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# Special Collections

*Brian Shetler, Drew University, Convener*

## **MEMBERS PRESENT**

- Brian Shetler, Drew University, Convener
- Cindy Aalders, Regent College
- Chris Anderson, Yale University
- Carisse Berryhill, Abilene Christian University
- Jenny de Klerk, Regent College
- Liz Leahy, Azusa Pacific University
- Patrick Milas, New Brunswick Theological Seminary
- Peggy O’Kane, Lancaster Theological Seminary
- Steve Perisho, Seattle Pacific University
- Elizabeth Peters, Yale University
- Armin Siedlecki, Emory University
- Daniel Smith, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
- Margie Wallace, Athenaeum of Ohio-Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

## **MEETING**

The Special Collections Interest Group met online via Zoom as part of Atla Annual 2020 on Thursday, June 25, 2020 from 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Central time. The meeting was convened by Brian Shetler, Drew University.

## **AGENDA**

- 1) Approval of 2019 Meeting Minutes
- 2) Announcement/Discussion Regarding Convenor of SCIG
- 3) Group Discussion of Special Collections in the Time of COVID
- 4) Institutional Reports
- 5) New Business
  - a) Discussion of plans for 2021 Atla Annual (including excursion)

## **APPROVAL OF 2019 MINUTES**

Brief introductions were made. The minutes of the 2019 meeting of the Special Collections Interest Group were then approved with no changes.

## **UPDATE ON GROUP CONVENER**

Due to the COVID pandemic and uncertainty about this year's Atla Annual, Brian Shetler (Drew University) decided to continue to serve as convener for this year. This seemed like the best way to move forward for this year and to maintain consistency in convenership, rather than having someone new rotate in during the pandemic. At last year's meeting, Cindy Aalders (Regent College) was nominated to take over the convener role for this year. Cindy agreed to move her term to next year when things will return to an in-person meeting format. This decision was supported by the group and we thank Cindy for her flexibility and willingness to serve as convener in 2021. Brian mentioned that part of the role of the convener is to set up the SCIG excursion in our host city each year; this year's excursion was going to take place at the Detroit Public Library with their state history archival collections. With the conference moving online, this excursion could not happen. A brief discussion ensued about next year's Atla conference location (Ft. Worth, TX). Cindy and Brian will work together to plan the excursion for next year.

## **SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID**

The group discussed how moving to a virtual environment has changed their work in special collections. Brian (Drew University) mentioned that they saw an increase in the number of class interactions once the university moved to online teaching; this was due, in part, to the fact that faculty members were looking for ways to engage their students online other than just straight lectures on Zoom. Cindy (Regent College) discussed having to make new rare book purchases from home and how they are now housed "off-site" in her house. Jen (Regent College) mentioned that the summer and fall courses, which will all be online, may provide opportunities for classroom presentations. She is working with professors to do some virtual presentations and has seen some good responses to her queries. Carisse (Abilene Christian University) mentioned that they

have one staff member who has been able to go into the library regularly and is able to get a good amount of work done since the library is not fully open. Carisse is also using this working-from-home opportunity to clear out some older material and go through backlogs; one of her colleagues will be going on maternity leave soon and Carisse will be taking on some of her duties, including social media. Brian pointed out that social media platforms seem to be more active and engaging during this time, and this is reflected in increased followers and comments on Instagram in particular. Chris (Yale University) discussed the role of social media at Yale Divinity Library and its overall increase in usage across the board. He also discussed how COVID has changed his focus to working from home and doing a lot of clean-up work online (website, catalog, and finding aids). Elizabeth (Yale University) discussed specifically how she is cleaning up the online finding aids, editing and updating them to meet modern archival standards and adjusting for readability and accuracy. A student worker at Yale is editing finding aids that have Chinese place names and adding in more accurate names. Chris mentioned that Elizabeth has recently completed a lengthy finding aid (425 pp.) for a large collection related to the World Student Christian Federation.

## **INSTITUTIONAL REPORTS**

### *Emory University*

Emory is getting a new university president in August. The library has been closed since March and will be closed for the foreseeable future; a few staff members are able to go in but most have been home since March. The annual Reformation Day will be held virtually this year. While it is disappointing that it cannot be in person, the online version presents an opportunity for a larger audience to attend virtually. Exhibit hall is closed, but they are at work converting an in-person physical exhibit on religion and science to an online exhibit, which should launch in the fall.

### *New Brunswick Theological Seminary*

The library was shut down fairly quickly in March. They have been using existing images/digitized items for classes online. They have a digital services librarian who goes into the library to take pictures/scans of items for social media and online class use. Courses for the summer and fall will be online. Russell Gasero, archivist for the

Reformed Church, is retiring soon after 42 years in the position, leaving big shoes to fill. The library is renaming the reading room after an African American graduate of the seminary in honor of a new direction for the seminary and as an acknowledgement of racial justice.

#### *Azusa Pacific University*

The campus closed in early March. One of Liz's colleagues has been working on-site from the library since then, but the rest of the campus is closed. Special Collections is working on a large Tolkien-Lewis collection that was acquired about a year ago, with two catalogers working full-time from home to catalog all of the materials. A planned exhibit for the fall (on the Salvation Army) will probably need to be altered in case people cannot access it in person. Teaching in the fall is being planned both online and face-to-face. The library received a grant to help incorporate the sciences into library work and curriculum. There is a lot of change in the university administration, including interviews for a new provost and the need for a new library director.

#### *Abilene Christian University*

A new dean (James Wiser) is coming into the library to start in early August. Only the head of Special Collections will be working on-site for the foreseeable future, with Carisse working from home.

#### *Regent College*

Still actively collecting/purchasing material thanks to a generous donor to the Puritan Project. Cindy and Jen are working together to photograph and post material on Instagram. Discussions are underway for doing online exhibits (replacing the in-person ones). The library should be opening up to staff soon, and so will allow people to work with material in-person again. There is a digitization project already underway, and these will be made available through OCLC shortly. Regent is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year; a large homecoming celebration was scheduled for this year but has been delayed until next year. The library has been actively collecting materials for archives and special collections that tie into the founding of the college. Seven or eight years ago, Regent purchased an enormous pamphlet collection owned by Samuel Wilberforce. These thousands of items are being cataloged from home by library staff during quarantine.

*Seattle Pacific University*

Last fall, they did a special collections exhibit for a faculty retreat on spiritual practices. Steve found a few items that they were able to purchase for the exhibit and to add to the special collections holdings. For the first time, a church history class came into the library for a visit and display of materials both in-person and, after COVID hit, in a digital format online.

*Drew University*

Discussed working with classes in multiple different formats (in-person, online synchronous, and asynchronous) in the upcoming semester.

Liz asked about doing online exhibits and the programs/software used. Carisse mentioned using WordPress to create virtual exhibits with scanned/digitized material that corresponds with all physical exhibits that are put up on site. Steve does similar work with LibGuides, creating exhibits for classes to use remotely. Brian mentioned using Omeka as an online exhibit platform, both for creating online versions of physical exhibits and solely online exhibits. Drew has a new hire in Instructional Technology who has helped them to expand the look and feel of their Omeka exhibits. Chris and Elizabeth discussed their online exhibits done through Omeka at Yale. Peggy discussed the use of Omeka as a site for online transcription, which proved very popular and successful as a transcription setting. Jen asked about timing, how often online exhibits are produced and put up; Brian and Carisse talked about how they create online exhibits every 3–4 months as a tie-in to the physical exhibitions that are on display.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Brian mentioned that we will be in Ft. Worth for Atla Annual in 2021. He and Cindy will work on the Special Collections Interest Group excursion as part of the conference. In the meantime, he asked that others in the group think about other ways to bring special collections to the Atla conference (through presentations, projects, etc.).



**2019–20 GROUP:** [pictured, left to right] Chris Anderson, Brian Shetler, Steve Perisho, Cindy Aalders, Peggy O’Kane, Carisse Berryhill, Jenny-Lyn de Klerk, Elizabeth Peters, Daniel Smith, Liz Leahy, Patrick Milas