Powell, Benjamin Edward [1]

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Powell, Benjamin Edward

by William S. Powell, 1994

28 Aug. 1905–11 Mar. 1981

Benjamin Edward Powell, librarian and teacher, was born in Sunbury, Gates County [2], the son of Willis Warren and Beatrice Franklin Powell. In 1922 he entered Trinity College [3], Durham, which became Duke University [4] in 1924, and was graduated in 1926 with a major in history. He worked briefly in the university library; taught school and coached athletics in Bethel High School, Pitt County [5], during the year 1926–27; and then accepted a position on the Duke University library staff, where he soon became head of the circulation department. On leave of absence in 1929–30, he received a degree in library science from Columbia University [6].

At Duke, Powell planned, organized, and supervised the library move from the Trinity College library to the new General Library on the West Campus. After attending the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago [7] in 1934–35, he returned to Duke, but in 1937 he went to the University of Missouri, where he became head librarian. He received the doctorate in library science from the University of Chicago in 1946 and returned to Duke as university librarian, where he remained until his retirement in 1975. Frequently during those years Powell taught courses in the theory of library administration in the School of Library Science [8] at The University of North Carolina [9].

Powell held numerous posts of professional significance: he was president of the American Library Association [10] and of the Association of College and Research Libraries, consultant to college and research libraries and to the U.S. government, and an active member of committees and boards. He contributed to such journals as the *ALA Bulletin, College and Research Libraries*, and *Southeastern Librarian*. He made trips to Germany and England to study conditions there and to discuss topics of mutual concern. He also played key roles in the building of a new city library in Durham and integrating library service for all races.

During his administration, the Duke University library was enlarged twice and between 1946 and 1975 its holdings grew from 875,000 volumes to nearly 3 million and from 975,000 manuscripts to over 4.5 million. In 1972, under his guidance, the Duke University Archives became a part of the library. A completely automated library system covering serials, purchasing records, and the accounting system was established. An on-line ordering system and the preparation of a microfiche of serial titles also were completed under his direction.

Powell was married in 1940 to Elizabeth Graves of Scottsbluff, Nebr., and they became the parents of a daughter, Lisa Holland Powell. He was a Methodist [11] and a Democrat [12]. He was buried in Maplewood Cemetery, Durham.

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