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# Special Collections

*Kristy Sorensen, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Convener*

## **MEMBERS PRESENT**

- Kristy Sorensen, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Convener)
- David Buresh, Virginia Theological Seminary
- Clay-Edward Dixon, Graduate Theological Union
- Indira Douglas, New Brunswick Theological Seminary
- Christina Gather, New Brunswick Theological Seminary
- Liz Leahy, Azusa Pacific Seminary & University
- Patrick Milas, New Brunswick Theological Seminary
- Brian Shetler, Princeton Theological Seminary
- Armin Siedlecki, Emory University

## **AGENDA**

Meeting agenda and summary of discussion.

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Reflections on Atla in Long Beach (or virtual Atla)
  - a) Congratulations to Liz Leahy and the Local Host Committee for putting on a great conference.
  - b) Almost all the sessions were recorded, and they will be posted in 4-6 weeks. Links will be on Sched when available and an email will go out to registrants.
  - c) Several people noted that the sessions on AI were particularly helpful, especially the Saturday workshop. Attendees learned about the many different AI programs that all do different things and got ideas for how AI may be incorporated into the work of theological librarianship.
  - d) While there were many great sessions, three were called out as being particularly helpful -- Beyond Mere Denominationalism in Atla: Exploring Ways to Enhance Professional Development and Resource Sharing in Theological Librarianship; Discard to Discovery:

Empowering Majority World Theology Libraries  
Through Book Donations; and Tools and Technology for  
Teaching the History of the Book at a Theological Library.

- 3) Round Robin reports (see below)
- 4) Review last year's work:
  - a) Our primary achievement over the past year was reviving the Special Collections Interest Group discussion list with the help of Alexis Weiss at Atla. We used the list to share professional development opportunities and news of interest, and as a place to ask questions and start conversations.
- 5) Ideas for this coming year
  - a) Add a co-convenor? This could help distribute the workload and create a built-in succession plan. In the past, this group has had a co-convenor model, but it fell off during the pandemic. All agreed that it is worth trying again. Will post to the discussion list asking for volunteers to open the opportunity beyond just those on the call.
  - b) Encourage people to submit a proposal that would be "sponsored" by the special collections interest group. The discussion list would be a good avenue for encouraging people to present on special collections topics or to build a panel on a theme.
  - c) Work with the conference planning committee for next year's meeting in Pittsburgh to include a workshop option on a rare books and manuscripts topic. Liz notes that an instructor from the Rare Books School may be willing to travel to Pittsburgh to give an abbreviated workshop-length instruction on rare books for theological librarians. In the past, workshops on book repair and preservation have been popular.
  - d) Brainstorm possible excursions relating to special collections in conjunction with the Atla Annual meeting in Pittsburgh in 2025. The conference hotel is within walking distance of Duquesne University, which may have some interesting collections. Could also do a walking tour of historic churches near the hotel. It was noted that any excursion ideas should be solidified early enough to be added to the schedule and clearly communicated to attendees so they can plan to arrive in Pittsburgh early enough to attend. The cost of transportation will also be a deciding factor.

## 6) Other items

- a) Brian Shetler noted that the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) will be held at Yale next year with a focus on the repatriation of collections. A call for papers is coming out soon, and Brian is on the organizing committee.
- b) Brian also reports that he has a chapter titled “The Changing Realities of Special Collections and Archives: Facing the Future with Confidence” in *Personalizing the Pandemic: Experiences of Theological & Religious Studies Librarians During COVID-19*, an Atla Open Press title.
- c) Q&A:
  - Q: Should scanned archival photographs be cleaned up using Photoshop (damaged corners, ink markings, etc.)? If so, should you keep both copies? A: In general, we only clean up to adjust contrast/color balance. The goal is to make the scan look like the photo. Damage and markings on the original may be of interest to researchers. Clean-up also takes a lot of time. If you adjust the settings on the scanner or even just lay white paper behind the photo you can quickly correct many issues with contrast or color balance. Occasionally digital clean-up is warranted (for example, if a photo is being used in an exhibit or publication). In those cases, you should also keep the original scan.
  - Q: What kind of security is recommended for exhibit cases? They are heavy, but not locked, and are kept in a public and not-always-staffed area. A: Locks are important when cases aren't in restricted areas. Some exhibit cases can be retrofitted to add a lock. Alternatively, you could use facsimiles in the case rather than originals.

## 7) Adjourn

## YEAR IN REVIEW

Highlights and/or summary of your group's activities over the past year.

- No specific activities this past year.

## ROUND ROBIN REPORTS

**Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary** – In January 2024, upon the retirement of Timothy Lincoln, the archivist, Kristy Sorensen, was appointed the Associate Dean of Library & Learning Services. Rodrigo Leal, who previously served as the Learning Technologies Librarian, was appointed the Learning Technologies Librarian & Archives and Records Manager. Prior to his work as the Learning Technologies Librarian, Rodrigo served as a part-time Archives Assistant at the Austin Seminary Archives. Recently, we digitized and posted 55 issues of the *Unánimes* newsletter (1979-1999) to the Austin Seminary Digital Collections (<https://austinseminarydigital.org/collections/show/81>). *Unánimes* was a publication by the Mexican American Coordinating Council (MACC), later the Hispanic American Ministries Council (HAMC). Both groups were a part of the Synod of the Sun (PCUSA), formerly Synod of Red River (PCUS) and Synod of the Sun (UPCUSA).

**Azusa Pacific Seminary & University** – Staff have finished digitizing just about everything in the extensive Henrietta Mears collection and are working on metadata for the digitized files. They will be using JSTOR as their institutional repository. Two films about Henrietta Mears will be coming out this year and the filmmakers used material from Azusa's collections. Unfortunately, staff cuts (including the lead special collections librarian & archivist) have necessitated the closure of special collections and archives for the foreseeable future.

**Emory University, Candler School of Theology** – Church historian Jonathan Strom, a big supporter of special collections and archives, was recently named the new Dean of the Candler School of Theology. Work continues processing a large English Bible collection, and they have recently acquired a copy of the Nuremberg Chronicle, one of the most famous early printed books, which has been featured in a recent exhibit.

**Graduate Theological Union** – The library continues to collaborate with the Internet Archive to digitize and provide access to library material that would not fit in their reduced footprint, and recently they have expanded that collaboration by becoming an Internet Archive scanning center. Archives and rare book material that had been temporarily stored off-site have been returned in good shape. They have recently received a large donation of religiously associated artwork and are in the process of creating a teaching museum for the history of sacred art.

**New Brunswick Theological Seminary** – It has been a delightful and eventful year at the Gardner A. Sage Library – in person and online. In February, Sage Library welcomed the new Archivist of the Archives of the Reformed Church in America, Dr. Elizabeth Pallitto. And in November, Indira Douglas was promoted to Access Services and Reference Coordinator. Library staff have enjoyed several important projects to date. Technical Services Librarian and Archivist Christina Geuther migrated our archives inventory from MS Access to Excel to facilitate ingesting metadata for recent donations. We received a donation of rare books and papers belonging to J. van Kuiken, a Reformed pastor who was chaplain to Queen Juliana of the Netherlands. He was instrumental in Dutch immigration to Canada and the growth of the Reformed Church throughout Canada.

Most of Sage Library's off-site collection has now been entrusted to the Internet Archive for digitization, perpetual hosting and access. Over-sized, antique folios returned to New Brunswick for further review by library staff and faculty. We were able to cull some of the 19th-century biblical language dictionaries and lexicons to make space available both for the Presidential Papers of Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield, President Emeritus of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and the women's history collections of Mary Kansfield.

Producers of the PBS show *Finding Your Roots* contacted the Archives of the Reformed Church in America for records pertaining to an ancestor of writer and actor Lena Dunham. The RCA Archives had received the seventeenth-century record books of the Collegiate Church in December of 2022, which were photographed and used for research for the episode. Dunham's paternal eighth great-grandfather, Stephanus van Cortlandt, was a significant figure in the early history of New York City and became the first native-born mayor of

New York. The episode “In the Blood”, which aired on April 2, 2024, explored Cortlandt’s legacy-- including his dealings with the Lenape tribe and involvement in slavery.

**Princeton Theological Seminary** – The archives has been receiving some big donations and making process on processing with a small but mighty staff. Recently processing of the Prathia Hall papers was completed, and work is wrapping up on a collection focused on theology and UFOs from alumnus Barry H. Downing. The library recently installed new state-of-the-art exhibit cases thanks to a grant from the board, and the inaugural exhibit honored their new president, Jonathan L. Walton, along with a history of the presidency at the seminary. A crew from a Vietnamese TV network visited the archives recently to film for an upcoming show on Thich Nhat Hahn, who was an alumnus of Princeton Theological Seminary.

**Virginia Theological Seminary** – Dr. Mitzi Budde, the head librarian for the last 33 years, is retiring in July and will be succeeded by Dr. Joseph Thompson, a current faculty member at VTS, in August. David Buresh will continue as the Rare Books Curator, having learned a great deal about the collection and about rare books from Dr. Budde. They are working to preserve, curate, and provide scholarly access to 6,500 rare books that were recently transferred to Virginia Theological Seminary from the General Theological Seminary in New York, as part of an affiliation between the two seminaries. The books include incunabula, as well as many early English Bibles and a fine collection of Early English Theology books (1522-1700). They are looking forward to featuring the collection in future exhibits.