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DR. JOHN C. VAN HORNE TO STEP DOWN AS DIRECTOR OF THE LIBRARY COMPANY

Benjamin Franklin's Library Looks for a New Leader

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—May 23, 2013—Library Company Director John Van Horne has announced that he will retire in May 2014 after almost 30 years at the helm. When he took over leadership of the Library Company of Philadelphia in 1985, special collections libraries operated pretty much the way they always had. It was just before the advent of the personal computer, and the Library Company had recently acquired a Wang word processor. Van Horne remembers the first FAX machine arriving in 1987, a clunky affair which cost several thousand dollars and used thermal paper. Since then, the digital revolution has transformed almost every aspect of the research environment, from the electronic catalog and online databases to online access to digitized images of the collections.

Van Horne has presided over this dramatic transformation with attentiveness to the needs of visitors, researchers, and members; a keen instinct for opportunity; and an unwavering reverence for the institution's history and mission. "This library has been in continuous operation for 282 years. Benjamin Franklin himself believed that it helped instill in Americans their passion for democratic citizenship. I cannot imagine a more critical task than ensuring that scholars and the public are able to have access these collections and the historical insights they make possible-and that they are preserved for future generations."

Among the many ways in which Van Horne has fulfilled this trust and built the Library Company's reputation as one of the very best independent research libraries in the country is by assembling a professional staff that includes experts in early American history; bookbinding; early photography and graphic arts; and rare book cataloging. In his 28 years at the helm of America's first subscription library, the operating budget has grown from \$500,000 to \$2.5 million, the endowment has grown from \$5 million to \$27 million, and the Center City "campus" now includes a residential research center and a third building to provide for future collection storage space and programming space needs. Tellingly, he is equally proud of the fact that the collections and programs are still available to the public free of charge.

Among the accomplishments of Van Horne's tenure are:

- Significant additions to the Library Company's collections through gift and purchase, including the 14,000-item Michael Zinman Collections of Early American Imprints and Bindings and the McNeil Americana Collection.
- Establishment of a Research Fellowship Program for doctoral candidates and senior scholars, now in its 26th year with almost 700 "alumni" who have published more than 200 books based on Library Company research.
- Creation and endowment of an innovative Program in Early American Economy and Society (PEAES), which supports acquisitions, research fellowships, public programs, exhibitions, and publications.
- Establishment of ground-breaking programs in early African American History and in Visual Culture.

- Major capital projects including renovation of a neighboring historic townhouse as a residential research center.
- More than forty major exhibitions; countless lectures, conferences, and other public programs; a robust publication program; and extensive collaborative ventures.

President B. Robert DeMento expresses the gratitude of the Board of Trustees by observing that "John Van Horne has made a profound contribution to the history of this nation, both through his dedicated stewardship of irreplaceable collections of rare early American books and prints and through his devotion to supporting the scholarship of others and, particularly, increasing access for young researchers. He has certainly put his stamp on this institution," continues DeMento, "and the Board has a very large task in front of us to fill his shoes. We are taking steps to be sure that we identify a leader who is capable of building on John's legacy as well as taking us into the next phase."

Van Horne, 63, will step down a year from now, in May 2014, allowing him time to make substantial progress on several projects before he leaves: securing endowment funds for the Program in African American History, expanding the Library Company's digitization efforts, and upgrading the systems in the 50-year-old main building so it can serve the needs of the Library Company for many years to come.

An elected member of the American Philosophical Society and the American Antiquarian Society, Van Horne received a bachelor's degree from Princeton University and a doctoral degree in history from the University of Virginia. He has served as President of the Independent Research Libraries Association and currently serves on the Board of the Philadelphia Area Center for the History of Science; the Committee on Library of the American Philosophical Society; and the Academic Affairs Committee of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library. He is Chair of the Victorian Society Scholarship Fund and has previously served on the boards of the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, the National Humanities Alliance, and the Abraham Lincoln Foundation of the Union League of Philadelphia. He has edited or co-edited numerous volumes and published a large number of scholarly articles.

The Library Company of Philadelphia

The Library Company of Philadelphia is an independent research library specializing in American history and culture from the 17th through the 19th centuries. Founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, the Library Company is America's oldest cultural institution and served as the Library of Congress from the Revolutionary War to 1800. The Library Company was the largest public library in America until the Civil War and includes the extensive personal libraries of such prominent early American bibliophiles such as James Logan. Open to the public free of charge, the Library Company houses an extensive collection of rare books, manuscripts, broadsides, ephemera, prints, photographs, and works of art, and the second largest holding of early American imprints. Particular strengths of the collection include economic history, women's history, African American history, history of medicine, history of philanthropy, and visual culture. To find out more, please visit www.librarycompany.org.

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