

Chris Krause

Archives Visit

Special Collections and University Archives at Stony Brook University, New York was founded in 1969 following the absorption by the university's English department of a modern literature collection involving the poets and authors of Black Mountain College in North Carolina. While it was initially founded to accommodate these records, the archive has expanded in the decades following its foundation. Since then the Special Collections and University Archives has acquired a modest but impressive store of collections with over twenty thousand printed volumes, two hundred and seventy five manuscript collections and seventeen hundred historic maps. Various records involving the professional work and lives of Stonybrook University's population include manuscripts, letters, pamphlets, broadsides, maps, newspapers, as well as books and periodicals. The library serves as a repository for staff works, ranging from articles and manuscripts to doctoral theses. It is open to the public Monday through Friday.

The archive is largely staffed by two dedicated personnel: Kristen J. Nyitray, head of Special Collections and F. Jason Torre, University Archivist. Ms. Nyitray was of spectacular assistance in producing this report, going out of her way to accommodate my schedule and to provide information on the collections, physical plant and institutional philosophy. Ms. Nyitray even provided photographs for use in this report (visitor photography is prohibited) on the condition that they not be shared with the general public, as I was inclined to show classmates the stylish physical plant.

The Special Collections of Stonybrook University is part of the greater Frank Melville Jr. Memorial Library, a prominent research library in New England academia. Funding derives from the University coffers and is integral to the general library fund. Even so, the archive has a unique aesthetic and gravity to it, and does not appear to have been relegated as merely an annex of the larger library.

While open to the public the primary clientele who visit the plant are students and staff of the university. Interest and function of use is dominated by the examination of primary documents, particularly for academic purposes. In this fashion professors bring their students to the archive in order to inform them on the nature of documents they are studying. The main reading room contains a comfortable space for up to twenty persons to engage in discussion while accessing the records. The special collections library is a restricted access area, and while open to the public, appointments must be made in order to visit it. The off limit stacks are constituted as a series of archival boxes, labeled numerically and by category. The institution makes heavy use of such containers, preferring this staple of preservation as a means of safeguarding the records. Records are listed for public access either on the official website or using Stonybrook University's STARS database, the greater university library catalog. Interestingly, I found that each object in the collection mentioned on the official website is also included with a cubic measurement, often in feet. This seems to suggest that the website is used by the staff as a means of organization just as it is a form of communication to the public. Lastly, the archive offers remote duplication services at a modest fee: they will mail prospective researchers audio/video cassette or facsimile of a record upon request. Thus there is a surprisingly vast range of services provided by a small staff.

Prominent collections include Senator Jacob K. Javits Collection and William Butler Yeats Microfilmed Manuscripts Collection, the latter of which is the most extensive repository of the poet's manuscripts outside of Ireland. An emphasis on preserving the writings of prominent university faculty including Lee Koppelman, Sidney Gelber, George Williams, and John Gagnon is also apparent, as well as those of John Ciardi and Pietro di Donato, the Environmental Defense organization and the Automatic Identification and Data Capture industry. An extensive collection of original maps of the Long Island, New York area is also included in the collection, dating back to the 1700s. Rare books dating from 1493 cover such diverse topics as Long Island and New York history; classics in Latin; Irish literature; the

Perishable Press Limited; "Black Mountain" poetry; natural sciences; and book and printing history. Of these rare books the oldest (1493) and perhaps the most prized record is the *The Nuremberg Chronicle*, a historically important incunabulum featuring a pictorial history of the world. The *Chronicle* was one of the first books printed on a press, and includes the vivid wood block prints of a young Albrecht Dürer. The scope of the archive is rather diverse: in 2002 a large collection of rare Chinese cookbooks were absorbed into the collection by a faculty member.

Yet another critical aspect of the Special Collections and University Archives at Stony Brook University is housing the university's faculty files, administration records, photographs, publications and other primary documents concerning the history of the institution. The official website boasts that such records comprise over "1,000 linear feet" of material. In addition to original records, manuscripts and administrative files the University Archives is also responsible for maintaining "DSpace," a digitized database of publications created by Stonybrook University staff, faculty and students. In this way the archive preserves the intellectual history of the institution as the years pass. The archives contain records pertaining to such diverse topics as campus poetry readings and events, audio and visual materials (some of which have been exported to YouTube by archive staff), a university photo archive, and the personal correspondences of university presidents.

The majority of the collections are acquired by donation of university staff, faculty and students, or through institutional apparatus. New university archives are more or less automatically absorbed into the collection, while the more exotic and rare records tend to be acquired by the generosity or professional obligations of the campus' academic community. As Stonybrook University is a prominent institution known for its original research, the collection continues to expand on a yearly basis, occasionally subject to an influx of new records following discoveries, academic breakthroughs or major events. Pictures to follow.

Entrance foyer: sign-in desk, lockers, coat rack, exhibit cases





Main Reading Room: map case, exhibit cases, photcopy machine





Douglas Edgell Reading Room (dedicated to an archive that documents AIDC technologies (automatic identification and data capture), i.e. barcodes and RFID)



All information contained in this report is courtesy of Kristen J. Nyitray, head of Special Collections.
Supplemental information also gleamed from the archives' official website at:
<http://www.stonybrook.edu/libspecial/index.shtml>