

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

Edited by Joseph W. Barnes, *City Historian*

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## From Books to Multimedia

A History of the Reynolds Library and the  
Reynolds Audio-Visual Department of the  
Rochester Public Library

by Joseph W. Barnes and Robert W. Barnes

Many Rochesterians, particularly educators, students, and those with a serious interest in film and records, are aware of the services provided by the Reynolds Audio- Visual Department of the Rochester Public Library. But few are aware of the origins of this unique institution. The Reynolds Department, said to contain the nation's largest public film collection, is the product of special cooperation between private philanthropy and public initiative. This year marks the ninetieth anniversary of the Reynolds Library, Incorporated, and is an appropriate occasion to review its early history as well as its role during the past twenty- five years as the financial patron of the Public Library's outstanding non- print collection.

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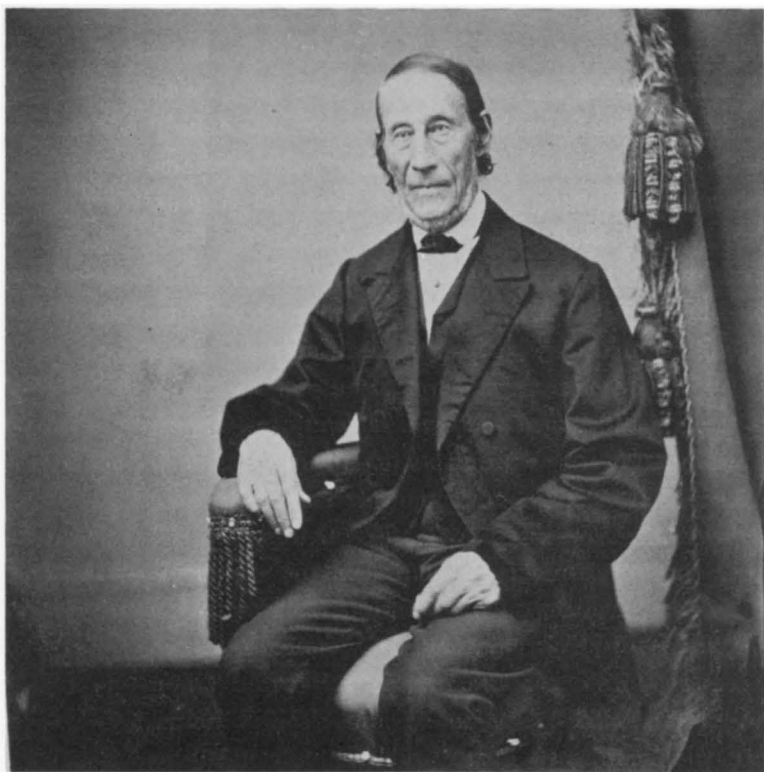
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## Beginnings; The Reynolds Family and Early Libraries in Rochester

The events which led to the creation of the Reynolds Library lay in Rochester's beginnings. In 1812 young Abelard Reynolds of Pittsfield, Massachusetts visited the Genesee Falls in the course of a trip to Ohio, shopping for new lands on which to locate his growing family. Reynolds was so impressed by the prospects for Nathaniel Rochester's hundred acres that he rejected the Ohio country and instead became one of the Colonel's first customers for a pair of village lots. Reynolds insisted on a central location and chose a parcel of land on the north side of Main Street just west of the river. Before returning to Massachusetts to fetch his wife Lydia, and their son, William Abelard, he began construction of a two-story house at the site. The frame structure, 24 by 36 feet, was a most impressive addition to the infant settlement.

In 1813 Reynolds returned to the Genesee with his family in tow. As an aspiring merchant he also brought a half ton of iron goods, which found a ready sale in the frontier village. The enterprising family was soon engaged in several lines of business. In addition to being a store, the Reynolds house was a tavern and a saddlery. Moreover, it was the village post office; through the intercession of Colonel Rochester, Abelard Reynolds secured appointment as the settlement's first Postmaster, a position he held for nearly seventeen years. In 1814 Abelard and Lydia were blessed with the addition of a second son, Mortimer.

The fortunes of the Reynolds family prospered along with those of the Genesee boom town. In 1828 Abelard Reynolds drew up plans for a great commercial building, the most ambitious in Rochester, and, some said, the largest west of Albany. The original Reynolds house was moved 150 feet north, and in its place there arose (to the astonishment of more than a few) a four- and- one- half story building, "permanently built of brick," fronting 99 feet on Main Street and containing 86 rooms



**Abelard Reynolds**

and 14 cellars. The Reynolds Arcade featured an ingenious design like that of a twentieth century enclosed shopping mall. The arcade proper was a lofty skylighted corridor of generous proportions which divided the building through the middle. Shops and offices opened onto the corridor at ground level and at a second balconied gallery level. At the rear of the hall Reynolds located the village post office. The Arcade also boasted six large stores facing Main Street, hotel rooms on the upper stories, and a turret on the roof with an observatory 89 feet above the street.

The Reynolds Arcade was destined to serve as the center of Rochester downtown life for more than a century; opened in

1829, the building was a commercial success from the start. Its many offices and suites were adapted for a variety of tenants: retailers, printers, lawyers, and real estate men, doctors and dentists, restaurateurs and booksellers, photographers and artists. As the Arcade was for many years the city's communications center—housing the post office until 1891 and the telegraph office continuously after 1856—it was the natural gathering place for businessmen in all walks of life. The Arcade was the site of the inauguration of Jonathan Child, Rochester's first mayor under its new city charter of 1834. In the same year William A. Reynolds, now 24 years old, opened an office in the Arcade for a nursery and seed business, a business which he later gave up and which became the nucleus for the great nursery of George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry. The Arcade was also the location for Western Union's headquarters during that company's early growth years, 1856 to 1866. In 1851, Daniel Webster, then Secretary of State, delivered a famous (or rather notorious) speech in the Arcade. His enemies declared, and it was widely believed for many years, that Webster was staggeringly drunk for the occasion—although evidence later assembled disputes the charge.

The Reynolds Arcade played an important part in the city's cultural life as well. Shortly after the Arcade opened, Abelard Reynolds graciously offered use of part of the building to the newly formed Rochester Athenaeum. The Athenaeum was a voluntary association dedicated to "the purpose of procuring newspapers of different states and countries, pamphlets, books, maps, charts, and of collecting historical and other monuments connected with the history and antiquities of our country and the useful arts and generally to disseminate useful knowledge..." The Athenaeum was one of several such clubs organized along similar lines in the city's early years. Others included the Franklin Institute, founded two years earlier; the Young Men's Society, organized in 1833; the Mechanics' Literary Association of 1836; and the Young Men's Association of 1838.

Although the various associations began with somewhat different purposes in mind, all pursued library programs with greater or lesser degrees of success. The record of these associations for learning is the early history of libraries in Rochester, a history in which the Reynolds family figured prominently. Abelard Reynolds, besides providing the original home for the Athenaeum, served with other leading citizens as one of its associate directors. His son, William A. Reynolds, was a founder of the Mechanics' Literary Association and served as that group's president for many years. (The Mechanics' Literary Association was a younger organization in both senses of the word; formed seven years later than the Athenaeum, its membership represented the city's younger generation.)

At times it was a painful struggle to keep the associations alive. During economic slowdowns members drifted away or failed to pay their dues, and from time to time one or another of the associations almost disappeared altogether. That was the fate of the short-lived Franklin Institute, the book collection of which was sold at public auction in 1833. Despite a promising beginning, the Athenaeum was nearly defunct by the mid-1830s. Four or five separate association libraries were obviously too many in a city the size of Rochester. In the late 1830s a trend towards merger began with the union of the Athenaeum and Young Men's Association. Re-energized by this pooling of effort, the combined organization maintained reading rooms on State Street which were proudly designated the "City Library" and which boasted over 3,000 books by the mid-1840s.

But the City Library, like its predecessors, fell on hard times within a few years. Lacking adequate funds to properly maintain its book collection or even, at times, to pay the rent, the Athenaeum joined with the Mechanics' Literary Association in another merger in 1847. William A. Reynolds was chosen as the first president of the new Athenaeum and Mechanics' Association and became its most important benefactor during the next twenty-five years. In 1849 the younger Reynolds



**William A. Reynolds**

completed a new brick structure for the organization on Exchange Place back of the Arcade. The new building, consisting of a large concert or lecture hall and library rooms on the upper story, was to be called the "Athenaeum." However, friends persuaded Reynolds to name it Corinthian Hall instead, a name suggested by ornate Corinthian columns in the building's interior. Reynolds' generosity in supplying the Athenaeum with a new home stimulated public enthusiasm. Soon the Athenaeum's membership numbered over 2,000, while the size of its book collection when moved into the new quarters was nearly 5,000 volumes.

Reynolds' generosity was made possible by the continued success of the family in a variety of business affairs. Abelard Reynolds reinvested much of the profit from the Arcade in real estate in the growing city. In this steady, unglamorous fashion the family's wealth increased year by year. In addition, Abelard profited from speculations in Genesee wheat and numerous

personal loans which almost amounted to a private banking business. During the 1840s he began transferring management of his properties to his son William. Surviving letterbooks and other manuscript material of William A. Reynolds document the hard work of amassing a fortune in the pre-Civil War era. Here are recorded loans, payments for the supplies to maintain and enlarge the Arcade, and painstaking entries in account books for rents received. Of special interest is the business correspondence between the younger Reynolds and the son of John Jacob Astor, the New York City millionaire whose fortune was made investing in Manhattan real estate and who held the principal mortgage on the Reynolds Arcade. In 1849 the younger Reynolds wrote to his New York counterpart asking for an extension on the mortgage, justified by the large expenditure on nearby Corinthian Hall which raised the Arcade's value.

Corinthian Hall elevated the cultural life of Rochester as well. Besides providing a base for the growth of the Athenaeum library, Corinthian Hall was the site of many of Rochester's landmark events. Here, in 1849, the Fox sisters publicly demonstrated their alleged ability to communicate with the spirit world—an event made famous as the "Rochester rappings." Jenny Lind and Edwin Booth both performed here. In 1853, a Rochester audience heard a full scale opera performance for the first time in Corinthian Hall, the same year that Susan B. Anthony and others addressed a crowded women's rights convention on the new bloomer costume. As the Civil War approached, Corinthian Hall hosted numerous anti-slavery meetings, and was the site of the famous Independence Day address by Fredrick Douglass in 1852.

The publicity given these occasions, and the popularity of the regular annual lecture series given in the Hall, may have tended to obscure the less spectacular library services which were at least a co-equal part of the Athenaeum's program. But it was the profits from the lectures and special events that paid for additions to the book collection. By 1870 the Athenaeum library had accumulated some 19,000 volumes.

The Civil War, however, proved a serious blow to the quality of the Athenaeum's library services. For a time the energies of young men and the community's attention were diverted elsewhere. In 1865 William A. Reynolds sold Corinthian Hall; six years later the library's favorable lease on its rooms expired, and the book collection was moved to rooms over the Rochester Savings Bank (of which William A. Reynolds was president). In 1872, with the death of William A. Reynolds, the Athenaeum lost its chief patron. The organization now entered a steep decline. With membership falling away, support dwindling, and increased losses on the lecture series it sponsored during these depression years, the Athenaeum finally ended in bankruptcy in 1877. As a humiliating postscript, creditors forced a sheriff's sale at public auction of the Athenaeum's entire book collection. Abruptly, Rochester (now a city of 80,000 people) had lost its principal library.\*

### **The Reynolds Library**

The outlook was not entirely gloomy. Attending the sheriff's sale were two prosperous friends of the Athenaeum, Mortimer F. Reynolds and George S. Riley. With a joint bid of \$3,350 the two men purchased the book collection intact. Their primary object, as Mortimer Reynolds later recalled, was "to save the city from the disgrace and scandal of having its only public library transferred to one of the villages in an adjoining county." Whether an attempt should be made to revive the Athenaeum, as Mr. Riley believed, or the library should be reopened on a new basis, as Mr. Reynolds believed, was a question yet to be decided.

\*There were more specialized libraries in Rochester at the time, such as the Law Library and University Library. Although open at times to the public, their collections could not adequately compensate for the loss of the Athenaeum. Fortunately, a sort of public library was maintained in the Free Academy, Rochester's first high school. This Central Library as it was called, performed valuable service in the last part of the nineteenth century.

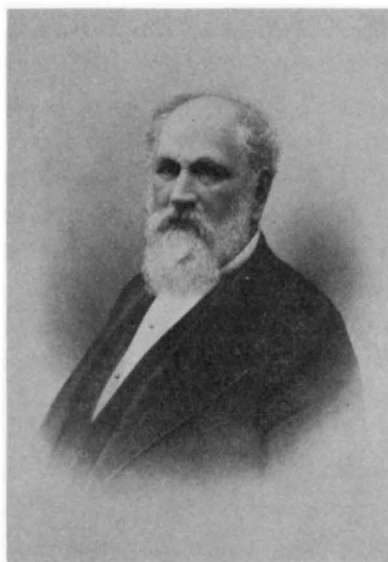


Until this time, it might be fairly stated, Mortimer Reynolds had lived under the shadow of his father and older brother. Unlike Abelard and William, Mortimer was a Rochester native, a fact he liked to make much of since he erroneously believed he was the first white child born in Rochester. In later life Mortimer also liked to boast that he had never been absent from Rochester for a period longer than seven weeks, except when away at school. His schooling included sessions at Flint's High School in Lyons, Monroe Academy in Henrietta, and Temple Hill in Geneseo. There is no record that he ever graduated from these institutions, and a letter from his father dated 1835 suggests that Abelard felt some concern lest Mortimer stray from "strict business habits" and "moral principle". But if young Mortimer was "undirected," as twentieth century experts might phrase it, he quickly overcame his weaknesses. Moving easily among Rochester business circles, Mortimer worked his way up from teller at the Bank of Western New York, to partner in the Horace Hooker & Company warehouse business at Carthage, to independent owner of a successful paint and building supply business in the 1840s. In middle age one of his principal interests was in railroads; he was an incorporator of the Genesee Valley Railroad, first president of the State Line Railroad, and major stockholder in other Rochester-financed lines.

Following the death of William in 1872, Mortimer assumed control of the numerous Reynolds properties. He and his aged father were now clearly among the wealthiest men in Rochester. Mortimer became president of the Citizen's Gas Company and of the Rochester Gas Company with which it merged. For ten years he was president of the Rochester Savings Bank. Management of such wide-ranging business affairs might have become his only activity, but Mortimer earned a favorable reputation for public service. At various times he was vice-president of the Board of Park Commissioners, a trustee of Hobart College, and a director of the City Hospital and the House of Refuge.

But it was the rescue of the Athenaeum book collection and

founding of a new library in honor of his father and brother which insured Mortimer Reynolds a permanent reputation as a publicly spirited citizen. It required several years to develop the plan for the new Reynolds Library. George S. Riley, the successful real estate speculator who joined with Reynolds in purchasing the old book collection, strongly felt that the Athenaeum and Mechanics' Association should be revived to operate the library. Reynolds was not so certain of the practicality of such a plan. After his father's death, in late 1878, he became increasingly convinced of the appropriateness of founding a



**Mortimer F. Reynolds**

new library in the family name. A familiar precedent had been set some years before in New York City, where in 1848 John Jacob Astor bequeathed \$400,000 as a trust fund for the Astor Library.

In 1881 the remaining trustees of the defunct Athenaeum met with Reynolds and Riley to discuss the situation. Both men

were willing to return the books to the Athenaeum if the organization could be restored to a sound financial condition. The two owners of the books offered to head a subscription list of Athenaeum patrons at \$1,000 apiece, since it was felt that the Athenaeum must have a substantial permanent fund, but, as Reynolds later recalled. "The trustees seemed thoroughly disheartened, and were unwilling to undertake what their experience had led them to believe at least a doubtful expedient." The subscription list never materialized.

Still, Riley hoped for some means to revive the Athenaeum and for another year resisted Mortimer Reynolds' attempts to buy out his interest in the books. At last Reynolds was able to persuade his friend to give up his interest, and in 1882 plans were afoot to move the collection from storage inaccessible to the public to new quarters specially fitted up for it in the Reynolds Arcade. As was typical of philanthropy in that day, Reynolds pursued his plans without fanfare and without even an announcement. In April, 1882 brief news items began appearing in the local press concerning the "open secret" that Mr. Reynolds was readying a large space in the Arcade. It was next announced that a bill, "To incorporate The Reynolds Library in the City of Rochester," had been introduced in the state legislature by local Assemblyman Charles S. Baker.

Since the proposed act of incorporation was the first concrete indication of Mortimer Reynolds' intentions, the document was reprinted and minutely examined in the local newspapers. Most of its provisions were quite routine; the legislature designated Mortimer Reynolds and seventeen other men "and their successors" to be a corporate body forever by the name "Reynolds Library." The law provided means for the trustees to choose new members to fill vacancies, empowered them to acquire property and dispose of it, and limited their ability to contract debts. The purpose of "said corporation" was to "establish and maintain a public library and reading room, and, so far as may seem to the trustees to be expedient, to promote the mental improvement of the inhabitants of the city

of Rochester....” Martin B. Anderson, President of the University of Rochester, and Arthur C. Coxe, Bishop of the Episcopal Church for the Diocese of western New York, were named among the eighteen trustees, and it was provided that their successors would serve on the Reynolds board *ex officio*.\*

Other provisions in the proposed act of incorporation provoked grumblings in the press, much to the surprise of Mortimer Reynolds. One section of the act empowered the Reynolds trustees to protect the books and other materials in the library with penalties not to exceed a fine of one hundred dollars. Such penalties, the act somewhat cryptically added, “may be enforced in like manner as penalties for violation of ordinances of the city of Rochester.” “A Questionable Provision,” announced the daily *Union and Advertiser*; “A Modification Desirable,” chimed in the morning *Herald*. If the Reynolds board could enforce its fines like the city, the newspapers pointed out, persons could be summarily sent to the penitentiary for refusal or inability to pay. “Is not that an extraordinary power with which to clothe any private corporation, and especially any private close corporation that, once organized, without constituency, perpetuates itself?” asked the *Union and Advertiser*. A reporter was sent to Theodore Bacon, attorney and prospective trustee responsible for drafting the bill. Bacon explained that the offensive section, like most of the charter language, had been drawn from existing acts of incorporation for similar institutions. The incorporation of the Cornell Library at Ithaca provided an exact precedent for the strong penal-

\*The other original trustees, all leading citizens of Rochester, included Theodore Bacon, George Ellwanger, Roswell Hart, Daniel T. Hunt, Samuel A. Lattimore, Donald McNaughton, Edward Mott Moore, William C. Morey, George F. Mumford, Howard Osgood, Gilman H. Perkins, William C. Rowley, Hiram Sibley, Don Alonzo Watson, and Frederick A. Whittlesey. In the Act of Incorporation of 1884, Roswell Hart was dropped from the list and Josiah Anstice, Max Landsberg, and Samuel Sloan were added.

ties and enforcement section. While Bacon insisted that "stringent measures" were necessary to protect against vandalism, he hinted that the Reynolds trustees might be willing to let the section be modified if opinion demanded it.

On another charter provision Mortimer Reynolds and his associates proved less willing to compromise, and a bitter confrontation took place which delayed the opening of the Reynolds Library for several more years. The proposed act of incorporation declared that the real and personal property of the Reynolds Library "situated in the city of Rochester shall not, nor shall any part thereof, be subject to taxation ...." The difficulty was caused by another of Mortimer Reynolds' open secrets: his intention to bequeath the entire Reynolds Arcade to the library as a source of income. The *Democratic Union and Advertiser* felt that such a sweeping tax exemption was unwarranted, unconstitutional, and unfair to the taxpayers of Rochester who in effect would be called upon to subsidize operation of the library. This sentiment was shared by at least a few leading citizens, who, whether motivated by anxiety for the city's tax base or by meaner thoughts, privately corresponded with local legislators to urge amendment of the act of incorporation. After much acrimonious debate in the local press and typical confusion in the legislative halls at Albany, an act to incorporate the Reynolds Library was reported out which limited its tax exemption to whatever property it actually used as a library. The Reynolds trustees, insulted by this amendment, refused to organize under the legislation and so notified the state government.

The episode is of some interest. The *Union and Advertiser*, chief opponent of the Reynolds charter as originally written, cited provisions in the state constitution prohibiting special acts in favor of corporations and municipal aid to any private enterprise. The *Democrat and Chronicle* and journalists of other local newspapers which supported the position taken by the Reynolds board pointed out precedents for tax exemption in the charters of the Astor, Cornell, and other privately endowed

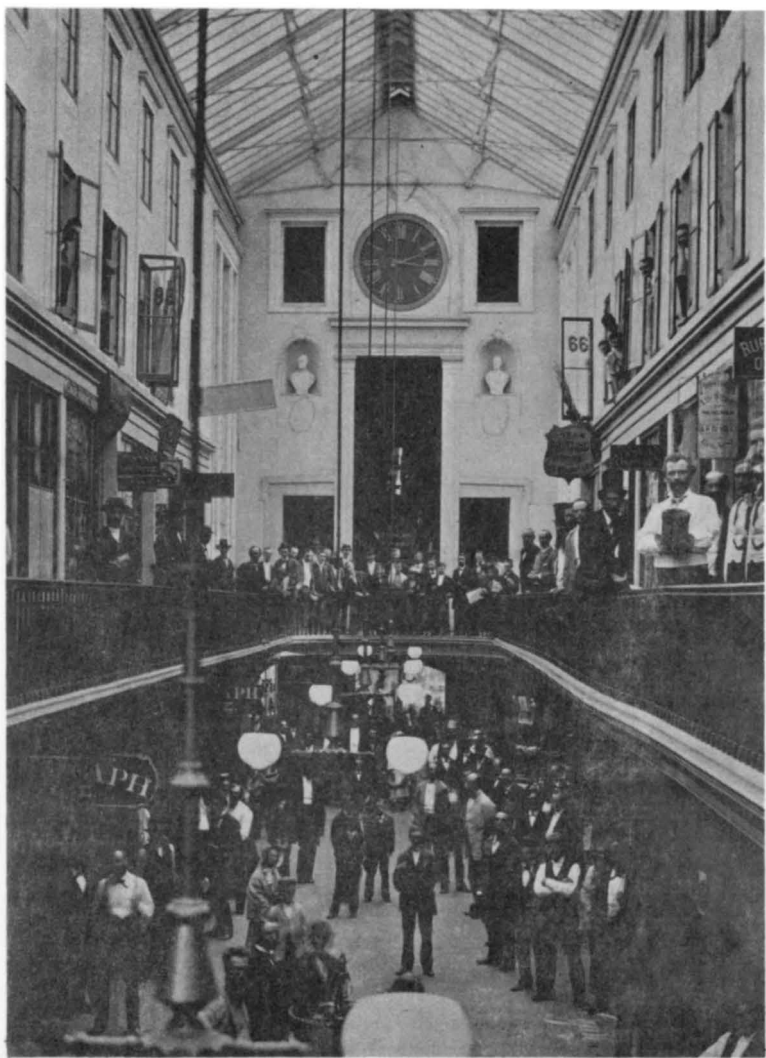
libraries in the state. Both sides in the debate repeatedly acknowledged Mortimer Reynolds' generosity in planning for the library. The *Union and Advertiser*, the most vehement opponent of tax exemption, attributed all the trouble to a "little coterie" surrounding the respected Mr. Reynolds. Others ascribed the trouble to the *Union and Advertiser*.

Another attempt to incorporate the Reynolds Library in 1883 failed. Finally, a new act of incorporation was approved by the state and accepted by the Reynolds trustees in February, 1884, which guaranteed that the library would be subject to taxation "applicable equally" to all library corporations in the state. The new act represented a real compromise; the trustees gave up their demand for special tax exemption (enjoyed by half a dozen privately endowed libraries in the state) and accepted equal treatment with other library corporations, even though "equality" was subject to interpretation. In addition, the trustees gave up the power to enforce one hundred dollar fines. Mortimer Reynolds, stung by charges of bigotry in the local Catholic press, abandoned the section in the charter which named the Episcopal Bishop and president of the then- Baptist university as *ex officio* trustees.

With the way at last cleared, Mortimer Reynolds formally transferred the Athenaeum collection to the new board of trustees in July, 1884. At the organizational meeting the trustees chose Martin B. Anderson and Edward Mott Moore as president and vice- president. Mortimer Reynolds was named treasurer, and Josiah Anstice, his son- in- law, became secretary. An important Library Committee, consisting of William C. Morey, Max Landsberg, and Fredrick A. Whittlesey, was chosen to supervise the actual operation of the library.

Previously, George Harris, a local scholar who earned his living as manager of the Arcade, had set to work inventorying the Athenaeum books and doing preliminary organizational work. Sadly enough, out of a collection that had once contained 20,000 books, Harris counted only 13,000; many borrowers

in the last days of the Athenaeum had simply neglected to make returns. Other evidence of the Athenaeum's disorganized end was found in the condition of many of the books and periodicals. Only 8,000 volumes would be useable; the rest were simply too worn out or otherwise damaged. In order to pay for replacements and the initial cost of staff salaries, Mortimer Reynolds turned over \$10,000 to the library fund. The rooms that had been waiting for the library in the Arcade were now equipped with new tables, chairs, and bookcases. The library quarters, located in an east wing of the Arcade built in 1864, consisted of one large reading room, 35 by 65 feet, and three smaller rooms reserved for storage and clerical work.



**Interior of the Reynolds Arcade, 1877**



As important as these physical preparations were, the vital element in readying the new library was the discussion among the trustees on policies and long-range goals. For several months a temporary nine-man committee—which did not include Mortimer Reynolds or members of the permanent Library Committee—gave these questions careful consideration. In what area should the library collect? How broad in scope should its public service be? How should its administration be organized? Preliminary answers to these questions were contained in a lengthy printed document submitted by the committee to the entire board. The policies outlined became the essential principles that guided the Reynolds Library for the next fifty years.

First, it was decided that the institution should be at least in part a lending library. "The library should not be a mere warehouse ... adapted only to the wants of scholars, and those having leisure," but should serve the greatest number. This could be accomplished only by permitting persons to take books home for limited periods of time. Moreover, it was decided that use of the library would be free; again, so that it could provide the broadest possible service. Membership dues and user fees were not uncommon in other privately endowed libraries, but neither were they universal; the Reynolds board, counting on the generosity of Mortimer Reynolds' support, chose the democratic alternative. A third important policy decision was that the library should maintain a strong reference collection to be used on the premises. This would include encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases and maps, bound volumes of trade and professional journals, textbooks and the like. In time the Reynolds Library's emphasis on a first class reference collection became its outstanding strength.

A straightforward plan of administration was also decided upon. Professor Morey and Frederick A. Whittlesey toured a dozen eastern libraries studying their organization. They returned with not only a plan, but a Librarian as well. On their recommendation the board chose William A. Borden, an ex-

perienced librarian from the Boston Athenaeum who assumed his duties on July 1, 1885. Borden was to have charge of all the day-to-day affairs of the library, including the hiring of staff, and was to report to the three-man Library Committee. Borden remained at the post of Librarian for only a year, but was an important influence. Working closely with the Library Committee, Borden organized the collection in eight major subject classifications; he also adopted a card catalogue, then an innovation in library work. After Borden's departure, his post was filled for a year by William Scott, a young University of Rochester graduate. In 1887 Alfred S. Collins, a graduate of New York University and Union Theological Seminary with experience at the Brooklyn Library, assumed the job. Collins was Reynolds Librarian until 1911, when he was succeeded by his daughter Anne Ross Collins. Alfred Collins and his daughter (who worked continuously for the library from 1887 until 1936) thus provided the Reynolds Library with a remarkable continuity in professional staffing.

The opening of the Reynolds Library to the public in January, 1886, filled a void in the life of a city which by now had grown past the 100,000 mark in population. During its first decade the library had a total attendance of 204,884 and a circulation of 176,094 books. Owing to the financial support of Mortimer Reynolds and the donations of others, the book collection grew from 8,000 to over 31,000 volumes in these ten years. One consequence was that the library began to run short of space in its Reynolds Arcade quarters.

But the library was not destined to remain in the Arcade for long. In 1892, Mortimer Reynolds, aged 79 years, died quietly in his home at 40 Spring Street. Anne Collins, writing in 1937, recorded her memories of Mortimer Reynolds: a large, handsome man six feet six inches in height with white hair and a full beard. "During his last years his keenest personal interest was in the affairs of the Library.... He frequently visited the library rooms and viewed the quiet readers with a benevolent air,

gaining pleasure from the scene and gratification at the increasing popularity of the institution." On his death Reynolds left not only the Arcade to the library as an income source, but his mansion on Spring Street for a new headquarters as well.

The move to the large, historic mansion was made in 1895. Space in the new quarters enabled the library to assume new functions. Partitions were removed and other alterations made to convert the first floor into a large reading room and adjoining stack rooms. The second floor became a lecture hall with 105 seats, where programs were conducted from time to time reminiscent of the lecture series of the old Athenaeum. The second and third floors were also used as headquarters for the Monroe County Medical Society, the Rochester Historical Society, and the Rochester Engineering Society. The space previously used by the library in the Arcade was converted into a reading room for newspapers and periodicals.

The Reynolds Library thus assumed a vigorous role in the cultural life of the city. Unfortunately, a reopening of the tax exemption issue resulted in decisions which weakened the library's prospects for a permanent independent existence. In the late 1890s state legislation favored by that old enemy of tax exemption, the *Union and Advertiser*, abolished tax exemption of library property in the form of real estate. Since the Reynolds Library was the only library in New York with substantial real estate holdings (which constituted virtually its entire endowment) the legislation struck the trustees as particularly discriminatory. But attempts at repeal failed, and by the turn of the century nearly half the \$16,000 annual income from the Arcade was being consumed in taxes. A major plan for rebuilding the Arcade had to be curtailed at this time, but the library was able to expand space in the Spring Street property when necessary to accommodate the ever-growing collection.

Soon, however, developments in the city along with the diminution of the library's income raised serious questions about its future. While the trustees were able to maintain first class



**Reynolds Library, Spring Street**

reference services, the Reynolds Library was unable to fully satisfy the demand for a popular lending library. When in 1904 the school authorities closed their Central Library in the Free Academy, the public outcry for expanded library services was renewed. At this time the city was experiencing major population growth; 134,000 persons in 1890 had grown to 163,000 by 1900 and would reach nearly 296,000 by 1920. In the face of such growth the Reynolds Library could not hope to meet public demand with its limited private income. Discussions aimed at subsidizing the library's operations with public tax money — a course of action with precedents in other cities — were unproductive.

In 1911 the state government turned over the property and buildings of the Western House of Refuge to the City of Roch-

ester. These properties, later renamed Edgerton Park, provided the city with a special opportunity to embark on a public library program of its own. In the same year Mayor Hiram Edgerton proudly signed the city charter amendment providing for a Rochester Public Library, and the following year the first branch library of the new system was opened.

During the next two decades the rapid expansion of the Public Library in branches throughout the city partly eclipsed the work of the Reynolds Library, but it would be false to suggest that the services of the Reynolds Library had become irrelevant. The rivalry between the two libraries was a friendly one. While the Reynolds Library continued to serve primarily as a central reference collection and lending library for adult readers, the Public Library emphasized its services to children and to those desiring popular literature. After 1925, however, when the Public Library opened its first Central Branch in the old Kimball Tobacco Factory (where the War Memorial now stands), it began drawing increasing numbers of the Reynolds patrons away.

At this stage the Reynolds trustees began to seriously consider a merger, and discussions with the Public Library trustees were initiated. The question of ending the independent existence of the Reynolds Library was a serious, even a solemn, one. Several of the Reynolds trustees favored merger with the University of Rochester Library; all felt a deep responsibility to decide on a course consistent with the original desires of Mortimer Reynolds. After the university expressed its disinterest in the Reynolds collection, protracted negotiations between the Reynolds and Public Libraries were resumed. Some type of merger was doubly imperative owing to the wear and tear on the Reynolds properties. The old Arcade marked its hundredth year in 1928, and it was considered a firetrap. The converted mansion on Spring Street was also worn with age.

Despite their other dilemmas, the Reynolds trustees decided, in 1932, that replacement of the Reynolds Arcade could no

longer be postponed. Contractors began demolition that year and in 1933 the present ten-story Reynolds Arcade was opened. Costing about one million dollars, the new building was advertised as thoroughly up-to-date; among other things it was one of the first structures in Rochester built with central air conditioning. In order to finance construction costs, the Reynolds trustees had to obtain a \$600,000 mortgage as well as state legislation permitting them to borrow that much money; the balance of the costs were paid from a depreciation fund on the old Arcade. Since the project was undertaken during the depths of the depression, interest rates and construction costs were relatively low; on the other hand it was several years before the building could be fully rented.

Almost simultaneously, a judicial settlement of the Morton Rundel estate in 1932 allowed the City and Public Library trustees to proceed with final planning for a new central library. a plan for the union of the Reynolds and Public Libraries was at last approved by both parties in 1933, three years before opening of the Rundel Building. The plan, which acquired legal force in 1934, transferred management of the Reynolds collection to the Public Library, provided that the Public Library build and maintain a "Reynolds Reference Library" in its new headquarters. In exchange, the Reynolds trustees agreed to turn over the income of the Reynolds Library to help pay for maintenance and enlargement of the collection. Details of the agreement included continued acknowledgement of the Reynolds books in the amalgamated collection with bookplates. The City agreed to choose one additional trustee of the Public Library who would be nominated by the Reynolds trustees in the future.

The opening of the new Rundel Building in 1936 marked the end of fifty years of independent operation for the Reynolds Library. The Information Services Division of the central library still bears memorial tablets marking the contributions of Abelard and Mortimer Reynolds. But the new era of cooperation between the two libraries thus begun did not end here. In twelve years

the Reynolds trustees found themselves launched on a new program of innovative library service.

### **The Reynolds Audio-Visual Department**

The new Reynolds program begun in 1948 was the funding of the Reynolds Audio-Visual Department (RAVD), a unit which has been aptly described as "a library within a library." During the past quarter century the Reynolds Department has grown steadily to become one of the leading service units in the public library system; it contains one of the largest public collections of 16mm film in the world. In addition, it handles collections of filmstrips and 8mm film for home use. The services the Reynolds Department is able to provide to local schools and to the public are the envy of other urban areas. Elsewhere public film collections are often small or nonexistent, and schools resort to rental libraries with high fees or to costly duplication of collections.

The years of cooperation between Reynolds and the Rochester Public Library did not begin auspiciously. In the 1930s and early 1940s the annual financial reports of the Reynolds Library often recorded losses, after expenses, depreciation, and real estate taxes were deducted from income. As a result the trustees were unable to contribute toward maintenance of the book collection in the Public Library as they had agreed. During the 1940s economic recovery helped augment rental income from the Arcade, but increased real estate taxes which the Reynolds Library still paid because of legislation passed in 1896 reduced the gains. In 1947 the Reynolds trustees seized an opportunity to sell the Arcade. A three-man real estate syndicate, the Reynolds Arcade Incorporated, purchased the building for \$705,000. After a mortgage and other obligations were paid, the Reynolds Library realized some \$468,000 which was invested in a solid portfolio of stocks and bonds.

At last freed of the burden of real estate taxes— and wisely converting downtown real estate into securities at an excellent time to do so—the Reynolds Library was now in a position to begin support of a new library program in cooperation with the Public Library. The Director of the Rochester Public Library, John Adams Lowe, who was himself a Reynolds trustee, persuaded his fellow board members to pay for an audio-visual division in the library on an experimental three year basis.

The use of audio-visual instruction in the armed services during World War II had awakened librarians to the educational potential of the film medium. After the war the government turned over much of its stockpile of training films, covering a variety of technical subjects, to local libraries; the films given to the Rochester library formed an important nucleus for an audio-visual collection. Even before 1945, however, John Lowe had demonstrated a serious interest in film. Along with staff members in the Public Library he had prepared a script for a documentary film on library services. Nothing came of this project until 1945, when two filmmakers connected with Eastman Kodak, Margaret Cussler and Mary L. de Give, arrived in Rochester. With their help the script was rewritten and a film was produced titled *Not by Books Alone*. Considering its early date, this film documentary was an outstanding achievement. The U.S. State Department paid for its translation into several languages and UNESCO screened the film at conferences in Mexico City and Paris.

Lowe's recommendation to the Reynolds board was underscored by a professional survey of the substantial audience for non-theatrical film usage in the Rochester area, paid for in part by the Eastman Kodak Company. After hearing the arguments for a public audio-visual collection, the Reynolds Trustees voted an initial appropriation of \$10,000 per year for three years. The necessary modification of the legal agreement between the Reynolds Library and the city was quickly approved, and the new Reynolds Audio-Visual Division of the Rochester Public



library was ready to open for business in 1948. To accommodate the new division, space was created in the Rundel Building by closing the periodical reading room on the second floor. The revised agreement between the Reynolds Library and the City was similar in form to the agreement of 1933- 1934. The Reynolds trustees agreed to use the earnings from their trust fund to help pay for an audio- visual division. The Public Library would manage the division and hold ownership of the collection.

After the initial three year period, the Reynolds board was able to vote steady increases in its support of RAVD, a subsidy which by the 1970s reached more than \$60,000 annually. Films are expensive to purchase and maintain; purchase of the 16mm collection, which reached the 2,000 mark by 1957 and included nearly 5,500 titles by 1973, consumed much of the \$815,000 that the Reynolds Library contributed during the twenty- five year period. The selection and servicing of films, records, and tapes, and clerical processing of film loans — about 40,000 annually by the 1970s — presently requires a staff of eight full- time and several part- time employees.

At present RAVD draws on three major sources of funds. In addition to the annual contribution from the Reynolds Library, which approximately equals the cost of the new 16mm films added each year to the collection, RAVD depends on substantial support from local tax money (largely in the form of staff salaries and wages), and on film use charges.

RAVD loans of 16mm films increased so quickly in the late 1950s that it became necessary to seek financial help from large borrowers. Not surprisingly, the local school districts' demand for educational films accounted for more than half the loans. By 1960 the annual number of film loans was already twice what it had been in 1955, a growth rate that showed no sign of slackening and which overburdened the Reynolds staff. After lengthy discussions, spokesmen for the Public Library and the school districts agreed on a plan for film use charges. On July

1, 1961, the new policy went into effect; schools and organizations were entitled to borrow up to twenty-five (later, fifty) films annually without charge. Beyond this number, film loans were subject to a modest use charge based on running time. In this way the use charge was structured to preserve free service to small organizations, while heavy users began paying an important part of the operating costs of RAVD. In recent years film use charges have generated nearly \$40,000 per year. If the current annual costs of RAVD are added together, including purchase of materials and equipment and staff salaries, use charges can be said to pay for about one-fifth of the whole; local tax revenues account for one-half, while the Reynolds Library support pays for the remaining three-tenths.

Following is a chronicle of highlights in the brief history of the Reynolds Audio-Visual Department. Although it is only twenty-five years old, RAVD is already a major educational and cultural institution in the Rochester area.

#### 1948

The Reynolds Audio-Visual Division of the Rochester Public Library opens for business with a collection of 88 films, 60 of which are gifts from the Office of War Information. Norman Moore is named as the first head of the Division. Twenty-one organizations sign up for film service and 30 films are borrowed during the first 3 months of operation.

#### 1949

The number of groups registered as borrowers climbs to 390; film titles reach 362 and 3,800 loans are made during the year. The major subject areas emphasized in the collection are child study, human relations, juvenile delinquency, conservation, and free enterprise. The most popular films during the year are *Brotherhood of Man*, *Human Reproduction*, and *Feelings of Rejection*.

### 1950

A 15 per cent increase in borrowers and 51 per cent increase in loans are recorded. Churches are the single largest group of borrowers. Film service to the community is calculated as a cost of 3¢ per person.

### 1951

The Public Library's collection of phonograph records is transferred from its Art Division to RAVD. The number of film loans increases 24 per cent; Civilian Defense programs and United Nations observance programs contribute to the circulation increase.

### 1952

An important documentary film, Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, is added to the collection. The Visiting Nurse Association sponsors library film programs on child development. The Rochester Council of Social Agencies conducts film discussions under the leadership of Dr. Rex M. Johnson. A slide-tape show is prepared chronicling the career of John Adams Lowe as Public Library Director and is presented at his retirement dinner. The first 16mm film catalog is published.

### 1953

As a recognition of its special status, the Reynolds Audio-Visual Division becomes the Reynolds Audio- Visual Department. The film collection now exceeds 1,000 titles and is the third largest in the nation. A panel which includes Harold Gleason of the Eastman School, Margaret Mott of the Grosvenor Library in Buffalo, and Paul Jessup of the Rochester Public Library make selections for expansion of the phonograph record collection; for the first time, patrons are permitted to borrow phonograph records for home use.

## 1954

RAVD quarters are enlarged by expansion into the old print room of the Rundel Gallery. The most popular film in the collection proves to be *Nanook of the North*. The public is invited to borrow miniature musical scores, purchased for the Art Division from a special Reynolds Library grant.

## 1955

Two feature films, *Martin Luther*, and Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story*, are added to the collection, which now exceeds 1,600 titles. RAVD's 16mm film collection is now the second largest public library film collection in the country, surpassed only by Cleveland's. Most popular films of the year are *Longhouse People* and *Loon's Necklace*. Clarence Harper donates 432 phonograph records to the library.

## 1956

A full time film inspector is added to the department staff which now has two professionals, three people in clerical positions, and part-time help. The newsletter, *Reynolds Audio Visual Reporter*, is distributed among borrowers. A major rearrangement of the department to expand film inspection and storage areas is planned.

## 1957

The titles in the film collection now exceed 2,000, and the first Harwald automatic film inspection machine is ordered. Circulation is still rising; the number of loans during 1957 is up 18 per cent from 1956. The most popular film titles are *Life of Thomas A. Edison*, *True Story of the Civil War*, and Julien Bryan's *Japan*. F. Ritter Shumway and Walter Todd donate copies of a major filmstrip series, Yale University's *Pageant of America*.

## 1958

A film catalog which cost \$3,500 to produce is offered to the public at \$1.50 per copy. The automatic film machine inspects an average of 55,000 feet of film a day. A day long "Health film Institute" attracts an audience of 125.

## 1959

The RAVD staff selects titles for the first annual "Movies on a Shoestring" festival at the library; the event draws 250 persons. The first noon-hour "Films Sandwiched In" series sponsored by the Friends of the Rochester Public Library, is held. The Blue Ribbon winners of the American Film Festival are screened at the library. On February 23 new records are set: 253 films loaned and 132,000 feet of film inspected in one day. The Helen Painter Memorial Fund gives \$850 for children's recordings. The most popular film of the year is *Rescue Breathing*, on mouth- to- mouth resuscitation!

## 1960

Phonograph recordings of the plays of Shakespeare are added to the collection. The successful "Films Sandwiched In" series is augmented to 10 programs. A second film inspection machine is purchased, and a film use charge for large borrowers is recommended to the school and library administrations. RAVD staff select films for the second annual "Movies on a Shoestring" festival and the American Film Festival. Most popular film of the year is *Universe*.

## 1961

The film use charge takes effect, permitting expansion of the RAVD staff. Phonograph records, like books, may now be returned to any branch or community library regardless of where they were borrowed. Film collection climbs to 2,877 titles. *Power Among Men*, a feature length documentary dealing with the ideas and purposes of the United Nations, is added to the collection.

## 1962

The record collection now contains 8,000 titles and a "Recordings Sandwiched In" program is attempted. Herbert Dean and John Williams of Eastman Kodak assist in producing the first partially computerized film catalog. Norman Moore departs to become library director at Waterville, Maine. He is succeeded by Robert W. Barnes, present head of RAVD. RAVD staff judge films for Kodak Camera Club and the Council on International Nontheatrical Events, which selects American films for overseas festivals. Widmer Wine Company gives RAVD a film on wine making in the Finger Lakes Region. Two new films added to the collection turn out to be best sellers: Bert Haanstra's *Glass and Lonely Boy*, a day in the life of pop singer Paul Anka. RAVD acquires *Operation Abolition* and *Operation Correction*, films which offer contrasting points of view on student demonstrations during House Un-American Activities hearings and which help to resolve a brief censorship controversy.

## 1963

Phonograph record collections are developed in branch libraries. A careful survey of film service to areas schools reveals the following information: out of 26 responding school districts, 21 had official "Audio-Visual Coordinators"; RAVD was mentioned twice as frequently as any other single source of films; 11 of the school districts had "satellite" film collections of their own; perhaps most significantly, there was a decided split between those school districts (14) which wanted RAVD to emphasize "curriculum enrichment" films and the districts (12) which desired more "instructional" films. The most popular films of the year are *Red Balloon* and *Niak*. The 16mm collection has grown to 3,400 titles and almost 1,000 organizations are registered as borrowers.

## 1964

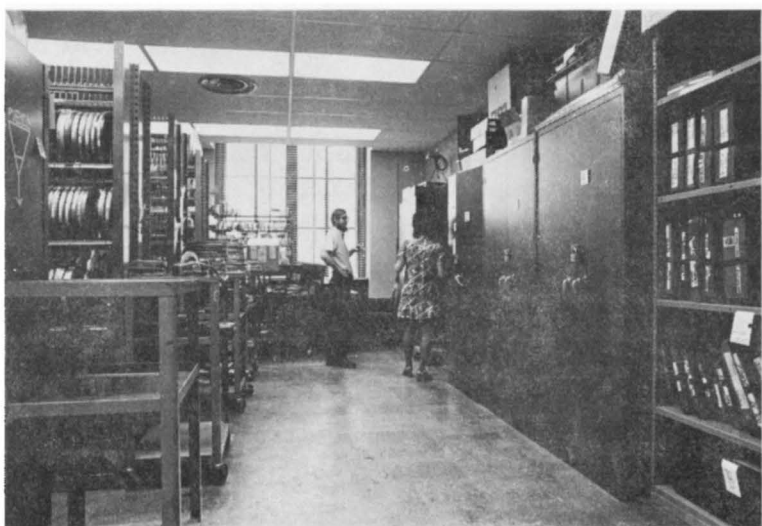
The Division of Audio Visual Instruction (DAVI), part of the National Education Association, holds its convention at Rochester and features the work of RAVD in its journal, *Film News*. The film collection passes the 4,000 mark and includes a copy of Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation's new film on Rochester. Public Library Director Harold Hacker presents a slide lecture on RAVD for the first time. Robert Barnes serves as chairman in the literature category at the American Film Festival and speaks on technical processes in film libraries at the convention of the New York Library Association (NYLA). Robert Flaherty's documentary, *Man of Aran*, is added to the collection. A summer film series for children draws over 1,000 youngsters.

## 1965

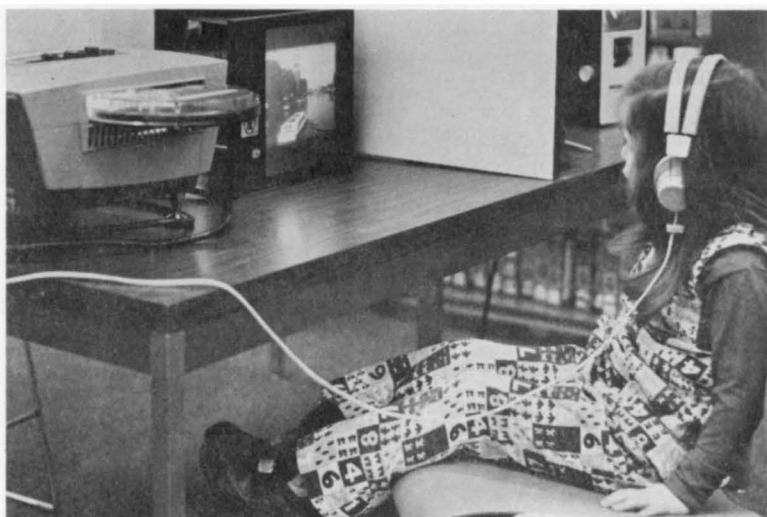
Registered film borrowers now number 1,206. "Films Sandwiched In" is expanded to a double showing for the benefit of one P.M. lunch people. A "Salute to France Film Festival" draws record crowds to the Rundel Building. Two showings of *The Burden and Glory of John F. Kennedy* launches the Films Sandwiched In series. Popular films during the year are *The Critic*, *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, and *Sailing*.

## 1966

The popular "Films Sandwiched In" is enlarged to 18 programs and draws a total audience of 3,400! Japanese audio-visual experts traveling under State Department auspices give RAVD a special look. During the year *Parable* is the most popular film title and *Dr. Zhivago* the most popular recording. An experiment in loaning films to individuals is begun.







## 1967

Borrowing privileges from the 16mm collection are made available to individuals. At the same time, a service destined to grow quickly by popular demand, the loan of 8mm films for home use, is begun. A \$25,000 federal grant administered by the State Education Department assists expansion of RAVD services throughout the Pioneer Library System region. RAVD plays a major role in conference programming for the New York Library Association convention hosted in Rochester.

## 1968

Two popular features, *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and *Wrong Arm of the Law*, are added to the film collection. Popular stereo records are added to the record collection. In twenty years, the Reynolds Library has contributed over half a million dollars to the support of RAVD. The Monroe County Library System sponsors a series of film workshops with experts drawn from all parts of the nation. Loans of 8mm films total 6,300 for the first year. An audio-visual technician is added to the staff to improve quality control of the 16mm collection. Robert Barnes is elected to the Board of Directors of the Film Library Information Council.

## 1969

A major expansion of the feature and popular film collection is made with a \$2,000 purchase of 40 features and cartoons from a local commercial film library. The decentralization of the record collection is begun with distribution of children's literature, drama, and language records to other library divisions. RAVD presents film programs at the Genesee Valley Safety Conference. The most popular film of the year is *The Fish Story*. An important film series on Black America, produced by CBS Television, is added to the collection.

## 1970

Interlibrary loan of 16mm films through community libraries to borrowers begins. Loans of tape cassettes, tape reels, and super-8 film projectors and cartridges begins. RAVD provides film for celebration of Earth Day and Environment Week in several downtown Rochester locations including Sibley's and McCurdy's Department stores. The classic Orson Welles feature, *Citizen Kane*, and the feature length animated film, *Animal Farm*, based on George Orwell's book, are added to the collection. Most popular films of the year are *Ski the Outer Limits* and Saul Bass's *Why Man Creates*. Five films on Dr. Frederick Herzberg's "motivation-hygiene" theory on work motivation are added for use by business and industry organizations.

## 1971

RAVD obtains a print of James Sibley Watson's classic *avant-garde* film, *The Fall of the House of Usher*. *King Kong* is the most popular feature of the year with an unprecedented three showings to overflow crowds. The first cartridge film-video system, "EVR," comes to the library on an experimental basis. RAVD receives a \$15,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to promote art films throughout the Pioneer region. The auditorium in the Rundel Building is improved with a new screen, projector, and sound system. Loans of 8mm films increase 34 per cent over 1970. The Rochester Sales Executives Club donates \$500 toward purchase of business films. The important television documentary, *Selling of the Pentagon*, is added to the collection.

## 1972

Liberalized loan procedures increase 8mm film borrowing 81 per cent. RAVD issues its first fully computerized catalog. RAVD and Portable Channel, a non-profit organization funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, experiment with the distri-

bution of video tapes produced by Portable Channel and deposited with the department. RAVD and the Eastman House cooperatively host a Film Library Information Council seminar on the silent film. A China film festival attracts over 200 viewers. Several important feature films are added including: *Great Expectations*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, *The Red Shoes*, *Room at the Top*, *The Third Man*, *Taste of Honey*, *Ulysses*, and *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*. Inter-library loans of 16mm films through community libraries increases 51% over 1971.

### 1973

Physical remodeling permits transfer of phonograph records, choral music, framed prints, and sculpture to a new Rundel Fine Arts Center. More space is provided for the film collection and facilities for the public, including space for 10 viewing stations for public use of visual materials available from RAVD. A Saturday series examining the work of famous filmmakers begins with a program on the animated films of Norman McLaren. The most popular film of the year is *Future Shock*. The early surrealist film, *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and a second print of *King Kong* are added to the collection. Important documentaries such as *The Plow That Broke the Plain*, *Kon-Tiki*, *Fellini: A Director's Notebook*, *Hollywood - The Dream Factory*, and *The City* are also added.

The Reynolds Audio-Visual Department has made great progress in twenty-five years: from a film service that made 699 loans in 1948 to one whose loans now approach 40,000 annually. Much of this progress is owed to the consistent support of the Reynolds Library which has contributed close to \$900,000 over the years to purchase, maintain, and circulate non-print materials to the community. John Grierson, a pioneer in the documentary film movement in England and a founder

of the National Film Board of Canada stated the case for film service in public libraries; "The unique qualification of the public library to act as a coordinator for the visual media lies in the fact that it is the only community institution which serves the whole public." Although those words were spoken many years ago they are still valid today. We have seen the evolution of visual technology from 16mm films, 8mm films and 35mm filmstrips to the easily accessible cartridge formats in film and magnetic tape. RAVD has not only expanded in size but has also evolved in the kinds of service offered to the public. Most recently RAVD has added in-house viewing carrels so that patrons may view materials in a variety of formats. In the near future RAVD will introduce a video replay center. In cooperation with Channel XXI, a selection of local public television programming will be available in cartridge format for replay.

Tomorrow could very well bring even more accessible visual media formats with advanced technologies using plastic discs and cards. Through computerization, electronic miniaturization, and the use of laser beams, the further refinement of visual images will progress. The media circulated by RAVD are very different from the books and periodicals in the library originally founded by Mortimer Reynolds. But it is undoubtedly true that the printed word of traditional library service combined with the newer forms of visual technology will continue to enrich one another in the years to come.

### Note on Sources

Among the primary sources consulted in the preparation of this article were the Minutes of the Reynolds Library trustees and the Reynolds Library *Annual Reports*. Also helpful were the Reynolds family papers, the George Harris Scrapbook, and the Reynolds Library Scrapbook (all of which are on deposit at the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library). Day to day local newspaper accounts of certain critical periods in the Reynolds Library history were also consulted.

The authors are indebted to two previously published articles on Rochester library history: Blake McKelvey, "Early Library Developments In and Around Rochester," and Anne R. Collins, "The Reynolds Library," both contained in the Rochester Historical Society *Publication Fund Series*, Volume XVI (1937), pp. 11-71. Two articles dealing with the original Reynolds Arcade and Corinthian Hall are Amy Hanmer-Croughton, "Historic Reynolds Arcade," RHS *Publication Fund Series*, Volume VIII (1929), pp. 99-107 and George M. Elood, "Some Earlier Amusements of Rochester," RHS *Publication Fund Series*, Volume I (1922), pp. 42-48. The work of the Reynolds Audio-Visual Department has been previously described in Norman B. Moore, "A Film Conscious Library for a Film Conscious Community," *Film News*, Volume XIX (1962), No. 3 and in Robert W. Barnes, "Two Million Circulation in Spite of Use Fee," *Film News*, Volume XXI (1964), No. 2.

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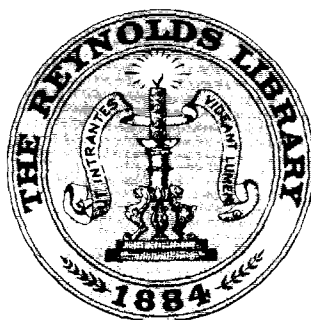
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