

Biographical/Historical note

Edwin Wolf 2nd (1911-1991) was a librarian, bibliophile, author, historian, Franklin scholar, and civic leader in Philadelphia. He was born on December 6, 1911 to a German Jewish family in Philadelphia. His father, Morris Wolf, was a founding partner of the law firm Wolf, Block, Schorr and Solis-Cohen. Wolf attended the William Penn Charter School, graduated at age fifteen, and then went on to study at the Bedales School in England. Upon his return to the United States in 1930, he began working for Dr. Abraham Simon Wolf Rosenbach, a famous collector and dealer of rare books, where he learned bibliographical description and cataloging of rare books.

In 1943, Wolf left the employ of Dr. Rosenbach to join the United States Army and serve in World War II. Under the Army Specialized Training Program, he learned German, then was trained in Army intelligence. In 1944, Wolf was sent to Europe, where he was responsible for turning in Nazis with arrest warrants. He also spent part of his service recovering ancient and rare books (including copies of the Gutenberg Bible) that had been hidden throughout the German countryside for protection. Wolf left the Army in 1945 and returned to working for Dr. Rosenbach in 1946.

Upon Dr. Rosenbach's death in 1952, Wolf joined the Library Company of Philadelphia as a consultant and advisor. He was tasked with surveying the contents of the building (the Ridgeway building at 900 South Broad Street) and make recommendations on the future direction of the Library Company. Wolf found that the institution's collections were of significant research value, and recommended that the Library Company cease circulation of its holdings and become a scholarly research library specializing in American history and culture to 1880. He also suggested that the collections be cataloged and moved out of the Ridgeway building, which was in deteriorating condition. Wolf was hired to carry out this plan and was named Curator of the Library Company in 1953, and Librarian in 1955.

It was in this capacity that Wolf revitalized the Library Company of Philadelphia. He cataloged the institution's holdings according to a classification system devised by Wolf to meet the unique needs of the institution and collection and sold duplicate volumes to earn money to increase the Library Company's holdings and fill in collection gaps. In 1960, he petitioned the Orphan's Court to sell the Ridgeway building so that the Library Company could build and move into a new building next door to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

As Librarian, Wolf made great strides in promoting the Library Company through his Annual Reports (which showcased new acquisitions and the institution's achievements) and curated exhibitions. He collaborated with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the American Philosophical Society to produce catalogs on the subjects of American agriculture, natural history, education, and philanthropy. Wolf's efforts to revive the Library Company garnered notable donations of books and manuscripts, and also earned funding from grantors and individuals.

Wolf was also a prolific scholar, historian, and writer. His major publications include *A History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (co-authored with Maxwell Whiteman), *Rosenbach: A Biography* (co-authored with John Fleming), and *The Library of James Logan of Philadelphia, 1674-1751*. He served as associate editor for the volume *Philadelphia: A 300-Year*