A Picture is Worth —
A Thousand Uses
By Miranda Howard Haddock

[Miranda Haddock was appointed Visual Resources Librarian at WMU in May 1997. She holds a M.A.L.S. degree from Dominican University (formerly Rosary College) in Chicago and a M.A. from Northern Illinois University, De Kalb. Prior to coming to WMU, she was on the library staff and a member of the faculty at Columbia College in Chicago.]

Consider Liberty Leading the People (1830) by French painter Eugene Delacroix. Traditionally, this image of a bare-chested woman wearing a Phrygian cap and carrying the French flag surrounded by the battle weary has been discussed in art history courses. But, her image does not have to stop there. It can be used to illustrate concepts in other disciplines as well.

French literature is the first subject that may come to mind. Liberty is a fine example of how the French visualized the Revolution. Late eighteenth century history is another field that might use this painting as an illustration of the various economic classes involved in the French rebellion. A costume history professor might use the painting to demonstrate types of men’s garments worn during this time period in France while a professor of classics could show that the classical view of feminine beauty is a timeless ideal at least through the mid-1800s. Assigning a set design project? Use Liberty as an example of a scene for Les Misérables. Liberty’s Phrygian cap could be a topic of discussion in a semiotics class, or the picture could stimulate a philosophy of aesthetics discussion. Even further, English professors might find Delacroix’s painting useful in illustrating and reinforcing the concept of allegory to students. By now you get the picture (or pictures): visual resources enhance every class and a single picture may enhance many areas of study and research.

The University Libraries has a little known treasure trove of such resources for the classroom. The Visual Resources Library in 2213 Sangren is a newly established center of services and resources. The special collection houses over 80,000 35 mm. slides for classroom use. The majority of the images depict fine art objects such as painting, sculpture, drawing, and photography. Visual cultures from the western hemisphere as well as Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania are well represented. Images of architecture, furniture, costume, and decorative arts can also be found in the VRL. And, slides can be checked out just as one might check out a video, a book, or a recording to use in a class.

The concept of a visual resources collection is not new. Many visual resources facilities cropped up in colleges, universities, and museums during the 1920s when glass lantern slides began to be widely used to illustrate art history lectures. Most of these facilities, including the first at WMU, were housed in art departments; art faculty were the primary users. By the early 1950s, lantern slides had given way to color 35 mm. film slides. The number of slides offered by the facilities, wherever located, increased as the color in slide film became more stable. Today, slides continue to be widely used to illustrate lectures and presentations.

Usually, each academic visual resources collection reflects what has been taught over the years that it has been in existence. Areas pertaining to an institution’s significant departments are often the best represented. WMU’s collection is similar to those found elsewhere in this regard. Two of the most complete areas of the collections contain broad selections of art from medieval manuscripts and architecture, echoing the University’s international program in Medieval Studies. Paintings from western and Asian sources are also well represented, and reflect the breadth of the Department of Art’s programs.

The Visual Resources Collection has been a part of Western Michigan University Libraries for less than a year, but its placement within the Libraries means that the resources are available to all faculty members. Until June of 1997, the collection had been maintained by the art department, and art professors were the primary users. Although art emphases may continue to dominate the use, the potential value to faculty from the departments of History, English, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Medieval Studies, and Comparative Religion is obvious, and is already reflected in use during the last six months of 1997. Only three months after placement within the Libraries, almost 2,000 slides had been circulated to faculty other than those from the art department.

Providing and maintaining so many
New Issues Press will publish a major index in April to the regional history collections found at Western Michigan University. The 1998 Guide to the Western Michigan University Regional History Collections has been "in the works" for more than three years and is the product of hundreds of staff hours. Over a decade ago, William K. Smith, then Associate Director of the Archives and Regional History Collections, proposed that a comprehensive publication be compiled that would replace earlier guides. As with many ambitious, but complicated plans, the idea was put on hold until 1995 when the staff determined that it was essential to make available a resource that identified the extent of the University's thirty-year effort to collect, preserve, and organize southwest Michigan's regional history.

Nothing that provided printed access to the collection was available until a 1964 guide and 1966 supplement were published that described the first 157 "holdings" in the Collections. By 1995, the regional history collections had grown to over 2,600 distinct sets of documents. In addition, the compilation of a Guide also addressed the need to promote cooperative information sharing and, of course, the acquisition of additional materials—not only in southwest Michigan but within state and national archival networks. The staff of the ARHC were also motivated by the fact that the Regional History Collections at WMU is a regional depository for the State Archives.

The most compelling rationale for publication of a general index was the benefits that it would provide to the growing number of researchers with increasingly complex projects. Since the inception of the Regional History Collections in 1960, each year had brought more researchers to its various collections and, by the mid-1990s, more than 4,000 researchers annually were searching the resources. They included a range of expertise from the student to the faculty member, the local historian to the international scholar. Their concerns were a reflection of the fact that the University was classified as a Carnegie Doctoral I institution with strong emphasis on graduate education and a research experience that crossed undergraduate as well as graduate study.

The actual production of the Guide did not, obviously, come about without the substantial assistance of many individuals. First, and as a significant catalyst, University President Diether Haenicke provided a mandate and the necessary finances to sustain such a project. Dr. Ronald Davis and Dr. John Houdek of the Department of History were enthusiastic supporters who gave guidance, recommendations, and support to the effort. Five editors, Phyllis Burnham, Sharon Carlson, Pamela Jobin, Charlene Renner, and Suzanne Husband, reviewed collection descriptions and prepared three extensive indexes. Student employees contributed hundreds of hours verifying collections of information and assisting in the various phases of editing.

The final publication comprises 350 pages including an introduction by the first University Archivist, Dr. Alan Brown, Professor Emeritus of History. More than 200 pages include descriptions of each of the 2,600 regional history holdings. Each entry provides information about the contents, scope, and size of the given collection. To cap it off, three indexes—over one-third of the volume—provide access by (1) subject, (2) corporate and organization name, and (3) personal name.

The Guide was prepared with the goal of promoting interest and stimulating further research in the Regional History Collections. It purposefully omits the holdings of the University Archives which consist of historical documents of and about Western Michigan University. As it stands, however, it marks a significant milestone in the development of a remarkable regional history collection that provides many research opportunities to those seeking information about southwestern Michigan.

History is, in its essence, exciting; to present it as dull is, to my mind, stark and unforgivable misrepresentation.

— Catherine Drinker Bowen
Bill Combs: Man of Many Facets

Bill Combs was born in Houston, the county seat of Chickasaw County, a rural area found in northeast Mississippi. His father, as Bill wryly observed, was an "itinerant school superintendent," who moved from school to school several times during Bill's own years of schooling. Not surprisingly, Bill went on to college, "Ole Miss," the University of Mississippi, in Oxford, where he began his lifelong pursuit of the discipline of English.

Although much too young for World War II, Bill came of draft age during the Korean conflict and served with the U.S. Army from 1953-55. His "education" in that organization came from the Army Transportation School where he learned to dispatch trains, how to make them arrive on schedule, and how to avoid head-on collisions. He observes, of that experience, that "the army is a slow-moving monolith that was still handling transport the way it had been handled before World War II." Regardless, Bill was an adept learner and soon found himself teaching the same concepts and procedures to other GI's during the duration of his service career. And, there was a bonus since he also had the opportunity to meet and marry Marie. (Marie is a nationally known printmaker and designer of quilts that have been selected for display in major institutions across the country; one can also be seen in the Faculty Lounge of the Bernhard Center at WMU.) The Combs have two daughters—Mary Carol, a University of Michigan graduate and Sarah, a Cincinnati Conservatory graduate.

After discharge from his military service, Bill headed to Harvard for graduate study in the field of English. His dissertation was on Henry Fielding, the eighteenth century English novelist, dramatist, and essayist. With Ph.D. in hand, Dr. Combs began a long and distin-

Combs: A Renaissance Man
A Friends' Personality
By Gordon Eriksen

W e usually use the phrase, "Renaissance man" to describe an individual who is "a person of broad intellectual and cultural interests encompassing the full spectrum of available knowledge" (The Random House Dictionary of the English Language 1968, p. 1117). We know such a man, and our definition is more personal and descriptive. Our Renaissance man is intelligent, well-educated, well-read, and profoundly curious. His curiosity has lead him into wide-ranging investigations that cross many areas or disciplines. Moreover, he is alert to ethical, social, and political issues and responsibilities. Finally, he is urbane, witty, and likes to take risks or challenge the status quo. The one of whom we speak is William W. Combs, Professor Emeritus of English, Western Michigan University.

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After discharge from his military service, Bill headed to Harvard for graduate study in the field of English. His dissertation was on Henry Fielding, the eighteenth century English novelist, dramatist, and essayist. With Ph.D. in hand, Dr. Combs began a long and distinct academic career. He first taught at Duke University from 1958-62, and then was recruited to WMU where he remained until his retirement in 1995. But, as noted earlier, Renaissance men seek out new vistas and attempt innovative projects. Bill was no exception. Building on his youth and childhood background, he gravitated to specialized courses on Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and other Southern writers. His interest in different cultures saw him serve as Fulbright Professor at the University of Jyvaskyla in Finland. In time, he also took a turn at departmental administration and became chair of the English Department for a three-year period. A perusal of his thirty-three year WMU academic vitae uncovers major contribution is that of Amnesty International. That ambitious group has a strong letter writing campaign that crosses all national and political boundaries. Bill is one of the several authors of letters that are sent, monthly, to heads of state and ministers of justice—always articulating the rights of the individual and protesting human rights violations. He challenges repressive government policies and, when necessary, reaches directly and specifically to defend a particular person. Needless to say, rewards for this are seldom noted, but, on occasion, his letter has brought a positive outcome; justice has prevailed.

Finally, and, most important, there is William W. Combs's sense of moral commitment. One area where he makes a major contribution is that of Amnesty International. That ambitious group has a strong letter writing campaign that crosses all national and political boundaries. Bill is one of the several authors of letters that are sent, monthly, to heads of state and ministers of justice—always articulating the rights of the individual and protesting human rights violations. He challenges repressive government policies and, when necessary, reaches directly and specifically to defend a particular person. Needless to say, rewards for this are seldom noted, but, on occasion, his letter has brought a positive outcome; justice has prevailed.

And so it goes: an academic, a scholar, a musician and lover of the arts, member of service organizations, political activist, and moral man—the resident Renaissance man.

He who gives to me teaches me to give.

—Danish Proverb—
Fact and Fiction: Pain and Pleasure
By Paul L. Maier

[On September 24, 1997, a special meeting of the Friends of the University Libraries featured a presentation by Professor Paul Maier of the WMU History Department. The subtitle of his remarks is "A Literary Odyssey, and Gatherings is pleased to include the following epitome.]

My writing both non-fiction and fiction has carried with it a certain hazard. What if the reader should suspect fiction in my historical research, or interpret my novels as history? While stoutly affirming that, quite obviously, there is no fiction in my historical works, I do plead guilty to trying to bring enough realism into my novels that readers will assume they deal with actual events, past or present.

In my years at Western Michigan University, where I have spent all my professional life thus far, I seem to have tried most literary genres (with the exception of poetry, but for doggerel on computer greeting cards!). My inaugural effort was a theological dissertation that never made any best-seller lists. Published in Holland about the time that I joined the WMU faculty in 1959, it sold all of 300 copies in 38 years—one suspects that half of them were purchased by relatives.

Then came my initial foray into the world of biography. The obvious choice was my well-known father, whose ministry and widely-heard Lutheran Hour radio series brought instant name recognition across the faithful world. Even as a son, it was essential to be objective—even critical where necessary—and the result, A Man Spoke, a World Listened (McGraw-Hill, 1963) sold rather well despite the fact that radio personality and Old Testament professor Walter A. Maier had died thirteen years earlier.

Through the years, as a historian, I had also seen my research published in various scholarly journals, and it was in this connection that I developed a growing resentment against so-called "historical novels." As a younger reader, they delighted me, until I discovered—to my horror—that nearly all of them were short on fact and long on imagination. Most authors offered a quick salute to history, but then rode off into the wild vagaries of their own myths, fantasies, and fables that offered torque instead of truth about the past. Fictional characters intersected with authentic personalities, while the latter were given false portraits amid hopelessly garbled settings.

In 1968, I launched a one-man crusade to change all that (!) by devising a new literary genre that I called "the documentary novel." Three essential rules defined this ambitious format. First, all persons named in the book were known historical characters with their authentic names. No proper name was invented; if it were not known, it was not given. Second, no detail of any kind was to contradict historical fact. Third, only where all evidence was lacking would fictional "mortar," based on probabilities, be used to hold the bricks of fact together. Moreover, these "highly likely creations" would be identified for the reader at the close of the book. In this way, the reader could assume that all major and minor events in the novel truly took place, while the rest could well have happened.

I was intrigued by the Roman involvement in the trial of Jesus of Nazareth, so I introduced the documentary novel vehicle with Pontius Pilate (Doubleday, 1968), which unveiled the true story of the politics behind Jesus’ crucifixion. The information that had previously appeared in factual fabric through articles in scholarly journals was now recreated in the framework of a novel. Pilate worked: it sold across the world and has remained in print over the past three decades through numerous editions and translations.

During the ’70s came requests from press syndicates that I look at several key episodes in the development of Christianity from a historian’s viewpoint. The articles I wrote were widely published in newspapers across the country. When I gave them further detail, they became a book series from Harper & Row: First Christmas (1971), First Easter (1973), and First Christians (1976). This trilogy, revised and expanded, was ultimately published in one volume, In the Fullness of Time (Harper Collins, 1991).

Although the documentary novel had proved to be a demanding genre, I tried it again for The Flames of Rome (Doubleday, 1981), which dealt with how Christianity reached Rome, and why Nero persecuted the church so horribly after the great fire of A.D. 64. Although both Pilate and Flames were critical successes and sold very well indeed, the fact that this genre has not become widely accepted may be indicated by the fact that in the history of English literature, only two novels have ever appeared in this restrictive genre—both named above.

Editing and translating consumed a larger share of my time than was anticipated. One project, an anthology of my father’s writings, was inevitable. The Best of Walter A. Maier was published in 1980 on the thirtieth anniversary of his death. Since I was also making frequent references in various addresses to one of my prime sources, Flavius Josephus, new interest was developing in this first-century Jewish historian. But, I was at an impasse: Josephus wrote his valuable information in so verbose and prolix a fashion that he must have had a plaque over his desk in Rome that read, “Why use one word, when twenty will do?” His works, the equivalent of twelve volumes, were also locked into one major translation in archaic English by Isaac Newton’s successor at Cambridge, William Whiston. Accordingly, I translated from the Greek Josephus’ two most important writings: Jewish Antiquities and The Jewish War. These cover a span of time from the Creation to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. After condensing some sections into readability, the result was Josephus—The Essential Works (Kregel, 1995). My next book, which will appear in 1998, will also be a translation and commentary on the “father of Christian history” who picked up where Josephus left off: Eusebius—The Church History.

Meanwhile, I even tried local history. Dr. C. Allen Alexander, Kalamazoo’s first black surgeon, who was given an honorary doctorate by WMU in 1994, pursued an ambitious oral history project prior to his death in 1995. For this, he had interviewed a wide cross-section of people in this area, as well as colleagues in the medical profession. The result was a

Continued on page 5
to predict development/production/publication and new resource needs, the ability and inclination of our strongest institutions to provide for that future is uncertain. As evidence, one needs only to check on the number of colleges and universities who have amortization funds to deal with computer hardware and facility obsolescence—the number is shockingly low.

And so the paradox of collection building emerges. On the one hand, a deliciously rich array of choices; on the other hand, an inability to discern precisely what the University Libraries should hold or have accessible as the new millennium dawns. And, somewhere in between, impacting all planning, is the reality of the budget. There is, however, no substitute for funds. In an environment of limited resources, libraries will always compete with other areas of the academic community. We must also be accountable to our users and tax payers, and provide the right information needed by users at the right place, at the right price. One solution is to work collectively with other libraries to maximize our considerable purchasing power in the marketplace while also ensuring that our collections are sufficiently diverse to support this University’s distinctive programs. Currently, the ACCESSMichigan project offers hope that libraries of all types can cooperate for our mutual benefit.

But I would be remiss if I did not point out that cooperative collection development is only a partial solution. There is also no substitute for local funding. Under the leadership of President Diether Haenicke, the University Libraries has received extraordinary support.

- WMU’s percentage of State appropriated funds which are earmarked for libraries ranks #1 in the State. This priority funding has occurred every year since 1990.

- Funding specifically allocated for library collections has averaged 11.4% since 1990. This average is also the highest in the State. In addition, the library has received $700,000 one-time funds for collections.

Finally, in addition to the excellent support provided by this University’s administration, the University Libraries takes pride in making no distinction between undergraduate and graduate students, on campus or off, with regard to access to its collections—whether they are costly, specialized databases or rare books and manuscripts. The underlying commitment is to the broad community of scholars associated with the University—and to the community at large.

Western Michigan University has built and is building a great library for a great university. As we resolve the complex problems of a unique age of information access, our commitment cannot, will not waiver. Within our unbounded walls lies the life and mind of our society and civilization.

Fact and Fiction...

Continued from page 4

trilogy that I edited with two colleagues in the Department of History. The three volumes are entitled: C. Allen Alexander—An Autobiography (WMU, 1995); Social Changes in Western Michigan, 1930 to 1990 (WMU, 1997); and Progress in the Practice of Medicine, 1930 to 1990 (WMU, 1996).

Finally, or at least at this moment in history, I tried my hand at total fiction with a contemporary novel, A Skeleton in God’s Closet (Thomas Nelson, 1994), which surprised me by becoming a No. 1 national best-seller in religious fiction soon after publication. All told, my books have now appeared in a dozen languages and several million copies, which has prompted numerous media appearances.

Perhaps, one day I’ll settle down and concentrate on a single genre. Meanwhile, this traveller has journeyed through fact and fiction with both pain and pleasure, and only one certainty. Nothing would have been accomplished without the special world of Western Michigan University, its research ambiance, if you will. In particular, Waldo Library has played a very significant role, and I salute the strong “Friends” of this most important core at our University.
images is a multi-faced task. There are a number of activities that occur behind the scenes of the Visual Resources Library. After slides are made by staff or purchased from vendors, they are inserted in plastic and glass mounts so that they can be used repeatedly with a minimum of wear. Since slides are constantly exposed to the heat of a projector light, the images are masked with a special heat reflecting tape. Preservation is also aided by cleaning slides after use, and storing them in archival cabinets. The items in the collection are accessioned, labeled, and filed in a specific order so that they can readily be found again. Of course, a logical slide arrangement also means that their use is promoted since the more orderly a collection, the more users discover its many topics and breadth.

The VRL is staffed by a librarian especially recruited for the position, a slide library specialist, and five student workers who are engaged in acquiring, preserving, arranging, and circulating the slides as well as advising users as to the nature and value of the resources. They have also undertaken the creation of an electronic catalog. When completed, slides will be cataloged and the data entered into an imagebase so that users can easily identify an image needed to illustrate a presentation. Slides in the electronic catalog will be indexed by subject as well as creator, title, and medium. The catalog will also direct users to the location of the slide in the collection by listing a call number for that image. Whether explaining the difference between a buttress and a flying buttress in industrial design by use of slides of Speyer and Chartres cathedrals, or recreating the devastation of the Great Depression of the 1930s through photographs by Dorothea Lange or Walker Evans, slide resources are invaluable. Describing the pristine nature of our National Park system is visually reinforced by the unmatched photographic vistas of Ansel Adam’s Yosemite, and Buddhist and Christian aesthetics can be effectively illustrated by the images of sculptures of Buddha and Jesus Christ. When discussing the findings at medieval sites in England, Sutton Hoo can be geographically identified on a map, or, if studying black Americana, the paintings by Archibald J. Motley and Faith Ringold realistically depict a culture as do Frida Kahlo’s self-portraits, which “speak thousands of words” to the students of Women’s Studies. The possibilities of the Visual Resources Center are unlimited if faculty, staff, and students want to see more clearly the history of our civilization through the eyes of illustrators, painters, photographers, cartographers, and others who have captured our world in graphic detail.