MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
DAVID E. KASER
(1924 – 2017)

Distinguished Professor Emeritus David Kaser devoted his eighteen years at Indiana University to enlightening and mentoring future librarians and researchers in library and information science. His death in March, 2017 has provided his former students, colleagues, and other admirers with the opportunity to appreciate and respect his well-lived life. Professor Kaser was the senior library historian of his generation and one of the most prominent academic librarians of his time. He inspired generations of students through his sound scholarship and lively, spirited teaching. With special expertise in academic library management and buildings, his international consultancies shaped numerous library buildings and brought together students from around the world.

Born in Mishawaka, Indiana, David Kaser was the grandson of northern Indiana farmers. His father had a lifelong enthusiasm for the theater and devoted much of his life to writing for the amateur stage. As a high school student, David Kaser was active in theater and music groups, lettered in track and cross-country, and was voted “Most Popular Boy.” After graduating from high school he enrolled in North Georgia College, but his studies were interrupted two years later when he joined the U.S. Army. During World War II he saw combat in the European, African, and Middle East campaigns as well as serving in Alaska. A voracious reader, he carried a copy of *The Pocket Book of English Verse* in the turret of his tank. By the time it fell apart, he had memorized many of the poems that he would quote, years later, during his lectures.

Following his military service, Kaser enrolled in Houghton College in New York, where he completed his undergraduate education. He was working as a student assistant in the college library when he met Jane Jewell; they married in 1950, the year after Kaser received his B.A. in English. He went on to complete an M.A. in English at Notre Dame and an A.M.L.S. and Ph.D. in library science at the University of Michigan.

By the time he completed his doctoral dissertation, David Kaser had begun his career in librarianship at Ball State Teachers College. While there he taught courses on history of books and printing and research methods. In 1956 the Kasers moved to St. Louis when he became chief of library acquisitions; he was later promoted to director of libraries for technical services.

In 1960 Professor Kaser accepted the directorship of the pioneering Joint University Libraries at Vanderbilt University and was named professor of library science at George Peabody College. During his eight years at Vanderbilt, he initiated a substantial collection development program and oversaw the addition of a large wing to the central library. David and Jane Kaser’s two children, John and Kathleen, were born in Nashville.

The family moved again in 1968, when Kaser became director of the prestigious Cornell University Libraries. While at Cornell, he also taught courses in library administration at Syracuse University. He introduced computer operations in acquisitions and encouraged the library’s participation in OCLC, a nationwide library database. He also oversaw a dramatic expansion of Cornell’s college libraries and the growth of manuscripts and archives collections.
His leadership of the Cornell librarians and staff was exemplified by his directorship of one of the first library strategic planning exercises, conducted with funding from the Council on Library Resources and guidance from the American Management Association’s Center for planning. His tenure also included providing library service during campus protests, when students held hostage the engineering library and smashed windows on the ground floor of the main library building.

David Kaser moved easily among library directors and university administrators. In 1968-69 he served as president of the American Library Association’s Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL); he also edited the association’s highly-regarded journal *College & Research Libraries*, from 1963 to 1969. Under his leadership the ACRL board advocated for the academic status of librarians. In 1972, he led an inquiry team from the American Library Association that found racial discrimination in staff promotions at the Library of Congress. Thanks to his efforts, that Library implemented fairer hiring practices. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and also served as international president of Beta Phi Mu, the honor society in his field.

David Kaser claimed that he had been advised, “Whenever you look for information on a particular subject and do not find any, then you should write a book or an article on the subject yourself.” He ultimately wrote, edited, or co-authored fifteen books, from *Books and Libraries in Camp and Battle: The Civil War Experience* (1984) to *Book Pirating in Taiwan* (1969), which received the ultimate compliment of being pirated by a Taiwanese book publisher. He contributed some 250 articles, notes, and reviews; edited two national journals; refereed numerous manuscripts; and participated in many colloquia. In addition to a Guggenheim Fellowship, he received external funding for his work from such sources as the National Historical Publications Commission, the Pacific Cultural Foundation, and the American Philosophical Society.

Professor Kaser long maintained an active presence in many parts of the world, researching, lecturing, and consulting for such diverse agencies as the Asian Development Bank and the Agency for International Development. Over his career he handled more than 350 library consultancies on academic library management and library buildings.

In 1973 the Kasers moved to Bloomington, where IU had lured him to take up teaching full time in the Graduate Library School (later School of Library and Information Science). For years, experienced students advised newcomers to include at least one “Kaser course” in their programs. Professor Kaser taught courses on “History of the Book,” “History of American Libraries,” “The Academic Library,” and “International Librarianship.” He described his teaching philosophy in his very Kaserly autobiography, *Just Lucky, I Guess: My Adventures as a Hoosier Librarian* (2000): “I always attempted to address my instruction to the highest possible stage of their comprehension, where even the best students had to strive to benefit from it fully, and then I would do such remediation outside of class time as needy students were willing to take. I felt that doing this was surely better than the alternative of teaching to the lowest common denominator among them.”

Professor Kaser taught regularly in Bloomington and at IUPUI, and he offered frequent
lecture courses across the state through the IHETS television system. He served on many advisory and dissertation research committees and directed fifty doctoral dissertations on topics ranging from the Vatican Library and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to the need and tactics of fund raising in publicly-supported academic libraries. The University presented him a Distinguished Teaching Award in 1981 and the rank of Distinguished Professor in 1986. In 1989 former students John V. Richardson, Jr. and Jinnie Y. Davis co-edited a Festschrift in his honor, titled *Academic Libraries: Past, Present and Future*. Upon his retirement from active teaching his former students and admirers endowed a University lectureship in his name. The Kaser Lectures continue to challenge and enlighten the next generations.

We request that this memorial resolution be presented to the members of the Bloomington Faculty Council and that a copy be preserved in its archives. We also request that after its presentation in the Council copies be sent to David Kaser’s children.

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