

James H. Billington's Contributions to the Copyright Office

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On May 8, the Library of Congress, along with the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, hosted “Scholarship and Service: The Legacy of James H. Billington” in the Coolidge Auditorium. Billington, the thirteenth Librarian of Congress, passed away November 20, 2018, at age 89. The event included Billington’s family, former colleagues, and members of Congress.

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March 1989: Billington says hello to Minnie and Mickey Mouse. They celebrated the United States joining the Berne Convention.



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June 1988: Billington speaks at the Register's State of the Office address.

Service units throughout the Library contributed to a display chronicling Billington's twenty-eight years as Librarian. The Copyright Office contributed photos from hearings, celebrations, meetings, and day-to-day Office activities. The following are just a few of the times Billington collaborated with the Copyright Office.

June 1988

Billington spoke at the Register's State of the Office address. Billington praised the Office and its many accomplishments, noting the “extraordinary richness of human talent [that] complements the richness of the collections.” He told the staff “You are crucial people in the life of this library. You are the Champagne in the bottle.”

March 1989

On March 1, the Office celebrated the United States joining the Berne Convention. Guests included members of Congress, the poet laureate, and Mickey and Minnie Mouse.

October 1990

The Copyright Office co-sponsored a second International Copyright Institute in 1990, this one completely in French. Billington addressed the group, in French, discussing his idea of the Library of Congress in the twenty-first century.

November 1993

Along with Mary Levering (Acting Register of Copyrights), Billington testified before the Senate regarding the proposed

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Copyright Reform Act of 1993. He testified, "This package should be enacted as a whole and adequately funded and staffed if there are to be changes in the copyright registration system." The proposed changes involved eliminating sections 411(a) and 412 of the Copyright Act.

February 1994

The Copyright Office held an informal hearing February 1, 1994, regarding the proposed regulations for the new Copyright Arbitration Royalty Panel (CARP). Billington, along with Acting Register Barbara Ringer, ran the hearing pledging to establish good communication with all parties involved.

March 2006

Billington swore in the first judges for the Copyright Royalty Board, which replaced CARP. Bill Roberts, now-retired Associate Register of Copyrights and Director of Public Information and Education, was one of those first three judges.

December 2007

Year after year, Billington attended Junior Fellows Display Day. In 2007, then-senior information specialist Frank Evina presented Billington a memento from that year's display.

March 2010

To reduce the massive backlog the Office faced in 2010, Billington encouraged staff members from throughout the Library to be detailed to the Copyright Office. At the kick-off event, he said, "It is a time of great opportunity and great optimism. . . Your details are centrally important in this transitional time in converting from paper-based processing of claims to digital processing. You are helping deal with a temporary but urgent situation, and you will demonstrate how the Library can pull together to overcome a short-term problem." He also visited the Office and helped process some claims. ©



November 1993: Billington testifies before the Senate regarding the proposed Copyright Reform Act of 1993.



March 2006: Billington swears in the first judges for the Copyright Royalty Board.



March 2010: Billington at a kick off event to reduce the backlog.

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