to Europe.¹

By 1930 there were emulative friends groups at Columbia, Yale, Princeton, and Johns Hopkins, and the number grew substantially during the next four decades. While the process of growth has been substantial, it has undergone fluctuations; there has been a fairly high mortality rate among friends groups. The number swells during periods of poor library funding or rapidly rising costs, and it declines during times of plenty; for example, there were few new groups between 1954 and 1970,² but significant multiplication of them occurred during the decades immediately preceding and following that period. There has also been a tidal ebb and flow as groups have lost direction or membership, or as major projects have been completed. Successive editions of the ALA Friends of the Library Committee publications show that of thirty-five groups listed in 1937, twenty-four were not listed in 1951; and of eighty-eight listed in 1941, fifty-nine groups were not mentioned in 1951, and fifty were missing in 1955.³ However, groups which became moribund have sometimes been reactivated. Groups are presently active in support of about one-half of the ARL libraries.⁴

The typical academic research library friends group was organized by the library director working in conjunction with alumni and faculty. It has about 600 members and a number of membership categories, with dues ranging from \$10 to \$500. The group is governed by a president, a vice president, a secretary-treasurer, and a program chairman; an executive committee consisting of those officers acts as a steering committee for a board of fourteen, which governs the organization. The library director serves *ex officio* on the board.

This typical group raises funds for library purchases, builds the special collections of the library, issues publications, builds community support for the library, and conducts lectures and other library- and book-related social and cultural events. The group raises about \$25,000 each year through dues in order to provide for its activities and to support notable library acquisitions, though this support can represent only a portion of the \$25,000 raised. The activity of the group is furthered by a library staff member who acts as liaison officer, and the library provides the group with some clerical support and office space.

While the group is generally regarded as useful and beneficial, it does present a few problems for its library; chief among them are policy or authority disputes, work overload of library staff, minimal financial contribution, and membership or fiscal problems and complications.

The following statements of missions and goals summarize clearly the theoretical reasons for the existence of such groups. The Johns Hopkins brochure describes the friends' role as "to assume the responsibility of acquainting its members with the resources and needs of the university library and to create from dues or income a fund for the purchase of those materials most likely to enhance the lasting value of the library."⁵ The Rutgers Friends take a more long-term and developmental turn: to "maintain an organization of persons interested in books, to assist in bringing to the library funds for special needs beyond the command of the library budget, to encourage gifts of books and manuscripts, and to cooperate with the librarian and the library advisory board in the development of resources of the library."⁶

Here, I will move briefly from the general to the specific. The Stanford Library Associates, with which I am affiliated, is one of the newer friends groups in major academic research libraries. The organization was established in 1973 by collaboration between an extraordinarily energetic and visionary friend and faculty member, Paul Hanna, and our library director, David Weber, in recognition of the library's need for extraordinary development efforts to help offset materials cost increases—both during budget equilibrium programs of the late 1960s and from recognition that the 1970s and 1980s would probably bring greater constraints. Our friends group assists the library in many ways in dealing with fiscal restraint and its threat to the development and improvement of library research and teaching collections. It also enables the library to acquire extraordinary titles or collections in order to improve the quality of its holdings beyond the capacity of its budget or normal collecting priorities.

The Associates' membership is now nearing 550, having risen 61 percent in the last two years, thanks to hard and productive work by its officers and the library development officer, a splendid program of events, and a

high level of support by library staff. The organization of the group is fairly standard; I will concentrate on useful divergences from the pattern. There is a chairman, a vice chairman, a secretary-treasurer, and a membership chairman. The executive committee consists of these officers plus the immediate past chairman and an elected at-large member from the board of directors, which consists of eighteen members and meets quarterly. The executive committee governs between board meetings, but the board ultimately decides everything from major programs and gifts to the color of the napkins at receptions. We have sought to attract as members prominent California book dealers, collectors and printers, as well as prominent and wealthy citizens, and friends and students who love and use books and libraries.

The Stanford Library Associates sponsor an impressive annual series of programs including lectures, tours, picnics, and dramatic or musical presentations, which are coordinated with special collections exhibits and bibliographic or bibliophilic themes. Last summer, they conducted a library tour of Great Britain, which was a great success, and a William Morris tour of England is planned for summer 1980. A library tour of France is in the planning stages.

The organization has an ambitious publications program including membership brochures, keepsakes, and a highly attractive and informative journal, *The Imprint of the Stanford Libraries Associates*, which contains articles on books, collections and libraries around the world, as well as news of the Associates and important Stanford Library programs. Since the group, as well as our special collections staff, includes lovers of fine printing and a number of fine printers, typographical standards are high. The publications, like the program of activities, represent value given and have helped to increase the size and quality of the friends group.

An additional program element of the Stanford Library Associates is building what Robert Vosper calls the supportive or "contrapuntal" relationship between private book collecting and institutional collection building in this country.⁷ Vosper, a charter member of the Stanford Library Associates and former Library Visiting Committee member (as well as UCLA University Librarian Emeritus and former ALA president), writes:

The interweaving of the private with the institutional tone of collection building in modern research libraries is further evident in the flowering of organized community friends of libraries groups such as the Associates of the Stanford University Libraries in the years since 1950. Not only do private collectors form a significant part of the membership of those generous bodies, but the result in most cases, over and beyond direct gifts of books, is the creation of a special purchase fund which can be deployed more in the pri-

vate mode of book buying than in the routine institutional style. Most important, though, a group such as the Associates provides moral support for the library program and it assures a setting that will be encouraging for private benefactors.⁸

One of the most important and productive aspects of the Associates is the work of a full-time library development officer (whose salary funding is shared by the library and the University Office of Development, and which has been recovered many times over in gifts, endowments, and grants) as the group's secretary-treasurer and library liaison; I will return to this matter shortly. The chief of special collections and his staff, the university archivist, and the gifts-and-exchange head are also regular participants in the group's activities, as are a number of our chief bibliographers. The director of libraries and associate director for collection development also work closely with the group in its activities. We have encouraged a level of exchange and mutual education between friends and the library that is high without being stifling.

The Associates have been active in supporting special collections through gifts and funds, have set up endowments for book purchases, and have played an important role in our current National Endowment for the Humanities matching-fund campaign for books in the humanities. We get a maximum of gifts from the group through periodic, carefully orchestrated presentations of "gift lists," which suggest a number of potential gift items with descriptions, outlines of need, faculty letters of support, or presentations with illustrations, such as photocopies of title pages. The Associates have also visited virtually every branch and coordinate library on campus, and have often presented appropriate books or pieces of needed equipment as commemorations of their visits.

A few remarks need to be made on the theory and role of friends groups. These groups must not exist in a vacuum if they are to realize their greatest potential for library support. From the existing literature and from experience, I would suggest that many libraries have tapped only a portion of the development potential of such groups. Each friends organization should be part of a coherent library development program geared to the larger mission and goals of the library within the developmental context of the university as a whole. A friends group is a segment or a unit, certainly a vital one, of a library's *total* long-range development program, and its members, singly or in groups, offer a number of forms of support and aid beyond occasional gifts for special collections.

An academic library's friends group must be the library's alumni organization — the equal of that of any college or school — even though the library has, technically speaking, no alumni. The friends group has the addi-

tional advantage of being a *neutral* alumni group because the academic library is essentially a nonpolitical agency in an institution fraught with political antagonisms or disillusionments involving alumni and students or campus administrators. Study of the literature on library friends groups revealed no emphasis on the friends as a library's alumni, but I believe this analogy is significant and useful. Their contributions range well beyond books and funds, community relations efforts, and programs which bring alumni, faculty, librarians, and other friends together. Friends groups can be vital sources of information, contacts, and volunteers who help to solicit prospects and to move forward programs of library development of greater scope and significance than the more immediately programmatic results of friends group efforts as such. As individuals, they can provide gifts of collections, individual titles, funds, and bequests quite apart from their activity as friends or volunteers. A friends group is often only one of a number of developmental organizations within a library or university structure; others include visiting committees, campaign committees, volunteer groups, and annual fund committees, each of which has a rather different role in the larger developmental frame, and each of which draws from the resource pool provided by a friends group. Friends groups allow the opportunity to consider and prepare members for service on these other developmental or counseling groups, and for other university volunteer development activity.

It may reasonably be suggested that library friends groups cost more than they are worth in academic libraries if they exist only for their gifts of books or book funds (totaling, on the average, \$7,000–\$10,000 per year). Friends groups should be understood in terms of long-term developmental goals, primarily as a recruiting ground for other developmental activities and as a means of attracting personal gifts and bequests.

At Stanford, we try to bring the library's subject or area bibliographers into contact with the Associates. This is done as a deliberate program of mutual benefit in order to bring friends to a closer understanding of the library's relationship to academic programs, and thus closer to the work of teaching and scholarship that is the essence of our institution, and in turn, to make our librarians more consciously active agents in our development program. In addition to participation in the group's events and meetings, the bibliographers receive basic training in library and university development policies and practices from our library development officer. As endowment funds are solicited or received in support of ongoing library acquisition in a specified area — English literature, for example — the appropriate bibliographers maintain contact with donors, describe specific library needs of faculty and students, and report to donors of specific funds on selected purchases made with fund revenues. This program appears unusual in library

development activities, but has already proved its worth at Stanford in several concrete situations.

Once a library development program is constructed on a friends base, and a level of continuing activity is reached, results begin to multiply. The process of building up to such a level of ongoing activity is rather like the Japanese game of *Go*, in which moves are made in such a way as to create and multiply the largest number of favorable options and possibilities for future moves. Once a level of productive activity is built up, its continued operation is rather like conducting a symphony orchestra, with the development officer acting as conductor or concertmaster.

I will construct an example to illustrate: friends member A is active and effective, has substantial means, and a wide network of friends and acquaintances. Friend A is then asked to serve on the visiting committee. As the result of productive and active membership on the visiting committee, A is asked, along with friends members B and C and visiting committee member D, to set up a blue-ribbon task force to raise endowment money for NEH matching-grant funds. A, B, C, and D, with the development officer and the collection development officer, choose other task force members, including interested, knowledgeable, and articulate faculty and librarians.

As a result of meetings, the identification of needs, and goals, lists of prospects and volunteers, and a variety of activities and solicitations, \$300,000 is raised for endowed humanities book funds, thus bringing in \$100,000 in federal matching money. But, as spin-offs of a raised level of activity and awareness, a \$250,000 literature collection is given to the library (which brings an additional \$80,000 in federal matching money), a task force member pays for a renovated special collections reading room, a friend endows a chair in French, and a whole group of friends, librarians, faculty, and development office staff have an exciting, informative, and productive time working together. I cannot overemphasize the strong sense of community, mutual understanding, and common pursuit of goals that results when such an effort is successfully constructed and executed. It should be noted that throughout such a campaign the committee and the library must work closely with the development office staff. This clarifies priorities, ensures that prospects are not cross-solicited, and can also serve as a program of the library development office, a process quite as important as development work with volunteers or prospects.

This story, or a scaled version of it, could happen to your library. It could *not* have happened without the library friends, without a professional development officer to coordinate planning, staffing, and phasing, or without the willing and enthusiastic participation of volunteers: lay, librarian, and faculty.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that one doesn't make money without investing time and money. Development work in a library is a long-term process carried out over years, decades and generations, and should not be regarded as a short-term, single campaign. The investment in development using library friends as a base is not, however, appropriate only for large, wealthy universities; it can take place in most libraries, scaled and shaped by local goals and available resources. The specific annual contributions of a friends group would often scarcely justify the existence of the group, to say nothing of the investment of library staff effort and office space, but the periodic or annual gifts of such a group should properly be seen as only the tip of the development iceberg; the longer-term investment should be seen as bequests, significant donations of books or endowment, or the action of friends as volunteers in soliciting or approaching other benefactors over a period of years.

It is the role of friends groups as resource and recruiting pools for long-term, ambitious, and multiple campaign efforts that I have wished to underline here. Friends groups should not be seen as ends in themselves for most libraries, but as sources and resources for a range of short- and long-term developmental activities having as their goal the larger financial benefit of the library. Through carefully nurturing those resources, a library can gain better support, better collections and better service for generations of library users yet to come.

NOTES

1. Wallace, Sarah L., ed. *Friends of the Library: Organization and Activities*. Chicago, ALA, 1962, p. 4.
2. Association of Research Libraries. Systems and Procedures Exchange Center. "Friends of the Library Organizations," SPEC Flyer No. 6, April 1974. (News release.) See also _____. *SPEC Kit 6: Friends of the Library Organizations*. 1974.
3. Wallace, op. cit., p. 9.
4. Association of Research Libraries, *SPEC Kit 6*, op. cit.
5. Brewer, Frances J. "Friends of the Library and Other Benefactors and Donors," *Library Trends* 9:459, April 1961.
6. Ibid.
7. Vosper, Robert. "The Private Collector and the Research Library: A Goodly Company," *The Imprint of the Stanford Libraries Associates* 4:11, 1978.
8. Ibid., p. 12.