

Flora Belle Ludington: A Biography and Bibliography

BY MARGARET L. JOHNSON

FLORA BELLE LUDINGTON was born in Huron County, Michigan, but moved with her family to Wenatchee, Washington, in time to begin her library career at the age of fourteen as a volunteer in the newly established Carnegie public library. She was an assistant in the library of the University of Washington in Seattle, where she took the AB degree in librarianship, in 1920. Later studies brought her an MA degree in history from Mills College, and a BLS degree from New York State Library School, both conferred in 1925. After one year as an assistant in the circulation department of the University of Washington library (1920-21) Miss Ludington was appointed reference librarian at Mills College. She was later named assistant professor of bibliography and then associate librarian. In 1936 she was appointed librarian of the Mount Holyoke College library, the position she has since held until her retirement in June 1964. She has been a visiting professor of library science during summer sessions at the University of Texas (1930), San Jose (California) State Teachers College (1931), and at the Columbia University school of library service (1936, 1938, 1939, 1941, 1942, and 1943).

The years at Mount Holyoke have included varied services to the library profession and to the larger community of the world. Her two-year chairmanship of the Special Committee on International Cultural Relations during the second World War led to her personal participation in the overseas program as first director of the United States information

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library in Bombay, India, from 1944 to 1946, while on war leave from Mount Holyoke. In 1947 she attended the meetings of the International Federation of Library Associations in Oslo, Norway. Miss Ludington served for several months in 1948 as visiting expert on information libraries in Japan for the Supreme Command for Allied Powers and was awarded the Certificate of Achievement of the Civil Information and Education Section. She has been a member of the USIA's Advisory Committee on International Cultural Relations since 1957. As chairman of a committee working with the ALA and the Ford Foundation to establish a library school at the University of Ankara in Turkey, she visited libraries there and in Lebanon in 1957. In 1959 she studied library development in Africa under a Rockefeller Foundation grant.

Always interested in the development of international cultural relations, Miss Ludington is equally distinguished for her services to the library profession in this country. A long-time member of the American Library Association, she was twice chairman of the Board on International Relations (1942-44), working on

postwar rehabilitation of European libraries and closer cooperation with libraries in Latin America. As president of the American Library Association in 1953-54, she worked with the establishment of the National Book Committee, organized by a group of citizens "to promote wider and wiser distribution of books and to preserve the freedom to read." She also served (1959) on the National Book Committee's Awards Advisory Committee, under whose annual program the book industry's prizes are given to American writers for the most distinguished books published in the United States the previous year.

As librarian of Mount Holyoke College, Miss Ludington was instrumental in establishing (1951) the Hampshire Inter-Library Center, a cooperative center for scholarly materials maintained by Amherst, Mount Holyoke, and Smith colleges and the University of Massachusetts, and has since served on its executive committee. She has also served on the board of directors of the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Library Council of Massachusetts, and the executive committee of the Mount Holyoke Institute of the United Nations.

In 1953 Mills College granted Miss Ludington an honorary LLD degree, and in 1957 she received from the American Library Association one of the most distinguished awards in librarianship—the Joseph W. Lippincott Award for "high achievement." Praising her for her "creative contributions to the advancement of the library profession," the citation added: "As former president of the American Library Association and one of its most respected advisors today, Miss Ludington has demonstrated a level of public and private statesmanship which should be both a deep source of satisfaction to her and a continuing challenge to all members of her profession." And in this year of her retirement, it seems most fitting that the Alumnae Association of the

University of Washington school of librarianship selected her as the Distinguished Alumna of 1964.

To those who have been fortunate in working with Flora Belle Ludington in the Connecticut Valley, this brief summary of her professional contributions and achievements provides little more than the bare biographical skeleton of a truly great professional. The flesh and spirit are found in qualities difficult to define without seeming fulsome and perhaps even a bit emotional. As the HILC librarians were appointed, she welcomed each with warmth and genuine acceptance as colleagues in the profession to which she had made full commitment. Her splendid judgment and her wise and patient counsel are complemented by imagination, enthusiasm, and humor, which made the cooperative venture of HILC, as she often said, "one of the most exciting experiences" in a librarian's career.

The true professional should have breadth of interests, but at the same time a clear vision of the central purposes of the profession to which he has committed himself. Flora Belle Ludington never loses sight of the first responsibility of the librarian—to bring together books and people, and, she would add, "books that will inspire the mind, that will throw fresh lights on current problems . . . books on a variety of subjects, not necessarily new books . . . good books." She also is an articulate librarian, ample evidence of which is provided in the bibliography of her writings which follows. Her reading as well as her writings encompasses many diverse fields, and are worldwide in their extent. She is a librarian, bookman, collector, and, perhaps of greater importance, an informed and active citizen of the world. She once said of William E. Henry, founder and dean of the school of librarianship at the University of Washington: "It was to Dean Henry that we all looked for his warm personality, his professional knowledge, his breadth of learn-

ing and his devotion to the profession."¹ Those who have worked with Flora Belle

¹ Dorothy Bevis, "Flora B. Ludington," *Bulletin of Bibliography*, XXI (January-April 1956), 193-95.

Ludington would ascribe these same qualities to her, and be grateful for the association and the example she has set for excellence in the profession. ■ ■

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1928

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1934

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1935

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1936

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1938

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1940

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1942

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