



# Friends of the Huntington Library

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MANY YEARS AGO A MAN who had expressed considerable interest in the Huntington Library and who felt on sufficiently easy terms with the staff to voice the following said: "I wish there were some way in which I could be more closely associated with the Library." This was before the present popularity of Friends movements, and the only means this person had of expressing his interest was to visit the library frequently and to make a special contribution occasionally to its purchase fund. Needless to say, when the Friends of the Huntington Library was organized in February 1939, this individual was one of the leading movers and was an officer of the board until his untimely death.

The impelling motive behind the association of many laymen with these groups is just such an unselfish desire to participate in the growth of institutions with which they also share a degree of responsibility and a satisfaction in meeting the problems and rewards of libraries. A requisite of a Friends movement is the existence of a group of people who are sufficiently interested in one institution to want to help it and to be willing to work for it. This focus gives the organization a definite objective. For the library such endorsement by the public is very important and impressive.

A library and a Friends movement are comparable to close relatives in a family: they live in intimate association, yet it is imperative that there be a measure of independence on both sides. Liaison is not only desirable but essential. It is frequently achieved by having a representative of the parent organization sit with the Friends board or committees either as a member or guest.

Most Friends groups have their own organization, with charter, by-laws, directors, officers, committees, and specific membership regulations. The last vary considerably with the institution to which the group attaches. For example, some organizations have honorary mem-

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bers; others do not. Some accept gifts in kind in lieu of membership dues. Most of them strive to develop a particular program on which to concentrate their efforts in order to achieve some productive goal.

Two ways in which Friends can be of definite help are through public relations and through acquisitions. In the former the addition of a large membership forms a constituency to which the institution can turn for guidance in time of need. It also acts as a semi-public endorsement of the institution's policies. Unlike colleges, libraries do not have alumni, but most organize their own well-wishers and advertisers. Some groups prefer to have a small number of members who are expected to contribute a large amount in dues; others prefer a maximum number of members who contribute a minimum amount in dues. In some instances the net benefit from dues is negligible after the expenses of organization and membership returns have been met. Nevertheless, the organization may be considered to have served a good purpose if it has won and held the interest of a representative group of people.

For the Huntington Library Friends, the board as a whole acted as the membership committee in the early days. It met frequently, considered names from a variety of sources, and individual directors sponsored the various invitations to join that were sent out. This action resulted in building up a membership of several hundred, and these members in turn became sponsors of their friends. Today there are no drives for membership, but a year around effort is made to supplement the names proposed by members with other eligible prospects. Since members may join throughout the year, the membership year is divided into four quarters so that each member has a full year on the roster each time he renews.

There will be as many attractions for members as there are types of institution. There are libraries, universities, museums, art galleries, restorations, gardens, and rare book collections within libraries. The Huntington Library is unusually inclusive with its art gallery and botanical garden and consequently has exercised a wider appeal to friends than if it were confined to a single function. The membership roster at present includes more than 1,500 names representing national, state-wide, and local interest.

In an early letter to the membership the then president, W. W. Clary, outlined functions fulfilled by the Friends. Among those he named, first, the all important one of furnishing a constituency whose interest would give vitality to the institution beyond that supplied by its own trustees and staff. Next, he stressed that a large number of relatively small contributions amounted to a very substantial sum

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to augment the fixed amounts in the institution's budget. Another consideration was that many really desirable acquisitions fall short of the priority necessary to make them effective recommendations. They would benefit especially by the help of contributions from the Friends.

Clary pointed out the part that individual members might take in the library's program of acquisitions once they understood that program. He also invited members to make known their special interests which they would like to support. In conclusion Clary wrote: "The effectiveness of the Friends organization will increase geometrically in proportion to the number of members. It is our goal this year (1940) to increase the number to one thousand. The goodwill created by such a group spreads far beyond the actual membership. Likewise such a group reaches out like a great net and gathers material aid from a multitude of sources unknown to any one person."<sup>1</sup>

Writing fifteen years later, H. D. Crotty, successor to Clary, said:

The manner in which the Friends throughout the year are responsible for an intelligently integrated enrichment of the Library's collections may be of interest. The Library's Book Committee is of course alert to items which come into the rare book market or are otherwise known to be obtainable. The suitability and sometimes extreme importance of a particular book or manuscript to the Library's holdings is determined in committee, and often when the item seems appropriate to the Friends interests, the matter is referred to us. Subsequently the acquisition may be made by the Friends or jointly by the Library and the Friends. Conversely, we frequently come upon an item which we feel would be an appropriate addition to the collections, the matter is referred to the Director of the Library, and if the suggested gift is wanted, and not already duplicated in the Library, it is secured. These same procedures are followed in the case of prints or other art material.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes, as in the instance of the Isaac Lord manuscript journal and its accompanying T. H. Jefferson *Map of the Emigrant Road from Independence, Mo. to St. Francisco*, a particular acquisition is substantially assisted by an individual Friend who comes forward to supplement the library's part in securing it. Or, a gift may come from a Friend's own collection, and the knowledge that the Huntington Library is already rich in a certain field frequently leads to a transfer of ownership. For example, the beautiful pieces of silver presented this year by four members of the library's Friends long graced their homes, and parting with them must have entailed a painful wrench.

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The library's periodic exhibitions of material from its archives has familiarized the Friends with its interests. A case in point is the Walt Whitman material presented by a Friend whose interest in the Library's Whitman collection was aroused by last year's exhibit in honor of the *Leaves of Grass* centennial.

Another means of apprising the membership of the library's needs is the "want list" which sometimes appears in the *Friends* leaflet. Possibly this appeals to the sleuthing instincts of the members, for the fact is that since the publication of such a list in the June 1955 issue, nine of the twenty wanted items have materialized. Sixty-five individual Friends have presented books, manuscripts, or art objects this year. Along with the contributions of the organization as a whole, these constitute a thoughtful and important increase in the library's holdings.

The germ from which a Friends movement grows is the dynamic interest of a group of men and women in furthering the welfare of a worthy institution. To do this some formality is entailed. First, there needs to be a group of sponsors and articles of incorporation which set forth the objects of the proposed organization. The articles of the Friends of the Huntington Library, signed December 22, 1938, set forth the legal name of the corporation and designate its purposes. After the familiar "advancement of learning and promotion of the public welfare" clause comes the second, to provide funds for the purchase of books, manuscripts, etc., for the enrichment of the library's resources, to provide for the publication of manuscripts and other material, and to provide funds for the cataloging of all books and other material given by this corporation to the library. Other sections take up acquisitions of material for the art and botanical collections.

The number of directors is set at fifteen, and the incorporators act in the capacity of directors until the election of their successors. The number of directors may be altered by amendment of the by-laws, but the purposes of the organization and the requirement of an eighty per cent affirmative vote of the membership for change of either of these sections is part of the Articles of Incorporation. Fortunately for libraries, the legal profession is a bookish one and is unusually well-represented among the supporters of Friends movements. Therefore a Friends group usually will contain one or more lawyers who can guide it through the legal formalities of its activities.

The directors of the Huntington Library Friends happen to be all men at the present time, and they meet throughout the year whenever business requires, in addition to the stated annual meeting for the

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election of directors (on staggered three-year terms) and the annual election of officers and appointment of committees in March. An effort is made to keep books in the forefront at these meetings by having the staff exhibit some prospective purchases. The executive committee meets more frequently than the full board, since of the fifteen board members, twelve are from Southern California, one from Northern California, and two from the East.

The question of how large a membership is desired is fundamental to the plan of every Friends organization. Broadly speaking, it might be assumed that groups would desire the largest possible membership consistent with their plan, but the dues asked affect size. Some organizations seek a maximum financial return and encourage this by establishing several classes of membership at various amounts. Others keep to one class of membership at a nominal annual contribution, on the theory that the informed interest of the constituency is more valuable to the institution than the purchasing power of their gifts. Generally annual fees range from \$5 to \$100 or more, with \$10 striking a popular note. Thus far the Huntington Friends have had only one class of membership with a minimum contribution of \$10, although many members have generously contributed larger amounts.

Different organizations offer a variety of membership returns, such as bulletins, lectures, invitations to teas and dinners, and a choice of publications. In the Huntington Library's plan, publications or reproductions of paintings or other art works have always been an important factor and a happy interchange between the library and its Friends. The library also issues a *Quarterly* for the publication of studies related to the library's collections, and a considerable number of Friends take their membership return in the form of a subscription to this periodical.

Most organizations function better for some social grace, and the Friends of the Huntington Library is no exception. Twice a year the membership is invited by the trustees to a program and tea. Founder's Day (around March 1) is the occasion for an address by a distinguished speaker; Friends Day (about June 1) is marked by a display of Friends gifts and a garden tea under the large oaks adjacent to the library building. Members also are invited to lectures and new exhibitions, and they receive annual reports of the library and special accounts of important Friends acquisitions. To those whose interest is well defined, these seem to constitute satisfactory return, but they cannot be and are not used as bait for the skeptical. To do so would only produce a large number of in-and-out members.

The list of books, manuscripts, and prints purchased for the library

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by its Friends or with their help during the last twelve months is impressive. It ranges from incunabula to a collection of Christopher Morley first editions, and highlights such items as a beautiful set of twelve engravings of the Irish linen industry by William Hincks (1783), an unique copy of Samuel Ireland's *Shakespeare* (1796) extra-illustrated with many of W. H. Ireland's forgeries, a set of Henry Alken's original water colors of the Leicestershire Hunt, an early English dictionary by Rider (1612), and an excellent manuscript journal of the Mexican War. Almost every one of thirty or more items listed in the annual report to the members would justify a descriptive paragraph.

The relation of two groups when one exists only to help the other can be fraught with problems. An obvious step for harmony is to insure that those delegated with the executive responsibilities of the two groups see eye-to-eye on policies, needs, and plans for growth. The Friends of the Huntington Library was not among the earliest such organizations in the country, but its history has been one of consistent vitality and growth. Its board is composed of men of affairs with wide and diverse interests yet who never seem too busy to turn their attention to the interest of the Huntington Library. The concern of the membership at large justifies describing the enterprise as a "share the wealth" movement.

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