

# Alexander Library Environmental Monitoring Project

## NEH Preservation Assistance Grant—Narrative Section

David Moles

17:610:556:90 Preservation of Library and Archival Materials

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*Note: Much of the description of the library's collections and infrastructure has been taken directly, or minimally paraphrased, from various parts of the RUL website, with specific pages indicated in the notes. To preserve the form of the grant proposal, I have omitted quotation marks.*

### A. What activity (or activities) would the grant support?

In order to mitigate environmental preservation risks, Rutgers University Libraries (RUL) requests funds for equipment needed to monitor conditions in the Archibald S. Alexander Library at Rutgers–New Brunswick, including temperature and humidity data loggers, electronic temperature/humidity readers, consumer-grade air quality monitors, ISO Blue Wool cards for measuring light exposure damage risk, and glue traps for detecting and preventing insect and rodent intrusion. In addition, RUL requests funds for improved shelving and storage units, for related equipment such as bookends and document boxes, and for improved waste containers.

The project will be overseen by the Rutgers–New Brunswick Leadership Team, in particular Fernanda Perrone, Archivist and Head of the Exhibitions Program, and by Erika Gorder, University Archivist.

### B. What are the content and size of the humanities collections that are the focus of the project?

The Alexander Library is the main humanities and social sciences library at Rutgers–New Brunswick. It is the oldest and largest of the Rutgers–New Brunswick libraries, housing not only general collections, but also government publications, Special Collections and University Archives, and the East Asian Library.<sup>1</sup> The current library building, built to house 1.5 million volumes, seat 1200 patrons, and provide workspace for 60 staff, was opened in 1956;<sup>2</sup> an expansion in 1992 added a new 48,000-square-foot wing and renovated 22,000 square feet of the existing structure, bringing the total space to nearly 150,000 square feet.<sup>3</sup> Books, bound periodicals, microforms, and government documents, are housed in the north wing, along with Special Collections and University

Archives; the north wing is also home to the Digital Learning Commons, a state-of-the-art multimedia collaboration center, and the Digital Humanities Lab, a collaborative research lab for students, faculty, and staff use in project consultations, teaching, workshops, and lectures.<sup>4</sup> The south wing houses Access Services, reading rooms, the East Asian Library, and the Hatchery Innovation Studio, an innovation and creation space.<sup>5</sup>

## General Collections

The humanities and social sciences research collections housed in the Alexander Library comprise more than 800,000 volumes, as well as pamphlets, periodicals, and Federal and state government documents.<sup>6</sup> In addition to books and bound and unbound periodicals, the library's holdings include maps, microforms (microfiche, microfilm, and microcard), audiocassettes, and files on CD-ROM.

## Special Collections and University Archives

Special Collections and University Archives collects, preserves, and makes available primary sources of a rare, unique, or specialized nature to support advanced study and research in the humanities and social sciences. The collections focus on the social, cultural, economic, and political life of New Jersey; there are also significant holdings of broadsides and ephemera, genealogical resources, maps, newspapers, photographs, and prints documenting many aspects of American history.<sup>7</sup> Notable collections include:

- The **Donald Arleigh Sinclair New Jersey Collection**, comprising over 70,000 monographs, pamphlets, periodicals and serials; the largest, most comprehensive collection of New Jersey materials in the state, representing a vast number of topics, including state, county and municipal history, genealogy, religion, business and industry, labor, education, architecture, literature, medicine, agriculture, science and technology, political science, ethnic studies, gender studies, art, music, and bibliography.<sup>8</sup>
- The **Manuscript Collection**, including more than eight million original letters, diaries, sermons, literary manuscripts, organizational records, financial and legal records, and other documents, documenting all aspects of New Jersey history and society and New Jerseyans' response to national and international issues since the 18th century, as well as 19th century Westerners in Japan, 19th and early 20th century British writers, the United States consumer movement, 20th century Latin American politics, society and foreign relations, 20th century United States labor history, American business, technology, social welfare, and social policy, and women's history.<sup>9</sup>
- The **Rare Books and Book Arts collection**, containing over 53,000 books, pamphlets and broadsides on subjects from 15th-century cooking, to 19th-century announcements of escaped slaves, to 21st-century artists' books.<sup>10</sup>

## **East Asian Library**

The East Asian Library hosts collections in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean vernaculars, with the Japanese and Korean collections focusing on language and contemporary literature, while the Chinese collection is particularly strong in Ming, Qing, and Republican history, and in classics, literature, religion, and philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Its special collections include more than four thousand books and two thousand volumes of journals in Chinese medicine, more than a thousand black and white photographs released by Xinhua News Agency in Beijing during the 1960s and 1970s, and more than four thousand reels of microfilmed rare books from the National Central Library of Taiwan, as well as the William Elliot Griffis Collection of more than 250,000 items documenting the experience of Westerners in Japan, the roots of Japanese-American relations, and the connections of Rutgers with Japan during the Meiji period (1868-1912).

## **C. How are these humanities collections used?**

The Alexander Library humanities collections support undergraduate study across the range of the humanities and social sciences, doctoral programs in anthropology, economics, geography, history, linguistics, literature (classical, comparative, English & American, French, German, Italian, Spanish & Portuguese), philosophy, political science, and sociology, as well as major interdisciplinary programs in African studies, Latin American studies, medieval studies, and South Asian Studies, and four professional schools, all of which include doctoral programs: the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning & Public Policy; the Graduate School of Education; the Graduate School of Social Work; and the School of Communication and Information. The library is also a congressionally designated depository for U.S. Government documents and a state designated depository for New Jersey government documents.<sup>12</sup>

The Sinclair New Jersey Collection is an indispensable resource for research on any aspect of New Jersey, past or present, while the Rare Book Collection supports advanced research in the humanities and social sciences, with notable depth in American and British literature, art and history. Particular strengths include 17th and 18 century, Early Modern, and 20th Century Literature and Art, History of Printing and the Book, Incunabula, and 16th and 17th Century Festival Books and Herbals.<sup>13</sup> The University Archives provides source material for administrators, faculty, students, alumni, and other members of the Rutgers community, as well as scholars, authors, and other interested persons who seek to evaluate the impact of the University's activities on the history of American social, cultural, and intellectual development.<sup>14</sup>

While the primary users of the collections are Rutgers students, faculty, and staff, the library's collections are also available to the general public.<sup>15</sup> The

Federal depository collections, and the services associated with those collections, are open to all regardless of age or affiliation. Members of the public who are unaffiliated with Rutgers and who wish to use depository materials during hours when a Rutgers identification card is required, may gain access with advance notice. The Libraries' reference and information services are available to all individuals on site, by telephone, by correspondence, and electronically. University affiliates may also qualify to request Rutgers materials, use Interlibrary Loan and Article Delivery, and use library instructional services. Other individuals are referred to their public library or other library at which they have privileges. Certain categories of individuals by virtue of their association with the University may be extended guest borrower status.

#### **D. What is the nature and mission of your institution?**

As the oldest and largest public university in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area, and one of the leading comprehensive public research universities in the United States, Rutgers provides teaching, research, and public service for the benefit of the residents of New Jersey.<sup>16</sup> Rutgers University Libraries supports this mission by providing essential scholarly resources and services to the Rutgers community and the public, advancing teaching, learning, research, and health care.<sup>17</sup> The Rutgers–New Brunswick collections, across all libraries and subjects, include over 1.7 million physical books, more than a quarter million physical media items, and more than 60,000 physical serials, as well as nearly 1.5 million digital items.<sup>18</sup> In a typical year, the libraries circulate nearly 100,000 physical and more than 3 million digital items, and provide nearly 30,000 items to other libraries via interlibrary loan.

The libraries employ roughly 50 librarians and more than 100 paid staff, on a full-time equivalent basis, as well as several dozen student assistants, on an annual budget of roughly 30 million dollars, of which approximately 60% goes to salaries, wages, and benefits, 35% to materials and services (the overwhelming majority to subscriptions), and 5% to operations and maintenance. The Alexander Library, alone, employs ten librarians, five archivists, and roughly 15 professional staff.<sup>19</sup> It is open approximately 290 days per year: seven days per week during fall and spring semesters and six days per week during winter and summer sessions, holidays excepted.<sup>20</sup>

#### **E. Has your institution ever had a preservation or conservation assessment or consultation?**

Alexander Library underwent a two-part preservation needs assessment in September and October 2023, conducted by David Moles, a graduate student in the School of Communication and Information. The first part, based on a

photographic survey conducted in February 2023 by preservation instructor and digital imaging specialist Lauren Bell, and delivered September 19, 2023, represented a general assessment of building infrastructure and collection conditions; the second part, delivered October 11, 2023, represented an environmental monitoring plan for the Alexander Library general collections area, in accordance with guidance from the National Archives and Records Administration and Northeast Document Conservation Center.

The current proposal extends the recommendations from the environmental monitoring plan to the entirety of the Alexander Library collections areas, while incorporating suggestions for storage improvements from the general assessment. Note that this request does *not* include suggested improvements to heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), to security and fire protection, and to lighting (e.g. installing improved lighting and sensors to reduce UV and visible light damage), which are covered by a separate NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant.

## **F. What is the importance of this project to your institution?**

This project will allow RUL to address critical recommendations outlined in the infrastructure and conditions assessment and environmental monitoring plans of September–October 2023. In addition, this project will ensure the long-term effectiveness of HVAC and lighting improvements funded by the NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections award mentioned above. Stabilizing the Alexander Library's collections and ensuring long-term access to the materials in those collections is critical to the ability of the Alexander Library and the Rutgers libraries in general to continue to provide world-class scholarly resources and services to the Rutgers community and to the public.

## **G. What are the names and qualifications of the consultant(s) and staff involved in the project?**

**Fernanda Perrone**, Archivist and Head of the Exhibitions Program, is an archivist and librarian with interests in American women's history, Japanese and Korean history, and exhibitions in archives and libraries. Dr. Perrone has worked in Rutgers Special Collections since 1995, and serves on the Steering Committee for the Rutgers–New Brunswick Libraries. She has an MLS in library science from Rutgers, a D. Phil. in history from the University of Oxford, and a BA in English and an MA in history from McGill University.<sup>21</sup>

**Erika Gorder**, University Archivist, has worked in Rutgers University Archives since 1998. She has a BA and MLIS from Rutgers and a master's degree in history and archival studies from New York University.<sup>22</sup>

**David Moles**, consultant, is a student in the Master of Information program at the Rutgers School of Communication and Information. They have an M. Phil. in history from the University of Oxford, and a BA in language studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Mx. Moles has no professional experience in conservation and no particular qualifications to make the preservation needs assessment described in Section E above; but that deficiency notwithstanding, Mx. Moles' assessment was free, and a qualified consultant would cost money.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Alexander Library*, n.d.
- <sup>2</sup> Smith, 1992, p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Toyama, 1992, p. 19; Smith, 1992, p. 13.
- <sup>4</sup> *Building Directory*, n.d.; *Digital Learning Commons*, n.d.; *Digital Humanities Lab*, n.d.
- <sup>5</sup> *Building Directory*, n.d.; *Hatchery Innovation Studio*, n.d.
- <sup>6</sup> Smith, 1992, p. 11; *Shelving Locations*, n.d.
- <sup>7</sup> *Special Collections and University Archives*, n.d.
- <sup>8</sup> *Sinclair New Jersey Collection*, n.d.
- <sup>9</sup> *Manuscripts at SCUA*, n.d.
- <sup>10</sup> *Rare Books at SCUA*, n.d.
- <sup>11</sup> *East Asian Library*, n.d.
- <sup>12</sup> *Alexander Library*, n.d.
- <sup>13</sup> *Sinclair New Jersey Collection*, n.d.; *Rare Books at SCUA*, n.d.
- <sup>14</sup> *Rutgers University Archives*, n.d.
- <sup>15</sup> *Access to Library Resources and Services*, n.d.
- <sup>16</sup> *About Rutgers*, n.d.
- <sup>17</sup> *Mission, Aspirations, and Values*, n.d.
- <sup>18</sup> *Reported Data*, 2021.
- <sup>19</sup> *Directory*, n.d.
- <sup>20</sup> *Visit and Study*, n.d. Summer and winter session reduced hours imputed from one Internet Archive capture dated June 30, 2023. Total days per year are approximated based on the Rutgers academic calendar and holiday closing schedule, and on the assumption of reduced hours during summer and winter sessions.
- <sup>21</sup> Perrone, n.d.; *Leadership Team*, n.d.
- <sup>22</sup> *Erika Gorder*, n.d.