

LYNCHBURG'S PREMIER LIFESTYLE & ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

# Lynchburg LIVING

MAY/JUNE 2008

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## Space Case

A Local Astronaut's  
Return to Earth  
& His Home

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When City Kids  
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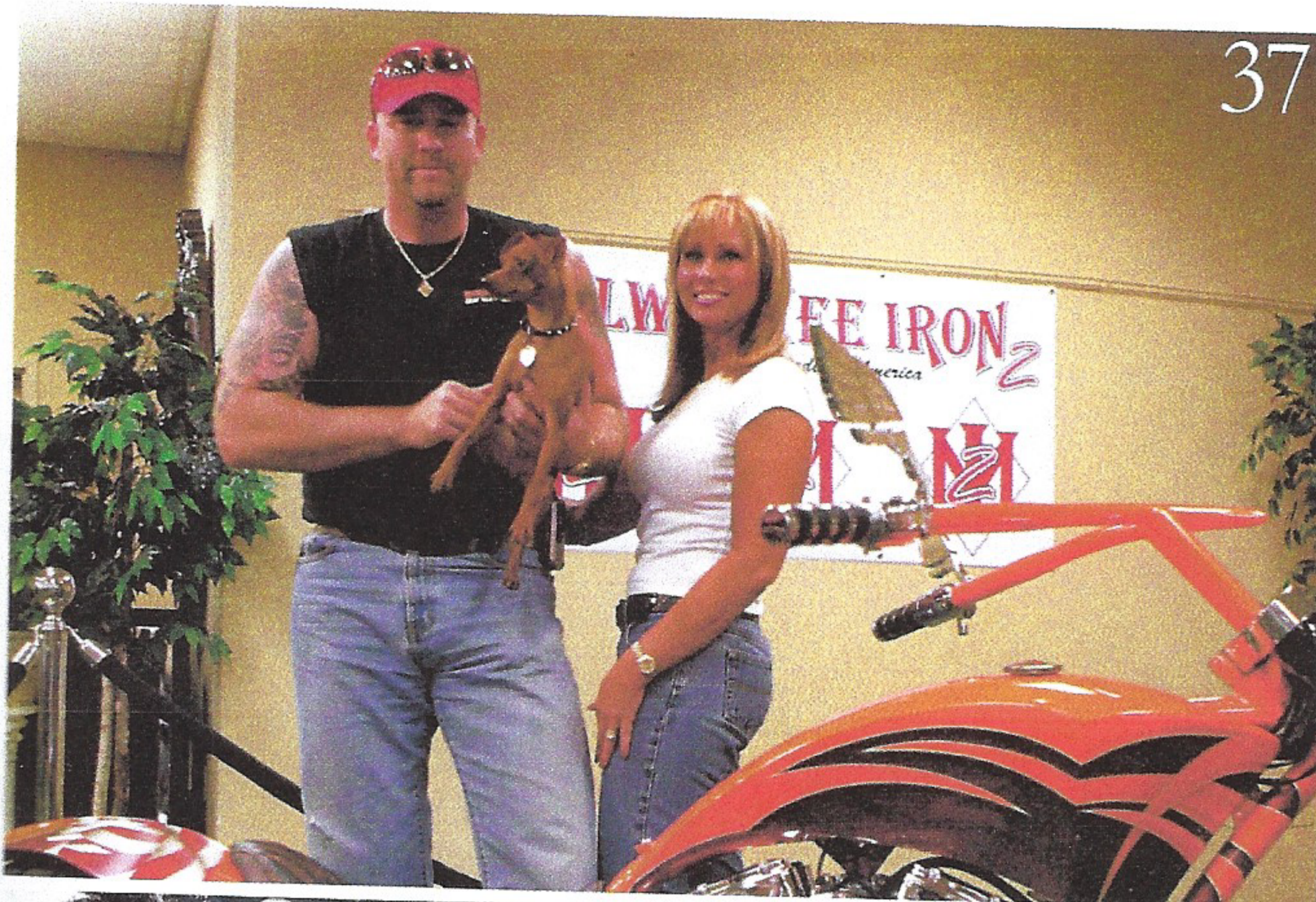
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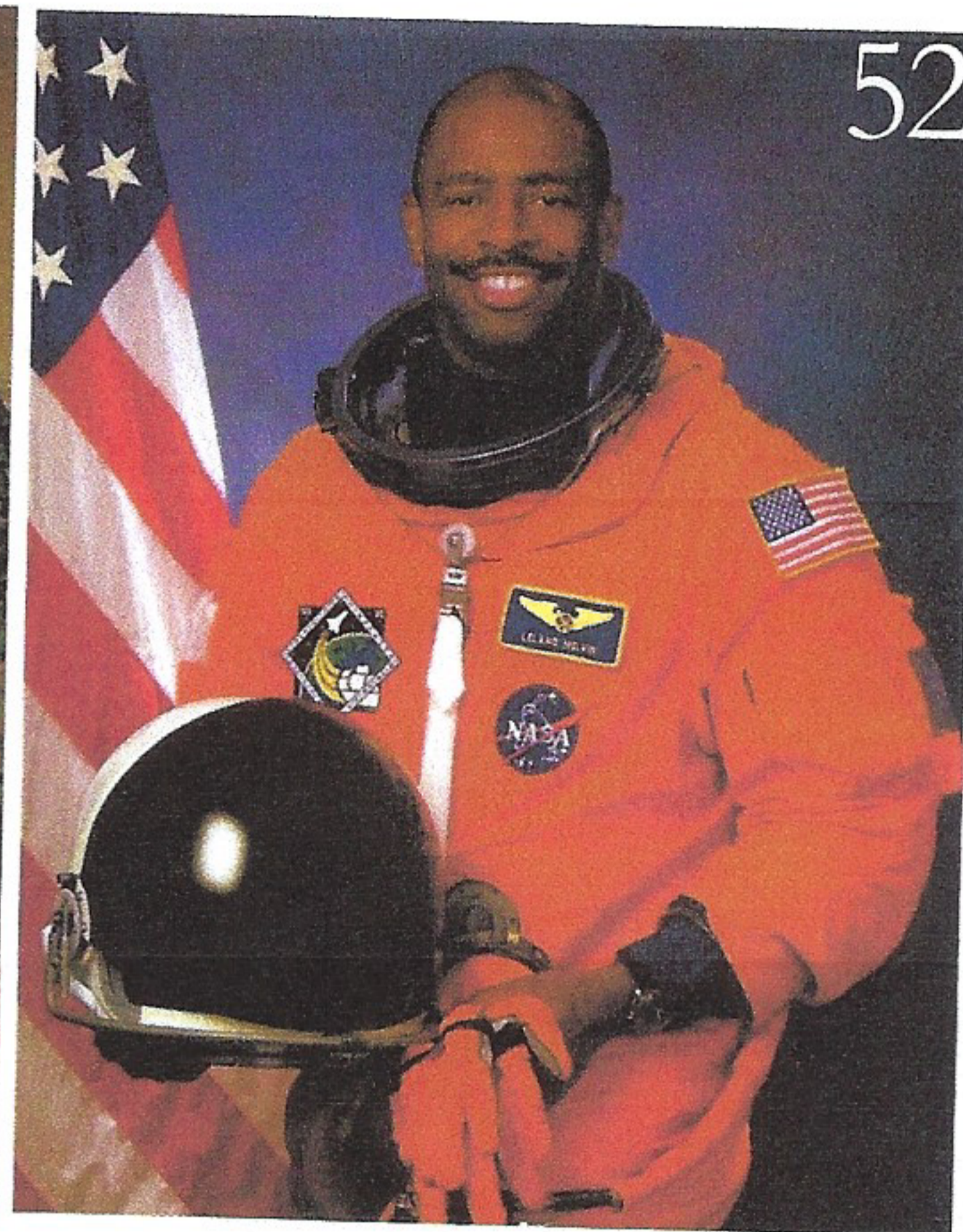
Jones Memorial Library  
A Century of Learning

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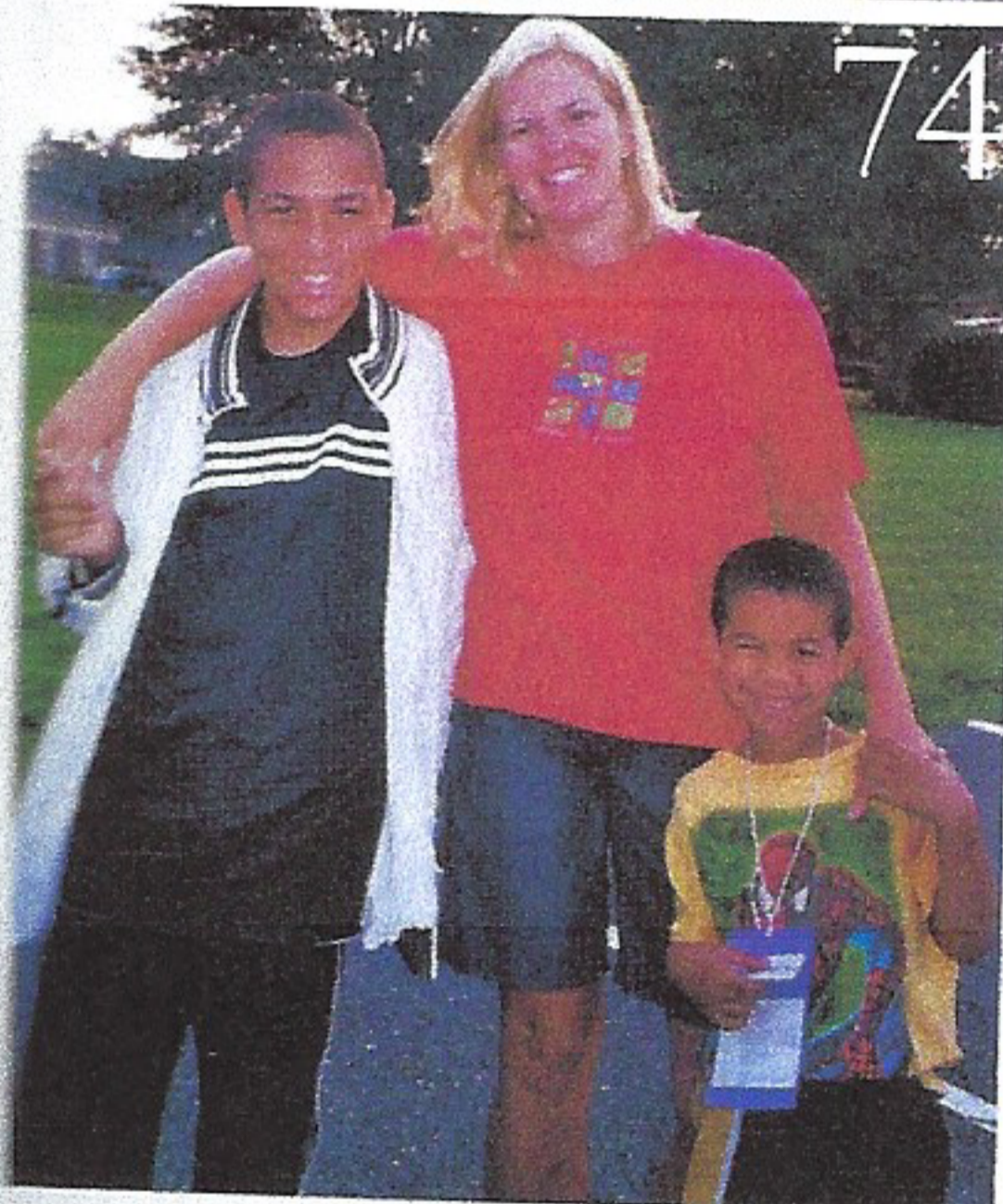
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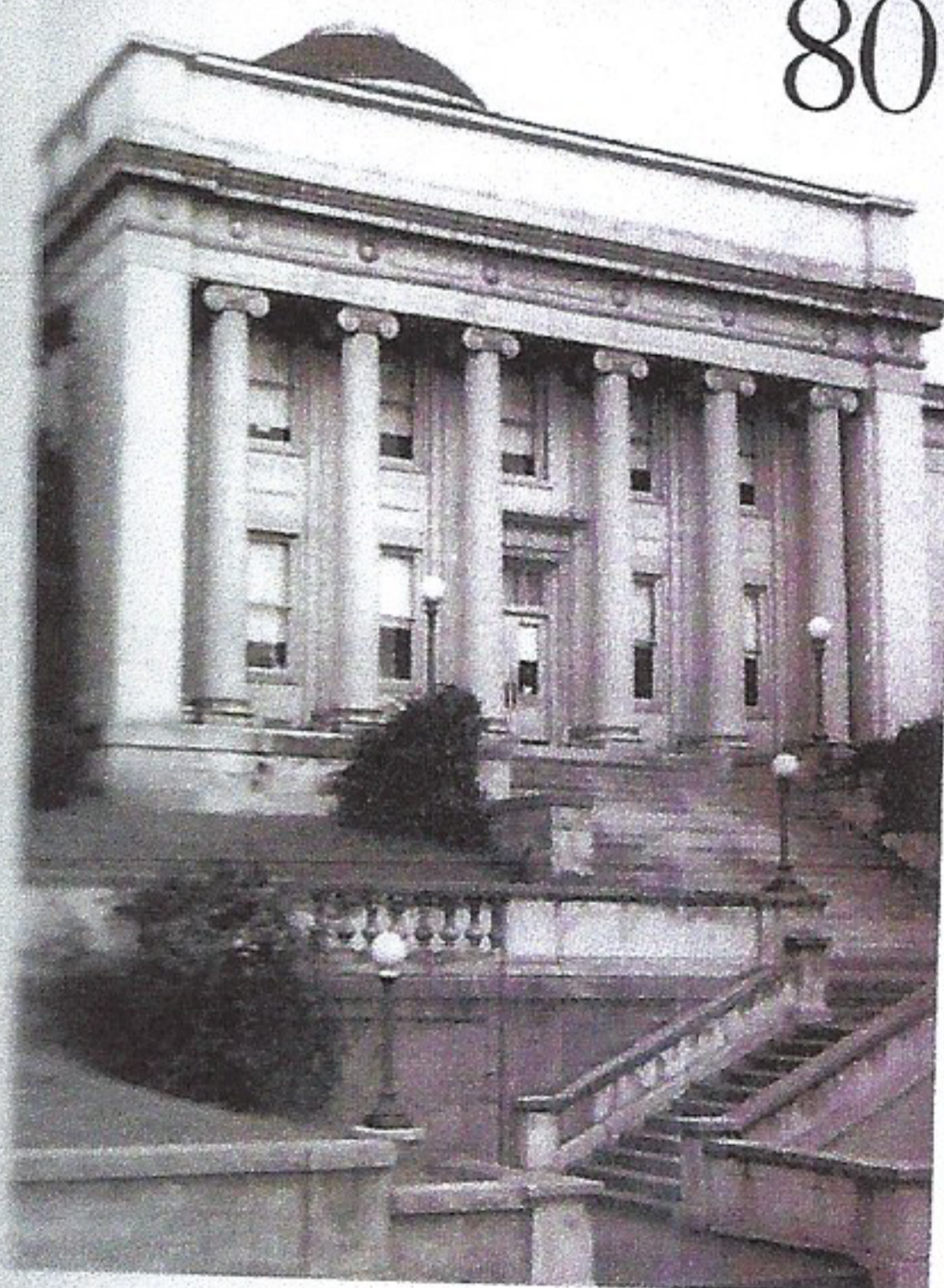
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# 100 YEARS OF LEARNING

## The Jones Memorial Library

STORY BY AMANDA SOUTHALL | PHOTOS BY COLETTE DESMARAIS

Surely, no one who knew George Morgan Jones was surprised to learn of his plans to build a public library in Lynchburg. As one of the area's most well-known and respected businessmen, Jones had a reputation as a philanthropist that placed great value on education and community. Jones died before his dream to build Lynchburg's first public library came to fruition, but his influence lives on in the library that bears his name. As the Jones Memorial Library celebrates its 100th anniversary, it continues to be the cornerstone of genealogical and historical information in Lynchburg and Virginia.

The Jones Memorial Library, located on the second floor of the Lynchburg Public Library at 2311 Memorial Avenue, has one of the largest collections of historical and genealogical information in the state.

"We have more records than most libraries and we're in a better position to provide information and services because historical records are our focus," said Lewis Averett, coordinator of public services for Jones Memorial Library. "We get all kinds of requests and people come from all over, even people from other countries."

As it approaches its 100th year, the Jones Memorial Library is celebrating the way it knows best, by educating the citizens of Lynchburg about the past. The commemoration started with a lecture by Barbara Rothermel on the art of Queena Stovall on April 9.

"Queen Stovall was an area artist and her art gives an idea of what life was like around here in the 20th century," said Averett.

For those who want to learn more, Library Director Wayne Rhodes will deliver a lecture on May 14 at 5 p.m. titled "Jones Memorial Library: A Dream Realized," about the Jones family and library history, followed by a centennial celebration.

### LYNCHBURG'S FIRST LIBRARY

The Jones Memorial Library has a genealogy database of more than 136,000 names, over 2,000 sets of architectural drawings, an obituary index with 380,000 names that dates back to 1795 (and grows every day), and more than 300 manuscript collections.

Knowledge, though, is one of those things that can't be quantified.

"The library houses so much business, family and local historical information that you can't find anywhere else," said Rhodes, who has been working at the library for 26 years, 10 of which as the library's director.

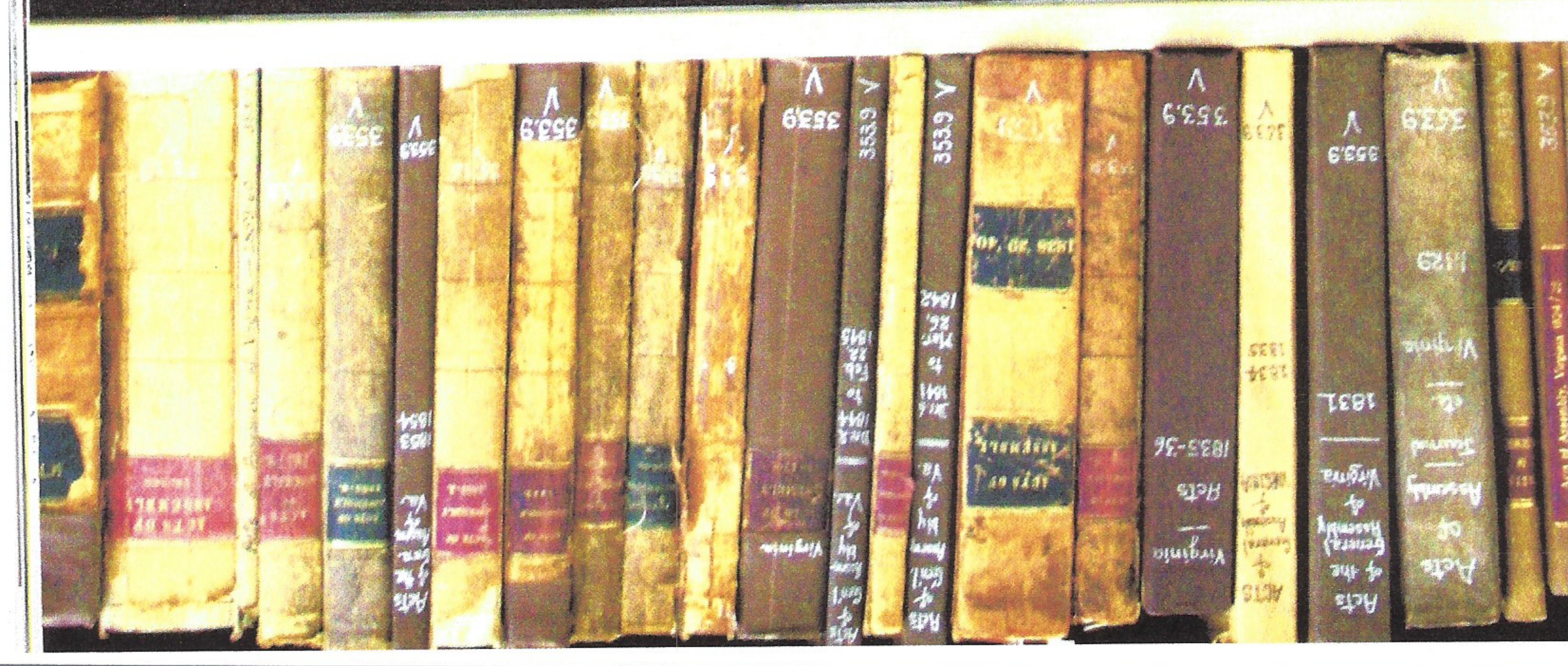
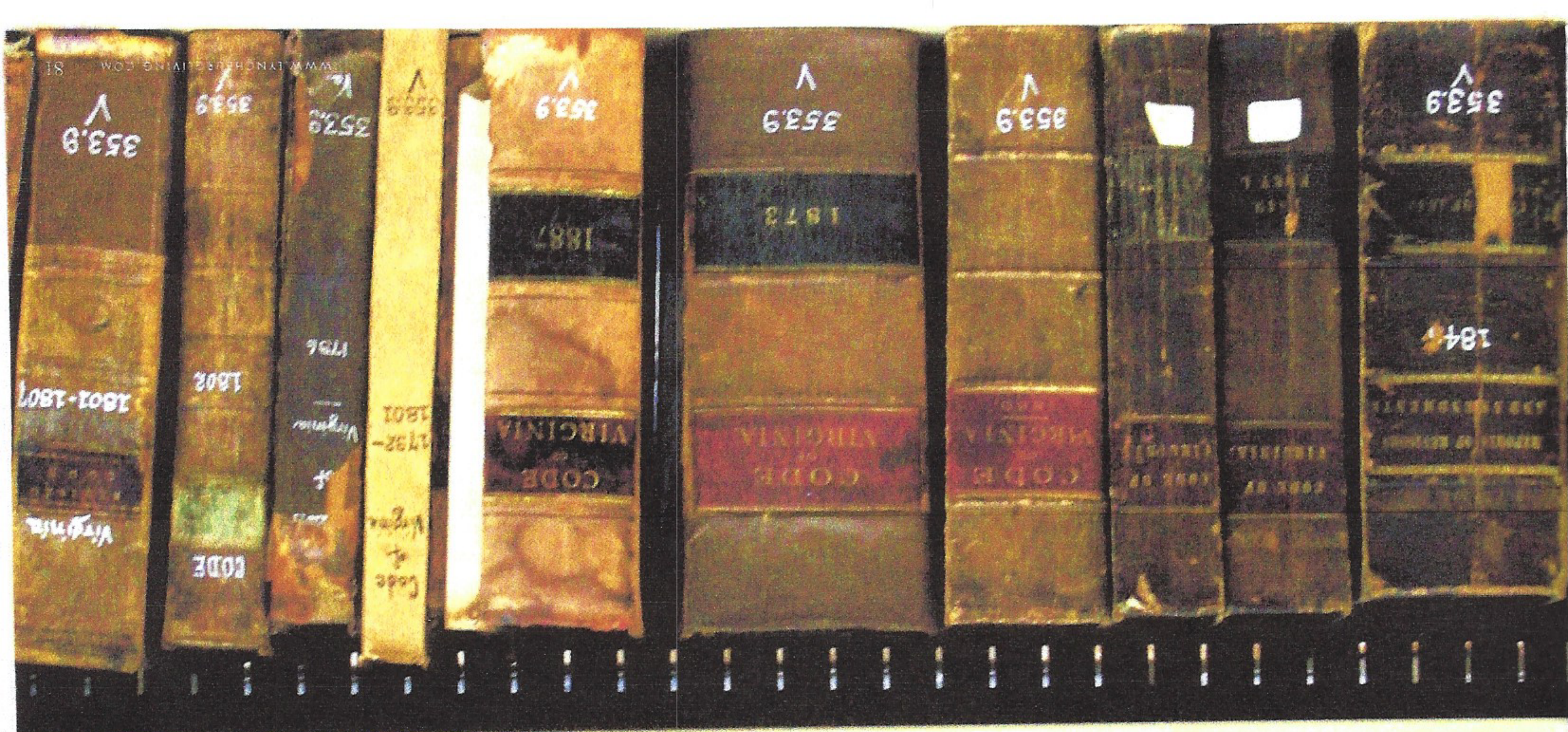
The preservation of that information is largely thanks to the ingenuity and vision of the Jones family. When George Morgan Jones passed away, his wife Mary Frances Watts Jones picked up where her husband left off, spearheading the campaign to build the library. With a \$50,000 grant, she financed the construction and establishment of the library and, after it opened, was actively involved in its daily operations.

In her lifetime, Mrs. Jones earned a reputation for eccentricity.

"There are stories about her arranging the books by color, but I'm not sure if there's any truth to that," Averett said.

Her true legacy though, was the continued financial support she provided for the library. Upon Mrs. Jones's death in 1920, she established an endowment for the library in her will. To this day, the Jones Memorial Library operates independently without public financial support using funds from the endowment.

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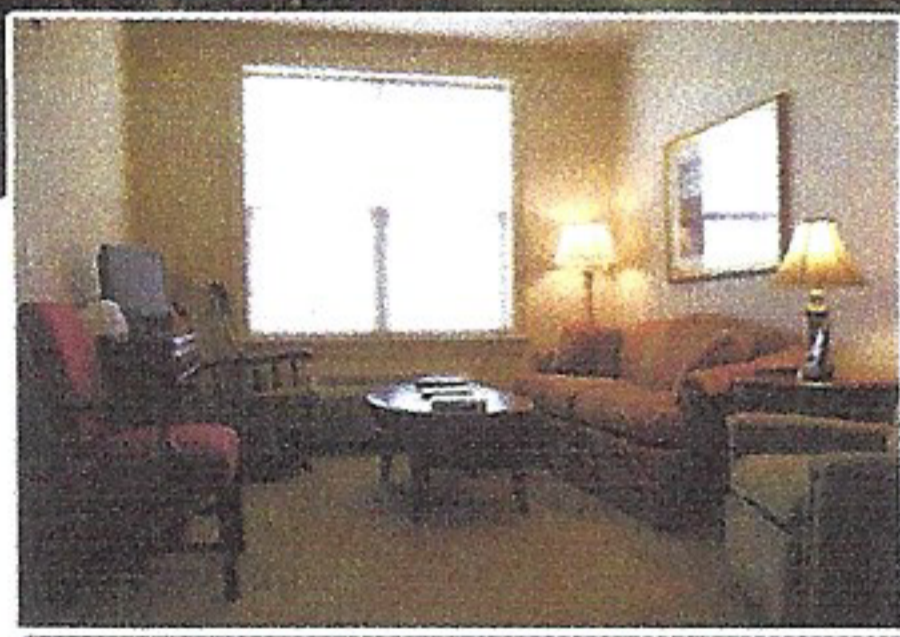


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When the Lynchburg Public Library opened in 1966, the Jones Memorial Library suddenly faced competition of a tax-supported institution with a growing collection of books.

"Instead of trying to compete with the size of their collection, the library decided to offer the community something entirely different," Rhodes said.

The decision to focus its collection was a critical one. It changed the library's direction and as a result, the Jones Memorial Library developed into one of the best research libraries in the state.

"People come here all the time who want to trace their family history, and usually we can help them because we have such a large database," Rhodes said.

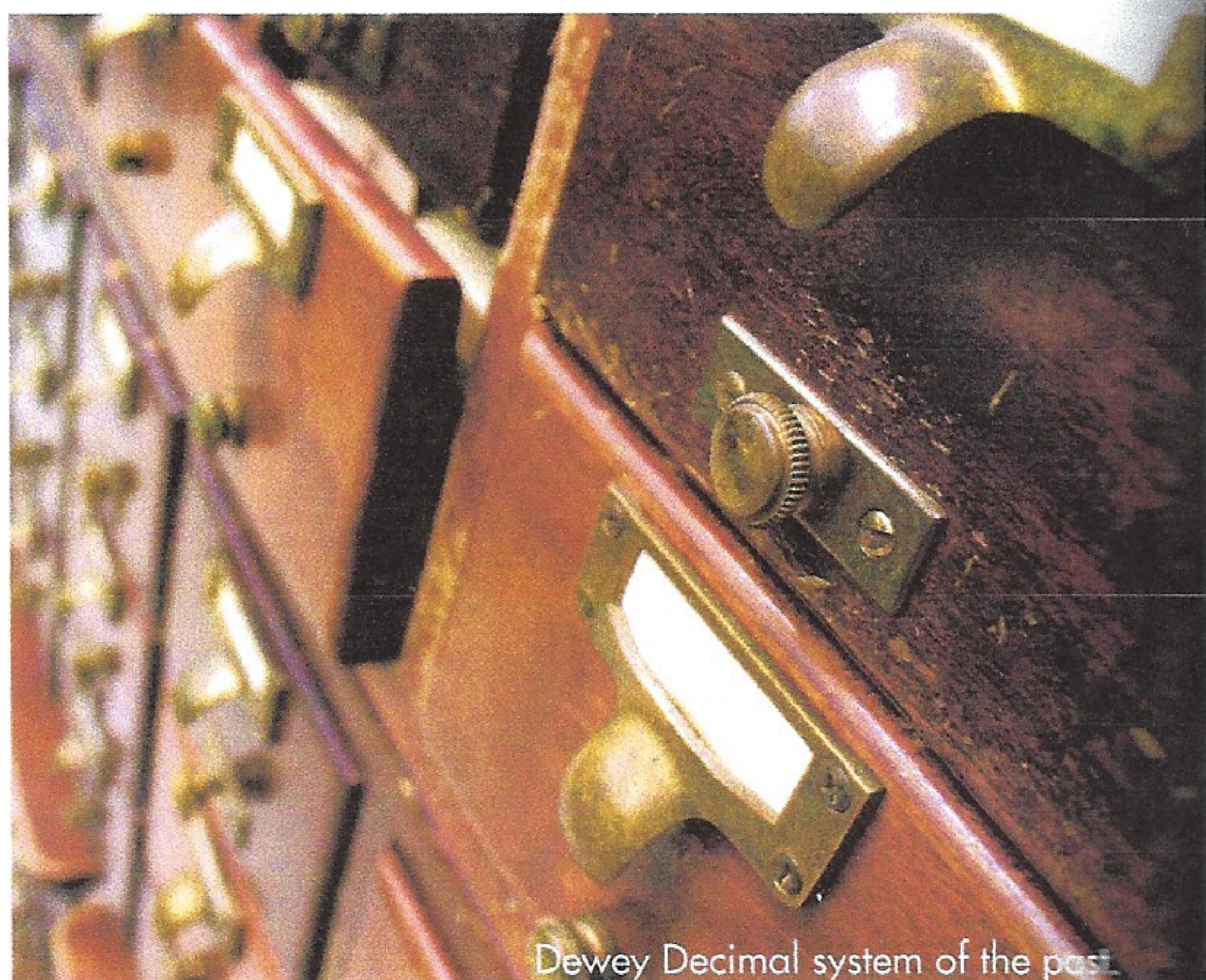
### THE HISTORY OF A LIBRARY

Amidst rare books and original manuscripts, patrons are invited to pour over history on rich oak tables and captains chairs.

"The look of this library is truly what a library should look like," Averett said. "People come here all the time to just study or do work because it's a great environment."

The Jones Memorial Library has seen a lot of changes in the past century. It opened its doors in June 1908, making it the second-oldest public library in the state (the oldest is the Norfolk Public Library). It grew rapidly in its early years, opening seven different branches between 1924 and 1931. The first to open was the Dunbar Branch in 1924, which was turned over to the School Board in 1946. Also in 1924, a branch in the Fort Hill Club at Fort Early was established. Two years later in 1926, a branch was opened on College Hill at the junior high school (this branch was also turned over to the school board). In 1928, a fourth branch opened at the Guggenheimer-Milliken Playground, then branches in West End and Fairview Heights schools opened in 1929. Finally, in 1931 a branch opened in Miller Park at the Aviary.

"As a youngster, I went there all the time to get books to read," Rhodes said.



Dewey Decimal system of the past



When the Jones Memorial Library opened, there was no such thing as microfiche, computers or the Internet. Instead of pointing and clicking, patrons shuffled through the card catalogue and navigated the Dewey Decimal System.

"When I came to work here we had two big boxy Apple computers that were donated to the library. Computers are by far the biggest change the library has seen," Averett, who started working at the library in 1989, said.

The library has also changed locations. In 1987, it moved from its original building on Rivermont Avenue to an updated, climate-controlled space above the Lynchburg Public Library.

"The original building needed extensive repairs and renovations," Rhodes said.

Perhaps the most drastic change at the Jones Memorial Library came in the 1960s. When the library opened in 1908 it, like all public institutions, was segregated.

"The library's history of segregation is more a result of the library's age than its spirit," Averett said. "At the time segregation was nothing out of the ordinary. It certainly wasn't a good thing, but it wasn't an odd thing at the time."

When the Jones Memorial Library opened, its segregation policy, which declared the library "wholly for the use of white people without respect for religious distinction," was stated in the deed, Rhodes said.

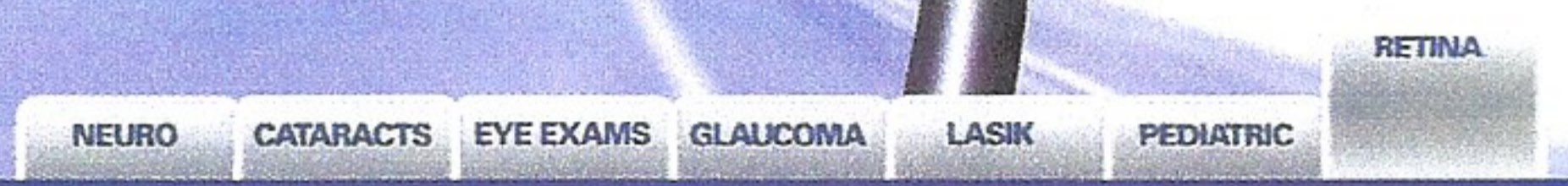
At the time, the library's answer to the segregation policy was the Dunbar Branch, located at Lynchburg's black high school, Dunbar High School.


"The library had a segregation policy, and at the time the branch at Dunbar was open to black patrons," Averett said. "Now, our library is full of African-American history, genealogy and patrons. Segregation is an unfortunate part of our past because the last thing we'd want is for someone to think we still operate that way."

Jones Memorial Library wasn't alone in its segregation policies, at the time integrated public libraries were rare and most college libraries did not allow black students to use their facilities.

(cont.)

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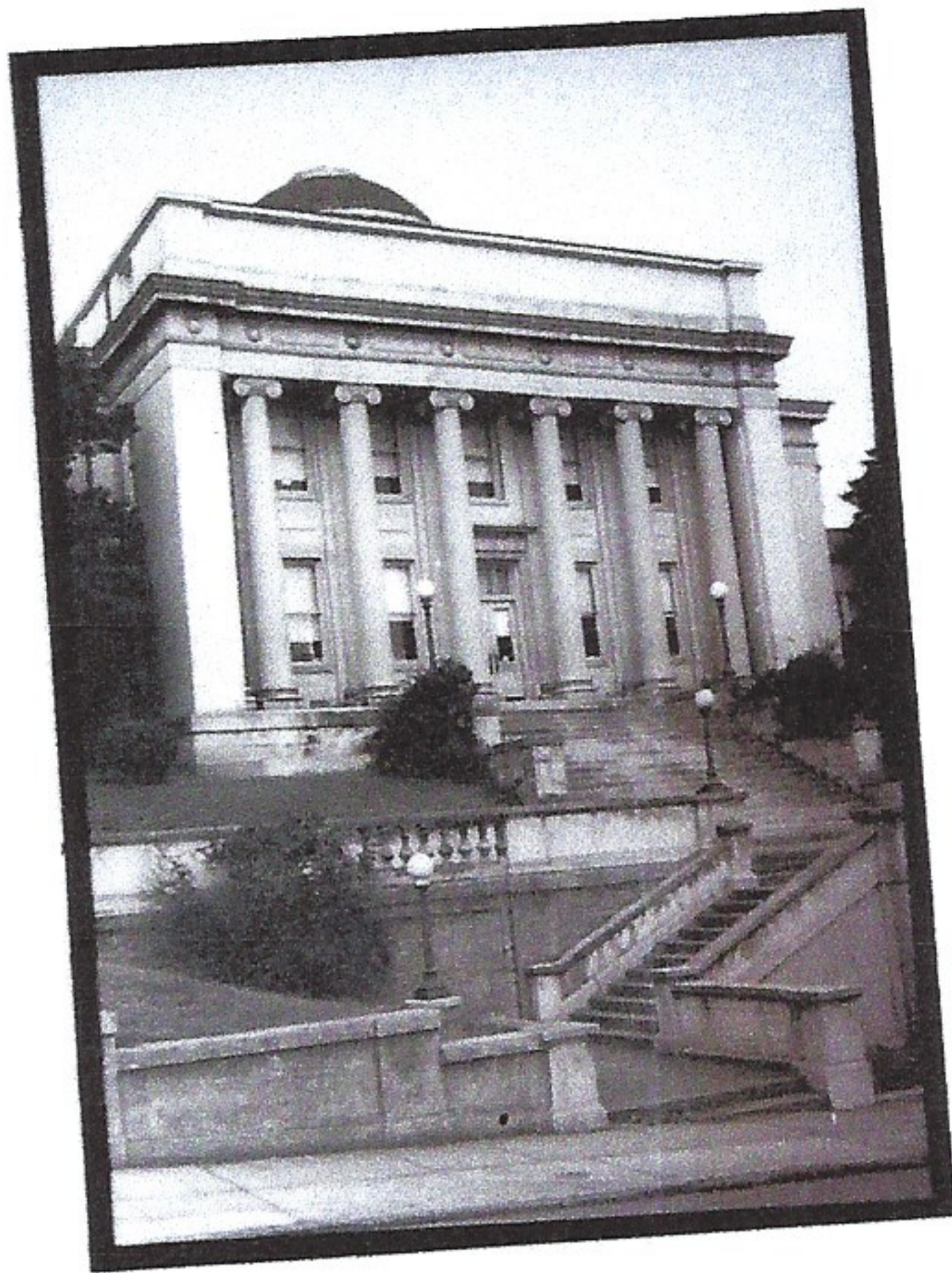
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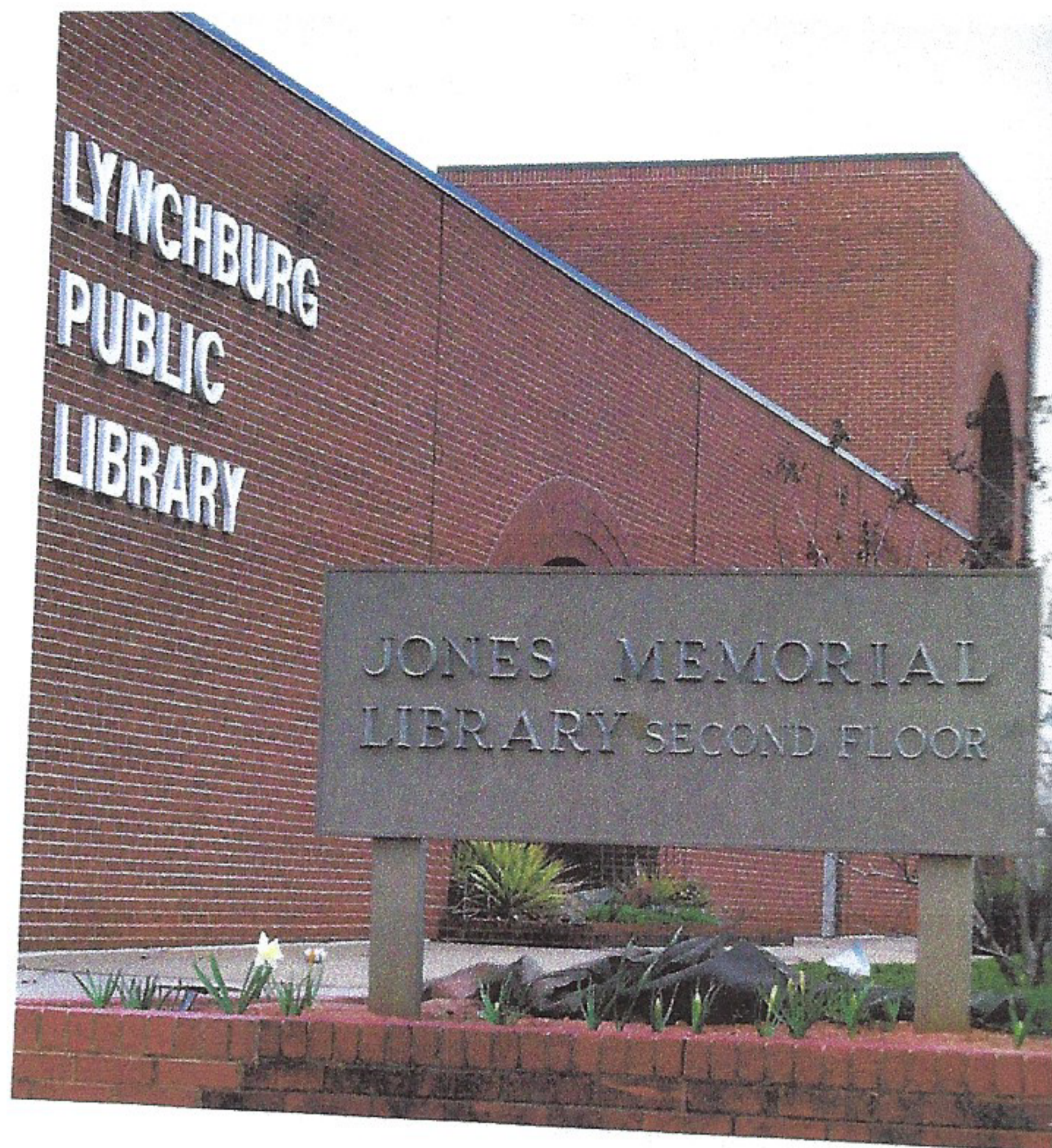
Stained glass captures the library's "philosophy."

# PHILOSOPHY





THE JONES  
MEMORIAL LIBRARY  
HAS SEEN A LOT OF  
CHANGES IN THE  
PAST CENTURY.



In August 1969 the segregation policy officially became a part of the library's past.

"It's hard when people focus on that part of our past because it truly is in the past," Rhodes said.

Upon its announcement to integrate, the Jones Memorial Library also announced its decision to shift to an all-reference library. In light of the changes at Jones Memorial Library, perhaps its most incredible characteristics are the things that have stayed the same. Throughout the years, the library has remained dedicated to preserving the city and state's history for the sake of public education.

"The library exists to preserve regional history, and the library itself has a long and interesting history," Averett said.

### KEEPING UP WITH THE JONES'

The story of the Jones Memorial Library is not complete without the story of its visionary, George Morgan Jones. In 1899, George Morgan Jones's plans for a public library in Lynchburg were finally falling into place. The blueprints were drawn and a location for the building was nearly decided. The library was still in planning stages though, when Jones died in August 1903.

As a businessman, Jones was consistently successful. He made a name for himself in the hardware business when he started Jones, Watts & Company with his brothers-in-law. He also served as president of the first cotton manufacturing company in Lynchburg, was the first president of the Lynchburg Board of Trade, and was the president of the National Exchange Bank for 20 years. Through all of his ventures, Jones built a reputation of business integrity and success. However, professional achievements were marked by personal tragedy.

Jones married Mary Frances Watts of Bedford County in 1848. They had three daughters, Nannie Isabelle, who died days before her first birthday; Georgie Lee, who was 19 years old when she died; and Lily Frances, who passed away at age 16.

"The deaths of his daughters affected him greatly," Rhodes said. "He lived for his daughters and their deaths really broke him."

Following the death of his third daughter, Jones retired from the hardware business and sold Jones, Watts & Company to associates in 1887. In his bereft state, Jones strived to honor his daughters, particularly the two elder girls. He donated stained glass windows to the Court Street Methodist Episcopal Church in their memory and donated funds to help establish the library at Randolph-Macon Women's College, aptly named the Jones Library. His final tribute to his daughters was the construction of a public library in Lynchburg. His original plans included naming the library "The Georgie and Lillie Library" in honor of his daughters.

"Education was important to Jones because all of his daughters died at such a young age," Rhodes said. "He wanted to provide for other young people what his daughters never got to experience."

A glass plaque that hung near the entrance of the original library is now on display in the new location. The plaque reads, "This library building and the ground on which it stands have been given by me for the free use of the citizens of Lynchburg as a memorial to my husband George M. Jones and my two daughters Georgie Jones and Lillie Jones on the understanding that they will always be maintained by the city for such use. Mrs. George M. Jones AD 1907."

Though George Jones didn't live to see the library, it still stands as a memorial to his daughters and the Jones family. In the century it has been in operation, the Jones Memorial Library hasn't just preserved Lynchburg's history-it has become a part of it. 📖

*Amanda Southall is a freelance writer and graduate of Virginia Tech. When she's not writing, Amanda enjoys running, mountain biking and rock climbing. Read more of her work at [www.amandasouthall.com](http://www.amandasouthall.com).*