

# Fearsome beasts guard Albright

Three weathered, stone lions stand guard around the main entrance to the Albright Memorial Library. When I went to Scranton Central High School, which is now Lackawanna College and across the street from the library, I did a



**KEVIN O'NEILL**

*Artistic Impression*

pencil drawing of one of them for Lois Dreater's art class. The drawing turned out well and it hangs in my house today. When I compare the illustration on this page of that same lion with the drawing from long ago, the passage of time is evident. The original drawing depicts details that the elements have slowly worn away over the years.

Lions grace the entrances of many libraries, most famously the two dubbed Patience and Fortitude in front of the New York Public Library on 5th Avenue in Manhattan. I did a little research on the connection between lions and libraries. I didn't find a definitive connection, but I did find one theory that seems to fit. St. Jerome (347-420) is the patron saint of librarians. He was one of the fathers of the early Christian Church and famous for translating the Bible into Latin. Legend has it that he befriended a lion by removing a thorn from its paw. The lion stayed with him and protected his livestock. Illustrations of St. Jerome often picture him with a lion by his side.

Not only does our library have more lions than the one in New York, it also boasts stone owls, gargoyles and many other decorative elements. The 12 gables on the building each feature a stone-relief carving depicting various printers' marks. The iron fence around the grounds has two ornamental gates with a monogrammed A.L. in the center and glass lanterns on top.

## Artistic Impression

Art is all around us. This is another installment in our occasional series that looks at the wonderful artistic elements in our community.

There are numerous stained glass windows made by Edwin Ford and Frederick Brooks of Boston throughout the building. Most of them depict the ornate tooling of old book covers with text identifying the binders and printers. The interior of the building features extensive quartered-oak woodwork, mosaic tiling, an Italian marble fireplace and other touches that create an exquisite atmosphere.

The library sits on a lot where the home of Joseph Jacob and Elisabeth Sellers Albright once lived. Albright made a fortune in iron and coal in the mid-19th century and became a prominent local citizen. In the early 1890s, his heirs, led by his son John, donated the land and a substantial portion of the \$125,000 cost of the library to the city. John Albright wanted the design of the library to be based on the Musée de Cluny, a former monastery in Paris he had seen in his travels. Architects Green and Wicks, of Buffalo, New York, came up with a design that was a combination of gothic and renaissance styles like the French building, but also featured the latest steam heat and electrical systems. The building opened on June 1, 1893. The chairman of the board of trustees, Judge Alfred Hand, said in his address at the opening, "The rich man can buy his own books, but here, with a card in his hand — a free gift — the poorest child from the twelfth ward practically owns a better library than the wealthiest of our citizens." The library opened with 16,000 books on its shelves, ready to be checked out by anyone with a library card.

**KEVIN O'NEILL** is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite local artistic wonders with him at [koneill@timeshamrock.com](mailto:koneill@timeshamrock.com).