Alfred N. Brandon, 1922-1996

Alfred N. Brandon, originator of the “Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library,” father of the List of Journals Indexed in Index Medicus, consultant on building plans for ten major academic medical libraries, author and frequent speaker, as well as mentor and friend to many, died on July 4, 1996, in Daytona Beach, Florida. His many contributions, including leadership of the Medical Library Association (MLA), development and nurturing of medical librarians, and contributions to librarianship in general, are noteworthy and of lasting significance.

Born on September 10, 1922, in Ogden, Utah, Alfred N. Brandon pursued a degree in theology at Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, where he had his first experience working in a library. Beginning as a student assistant, he gradually assumed more responsibility when the librarian became ill. After graduating with a major in theology and minor in history he spent a year and a half in the ministry in Canada, prior to being lured back to Atlantic Union—as assistant librarian—where his career in librarianship moved forward full steam. Although he was an active Seventh-Day Adventist and religion played a strong role in his life, this opportunity diverted him to what was to become a lifelong commitment to librarianship. It was at Atlantic Union that he first met Dorothy Hill, who was to become his collaborator in building numerous library collections and in preparing the Brandon-Hill lists. Ms. Hill was a student at Atlantic Union who was hired to work as a library assistant.

Recognizing the need for a professional education in librarianship, he pursued the study of library science and received a bachelor of science with a major in library science from Syracuse University in 1948, and a master’s degree in library science from the University of Illinois in 1951. Mr. Brandon’s entry into the field of medical librarianship came a few years later when in 1953, Loma Linda University in California recruited him from the Transportation Library at the University of Michigan. He was working there while pursuing a doctorate that was never completed, and received a master’s degree in history before leaving the university.

After four years at Loma Linda, Mr. Brandon moved eastward to the University of Kentucky, where he faced the challenge of building the medical center library from scratch, including developing the collection, designing the building, defining and creating services, and recruiting staff. With a budget of $500,000 and many pleas to fellow librarians for duplicates, the library at the university grew to 75,000 volumes during his six years at Kentucky. As one of the first seven faculty members of the new medical school, he participated in interviews of all faculty subsequently hired and was able to substantially influence the development of the new program.

While at Kentucky, Mr. Brandon spent every Sunday at the library, often working until midnight. A landmark publication which came from these long days was the subject list of journals indexed in Index Medicus, the forerunner of the National Library of Medicine’s list. His interest in working on this was roused because in developing the new collection at Kentucky he was often asked for a list of journals in a particular subject.

The directorship of the Welch Medical Library at Johns Hopkins University beckoned in 1963. At Johns Hopkins, Mr. Brandon was able to combine his considerable experience in medical librarianship with his love of history, having the university’s significant History of Medicine collection at his disposal. It was during his time at Johns Hopkins that the first “Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library” was prepared, although the idea had first been discussed with hospital library colleagues in Kentucky who requested guidance in making purchasing decisions. Already a leader in medical librarianship, Mr. Brandon’s service to the Medical Library Association reached a high point while he was at Johns Hopkins as he assumed editorship of the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association and then the MLA presidency.

In 1969, the newly established Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City offered the next challenge. The opportunity to again develop a program for a new school and design a new library was too good to pass up. Coming to Mount Sinai as chairman and professor of the Department of Library Science, Mr. Brandon took what was an excellent hospital library, added basic science materi-
als, and designed a facility that has been relatively easily adapted to technology not visualized in the 1960s. With well-designed space for collections, users, and especially library staff, as well as a director's office with a dynamite view of Central Park, the library has endured into the 1990s. Unfortunately, the hectic pace of a new organization and life in New York City took its toll, and Mr. Brandon suffered the first of several heart attacks, the last of which proved fatal.

Envisioning a slightly lower stress level, Mr. Brandon assumed his last full-time position in 1973 as librarian of the New York Academy of Medicine and director of the New York and New Jersey Regional Medical Library Program. It was in this last library position that our paths first crossed and I learned first-hand what numerous other librarians already knew about his skills as a mentor. He never failed to provide the opportunity to learn, to encourage full participation in discussions, to allow a challenge to an idea or thought, or to consider a suggestion, however naive or incompletely considered. He also took an interest in his staff members' personal growth and development and was never happier than when his staff were happy in their "outside" lives.

Retiring from the New York Academy of Medicine in 1978, Mr. Brandon never really retired, and maintained an active consulting practice up until his death. In 1979 he began consulting for Majors Scientific Books and continued that relationship right through to the end. Many will recall meeting with Mr. Brandon at the Majors booth at MLA meetings, most recently in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1996. He attended numerous chapter meetings over the years, and was often an invited speaker. He also initiated the publication A Major Report, which supplemented the Brandon/Hill lists. Never one to miss a leadership challenge, he was elected president of his condominium association in Daytona Beach, where condo residents claim he was one of the best they ever had.

The contributions to medical librarianship made by Alfred N. Brandon were numerous. He was editor of the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association from 1963 to 1965 and in his editorials revealed something of himself in writing on topics from friendship to the need for medical librarians to conduct research and the importance of regional groups (now chapters). After editing the Bulletin, he assumed the MLA presidency. His presidency came at a very difficult time in his life, in that just three weeks before he chaired the 1966 Annual Meeting in Boston, his wife, Mabel, died after a long bout with cancer. Throughout her illness, he managed to fulfill his obligations to MLA, although feeling somewhat guilty about his inability to be in two places at once. His two children, Bob and Sharon, joined him at the Boston meeting and their photos are recorded for posterity on page 351 of volume 54 of the Bulletin.

Significant other MLA honors received by Mr. Brandon included the 1969 Janet Doe Lectureship and the 1977 Marcia C. Noyes award, MLA's highest honor.

However significant his many contributions to medical librarianship are, Mr. Brandon's most enduring contribution is surely the "Selected List of Books for the Small Medical Library." Begun in 1965, the "Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library" became so widely used that a nursing list was added in 1979, and an allied health list in 1984. Collaborating on all editions of the lists was Dorothy Hill. The original "Selected List" and its many subsequent editions have achieved national and international recognition and are referenced in the Joint Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations standards. The introductions to the "Selected List of Books for the Small Medical Library" have always been eagerly awaited and have tackled some thorny issues, such as virtual libraries, print and non-print materials, and collection development. They have admonished librarians to remember their fundamental role, and posed challenges to librarians to assume leadership positions in their organizations.

Mr. Brandon leaves behind his son Bob, daughter Sharon, six grandchildren, long-time collaborator and friend Dorothy Hill, and many friends. Writing about friendship in a 1964 Bulletin editorial, he said, "To be a friend is a great responsibility; to have a friend is a rewarding experience." It was rewarding to know and work with Alfred N. Brandon.

Lynn Kasner Morgan
Mount Sinai School of Medicine

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