

Dietrich Hans Borchardt

14 April 1916 – 6 June 1997

John Horacek, La Trobe University Library

With the death of Dietrich Borchardt, Australia has lost one of its major librarians, bibliographers and editors, whose legacy continues through his writings, the library he built and his influence on many aspects of the profession as well as on his colleagues.

Born in Hanover into a middle-class Jewish family, Dietrich Borchardt (or DHB as he was often known) suffered from the persecutions of the nascent Nazi regime, being forced in his teens to give up his schooling and earn his keep through hard work on farms. Eventually, forced to flee Europe, he landed in New Zealand in June 1939. There too he had to take such work as he could find (on farms and on teams building bridges in the country). However, later he moved into book selling, and, most importantly, started tertiary studies, graduating BA (1944) and MA (1947) from the University of Wellington. He also gained his library qualifications at the New Zealand Library School. At the end of 1947 he gained his first professional post — acquisitions librarian at the University of Otago. From there he went to the University of Tasmania in 1950, becoming university librarian in 1953.

When in 1965 he was invited to accept the position of librarian at the newly created La Trobe University, he seized the opportunity with considerable eagerness, and the library he created should perhaps be seen as his major monument. His vision was for a strong collection of resources in all formats, housed in a purpose-built central building, administered by a dedicated professional staff in a supportive academic and administrative environment. He pursued this vision with great energy, fully exploiting his authority within the University structure, winning the support of the teaching staff and motivating his staff to see themselves as active participants in the University's mission (he insisted on academic equation for professional staff). The University's decision to name the library after him upon his retirement in 1981, and the award of the degree of Doctor of the University in 1992, are proof that he succeeded.

His firm belief in the importance of the role of librarians led him to take considerable interest in tertiary courses for librarians, and he founded *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* in 1970 as a vehicle for publishing professional writing. In those growth years for academic libraries *Austral-*

ian Academic and Research Libraries flourished, achieving an international reputation. But its success was due to his battling for funding, bullying people to write and skilfully editing contributions to maintain his high standards. The annual compiling of academic library statistics was another cause he espoused, seeing the value of hard data to further the case for libraries (not without a degree of opposition from less farsighted colleagues).

Dietrich worked tirelessly for the profession through his involvement in bodies such as ALIA (which bestowed on him the HCL Anderson award in 1978), AACOBS/AC LIS, CAUL and IFLA. He travelled and taught overseas, raising the profile of Australian librarianship as well as his own international reputation. He was influential in academic and government committees and councils (for example, the Council of the Victoria Institute of Colleges).

His other great monument is in his writing. Much of his 'spare' time was spent compiling lists, bibliographies and indexes, which were ground-breaking ventures in bringing bibliographical control to the field of Australian studies. He will be particularly remembered for his *Australian bibliography*, the *Checklist of Royal Commissions* and *Australians: a guide to sources*. His vivid, trenchant style reflected his decisive nature.

Lest the above give the impression that Dietrich was nothing but a librarian, it should be added that he was generous with praise and encouragement, always interested in a good discussion, a good book, and good music, delighted in tending his vegetable patch, and loved to dispense hospitality in his home. He held his opinions firmly, but accepted the fact that others did not necessarily share them.

He continued writing and editing for some ten years after his retirement, till failing health slowed him down in the 1990s.

He is survived by two children (Sandra and Max) and his second wife Pam (his first wife Janet died in 1988).

As well as the previously-mentioned awards, he also received an honorary doctorate from ALIA and the Order of Australia. ■



Dietrich Hans Borchardt

Dietrich worked tirelessly for the profession through his involvement in bodies such as ALIA ... he travelled and taught overseas, raising the profile of Australian librarianship as well as his own international reputation.