John T. Ryan Jr. established the Irene O’Brien Ryan Library Collection in Fine Arts to honor his wife, Irene O’Brien Ryan, who was passionate about the arts. John, a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was a Trustee of Notre Dame for many years and was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree in 1973.
As president and then chairman and chief executive officer of the Mine Safety Appliances Company (MSA) for several decades, John was instrumental in developing MSA into an international company that became the world’s leading manufacturer of personal protective equipment and instrumentation, with the mission “that men and women may work in safety and they, their families, and their communities may live in health throughout the world.” His career as an executive and director of the company endured from 1936 until his death in 1995. The company’s annual sales now total more than $850 million, with operations and representative offices in 38 countries.

John graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a bachelor’s degree in mining engineering. He went on to earn an MBA from Harvard in 1936. He was involved in many Pittsburgh civic organizations, particularly the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. Of the Ryan’s six children, four sons and one daughter are Notre Dame graduates. Irene maintained an active interest in the University through the Summer Shakespeare Program until her death in 2004 at age 91.

The Irene O’Brien Ryan Library Collection in Fine Arts makes possible the acquisition of materials that support teaching and research within the Department of Art, the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre, and the Department of Music.