

LOUIS DECIMUS RUBIN, JR.

In 1953, when Louis Rubin co-edited an edition of essays that he called "the first reasonably thorough treatment of the literature of the modern South," he remarked in the "Preface" that the call for papers "was so overwhelming, and so encouraging, that it was realized just how widespread was the latent interest in Southern writing, and how potentially important a thoroughgoing survey and analysis of the literature of the modern South might be. Accordingly plans were expanded tenfold." Now 42 years later, it can be recognized that Louis Rubin dedicated his career to that expansion, one that has far exceeded that original tenfold growth. The renaissance in American Southern writers continues to this day, but our understanding of its richness and range, its history and diversity, surely owes more to him than to any other single figure. In his 22 years as a Professor of English at this University, he helped to transform that department into the center of Southern literary studies, shepherding scores of dissertations that would later become books and steadily producing his own critical books and essays, biographies, histories, and -- not least -- fiction of his own creation. He published more than thirty book-length studies, many capturing regional and national prizes, treating various qualities of the work of Southern writers. Students of Louis Rubin, like Lee Smith, Jill McCorkle, Annie Dillard, John Barth, and Kaye Gibbons, have gone on to take their own

places in the ranks of contemporary Southern and American letters.

Anticipating his retirement from the University, he founded in 1982 a publishing house in Chapel Hill called Algonquin Books. As he expressed it, "There didn't seem to be any reason why there shouldn't be a good full-fledged nationally-oriented trade publishing house in the South," catering to Southern writers. Algonquin Books prospered during the years of his oversight as he introduced another generation of new Southern writers by publishing their works.

A native of Charleston, South Carolina, who began as a newspaper man before taking his graduate degrees at Johns Hopkins University, he went on to teach at Hollins College for a decade before coming here. He became University Distinguished Professor of English in 1972. Upon his retirement in 1989, the sixteen-campus University of North Carolina conferred on him its highest honor, the O. Max Gardner Award. Today, we summon Louis D. Rubin, Jr., from his home on Gimghoul Road in Chapel Hill to receive our own highest award, this honorary Doctor of Letters degree.