



MARCUS ALLEN MCCORISON  
1926–2013

## Memories of Mark McCorison

**M**arcus A. McCorison, who died at the age of 86 on February 3, 2013, was a towering presence in the world of early Americana. In a thirty-two-year tenure as librarian, director, and president of the American Antiquarian Society, Mark led one of the nation's greatest historical institutions. A prolific author on various aspects of the history of the book in America, he excelled at collection development, significantly expanding the extraordinary AAS holdings of pre-1877 Americana through purchase, expert cultivation of leading collectors and other donors, and uniquely productive relationships with dealers, auctioneers, and book scouts across the country. In the long line of outstanding early Americana collectors, curators, bibliographers, and connoisseurs that stretches from the 1790s to the present—Isaiah Thomas, Joseph Sabin, James Lenox, George Brinley, Wilberforce Eames, William L. Clements, Lawrence Wroth, and others—Mark McCorison was

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one of the giants of our time. Looking at today's up-and-coming young talents in historical research librarianship, it's hard to identify his equal for combining encyclopedic knowledge of early Americana, a flair for fundraising and collection development, scholarly research, the ability to interact effectively with antiquarian dealers and collectors, and the vision, drive, and administrative ability to lead a great institution.

Mark had deep Vermont connections. He began working on early Vermont printers as a UVM graduate student in the early 1950s, producing a bibliography of early Vermont imprints that became his 1963 book *Vermont Imprints 1778–1820*, then and now one of the most essential reference works for Green Mountain researchers and collectors. His first professional job, after service as a combat officer in the Korean War, was as head of the Kellogg-Hubbard Library in Montpelier. He continued to work on Vermont topics after moving to Special Collections at Dartmouth College and during his long years at AAS. He was a trustee of the Vermont Historical Society from 1960 to 1966. Mark knew almost everybody who collected, curated, or researched early Vermont between 1950 and 2010; his circle of now-departed Vermont friends and acquaintances included Hall Park McCullough, Harold Goddard Rugg, Ken Leach, Gertrude Mallery, Frank Teagle, Tom Bassett, Edwin Hoyt, Hamilton V. Bail, Charles Tuttle, and others. Vermont history and bibliography will be poorer for the loss of Mark's memories of those individuals.

I first met Mark in 1976, when I was a senior at UVM working on an honors thesis about the Dresden Press. I had written to him earlier, when I was a teenager starting up an antiquarian book business specializing in Vermontiana, and he had responded graciously to my uninformed questions about arcane points of early Vermont bibliography. In 1976 Mark, Frank Teagle, and Bob Sharp did some work on the old printing press at the VHS museum, which Alden Spooner used at Dresden in 1778–79, and they were kind in letting me hang around while they discussed whether they could restore the press to working condition. Shortly thereafter, when I became a member of the Committee for a New England Bibliography, I watched with interest as the other CNEB members consistently deferred to Mark on almost everything. Once, when a CNEB meeting ran on far too long, Mark started rapping his big ring against the top of the table. When that had no apparent effect, the rapping pace and noise increased, thoroughly flustering our chairman, John Armstrong of Boston University. John marched us rapidly through the remaining agenda items, for which most of us thanked Mark and his dislike of wasting time on administrivia. Patience was not always a McCorison virtue, and he did not suffer fools gladly; but if you

could hold your own with Mark and earn his respect, there was no better colleague, advisor, dinner companion, or raconteur in the history community.

In my years as curator of UVM's Wilbur Collection of Vermontiana, I occasionally went up against Mark in the collection development arena. Youth, inexperience, and representing the less prestigious institution usually put me at a disadvantage, but once I came out ahead on something important. Gertrude Mallary (1903–2002) of Fairlee owned her generation's finest private collection of Vermontiana, and both Mark and I cultivated her assiduously for our institutions. When Gertrude decided in the early 1990s that UVM would be the best home for her library, it was a huge coup for me and a big disappointment for Mark. He managed to be gracious about the rare defeat, even in the face of my occasional ribbing about it.

In a long career that has now moved me firmly into the ranks of "senior" Vermont historians, I've had a handful of important mentors and influences on my professional development. Mark McCorison ranks high on that list, and I am proud to say that he was my friend as well. When colleagues have occasionally said I remind them in some ways of "a young McCorison," I've always considered it high praise, for there's nobody I've regarded with more respect and affection than Mark. May we all live so long, accomplish so much, and be so loved.

J. KEVIN GRAFFAGNINO

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