

Myrl Lua-Frances Ebert, October 20, 1913–May 5, 2001



Myrl Lua-Frances Ebert claimed she went to library school to support her interest in painting and studying art works. How fortunate

for us, as she became one of the notable medical librarians who guided the significant growth of medical libraries in the second half of the twentieth century. As the first director of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) Health Sciences Library, from 1952 until her retirement in 1975, she was principally responsible for building a library collection that met the needs of the growing Division of Health Affairs at UNC, consisting of five schools and a new hospital. Ebert was the driving force that led to the completion of a new building for the library in 1970. She showed unflinching confidence in her staff, and a generation of UNC library science students, introduced to medical librarianship through her course, went on to work in the field. She contributed greatly to the development of medical libraries and librarians in the United States and abroad, for which she was recognized by the Medical Library Association (MLA) and the American Medical Association.

Prior to coming to UNC, Myrl Ebert served as assistant reference librarian and periodicals librarian at the New York Academy of Medicine from 1946 to 1951 and as library associate of New York University Bellevue Medical Center Library from 1951 to 1952. She earned a bachelor's degree in physical education in 1943, followed by a second one in 1945 in library science, both from George Peabody College in Nashville. While in

Nashville, she worked under Eileen Cunningham at Vanderbilt University. She received a master's degree in library science from Columbia University in 1951.

Ebert reorganized the library as an independent library, serving the Division of Health Affairs and not reporting to the university librarian. She greatly enlarged and reclassified the library's collection to the National Library of Medicine scheme and instituted cooperative acquisitions and loan programs with other medical libraries in North Carolina. "Ms. Ebert was part of the generation of medical library directors with expertise in collection development and the history of medicine," noted Carolyn Lipscomb, former staff member. "She established a small but excellent collection of historical materials that included nursing and public health examples," and sponsored a History of Medicine Group of faculty and students who met in the library or at a faculty member's home. "She looked to the future as well," said Lipscomb, "introducing technology from photocopying to audiovisuals to database searching, and adapting services to changes in education."

Mary Horres, Ebert's former student and staff member, noted,

Myrl was just the right person to establish and build the Health Sciences Library. She was very much a "people person," and everyone who entered the old hospital library passed by her open office door. Her office was a welcome place for faculty and students and the only place in the library where smoking was allowed. Myrl knew most of the faculty and cultivated the bibliophiles and medical history buffs. She campaigned tirelessly to garner resources for the library and, as a result, she enriched and expanded the collection with many valuable contributed works that the budget could never have afforded.

Ebert was active on campus committees and in library organizations in North Carolina and the Southeast, serving from 1953 to 1955 as chair of the then-named Southern Regional Group of MLA. She was active nationally and internationally as well. She was a consultant to numerous hospital, medical society, and other health sciences libraries and with the MEDLARS Program at the National Library of Medicine. She served on the Board of Directors of the U.S. Book Exchange. She was a longtime member of MLA, as well as of the Special Libraries Association and the American Association of the History of Medicine. Her roles with MLA included consulting editor of *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, secretary, member of the Board of Directors, and member of numerous committees. She was the author of many articles in professional journals, including an historical review of the development of the American medical periodical [1]. She was named a Fellow of MLA in 1978.

She was the recipient of an American Medical Association service award for her efforts from 1966 to 1974 to develop library resources at the University of Saigon Medical School. These efforts involved taking several extended trips to Saigon, as well as hosting Vietnamese medical librarians at North Carolina. In 1973, she taught at the International Institute for Population Libraries in Bangkok, Thailand.

Ebert had an outgoing, upbeat personality that, combined with her extensive knowledge, helped her build lasting relationships with faculty, students, and staff. Horres said

Myrl Ebert was a mentor and a cherished lifelong friend. Her enthusiasm was contagious, and she had exten-

sive knowledge of the medical literature and the history of medicine, as well as a keen understanding of the health sciences professions. I especially valued her spirit of adventure and her passion for the profession of medical librarianship. She is the one who influenced me, like many of her other students, to become a medical librarian . . . She took a personal interest in her students. She not only made special efforts to help us get established in the profession, but she also delighted in keeping up with us throughout our careers.

Lipscomb also commented on Myrl Ebert's support for her staff. "She treated her staff as family. She always said she had the best staff

in the country," she recalled, "inviting them and their spouses to her modern house in the woods to celebrate the completion of projects. Once when Estelle Brodman and Gertrude Annan visited her in Chapel Hill, she took all the librarians to dinner with them."

Myrl Ebert died on May 5, 2001, at the age of eighty-seven. She is survived by her longtime friend and companion Dr. Lois Harris, of Chapel Hill. Those of us who knew her and those who did not nonetheless appreciate the legacy of one who used her expert knowledge, her love of life, and her spirit to enrich our profession for generations to come.

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Reference

1. EBERT M. Rise and development of the American medical periodical, 1797–1850. *Bull Med Libr Assoc* 1952 Jul; 40(3):243–76.

Beginning with this issue, T. Mark Hodges assumes the role of obituaries editor. Hodges will be responsible for developing guidelines for *Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA)* obituaries and working with the authors of obituaries to ensure that we can properly commemorate and honor those colleagues who have died. Sometimes we do not become immediately aware of the passing of a colleague, particularly those who have been long retired, and it will be a great help if readers of the *JMLA* will alert Hodges when they have such information. He can be reached by email at tmhodges33@aol.com.