Remembering Carlton Rochell

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Remembering Carlton Rochell

by Nancy Kranich
Jan 09, 2019 | Filed in News

Dr. Carlton C. Rochell, who served as Dean of Libraries at New York University (NYU) from 1976–1999, died in Nashville, TN, on Dec. 23 at the age of 85 after a brief illness.

Rochell came to NYU shortly after the University combined 38 separate collections into the dramatic new Philip Johnson-designed Elmer Holmes Bobst Library. He managed and integrated those disparate collections by introducing innovative technological solutions that became models for the nation. During his tenure, the library's collection size doubled, the book endowment grew 1,200 percent, and circulation of books and materials expenditures both tripled.

Rochell asserted a leadership role that transformed the NYU Libraries into a world-class resource. He founded the Research Library Association of South Manhattan with the New School, Parsons, and Cooper Union, which he brought together with NYU through the first mini-computer based online catalog. He later extended that network through a partnership with the New-York Historical Society,
enhancing access to unique 18th- and 19th-century Americana for scholars around the world. In recognition of the convergence of new and old media, Rochell brought the NYU Press under the management of the libraries in 1980—among the first such models in the country. Several years later, he added a campus media and video production unit that incorporated cable television for the residence halls and NYU-TV, blending them with the rich resources available through the newly conceived Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media.

Rochell also honored writers through the Elmer H. Bobst Awards for Arts and Letters and working closely with Bobst’s widow, Mamdouha Bobst, to endow collections. In addition, he joined forces with national and local labor leaders to develop the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, now one of the preeminent research centers for American labor history. An Arts and Science dean once stated that he never experienced a librarian that exerted such a force within a university.

Never shying away from controversy, Rochell came to research libraries from an unlikely route—the Atlanta Public Library, where he built an iconic Marcel Breuer–designed public library. He galvanized a grassroots campaign to pass a referendum to support the new central library, overcoming political odds by leveraging his strong connections to key local political figures like Andrew Young, many of whom followed then—Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter to the White House—connections he again tapped to advocate for library programs in Washington. Rochell was also instrumental in advancing the integration of public libraries in the south in Anniston, Alabama, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and Knoxville, TN during the civil
rights movement of the 1960s—a legacy recounted in a number of recent histories about libraries in the Jim Crow South.

Nationally, Rochell served as chairman of the board of the Research Libraries Group, shaping the organization in its early days. He was also an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) board member and an American Library Association (ALA) councilor. His political savvy guided the New York delegation at the 1979 White House Conference on Libraries and the New York State Governor’s Commission on Libraries. About the same time, he advocated for a National Periodicals Center, working closely with the ALA Washington Office and testifying on its merits in Congress.

A master communicator, Rochell received many awards for his accomplishments, including an Effie from the New York Chapter of the American Marketing Association and an Andy from the Advertising Club of New York, both in 1976 for leading a successful referendum to build the new central library in Atlanta. At NYU, his promotional campaign to name the new online catalog, BobCat, received a John Cotton Dana Public Relations Award in 1984, and a subsequent crusade to discourage eating in the stacks attracted another Dana Award in 1989. In recognition of his collaboration with the labor community to preserve New York labor history, the Wagner Labor Archives won the first John Sessions Memorial Award in 1982. To bolster his personal research and writing, Rochell received a Council on Library Resources fellowship in 1973, an International Institute Administrator Science fellowship from 1979–81, and a Bellagio Study and Conference Center Rockefeller Foundation scholar-in-residence appointment in 1982.

Academically, Rochell earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics at Vanderbilt University–George Peabody College, and Masters' degrees in Library Science and Liberal Studies as well as a Doctor of Philosophy in Library Science and Government from Florida State University. His 1976 dissertation focused on the role of the public library in adult learning. While in Atlanta and New York, he taught management in the library programs at Atlanta University and Columbia University—both programs have since closed, but their graduates remain inspired by his vision and passion for libraries.

Rochell was noted for his astute political acumen and his unwavering commitment to positioning libraries at the center of their communities. As the late Congressman and librarian Major Owens once said of him, “The only person I
ever worked with more politically astute than me was Carlton Rochell." For me and others who came to NYU early in our careers, Rochell was an exceptional mentor who recognized and made tangible the power and possibility of libraries to transform people’s lives, their communities and society. Colleagues remember this mover and shaker as astute, urbane, and charming. He was also a man of great wit whose love and respect for contemporary literature knew no bounds. His influence endures, and he shall be missed.

Following retirement, Rochell returned to country living in his native Tennessee with his longtime companion, Noella Fachinetti, where they created a haven for wildlife and a home for dogs, cats, horses, chickens, bees, and other animals. He is survived by two daughters, a son, and six grandchildren.

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Library of Congress Drops Illegal Alien Subject Heading, Provokes Backlash Legislation

Lisa Peet

Thanks to the joint efforts of a student group and university librarians at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, with a push from the American Library Association (ALA), the Library of Congress (LC) announced on March 22 that it would remove the term “Illegal alien” from the LC Subject Heading
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