A Library Detective Story

By Nancy Booth, Archivist Emerita
Dear Friends,

It has been an honor and privilege as well as fun to serve this year as the President of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Fondren Library. It was a good year with many successful events. The 2005 Gala honoring Bill and Peggy Barnett was successful in raising additional resources for the Special Collections Fund which is dedicated to enlarging the Library’s array of rare books especially in the area of the history of science. The every-other-year book sale contained an unusually wide selection of interesting material and set a record for proceeds from the sale of these books. Other Friends’ events are described in this issue of the Flyleaf.

The renovation of Fondren Library continues apace. The Woodson Research Center, Circulation Desk and Reference Desk have been completed and the new areas are spacious, appealing and attract crowds of students. As a result of the changes on the first floor the FOFL office is now visible and accessible. Please come by and visit.

The Board joins me in thanking Pam Devine, Kyle Frazier and Michelle Hicks who are leaving the Board after years of meritorious service. We will miss you. In turn, we welcome new Board members Gay Beamon and Logan Browning. We look forward to an interesting new year.

Also, many thanks to Chuck Henry and Sara Lowman for their continued support of the FOFL and for their suggestions for new ways that the Friends can support the Library. The Friends of Fondren continue to benefit from the leadership and the hard and cheerful work of Mary Bixby, our Executive Director, and the Board members join me in thanking her.

Sincerely,

John C. Ribble, M.D.
Editors:

Frances Heyne
Vice President, Publications
Mary Bixby

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Funny things happen in libraries. Or perhaps “funny” isn’t the right word. “Unexpected,” or even “shocking” might be the reaction of many people to reports of library thefts. But sadly, some of us in the business are no longer surprised. I’m not talking about a couple of text pages torn out to cram for an exam, but rather about valuable illustrations or entire books taken by professional or near-professional thieves, often repeat offenders, who have the knowledge and skill to select really rare material. These thieves steal valuable library/archival materials to sell, to add to their own personal collections, or both.

One such ambitious criminal was James Shinn, who robbed several Ohio colleges, most notably Oberlin, of thousands of rare and valuable books beginning in the late 1970’s. In 1982, the Oberlin College Libraries distributed a 144-page list of books known to be taken from the Ohio libraries, as well as volumes in Shinn’s possession when he was captured in December 1981.

Perhaps the most highly-publicized book thief in America was Stephen Blumberg, who was tried in 1991 and found guilty of possessing and transporting more than 20,000 rare books and 10,000 manuscripts from over 140 universities in the U.S. and Canada. The stolen material, which was recovered by the FBI, was valued at about $20 million. He was sentenced to 11 months in prison and fined only $200,000. Blumberg was different from other mainstream thieves in that he stole books and manuscripts to keep for himself, not to sell. He stashed the majority of the material in his 17-room house in Ottumwa, Iowa. Once again, the library/archives community saw to it that a list of the stolen materials was created and widely distributed. Rice reference librarians examined the list and identified 28 books taken from the open stacks, but none from special collections.

In July 2005, a Massachusetts map dealer, who claims to have helped build “some of the world’s best private collections,” was actually caught himself in Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. During a visit there he was careless enough to drop a knife blade on the floor under the table where he was sitting, and the staff called the cops. His name is E. Forbes Smiley III, a resident of Martha’s Vineyard, and he blended well with the elite crowd (and elite libraries) to which he sold rare maps. The Boston Public Library is also missing at least ten maps taken from books which Smiley had viewed over a number of years. Smiley of course pled guilty, and his trial is yet to come.

The Fondren Library suffered its own major theft in 1980. One day in early July, University Librarian Sam Carrington received a phone call from Corporal Murvin Valentine of the campus police at the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana. A man named Robert Kindred had been caught in the university library a few days before in the process of stealing valuable engraved
plates from bound volumes of nineteenth-century periodicals. The campus police soon traced his automobile (a blue Cadillac with a Texas license plate) and in its trunk found dozens of plastic bags packed with similar engraved illustrations. A few of the plates had property stamps of libraries throughout the United States, one of which was Rice’s Fondren Library. The Illinois people wanted help in verifying the ownership of the materials, so in a couple of days I was on my way to Champaign/Urbana.

One of the coincidences—(perhaps)—of the theft was that it occurred during the annual conference of the American Library Association, and many of the U of I librarians were away at that meeting. So for a short while I was the only trained librarian in the small room in the police station examining and trying to identify the volumes from which the plates had been stolen.

Kindred, I learned, owned “antique prints” stores in Garland, Texas, and in California, and he had developed a clever and up till then successful technique for replenishing his stock of pricey engravings. He was familiar with such standard library reference guides as the Union List of Serials, which identify libraries in the United States holding runs of particular titles of serial publications. So if he needed more prints from The Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London, Harper’s Weekly, Ibis or The Engineer, for example, he could identify libraries with long runs of these periodicals and thus plan his next road trip.

As more library ownership markings appeared among the purloined plates, more libraries received queries from the police about possible missing materials. Responses came in from other libraries that had been victimized (the University of Maryland, Texas A&M University, and Loyola University in New Orleans) and Murvin (Corporal Valentine, but we were on a first name basis by then) passed these on to me. Some of these I spoke to by phone to learn more details of their losses. At the request of these librarians I made a list for the university police of additional periodicals and monographs plundered from these libraries, in case a second batch of stolen material was apprehended. For instance, the Texas A&M library was missing a hundred plates from volumes of a French periodical on the flora of Europe, as well as all plates from a 3-volume set of The Floral Cabinet & Magazine of Exotic Botany, and the University of Maryland lost many plates from Harper’s Weekly.

All in all, Fondren apparently lost 4,000 plates from 257 volumes in 24 titles.

Most of the raided libraries, including Fondren, shelved such materials in the open stacks, rather than using the traditionally-limited space of “rare book rooms.” [Fondren’s savaged volumes are now in remote storage and must be requested by the person wishing to use them in the library.]

The University of Illinois police did a masterful job of inventorying the contents of Kindred’s 140 plastic bags containing the stolen merchandise, considering they didn’t usually deal with thefts of library material. The police also inventoried the other contents of the trunk of the blue Cadillac, which make for interesting reading:

Here is an example of one item tagged by the police:

| P 5614 |
| University of Illinois Police at Urbana-Champaign |
| PROPERTY TAG |

**Item:** One plastic bag marked 255/IBIS (e.g. 255 plates from IBIS)

| Impounded | box |
| Abandoned | box |
| Do Not Release | box |
| OK to Release | box |

**Date:** 7-10-80

**Comp. No.** 1437089

**Comments:** Containing numerous color bird prints

**Trunk**

(Officer’s initials)

**Other property**

Brown paper sack . . . containing Lays potato chips, 7 ounce bag, about half full, price 99 cents

Other property tags showed, in addition to stolen plates, information as to the brand and size of his jockey shorts, a Ramada Inn key labeled: “Thank you for staying with us,” tapes by Olivia Newton-John, and tons of photos of
Annette Funicello, one of the original Disney Mouseketeers, with whom he was apparently infatuated.

On my return to Houston in a few days, it fell to my staff and me to study all the relevant Fondren volumes for missing plates, and compare our lacunae with the Illinois list (60 plastic bags’ worth) which we then reported to the University of Illinois police. Ultimately the police returned bags of plates to those institutions whose losses appeared to correspond to the captured material, but it was an almost impossible job because not all the affected libraries reported their losses in the detail that we did.

First tried in an Illinois state court, Kindred pled guilty and was sentenced to 30 months of probation and fined $2,500 in court costs, not exactly a burdensome sentence.

The FBI was interested in entering the case, and Fondren was the only affected library to come up with positive identification of plates (this time from a 7-volume monograph entitled Picturesque Views of Seats of the Noblemen and Gentlemen of Great Britain and Ireland, published in London in 1888). The plates were stamped on the verso “Grand Rapids Public Library, and had no Fondren marking. But my staff and I discovered via early library book acquisition records that Fondren had purchased this set from the Grand Rapids library in 1944. This was enough proof for the FBI to prosecute Kindred for theft across state lines.

In January 1985, I received a subpoena to appear in an Illinois court for the Kindred case, but ultimately my appearance was unnecessary. One of the assistant US attorneys in the case, Paul Kanter, wrote on January 28 to tell me that the case had been completed. Kindred had pled guilty to one count of interstate transportation of stolen goods. On March 14 he was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

So what happened to Kindred’s booty that was returned to Fondren? One suggestion was that the valuable plates be converted to another format (in this case, microfilm or microfiche), which could be shelved with the volumes or separately requested by researchers. This idea did not fly, so now the plates are filed in pH-neutral archival boxes in Woodson, organized by the name of the periodical from which they had been detached.

What would you have done?
On Saturday, April 2, 2005, the Friends of Fondren Library paid tribute to Peggy and Bill Barnett, upon his retirement as chair of the Rice University Board of Trustees. The twenty-fifth annual gala was a celebration of the event’s silver anniversary and benefited the Special Collections Endowment of Fondren Library.

Harriet Calvin Latimer chaired the event and was ably assisted by committee members: Iris Ballew, Pamela Smith Devine, Pamela Giraud, Michelle Hicks, Elsa Daniels Horlock, Catherine Matusow, Shirley Redwine, Karen Rogers, Lee Seureau, Amy Dunn Taylor, Edward L. Whalen and Mary Ellen Wilson.

The success of the 2004 gala, held at The Intercontinental Hotel, convinced the committee to return to the same location for the 2005 event. Upon arriving, guests enjoyed cocktails and conversation while bidding on silent auction items. Guests then entered the ballroom, decorated with black tablecloths and silver centerpieces, crafted by the committee.

Friends of Fondren President Robins Brice welcomed guests and thanked Harriet Latimer and the gala committee. He then introduced Jim Crownover and Raymond Brochstein who paid tribute to Peggy and Bill respectively. Harriet Latimer joined Robins at the podium to present a photograph album to the Barnetts.

After dinner, Robins introduced a new team of auctioneers: Susie Glasscock and Bob Patten. Susie and Bob, using all sorts of props and costumes, raised over $28,000 in the live auction.
The gala program contained the following tribute to Peggy and Bill Barnett:

There are times in the lives of institutions, no less than people, that singular relationships prove of paramount importance. In the life of Rice University, few friendships have been as influential as that bestowed by E. William and Peggy Mauk Barnett.

Bill and Peggy both graduated from Rice in 1955, and their bond with Rice has only increased with time. It is safe to say, in fact, that Rice would not be nearly as prepared as it is to face the challenges of higher education and research in the 21st century without the profound and farsighted leadership that Bill brought to the university during his nine-year tenure as chair of the Rice Board of Trustees.

A managing partner, and later senior counsel, of Baker Botts L.L.P., Bill joined the Rice board in 1991 and was elected chair in 1996. The following year proved a watershed time for Rice as the board, under Bill’s leadership and in conjunction with then-president Malcolm Gillis, approved and began implementing a comprehensive strategic plan. The changes instituted by the plan have had a remarkable impact on practically every area of the university, including governance, academics, interinstitutional collaboration, diversity, athletics, and Rice’s global presence. Strong in the mix is a program of campus enhancement that saw more buildings constructed and renovated than during any other comparable period in Rice’s history.

Concurrent with its approval by the board, the plan received resounding support with an allocation of $21.4 million for Fondren Library from a fund established by Oveta Culp Hobby—at the time, the largest single gift ever made to a library anywhere. Subsequently, the strategic plan became the platform that launched Rice: The Next Century Campaign—the first major capital campaign in the university’s history.

Fondren has benefited from the campaign and Rice’s building boom in ways that are not immediately obvious on the Rice campus. One was the creation of a state-of-the-art remote library storage facility. The gloriously green Library Service Center might look out of place if it were inside the hedges, but it is a distinctive and ready landmark in its location on South Main Street. More importantly, it has greatly augmented Fondren’s storage capacity. In addition, construction of the
Humanities Building and renovations to Rayzor and Herring Halls have provided offices for humanities faculty formerly housed in Fondren, freeing space within the library.

Bill may be stepping down from the Rice board this year, but Fondren will continue to benefit from plans made under his tenure to carry out extensive renovations to the library building itself. Scheduled to begin this year, the renovations are likely to include a second entrance at the west end of the building to provide easier access and traffic flow, relocation of critical library services to make them more user-friendly, enhancement of space for collections in particular areas of specialization, improvements to Woodson Research Center, renovated study areas, a student reading room on the sixth floor, and electronic network upgrades to allow Fondren to integrate advances in digital media. One of the more visible additions will be a pavilion with a coffeehouse/cyber café constructed on the western side of the building. These much-needed renovations will provide substantial support to the academic needs of faculty and students campuswide.

Peggy’s contributions to her alma mater are significant, as well, and the library is especially thankful for her membership on the board of the Friends of Fondren, to which she has devoted considerable effort and thoughtful guidance. In addition to being a tireless fundraiser for Rice, Peggy served on the Shepherd Society Governing Council from 1997 to 2003, currently serves on the Shepherd Society Advisory Board, and has been a member of the Baker Institute Roundtable. A strong advocate of education and healthcare, Peggy also has served on the development board of the UT Health Science Center at Houston and has been an active and successful fundraiser for the UT School of Nursing at Houston in particular, where she was instrumental in founding PARTNERS, a community support group.

The dedication and service that the Barnetts have shown to Rice are not just notable—they are the mark of people of outstanding vision. Rice University and Fondren Library are pleased and proud to have such exceptional friends as Peggy and Bill Barnett.
Auctioneers Susie Glasscock and Bob Patten

Dick and Mary Ellen Wilson, Bill Barnett

Jack and Ginger Blanton, Dr. John Mendelsohn

Arthur and Karen Rogers
Susie Glasscock visits the silent auction.

Frances and Ed Heyne

Jenard and Gail Gross

Gail and Louis Adler
The Friends of Fondren would like to thank the following for their generous contributions:

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Urban Retreat
Cassandra Vasquez / Kilim Home
Bruce Williamson Fine Arts
Mary Ellen and Dick Wilson
Fondren Recital
The Friends once again helped fund a recital featuring former and current staff members of the Fondren Library. The event was held on Sunday, August 21 in the Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall. Featured composers were Debussy, Gershwin, Glazunov, Mendelssohn, and Tcherepnin.

Performers. **Front row:** Laurie Thompson, Anthony Potoczniak, Alice Rhoades, and David Bynog. **Back row:** Keith Chapman, Barbara Shreffler, Robert Estep, and Mary Du Mont.

Distinguished Guest Lecture
Michael Cunningham, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Home at the End of the World* and *The Hours*, read from his newest book, *Specimen Days*. The lecture and reception was held on Thursday, October 6.

Michael Cunningham and event chair, Cathryn Rodd Selman.
Book Sale

On the week-end of November 3-5, the Friends held their most profitable book sale ever.

Margaret Jordan, event chair, guided some changes that contributed to the success of the sale: a Thursday evening opening with a $10 entry fee for everyone and Friday operating hours allowing faculty, staff, and students to attend. The sale netted $17,000!

Homecoming

David Itz, a former president of the Friends of Fondren, was honored at the 2005 Homecoming Brunch. The event was chaired by Elisa Donovan.

Dr. John Ribble, current president of the Friends, shared David’s accomplishments:

David is a native of San Antonio, Texas, and holds a B.A. degree from Rice University in geology and economics, class of 1972. He was a member of Will Rice College.

David has 33 years experience in the energy industry, including various positions with El Paso Natural Gas Company, TXU, CenterPoint Energy, and currently Calpine Corporation. During the last few years, he has been a key player in electricity deregulation efforts in Texas, serving on the Board of Directors of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas from 2000 through 2003.

David is also Chairman of the Board of Directors of First Service Credit Union, a community financial institution serving all of Harris County; and he is a member of the Board of Managers of Cameron Management Company.

David joined the Friends of Fondren Library Board of Directors in 1984. He was elected president in 1986 and served two years in that office. He continued to serve on the Board through the 1990-91 term. In his President’s Letter in the summer 1986 issue of The Flyleaf, he stated:
Perhaps the largest challenge we face this year is brought about by the plan for the complete renovation of the Fondren building. This plan will take into consideration efficient space utilization given Rice’s present and projected library requirements as well as present and future library technologies.

...Finally, I face a personal challenge of being a fairly new (I’d like to say young) Board member who is still learning the ropes of this organization.

The Friends of Fondren is a unique organization on the Rice Campus. It brings members of the community, whether or not they are Rice alumni, closer to the great information resources that exist at Rice University. Your support will enhance the ability of the Fondren Library to become a true “information center,” using up-to-date technology to meet the needs of faculty and students as well as other corporate and individual users.

His other community activities include serving on the Board of Directors of the San Jacinto Girl Scout Council for six years in the mid 1990s.

He and his wife Julie, also a 1972 Rice graduate, have three daughters, Elsa, Sarah and Mary, and one granddaughter, Katherine. David and Julie are Rice Associates and Julie has worked with the Shepherd Society at Rice for many years. They are presently serving on the Gala Committee for the Shepherd School’s 30th Anniversary Gala.

John Perez, president of the Rice Engineering Alumni which co-sponsored the brunch, presented awards to engineering alumni. Tim Dehne ’87 was honored as the Outstanding Young Engineering Alumnus, and Pat H. Moore ’52 was honored as the Outstanding Engineering Alumnus.
Friends of Fondren

July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005

We welcome the following new members:

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Looking Ahead

Mark your calendars now for upcoming Friends of Fondren Library events.

Saturday, October 28, 2006

The biennial book drive will be held at Star Motor Cars at 7000 Old Katy Road. Hours are 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Please donate your new and used books to be sold at the 2007 Book Sale. No magazines, outdated technical books, catalogs, or damaged books. Thank you to Lee and Glenn Seureau for hosting the event and for storing our books!

Saturday, November 18, 2006

Members of the Friends and the Rice Engineering Alumni are invited to attend the annual Homecoming Brunch in the Kyle Morrow Room, Fondren Library. 9:30 a.m.