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## **Obituary. Charles Robin LeSueur, 1923-2004**

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another's ideas. Anyone who acquired a new skill or new information was encouraged and given the time to teach the rest of the staff what had been learned. John was always an enthusiastic student in these sessions himself. The atmosphere was extremely collegial with different people taking the lead on different ventures, according to their interests and abilities. Each person's contributions were valued. Disagreement was valued as a logical component of discussion. (Nancy Calabretta)

And a student in the medical librarianship course at Drexel University recalled:

We left the classes with the assurance that medical librarians do make a difference in the health care world, the certainty that we wanted to be part of that world, and the absolute conviction that Jefferson must be the best place in the city to work, because John must be the best boss in the world. (Dianne Rose)

John was comfortable in front of an audience, and nowhere was this more apparent than in the classroom. He was adjunct professor of library science at Drexel (19 6-19 8) and, earlier, a lecturer on library science at South Connecticut State College (19 0-19 1). Interactions with his students energized him as well as them, as they learned the true meaning of professionalism. Many of his students be-

came active in regional and national professional organizations, serving on committees and as officers.

John's eloquence extended to the written word. Many of his articles were published in professional journals, and, in 19 4, he won the Medical Library Association's (MLA's) Ida and George Eliot Prize for "Are Hospital Libraries Meeting Physicians' Information Needs?" His other professional honors included Beta Phi Mu and induction into *Who's Who i America*.

John's participation in professional organizations has already been noted. This included:

- MLA Board of Directors, member, 19 8-1981
- MLA Philadelphia Regional Group, chair, 19 5-19 6
- American Medical Writers Association, Philadelphia Chapter, president, 1986-198
- Special Libraries Association (SLA), Philadelphia Chapter, president, 19 9-1980
- SLA Biological Sciences Division, treasurer, 19 6-19 6; chair, 19 6-19
- SLA Connecticut Valley Chapter, treasurer, 19 2-19 3
- CVC Bulletin, editor, 19 0-19 2; director, 19 0-19 1
- American Library Association, Research Committee, chairman, 19 1-19 3

He also held numerous committee appointments for all of these groups. In 1981, he was one of two

nominees for the MLA presidency, and, while not elected, the nomination shows the high esteem in which he was held.

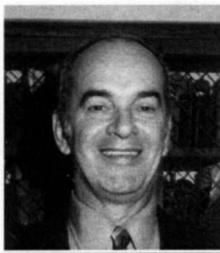
Throughout his career, John was sustained by his enjoyment of the people with whom he worked and by his commitment to the profession he loved. His enthusiasm was contagious, and his vision was inspiring. Even after retirement, he could not stop doing what he loved and donated his services to the local public library. Once again, John motivated the lives of the people he touched. When he died, the residents of Washington, North Carolina, came together for a "departing" party. If there was one thing John could not resist, it was a party, and Oh My, could he and Betty dance!

#### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to these persons who helped me prepare this tribute: Harry Armistead, Albert Berkowitz, Lillian Brazin, Nancy Calabretta, Henry T. Clark, Peggy Devlin, Barbara Laynor, Dianne Rose, Donna Ryan, and a special thanks to Betty Timour. Shared tributes from several of these are available upon request.

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## Charles Robin LeSueur, 1923-2004



The Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine

Robin LeSueur died at home in Chester Basin, Nova Scotia, Canada, on September 4, 2004. For those of us in the medical library community, Robin will be remembered as having been the director of two distinguished academic medical center libraries, those at Rocke-

efeller University in Manhattan, New York, and at Harvard Medical School (the Countway) in Boston, Massachusetts.

However, combat experience in World War II in the Royal Canadian Navy was central to Robin's life. His military career started in 1941 and ended shortly after Victory-in-Europe (VE) Day, 1945. When we met for the first time, one of Robin's first questions was to ask about my role in the Second World War. Surprised, I responded that my birth took place in the middle of that conflict.

Robin spent his Navy years on a

corvette. This vessel is smaller than a destroyer and, during the war, served to escort larger ships. To appreciate what Robin's life was like during this period, one has only to read Nicholas Monsarrat's *The Cruel Sea* [1], which relates the wartime activities of a corvette.

During the time that Robin was at Harvard, we attended numerous meetings together, particularly those associated with the New England Regional Medical Library Service (NERMLS), for which the Countway Library was responsible. Often at dinner after a meeting,

Robin would reminisce about the war. One memorable anecdote dealt with the night of June 5/6, 1944, just before D-Day. Robin's corvette was posted to the Irish Sea, between Ireland and England. The order of the night was no lights, not even running lights. Robin was on duty. During his watch, lights flashed in Morse code from a distance. Following orders, Robin did not respond. The flashed message continued to get closer. Still, no response from Robin. Finally, a large mountain of a vessel, appeared adjacent to the corvette. Over a bullhorn, a voice boomed. "This is the lead battleship for the invasion of Europe. Either move your ship, or we'll come across your bow." Robin noted he quickly told his commanding officer, "I think we have to move our boat."

Robin's childhood was spent in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. The economic depression of the 1930s provided fewer employment opportunities than previous decades. Family members—father, uncle, and brother—had served or were serving in the Royal Canadian Navy. Robin enlisted as soon as he met the age requirement of eighteen.

After the war, Robin used his veteran's benefits and attended the University of Toronto to study mechanical engineering. Although his brother had majored in this field, engineering did not prove to be to Robin's liking. He changed fields and obtained a bachelor of arts degree in 1950 and a bachelor's degree in social work in 1951.

Robin was employed as a social worker from 1951 to 1953 with the Children's Aid Society of Toronto. His next employer, from 1953 to 1955, was the Canadian General Electric Company. Robin became disenchanted with this position when he was responsible for relocating workers to what turned out to be undesirable living conditions.

After a trip to New York City to visit friends in April 1955, Robin found Manhattan so attractive that he decided to relocate there immediately, even though he did not have a job prospect. His early experience in the city was, therefore,

a difficult one with little money and inferior housing.

His library career was launched when he was hired as an evening clerk at the New York University (NYU) Library. His employment at NYU struck a responsive chord in Robin. He pursued a master's in library science at Columbia University, which he completed in 1959.

Robin's first professional position was also at NYU, where he was employed in the engineering school library. Now he could bring together two of the areas he had studied: engineering and librarianship. Robin remained at NYU for thirteen years, had a series of promotions, and finally was appointed head of its engineering library.

From 1968 to 1972, the Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, New Jersey, was Robin's employer, where he served as library director. In this capacity, he was responsible for the construction of a new library.

Robin moved back to Manhattan in 1972 to assume responsibility for the Rockefeller University Library. He remained in that position until 1977.

His final career position was that of director of the Countway Library of Medicine, Harvard University, from 1977 to 1988. When Robin moved to Boston, I made his acquaintance. We participated in a major collaboration in 1980 with the reconfiguration of the RML program and the reduction in the number of its regions from eleven to seven. This eliminated the New England Region, of which the Countway was the RML, and combined it with New York. (The region was later restored.) Robin and I submitted a joint proposal to the National Library of Medicine in which our two institutions would share specific functional responsibilities for medical library services in the northeast—from Maine to Pennsylvania. Although our proposal was not successful, Robin and I came to know each other better than previously because of the intensity of intermeshing our proposals; they had to be complementary.

Though not especially active in MLA, Robin was both an individual member and an institutional representative and he regularly attended annual meetings. He was chair of the International Cooperation Committee in 1980/81. (It is unfortunate that in the printed directory during his MLA years, he was listed as Le Sueur, rather than LeSueur, and could easily be overlooked.) His Canadian background made him the ideal broker for the *Bilateral Agreement between the Canadian Health Libraries Association (CHLA) and the Medical Library Association (MLA)* that was drawn up following the establishment of a separate Canadian health sciences library association in the late 1970s.

However, Robin was very active during the formative years of the Association of Academic Health Sciences Library Directors (AAHSLD). He was a charter member of the association and its president in 1980/81 (only the third person to hold that office). Two years earlier he had served as a member of AAHSLD's first Nominating Committee and its first Information Control Committee.

Robin retired from Harvard on June 30, 1988, and relocated to Nova Scotia. It was from Halifax that he had shipped out during the war, escorting convoys to Europe with desperately needed supplies. His attachment to the province was deep, and his decision to retire there reinforces the centrality of the war to his life. In Halifax, from all accounts, he developed a network of friends with whom he walked by the sea accompanied by his dog, Maggie.

Robin was a quiet, gentle man who taught himself to knit to fill the time when he was on naval escort. When at Harvard, he was still knitting scarves, which a friend would sell and use the proceeds to buy them dinner. His unassuming character and readiness to laugh would not lead one to suspect how much combat he had seen.

He had made the perilous trip escorting merchant marine ships to Murmansk, USSR, several times. Although his corvette was armed, the Nazi fighter planes taking off

from occupied Norway could easily sink these lightly armed convoy escort ships. The cold north Atlantic waters meant certain death if one of them was hit.

When I visited his Boston apartment, what looked like a butter knife was on the table in the foyer. When asked, Robin casually remarked that the Germans had physically stormed his boat in the North Sea. All his crewmates were on deck for the fight, including the galley crew who took whatever they could use as arms. This knife

was taken from the back of one of the attackers.

Robin's corvette escorted landing craft into Normandy on D-Day. Coincidentally, his brother was on one of the ships he escorted. They exchanged greetings after years of military separation.

Two of the corvettes on which Robin served were torpedoed; one off Iceland, the other off North Carolina. On one occasion, his arms were still swinging as though loading ammunition when he awoke in sick bay after suffering a concussion.

Robin once said that he felt that the Allied combat veterans of World War II were individuals who earned—and had—halos. He was right; he did.

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#### **Reference**

1. MONSARRAT N. *The cruel sea*. New York, NY: Knopf, 1951.