



Library Staff November 2005

# LIBRARY LETTERS

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[Library.wlu.edu](http://Library.wlu.edu)

## Notes from the University Librarian



In this early part of the twenty-first century we tend to hear a great deal about technology and its wonders, and certainly technology has done remarkable things for libraries. It has revolutionized our ability

to process and share collections, and made it possible for students and faculty at W&L to use materials that, a decade ago, would have been found only in the world's great research libraries.

Technology is only a part of what goes on in the library, however, and while much information is available in digital form, our users still value, and use, print and other traditional format collections. Fred Farrar's "really old newspapers," for example, tell us as much through their look and feel as they do through their content. Scholars and students look at typefaces, bindings, marginal notations, and even who owned a book as a way of seeing what the book, as an object, has to teach us.

One of the things that sets institutions like W&L apart is the fact that students and faculty can come to the Library to touch and work with an original item, such as the letters of Robert E. Lee – and that is a very different experience. While there is much excitement now about the possibilities inherent in digitizing such collections, primary materials remain the lifeblood of study in many disciplines. Without the commitment of private individuals, libraries, and historical societies to collect and preserve this material, there would be nothing left to digitize – or to be studied. Providing a safe and secure home for such collections, while publicizing their existence to the world, is another aspect of the many-faceted library.

Finally, there is the Library's role as the link to information beyond our walls. Interlibrary Loan (ILL) is, in fact, the perfect melding of the things that have always constituted a good library – collections, organization, and service. Interlibrary loan is possible because libraries around the world continue to be wonderfully varied in the collections they develop and in the desire to share. To meet the thousands of requests that come in annually, ILL depends on sophisticated borrowing/lending software and an even more talented and committed staff, because one eternal truism with ILL is that the borrower usually needs the item "yesterday."

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Someone once wrote that libraries constantly change and grow over time, something which by rights is only supposed to happen to living things. I happen to think that the library *is* a living thing, if only in the symbolic sense – but whether it's living or not, our library is most certainly a complex organism when it comes to delivering the services and collections our community needs. That's why life in the Library is never dull!

Merrily E. Taylor  
University Librarian

## New Lee Letter a Hit at First Friends of the Library Event

During Homecoming 05 (September), the fledgling Friends of the Library provided its members the first look at a newly-purchased letter from Robert E. Lee to a young man inquiring about college advice. The youngster asked Lee to recommend the best colleges in the South. Lee graciously mentioned UVA, William and Mary and Washington College. He enclosed a catalog for Washington College with his reply. It is unknown where the young man ended up!

The purchase of the letter was fortuitous, says Special Collections Librarian Vaughan Stanley. And the letter itself arrived on campus the day before the FOL event.

Librarians John Tombarge and Kyle Felker entertained and enlightened the Friends with a presentation on the library of the future. They demonstrated a few of the newest databases, including *Lexis-Nexis Serial Set* and *JStor*. Following the Q&A session, Friends went to the Boatwright Room where they were able to get up close and personal with the latest Lee letter and other selected documents, under the watchful eye of Stanley.



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## Fred Farrar's Big Donation Already Paying Dividends

For years, Fred Farrar '41 has been collecting really old newspapers. Recently he has donated a large portion of his collection to The University Library. This year's journalism students are the first to get to use this invaluable source. Journalism professor Doug Cumming comments, "The way I look at things as a well-seasoned journalist, and a recent Ph.D. in media history, Farrar Collection is a powerful teaching tool. There's nothing like experiencing the material-culture artifact of pages and pages of actual 18th and 19th century papers, inked on old Hoe & Co. presses and still alive on rag-paper. It's like being able to handle the objects in a museum, but better — for these are full of the ideas, opinions, products and stories of American life. The collection allows me and my students to approach newspaper history not in the usual bland way, through the pre-digested conventions of a textbook, but starting with the newspapers themselves. This also gives the students the experience of doing history starting with primary sources, the way it's done by historians.

"While undergraduate Stephanie Wiechmann did a terrific job last summer building a website indexing the collection — [journalism.wlu.edu/Farrar/](http://journalism.wlu.edu/Farrar/) — much of that indexing remains spotty. One of the student projects for my class — JOUR295A, Discovering Early American Newspapers — [journalism.wlu.edu/J295a/J295%20Syllabus.htm](http://journalism.wlu.edu/J295a/J295%20Syllabus.htm) — is going to flesh out some of the indexes in this online catalog. Another project is to write a paper on "life in America" in a particular decade of the 18th or 19th century. The Farrar newspapers provide the details, in news items and advertisements, to use for this paper; the kind of details historical novelists like to use to make their stories come alive.



"We also look at the intellectual foundations for the American constitutional story by browsing in first- editions

of Locke's work or in the complete collection of the London-based Gentleman's Magazine (both among Farrar's donations)."

**"I have many fond memories of studying in  
Leyburn..." Jane Ledlie '08L**

## New ILL System Makes Borrowing a Snap

Borrowing materials from other libraries for our students and faculty is one of the Library's most popular and valued services. In 2004/05 the Interlibrary Loan team filled 4,460 requests, 60 percent of them from students and 40 percent from faculty or staff. To improve the quality of our service even more, we debuted a new web-based ILL system this past Fall. With this system, the W&L community can order ILL materials; track the status of requests; and view their current and past requests. In addition, it allows users to put in ILL requests directly from library databases such as FirstSearch, EconLit, MLA Bibliography, and PsycInfo.

A link to the ILL system is on the Library Homepage, or you can go directly to [illiad.wlu.edu](http://illiad.wlu.edu). You are required to log in with your university ID and password.

To review ILL policies, go to [library.wlu.edu/services/ill/default.asp](http://library.wlu.edu/services/ill/default.asp). Note that non-W&L patrons can use the service for a fee of \$10 per item.



## Book Sale Raises \$2600+ in Four Days

"We were very pleased with the turnout this year," says Acquisitions Librarian Laura Turner. "We made almost \$200 more than last year. All money goes into the library's general fund and is used to augment the budget. The Library has added a new point-of-sale system that allows students to swipe home their charges; this may have helped with our sales!"

A preview period for Friends of the Library was added to the annual Leyburn book sale. FOL members—and a few others who snuck in! - accounted for 25% of the total sales generated over the four days.

