

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Centennial gift highlights support for Watson Library

With its celebratory dinner, “Rhapsody in Jayhawk Blue,” held September 19, KU Libraries set out to honor the centennial anniversary of Watson Library and show appreciation for its most stalwart supporters. But, in a surprise twist, donors expressed their own deep gratitude for the libraries by presenting Dean of Libraries Carol Smith with a \$100,000 gift.

The festivities commemorating the 100-year milestone took place in the study space under the library’s iconic Gothic windows with a roaring 1920s theme, a nod to the era when Watson Library first opened its doors. The evening featured dinner and dancing, with a seven-piece jazz and swing band. A swelling piano solo of George Gershwin’s 1924, “Rhapsody in Blue,” performed by Ellen Sommer, KU associate professor of piano practice, welcomed guests to Watson’s lobby. Guests posed for photos by a vintage Model T automobile and experienced a live painting of the event by Octavia Lawson-Solorio, a KU senior studying fine art. Remarks from university leadership and a keynote address by Crosby Kemper, former director of the national Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), shaped a heartfelt program.

The libraries volunteer Board of Advocates, led by board chair Ken Stephens and past chair



Photo by Nick Krug.

“I thought we needed to do something to demonstrate our affection for and commitment to KU Libraries. \$100,000 for 100 years seemed to have a nice ring to it.”

– Ken Stephens, 2025 Board of Advocates Chair

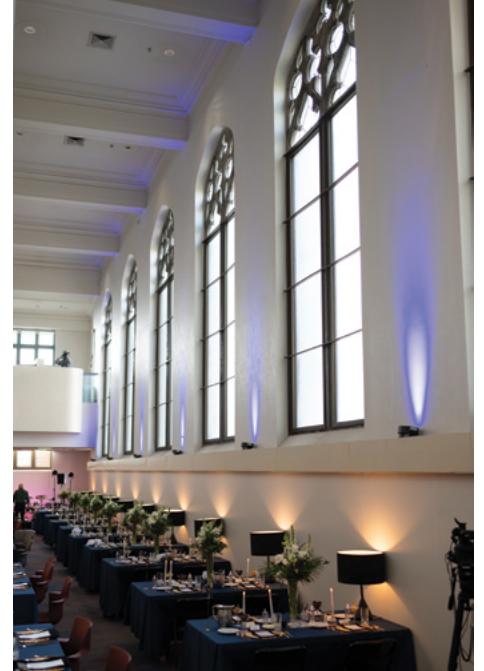
Janet Cinelli, collaborated with KU Endowment development director Amy Gray to rally the donors and raise funds for the surprise gift.

“I’ve never had a check like this,” Smith said, fighting back joyful tears while accepting an oversized check on stage. “It’s large. I mean that in multiple ways.”

During preparations for the centennial celebrations, Cinelli and Stephens served on the Watson Library Centennial Council. This planning committee, also comprised of libraries faculty and staff, brainstormed a slate of fall activities to engage the libraries communities and highlight the library’s history.

(continued on following page)

Centennial Season





A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Part of the impetus for the construction of Watson Library in 1924 was, of course, providing space for the growing collections, but Watson was always designed to be far more. It was intended to be a sanctuary for ideas. A space where every student and scholar could embark on a journey of discovery and be inspired by the world around them.

The Collegiate Gothic architecture of the building with its stately design and grand reading room, speaks to that seriousness of purpose that our predecessors envisioned — a place of quiet reflection, dedicated study, and rigorous intellectual exchange. Watson Library radiates enduring values and a lasting commitment to preserving and sharing knowledge, fostering intellectual curiosity, and advancing the mission of our university.

Carrie Watson, for whom Watson Library is named — along with countless others at KU who helped realize the vision of Watson 100 years ago — understood that every great institution of higher learning requires a place where knowledge can be cultivated, preserved, shared and transmitted to future generations. Their work and care and determination is carried on today by our dedicated KU Libraries community of supporters. The libraries' friends and Board of Advocates contribute in essential ways, continuing to weave the rich tapestry of library history and the story of KU.

It has been a joy to celebrate this milestone with you, a perfect expression of the specialness of this place and the remarkable community who carries it onward toward the next 100 years. Thank you to each of you who have celebrated with us this fall and who continue to contribute toward KU Libraries' dynamic future.

Sincerely,

Carol E. Smith
Dean of Libraries

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Centennial gift for Watson Library

(continued from cover)



As preparations for the appreciation dinner came together, Cinelli and Stephens worked with Gray to surprise Dean Smith and honor the work of the libraries as part of the evening's program. Approximately 150 guests were in attendance when they took the stage to reveal the gift.

"I thought we needed to do something to demonstrate our affection for and commitment to KU Libraries," Stephens said. "\$100,000 for 100 years seemed to have a nice ring to it."

"Amy Gray was masterful in her coordination and management of pulling this gift together," Cinelli said. "Also it's a testament to the board of advocates that on top of the donations that we each give to the libraries every year that we would collectively step up to raise an additional \$100,000 amongst ourselves. I have sat on numerous boards in my life, but never have I been part of a board that is this connected and this well run."

Campus and greater community members can honor the centennial and support the libraries through the Watson Centennial Launch KU campaign. Gifts assist in Watson's continued evolution as a welcoming and empowering environment for discovery and learning.

Make your centennial gift at rockcha.ik/GiveWatson100. ■

Watson Library's 100-year history highlights commitment of campus community

The persistence and grit of library leaders and supporters, along with the devotion of generations of Jayhawks have fortified Watson Library as much as its lofty limestone walls for 100 years. The history of Watson illustrates its extraordinary impact on the KU community from its beginnings to the modern, interdisciplinary and technology-infused work of today.



The birth of the university's library collection harkens back to the beginnings of the university itself, with the library occupying the southwest room on the second floor of North College, KU's first university building established in 1866.



The library grew along with KU and moved into its first free-standing building, Spooner Library, in 1894.

Spooner Library quickly filled as the student body tripled in size over the next 30 years; library staff necessarily increased; and the collection expanded exponentially. The university community advocated for larger library spaces and Chancellor Ernest H. Lindley urged the state legislature to fund a new library. The legislature provided funding, though library advocates feared it was largely insufficient for a building of the size and caliber needed.

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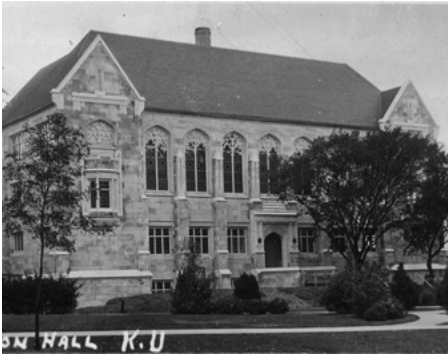
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Construction of the new library began in 1923, with plans reflecting an anticipated need for expansion as soon as possible.



Watson Library opened its doors on September 11, 1924, the first Collegiate Gothic style building on campus with its large, cathedral-worthy windows and castle-like features, including a “moat” around the front of the building with a “bridge” leading to the front entrance. The library was named after longtime librarian Carrie Watson, the first academic building on the KU campus to be named for a woman.

In the first decade it was open, Watson Library became so crowded that the proper storage of materials was compromised. By the late 1930s, the situation had become extreme — tens of thousands of books were being stored in library hallways and the attic.



Many dedicated library leaders and generations of the university community have worked toward expansion and improvements at Watson Library, including multiple additions to address demands for student spaces and materials storage, including additional stacks and substantial wings to the west and east.

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A NOTE FROM AMY GRAY, KU ENDOWMENT

As a supporter of KU Libraries, you recognize the essential role our libraries play in the success of students, faculty, staff, and alumni within our proud Jayhawk Nation!

During the Watson Centennial celebration in September, the KU Libraries Board of Advocates presented a BIG check to Dean Carol Smith, honoring her and the entire KU Libraries staff. Current Chair Ken Stephens and Co-Chair of the Watson Centennial Committee Janet Cinelli addressed the gathering, stating:

“I’m very excited to share that the Board of Advocates has raised \$100,000 in recognition of 100 years of our iconic and beautiful Watson Library. On behalf of the Board, Ken and I are proud to present you with this \$100,000 check to honor you and your staff in support of the great work happening at KU Libraries.”

Such philanthropic giving to honor a century of Watson Library is inspiring!

Personally, I want to thank each board member for their commitment and financial support of KU Libraries. As we near the end of the centennial year, we invite our supporters to commemorate this significant milestone through personal giving. In early December, you will receive a special letter inviting you to join the Board of Advocates in honoring this once-in-a-century milestone.

Thank you, in advance, for supporting KU Libraries.

Rock Chalk!

Amy Gray
Development Officer, KU Endowment

To learn more about how your philanthropy supports KU Libraries and the success of all Jayhawk students, contact Amy Gray at agray@kuendowment.org or 785-832-7421.

Watson Library's 100-year history

(continued from inside right)



In 1975, James Ranz became the first dean of KU Libraries and went to work via internal committees and outside consultants to find solutions to the ongoing obstacles Watson Library faced, including persistent overcrowding and challenges with layout exacerbated by the multiple additions. The library updates were completed in 1982, along with a plan for adding what is now Anschutz Library, a long-term solution to accommodate library user needs, which only continued to grow.



In 2006, the KU Library Annex, a high-density storage facility, was built. Extended upon in 2012, the annex houses some of the libraries' collection, increasing the amount of space available for library users in Watson and Anschutz libraries, providing conservation-level environmental controls for materials while also keeping items easily accessible for users.



For a century Watson Library has evolved to meet challenges and keep pace with the demand for services and space, a perpetual place of discovery and welcome for students and faculty. With its team of librarians and expert staff, Watson is ready for the next evolution as it continues to meet the rapidly changing needs of the campus community. Over 100 years the library remains a distinctive and beloved place where knowledge is cultivated, preserved, shared, and transmitted to future generations.

More information about Watson's history and impact is available at lib.ku.edu/watson100.

MAKE A GIFT IN HONOR OF WATSON'S CENTENNIAL



Continue your legacy of giving or encourage others to support the libraries via the Watson Centennial Launch KU campaign, which honors Watson's continued evolution as a welcoming and supportive environment for all Jayhawks.

rockcha.ik/GiveWatson100

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