Special Collections’ Golden Age

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Columbia University librarian James C. Neal beams as he walks past items on display in the school's Butler Library, treasures drawn from the master Broadway musicals Dramatic Museum. The collection is a veritable feast for theater scholars, including everything from rare first editions, sketches, and manuscript drafts to playbills, set designs, costume sketches, and some remarkable 19th-century handcrafted marionettes.

It is in unique collections like these that Neal sees a bright future for libraries. In fact, at the April 2005 Association of College and Research Libraries annual conference in Minneapolis, Neal told an audience of librarians that in the digital age, libraries are poised to enter a new "golden age" of special collections, spurred by digitization and greater online access to primary resources. "Research libraries traditionally have been evaluated by how many volumes they hold, but the smallest library can eventually access as many volumes in the largest," Neal explains, adding to the advent of digital databases for community resources. "In the future, I believe great research libraries will be evaluated more and more on their special collections."

At the center of it all
Indeed, digitization, high-speed connections, and suites of powerful new tools that allow students and researchers to interact as never before with collections are breaking them free from their climate-controlled exile and putting valuable special collections at the center of exciting new partnerships among librarians, faculty, students, and technologists. It's still early—but already the results are remarkable.

At Columbia, initiatives like the Columbia University Libraries Digital Program bring together librarians, faculty, and technologists to create cutting-edge digital representations and research tools. This includes the Joseph Urban Stage Design Models and Documents stabilization and access project. Funded with a $307,360 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project preserves 240 three-dimensional stage models created by Joseph Urban for New York theaters between 1914 and 1933, including productions for the Ziegfeld Follies, the Metropolitan Opera, and a variety of Broadway theaters. The project also created digital images of related stage design documents and drawings that link to the existing online finding aid, making Urban's work available to a worldwide audience via the web.

In July 2005, Stanford and Cambridge universities, backed by a generous $1.4 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, announced a similar effort to digitize and create tools to view more than 500 medieval manuscripts, as many as 200,000 pages. If that sounds like a lot, a quarter of the world's medieval manuscripts, which, until now, were usable only by a handful of scholars.

"As unique artifacts, these manuscripts are kept in a single room in Cambridge that is not open to the public," explains Standard's Andrew Herkomer. Now, he says, the Parker on the Web project will "open that single room up to the entire scholarly community."

With new projects starting seemingly every day, Alice Schreyer, special collections librarian at the University of Chicago, agrees with Neal's assessment that libraries are on the cusp of a new "golden age" for special collections. "There have been marvelous joint efforts on several fronts," she says. "The most exciting thing about this 'golden age' is that libraries are providing access to the material itself."

"We're interested in collections," she adds. "It's a big part of the job. It's exciting, and it's wonderful to see."

"With new projects starting seemingly every day," Alice Schreyer, special collections librarian at the University of Chicago, agrees with Neal's assessment that libraries are on the cusp of a new "golden age" for special collections. "There have been marvelous joint efforts on several fronts," she says. "The most exciting thing about this "golden age" is creating partnerships with faculty and librarians in other fields," she says. "What excites me most is how much of the material itself is available to us online."

Still, for all the promise technology brings to the world of special collections, challenges also remain. How quickly libraries realize the potential for their special collections will depend on many factors: funding, innovation, instructional strategy, and perhaps above all, Neal says, leadership.

Do you get it?
The overwhelming challenge, Neal says, is what it always was: acquisitions. "Digitization is important," he explains, "but if we don't first remain committed to getting this stuff digitized, these collections are at risk of being broken up and sold."

While the Internet holds enormous potential for making historic collections increasingly accessible for teaching and learning, it has also made collections more available to private collectors. With the advent of online auction houses, libraries now compete increasingly with an aggressive, global, and growing private collector market. The result is that more owners today expect to be paid for their collections, and fundraising pressure on library administrators has increased. "It's a big part of the job. It's exciting, and it's wonderful to see."
Special Collections Initiatives at Whitman College

► Curricular
► Digital
► Administrative
Special Collections at the Center

“The library is, of course, the central laboratory of the institution. It is more important than any other part of the equipment. It is the heart of the institution, sending its life-blood into all different departments.”

—Stephen B. L. Penrose, Whitman College President, 1923
The Whitman College Library Annex, a.k.a. “The Shack” (circa 1921)
History of Whitman College

- Whitman Seminary Building (1866)
- Whitman College Hall (1883)
- Whitman Memorial Building (1900)

Walla Walla (1859)
Walla Walla (1900)
History of Collections

College Librarian
Arminda Fix (1908)

Museum Curator Howard Brode (1908)

Myron Eells (1843-1907)

Bookplate for the Eells Northwest History Collection

Howard Stidham Brode

Eells’s Library, Historical Manuscripts, and Indian Cabinet
The Library, Archives, and Museum at Whitman College

The Penrose Library;
the Whitman College and Northwest Archives;
the Maxey Museum
Teaching with Special Collections

►► Show and tell

Cuneiform Tablets and Cones (circa 2350 BCE)

Leaf from a manuscript Bible (circa 1350)

Leaf from a Gutenberg Bible (circa 1450)
Teaching with Special Collections

► Show and tell

Nuremberg Chronicle (1493)

Gentleman’s Magazine (1747); Fables of Aesop (1788)

On the Origin of Species (1859)
Teaching with Special Collections

Curricular integration

Information literacy and community-based research
Teaching with Special Collections

Curricular integration

Engraving studio and tools, from Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*

“Knowledge of the World in 18th-Century France”
Digital Special Collections

►► The old

Online finding aids and digital collections
Digital Special Collections

The new Collections Grid, developed by and Lorcan Dempsey and Eric Childress of OCLC Research
New Special Collections

The Whitman College Institutional Repository (part of the Liberal Arts Scholarly Repository)
An Administrative Resource

Farm Committee oversees 22,000 acres of farmland

The committee oversees a combined 22,000 acres of farmland stretching over four counties: Walla Walla, Umatilla, Garfield and Columbia. “We have a very dynamic process,” said Alex McGregor ’71, a business major at Whitman and current assistant professor of finance (77-81), who owns McGregor Cattle Company, a fertilizer and farm supply firm with 42 offices in Washington, Idaho and Oregon. “The committee and the college, I think, have been wise in their judgment not to tell people to farm but rather to choose talented, knowledgeable people and let them make informed decisions.”

The committee works closely with Reid and Treasurer/Chief Financial Officer Peter Harvey ’90, co-officers of the group, on everything from soil conservation to lease agreements. Most of the 1.5 leases call for the farm manager to receive 40 percent of the crop and the college to take 60 percent. For dairy properties, the split is 67 percent for the farmer and 33 percent for Whitman. On the low-yield barley property, the college receives 28 percent of the crop, but 95 wind dollars in the property generated nearly $100,000 in revenue in 2007 and enough diversity to supply a campus the size of Whitman.

“We have a tremendous arrangement,” McGregor said. “If you find dedicated people who care — and Whitman has a strong record of that in all areas of its operation — strong partnerships occur naturally, and you come to me and say what we are doing to the success of everything you do.”

Whitman Farm Committee 2007-08
Dave Wyckoff ’97 (Chair)
Bob Danforth
Donna Davis ’56
Jack Froncin
Jon Harman ’73
Dweller Jones ’74
Frank Lamb ’63
Don Loderde ’78
Alex McGregor ’71
Walter Minick ’64
Merrill Phillips ’62 (ex officio)
Anna Maria Ziolkowski
Mark Vogler ’74
Paul Wills ’60
Jerry Zuhl

Ex-officio members:
George Bridges, president, Whitman College
Peter Harvey ’90, treasurer and chief financial officer

Prints from the Whitman College Collection

Interpretive Text by Art History/Visual Culture Studies Students, Class of 2009

Sheehan Gallery, Whitman College, February 2009
An Administrative Resource

Fifty Year Plus

Football reunion set for fall

The Whitmans and Whitman

by Michael J. Paulus Jr.
Archivist and Special Collections Librarian

In 1978, Thomas Howell delivered a convocation address at Whitman College titled "An Initiation of Time." In the address, howell, who joined the English faculty at Whitman in 1960, recalled his earliest memories of the college and reflected on its history. "Memory is an initiation of time," howell said. "So is history." He said that the best way to check the accuracy of his memories is to include in course notes of the past the records of history - the minutes of earlier meetings and the reports of the earlier transactions witnessed and performed by the human race.

(Centinnial on page 8)

Whitman College presents
Summer College 2009

Survival

June 7-12, 2009

"We never stop investigating. We are never satisfied that we know enough to get by... This has become the greatest survival trick of our species."

Desmond Morris, zoologist, artist and author

Life is extreme. What have we done to survive through crisis? Biology, history, classics and more tell the story of how and what we do to survive. Here are a just a few of this summer's lectures that explore this fascinating subject.

A Record of Survival:
A sesquicentennial history of Whitman College and its archives.

Michael Paulus Jr., Archivist and Special Collections Librarian for the Whitman College and Northwest Archives, which is the archives and special collections division of the Pemrose Library. He came to Whitman College in 2006 from Princeton Seminary, where he was a special collections librarian. During his time at Whitman, Paulus has focused on the use of manuscripts, archives, and rare books in undergraduate education and in creating digital collections to enable greater awareness and use of the unique collections at the college. Paulus regularly publishes and presents on archival and historical topics and is a regular contributor to HistoryLink.org: The Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History. More information on the Whitman College and Northwest Archives is available from: www.whitman.edu/archives.
An Administrative Resource
Returning to the Center

Monumental, an art installation in front of the Penrose Library, by Michelle Acuff and Tyler Calkin, May 2009