Progressions

Preserving Culture with Skills Innovative and Traditional

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A Curious Mind, Brittle Paper, and a Preservation Legacy

Author Barbara Goldsmith was doing research in the mid-1970s when something struck her as odd. Pages from books she consulted were crumbling in her hands, but only ones published after 1850 or so. Older books were fine. So began Goldsmith’s successful crusade to have publishers revert to acid-free paper, which lasts 300 years rather than 30 and had been standard before wood pulp was introduced into papermaking. And she was just getting started. When Goldsmith died in June 2016, she left a conservation legacy that will benefit readers and researchers for generations to come.

In recognition of the Libraries’ outstanding conservation program, Goldsmith made a major gift to help establish the Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department in Bobst Library in 2006. Since then, the Department’s expertise has deepened and the field itself has expanded, with the Libraries at the forefront under the leadership of Paula De Stefano.

The Department’s specialists in book and paper conservation use a wide range of techniques, some cutting edge, some traditional—such as sewing bindings with linen thread and mending tears with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste. In the media preservation unit, technicians treat moving image and audio recordings on film and tape, obsolescent formats now at the end of their useful life.

The Libraries also collects and preserves born digital content, such as websites and digital art. Digital Library Technology Services (DLTS) manages reformatted and born digital content from special collections and in the Libraries’ digital preservation repository. DLTS and the preservation unit together develop standards and best practices for preserving and providing access to digital content. Most recently, with funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, they are developing new standards for digitally archiving the multimedia work of contemporary composers.

Several major digitization projects are underway in the Goldsmith Department. One, funded by a major grant from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, is digitizing collections of New York State history. A second is rescuing political footage from Cuba-based documentary filmmaker Estela Bravo, including her work on Fidel Castro.

Conservation students from institutions such as NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts and students from the Tisch School’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation program practice and refine their skills in the Goldsmith Department. “Barbara Goldsmith was passionate about preservation and proud of the national leadership role of our extraordinary conservation and preservation staff,” says Dean of Libraries Carol A. Mandel. “It is a fitting tribute to her memory that we are helping to train the next generation of experts.”

Clockwise from top right: Preservation Media Technician Biff McKeldin, Barbara Goldsmith () and Dean of Libraries Carol A. Mandel at the dedication of the Department in 2006, Media Preservation Labs Supervisor Ben Moskowitz, Barbara Goldsmith Curator for Preservation Paula De Stefano () inspecting film with Media Preservation Head Kimberly Tan, and Project Conservator Alex Bero. Photos: Dan Creighton; Alex Bero photo, Elena Olivo; 2006 photo, NYU Photo Bureau.
New Faces

Matthew Frenkle, Engineering Librarian
Formerly: Technician, Microscopy and Imaging Lab, American Museum of Natural History  
Education: PhD, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Rutgers University; BA, Physics, NYU

Undergraduate courses in the hard sciences and engineering, unlike those in the humanities, often do not have many inherent opportunities for students to develop advanced research skills, but students will need them in graduate school and professional life. I get a lot of satisfaction from introducing students to the library’s wide variety of electronic tools for making research and data management more efficient. I am planning a program for senior level undergraduates and new graduate students to explore ways to create, conduct, analyze, and share scientific research.

Dawn Mankowski, Special Collections Conservator
Formerly: Conservator, New York State Archives  
Education: M.A., Art Conservation, Library/Archives specialization, SUNY Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY; B.A., Art History/Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

I work to preserve and ensure access to our diverse primary source materials. On any given day, I might treat a manuscript cookbook, a rare edition of a Dickens serialized novel, an early book bound in parchment, a 20th century political poster, or a contemporary work on paper. I have expanded our photo-documentation program, including multispectral imaging of recently discovered medieval Talmud manuscript fragments. A rewarding perk of my job is the opportunity to share my book conservation knowledge with IFA students and our Mellon Conservation Fellow.

Jessica Pace, Preventative Conservator
Formerly: Assistant Conservator, American Museum of Natural History  
Education: MA, Art History, Advanced Certificate in Conservation, NYU; B.A., Art History and Visual Arts, Barnard College, Columbia University

I create strategies that mitigate the deterioration of materials in our archives and special collections. We have traditional content like papyrus, vellum, and paper, and some less categorizable items, such as animal skeletons and a stuffed alligator used in various installation works by the artist David Wojnarowicz, whose papers are in Fales Library. I work to improve the environments in which this valuable material is housed and used. You might find me checking the climate on the data loggers throughout the archives, or working with staff to develop and implement best practices for storing, handling, and exhibiting collections.

New AFC to Open January 23

The music collections in Bobst Library include tens of thousands of audio and video recordings in the Avery Fisher Center (AFC) and a hundred thousand books and musical scores. This winter, the AFC and the music stacks are moving from the 2nd floor to beautiful new quarters on the 7th floor. More study spaces, media ready carrels, and collaborative rooms are some of the enhancements that will greet students and faculty when the new AFC opens on January 23rd. Above: On the 7th floor, still a worksite in November, empty shelving units await delivery.

Kaddish Comes Home

Allen Ginsberg began writing his famous (and some say finest) poem, Kaddish, in the Beat Hotel in Paris in 1957, completing it in New York in 1959. The manuscript is archived in Fales Library, but it spent the summer in Paris as part of Beat Generation, an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou focused on the Beats and their Parisian ties. A plaque on the hotel lists its famous Beat guests. (See cover)
In New Lebec Reading Room, A Heartfelt Lesson in Giving

“The library is the heart and soul of a university,” said Leah Lebec, standing in Bobst Library’s 6th floor reading room in October. Lebec and her husband, Alain, were being honored for their million dollar gift to renovation. They were inspired by “all the opportunities this great university has opened up for our family,” Lebec said. She has a PhD from GSAS; both her parents had NYU degrees, and all the Lebecs’ children, Gabriel, Xavier, and Christina, are alumni as well. Lebec addressed them directly. “There is suffering in our world, and it is up to each of us to try to bring healing. Most of the time that will be in our daily interactions, not in any grand gesture. Don’t worry about giving money unless you can. Be of service. Shine a light in the world through civility, truth, and kindness.”

Vice Provost Ulrich Baer expressed gratitude on behalf of the University. Dean of Libraries Carol A. Mandel thanked the Lebecs for “honoring their NYU ties and encouraging the success of new generations of students by helping to create this beautiful Lebec Reading Room.” Looking at the wall of windows with its sweeping view above Washington Square Park, Leah Lebec observed, “I cannot think of any other room in any other building that would more eloquently symbolize the power of a great education.”

L to r: Emily Sanford and Christina, Leah, Xavier, Gabriel, and Alain Lebec. Photo: Elena Olivo