

The JOURNAL

OF THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

VOLUME XXIX

JUNE 1966

NUMBER 2

DONALD F. CAMERON

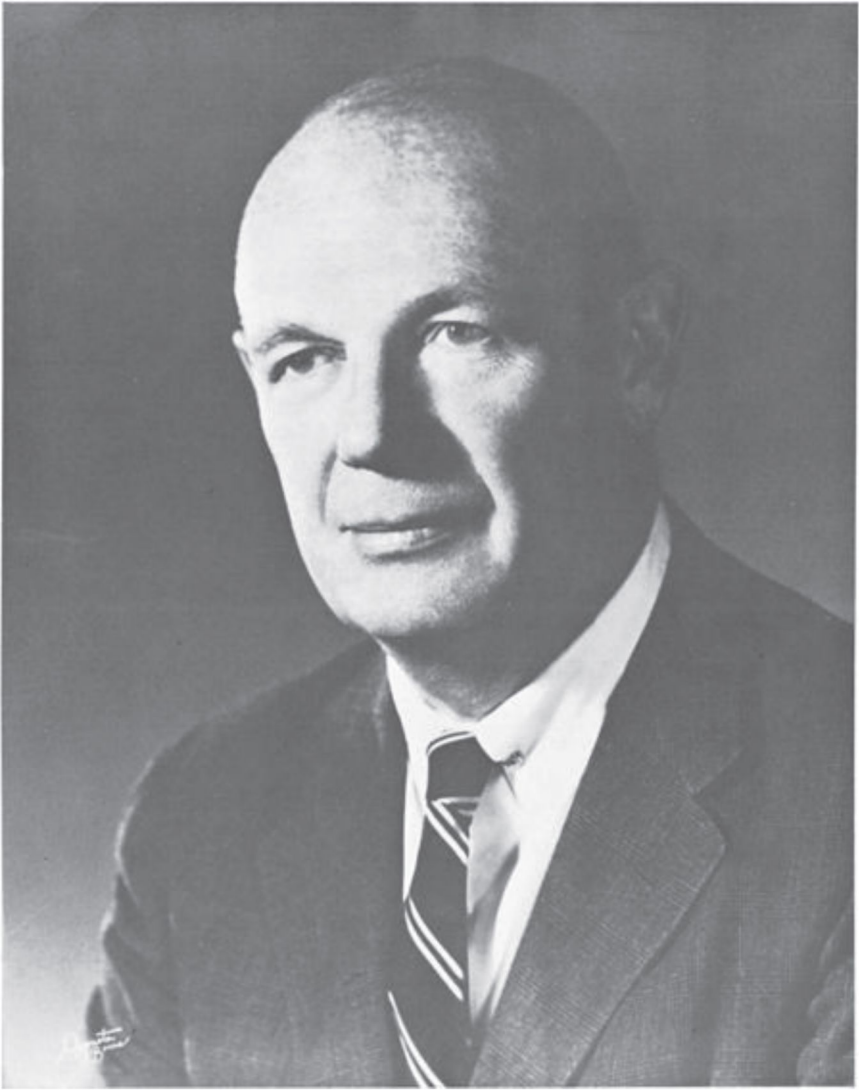
BY PETER CHARANIS

Voorhees Professor of History, Rutgers University

I MET Donald F. Cameron for the first time on Albany Street late one afternoon in the fall of 1938. I had just joined the Rutgers University faculty. We stopped and talked for a little while, and it soon became apparent that we had something in common. This was Edward Gibbon, for Cameron because of his interest in eighteenth century English literature, for me because of Gibbon's fame as the great historian of the Later Roman Empire. It was indeed about Gibbon that we talked, about the literary quality of his great book, but also how superannuated it had become in its interpretation of Roman history.

I knew virtually nothing about Cameron at the time of this accidental meeting, but the meeting itself and the conversation that ensued was for me an exhilarating experience. I had met a member of the Rutgers faculty who knew about, and was sympathetic to, things in which I was profoundly interested. I made up my mind to learn more about him and to cultivate his friendship.

In due course I learned that Cameron, or Scotty as some of us have come to call him affectionately, was born on the 29th of May, 1901, in Dennistoun, Glasgow, Scotland, the oldest of three children. In 1911 his father was given an opportunity to come to Amsterdam, New York, and so left the James Templeton Carpet Company of Scotland and joined what later became the Mohawk Carpet Company. He left in September of 1911, and his wife and three sons joined him the following April. Scotty has very seldom spoken of his father, but has frequently mentioned his mother, who was ap-



DONALD F. CAMERON
The Librarian, Rutgers University,
From 1945-1966

parently a very stern Presbyterian. It is to his mother perhaps that may be traced the sternness and stubbornness that at times he exhibits. He can be, and on occasions he has shown himself to be, a forbidding and dominant character. Scotty also has a sense of orderliness which may perhaps be traced to his father who apparently had that quality.

Cameron has been associated with Rutgers for thirty-seven years. He had come in 1929 as instructor in English and for the next sixteen years remained a member of the English department, going up through the ranks to become Associate Professor in 1944. In 1945 he was appointed University Librarian and also Professor of English, but it was as University Librarian that he was thenceforth to serve the University. He had been educated in the public schools of Amsterdam, New York, Union College, which he entered in 1919, and Princeton University, where he spent three years in graduate study, interrupted after the first year by two years of teaching at his Alma Mater. He married the former Donna Priest the year he came to Rutgers.

In the thirty-seven years during which Cameron was associated with Rutgers, the University went through a radical transformation—it became a real university. In this transformation various factors were involved—the war, the influx of the veterans, the clarification of the relations between the University and the State of New Jersey, the high birth rate during the war and the postwar years which is now bringing thousands of young people knocking at its doors, the enlightened and inspiring leadership of “Queens,” especially in the last seven or eight years. But there were two other developments, I think, which also played important roles. These were the establishment of the Rutgers University Press and the Research Council. In both these developments Cameron played a major role and in a certain sense made his greatest contribution to the growth in stature of this University.

The possibility of establishing a Rutgers University Press was first taken up in the academic year 1935-36. Among those who took part in the conversation were Carl Woodward, Class of 1914 and then Secretary of the University, Walter C. Russell, Executive Secretary of the Graduate Faculty, Ethan Ellis of the Department of History, and Cameron, then Assistant Professor of English. Their

deliberations were brought to a head with what could be considered an accident. Professor Jacob Joffe of the College of Agriculture had entirely on his own initiative produced a book called *Pedology*, printed in a job printing office in Somerville, New Jersey; it contained a colophon, indicating that it was the production of the Rutgers University Press, an institution which in fact did not exist. But the imprint had been used, and it was to a certain extent in order to protect it that the group came to a definite decision; in so doing, however, it had the cooperation of George Osborn, then the Librarian of the University, who was interested in improving his exchange program. Osborn, at the time, was spending seven hundred dollars *per annum* for offprints of publications of the faculty which appeared in learned periodicals, binding them in a scarlet cover to indicate their Rutgers origin, and using them as part of the exchange program of the library. He was quick to see that a Press, once established, would supply him with valuable items for exchange and readily agreed to turn over the seven hundred dollars if that sum was supplemented by another offered by the University. The University responded by appropriating twelve hundred dollars. Earl S. Miers, who was then in the University Publications Office, proceeded to draw up plans for the operation of the Press while Cameron assumed the duties of editor. With the meager funds at their disposal they published under the general title of Rutgers University Studies three books written by members of the University faculty. Thus did the Rutgers University Press come into being. This was in 1937. Today it is still relatively small, but by the distinction it has won among university presses, it brings renown and prestige to the University. And Cameron is still associated with it. He is the Secretary of the Rutgers University Press Council which must approve all manuscripts before they are accepted for publication.

The Rutgers University Research Council is today one of the most important university divisions contributing to the development and maintenance of a good faculty. Its establishment was, to a considerable extent, the result of the force of circumstances, but some one had to take the initiative. Here again Cameron played a very important role. When, in the spring of 1943, it became apparent that the University, because of the manpower needs of the country then fully engaged in war, would have virtually no students, it was de-

cided that the best way to meet the financial difficulties that would ensue was to dismiss the major part of the faculty regardless of tenure or other contractual obligations. Particularly vulnerable were certain young men, for various reasons not subject to the draft, who had shown promise of becoming good teachers and scholars. I well remember the general uproar among the faculty that this decision aroused. But I well remember also the initiative which Cameron, together with a few others, notably Miers, Walter Russell and William H. Cole, took in bringing to the attention of the President the seriousness of this matter, particularly for the future of the University. The result was the establishment of a Board, with Cole as Director and Cameron, Russell and a few others as members with funds at their disposal and the power to shift, for the moment at least, certain members of the faculty from teaching to research. Thus did the Rutgers University Research Council come into being. But in establishing the Research Council, the University did something more than just create another University division. It recognized officially the importance of research as an attribute of a good faculty as well as its own obligations to provide the necessary facilities to make research possible. And by so doing it took a big step forward to distinction.

Meanwhile, Cameron became engaged in another activity which may eventually have contributed to his becoming the University Librarian. This was the founding in 1938 of the Friends of the Library. This Rutgers organization was patterned after similar organizations of other universities, but its objectives were somewhat different. It sought in the first place to arouse an interest in Rutgers and the State of New Jersey and so make it possible for the University Library to acquire as much material relating to New Jersey as possible. This interest Cameron has pursued intensely as University Librarian with the result that he has been able to increase considerably the Library's holdings of New Jersey material and to interest in Rutgers a number of important donors of such material. The second objective of the Friends of the Library was to start a campaign for a new library building in New Brunswick. It took more than the campaign of the Friends of the Library to bring about the erection of the new building, but it must have been a thrill for Cameron to know that the man who, as University Librarian, moved

into the new library was no other than he. He inherited a small college library; he leaves one well on the road to becoming an important research library.

Cameron has often complained that universities today with their emphasis on research tend to neglect teaching, but deep down he knows that there is an intimate relationship between good teaching and research. For while there may be scholars who are no good as teachers, a university teacher to be indeed a good teacher must also be a good scholar, and this he can be only by continuous research and scholarly activity. However that may be, it is in the domain of research, in the creation of conditions favorable to it, that Cameron made his contributions to the growth in stature of this University. As University Librarian he has sought to provide the material necessary for research; as one of the founders of the Research Council he has helped to make the way of research as easy as possible; and finally, in helping to found the Rutgers University Press, he has helped to provide an outlet for the publication of the results of research.

But the greatest tribute that I can pay to Cameron is to say of him that during the thirty-seven years that he has been associated with the University, he did not just work for it. He served it, and served in such a way as to help it to achieve distinction.