Celebrating George Fisher

Arkansas’s best known political cartoonist, George Fisher, donated his collection of original drawings and personal papers this year to the University Libraries. The gift was celebrated at a special event in the Walton Reading Room in Mullins Library in October. Fisher, as guest of honor and principal speaker, entertained a large and enthusiastic audience with both prepared and spontaneous drawings and a running commentary on the political scene in Arkansas during his long career. A reception honoring Fisher followed the event.

Fisher’s appearance was one of a continuing series of public programs intended to stimulate interest in the Library and its holdings and to demonstrate the place of the Library in the intellectual and cultural mission of the University. Previous programs have presented musicians, artists, and speakers, as well as exhibits from the Library’s collections.

George Fisher was born in Searcy, Arkansas in 1923 and grew up at Beebe. While still a schoolboy he created a comic book character named Fisky Limps. He went into the Army in 1943 and fought in Europe, earning the Bronze Star for meritorious service. His father, Charles Fisher, kept a scrapbook of George’s letters home, many of them with elaborate illustrations of his experiences. This scrapbook, as well as other materials from his military service, is included in Fisher’s gift to the Library.

While Fisher was stationed in England, he was employed as a cartoonist for a newsletter distributed to servicemen. He used the studio facilities of an art school in Bournemouth and there met his future wife, Rosemary Snook, who was studying pottery and ceramics. They corresponded during his tour in Germany and were married in Bournemouth immediately after the war. Her scrapbooks, which contain letters from George and Charles Fisher as well as many other documents and souvenirs, are also included in the collection.

In 1949 the Fishers settled in Little Rock, and George established Fisher Art Service, a commercial graphics firm. In the early 1960s he published a weekly cartoon in the North Little Rock Times. The Arkansas Gazette picked up the cartoons, and from 1972 until the close of the paper in 1991, Fisher produced two cartoons every week for the Gazette. His best work from that period was collected into several volumes.

Since the Gazette closed, Fisher’s work has appeared in the Arkansas Times, a Little Rock weekly.

Fisher’s Arkansas work is dominated by several themes, satirizing stupidity, greed, and wrongheadedness wherever he finds them. Generally he has concentrated on state issues. He uses the graphic equivalent of the Arkansas dialect—that is, overalls, pickup trucks, hunting dogs, baptizings, and other local color. Because of the enormous influence of the Gazette as a state newspaper, Fisher’s treatment of some subjects has entered the Arkansas consciousness. For example, when Bill Clinton first appeared in Fisher cartoons, he was in a baby carriage. Later he advanced to a tricycle, a ten-speed bicycle, and then to a pickup truck. The Old Guard Rest Home celebrated, while it also ridiculed, some of Arkansas’s legendary politicians. Recently Fisher has been busy with educational reform, the Arkansas General Assembly, and George W. Bush. Perhaps his most extended treatment of a single subject was that of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, in which he lent his influence to the successful struggle to save the Buffalo River from being dammed.

Fisher’s two most popular books, published by the University of Arkansas Press, are Fisher’s Comic Relief: Editorial Cartoons on Arkansas in the 1980s (1987) and The Best of George Fisher: 28 Years of Editorial Cartoons from Faubus to Clinton (1993).
Preserving Our Resources

All research libraries hold within their stewardship deteriorating collections that require conservation if they are to be available for future generations of scholars. In fiscal year 2002 the 116 reporting members of the Association of Research Libraries spent over $96 million on preservation of library materials. And so, like any other library, the University Libraries have some book pages from the 1940s that snap in two when turned, newspapers from the fifties that slowly crumble to dust, a heavily used reel of microfilm that splits as a student rolls it through a microfilm reader, and an important collection of old books that arrives bearing tiny worm holes.

In July 2002 the Library established a Preservation Department, encompassing all activities related to conservation. Lora Lennertz, the former head of the circulation and audiovisual departments, was appointed to this position. In August, Lennertz received a National Endowment for the Humanities Scholarship to participate in the Preservation Management Institute offered by Rutgers University. The Institute spanned one year (October 2002 through October 2003) and has resulted in her certification in preservation management.

Lennertz began her duties after attending the initial residence portion of the Institute in October 2002, and this spring she conducted an extensive preservation survey, measuring temperature, humidity, and lighting within all library facilities, as well as reviewing housekeeping activities and inspecting facilities for evidence of insect pests. She also coordinated the inspection of shelving conditions in the general collections and conducted a comprehensive survey to determine which materials in the collections—including microforms—were brittle, damaged, or deteriorating.

Clearly, a disaster preparedness plan to mitigate the loss of library materials in the event of a flood, fire, tornado, or earthquake is also essential to any good preservation program. Toward that end, subject librarians, under the direction of the Preservation Department, have begun determining which materials should be given priority in the event of one of these disasters. Potential security issues will also be examined as part of the preservation program.

Paragould Meteorite on Display in Library

On November 20, physical plant workers at the University began the Herculean operation of hauling the Paragould Meteorite into Mullins Library. Eventually, the 16 x 41 inch rock, weighing in at 816 pounds, was mounted on a platform and placed on exhibit on Level Three of Mullins near the east staircase. The meteorite is on loan to the Arkansas-Oklahoma Center for Space and Planetary Sciences, but Carolyn Henderson Allen, dean of Libraries, happily agreed to a suggestion by Derek Sears, director of the Center, to house it in the main library, where many students, faculty, staff, and visitors would be able to view and enjoy it.

The third largest meteorite recovered in North America, the Paragould Meteorite fell at 4:08 a.m. on February 17, 1930. A brilliant meteor, between four and six times the size of the full moon, was first seen over southern Indiana, moving to the southwest parallel to the Ohio River, then passing over southern Missouri. There, at a height of nine miles, the meteorite exploded to produce three major fireballs and innumerable sparks followed by detonations and a roar. The burst was seen over seventy-five miles away. The fireballs disappeared over Paragould, Arkansas, while still at a height of 5 miles. A small meteorite was recovered immediately, but four weeks later, W. H. Hodges, a farmer, discovered an eight-foot-deep hole on a neighbor’s land a few miles southwest of Finch, where this meteorite was recovered.

The impact of the meteorite threw soil from 30 to 164 feet away. More information about this meteorite and the phenomenon of meteorites can be found in a book called Thunderstones: A Study of Meteorites Based on the Falls and Finds in Arkansas (University of Arkansas Press, 1988) by Derek Sears, a University of Arkansas professor of geophysics. More information can also be found at http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/sears/paragould.html.
Library Offers a New World of Knowledge

This fall, the University Libraries acquired access to the large online research collection known as Web of Knowledge from the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI). With more than 32 million citations drawn from more than 8,000 journals dating back to 1945, Web of Knowledge dwarfs most other online resources previously available to the University’s researchers. Only WorldCat, the union catalog linking users to more than 30,000 libraries around the globe, holds more records. But Web of Knowledge offers much more than mere size. It presents researchers with new and unique tools to track concepts and ideas through scholarly publications.

Web of Knowledge consists of two separate databases: Web of Science, a comprehensive citation index dating back to 1945, and Current Contents Connect, an alerting service designed to inform users quickly of new publications in their field. Both databases cover all disciplines, including arts and humanities, social sciences and area studies, and science and technology. Because of the extraordinary depth of multidisciplinary coverage, Web of Science is an ideal source for identifying research publications that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries.

In a recent example from the reference desk, an honors student was seeking journal articles on “liquid breathing.” Although it sounds like something from science fiction and was featured in the 1989 film The Abyss, liquid breathing is real. In liquid breathing, various fluorocarbons are used instead of oxygen, preventing “the bends” and other physiological hazards of deep-sea exploration. While traditional indexes in medicine, chemistry, sports science, and engineering revealed only a few scraps of information, one quick search in Web of Science turned up more than forty articles. Because Web of Science records include the institutional affiliation of the authors, the student could then identify and contact the key experts in the field for more information on research avenues in the field of liquid breathing.

Even more remarkable, the Web of Science allows users to explore the footnotes from indexed articles. Using this citation search feature, a student could identify what articles have cited the publications on liquid breathing, thus locating related topics and projects. Cited reference searching can reveal previously obscure links between scholars and help to determine the impact of a particular publication on the scholarly community. For example, works by law professor Robert A. Leflar, including his history of the University entitled The First 100 Years, as well as his text American Conflicts Law are cited in the database by more than two hundred other authors. The researcher will also find that distinguished alumni Professor Elliott West’s chronicle of westward expansion, Contested Plains, is cited by researchers in fields as disparate as economics, environmental studies, anthropology, and geography.

Current Contents Connect covers an equally wide range of subjects and disciplines and is updated daily. Using this tool, scholars can configure personal profiles to be alerted by e-mail as soon as new articles on their current research area are published. Current Contents also indexes and updates information on scholarly Web sites of interest to researchers. Web of Knowledge also provides access to ISI Highly Cited, a gateway to experts in life sciences, medicine, physical sciences, engineering, and social sciences.

But Web of Knowledge is not the only new resource available from the Library’s Web page. Other electronic products added in the last year support research in a wide range of subjects from anthropology to zoology. Several important new resources for the sciences include: JSTOR General Science and Ecology and Botany Collections, online archives of core science journals (back to the nineteenth century in some cases); ENGridBASE and CHEMnetBASE, handbooks for engineering, chemistry, physics, and related fields; the Current Protocols series, a collection of laboratory methods for the life sciences; and Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts, an index to publications on water quality, aquaculture, marine life, and related fields.

Beilstein CrossFire is the most comprehensive resource recently made available by the Library for organic chemistry. It contains citations to publications predating the American Revolution. While the print version of Beilstein was very cumbersome to use and required a good working knowledge of scientific terms in German, the online database allows students to search by chemical structure and reactions and physical properties, in addition to the expected author, title, subject, or keyword fields. Beilstein Crossfire offers detailed compound and pharmacological, biosafety, and environmental aspects of more than eight million compounds. This fall, chemistry and physics librarian Usha Gupta was able to work closely with several honors and graduate chemistry classes to use the Beilstein and related SciFinder (Chemical Abstracts) databases in classroom and lab settings. Even the undergraduates in the basic Organic Chemistry classes searched Beilstein in a “real-world” introduction to the tools used by bench scientists. As Gupta noted, “Beilstein has opened doors for librarians and teaching faculty to collaborate in science instruction.”

One of the most welcome additions from the past year gives national prominence to the work of the University’s own graduate students. Digital Dissertations is a full-text extension of the Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI) database, which indexes dissertations produced in the United States since the time of the Civil War. Master’s theses and foreign dissertation coverage was added in the 1980s. While DAI offered only citations and abstracts, the Digital Dissertations database also incorporates the full text of recent theses—giving our students instant access to more than 100,000 dissertations produced at universities around the globe since 1997. The Library conducted a retrospective project to digitize older U of A doctoral dissertations on topics such as Arkansas history and culture; these works are now available to researchers at other institutions subscribing to Digital Dissertations, in addition to being within a few keystrokes for our own students and faculty. A similar project to digitize master’s theses is in the planning stages.

B.J.
A Note of Thanks!

Students, teachers, and libraries are not alone in advancing learning and knowledge at the University of Arkansas. The role of our donors is crucial. Their contributions have made a significant impact in improving our collections and services. The University Libraries gratefully list below the names of generous donors who have donated gifts during fiscal year July 1, 2002, through June 30, 2003.

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Important Research Areas Benefit from Gift Collections

The University Libraries acquired two significant book collections recently, resulting in great leaps forward in the Library’s holdings supporting important research areas.

The King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies in Fulbright College purchased the extensive library of Kenneth L. Brown. Professor Brown recently retired from a faculty post at the University of Manchester in England. His collection comprises more than seven thousand books written in Arabic, Hebrew, English, and French. Subjects include literature, history, and politics in the Middle East and the Maghreb, as well as important books on Islam. With the acquisition of the Ken Brown library, the instructional and research programs in Middle Eastern languages, history, literature, and other areas will be considerably enriched.

David R. Malone, a former state senator and longtime member of the University of Arkansas community, retired from his position as law professor in January to become the executive director of the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System. As a parting gift to the University, Malone donated more than three thousand books from his extensive personal library.

A serious collector of Arkansas-related books, Malone maintains connections with rare and out-of-print book dealers throughout the country. In the research for his book Hattie and Huey, a study of U. S. Senators Hattie Caraway and Huey Long, he acquired a considerable number of titles, including a first edition of Huey Long’s autobiography, Every Man a King. Some of his reading and research interests are in United States history, especially the Civil War, and twentieth-century American politics. The gift to the Library also contains a considerable amount of Clintoniana, ranging from serious academic studies to scurrilous exposés. Also included are approximately five hundred titles in Arkansiana. All the books in the collection are in very good condition and some even inscribed or autographed by the author.

The Library welcomes gift book collections such as these, whether large or small, that support the University’s teaching and research functions. Interested donors should contact Judy Ganson, Director for Collection Management, Services, and Systems.

Art Enriches Environment in Mullins Library

As early as 1995, John A. Harrison, then director of the University Libraries, took advantage of prime exhibit space in the renovated public service areas of Mullins Library to offer artists on campus a place to exhibit their work on a rotating basis. He recruited several artists to be featured at these exhibits—all of them from the faculty of the Art Department at the University. They included Ken Stout, Donna Stout, John Newman, and Robert Ross. Harrison also created a permanent display of art works by Stephen Chism, a reference librarian in Mullins Library who had received Andy Warhol and National Endowment for the Humanities grants to create them.

Since then, the Library’s art exhibit program has evolved considerably. After Harrison retired, acting director Juana Young continued this commitment and created an Art Advisory Committee comprised of three library employees and the exhibit director of the Art Department, all of whom have expertise and/or interest in art. Young hoped to expand the pool of potential artists for the exhibits and gave the Committee the charge of identifying accomplished artists in the area. These artists responded favorably, and the Library was pleased to host exhibits of work by artists and photographers Marilyn Nelson, Don House, Myron Brody, Joanne Jones, and Kristin Musmug.

Carolyn Henderson Allen, dean of Libraries since October 2000, continued the art program, sometimes interweaving an art exhibit with complementary programming corresponding to a national theme or event. In February 2003, for example, the Library celebrated Black History Month, exhibiting oil paintings by Frances S. Longley of Fort Smith and presenting the exhibit in conjunction with a lecture by the distinguished historian and political scientist Adolph Reed, Jr., of City College, New York.

Other artists and photographers featured since Dean Allen’s appointment have been Andrew Kilgore, Steven Wise, Jocelyn Knight, Norma Tomboulian, Jaqueline Golden, as well as various library staff members who were featured in a separate exhibit. Selected works of these artists have also been featured on the Library’s Web site. Most recently featured were intriguing and eclectic paintings and pottery pieces by Dorothy Linsley of Little Rock. All of the exhibits have been met with great enthusiasm by students and other library patrons. Dean Allen feels strongly that there is a “symbiotic relationship between artistic expression and the pursuit of learning.” The Library’s exhibits of art and artifacts allow our library patrons to explore, however briefly, the creative impulse.

M.B.

The book cover of a first edition of Huey Long’s Every Man a King donated to the Library by David Malone.

A painting entitled “Homage to Vermeer,” one of several art works by Dorothy Linsley on exhibit in Mullins Library through December. Photo courtesy of Don Batson.
Commemorative Volumes Fund

The University Libraries invite you to participate in the Commemorative Volumes Fund to honor a student, parent, friend, or family member. This is an opportunity for you to make a personally meaningful and lasting contribution to the Libraries which will benefit our students now and in the future. With your donation of $50, $75, or $100 to the University Libraries, a librarian will purchase a book with the value and within a subject area that you specify. We will place a special bookplate in the book purchased with your gift to honor the person you have identified. You and the person you designate will be notified of the book selected and will be given a copy of the bookplate that appears in the book. The book will be placed on the shelves as a part of the permanent circulating collection.

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