The Life of Mary Church Terrell Examined

Uncasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell, published in 2021 by the University of North Carolina Press, is Alison M. Parker’s newest work. Parker is Chair and Richards Professor of American History at the University of Delaware. Her research and teaching interests include U.S. women’s and gender history, African American history, and legal history. She majored in art history and history at the University of California, Berkeley, and earned a PhD from the Johns Hopkins University. In 2017-2018, Parker was an Andrew W. Mellon Advanced Fellow at the James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference at Emory University.

Parker is author of Articulating Rights: Nineteenth-Century American Women on Race, Reform, and the State (2010) and Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933 (1997). Parker also serves as co-editor of the Gender and Race in American History book series for the University of Rochester Press. As Chair of the History Department at the University of Delaware, Parker is committed to helping to build a coalition of students, faculty, and staff promoting a wide-ranging anti-racism agenda.

Born into slavery during the Civil War, Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954)

Continued on page 7

Dime Novel Digitization Funded by NEH

Terrell Main Library is participating in a grant funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to digitize dime novels published by Street & Smith.

Dime novels are a form of American popular literature produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With copies printed in the millions, on the least expensive paper, dime novels were the original ‘pulp fiction,’ cheap enough to be purchased by readers of all social classes. With themes ranging from Westerns to romances to detective stories, there was something for literally everyone. Street & Smith was among the leading publishers of the genre.

Continued on page 6

Malangatana Valente Ngwenya
paintings loaned to Art Institute of Chicago
Story on Page 7

The Witch Doctor, or The Purification of the Child (O feiticeiro, ou A purificação da criança), 1962, Malangatana Ngwenya. Oberlin College Libraries, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Lloyd H. Ellis Jr. in memory of Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane ’53.
Update from the Interim Co-Directors

We would like to provide an update from the Libraries for the spring semester.

Hours for spring 2021
Service hours for each library are posted on the libraries website, along with details for accessing the collections and using library facilities.

The service model for the branch libraries is very similar to fall semester, as described in Perspectives, Spring/Fall 2020.

Terrell Library
In-person use walk-in (card swipe access only after 4pm and weekends)
Monday – Thursday, 8am–9pm; Friday, 8am–4pm; Saturday, 10am–4pm; Sunday, 10am–9pm
Chat Reference available
Monday – Thursday, 9am–12pm, 1–5pm and 7–10pm; Friday, 9am–12pm, 1pm–5pm; Saturday, Closed; Sunday, 1pm–4pm. Virtual research appointments also available.

Art Library
In-person use by appointment
Monday – Friday, 9am–12pm and 1–4:30pm; Sun. 2–8pm

Science Library
In-person use by appointment
Monday – Friday, 9am–12pm and 1–5pm, plus virtual research appointments as indicated online.

Conservatory Library
Book pickup / drop off at the “Circ @ Central” station, located in the lobby of the South Professor entrance. Virtual research appointments also available.

Special Collections
On-site reference by appointment ONLY
Monday, 10am–12pm and 1–4:30pm and 5:30–9pm; Tuesday – Friday, 10am–12pm and 1–4:30pm; Sunday, 1–5pm
Contact Special Collections for assistance: scollect@oberlin.edu

Archives
On-site reference by appointment ONLY. Online research help, Monday – Friday, 10am–12pm and 1–4:30pm
Contact the Archives for assistance: archive@oberlin.edu

• Scanning: The Art Library has a new easy-to-use cradle scanner that is fast and accommodates oversize materials.

• Study Spaces: Students who are looking for a change of scenery for quiet study can book a study room or space in the Terrell Library, Art Library, or the Science Library.

• Staffing: Library staff continue to provide uninterrupted service during the pandemic with rotating schedules, contactless pickup, and virtual reference.

• Fire Safety and Networking: The Mudd Center will be getting some new wiring for networking as well as an enhanced fire safety system.

• The Collection: All of the libraries will be undergoing updates to their HVAC systems, thanks to the Carbon Neutrality project. This will lessen our carbon footprint and better protect the collection. Hours of operation may be affected; check the libraries website for updates.

• Under the Ramp: The air will again be filled with the lovely sounds of Obies singing for various choral performances this spring just outside of the Mudd Center, weather permitting.

• Director Search: The search for the next director of the Oberlin College Libraries began in January. The Libraries’ staff looks forward to working with the search committee during the process.

We appreciate your support of the Oberlin College Libraries and offer best wishes for spring 2021. Thank you.

—Tracy Sutherland and Ken Grossi, Interim Co-Directors of the Libraries
Lyric Grimes ’17 is the second-named recipient of the Virginia Proctor Powell Florence (OC 1919) Friends of the Oberlin College Libraries Graduate Library School Scholarship. Grimes was an East Asian Studies major who served as a Shansi Fellow in 2017-2019. She is currently enrolled in the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill School of Library and Information Science. Find other 2020 Graduate Library School Scholarship recipients and the story of Virginia Florence in Perspectives, Fall/Spring 2020.

Friends Council

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Recent Gifts

The Libraries gratefully acknowledge the following significant monetary gifts and gifts-in-kind.

Major monetary gifts:
• Wayne G. Johns ’73, for the Librarian’s Discretionary Fund.

Generous monetary gifts:
• Robert I. Cassady ’54, for the Friends of the Libraries.
• Edwin E. Dugger ’62, for the Conservatory Special Book Fund.
• Dean S. Edmonds, for the Conservatory Special Book Fund.
• Gwendolyn F. Freed ’85, for the Librarian’s Discretionary Fund.
• Joseph C. Hickerson ’57, for the Mary Church Terrell Endowed Book Fund and the Friends of the Libraries.
• Maxine J. Houck ’58, for the Friends of the Libraries and the Ray English Endowed Library Discretionary Fund.
• Norman O. Jung ’56, for the Friends of the Libraries.
• Lucy K. Marks ’73, for the Lucy K. Marks ’73 English and Classics Book Fund.
• Mark M. Nelson ’80, for the Friends of the Libraries.
• Janice R. Pardoe ’88, for the Friends of the Libraries.
• William Pollak ’58, for the Ken Roose Economics Library Book Fund.
• Michael Shinagel ’57, for the Friends of the Libraries.
• Andrew H. Stone ’80, for the George A. & Susan P. Lanyi Fund for Library Acquisitions.
• Avonelle Walker ’53, for the Conservatory Special Book Fund and the Friends of the Libraries.

Significant gifts-in-kind:
• Albert Matlin, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, donated books to the Science Library and the Terrell Main Library.
• Oberlin College Press donated books to the Terrell Main Library.
• Robert Rotberg ’55 continues to donate books to the Terrell Main Library.
• Kenichiro Sasae donated books to the Terrell Main Library.
• Thomas Schiff donated books to the Clarence Ward Art Library.
• Richard Uhlmann ’74 donated The Illustrated History of Apples in the United States and Canada to the Science Library.
• Victor Yalom ’82 donated an institutional subscription to the complete set of databases, Psychotherapy.net, as well as social work collections to the Terrell Main Library.
In an effort to increase donor support and engagement, the Libraries once again created a commemorative calendar. For each month, the calendar, 2021: Fun Facts from the Archives of Oberlin College and Conservatory, features photographs and documents from the Archives that are related to significant years in college and conservatory history. The chosen anniversary markers were 25 (1996), 50 (1971), 75 (1946), 100 (1921), 125 (1896), and 150 (1871).

The commemorative calendar was given as an incentive to donors who gave a gift of $100 or more to the Mary Church Terrell Endowed Book Fund. The book fund assists the libraries in expanding their collections and acquisitions of materials related to cultural diversity, civil rights, community leadership, and social justice. Thanks to the generosity of donors, the current yield from this fund is more than $3,700.
As products of their times, some characters and imagery from dime novels reflect sexist, racist, and xenophobic attitudes prevalent in society. What makes the content offensive to modern readers also makes them excellent primary sources for contemporary students and scholars of literature, history, and sociology.

Because they were ephemeral and not taken seriously as literature at the time of publication, dime novels were not widely collected by libraries. Digitization is the best way to preserve these fragile and elusive bits of Americana and make them accessible to future generations.

Oberlin was invited to join the project by the principal investigators at the lead institutions, Villanova University and Northern Illinois University, who had previously collaborated on another dime novel digitization grant; additional partners in this project include Stanford University and Bowling Green State University.

Each partner library will digitize and provide metadata, or descriptive information, for specified issues from their collections, which will be added to the central repository housed at Villanova University. All of the issues will be made fully searchable with optical character recognition software to improve discoverability and usability.

As is the case with many libraries, Oberlin’s holdings of dime novels came from the private collection of a local aficionado. The Walter F. Tunks Collection, housed in Special Collections, is a cache of more than 4,000 items from a variety of publishers. Some of these novels have been available since late 2017 in the Internet Archive (see archive.org/details/ocdimenov).

Megan Mitchell, Academic Engagement & Digital Initiatives Librarian, will coordinate Oberlin’s participation in the project; Heath Patten, Visual Resources Curator, will oversee the digitization; Diane Kajganich, Special Collections/OberlinScholarship OA Cataloger will create the metadata; and Ed Vermue, Head, Special Collections and Preservation, and Gena Reynolds, Special Collections and Preservation Assistant, will manage access to the material as well as conservation.

The grant project runs through June 2022. The project was featured in the Wall Street Journal, May 29, 2020; see wsj.com/articles/a-digital-afterlife-for-dime-novels-11590778083

The library is also contributing to the Edward T. LeBlanc Dime Novel Bibliography, an ongoing project which aims to create a comprehensive online database of dime novels, story papers, reprint libraries, and related materials, maintained by Demian Katz, Director of Library Technology at Villanova University. Details of the project are at dimenovels.org.
Malangatana Valente Ngwenya paintings loaned to Art Institute of Chicago

During last year, Special Collections and the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM) each loaned paintings to the Art Institute of Chicago for an exhibition on modern African art pioneer and Mozambique artist Malangatana Valente Ngwenya.

Installed from July 30 – November 16, 2020, the Art Institute’s curated exhibition Malangatana: Mozambique Modern presented a survey of the artist’s bold, experimental work between 1959 and 1975. Largely self-taught, Malangatana has a distinctive style and takes an allegorical approach to depict daily life in Mozambique, mixing symbols and motifs culled from his experience of local craft traditions, Christianity, and folklore.

The libraries’ work, The Witch Doctor, or The Purification of the Child (O feiticeiro, ou A purificação da criança), painted in 1962, was given to the libraries by Dr. and Mrs. Lloyd H. Ellis Jr. in memory of Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane ’53 (see Perspectives, Fall 2013). Also, in Mondlane’s memory, the Ellis family donated Malangatana’s 1963 painting The Poet as a Child (O bebé poeta) to the AMAM.

Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane served as the president of the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO) from its founding in 1962 in Tanzania until his assassination in 1969. He is considered the father of Mozambican independence. After graduating from Oberlin, Mondlane earned a Master’s and PhD degrees in anthropology from Northwestern University. He taught at Syracuse University before returning to Africa to lead the independence movement. A plaque commemorating Mondlane’s life is installed in the lobby of Peters Hall.

Another library-held resource on Mondlane, the Herbert Shore Collection, is distributed between the College Archives and Special Collections. This rich collection contains both original and reproduced materials documenting Mondlane’s life.

To learn more about the exhibit Malangatana: Mozambique Modern and see related materials, visit the Art Institute of Chicago’s exhibitions website artic.edu/exhibitions/9169/malangatana-mozambique-modern.

Mary Church Terrell

would become one of the most prominent activists of her time, with a career bridging the late 19th century to the civil rights movement of the 1950s. The first president of the National Association of Colored Women and a founding member of the NAACP, Terrell collaborated closely with Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, W. E. B. Du Bois, and other notable leaders. Unceasing Militant is the first full-length biography of Terrell, bringing her vibrant voice and personality to life. Though most accounts of Terrell focus almost exclusively on her public activism, Parker also looks at the often turbulent, unexplored moments in her life to provide a more complete account of a woman dedicated to changing the culture and institutions that perpetuated inequality throughout the United States.

Drawing on newly discovered letters and diaries, Parker weaves together the joys and struggles of Terrell’s personal, private life with the challenges and achievements of her public, political career, producing a stunning portrait of an often underrecognized political leader.

In 2015, Alison Parker contacted Oberlin College to connect the libraries with the Raymond Langston Family. The Langston Family donated a collection of papers of Mary Church Terrell to the Oberlin College Libraries (see Perspectives, Spring 2016).
Library Instruction Services in the Virtual Environment

As necessitated by the pandemic, library workshops, instruction, and research assistance now happen virtually, for the most part, with some in-person encounters. Research appointments through Zoom, virtual tours, video tutorials, speaking to “hybrid” classes in-person while maximizing screen sharing with students in a remote location, and remote teaching are all part of library services.

Group instruction in the libraries has not disappeared completely, however. Inventive rearrangement of furniture in the art library has created a space for students to safely handle books from the collection and study images in-person, so necessary for the discipline. One-on-one assistance is offered in-person in both the art and science libraries, accessible by appointment through a booking system on the libraries’ website. Special Collections and Archives staff have also managed to provide in-person assistance and access to materials, utilizing space on the main level of Terrell Library (see Perspectives, Spring/Fall 2020).

Other things that remain the same include:
- paying attention to how people learn,
- emphasizing active learning and student engagement, and
- working to ensure instruction is inclusive and accessible for all learners.

Early in the fall semester, connecting with every first-year student through the First Year Library Advisor (FYLA) program was accomplished with short videos to introduce students to their personal librarian. These unique welcome videos provided contact information and encouraged students to be in touch with questions. The videos can be viewed on the FYLA Research Guide: libguides.oberlin.edu/first-year.

Most course-related instruction in this virtual environment was and is offered synchronously, working collaboratively with faculty during regularly scheduled class times. This helps create a sense of community and connection with the library, enhanced by active learning techniques such as classroom polls, instructor-led breakout discussions, padlets or whiteboards, and reflective writing. One drawback of the virtual environment is its reliance on technology and strong internet connections; not all Oberlin learners have computers or high-speed connections. Despite the challenges, 70 synchronous sessions were conducted during the fall semester, which compares favorably with sessions conducted the previous year.

With some students in-person and others in remote locations, hybrid courses offer the chance to meet the class in-person. A few librarians took advantage of that option during the fall semester and found that students appreciated the visit. More often, remote instruction was the norm. Flexibility is key.

There were only a handful of asynchronous instruction sessions offered during the fall semester. In asynchronous instruction, instructors create online lectures and assignments for learners to work through at their own pace. One such example was MHST 101 - Introduction to the History and Literature of Music, in which a series of seven short videos substituted person-to-person instruction. It is challenging to create learner-to-learner interaction in asynchronous classes, and peer review was used in those settings as a way to create a learning community.

The libraries’ research guides are another asynchronous teaching tool. They were heavily used in the fall semester; a total of 331 research guides on the libraries’ website garnered 25,600 views! One of the most-viewed guides is

“Citation,” which explains the process of citing research resources. Remote access to electronic library resources, available 24 hours a day, is essential for the current learning environment.

One-on-one research appointments is another remote offering that has been successful, with librarians facilitating over 200 appointments. Anyone can sign up for library assistance via Zoom. A one-on-one session with a librarian or archivist can focus on in-depth research assistance or a quick refresher on accessing databases or anything else that helps get needed sources.

Finally, take a look at the libraries’ Vimeo channel (vimeo.com/user5041809) and more than 160 videos. Vimeo allows various levels of quality, a helpful attribute for students with limited internet. Some learners have noted that they prefer screen captures and text rather than videos, and library staff will keep that in mind as new instructional tools are created. Going forward, evaluation of all of the libraries’ new services could very well result in adopting and enhancing aspects of virtual services for continued use in a post-pandemic environment.
Students’ honors theses and dissertations are a growing category in the Digital Commons, especially from students in the humanities, social sciences, computer science, and mathematics. Theses from students in some departments are not routinely deposited in the Digital Commons, as honors work is often undertaken as part of ongoing research investigations led by faculty (typical in biology, chemistry, geology, and neuroscience). The data analysis and conclusions for those projects may ultimately be incorporated in manuscripts submitted for publication, which precludes their inclusion in the Digital Commons.

The collection includes works from as far back as 1924 (Champion, Milton M., “The Physiographic History of Five River Valleys in Northern Ohio,” submitted for the Master of Arts in Geology, under the direction of George Hubbard). Thirty-six honors theses from 11 different departments were deposited last year, covering disciplines across the curriculum. The breadth of research presented by students, especially given the constraints of working remotely in the first year of the pandemic, is extraordinary. Acknowledgment is due to Diane Kajganich, Special Collections/Oberlin Scholarship OA Cataloger, for her work to digitize, process, and load student work in the Digital Commons. Other student work in the Digital Commons includes abstracts of presentations at Senior Symposia, Celebration of Undergraduate Research, and miscellanea. All told, there are more than 6,000 works in 17 different formats in the Digital Commons, with faculty and staff scholarship making up the bulk of the collection. Link to the Digital Commons from the “Search Tools” page on the libraries’ website or go directly to digitalcommons.oberlin.edu.

Anne Salsich, Associate Archivist, curated a virtual exhibition featuring historically significant art works in Art in the Archives of Oberlin College. Among the works are a drawing by Edmonia Lewis, busts of Lucy Stone (OC 1847) and John Brown, and Arab garments gifted by Emir Faisal to President Henry Churchill King in 1919. Two new acquisitions have never before been presented to the public: an embroidered Chinese robe gifted to Margaret Leonard, executive director of Oberlin Shansi Memorial Association, by H. H. Kung (donated by Carl Jacobson and Deb Cocco in 2020), and a Thai painting given to Oberlin missionary Dan Beach Bradley by King Monikut of Siam in the late 19th century. The exhibition is online at scalar.oberlincollege.library.org/archives-art.

Salsich is developing Environmental Thought and Activism at Oberlin College, with the intention of including new content from faculty and students in the Environmental Studies Program. She built the historical section and parts of the 20th-21st century components as a scaffolding for new research by collaborators. Professor of Japanese Ann Sherif has expressed interest in contributing content on the Green Legacy Project, the subject of a Junior Practicum in fall 2020.
New Digital Resources

The libraries recently acquired many new digital resources for the collection, driven in part by the need to support remote teaching and learning. The following represents a sampling of those resources.

Cochrane Library

Cochrane Library is a collection of databases in medicine and other healthcare specialties that summarizes their evidence-based medical findings. Cochrane’s members and supporters come from more than 130 countries worldwide. Their global independent network summarizes evidence from research, and they do not accept commercial or conflicted funding. The database provides systematic reviews and meta-analyses that summarize and interpret the results of medical research and make clinical trials readily available. It will support the new public health concentration in the college.

ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Oberlin’s access has been expanded to include Leftist Newspapers and Periodicals. Previous access included Chinese Newspapers Collection, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and the Times of India. Every issue consists of the complete paper, with full-page and article images in downloadable PDF format. Researchers can study the progression of issues over time through these historical newspaper pages, including articles, photos, advertisements, classified ads, obituaries, editorial cartoons, and more.

Encyclopedias

Birds of the World is a robust research database that brings together Birds of North America, The Handbook of Birds of the World, Neotropical Birds, and Bird Families of the World in a single platform where users can explore in-depth history and information on birds. Included are tens of thousands of media assets (photos, videos, and sound recordings) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Macaulay Library (macaulaylibrary.org).

Encyclopedia of International Economics and Global Trade is a comprehensive overview of the theory and evidence on the causes and consequences of global trade, the economics of international trade, and financial and monetary transactions. Content provides a discussion of today’s central policy debates, such as the impact of globalization on employment, wages and income distribution, international financial flows, the effects of tariffs and protectionist policies, exchange rate regimes, and the role of the multinational enterprise on global growth, technical change, and income distribution.

This four-volume encyclopedia, Germany at War: 400 Years of Military History, explores how, despite some of the most advanced weapons and advanced tactical proficiency, Germany lost both World Wars. Coverage includes the Federal Republic of Germany, its predecessor states, and the kingdoms and principalities that combined to form Imperial Germany in 1871.

Worldmark Encyclopedia of the States presents information on all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and all U.S. dependencies. State articles are organized into standardized rubrics that allow for easy comparisons across states. Information on famous persons, statistical tables, and a bibliography are included.

Handbooks

The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory is a collection of essays that aim to convey a fuller understanding of music theorists’ terms in everyday teaching and research.

Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies is international in perspective and surveys the state of the discipline by examining emerging and cutting-edge areas.

Routledge Handbook of Minority Discourses in African Literature provides a critical overview of literature dealing with groups of people or regions that suffer marginalization within Africa, and brings together diverse perspectives to give a holistic representation of the African reality.

The Routledge Handbook of North American Languages comprises two distinct parts: the first surveys some of the issues and considerations most frequently discussed in the study of North American languages, and the second surveys some of the most commonly discussed language families of North America.

The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Activism includes case studies and histories of oppressed and marginalized people from over 20 different languages. The source includes a substantial introduction, 31 chapters, and an extensive bibliography.

The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender brings together work from more than 20 different countries and represents various aspects of gender in translation and its effects, both local and transnational.
Technical Services Keep Us Going

The pandemic hasn’t posed a significant upset to the processes of technical services, despite the realities of working from home and coordinating on-site schedules to maximize staff safety and efficiency. Generally unseen by the public, staff of the technical services side of the libraries work tirelessly to provide support for the collections, including acquisitions, access to and discoverability of library materials, as well as catalog and bibliographic maintenance and authority control.

Collection development continues unabated with guidance from the newly formed Collection Services Leadership Group, liaison librarians, and essential staff working with local digital collections. The group is chaired by the Head of Collections and Discovery. Many new selections are available electronically, though the print collection continues to grow as well.

Discovery and Metadata Services (DMS) looks simultaneously different from prior operations and the same or improved in terms of efficiency and workflow. Library staff were agile in adapting to the new setting of working from home and establishing a system by which they could safely continue cataloging and processing new materials for the libraries.

Initially, these efforts included transitioning workstations to new laptops, scanning materials in need of cataloging, and working from PDFs but soon encompassed spreadsheets and tracking boxes of materials to and from the library, enabling many staff members to work entirely remotely. A lingering challenge for catalogers is dealing with the smaller work surface of a laptop screen; reviewing bibliographic records and comparing data between different cataloging software is more easily accomplished on the large monitors left behind in staff work areas.

DMS staff used the early period of working from home to tackle special projects; cataloging backlogged materials, including rare and unique items; and accomplishing database cleanup projects to improve the catalog for patrons, not the least of which included changing problematic subject headings. These “behind the scenes” cleanup projects help improve findability and search efficiency in some instances, and provide updated and improved bibliographic information in others.

In terms of other efficiencies, the previous in-person model of regular meetings has been streamlined by either Zoom meetings or Google Chat. While virtual meetings lack some sense of familiarity, collegial and collaborative work not only remains possible but entirely successful in helping to achieve the libraries’ mission of supporting the education, research and artistic goals of the institution.  

Lindsey Felice, Discovery & Metadata Services Assistant

Sara Hasley, Discovery & Metadata Services Assistant

Tim Keller, Head of Collections & Discovery
Photo Albums Added to African & African Diaspora Collection

Over the past three years, Special Collections acquired six late 19th- and early 20th-century albums of photography and a collection of glass plates of images in Africa. Ed Vermue, Head, Special Collections and Preservation, worked closely with Matthew Francis Rarey, Assistant Professor of Art History, to bring these works to Oberlin. Collectively, they represent a significant expansion of the libraries’ African holdings, and provide unique primary sources to support curricula in African and African diaspora art history, Africana Studies, and (to a lesser degree) ethnomusicology.

Taken as a whole, the albums contain over one thousand gelatin silver prints taken by Europeans across western and central Africa. Some were dedicated to the documentation of colonial projects, as is the case with an early 20th-century album produced as a visual record of the construction of a steam locomotive railway in Congo. Another album, circa 1909, records the activities of a French expedition across the borderlands of the present-day Central African Republic, Cameroon, and Chad. Members of the expedition produced portrait photographs across the region while also recording architecture and scenes of daily life. A large early 20th-century album contains over six hundred prints from southern and southwestern Nigeria. Produced by British anthropologist Percy Amaury Talbot, a prolific writer on Yoruba cultures, it contains portraits of early 20th-century Yoruba and Urhobo kings, detailed photographs of religious architecture, and images of Yoruba objects closely related to some currently held in the Allen Memorial Art Museum. The ethnographic impulse behind Talbot’s work parallels an album produced by the director of the Leipzig Zoo, focused on Liberia. It contains rare photographs of a Loba masquerade, in addition to extensive documentation of Liberian cotton, rubber, and palm oil plantations primarily worked by forced and conscripted labor. A personal travel album from the 1890s rounds out the collection; it was produced by the crew of a French steamship that traveled between Madeira, Martinique, and French and Portuguese West Africa. Its photographs provide a rare comparison of West African and Caribbean identities at the same time.

These acquisitions are now integral to courses taught by Rarey, which examine African visual cultures, the visual dynamics of European colonialism in Africa, and Afro-Caribbean religions. “These albums are not only critical documents of African societies during a period of dramatic social change wrought by European colonialism,” Rarey argues, “but they also allow students to carefully consider how and why photography functioned in colonial settings. Can they use these images as primary sources, or do they also represent the desires of their European makers to present specific visions of African peoples?” By continuing to expand the college’s collections in this area, Vermue and Rarey hope to broaden the scope of materials students use to think critically about the relationship between photography, visual representation, and colonialism in African and African diaspora history.

Vermue noted that his goals with these acquisitions is to add to the rare primary resources for teaching and private study that have been underrepresented historically. He further stated, “Our special collections – which provide students with a heightened experience of doing original research – should attempt to keep up with the changes in the college’s curriculum and the stories we tell ourselves. That means looking beyond the Euro-American cultural sphere towards competing cultures and unrecorded perspectives. These photo albums specifically give Oberlin College students a glimpse into past lives of those who were otherwise excluded and do so in an accessible, if problematic, way.”
Scroll down to the bottom of the libraries’ website, and you will find no fewer than 19 ways to connect with the libraries through social media. Some of the accounts were relatively quiet over the past year, but there is renewed interest in reaching out to the community through these platforms. Follow the libraries on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr, or read posts in Blogger. Each library or department has its own focus in the various social media outlets. The Main Library Tumblr is actually a platform for all departments in the libraries, including Archives. Enjoy some screenshots here, from Instagram and Tumblr, and visit the libraries online for more! 

Ready, set, read! Oberlin College Libraries is hosting a reading challenge! February 1, 2021 - May 31, 2021.

You can sign up to participate and learn more about the challenge here.

We will highlight reading suggestions every weekend during the spring trimester, so be sure to stop back for ideas!

Follow us!
Staff Publications, Presentations, and Professional Activity

Kathleen Abromeit, Conservatory Public Services Librarian, was named a senior fellow for Advancement of Grinnell College Excellence, where she is mentoring a staff member from an underrepresented group for three years.

As editor of the Music Library Association’s Basic Manual Series, Abromeit spearheaded a new topic area for publication, “Belonging in Music Libraries.” The development of this publishing area was designed to “promote belonging by expanding our inclusion structures that recognize and accommodate differences in our music libraries.”

Deborah Campana, Head, Conservatory Library, completed a five-year term as editor of the Music Library Association’s quarterly journal, Notes. She now chairs the MLA Publications Committee, for another five-year term.

Ken Grossi, College Archivist, participated in a pre-recorded panel discussion as part of the Pennsylvania State University Douglass Day program on February 12. The panel focused on the important work of the stewards of the collections related to Mary Church Terrell’s life and legacy, and included Adrienne Cannon from the Library of Congress and Dr. Lopez Matthews from Howard University.


Anne Salsich, Associate Archivist, serves as a reviewer of applications for the National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions. Salsich also serves as an invited Editorial Board Member of the Midwest Archives Conference journal Archival Issues for a three-year term, beginning in the summer of 2020.


Jessica Grim on Peace Corps Experience

Former Collection Development Librarian Jessica Grim began her Peace Corps service in January 2019, shortly after leaving her position in the libraries (see Perspectives, Spring 2019). She recalls her time in Myanmar, where she spent 14 months teaching English “in a public K-12 school at a gorgeous, crowded, fantastic, complicated city near the Andaman Sea,” in an article on the Peace Corps website. Her assignment was cut short by the pandemic, as she and thousands of other Peace Corps volunteers worldwide were called home. Read Grim’s story at peacecorps.gov/stories/reflection-serving-myanmar-60/.

In Memoriam: Irene Omori

Irene Omori worked in the Main Library Acquisitions department, reporting to former Collection Development Librarian Eric Carpenter, from 1982 to 1987. She passed away on November 23, 2020, after a long residence in Wesleyan Village, Elyria. Her obituary is posted on the Busch Funeral website bit.ly/3ptihpS, which notes that Irene was born in Hawaii and she earned her bachelor’s from the University of Hawaii. Carpenter recalled Omori fondly, saying, “She was a joy to work with: capable in handling complicated library records for over 2,000 subscriptions as well as supervising student assistants whom she trained to do much of this detailed work. She was warm-hearted and quietly efficient in a very self-effacing manner. In short, Irene was one of our best technical services staff during her time of service.”

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Tamika Y. Nunley, Associate Professor of History, Comparative American Studies, Law & Society, at Oberlin College discusses her recent book *At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.* Drawing on newspapers, government documents, letters, abolitionist records, legislation, and memoirs, Professor Nunley traces how Black women navigated social and legal proscriptions to develop their own ideas about liberty as they escaped from slavery, initiated freedom suits, created entrepreneurial economies, pursued education, and participated in political work. In telling these stories, Nunley places Black women at the vanguard of the history of Washington, D.C., and the momentous transformations of nineteenth-century America.

Virtual Friends of the Oberlin College Libraries Event

April 15, 2021, 4:30-5:30pm EST
Registration: Free, but registration is required. Contact: Ken Grossi, Oberlin College Libraries, ken.grossi@oberlin.edu.