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A Letter from the Director

I joined the staff of the MSU Libraries in 1982 and have enjoyed almost every day since. Over the years, there have been so many wonderful colleagues, library enhancements, users assisted, and great friends made along the way.

I was honored to be asked to serve as director starting in 1997 and never imagined that I would end up serving more than two decades. My how time flies! In the earliest days, there was only “one computer in the back room” where a select few attempted to log in to mainframe computers and pursue primitive database searches, generally without success.

Obviously, much has changed since then, and that is, at least in part, why I have asked the Office of the Provost to initiate a search to find the next head of the MSU Libraries. Specifically, I have asked that the new head be appointed to start on January 1, 2018. However, should that timetable prove insufficient, I will remain as long as June 30, 2018. This is prompted by the feeling that a short-term interim head is disruptive to the administrative flow of an organization. My hope is that the six-month window will enable a direct transition to the next permanent head.

Regardless of the exact transition timetable, one thing is certain. I’ll leave knowing that an exceptionally competent and dedicated staff has been assembled, one that will enable the new head to take the Libraries forward confidently on whatever course is chosen.

Thank you to the central administration for the trust and support they have provided, without which this great staff could not have been assembled, and a very special thanks to Jim Ranz, Beth Shapiro, and Dick Chapin. I hope I’ve justified the faith that they all showed in a young librarian.

Sincerely,

Cliff Haka
**The Joy of Collecting, Giving, and Appraising**

Charles Schoenknecht (left) and Ward Paul (right) are a married dynamic duo. They are experienced antique, art, and book appraisers as well as avid collectors. Both of them have been collecting all of their lives. For Ward, it started with collecting silver when he was eight years old. For Charles, it started with fabrics and costumes, coins, stamps, and rocks.

Now, they enjoy collecting on a professional level with a mutual focus on supporting MSU Libraries as well as art museums and historical societies. When they first became supporters of the Libraries, they asked Associate Director for Special Collections and Preservation, Peter Berg, “What are you missing? Where are there holes? What should we be out there searching for?”

Charles and Ward are stewards and caretakers of the materials they collect, always thinking in a historical and artistic context. When they collect, restore, and appraise rare items, they play a role in saving history. The ephemera they collect, in particular, can be extremely valuable to researchers a century from now but could be accidentally mistaken as insignificant today without foresight. Charles points out that ephemera can “just disappear if you don’t grab it or catch it and then appraise it and give it a new life.”

Charles and Ward take great joy in the process of hunting for rare and unique items. They have always been heavily involved with museums, but working with MSU Libraries has opened them up to different viewpoints and new areas of collecting, “I think that was part of the fun of getting involved with Special Collections. It gave us another focus,” Ward explains.

Charles was inspired to begin collecting manuscripts for MSU after a trip to the vault in Special Collections to see a late-fifteenth century book of hours. He recalls the experience, “My heart stopped for a second. I lost my breath. It had the most gorgeous colors. I have seen them in museum cases, but to actually be there without a piece of glass and to use my finger to move the page, I about died and went to heaven.”

Charles and Ward have donated numerous gift-in-kinds to MSU Libraries including maps, comics, and rare LGBTQ history and culture materials which are now being made accessible for research. When they make a donation, they enjoy meeting with the librarians who manage the collections and seeing their excitement over the gifts. It’s in those moments that they know they are really making a difference. Charles notes, “Everybody is appreciative and it makes the process of giving even more fun.”

For the two of them, giving is a rewarding experience, “Learning to give and let go is probably one of the most wonderful experiences you could possibly have in your life. You go, ‘Oh, I gave it away!’ and you go, ‘Oh, there’s a burden off my shoulder.’ Or it’s an object that could make somebody happy or make somebody become more enlightened,” Charles explains.

Through their donations, dedication to preserving history, and expertise as appraisers, Charles and Ward have supported MSU Libraries in countless ways over the years. We are immensely grateful to them for their generous gifts.
In July, Patrick Olson officially became the new Head of Special Collections. He is in charge of the day-to-day responsibilities for the department while Peter Berg continues as Associate Director for Special Collections and Preservation.

Olson is well prepared for this role given his extensive background working with rare books and special collections. He joined MSU in 2014 as the Rare Books Librarian and maintains that role, even as Head of Special Collections. Prior to MSU, he held special collections positions at the University of Iowa, MIT, and the University of Illinois, where he also earned his MLIS.

In Olson’s ten years of experience working with special collections, he has done cataloging, collection development and curation, instruction, and exhibits. Before he became a librarian, he spent four years working in the rare book trade.

Since his first day in the new position, he has already handled considerable changes in the department including growing staff, expanded hours, and the relocation of Special Collections to a beautiful, newly renovated space on the first floor. “Moving into this new space is part of that push to really set us up as a standard in the Special Collections world,” Olson explains.

He is thrilled that the public spaces for Special Collections are out of the basement and now located in a high-traffic area between the two main entrances. He hopes the glass walls that surround the space will increase visibility and generate interest in the collections.

One of his major priorities is to continue expanding instruction and outreach to increase awareness and use of the collections. Olson is eager to utilize the core rare book collection for instruction which comes as no surprise given his background in traditional rare books.

Olson looks forward to working closely with the collections and the Special Collections team as well as playing a more programmatic role in the long-term direction of the department. He shares his vision for Special Collections, “Ten years from now, I want to be able to look back and say we are one of the top ten public university special collections in the country.”

He believes this will be achieved “by continuing to build the collections, promoting use at all levels, promoting the research collections more broadly, and bringing in people not only from on-campus to use the collections, but from around the country and the world.”

He is honored to be in this role and believes it is a privilege to be part of the future direction of Special Collections. Patrick Olson definitely has the skills, passion, and long-term vision to be a strong leader, and the MSU Libraries are fortunate to have him.
Celebrating Major Renovations and a Growing Art Collection

On the evening of August 18, 2017, 170 library supporters, MSU faculty, and library staff gathered at the Main Library for a special event to celebrate the newly renovated Special Collections space on the first floor as well as recent art installations in the Main Library. The guests were able to see the new Reading Room and view an exhibit of Special Collections highlights by Patrick Olson, the new Head of Special Collections.

Clifford Haka, Director of Libraries, gave a short speech sharing his excitement over the opportunities the new Special Collections space will offer including increased visibility, more instruction sessions, and upgraded exhibit space. He also called attention to the growing collection of art throughout the Main Library and thanked Robert and Elizabeth Anderson for their generous gift of Seminar Room furnishings for Special Collections.

After the Director's remarks, guests mingled around the Main Library and viewed the art collection, including a newly installed sculpture, *Doorway for the Blues*, by John T. Scott (detail at left).

A lot of hard work went into planning and building the new Special Collections spaces and expanding the art collection. It was wonderful to celebrate those achievements. Thank you to all who attended and celebrated with us!

We strive to move all of our special collections into a retrofitted, climate-controlled space on 3-East, but we need your help to make this plan a reality. Make a gift to the Special Collections Relocation Fund, big or small, and help us preserve our world-class collections for many years to come.
Mold Samples Could Reveal More About the German Criminology Collection

The German Criminology Collection contains books from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and provides insights into the history of German criminal law and politics. Prior to arriving at MSU in 1965, some of the books unfortunately acquired mold.

It is difficult to know when the mold might have developed in the books given their old age and the long journey they made from Germany to America. In an attempt to learn whether the mold was of German or American origin, Bexx Caswell-Olson, Special Collections Conservator, decided it was time to do an experiment.

She started her investigation by reaching out to an expert on campus, Dr. Frances Trail, who is a Professor of Plant Biology and specializes in studying microfungi. Trail was immediately intrigued, "Microfungi fascinate me, so wherever I can find them, I will be glad to explore and sample."

In July, the two of them met in the Florence G. Wallace Conservation Lab to take mold samples from a few of the German Criminology books, and only one of the six mold samples ended up being viable. Trail was surprised, "I didn’t realize that you would have, essentially, a lab and all of the thought and work that it takes to keep rare books."

Now that the samples have been taken, Trail is in the process of identifying the mold cultures using DNA sequencing. If she can determine whether the mold is of German or American origin, it could help us better understand when the water incident occurred, and more importantly, whether or not there is a threat of the mold continuing to grow.

Many thanks to Dr. Trail for sharing her expertise with us and taking the time to conduct this experiment!
Faculty Testimonials:  
Primary Resources Enhance Teaching and Learning

“Bringing my students to MSU’s Special Collections is always a wonderful experience. Students get to explore fascinating materials, and nothing has quite the same effect as holding the materials in one’s own hands.

In the sessions at the library or in the classroom, my class of 50 students works in small groups, exploring an exciting array of materials and applying course concepts to generate their own knowledge and interpretations.

The sheer variety of materials that Special Collections offers has consistently impressed me, and Ruth Ann Jones always does terrific work finding materials that align brilliantly with the learning goals and subject matter of the course; she also designs great workshops to get students interacting with the materials, and it’s always a memorable and pedagogically rewarding class session. I absolutely plan to continue working with Special Collections for my future classes.”

Ellen Moll, Ph.D., Academic Specialist, College of Arts and Letters, Michigan State University

“Over the past seven semesters, Ruth Ann has designed numerous workshops for students in my WRAC and Women’s Studies courses. In doing so, she has gone above and beyond to create customized online resources, locate primary and secondary source materials, and guide bewildered students through the library’s varied resources.

Her assistance definitely made students more comfortable as they approached new and unfamiliar prompts. More than a few students have mentioned how helpful Ruth Ann has been both inside and outside of the classroom. I would suggest that fellow instructors schedule sessions with her as she is just as knowledgeable as she is passionate about helping students.”

Shelby Pumphrey, Dual Doctoral Major, African American and African Studies & History, Michigan State University

“In my almost ten years at MSU, Special Collections has been an extraordinary resource and experience for my students. The materials are incredibly rich, and the staff could not be kinder or more knowledgeable. It adds immeasurably to the intellectual and educational mission of the university—it’s one of the true gems of our institution.”

Charles Keith, Associate Professor, Department of History, Michigan State University

Ruth Ann Jones, the Special Collections Education and Outreach Librarian, teaches primary source literacy to MSU classes of all kinds and works with students and faculty doing independent research in Special Collections. As part of her outreach efforts, Jones hosts open houses throughout the semester highlighting unique gems from Special Collections (see back cover for event details).
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS OPEN HOUSES • FALL 2017

Homecoming
Saturday, 10/21/17 • 1:30–3:30pm
Amazing and surprising treasures from the MSU Libraries' Special Collections will be on display. Experience one of MSU's Points of Pride!

Witches and Demons
Tuesday, 10/24/17 • 6–8pm
Get ready for Halloween with rare books about witches, demons, and spirits, including the famous medieval text Malleus Maleficarum.

American Schoolbooks
Tuesday, 11/7/17 • 6–8pm
What kind of textbooks did American children use 200 years ago? Check out historical schoolbooks from the Revolutionary era to the 1950s.

Radicalism Posters
Tuesday, 11/21/17 • 6–8pm
If you loved the Art of Rebellion exhibit at the DIA, you'll want to see our posters from the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam War protests, the farm workers' movement, the anti-apartheid campaigns, and more.

Zine World
Tuesday, 12/5/17 • 6–8pm
Explore science fiction zines from the 50s, punk zines from the 70s, riot grrrl zines from the 90s, and the zines of the 21st century.

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