

FEATURES

Check out Wilson Library for N.C. books, memorabilia

By Vicki Cheng
Staff Writer

The polished wooden door opens to reveal a spacious room gently lit by glowing chandeliers. Elegant rugs adorned with intricate patterns lead to a delicate statue nestled beneath a cozy arch. Two white staircases stretch upward, promising more to discover.

Unfortunately, these images are unfamiliar to many at UNC. The room is the lobby of the Wilson Library, a place of which most people on campus are aware, but few actually explore.

"There is some sort of presumption that this is the 'graduate library' and that it's a little bit forbidding," said J.G. Jones, the curator of the N.C. Collection, which is housed in Wilson Library. "Actually, it's a very warm building, once a person feels at home in it. There's something that makes a student think, 'Well, that's off limits.' But that's not true."

Originally referred to as simply "the Library," Wilson Library was constructed between 1927 and 1929 to replace Carnegie Library (now Hill Hall), formerly the oldest state university library in the United States. The library was renamed in 1956 in honor of Louis Round Wilson, who served as the University librarian from 1901 to 1932.

The new library was designed with the idea that it would be a permanent solution to library expansion; architects envisioned unlimited additions behind

the building to accommodate the University's growing collection of books.

Although additions were built in 1952 and 1976, the construction of the Bell Tower and of South Road made further expansion impossible. After the completion of Davis Library in 1985, Wilson Library was renovated and became the home of UNC's special collections.

Today, these collections include the N.C. Collection, the Rare Book Collection and the Southern Historical Collection, all of which are funded by private trust funds and gifts.

The N.C. Collection, organized by Wilson in 1901, actually began in 1844 with University President David Swain's collection of N.C. memorabilia. Today, the N.C. Collection includes anything and everything written about North Carolina or North Carolinians, plus works written by North Carolinians, regardless of subject. The collection has grown and evolved to include the Gallery, the Reading Room and the Photographic Services department.

The N.C. Collections Gallery, open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday, is tucked away at the end of the hall on the first floor. But Jones said the Gallery is not just another everyday museum.

"Most museums are interested in artifact material and are loathe to do much with written materials," Jones said. "But we are a library and have acquired many

objects over the years. Our interest is to attract attention to the written word, which we supplement with artifacts. Normal museums display artifacts with as little written word as they can get away with."

The displays in the gallery often have a related theme or some tie to the University, Jones explained. For example, the Sir Walter Raleigh Collection, made up of the Sir Walter Raleigh rooms with 17th century paneling, furniture and artifacts, branches off into the Roanoke Collection and is supplemented by books and other materials.

Also in the Gallery are displays including Mangum Weeks' collection of Audubon Society works, photographs of and an account ledger about Siamese twins Chang and Eng, who eventually settled in North Carolina, and the brass cornerplate of Old East.

At the other end of the hall is the N.C. Collection's Reading Room. Furnished with dignified chairs and Chippendale study tables, visitors are invited to study in the Reading Room below spidery chandeliers and surrounded by austere portraits hung near giant arched windows.

The Reading Room houses the largest collection of material about a single state in the United States. Special displays include artifacts of Sir Walter Raleigh and Thomas Wolfe, as well as John Sprunt Hill and Bruce Cotten, University benefactors.

The N.C. Photographic Services comprises a collection of photographs ranging from the 1840s to the present. Photographs depicting all kinds of people, places throughout North Carolina and events that occurred in the state are on display on the ground floor.



DTH file photo

In addition to displaying rare N.C. artifacts, Wilson Library provides a quiet place to study

Another important part of Wilson Library is the Rare Book Collection, found on the second floor. The room itself is unmistakable; a breathtaking chandelier, glittering softly with dozens of brilliant lights, hangs beneath the infamous dome that crowns the library. The walls of the room are flanked by dark, marble-like columns, which stand beside shelves and shelves of caged

books. In 1929, a gift from the Hanes family began the Rare Book Collection, which has grown to include everything from clay tablets and papyrus to Shakespeare's folios and the works of Charles Dickens. A display focusing on crime and detective stories is now on display on the second floor. The Southern Historical Collection,

on the fourth floor of Wilson Library, contains documents and source materials for the study of the South. These materials were transferred from the N.C. Collection to the Southern Historical Collection in 1930.

Wilson Library is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

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