

Andrea Hinding | Wall of Books

By Vicki Stavig

I have been a professor and curator of the Koutz Family YMCA Archives, an administrative unit of the University Library, since September 1964 and, in 1998, was invited to be a member of the Heritage Gallery Advisory Committee. I eagerly accepted because I'm a great admirer of the University of Minnesota Alumni Association and because I think remembering is a sacred act. That's what the Heritage Gallery is: remembering our past.

One day, a group of about five of us were sitting in the lobby of the Radisson Hotel, talking about how to represent the contributions the University has made to knowledge. Bob Holt, a professor of political science and former dean of the Graduate School, said, "It's too bad we can't pile up the books." We recognized a good idea when we heard it, and that was the seed of the great Wall of Books.

The purpose of the Wall of Books is to represent dramatically some of the University's contributions to knowledge and understanding. The alumni association had asked people to donate books written by members of the University community—alumni,

students, and faculty—or about the University community. We received donations of more than 5,000 books and also had the opportunity, through the University Library, to acquire second copies of doctoral dissertations, some of which will be included in the wall. I earned bachelor's and masters degrees in history from the University in 1966 and '73 and donated two books I've published: *Common Bonds: A Memoir in Photographs of the University* and *Proud Heritage: A History in Pictures of the YMCA*.

The wall will be eight feet high and 60 feet long, with another 35 feet of faux books rising above the real ones. Because the wall really is a work of art, the books are arranged aesthetically as much as possible and, because of safety concerns and the weight of the books, they are permanently mounted on the wall. The books were stored at Deaton Museum Services in New Hope, which also constructed the wall in segments and transported them to the Gateway. The books, which include everything from anatomy to zoology and from Pulitzer Prize winners to doctoral dissertations, were mounted with the spines showing so you can walk along and read the titles.

The scale of the wall lets us imagine being part of this massive testimony to the University. The wall also includes seven exhibit cases where we will showcase some of the University's humanities and fine arts works, such as an early watercolor rendering of Pillsbury Hall, pencil drafts and page proofs of a John Berryman poem from *Dream Songs*, a playbill from *Showboat*, and a copy of *Old Turtle*, an award-winning children's book.

The wall is the largest single object in the Heritage Gallery. It's on one side of the Memorial Arch and offers an impressive experience as you enter the gallery. As the wall was being mounted, we all stood there like anxious midwives.

It was a brilliant idea, this wall that is made up of millions and millions of printed words, and yet it is a wordless testimony to the power of knowledge.

