

'In the absence of The Senior'

Patterson retires as THS chairman to work on Heinlein biography

By BILL PATTERSON

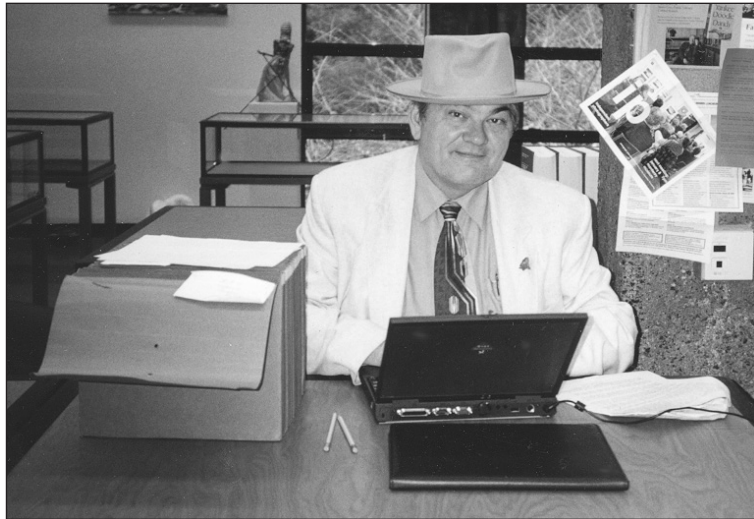
The Heinlein Society has been a major part of my life for the last six years.

It was quite an effort to get the Society off the ground, even with the enthusiastic endorsement of the people who showed up for the formation meeting. We weren't quite lucky enough to parallel Heinlein's first guest of honor appearance fifty-six years earlier — the Sunday of Westercon that year was July 6, 1997, so we made do, one day off. It was frustrating — just more work than I could handle by myself. Ginny Heinlein recruited our first secretary, Laurie A. MacDonald, to help with the work, and somehow, the three of us working together, the Society took off. Ginny also recruited her friend and longtime intellectual property lawyer, Art Dula, to handle our incorporation as a tax-exempt charitable and educational organization — Ginny could be very persuasive when she wanted to be!

When Laurie had done as much as she felt she was able, she resigned, and late in 1999 I asked David Silver to fill her size 6 pink pumps. David had launched the (then-AOL) Heinlein Readers' Group on almost the same day as the first organizational meeting of the Society, and he had spent years managing other charitable and educational organizations.

Under David's direction, the Society has grown pretty close to the magic number for self-sustaining size; the various technical pitfalls and organizational problems have been overcome, and we have taken a place of pride among other organizations promoting Heinlein's social legacy. I cannot pretend to be responsible for any major portion of these accomplishments: the Society as it currently exists is largely due to David's unremitting efforts, and it gratifies me to be able to turn over to his care the fruits of his own hard work. May his light, no less than his Talent of Silver, never be hid under a bushel as he takes up the Chair — "in the absence of The Senior ..."

On New Year's Day 2000, Ginny Heinlein called me — the first time we had spoken together on the telephone, though we had been conducting a brisk and voluminous correspondence by post and by internet for many months by that time. She had been a little mysterious about what it was she wanted



Bill Patterson working with Heinlein's sealed correspondence and wearing Heinlein's gardening hat.

Photo by Rita Bottoms, archivist (ret.)"

to talk about voice to voice, so I was surprised — and overwhelmed — when she asked me to write an official, formal biography of Robert Heinlein. She had reviewed and fact-checked and commented on the biographical sketch I wrote for The Heinlein Journal (No. 5, July 1999), and I guess she must have approved the way I worked with her comments. I visited Ginny in Florida early in February and collected the first of a series of taped interviews, then began work at the Archives at Special Collections of the University Library, University of California at Santa Cruz, in May.

The research for the library has involved reading and digesting perhaps as much as 75 million words of correspondence and secondary, historical materials over the last three years — essentially a ten year task condensed into two years. Mindful that this had to be the most complete and defensible biography possible, not a casual knock-off — but also that it was a project Ginny wanted to be able to oversee, I began the writing in August 2001, funnelling each chapter to Ginny as I finished it. This method made the task extremely cumbersome, because each chapter had to

Continued on page 20