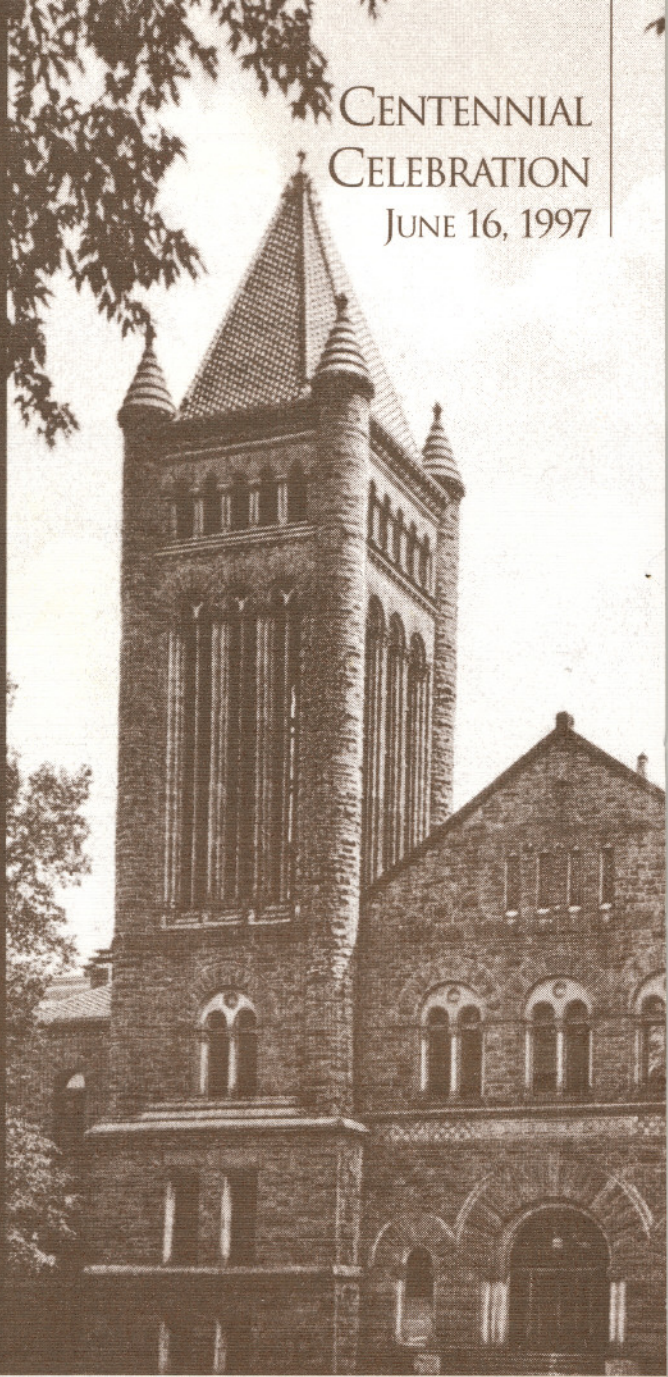


# ALTGELD HALL

CENTENNIAL  
CELEBRATION  
JUNE 16, 1997



# 1897-1997

# Altgeld Hall Centennial Celebration

June 16, 1997 3:00 p.m. 314 Illini Union

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## Welcome

**Michael Aiken**

*Chancellor, University of Illinois  
at Urbana-Champaign*

## Introductory Remarks

**Robert Wedgeworth**

*University Librarian, University of  
Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*



**"The History and Architecture  
of Altgeld Hall:" 3 p.m.**

**David J. Garner**

*Assistant Director, Office of Facility  
Planning and Management, University  
of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

**"Concentric Circles: Society,  
Learning, Libraries, and  
Cataloging:" 4 p.m.**

**Michael Gorman**

*Dean of Library Services, California  
State University, Fresno*

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Reception follows in  
216 Altgeld Hall



*(Below): "Arcadia," the mural dedicated to the College of Agriculture (photo, 1900), inspired by Gari Melchers' murals for the Columbian Exposition (1893) and Library of Congress (1897).*



*(Overleaf): "The Forge of Vulcan," the mural dedicated to the College of Engineering (photo ca. 1910). Below are nine of the medallion portraits. Above can be seen a portion of the original glass dome and single figures representing industries of Illinois.*

## ☞ THE HISTORY OF ALTGELD HALL ☞

☞ The creation of Library Hall (now known as Altgeld Hall) in 1896-7 was a turning point for the University of Illinois in two ways. It was not only the first building on campus devoted solely to the University Library, which had long before outstripped its space in University Hall (now site of the Illini Union), but it was also a statement to the world that the barely thirty-year-old land-grant institution was no longer a "cow college," but an institution of higher education in the ranks of the select. ☞ The design, by architecture faculty members Nathan Clifford Ricker and James M. White, was a "modern Romanesque" one whose most prominent feature was an asymmetrically placed bell tower. The exterior contains many elements reminiscent of some of the most beautiful European medieval buildings, such as the entranceway's curled leaf design and gargoyle (the only gargoyle on campus). ☞ It was the interior, however, which announced to the world (or, at least, to the students) that the University was a true seat of higher learning. The original rotunda, with its stained-glass, domed ceiling and suspended skylight, colonnaded arcades, portrait medallions, patterned wall designs, and mural decorations, was inspired by the grand court of the Berlin Royal Polytechnikum, where Ricker had studied some twenty years earlier. Over the years, many have said the rotunda resembles the throne room of Neuschwanstein Castle, the confection of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. ☞ Virtually every capital, arch, frieze, wall, and medallion of Altgeld Hall is embellished with gold leaf. Extravagantly shaped floral decorations and fleur-de-lis patterns abound above the arches and on the walls. Meticulously painted simulated mosaics appear in the vestibule.

(over)

*(Below): "Arcadia," the mural dedicated to the College of Agriculture (photo, 1900), inspired by Gari Melchers' murals for the Columbian Exposition (1893) and Library of Congress (1897).*



*(Overleaf): "The Forge of Vulcan," the mural dedicated to the College of Engineering (photo ca. 1910). Below are nine of the medallion portraits. Above can be seen a portion of the original glass dome and single figures representing industries of Illinois.*



☞ Most outstanding, however, are the four murals found in the lunettes below the domed ceiling. Following the architects' suggestion, artist Newton Alonzo Wells created four works depicting the four colleges of the University: "The Sacred Wood of the Muses" (literature and arts, south lunette); "Arcadia" (agriculture, north lunette); "The Laboratory of Minerva" (science, west lunette); and "The Forge of Vulcan" (east lunette). Also prominent, in a frieze extending around the first floor of the rotunda, are medallion portraits of "America's greatest soldiers, statesmen, and scholars," a suggestion of University President Andrew Draper. ☞ The cornerstone of this important building was laid on September 18, 1896, complete with a time capsule. Formal dedication occurred on June 9, 1897, with Melvil Dewey (creator of the Dewey decimal system and then director of the New York State Library) as keynote speaker. The Library had 30,190 volumes and 6,350 pamphlets. By 1908, Library holdings had outstripped available space, necessitating additions to the building in 1914 and 1919. Finally, in 1923, plans were made for a new and more functional library building. The result, the current main Library, was opened in 1927. Library Hall then became the home of the College of Law until 1955. In 1941, due to a resolution of the Board of Trustees, the building was renamed Altgeld Hall in memory of John P. Altgeld, governor of Illinois from 1893-97. After construction of a third addition in 1956 and extensive interior remodeling, the building became the home of the Department of Mathematics and the Division of General Studies. Today, the Department of Mathematics is still the main occupant of the building; the Mathematics Library occupies the major portion of what was the middle floor of the original Library Hall plus all of the 1914 addition.