

Felix Reichmann (1899-1987)
Scholar, bookseller and librarian in Europe and the United States

Felix Reichmann was born in Vienna in 1899. His parents, Alois Reichmann (1868-1936) and Emilie Löwe (1871-1950), were the owners of a bookstore in Vienna that they had founded in 1896. The Alois Reichmann Buchhandlung und Antiquariat in due time became Vienna's leading scholarly bookstore with a prominent location on the Wiedner Hauptstrasse and specializing in the sciences and art history.

Reichmann attended the Gymnasium in Vienna, graduating in 1918, but not before also serving as lieutenant in the Austrian cavalry in 1917-1918. He continued his studies at the University of Vienna where his major field was art history. He earned his doctorate in 1923 with a dissertation on Gothic mural painting in Austria. Before joining his parent's bookselling company as partner in 1926, Reichmann served extensive bookselling internships in Frankfurt, Paris, London and Florence. Especially his association in the latter city with the famous publishers and booksellers Leo Olschki & Co fuelled his subsequent long term interest in Italian book history. In 1933 Reichmann married Lilly Dörfler (1907-1997) and a daughter Ingrid was born to them in 1936. After Alois Reichmann had died in 1936, mother and son continued the ownership of the firm as equal partners. Felix Reichmann expended much of his energies on developing the antiquarian side of the book business.

Drama unfolded in 1938 after the Germans invaded Austria. A long-term employee and a secret Nazi member denounced Reichmann to the authorities for his perceived political views. Moreover, the Reichmann family was of Jewish ancestry. The company was confiscated and Reichmann was sent to the concentration camp Dachau and later Buchenwald. After strenuous efforts by his wife Lilly, and several international colleagues, Reichmann was ultimately released in 1939 and was able to immigrate with his immediate family to the United States. His mother Emilie and sister Lisbeth (1915-1969) moved to England.

Reichmann's US visa application had been supported by Douglas Waples, prominent library educator at the University of Chicago, a personal friend and mentor. The Society of Friends assisted the Reichmann family after their arrival in New York. Soon afterward, Reichmann found employment as curator and librarian of the Landis Valley Museum in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Over the course of three summers Reichmann studied at the University of Chicago, where he attained a MA in Library Science in 1942 and, in the same year, he joined the Carl Schurz Foundation in Philadelphia as librarian. He became an American citizen in 1944, joined the Army and was assigned to the Office of Strategic Services in Washington, DC. After the German defeat, Reichmann was appointed as Chief of the Publications Control Branch for the US military zone. Among his responsibilities was the re-organization of the German booktrade.

After the war, the Reichmann family regained control of the company but left the management to a former long-term employee, Hans Edelmann (1907-1978), who also had been fired and exiled to England and Australia. Edelmann ultimately became the sole owner and his son, Paul, continues the business currently.

In 1946 Reichmann left the military service and became a consultant for the Library of Congress as part of the Library's effort to collect European war time publications. Stephen McCarthy, the newly appointed Director of Libraries at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY recruited Reichmann in 1947 as one of the first professional staff members to lead the effort to rebuild the library and its collections after many years of neglect. His initial appointment was as Acquisitions Librarian, but a year later the responsibility for cataloging was added to his portfolio and his title was changed to Assistant Director for Technical Services.

During his long tenure until 1970 Reichmann had a profound influence on the development of the collections at Cornell. Although there were historical strengths, the collections were inadequate for the needs of the post-war influx of new faculty members and students. Reichmann systematized the process of procuring current publications from

all over the world and worked closely with faculty members in building retrospective collections. His extensive knowledge of the European booktrade was instrumental in the acquisition of major standard sets of books and periodicals, as well as numerous needed special publications. Among the important collections Reichmann acquired for Cornell were the Hull Collection on Brazil and the Indonesia Collection from the Netherlands.

He also was a tireless innovator in finding ways to develop more efficient cataloging processes and was an early proponent of the use of computers in libraries. Active in regional and national library organizations, he had a considerable influence on new generations of librarians. His rich knowledge, his natural charm and sense of humor and his unmistakable Austrian accent added to the quality of his relationships with colleagues inside and outside the library.

Reichmann was awarded Guggenheim and Fulbright grants in 1956, which allowed him to return to Italy to study his beloved subject, the medieval booktrade. Because of the ever growing task of overseeing both the acquisitions and cataloging processes at Cornell, the administration was split into two positions 1964 Reichmann concentrated on the first. His official title was changed to Assistant Director of Collection Development . A year later the University honored him with the promotion to Professor of Bibliography. Reichmann retired in 1970, leaving a legacy of intricate knowledge of the needs of scholars in many academic disciplines and the ability to provide the required resources. The modern discipline of library collection development could not have emerged without his example and leadership. An endowed book fund in his name has been established at the Cornell University Library.

Throughout his career, Reichmann published books, articles and reviews in the fields of art history, classics, bibliography and library science.

Selected Reichmann publications:

Gothische Wandmalerei in Niederösterreich. Zürich, Amalthea Verlag, 1925. (Wiener Studien zur Kunstgeschichte, 1)

“The Book trade at the time of the Roman Empire” *Library Quarterly* vol. 8 (1) 1938. pp. 40-76

Christopher Sower sr, 1694-1758, Printer in Germantown. Philadelphia, Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1943. (Bibliographies on German American History, 2)

“The Reorganization of the book trade in Germany” *Library Quarterly* vol. 17 (3) 1947. pp. 185-200

Sugar, gold and coffee. Essays on the history of Brazil. The Francis Hull Library of Braziliانا. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Library, 1959

Bibliographic Control of Microforms. With Josephine Tharpe, Henriette Avram, and others. Westport, CT. Greenwood Press, 1972.

The Sources of Western literacy: the Middle Eastern civilizations. Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1980. (Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science, 29)

Sources:

Cornell University Archives. *Felix Reichmann files.*

Birgitta Stieglitz-Hofer, *Buch-und Antquariatshandlung Alois Reichmann.*
(www.murrayhall.com/files/referate/reichmann-stieglitz.pdf) (August 12, 2009)

Stephen A. McCarthy, “Felix Reichmann and the development of the Cornell Library”.
Library Trends, October 1966. pp. 215-221

Bulletin of the Cornell University Libraries. Special issue dedicated to Felix Reichmann.
Ithaca, NY June 1, 1970. (Contains a complete bibliography of Reichmann's writings)

Photograph: Felix Reichmann in 1948. (Courtesy Cornell University Archives)

August 2009

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