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## The pleasure of her company: Rachel Martin, 1918-2006

When Rachel Sangster Martin died November 27 at the age of 88, she left a professional legacy of 27 years of service to Furman, the last six as head librarian.

She also left a tangible treasure: a handwritten, personal history of her years on campus. Dated December 16, 1998, her narrative was stored in a file in the Special Collections and Archives section of the James Buchanan Duke Library. It described her time at Furman in elegant prose, from her arrival in 1957 as a reference and serials librarian (reference being, she wrote, her “first love”) to her promotions to associate librarian in the early 1970s and head librarian in 1978, and on to her decision to retire.

She wrote of her first year at Furman, spent at the Greenville Woman’s College campus, where the library was housed in “a drafty old brick building, formerly a private home.” She told of how her desk was located near the building’s rear entrance, and that during the winter she surrounded her work space with heavy cardboard boxes — “to keep my feet from being numb with cold.” Soon thereafter, the Duke Library opened on the current campus, and Miss Martin was able to enjoy more comfortable confines.

A native of Mount Olive, N.C., Rachel Martin earned her undergraduate degree from Brenau College and began her career as a teacher and librarian in the North Carolina public schools. She completed graduate degrees in library science at the University of North Carolina and history at the University of Iowa, and worked at Auburn, Mary Baldwin College and Florida State before coming to Furman.

In her memoir, which she titled “Remembering,” she recalled how, after Robert Tucker retired as head librarian in 1978, she was one day suddenly summoned to Dean Francis Bonner’s office. There, she was invited to become the new library director — “not to take Bob’s place but to try to carry on the leadership to which the staff was accustomed.”

Which is exactly what she did, according to friends and colleagues who recall her intelligence, gracious manner and strong work ethic. She worked with the Parents Council to establish a fund to help maintain the library’s holdings and financial stability during a time of extreme

inflation, and she was credited with realizing that advances in technology would soon revolutionize her profession — and thus with laying the groundwork for the library to enter the computer age and ultimately become the fully automated facility students enjoy today.

Her efforts on Furman’s behalf extended to service as vice chair of the faculty and on a host of institutional committees. She was also active in state, regional and national library associations. For many years she was a reviewer and editorial board member for the American Library Association’s Reference and Subscription Books Review Committees. Among librarians, these jobs are considered high professional honors.

And when she felt she had done what she could for Furman, she decided to put her considerable talents to use in other areas. She wrote, “In 1984, keenly aware of what I didn’t know about successfully taking the library where it should go technologically, I decided it was time to retire. And after 27 happy years, I did just that.”

In retirement, she pursued such interests as traveling, reading (she especially enjoyed historical biographies), gourmet cooking (she was said to have quite the sweet tooth), gardening and flower arranging. And she contributed her time and talents to a host of Greenville organizations, among them the Red Cross, Free Medical Clinic, Meals on Wheels, the American Cancer Society and First Baptist Church.

Her retirement was as rewarding as her professional life. “Retirement has been great — extensive traveling to fascinating places and time to volunteer in many worthwhile commu-

nity charities where I have learned much about the thriving city in which I live and have met and known many fine and lovely people,” she wrote.

Would that all of us could live a life filled with such richness and satisfaction.

— JIM STEWART



*Memorials: Greenville Free Medical Clinic, 600 Arlington St., Greenville 29607, or the Martin Endowment, Mount Olive College, 634 Henderson St., Mount Olive, N.C., 28365.*