

Obituaries

John L. Mish (1909–1983)

John L. Mish, chief of the Oriental and Slavonic divisions of the New York Public Library until his retirement in 1978, died on August 22, 1983.

Before coming to the New York Public Library in 1946, Dr. Mish taught Oriental studies in Warsaw, taught German in Baghdad, and worked as an intelligence officer in Bombay. These experiences provided broad exposure to the Orient and its written traditions, and they provided him with material for stories—Mish was a raconteur par excellence. In addition to European languages, he was conversant in Malay, Chinese, Manchu, and Japanese, he knew Arabic, Sanskrit, and Hindi well, and he was familiar with several other Oriental languages.

Dr. Mish pointed the Oriental Division of the New York Public Library toward the Far East. By the end of World War II, the division had strong Middle East and Indic collections and a much smaller Far Eastern collection. Under his direction, the Oriental Division strengthened its Chinese, Manchu, Japanese, and Korean holdings, and it joined several Public Law 480 programs, which vastly increased vernacular holdings for India and strengthened the Arabic collection. During his tenure, the Oriental Division was reorganized into three sections, greatly improving the division's ability to cope with the increasing flow of materials from the Orient, and area specialists, the backbone of the division's reference expertise, joined the staff.

Dr. Mish held a number of adjunct appointments during his career at the New York Public Library, including professorships at the Asia Institute (1946–1951), Dropsie College (1961–1963), Seton Hall University (1963–1976), Fordham University (1967–1969), and Barnard College (1970–1973). Dr. Mish was a prolific author, and his reputation as a Manchu scholar is international. His most important publications are devoted to questions in early Chinese history and, especially, to texts published in Manchu, the official language of the Chinese Empire until 1911.

John L. Mish spent many productive years at the New York Public Library, building and expanding the collections of the Oriental and Slavonic divisions. He placed his profound knowledge and expertise in the service of the institution and its public. The collections are his living memorial.

DAVID H. STAM
New York Public Library

Robert Milton Somers (1942–1983)

Early on August 23, 1983, Bob Somers took his own life, thus bringing to a close several years of acute suffering from depression. He also ended a career of great distinction, and an exceptionally rich family life with his wife Miko and their four young daughters.

Bob developed his first interests in Asian studies with John Cady at the University of Ohio. In the mid-1960s, he studied Chinese at Taiwan Normal University and met Miko in Kyoto. He took an M.A. from the East-West Center in Chinese studies, then completed his doctorate at Yale in medieval Chinese history, under the affection-