

Spring 4-1-1993

Lumières, Spring Supplement 1993

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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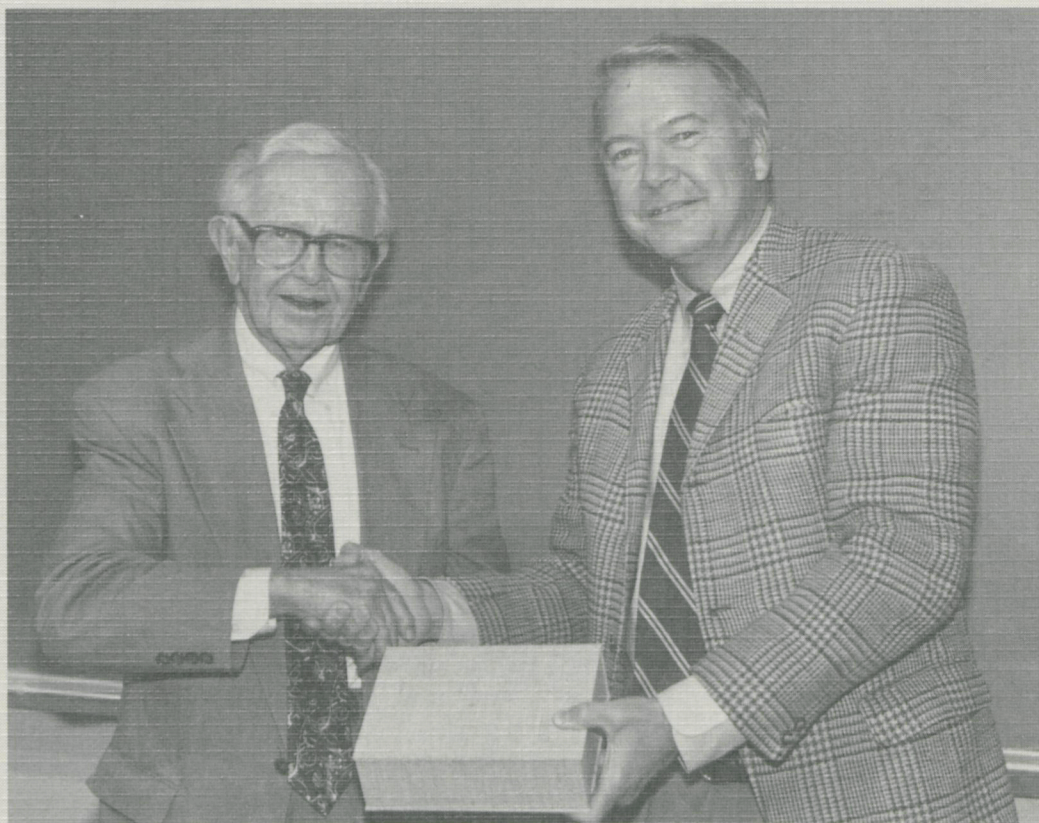
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, "Lumières, Spring Supplement 1993" (1993). *Friends of the LSU Libraries*. 42.
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LSU LIBRARIES CELEBRATE

TWO MILLIONTH VOLUME

In a simple but elegant manner, the addition of the two millionth volume to the LSU Libraries collections was celebrated on November 20, 1992 at 3 p.m. in Dodson Auditorium. Jennifer Cargill, dean of the LSU Libraries, welcomed the members of the LSU community and Friends of the Library present for the occasion. William E. Davis, chancellor of LSU, conveyed his greetings on behalf of the University. C. Roland Haden, vice chancellor and provost of the LSU Baton Rouge campus, represented the academic community in observing the milestone of the growth of the LSU Libraries collections.



CHANCELLOR EMERITUS CECIL TAYLOR PRESENTS THE TWO MILLIONTH VOLUME TO PAT CULBERTSON, PRESIDENT OF THE LSU FACULTY SENATE.

Chancellor Emeritus Cecil Taylor presented the symbolic two millionth volume, a 15th-century illuminated medieval *Book of Hours*, on behalf of the many donors who have given to the LSU Libraries. William P. Culbertson, Jr., president of the LSU Faculty Senate, accepted the ceremonial volume on behalf of the faculty and students of the University. Following the presentation ceremony, Les Phillabaum, director of the LSU Press, introduced the speaker for the occasion, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. An eminent scholar in the field of Southern literature, Professor Rubin delivered an erudite and witty address on the importance of books and libraries to society. The text of his address is printed as a separate supplement to this issue of *Lumieres*.

The two millionth volume was given for the occasion by a long-time friend of the libraries. The prayerbook came from the library of the Pasquier family of Paris and was crafted in 1450 in Autun, France. The book is manuscript on vellum, in a gothic bookhand with 12 large miniatures, each within a full border, in colors and burnished gold. There are two text pages also within full borders and a calendar written in red, blue, and gold and numerous illuminated initials in blue, pink, white, and gold. The pigments and gold are very fresh and brilliant.

An exhibit "Books of Ours, Two Million Reasons to Celebrate" was mounted in Hill Memorial Library to celebrate the acquisition of the two millionth volume. On exhibit was a selection of rare and beautiful books, many given by local friends of the libraries and a number purchased with funds generated by the annual book bazaar sponsored by the Friends of the LSU Library organization.

A reception sponsored by the Friends of the LSU Library was held in Hill Memorial Library following the ceremony for the two millionth volume.



ON LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
TWO MILLIONTH VOLUME CELEBRATION

NOVEMBER 20, 1992

LOUIS D. RUBIN, JR.

It goes without saying that I am honored to be invited to speak on the occasion of the acquisition of the two millionth book by this library. However, I have no intention of giving an oration on the importance of books and libraries to society, as stated in the printed invitation. What, after all, would be the point in my speaking on that topic? It would be a sermon to the already converted. Unless you already knew how important books and libraries are, you would not be present this afternoon in the first place, would you? A solemn discourse on the value of books and libraries in western civilization on an occasion like this would make about as much sense as instructing the Archbishop of Canterbury on the value of the Book of Common Prayer, or a resident of downtown New Orleans on the advantages of the judicious use of anti-cockroach ointment.

No, I think we may take it for granted that all present here today approve of books and libraries, believe they are of inestimable value to society, and we can go on to less high-sounding topics.

The two millionth book! What an extraordinary number of volumes in a single library! It is a watershed figure, like John D. Rockefeller's first billion dollars, or Jesse James' tenth bank robbery. It gives the habitual user of the library a sense of serenity. He (or she) can feel that when he goes into the library in search of a particular book, there is at least one chance in three that it will be there in place on the shelf, and not in some graduate student's carrel.

As I'm sure all of you who use a university library regularly know, a constant struggle goes on between those who wish to make use of its books, and the graduate students of whatever persuasion who are assigned to carrels there. The graduate students are apprentice scholars; they are writing master's theses and doctoral dissertations. In order to demonstrate to their fellow graduate students their newly acquired scholarly status and dignity, they like to have a carrel that is stacked to the gunwales with books, preferably on very recondite subjects. A graduate student in American literature, for example, would not be content with a copy of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* in view on the shelf of his or her carrel; anybody might be reading that book—even an undergraduate. To create the proper impression it would also be necessary to display Mrs. Trollope's, Captain Marryat's, and Harriett Martineau's

American travels, the Journals of Lewis and Clark, Bienville's correspondence, Gayarre's history of Louisiana, and several volumes of the Reports of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Mississippi River district. *See what a serious and learned scholar I am!* those books announce; *no mere popularizer I!*

Historians—that is, students who are writing doctoral dissertations in the field of history—are perhaps most zealous of all in this respect. The one thing that any historical scholar, famous or apprentice, fears most of all, cries out in his or her sleep at night when dreaming of it, is that another historian is going to accuse him or her of being a popularizer—which is to say of writing for an audience of other than fellow academic historians. It is the “kiss of death,” the equivalent of tipping the historian the “black spot.”

It is no mere coincidence, by the way, that of all the learned disciplines, the historians are the only ones who refer to themselves as members of a guild, “The Guild.” Woe unto anyone who doesn't belong to the Guild—that is, not only have a doctorate in history, but teach it—and who dares to publish a book. Barbara Tuchman on the coming of World War I? Winston Churchill on the Duke of Marlborough? W. J. Cash on the mind of the redneck? These are not historians; they are popularizers, “impressionists.” The Ph.D. candidate writing a dissertation is expected to dismiss them as amateurs, who write for uncritical audiences, even audiences that contain lay persons.

Given this attitude, the apprentice scholars assigned carrels in the library load them up with every volume that can possibly be fitted into them. And since these carrels are located where there is easy access to the library stacks, all the graduate students need do is to place the books in their carrels, without bothering to go through the formality of checking them out at the circulation desk. This means that as far as the library circulation department is concerned the particular book is



EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR JAMES COLEMAN, LSU PRESS; DIRECTOR LES PHILLABAUM, PROFESSOR LOUIS RUBIN, AND VICE CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS ROLAND HADEN SHARE A MOMENT OF LEVITY.

available, but as far as anyone seeking to locate and read the book, it is not.

The library employees do their best to check the carrels as often as possible and confiscate all the unchecked-out books, but they can't do this around the clock. So a continuing duel takes place, between library employees and graduate students, with the graduate students loading up their carrels with unchecked-out books and the library staff confiscating the books and returning them to the library shelves. The librarians win temporary victories, but only that. It is like getting rid of fire ants from the back yard; you can plug up the holes, drench the visible colonies with poison, but they will only dig more tunnels and reappear somewhere else the next day.

Even so, one can place some reliance on a library that contains 2,000,000 volumes. Somewhere, in some book, one will probably be able to find what one needs to know.

To be sure, one can never be absolutely sure of that, no matter how many books there are in a library. As the late Willie Stark, in a novel written by a onetime user of this library, said to Jack Burden, "There is Always Something." No library, however large, can possess all the books; or even most of the books—not even the Library of Congress, which has the great advantage over other libraries that it gets its books free, via the Copyright Law, on the theory that the Congress of the United States deserves to have available a copy of every book published in the country.

It isn't that the congressmen wish to read the books; what they need them for is television campaign commercials. You can't get through an entire campaign commercial just by showing the congressman talking to a factory worker and then strolling across a meadow arm in arm with wives, children, and grandchildren; you have to show the congressman at work in his office, too. To serve as a backdrop for that you need some books in a bookcase. So the congressman's aide in charge of campaign commercials calls up the Library of Congress and says, "Send over six dozen books right away—let's see, he'll be wearing a blue shirt, so you better send mostly reds and whites. And while you're at it, could you also let us borrow a bookcase?"

Please understand. What red-blooded American congressman actually *reads* books? Congressmen are men of action, not eggheads. But in any event, not even the Library of Congress has all the books. This is why we have the inter-library loan service. But even that will not always work. Counting on being able to find out everything, even in the best of libraries, is somewhat like the situation I confronted when very young. I had two uncles, Dan and Manning, one in California, one in Charleston (I don't mean Charleston, West Virginia, of course, or Charleston, Illinois; I mean *Charleston*), and the uncle in Charleston once assured me that between the two of them, they knew everything there was to know. I was suspicious of the veracity of the statement, so I looked up some fact in *Compton's Nature Encyclopedia* and the next time I saw him asked him for



PROFESSOR EMERITUS LEWIS SIMPSON AND MRS. SIMPSON CHAT WITH LOUIS RUBIN.

the answer. "That's one of the things that your Uncle Dan knows," he told me.

Nowadays, I suppose, the difficulty of finding such information is less urgent, because if one needs to know something that can't be found in a book in the library, one asks a computer. But even then, there can be problems—or as the computers call them, glitches. You have to know *how* to ask the computer. Despite the use of terms such as "memory" and "artificial intelligence" when computers are concerned, no computer can think or reason. It cannot tell you what you wish to know unless you know exactly how to ask for it, and there is no margin for error. This is one of the many reasons why I prefer librarians to computers. The computer cannot figure out what it is you want but are unable to identify in so many words.

I do not wish to dwell at too great length upon computers, but for an ageing man like myself, who used to pride himself upon his ability to change any typewriter ribbon whatever within no more than a quarter-hour, the coming of the computer has its melancholy aspects. If your library is like that in my university, wherever you go in the building you find a computer screen gazing its single blank, sightless eye at you. Where one used to find a librarian, now one finds a computer terminal. Unfortunately, one cannot ask a computer terminal such things as, "Where are the oversized art books shelved?" or, "Is there a Xerox machine on this floor?" or "Do you have a pencil sharpener?"

Computers are also the occasion for continued humiliation of older persons such as myself. My office in our English department building used to be opposite the door to the computer lab across the hall. I would look in and see some teenager seated there at a computer, clearly no more than a sophomore, who if asked would not be able to tell the difference between George Washington Cable and James Branch Cabell, and who probably thought that dactylic hexameter was a disease of house plants. Yet, she is working away happily and confidently, swapping sentences and paragraphs around, check-

ing spelling, tapping out commands to it like Admiral Farragut at the Battle of Mobile Bay, and making it do her bidding. Why, doubtless the young lady had still been mixing mud pies when I was giving the Fleming Lectures, yet *she* could operate a computer like Miss Eckhart played the piano in Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*, and I could do nothing of the kind.

It made me realize how old I was becoming, that I dated all the way back to the day of rabbit ears and black-and-white television, and even before. It was one reason that I took early retirement, even though in self-defense I have since learned how to use a computer myself. I tend to go very easy on issuing commands to it, however; I approach it humbly and even warily, like a demolition team approaching a long-submerged, barnacle-encrusted mine that has finally come loose from its mooring and washed up on a shore. One wrong move and it may explode.

I do think, however, that it is absolutely necessary that libraries keep pace with the latest and most advanced technological developments in information storage and retrieval, data accessibility, the electronic removal of bubblegum from underneath reference room tabletops, and so on. And of course I understand and accept the library's need to employ electronic surveillance devices, recording equipment, in-house TV cameras, electric fingerprinting machines and gene string counters, doors that ring alarm bells summoning the 82nd Airborne to the circulation desk, automatic FBI and CIA screening for subversive activities and possible participation in anti-Viet Nam War demonstrations in London, and examinations for viral pneumonia. People do steal; they even steal books.

In my youth the idea of a student wanting to steal a book was like Tom Sawyer sneaking under a tent, only to find that it was a revival meeting. No more. It is something like what a friend of mine remarked years ago when we were working together on the Associated Press in Richmond, and a story came in that a fin or something of the kind had been stolen off of an Alexander Calder mobile on display at the University of Virginia. "It just goes to prove," he said, "that University of Virginia students will steal *anything*!"

We have to live in the present, not the past. People's attitudes are different. What one age thought unthinkable is quite thinkable to another. Moreover, our culture is changing. We used to divide the arts into categories: highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow. Today, it is some of one and some of the other. President Jefferson played the violin. President Truman played the piano. President-elect Clinton plays the saxophone. (The recent election posed a cruel dilemma for me. As a devotee of traditional New Orleans jazz, how could I bring myself to cast my vote for a tenor sax man? But I note that Governor Clinton carried the state of Louisiana, so I can only surmise that other jazz devotees who faced the same problem must have decided as I did—a Bird in the band is worth two-beat and Bush.)

Speaking of music, and changing mores, particularly as they affect libraries, we do have to get used to the fact that the old high culture that we were raised on, though by no means *passé*, must accommodate itself to current developments. I was brought up to speak of classical music as "good music"—a descriptive term that obviously also carried a social judgment. It remains

'We have to live in the present, not the past...What one age thought unthinkable is quite thinkable to another.'

my favorite form of music. But nowadays, bluegrass or country-and-western as some call it, is quite respectable and I do confess that I rather like it, and very much admire the skill at metaphor manifested in the titles of the songs meant to be sung at the Grand Old Opry. As for example "If She Wasn't So Good-Looking, I Might Have Seen the Train." Or, "If You Keep Checking Up on Me, I'm Checking Out on You." Or, "She Loaded Up My Heart on No-Doze, then She Went to Sleep on Me." Or "You're Placing Our Love on Overnight Reserve." Or, "There Ain't Gonna Be No Circulation Desk in the Rare Book Room of My Heart."

Enough of that. We must allow for changes in taste, for the development of data retrieval services, yet the fact remains that we are in the book business. We believe in the intrinsic worthiness of books; the age of Gutenberg has not ended for us, and we do not envision it doing so any time soon. Two million books! What a proud moment it must have been, when the acquisitions librarian suddenly realized that the two millionth volume was being added to the collection!

I understand that, purely by happy chance, the two millionth book happened to be an illuminated "Book of Hours," created in northern France in about the year 1450. Now that certainly was serendipitous! What would the library have done if the two millionth book happened to have been something of lesser moment, say a work on "Diseases of the Thorax," or a handbook of *ad valorem* tax assessment procedures, or *1,000 Jokes for All Occasions*, or for that matter, one of my books?

If that had happened, the library would have found itself in something of the position of the late Queen Victoria of England, who read and admired *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* so very much that word came to its author that Her Majesty would be most pleased if he were to dedicate his next book to her. Unfortunately for the Queen, the author, the Rev. C. L. Dodgson, was also a mathematician and logician who published books in those fields under his own name, rather than under the penname of Lewis Carrol, and his next book happened to be *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants*.

Of course, I realize that these things cannot be left entirely to chance. This library, like all libraries, has a responsibility to those who use it, and it must bear in mind that responsibility at all times. Many of those who come here are at a very

impressionable age and the impact of a too abrupt exposure to the books on its shelves can be profound, and even ruinous.

I think of my own case. I won't say that I was ruined by a too-early exposure to libraries, but it certainly was a shaping experience. When I was a mere ten years old: innocent and open-minded, something happened that cast a long shadow, as they say. Until this time I was not a notably bookish person; there was every reason to believe I might grow up to become a normal and useful tax-paying citizen. I had read the few books in my own library, and the books in my parents' library did not seem very enticing—a set of the Harvard Classics in uniform dull red cloth, and the collected writings of Elbert Hubbard.

Then one summer day in 1933 my father came home with a large book, titled *The Stars for Sam*. Inside the front cover was a card with my name typed on it which, he said, would entitle me to withdraw books from the Charleston Free Library, located in the Charleston Museum building some six blocks away from our home. I read the book that night, returned it to the library the next day, and checked out two more books, which I was told was the maximum number possible until I attained the more mature age of twelve—which would be in two years' time—and would be eligible to select books from the adult section.

Thereafter I was hooked. Instead of concentrating on life itself, and keeping books for my idle times, as Emerson advised, I concentrated on reading. On one occasion I borrowed two books in the morning, read both during the day, and returned sometime that afternoon for more, only to be told that I could not check out books twice during the same day. Since that

time—58 years ago—I have been embroiled with libraries.

Libraries can't be blamed entirely, however, for what happened to me. Something else occurred that same year that was also extremely dangerous to my future welfare. I was presented with a typewriter. It was a huge, ancient affair, a Rex, and cumbersome to operate, and was shortly thereafter replaced by a less venerable but by no means recent Underwood No. 5. I am sorry to say that, unlike the affair with the library, my father's motives in buying the typewriter for me were not entirely disinterested; he was afraid that I would break his Royal portable, which I had taken to using. For that year I had become a journalist. I had begun publication of a newspaper, titled *The Bulliten* (sic), which I carboned off and sold for two cents a copy. The press run, and thus my exchequer, was severely limited by the inability of the typewriter keys to penetrate legibly through more than three carbon copies at most, which meant that to produce 12 copies of my newspaper I had to type it three times. The initial issue of *The Bulliten* was distinguished by the presence of a recipe for a baked bean dish, copied from a Shredded Wheat package, in which the beans were somehow omitted.

In any event, one can see that my eleventh year was shaped for me toward the realization of three profound truths which have ever afterward characterized my career: (1) libraries are insidious institutions; (2) writing for a living involves doing a great deal of typing for very little in the way of material reward; and (3) if you choose to be a writer, and you're going to write about baked beans, don't forget the beans.

—SEE PAGE 6—



ASSISTANT DEAN OF LIBRARIES FOR SPECIAL COLLECTIONS ROBERT MARTIN, LOUIS RUBIN, JENNIFER CARGILL, DEAN OF THE LSU LIBRARIES, AND LSU FACULTY SENATE PRESIDENT PAT CULBERTSON AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE TWO MILLIONTH VOLUME.

Yet, there was still some hope of recovery for me; I was still in my teens, and it might have been possible to steer me along more fruitful paths. In my freshman year of college I studied geology. It was the first course in science I had ever taken. I was enthralled; finding fossils seemed almost as interesting as reading books. At the end of the school year, the teacher offered me a part-time job for the following fall. There was something called the National Youth Administration then, which paid college students small sums of money to work for the school, and the geology teacher would need a laboratory assistant for the following school year (the college offered only one course in geology) if the enrollment in the class was sufficiently large.

When fall came I was eager to begin my geological career. But, alas, fate intervened, in the form of a diminished enrollment. So instead of working as a geology lab assistant, I was assigned to the college library to write newspaper stories and the like about new books. Thus, instead of what might have been a career out in the open, tracking down fossils, undertaking Carbon 14 dating, and otherwise contributing to human betterment, I was once again pointed in the direction of libraries and books. The die was cast. This time I was permanently marred; from being made to read books, I took to writing them.

I published my first book in 1953; since then I have published about 40 of them, or approximately one book per year. I am at work on several more. There is a compulsion about it, I can no more stay away from it than Arnold Palmer can stay away from golf courses and Pennzoil commercials, or myself from cigars. I celebrated, or more properly observed, my 69th birthday yesterday, and I know that I ought to rest on such laurels as I have collected, however sparse and sere, and spend the remaining time fishing and boating, yet I cannot make myself do so. For that I blame libraries most of all. I was young, I was vulnerable, and the discovery of libraries ruined me.

Up to this point, I have concentrated upon libraries and books. I also ought to say something about librarians. It is librarians who buy and catalog the books and keep them in reasonable order for our use. All things considered, librarians are very useful creatures. But it is necessary to understand certain things about them. An important point to keep in mind when dealing with librarians is that by profession and instinct they are packrats. They collect. They save everything. Does anyone think for a minute that the librarians at this university are going to be satisfied with having acquired two million books—that they will say to themselves that two million books are an imposing lot of books for one library to possess and administer, and that it might be a good thing to settle for two million books, for a while at least, before ordering more? If so, you had better think again. I warn you: at this very moment, upon the occasion of this library's having acquired and catalogued its two millionth book, every librarian in this room is already thinking about acquiring the *three millionth book*. As a

species they are insatiable; when they get their three millionth book they will only start thinking about four million books. What they want is *all* the books ever printed or otherwise assembled. Nothing short of that will do. They want those books, and they want them *in* the library where they can be catalogued and shelved.

I heard a story once about a librarian at, I think, Harvard. We will call him Dr. Jones. An old grad, returning to the campus at Cambridge for his 30th reunion, came across the venerable Dr. Jones, still on the job, hurrying along a walkway

'You have a priceless treasure, a great library, a center of learning. The acquisition of its two millionth volume is symbolic; it is a milestone on a momentous journey...'

out in the Harvard Yard. "Well, Dr. Jones," he said, "have you finally gotten all your books back?"

"Not quite," the librarian told him. "There's still one book missing—It's over in Professor Miller's office and I'm on my way there to get that one right now!"

Let me say finally, that it is entirely fitting that I take part in this occasion commemorating the acquisition of your two millionth volume. To do so, constitutes a return to at least one scene of the crime, and is a way of owning up to my guilt. For the excessive use of libraries did me in, and this particular library is one of those that contributed to the damage, inasmuch as I taught history here one summer 35 years ago and worked on the Slater Fund papers. (I hope your stacks have been air-conditioned now, by the way. It was mighty hot up there.)

The state of Louisiana has a long and distinguished literary tradition, and this University has an illustrious record in writing, and publishing, important scholarship. In the academic world it is not the LSU tiger and the football team that gives this university its national and international renown; it is the books its faculty and alumni produce; the Harry Williams's and the Lewis Simpsons, the *Southern Review* and the University Press. The presence of this library, with its magnificent collection of books in so many fields, is what has made that record of creative scholarship possible. You have a priceless treasure, a great library, a center of learning. The acquisition of its two millionth volume is symbolic; it is a milestone on a momentous journey, the goal of which is, simply and profoundly, human knowledge. It has made this University, and this state, a center of learning, to which thousands of scholars come from all over the world to make use of its unique collections. What you have done thus far must not be allowed to languish; in these difficult times for libraries and universities, your help and your generosity are needed more than ever before. I hope that you take pride in your accomplishment. If it were mine, I would.