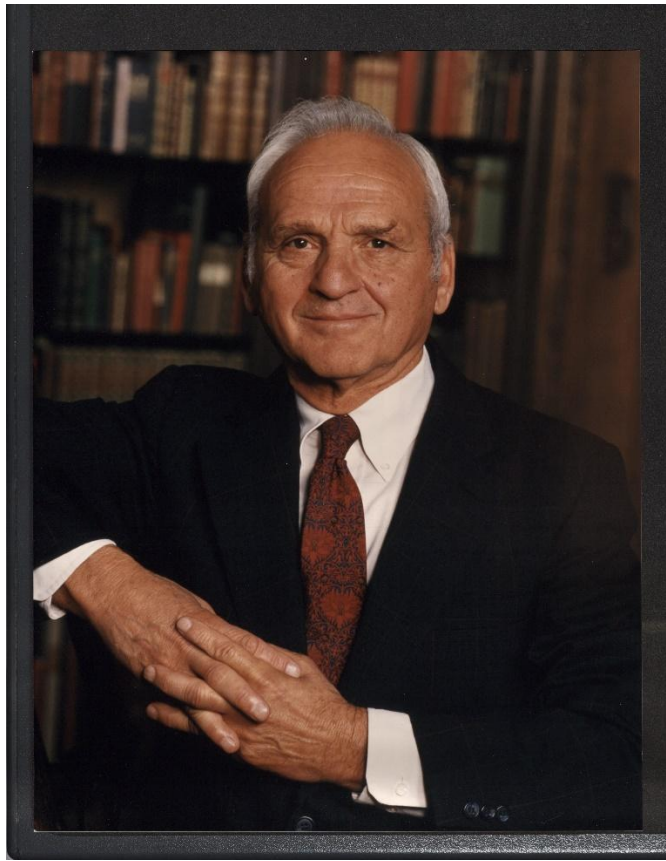


## **Richard De Gennaro**

1926-2024



*Photo courtesy of the Harvard University Archives*

Sarasota -- Richard De Gennaro, 98, passed away on October 11, 2024, of natural causes. He was born in New Haven, CT, to Italian immigrants Aquilina and Raffaele De Gennaro. During the Depression, he grew up on West Division Street as the second youngest of eight children.

Richard joined the US Navy at age 16, lying about his age,. He served four years in the Pacific during World War II as a radioman and rose to the rank of Petty Officer First Class. After the war Richard earned a B.A. and M.A. at Wesleyan University. He studied in Europe at the Universities of Paris (Sorbonne), Poitiers, Barcelona, Madrid, and Perugia during 1951-55. Upon his return to the US he earned a Master of Library Service at Columbia University's Graduate School. He later attended the Advanced Management Program at the Harvard Business School. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters by Wabash College.

Richard started his professional career in the reference department of the New York Public Library in 1956. He went to Harvard in 1958 where, for the next 12 years, he held increasingly responsible positions, including senior associate university librarian. He established Harvard's automation program and initiated and directed the computer-based Widener Library shelflist conversion and publication project. During a leave from Harvard in 1967-68 he was visiting professor at the University of Southern California. Later he served as Director of Libraries at the University of Pennsylvania (1970-1986) and Director of the New York Public Library (1987-1990). In 1991, he returned to Harvard as the Roy E. Larsen Librarian of Harvard College, in which position he oversaw the operations and

strategic planning of many of the university's main libraries. Richard was a pioneer in the introduction of computers to libraries and became an internationally recognized authority on library management and information technology. He published numerous articles as well as the book *Libraries, Technology, and the Information Marketplace*. He received many awards including the American Library Association's Melville Dewey Medal in 1986, the Academic Librarian of the Year award in 1991, and the Hugh Atkinson award in 1993.

Richard participated in a wide variety of professional activities, including membership in the Board of Governors of the Research Libraries Group, Inc., of which he was chairman (1984-85). He was president of the Association of Research Libraries (1975), president of ALA's Information Science and Automation Division, and chairman of the ASIS Special Interest Group on Library Automation and Networks. He has served on numerous other committees, councils, and advisory boards, and was critically important as an advisor to the nascent JSTOR organization in its early years. Kevin Guthrie, the president of JSTOR, noted that "He was always a visionary for how technology was going to transform librarianship."

Susan Lee, who worked with him at Harvard, said "Throughout his career, [Richard] has been well known as an innovator. He [was] a man of great ideas and major objectives, a person who has motivated, activated and mobilized all those around him... All leaders must be able to inspire a shared vision and set common goals... The final measure of a leader is the record of accomplishment they leave behind, the degree of "real change" they bring to the lives of others and the improvements they ultimately leave for the profession. Judged by this standard of actual accomplishment for promised change, Richard De Gennaro is very special indeed."

Indeed, the impact Richard had on both people and institutions was tangible and long-lasting. Duane Webster, former Executive Director of the Association of Research Libraries, reflected that "Few research librarians have ever had a greater impact on the profession than Richard DeGennaro. As a former Harvard College Librarian and President of the Association of Research Libraries, he was a visionary who understood the transformative power of knowledge and the importance in investing in the development of future generations of librarians. But beyond his professional accomplishments, Richard was a mentor, a friend, and an inspiration to many. His warmth, kindness, and genuine interest in others made him not just a leader, but a beloved figure in our community. He took the time to listen, to share his wisdom, and to encourage those around him to pursue their passions and dreams."

Richard De Gennaro left a lasting imprint on the field of library and information science, and more importantly, on the people who were his friends, colleagues, and students. He was a man of vision, a person who had an enormous supply of patience but who also would not suffer foolishness gladly. He was able to convey new and unusual ideas in a way that stirred the imagination and enthusiasm of others.

Richard married Birgit Erikson of Sweden in 1953, and they had three children. Throughout his entire adult life Richard exercised and pursued physical fitness. Later he pursued spiritual studies and meditated daily. His mind remained sharp and open. He learned new things every day.

After retirement Richard moved to Sarasota and fell in love with his present wife and best friend Barbara Bennett. They were married in 2003. He is survived by Barbara and his children Rafael and Christina, as well as many nieces and nephews.

A private celebration of life was held for family. No charitable donations in Richard's memory are suggested or solicited.

*Note: A more complete list of Richard's professional accomplishments, publications, and awards is available from The New Library Legacy: Essays in Honor of Richard De Gennaro, compiled on the occasion of his retirement from Harvard.*