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Ole Miss-Oxford icon leaves major gift to strengthen library resources

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Ole Miss-Oxford icon leaves major gift to strengthen library resources

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Widely known for its rich literary tradition, Oxford attracts a wealth of people who love to read, study and discuss literature. Bibliophile Sue Hart was a force of nature in this environment, spending almost 20 years as a research librarian and publications editor at the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture.

Hart's passion for the written word inspired her to direct a \$136,000 estate gift to the university's J.D. Williams Library, which will be

used to build resources for Southern studies.

"It makes sense that someone who loved books as much as Sue, and had such a natural feel for what made 'good writing,' should have her legacy left to improving the library," said Ted Ownby, director of the CSSC. "I don't know a better way to feel her influence."

Hart, who died in 2012, had been influencing Ole Miss since 1979, when she was persuaded to move back to her home state. After earning a bachelor's degree in social science at Siena College in Memphis in 1951 and then a master's degree in library science from Louisiana State University in 1963, Hart worked as a research assistant at Yale University in New Haven, Conn. William Ferris, who was working with her at Yale, had just been hired as the founding director for the CSSC and recruited the Canton native to become his research assistant.

The goal of the Southern studies program is to be interdisciplinary, not just focus on history, but encompass all things of the South — literature, music, food, etc. This sparked the idea for Hart to create a reference material for the South, inspired by Howard Lamar's *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*. So Ferris, along with Charles Reagan Wilson, began working on the book.

Hart and Ann Abadie, then associate director of the CSSC, became associate editors on the project. The team worked tirelessly and in 1989, the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, all 1,656 pages and nearly nine pounds of it, was published.

The success of the *Encyclopedia* was in a large part due to Hart's rigorous dedication. She had a no-nonsense approach when it came to her work.

"Sue's standards and expectations were very high, having come here from Yale," said Lisa Howorth, who worked for Hart as a bibliographer at the CSSC. "She was easily riled by ineptitude or ignorance; you did not want to see her lurching your way with something you screwed up. She was the smartest, most bookish person I knew at Ole Miss, and I learned a lot from her."

Julie Rholes, dean of libraries, noted how active Hart stayed in the happenings around Ole Miss after her 1995 retirement.

"She cared a great deal for this university, particularly the library," said Rholes. "Ann (Abadie) introduced us at one of the library's functions, and we instantly bonded over our background as librarians. She was truly a joy to know."

Hart had a family in the people of Ole Miss and Oxford. Friends described her as a unique individual with a "strong mind, spunky personality and a selfless spirit, who never complained — that is unless she had just read some really 'lousy writing.'"

Individuals or organizations wishing to make a memorial gift in Sue Hart's name may send a check with either Friends of the Library or the Sue Hart Prize in the CSSC noted in the memo line to the University of Mississippi Foundation, P.O. Box 249, University, MS 38677. Contributions can also be made online

Keywords Menu

- [Keywords Main Page](#)
- [University Libraries](#)
- [Ask A Librarian](#)
- [Give to UM Libraries](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Ole Miss Home](#)
- [Keywords – Past Issues](#)
 - [Keywords – Spring 2012](#)
 - [Keywords – Winter 2012](#)
 - [Keywords – Summer 2013](#)
 - [Keywords – Winter 2013](#)
 - [Keywords – Fall 2014](#)
 - [Keywords – Spring 2015](#)

Spring 2015 – Table of Contents

Local Authors Honored at Friends Reception

New collections from Archives & Special Collections

Spring Coffee

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Library campaign surpasses goal

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[Return to top of page](#)

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