

# WILLIAM H. LOOS

## 1937-2017

It is with great regret that Western New York Heritage notes the passing on January 24, 2017, of founding director and true friend of this organization, William H. Loos.

Bill first encountered the predecessor to Western New York Heritage in 1993, when he accepted the invitation of Canisius College president, the late Rev. James M. Demske, SJ, to join the Western New York Heritage Institute. As a member, he contributed valuable counsel in honing the Institute's mission to advocate for the importance of an appreciation for the area's history and heritage to the local school curriculum.

When the Institute separated from Canisius in 1995, Bill agreed to serve as a founding director of the new Western New York Heritage Press, and mentor in the development of *Western New York Heritage* magazine. Bill's meticulous attention to detail was demonstrated through his vast knowledge of local history, which he shared willingly, and through the pinpoint precision with which he corrected errors in proofs already passed on by others as press-ready. He also assisted enthusiastically when mundane tasks such as mailings required the assistance of volunteers.

Professionally, Bill will best be remembered for his distinguished career as the curator of the Rare Book Room at the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, from whence he retired in 2002 after 30 years' service. His most memorable

accomplishment in that role was the reuniting of the two halves of Mark Twain's manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn*. One-half had resided in the library's collection since its donation by the author. Its mate, thought to have been included in Twain's gift, was believed lost for nearly a

century. When the lost portion turned up in the hands of an auction house, Bill's negotiating skills resulted in an amicable resolution of competing claims to the work, which now resides in the Rare Book Room. He was also instrumental in negotiations leading to acquisition for the library of the "Milestones of Science," a unique collection of original scientific texts that were at risk of being sold by the Buffalo Museum of Science. Thanks to the efforts of Bill and others, those priceless volumes remain part of Buffalo's heritage.

During his career at the library, Bill curated numerous exhibits, lectured widely on its collections and the trials and rewards of a curator of rare books.

Anyone meeting Bill would be struck by his embodiment of the "old school" gentleman. Perhaps as would be implicit in that persona, email was a stranger to him. Nevertheless he would communicate his ideas the old-fashioned way, with grace and tact.

We will miss this courtly mentor, generous benefactor, devoted colleague and friend. 🕊



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