History in the Present—I

Continued from page 1

ments in the periodical—from corsets to cooking stoves to false teeth and spectacles. There are a number of ways to search Harper’s including browsing by date, searching the index, or searching the full-text of the entire database. In addition, one can limit searches just to illustrations and advertisements.

* A brand new addition to the University Libraries’ growing list of primary source databases is Early Encounters in North America: Peoples, Cultures and the Environment also published by the Alexander Street Press. This database will ultimately include more than 1,000 published and unpublished items from a variety of sources including online resources and microforms. It will feature more than 100,000 pages of letters, diaries, memoirs and accounts of traders, slaves, missionaries, explorers, soldiers, native peoples, and officials, both men and women, written from 1534 to 1850. The collection was compiled using a number of standard bibliographies including such works as A Bibliography of Native American Writers, 1772-1924; Sources for the Ethnography of Northeastern North America to 1611; The Plains and the Rockies; and Early Midwestern Travel Narratives, An Annotated Bibliography, 1634-1850. The material has been indexed so users can search by author, place, year, encounters, images, cultural events, places, personal events, environment, flora, fauna, and several other factors. Of special interest are the many accounts of Michigan’s early history, including narratives of the explorations and encounters of such Jesuit missionaries as Jacques Marquette, Pierre-François-Xavier Charlevoix and Isaac Jogues. There are also many references to Fort Michilimackinac, Fort Detroit, the Potawatomi Indians, and Lake Michigan.

The databases described above are easily accessible in any of the University Libraries, and other on-campus sites, but may not be accessed from home or off-campus unless one is affiliated with WMU as a student, staff, or faculty member. Instructions on how to set up your computer to do this can be found on the Libraries’ main screen (www.wmich.edu/library/) in the lower right hand corner. The instructions are easy to follow and, once implemented, you will have password access to these unique licensed databases.

Free and open access to many wonderful, rich databases of special interest to historians is available to anyone who can access the Internet. Two or more of these collections will be described in the next issue of Gatherings, but for those who want to open a door to a world of fascinating history right now, the full-text database called the Making of America is the place to begin. The Making of America is a digital library of primary sources in American social history from the antebellum period through Reconstruction. This is a major collaborative endeavor in preservation and electronic access to historical texts initiated by the University of Michigan (http://moa.umdl.umich.edu/) and Cornell University (http://library5.library.cornell.edu/moa/).

The collection is particularly strong in the subject areas of education, psychology, American history, sociology, religion, and science and technology. The complete Making of America collection includes over 2.5 million page images, representing approximately 5,000 volumes of primary source materials, including books and periodicals. The selection process at Cornell University has focused on the major journal literature of the period, ranging from general interest publications to those with more targeted audiences, such as agriculture. The University of Michigan process focuses on monographs in the subject areas of education, psychology, American history, sociology, science, technology, and religion. Since the pages are digitized, readers can view the scanned images of the actual pages of the 19th century texts—a realistic touch that gives students a feel for doing research with primary source materials.

The five databases mentioned in this article are just a few of the many history offerings by the University Libraries. There is a plethora of full-text resources available on the World Wide Web, many sponsored by our nation’s best colleges and universities. To explore further in the field of history, be sure and visit the Libraries’ History Web Resources page (http://www.wmich.edu/library/sr/history-web-resources.html). Arranged in twelve broad topics, this site provides a starting point for history resources on the Web. Another site of interest is the Primary Sources on the Web page (http://www.wmich.edu/library/handouts/primary-sources.html) found on the University Libraries’ Web site. In addition to listing a number of primary source sites on the Web, this page provides links to sites that discuss the process of doing historical research.

As digitization of original documents and artifacts becomes increasingly common, historians will find that there are no limits to their ability to see and read manuscripts from the Roman catacombs or the newspapers of Nazi Germany or the original census data of Kalamazoo, Michigan from 1910. Far more is available already than most of us know. A computer terminal and Internet access will provide an almost infinite assortment of full-text primary source materials. Just think... on a cold, snowy evening, you can explore America’s past online with a cup of coffee or hot chocolate by your side in the comfort of your home. Happy researching!

President Dwight B. Waldo Speaks His Mind

By David Isaacson
Professor and Humanities Librarian

The letter reproduced on p. 5 of this issue is imagined to be authored by Dwight Bryant Waldo who was the Principal and first President of Western State Normal School, which evolved through four name changes until it became Western Michigan University in 1957. David Isaacson, a reference librarian in Waldo Library, has been conversing—and corresponding—with Waldo for a number of years. Actually, Isaacson has listened to Waldo far more than he has spoken to him. Waldo in person is much like the rather austere man who examines each visitor to the library: named after him from his portrait on the wall on the first floor, near the entrance to Waldo Library. Up until now, no one else has paid much attention to Waldo’s quiet, but absolutely assured voice. In honor of the centennial of what began as Western State Normal School, Isaacson offers these edited remarks, presented in letter format, from the educational titan who presided over this school from its founding in 1903 until his retirement in 1936. He died, in 1939 at the age of 77, but his spirit still permeates the campus environment—as shown in these remarks.

Dwight B. Waldo, First President, WMU