

News Release: American Library Association

Public Information Office
American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
312 944-6780

From: Peggy Barber, Director
Public Information Office

Centennial Conference
American Library Association
Chicago

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July 18 - 24, 1976

Robert Bingham Downs received the highest award of the American Library Association, Honorary Membership, on Wednesday, July 20, during the Centennial Conference of the ALA in Chicago.

He was dean of library administration, University of Illinois, at the time of his retirement.

Mr. Downs has had a long and distinguished career as library administrator author and educator. He has served as first vice-president and president of ALA from 1951-53, president of the Association of College and Research Libraries, and president of the Illinois Library Association. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Beta Phi Mu, Rotary Club, Caxton Club, and the American Association of University Professors. He is the author of several publications, including Books That Changed the World and six subsequent titles which discuss the impact of books and reading on society.

The citation presented to Mr. Downs reads:

Through a long and distinguished career as a library administrator, author, lecturer, consultant, educator, association official, and mentor of librarians, you have been steadfastly committed to the profession of librarianship and to adherence to one of its fundamentals: the provision of materials needed by citizens in a democracy so that their intellectual freedom might be preserved. As ALA president during the post-World War II hysteria over subversion and the attempted repression of books and ideas, you provided the leadership which resulted in a U.S. President taking a strong stand for freedom of inquiry and freedom of the spoken and written word. Consequently the tide of censorship ebbed and the atmosphere of fear diminished during one of ALA's notable battles for the freedom of the mind.

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add 1. Robert Bingham Downs - Honorary Membership

As a builder of research collections during your twenty-eight years at the University of Illinois, you were without peer; and you were called upon constantly by your colleagues in the state, in the nation, and overseas to articulate the need for more library resources and the sharing of those resources among libraries. Your numerous studies of individual libraries and your surveys, from Resources of Southern Libraries in 1938, through American Library Resources in 1951, to your most recent British Library Resources in 1973, have enriched the bibliographic literature of our profession.

Pioneer in library cooperation, faculty status for librarians, study and research on library resources, and work with state boards of higher education, you have always insisted that the librarian must measure up to the highest standards of scholarship and demonstrate continuing professional growth. Your Books that Changed the World, and six subsequent titles which discuss the impact of books and reading on society, have had a wider audience both in America and abroad than books of any other librarian.

In your publications, whether surveys, or articles, or books, you have reflected an ideal rarely seen these days in library administration: a combination of the scholar and the librarian. Yet you have always maintained that the library administrator should first of all be a professional librarian.

Consultant to governments here and abroad, recognized by your colleagues in ALA with the Clarence Day, Joseph W. Lippincott, and Melvil Dewey Awards, recipient of honorary degrees from five universities, and, in retirement, still a teacher of librarians and contributor to our professional literature, you are a notable example of the scholar-librarian. The American Library Association in its centennial year is proud to add to your many honors its highest award,

Honorary Membership
Chicago, July 1976

Through a long and distinguished career as a library administrator, author, lecturer, consultant, educator, government official, and expert on librarianship, you have been steadfastly committed to the profession of librarianship and its advancement as one of its fundamental purposes. In the face of the threat to the profession of librarianship during the post-World War II hysteria over subversion and the attempted suppression of books and ideas, you provided the leadership which resulted in a U.S. President taking a strong stand for freedom of inquiry and freedom of the spoken and written word. Consequently the tide of censorship abated and the atmosphere of fear diminished. This was one of ALA's notable battles for the freedom of the mind.