

MEMORANDUM

Office of Development and
Alumni Relations

Date:

August 31, 2021

To:

Lorene Flanders,
Exec Director of
Libraries

Margaret Sullivan,
VP Development
& Alumni Relations

Shea Sadler,
Director
Advancement
Information &
Analytics

From:

Lori N. Harris, Development Officer, USA Libraries

Subject:

Deacquisition of Birds-of-Paradise display in the Marx Library

Background on the Donation:

In 1985, the family of Lieutenant General Walter K. Wilson, Jr. (1906 – 1985) donated a rare birds-of-paradise display to the Marx Library. The display had been presented to General Wilson, Chief of US Army Engineers, by Brig. General Soedarto, Chief of the Indonesian Army Corps of Engineers in 1963 in appreciation for the USA Army Corps of Engineers Mobile Training Team, which spent five months in Indonesia under the Military Assistance Program.

General Wilson, appointed as the 40th Chief of Engineers by President John F. Kennedy, served the Mobile Corps of Engineers' office twice during this distinguished career and chose to retire in Mobile in 1965.

There are no records held by the Development Office or the USA Libraries documenting the donation of this display.

Rationale for Deacquisition:

USA Libraries is in the process of putting information about their art collections into the new JagWorks institutional repository. It came to light that the birds-of-paradise in the display case on the 4th floor had visible decomposition and a detectable odor. Library staff were concerned about the viability and sustainability of the display given the decomposition of the birds and the possible presence of arsenic used in the older taxidermy processes from 1963.

Deacquisition Plan:

The plan for deacquisition of the display includes:

- Professional photographs of the birds in the display and the accompanying plaques were taken by Julie Andel and are being archived in the JagWorks institutional repository.
- The Development Office will create and send a photo book to the Wilson family contacts (General Wilson's daughter and grandson) as a memento and token of appreciation for the contribution of the display.

- The Development Office will document the gift in kind donation from the family of General Walter K. Wilson in the donor database and make sure they are properly stewarded.
- Dr. Jason Strickland of USA's Biology Department has collected the birds and the display case and plans to consult with colleagues/taxidermists to make recommendations on the proper and appropriate preservation or disposal of the birds in the display. If the birds are retained and preserved, we recommend they remain in the Biology Department as part of the vertebrate natural history collection of bird, mammal, reptile and amphibian specimens. This would allow future students, faculty and USA constituents to appreciate and study the birds as part of the larger collection.