



## IN MEMORIAM

Joseph Periam Danton  
Professor of Librarianship, Emeritus  
Berkeley  
1908–2002

Professor Joseph Periam Danton, former dean of the School of Librarianship, died on November 12, 2002, aged 94.

“Perry” Danton was born on the Stanford University campus in 1908, but spent most of his childhood in Beijing, where his father taught German at what is now Tsinghua University. Perry returned to the U.S.A. to attend Oberlin College, where he graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in German in 1928. Both of his parents were Germanists and, in 1925-26, he spent a year as a student at the University of Leipzig, still in the twilight of its greatness. The present and past of German and Austrian libraries and librarianship became his primary research interest.

Perry Danton had the privilege of benefiting from the finest preparation in librarianship then available: a B.S. in library science in 1929 from Columbia University, then the leading library school; an apprenticeship in the New York Public Library, a notable training ground; and, after an M.A. in German 1930 from Williams College, admission to the doctoral program of the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago, established in 1928. His doctoral dissertation was a study of the effectiveness of the selection of books for college libraries. While in Chicago he worked for the American Library Association and as an assistant to the dean of the Graduate Library School, Louis Round Wilson. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1935, he was the librarian of Colby College, and then of Temple University, before World War II service as an intelligence officer in the Navy in the Pacific.

Danton joined the University of California, Berkeley faculty in 1946 as dean and associate professor in the School of Librarianship. Still in his thirties, a young man with an elite preparation, he was impatient to implement vigorous change and expansion. A larger school, with an emphasis on traditional norms of scholarship and with a doctoral program, was the goal. Berkeley was to compete with Chicago and Columbia in this field. He played a pivotal role in the history of the school, because it was under his deanship that the school acquired its present form. Under the founding director Sydney Mitchell, the school’s program had remained a small, stable professional one with about 50 students taking the postbaccalaureate certificate in librarianship. When Danton arrived in 1946, the constraints imposed by the Depression, and then by World War II, were over. Under his 14- year leadership, the small, stable program was transformed into a much larger and more research- oriented school. The budget was greatly increased. The certificate program was replaced first by a bachelor of library science in 1947, and then by a master of library science in 1955, with a much expanded enrollment. A more research- oriented faculty was recruited. Faculty appointees were expected to have a Ph.D. and published research was expected. In those days the Academic Senate was reluctant to approve doctoral degrees in professional schools and it was only after repeated rejections that Danton achieved approval, and two doctoral programs, both Ph.D. and D.L.S., were eventually initiated. The changes and expansion that he implemented set the pattern that still exists today, 40 years later, through successive name changes.

Perry Danton’s primary research interests were in cultural differences, reflected in his *Book Selection and Collections: A Comparison of German and American University Libraries* (1963), and in tracing intellectual

influences, as in his *United States Influence on Norwegian Librarianship, 1890-1940* (1957). He was one of the pioneers of comparative study in librarianship, a specialty in which his *Dimensions of Comparative Librarianship* (1973) is a landmark, and he wrote extensively on education for librarianship. In addition, he was active in professional associations, especially the American Library Association, the Association of American Library Schools, and the International Federation of Library Associations. He traveled extensively and, as a consultant, undertook assignments in Ethiopia, Jamaica, and Southeast Asia.

Perry Danton taught courses on library administration, academic libraries, and collection development. He was especially fond of his seminars on comparative and international studies of librarianship, and of working with doctoral students. He kept in touch with his loyal doctoral graduates and many others, and was always happy to discuss some point of research, to reminisce about some figure in the past, or to clarify what a fragment of German means, or to review manuscripts, which he decorated liberally with his distinctive, left-handed check marks and annotations. Campus service included membership on library- related committees.

In 1976, he was honored by being awarded the Berkeley Citation on the occasion of his retirement. He was, however, a very unwilling retiree, forced out by the mandatory retirement age, and he still continued his research. He was determined to “die in harness,” but his health finally failed him. His last study, “The Role and Status of Faculty Emeriti in American Schools of Library and Information Studies,” was published in the *Library Quarterly* in 1999, when he was over 90 years old.

An oral history on Perry Danton’s career at Berkeley, completed not long before he died, is available in The Bancroft Library and on- line: J. Periam Danton. Dean and Professor at UC Berkeley’s School of Librarianship, 1946-1976. Berkeley: University of California, The Bancroft Library, Regional Oral History Office, 2000. Oral history. Bancroft BANC MSS 2001/91 c. It can be found at [http:// bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/ ohonline/](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/ohonline/)

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