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Ouachita's Riley-Hickingbotham Library receives copy of Arkansas' Porter Fund Literary Prize Collection



By Mandy Halbert

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For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University's Riley-Hickingbotham Library is among five Arkansas universities, as well as only one of two private libraries, chosen to receive a copy of the Porter Fund Collection, a curation of works by award-winning Arkansas writers. The collection will be available for Ouachita students, faculty and staff to read virtually, and an exhibition is to be held in the spring of 2021.

The Porter Fund Collection is the curation of works by Arkansas writers who have received the Porter Fund Literary Prize, an award presented annually to a native writer or poet who has accomplished a

substantial and impressive body of work that merits enhanced recognition. And according to Porter-Prize.com, “the \$2,000 prize makes it one of the state's most lucrative as well as prestigious literary awards.”

“It is a curated collection of representative works by Arkansas writers recognized for their ability to convey truth and understanding to an audience through the written word, regardless of format,” said Dr. Ray Granade, Ouachita director of library services and professor of history. “The collection serves to introduce outstanding Arkansas writers to an audience composed of people who might greet them as old friends or might discover them. Most importantly, the collection offers the best of Arkansas writers to students who can find a broader education in a place it would never occur to them to search.”

Granade said the Riley-Hickingbotham Library being chosen to exhibit the Porter Fund Collection “provides unsolicited confirmation of Ouachita’s strong academic reputation within the state and recognition that academic libraries, particularly those at private schools, must rely on the kindness of friends to provide all their patrons’ information needs as they try to support their institution’s mission and curriculum.”

“The Porter Fund was created to counteract the strain of anti-intellectualism in the United States, which is even more prevalent in the South,” Granade said. “In Arkansas, like many other southern states, it is difficult to write and be published because of the lack of a reading public.”

Granade referenced Southern writers such as Truman Capote, Harper Lee, Alice Walker and others who left for New York City in order to be published, explaining this was one of several reasons for the establishment of the Porter Fund Prize.

“Lacking encouragement means that some inchoate writers see neither future nor role models for the life they’d like to live,” Granade continued. “So having recognition like this for Arkansans encourages them and the rising generation of hopeful writers. It identifies, for writers, others like them, letting them know that they are not alone, or not as alone as they may have thought, in this solitary undertaking.”

Established in 1984, the Porter Prize and nonprofit organization was created to honor the memory of Dr. Ben Kimpel, chairman of the English Department at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, where he taught from 1952-1983. At Kimpel’s request, the prize was named after his mother, Gladys Crane Kimpel Porter.

Dr. Johnny Wink, Ouachita’s Betty Burton Peck Professor of English, studied under Kimpel during his time at the University of Arkansas.

“I’ve never known personally a more learned man than Ben Kimpel,” Wink said. “I hung on his every word. I used to write at the bottom of my notebook the witty things he said in class and then take them home to read them to my wife. I’ve also never known a kinder or more generous man. He is my hero of heroes among the people I have known and adored.”

For more information about Riley-Hickingbotham Library, visit obu.edu/library. For more information about the Porter Fund Collection, visit www.porter-prize.com or contact Dr. Ray Granade at granade@obu.edu or (870) 245-5121.

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