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The Dedication of the William T. Young Library: Selected Remarks

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In Recognition of the First Anniversary of the University of Kentucky's New Main Library

The Dedication of the William T. Young Library: Selected Remarks
April 3, 1998

Remarks by President Charles T. Wethington, Jr.

We certainly cannot begin to recognize all of those who have made major contributions to what we are celebrating today, but for those of you who may not know them I believe that all three of the principals of Kallmann, McKinnell & Wood are here, and since you are in a structure designed by this firm, a structure of which we are exceedingly proud, I'd like to ask those three gentlemen and their associates who are here to stand and be recognized.

It is my distinct pleasure and privilege to welcome each of you to your new library—The William T. Young Library.
The statewide mission of the University of Kentucky and the tremendous gains that have been made in new technology in recent years have combined to bring the cutting-edge resources of this new facility within easy reach of every Kentuckian.

For me, today truly does mark a dream come true.

Years before I became president of the University of Kentucky, it was clear to me that one of the greatest needs of this university was a new library. It has been said many times that you can't have a great university without a great library.

University of Kentucky can become, I am convinced, a leading university in America, but only with a library of quality and distinction.

Today we have that great library.

We want this building to make a statement about the importance of a library... about the commitment we have to academic excellence and I feel that we have done that.

It didn't come easily and it happened only because many of you, and thousands not here today, believed it should happen, and worked diligently to ensure that the effort to fund and build this library would be successful.

More than 14,000 people—most Kentuckians—from every part of this campus and from every corner of the state and across the nation contributed the funds that have made this day possible.

These efforts, combined with a unique partnership of local government, the University of Kentucky alumni and athletics associations and the Kentucky Medical Services Foundation, have led to this tremendous resource we so proudly dedicate today.

It is you—from Bill Young to John Gaines to the University of Kentucky student body, from this state's largest corporations to its loyal alumni—that we owe a great deal of gratitude.

It is your foresight and generosity that will change the way the people of Kentucky will be able to learn and grow in future years through the benefits offered by The William T. Young Library.

Thank you for making dreams come true—yours... and mine.

—Charles T. Wethington, Jr.
Remarks by John R. Gaines

In America, circa 1798, Thomas Jefferson chose the Roman Pantheon as the prototype of the library he envisioned building at the University of Virginia. It was Jefferson's inspiration to transform the ancient Pantheon, "The Temple of the Gods," into a modern Pantheon, "The Temple of the Intellect." Without hesitation he placed his library at the center of his famous "Academical Village" and symbolically at the epicenter of the civilized world.

In a not dissimilar permutation of Jefferson's insight, Oliver Wendell Holmes, nearly 100 years later observed at the laying of the cornerstone of the Boston Public Library, "Libraries are the Palaces that Democracies build." As Holmes understood so well, the foundation stones and building blocks of a democratic society depends almost entirely on an enlightened, educated and well-informed electorate of responsible citizens living in a free world and open society.

In 1935, a German immigrant to America, Dr. Otto L. Bettmann reported that he was startled to discover that the libraries in America were groaning with books, that were liberally available to all citizens without cost and with no questions asked. He found this to be one of the most remarkable features of American life. Dr. Bettmann was to found the Bettmann Pictorial Archives in New York City, an unrivaled national resource encompassing the whole of visual human history since the invention of the lens camera 160 years ago.

Jefferson's "Temple of the Intellect," Holmes' "Palaces of Democracy," and Bettmann's "Archives of Humanity" are all fitting metaphors as to the significance and value of the University Library in today's world so aptly called "The Age of Information." Today the greatest concern of all libraries is how to deal with the ever increasing avalanche of material; printed, verbal, and visual, that is being incessantly generated by a society obsessed with means that are so powerful, so developed and so beguiling, that we have completely forgotten about ends. The poet meditates: Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the life we have lost in living? Of this we can be certain it is from the books in our library that we breath the morning air of the world, see with the...
keenest eyes, reason with the greatest minds and listen to the sweetest voices of all times.

It is here within this beautifully proportioned, superbly organized and appropriately contemplative space, suffused with light but occasionally darkened by shadows, that we are beckoned to form a community united by the love of learning.

The gifts of over 12,000 true believers made this inspiring project a reality. It is our fondest hope and most fervent wish that of those who cross the welcoming threshold of the W.T. Young Library will be encouraged to become men and women of civilization and within these hallowed walls will be challenged to ponder the great horizon questions asked by humankind in every age of the time of man: Who are we? Why are we here? What do we know? Whither are we going?

—John R. Gaines

Remarks by William T. Young

It has been nearly 60 years since I graduated from the University of Kentucky. Other than my family, nothing has had a greater influence on my life than the time I spent on this campus. On a personal note, the university is responsible for the other great influence in my life, my wife, Lucy—we met here as freshmen. Over the years, the university has truly enriched my life, giving my family and me far more than we have given in return. For this, I will be forever grateful.

The magnificence of the library is enhanced enormously by the lovely 21-acre site on which we stand today. This site is a campus oasis that adds to the stature and prominence of the library. I ask the university to permanently dedicate this remarkable site in its entirety to the exclusive use of the library, insuring it will be open and pristine for the perpetual enjoyment of the students and all citizens of Kentucky. Should the university do this, I will propose and am prepared to support the creation of a new endowment, using private funds to supplement university funding of library operations. By so doing, we will have done everything possible to
insure excellence in the offerings and management of this wonderful facility.

I salute Charles Wethington as father of this incomparable library. I salute Paul Willis, UK librarian, whose many ideas have made this a state-of-the-art facility. I salute noted architect Michael McKinnell for perhaps his finest achievement. I salute Dr. Thomas D. Clark, distinguished professor in my day and the “grand” father of the library before you. I salute John Gaines, visionary and campaign chairman, and all others who have contributed in many ways. And finally, I particularly salute and applaud those organizations who participation made the major financing possible. What better use of their resources than this library, the very symbol of learning?

Again, thank you for this extraordinary honor to me and my family. I love this university. I speak with a humble heart. Thank you so much.

—William T. Young

Remarks by Theodore M. Hesburgh
President Emeritus of University of Notre Dame

I would like to begin today by thanking the distinguished president of the University of Kentucky, Charles T. Wethington, Jr., for his generous and cordial invitation to speak on this happy occasion. I am also deeply grateful to President Wethington and his colleagues for the opportunity to become an alumnus of this distinguished university, and especially on a wonderful occasion like this. I would also like to thank one of our Notre Dame alumni of the Class of 1951, John R. Gaines, who has been involved in this project with the president and the faculty, and trustees, since its very inception, as a great idea. He might well be called “the godfather of the Library,” and I gladly join you in honoring him today. His dreams have come true. Lastly, I would like to congratulate and thank on your behalf, William T. Young, a 1939 engineering graduate of this university, after whom the library is named. Mr. Young’s leadership gift of $5 million was enormously important in launching this project, thousands of others followed his example. I think it was only divine justice that one of his race...
horses won the Kentucky Derby only a short time after he had made his gift.

It is wonderful that Boston, the seat of classical architecture, and Louisville architects, teamed up to design this building, with such extraordinary results. The very size of the new W. T. Young Library is very impressive. Some would say, it should be, since it cost almost $60 million. Nonetheless, the university has one of the most exciting libraries in the world of universities: 361,000 square feet, including 37 miles of shelving that will accommodate over 1.2 million volumes, and simultaneously seat 4,000 scholars.

This library looks not only to the wisdom of the past but, also, to the future. It has 151 miles of data cable, as well as 50 miles of fibre optic cable. This enables the new library to be forever new as it reaches into the future and across the whole globe in seeking out wisdom and knowledge wherever they exist, and bringing them here to benefit the entire state. It would be hard to think of a university building that is more committed to be of service to the whole state of Kentucky, and all of its colleges and universities, not just this one, and to all of its citizens as well.

If I might be personal for a moment, there was no building among the many that were constructed during my 35 years as president at the University of Notre Dame, that gave me more joy than our new library which was dedicated in 1964. I have always been of the opinion that the library is the heart of the university, and the best way one may judge a university is by looking at its library with all of the treasures, wisdom and knowledge within it.

When I became president of Notre Dame in 1952, we had a smallish library that was bursting at the seams with only a quarter of a million books. That was not bad but it certainly was not great as universities go. Eight years passed before we had the possibility and the capacity of launching a new library. When they asked me if I wanted to double the size of the old one, I said, “no.” They then asked, “quadruple”. And I, again, said “no”. What do you really want? I said, “I want a library 12 times the size of our present library, with capacity of 12 times our present library holdings.” Why so large, they asked, and I responded, “Because I think we have a great future and libraries are like mouse traps, the bigger you build them, the more mice you catch. The bigger the building, the more books you attract.” And I am happy to report that our new memorial library now is approaching its capacity of 3 million volumes, having passed 2 million some years ago. More than half
of our students are in and out of the library every day, and that is what scholarship is all about. I must in all modesty admit that, when I retired, they named the library after me and I happily have my retirement office there. I trust that all of this will assure you of my great happiness of being with you today, participating in the dedication of the William T. Young Library which will become the new heart of the University of Kentucky and a veritable jewel in the crown of this state.

When one speaks of libraries, one almost instinctively remembers Alexandria, the great city on the delta of the Nile which was founded in 332 B.C. by Alexander the Great. It became the capital of the Ptolemies of Egypt and eventually the center of Greek and Jewish and Christian culture. All of this led to the creation of two famous libraries in Alexandria, one kept in the Temple of Zeus and the other in a nearby museum. At their height, these libraries contained over 700,000 rolls (their equivalent of volumes) which represented the whole culture of the day. On these treasures of wisdom and knowledge, there grew up a veritable university, attracting such scholars of the time as: Aristarchus of Samothrace who collated the homeric texts; Euclid, the mathematician and geometer, and Herophilus, the anatomist who founded a medical school there. After the suicide of Anthony and Cleopatra, Alexandria and its library became one of the most important parts of the Roman empire, the center of Christian learning that rivaled Rome and Constantinople. Sadly, the libraries were gradually destroyed, and with them, died a great center of culture and learning.

It is interesting that in this particular historical circumstance, the library came first and the university followed in time. I think all of this illustrates what was mentioned above, that the library is the heart of the university and the center of its learning and teaching. It was probably with this in mind that someone has called this library, the most important building built in this state of Kentucky, since its capital building of more than 100 years ago.

A famous professor at Columbia University, Jacques Barzun, once wrote of the university as the “House of the Intellect.” The library is the “House of the Intellect.” The library is certainly the center of that house since it enshrines all culture, past, present, and yet to come. As anyone who surfs the web on the Internet has seen all too clearly, general knowledge is doubling about every 12 years,
and it is in this library that scholars will have access to this growing body of knowledge, and will, indeed, contribute to it.

We, who as a nation, are dedicated to democracy, understand full well that democracy is impossible without citizens who are well informed and capable of leading the destiny of our nation, in all of its splendor. If one wonders how the union of Soviet Republics folded so quickly, I can give you the best explanation by pointing to a library.

The Lenin Library in Moscow, one of the biggest libraries in the world, with more than six million volumes, was essentially closed to the residents of Moscow and the populace throughout the Soviet Union. I once met a philosopher at the State University of Moscow who told that he was unable to keep up on modern Christian philosophy because he couldn’t get access to the books of great French philosophers like Jacques Maritan and Yves Simon and Etienne Gilson. I told him I would mail those volumes directly to him at his university. I mailed them directly to him at Lomonosov University but, of course, they were intercepted by the censor and put into the Lenin Library where they were promptly locked up without his having any access to them. When a nation bars its scholars from their greatest intellectual treasures, it is no mystery that the scholarship becomes sterile, and a free country of freely learning citizens becomes impossible.

When Andrew Carnegie, the great Scottish philanthropist, who made millions in the American steel industry, decided to give something back to this country, he created public libraries all across the land, so that today, our people have more access to public libraries, not to mention outstanding university libraries like this one, than any place on earth. And that is the best reason why we are a strong democracy and will continue to be so as long as we foster universities like this, with great libraries at their heart.

This library has been particularly designed for use. First of all, it has pulled library resources from distant places into one central location. Once advanced students come here to the library, there are many carrels where they can work privately, assemble the books that they need, lay out their papers and, after closing time, leave them there until they return for more study. There are study carrels available for 2,500 graduate students, at any given time. For the undergraduates, there are more than 3,000 general seats and 1,000 more seats in the library classrooms and meeting rooms. Needless to say, this is going to be one of the most important and
most used building on the campus for the great growth of the intellectual climate of this university.

Libraries are run by librarians. I found it interesting how our librarians will operate this magnificent building. As to their vision, they said this university will be a leading provider of information resources and services, continually anticipating and responding to all information needs and expectations of students and faculty.

Regarding their values, they want to emphasize team-work, creativity, integrity, service, and ultimately to earn the respect of the faculty and students and all who used this library. Our librarians state that their mission, as custodians of the major research library in the commonwealth, is to provide comprehensive access to information essential to teaching research and service at the University of Kentucky. Indeed, every college and university in this state, and scholars throughout the nation and the world, will be enriched by the use of this library, and the dedication of those librarians who bring it to its full potential as a center of culture and learning, and intellectual growth. We salute our librarians, who for all the years to come, will make this library a bright light in the surrounding darkness.

Some have said that libraries are obsolete today since, in the future, everything will be electronic. If that were true, how does one explain the continual growth today of book publishing, magazine editing, and growing newspaper use in the middle of an electronic revolution.

It is a fact that electronic access to knowledge has become very important and very widespread but it precisely in this building that this will take place with the best equipment available anywhere in the state. This building will be the center for teaching students and scholars to access and maintain such information from wherever it exists. This is a facility rooted in the past but imaginatively reaching out to the future and all that it holds.

One cannot come to this state and the University of Kentucky without mentioning one of our most distinguished and most learned presidents, Abraham Lincoln. As you know, Abraham Lincoln had practically no formal education at all. But he did learn how to read. That was all he needed to become a self-educated man, a brilliant debater, the author of the most eloquent speeches ever given in America, such as the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural, now enshrined in our hearts.
He did all of this because of books and his dedication to the learning they contained. He was admitted to the bar without ever having entered a law school. How I cherish that wonderful sketch of him, riding on horseback, slouched over as usual, but devouring a huge law book, which he read as he rode along through the countryside, maybe near here.

In one of the early planning documents for this magnificent library, John Gaines refers to Lincoln in a passage with which I would like to conclude:

“Lincoln might simply say that in keeping with our justly renowned tradition of Kentucky hospitality and generosity, we are building a home to help people reach their full human potential. We are building a home so people may live fuller lives with greater dignity and that we are building our new Kentucky home to thank and praise God for all of the blessings he has bestowed upon us, his children.”

Earlier, in this passage, John says;

“Through the inspiration, initiative, and instrumentality of this multi-dimensional resource, (the new Library), a project of, by, and for the people, there surely exists the potential, indeed the assurance, that poems will be written, symphonies will be composed, lives will be saved, people will be fed, laws will be enacted, governments will be enlightened, bridges will be built, environments will be protected, technologies will be born, industries will be formed, businesses will be financed, stars will be studies, plays will be produced, minerals will be extracted, pastures will be populated, research will be initiated, communities will be praying, cultures will be explored, and the unity of mankind will be affirmed.”

What a dream, what a prospect, what a great day of joy for all of us at our beloved University of Kentucky. There is an old saying that “what is past is prelude.” I would translate that for all of you today, in the vernacular: “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!”

God bless you all and God bless our University’s new Library.

—Theodore M. Hesburgh