Hoo's That Owl?

You've seen him on tee shirts, plastic rain bags, signs, fliers, web sites, bookmarks, and lapel pins, but have you ever wondered where he came from? Of course, I'm talking about the library's mascot, the owl. He has changed somewhat over the years, becoming more animated and exhibiting more personality, yet he essentially remains true to the original model, which sits above the portico of Altgeld Hall.

When the university opened its doors in 1899, students passed under the owl going to and from classes. This is only fitting as the owl is an age-old symbol of learning and, here, acts as a kind of threshold guardian, preserving the high purpose of the new university. He is the sacred bird of Athena, Greek goddess of wisdom, again deepening the owl's resonance as a symbol of education. The university's first library, Haish Library, was in Altgeld Hall, on the second floor, just down from the owl's perch. So when a symbol for the University Libraries was needed, the owl was a natural choice.

In designing the owl I wanted to be true to the original stone carving, hence the “funky” look, with flower-like feathers around the eyes and thick, simple feet. At first he appeared rather stiff, as here on one of the library's early web sites. Over time the owl has taken on a life of his own.

The owl is perhaps most associated with The Friends of NIU Libraries and appears on their web site,
on fliers for Friends events,

on tokens given for Friends support,

on a holiday greeting postcard,

and on the masthead of this very publication, pulling the arm of the letter press.

A suggestion has surfaced many times over the years to name him. Several suggested names have been: Oswald, Horace, and Bubo, from the Latin for many species of Horned Owls the world over. For now he remains nameless, referred to as the library owl. Next time you walk by Altgeld, look up above the entry and give a nod to the owl. He is in a sense the father of the library’s owl.

Charles Larry
Estate Planning and the Friends of NIU Libraries

Do you have a will? Have you considered making a trust? Do you know what the estate taxes would be in the event of your death? These are all questions that are important if you have considered making an estate plan. Every adult should have a will indicating who they wish to inherit their property at the time of their death. This not only includes such things as who would receive the assets such as money, stocks and bonds and real estate, but also designating who might receive items of tangible personal property. For example, who do you want to receive your jewelry or antique furniture or books? Often if there is a dispute in the family it involves these types of items rather than the more valuable assets. The advantage of a trust is that it avoids probate. Probate involves going through court to transfer property at the time of one’s death which is time consuming, public and expensive. Having a trust can avoid that.

At the present time the federal estate taxes only involve estates in excess of $3.5 million, however if an estate does exceed $3.5 million, the tax rate starts at 45%. Illinois taxes anything in excess of two million and that can result in a substantial tax as well for estates of that size. These are all matters that everyone should discuss with their legal advisor as it can avoid many problems for their heirs in the event of their death.

You may wish to include in your will bequests to charitable organizations. The Northern Illinois University Friends of the Library has established an endowment fund which is an ideal way to benefit the University for generations to come. All of us who are members of the NIU Friends of the Library value the library and want to do what we can to insure its continued growth in the years ahead. That is why the endowment was established, and anything given to the endowment fund during one’s lifetime is tax deductible for income tax purposes and if a bequest is included in one’s will, it would be deducted for Illinois and federal estate tax purposes as well.

Other estate planning documents that every adult should consider are powers of attorney for business as well as health care powers of attorney. If you become disabled and unable to handle your business affairs whether temporarily or permanently, a business power of attorney allows another individual to handle these matters for you. Often that is a parent or a spouse or a child. The health care power of attorney allows the individual you have named to obtain medical information if you are unable to make medical decisions yourself and also indicates whether you would want to be kept alive on life support in the event your medical situation became terminal. Every adult should consider having these documents.

Ronald G. Klein
President, NIU Friends of the Libraries
Thoughts from the Dean:

Visitors to the Rare Books and Special Collections Department in NIU’s Founders Memorial Library have undoubtedly seen the working replica of a 17th century printing press located just inside the reading room, and used often for class demonstrations. The printing press, developed in the 15th century by Johannes Gutenberg, represented a major revolution in the dissemination of information. Movable type made creation of the written word less expensive and easier to produce on a mass scale than block type printing or illuminated manuscripts. The written word was no longer (at least in Western culture) limited to religious topics for monasteries or the wealthy. This information revolution allowed for the expansion of reading among the population and for the secularization of publications. History, science, politics, philosophy, literature and the erotic evolved and developed as publishing and consumption became more affordable.

In the same reading room near the reproduction of the printing press there is a desktop computer. Many researchers and scholars who use the materials in Rare Books and Special Collections bring their own laptop computer or hand-held device which allows them to access the internet wirelessly. Computers and hand-held devices have become relatively affordable and innocuous and have expanded the reading of the written word from the printed word on paper, to the word processed or scanned word on the screen. Blogging, tweeting, social networking and personal web pages have created the opportunity for anyone to become their own publisher and share their thoughts and opinions with readers in cyberspace, truly a revolution in the dissemination of information.

Two results have come from this latest revolution. The first is that there is a plethora of information; so much information can be overwhelming. Search on any topic using your favorite search engine. Results will be in the thousands. The relevancy ranking system for search results does not always mean that the first few hits are indeed the best or contain correct information. The internet has neither editorial board nor content verifiers; it is wide open for anyone to post anything. As a result, libraries and librarians have found a new role: teaching how to interpret information and how to recognize good information from bad. The need to teach these skills, which librarians refer to as information literacy or information competency has become paramount as the amount of information has exploded, and a whole generation of students have grown up using search engines and trusting that the returned from their search is good information.

The second result is changes in the publishing industry. Up to the creation of the hypertext transfer protocol (http), the basis of the web, information dissemination was dependent upon paper; upon the printed word. Currently, although the printed word continues to be produced and to sell, publishers are producing and managing the bulk of their content, up to and including the information eventually destined to be printed on paper, electronically. This is both less expensive for the publisher and a quicker means for dissemination of timely information. Yet who is capable and responsible for finding and preserving all of the electronic information living in cyberspace? Information literacy and the need to preserve born-digital documents and information are the pressing questions for libraries and librarians at the current time. If libraries do not address these questions, then a large company may end up capturing information and controlling its dissemination and we would be back to the pre-printing press days, where only the rich or special interest groups will be able to afford to have access to the vast amounts of printed words in the many formats. That is our current challenge.

Patrick Dawson
Dean, University Libraries
Friendship is Golden: A Friends’ Purchase, 7 Years Later

The NIU Libraries provide teaching and research resources across the entire NIU community. Each year, the Friends of the NIU Libraries purchases materials for the NIU Libraries that would otherwise be too expensive for the library’s budget, using monies generated by their Endowment fund. The Friends Endowment has a demonstrably profound impact on the resources available to our students and faculty, particularly in departments like mine, where costs for appropriate teaching and research materials typically outstrip available funding. This is one example of the kind of impact that a gift to the Friends Endowment can make.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Friends purchased a group of medieval manuscript leaves selected by NIU faculty members for the department of Rare Books and Special Collections. These leaves have, like many other Friends purchases, become a “gift that keeps on giving,” forming a central role in the teaching mission of Rare Books and Special Collections, and by extension, the NIU academic community.

That single generous gift from the Friends of the NIU Libraries has had a profound impact on the ability of NIU students to handle and explore the meaning of a piece of history. Reading about medieval manuscripts in books, or hearing about them in a lecture with images on slides doesn’t allow students to see the size and scale of different manuscripts, the texture of the painted decoration, or the shine of medieval gold leaf as it hits the light.

The leaves entered the department several weeks before I did (I became the Head of Rare Books and Special Collections in January 2004) and were placed immediately on exhibit. They have been incorporated into exhibitions in our department at least twice more since we acquired them, and are routinely made use of by individual patrons and visitors.

Their true value, however, becomes evident when we examine their use in a classroom setting. From 2004 through the end of 2009, 151 classes, made up of 2,863 students from at least seven different departments visited Rare Books and Special Collections for instructional sessions using our materials. Of those class sessions, about half (75 classes, 1432 students) incorporated the use of the medieval manuscript leaves, either as part of a general overview of our departmental resources, or as part of a more targeted discussion relevant to the class topic.

Many of the NIU faculty bringing their classes had never incorporated an instruction session
from the Rare Books Department into their courses before, but were drawn in by the acquisition of the manuscripts. The vast majority of their students had never seen or handled a medieval manuscript before. Several students opted to closely study and write their papers about our manuscripts, an activity that would have required a trip to a major Chicago research library before 2004. The classes that originally made use of the manuscripts in 2004 return each time the class is offered, ensuring an enduring effect on the NIU student experience.

The acquisition of those manuscript leaves has made our department a notable resource for the NIU community. As a recipient of Friends support, I’d like to say thank you. Gifts like yours in support of the Friends Endowment make excellence in all of our programs possible.

Lynne M. Thomas
Head, Rare Books and Special Collections

Announcements:

If you have books you’d like to donate to The Friends book sale at NIU Library, please contact Jayne Crosby-Lindner (815) 753-9843.

Don’t forget to visit the Founders Cafe on the lower level of Founders Library!

Save These Dates:

January 24, 2010. “Heroes, Villains, and the American Zeitgeist” exhibit and Wine & Cheese reception from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the NIU Art Museum located in Altgeld Hall. Wine and cheeses by Inbodens of DeKalb, IL. This event is invite only.

March 3, 2010. An Evening with Sarah Monette. 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Ellwood House Carriage House. Discuss the author’s book The Bone Key while enjoying Sweet Dreams desserts. Co-Sponsored by DeKalb Public Library. This event is free and open to the public.

April 9, 2010. The Rockford Route: A ‘Twilight Railroad’ That Served DeKalb, presented by H. Roger Grant, Kathryn and Calhoun Lemon Professor of History, Clemson University, in the Rare Books and Special Collections Department from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. This event is free and open to the public.

May 2, 2010. 4th Annual Book Appraisal Fair. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Rare Books and Special Collections department located on the fourth floor in Founders Memorial Library. Featuring Thomas Joyce of Thomas J. Joyce & Co. and the Chicago Rare Book Center and William Butts of Main Street Fine Books in Galena, IL. Individual appraisals cost $10; Members of the Friends of NIU Libraries receive the first three appraisals free and pay a discounted rate of $5 each for subsequent appraisals.
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Yes! I/We wish to join the Friends of NIU Libraries at the following level:

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Thank you for your support!