Alexander Moffit (1902-1969)

Alexander Moffit was born at Primghar, Iowa, on March 21, 1902, the son of Cassius Clay Moffit and Harriet (Adams) Moffit. After graduating from Mechanicsville (Iowa) High School in 1920, he attended Iowa State College and then the State University of Iowa, from which he received a B.S. degree in 1926. Afterwards followed an interlude in business during which he was employed as accountant, salesman, and assistant to a vice-president in charge of advertising for a cereal company. Although he retained a keen interest in matters of business to the end of his life, he evidently found the prospect of a lifetime devoted to working for a corporation an unsatisfying one. In 1931, then, he entered the Library School of the University of Illinois, from which he received B.S. and M.S. degrees in Library Science in 1931 and 1935 respectively. While at the University of Illinois he filled various part-time and full-time positions in the library—as exchange assistant, documents assistant, assistant reference librarian, and chemistry librarian.

On August 17, 1929, Mr. Moffit had been married to Catherine Leytze, and two daughters were born to them—Ann (now Mrs. Blaine Murray of Topeka, Kansas) and Constance, a musical-comedy actress and singer in New York. Mrs. Moffit died in Austin on July 18, 1968.

In 1936, when the position of Associate Librarian was created at The University of Texas, Mr. Moffit was invited to fill it. Among the qualities cited in his references at the time were his fine character, his experience, his quiet forcefulness, his technical knowledge, his good common sense, and his executive ability. During his years as Associate Librarian at The University of Texas, he became intimately acquainted with every branch and department of the
library, and this added experience, together with the qualities which he brought to the position, made him the logical choice for Librarian when, in 1945, the position became vacant. Faculty members and others who had occasion to discuss library business with Mr. Moffit were impressed with his encyclopedic knowledge of it, seemingly always at his fingertips. That the Administration and the Board of Regents did not or could not always provide sufficient funds to support certain areas of the library to the extent needed—notably in staff and bread-and-butter books—was not for lack of having these needs pointed out to them in his annual reports. In 1967, having reached the age of retirement from an administrative post, Mr. Moffit was appointed consultant for library development in the University System. He was occupying this position at the time of his death, following a short illness, at the home of a sister in California on May 21, 1969.

In announcing Mr. Moffit's appointment as consultant for library development in the System, Chancellor Harry H. Ransom said: "In 1884 when The University of Texas Library consisted of 1200 volumes, the librarian was also secretary to the faculty and superintendent of grounds and buildings, with the title of proctor. It was not until 1897 that the position of librarian became a full-time assignment. While the library has grown steadily in the intervening years, it has made its most impressive gains during the twenty-two years of Mr. Moffit's administration. His knowledge, devotion, and complete altruism have set a permanent mark on a major national research center." Some measure of exactly what the phrase "major national research center" means may be gathered from the testimony of the late Bertram Rota, a well-known and respected London bookseller.
"The University of Texas," said Mr. Rota, "has the greatest library in the world for the study of literature written in English since 1900." And recently The University of Texas Library was selected by an English bibliophile as one of five American libraries to be included in a book on fifty great libraries of the world. That the eminence of the Library is not limited to literature of the modern period, however, is clearly shown by the statistics that Chancellor Ransom went on to cite: during Mr. Moffit's administration the holdings increased from 770,000 volumes to more than 1,870,000--figures that make this the sixteenth largest university library in the United States and the largest within an 800 mile radius of Austin. This impressive growth in quantity and quality would not have been possible without the efforts of Mr. Moffit, who was fortunate to have the active support of Chancellor Ransom.

Although Mr. Moffit was somewhat reserved in formal relationships, he was quite relaxed with personal friends and with members of a dinner club, who knew him as an interesting conversationalist possessed of an enormous fund of information and a delightful sense of humor. He seldom talked of himself, and few of his more recent friends knew, for example, that during the 1940's he taught in the Department of Chemistry a course in Chemical Literature and Reference Work, a subject which his undergraduate minor in chemistry and his subsequent experience as Chemistry Librarian at the University of Illinois qualified him to teach. Particularly in his earlier years as Associate Librarian and as Librarian, he was active in professional societies and served on various committees in regional and national library organizations. Of these he was a member of the American Library Association, the Southwestern Library Association, the Texas
Library Association, and the Iowa State Historical Association. Although Mr. Moffitt was not a prolific contributor to professional journals, he published the following articles and review:

ARTICLES


REVIEW


[Signature]

Norman Hackerman
President of the University of Texas at Austin

[Signature]

Eugene W. Nelson
Secretary of the General Faculty

These resolutions were prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Ira Iscoe, Ernest J. Lovell, Lorene N. Mozley and C. L. Cline, Chairman.