

L/ Life



Keepers of the ORIGINALS

Maps, swords, clothing and letters are treasured and shared by university archives **E4**

At Hofstra, senior library assistant Debra Willett and archivist Michael O'Connor amid the stacks of primary source materials in the university's Special Collections.

DAWN MCCORMICK

ACT 2

How a health crisis turned into a book and a mission **INSIDE**



HOWARD SIMMONS

BUCKET LIST

Put on your costume and step into history **E2**

S1



Kristen J. Nyitray is director of Special Collections and University Archives at Stony Brook. She said she often gets inquiries from people about caring for their own papers.

RICK KOPSTEIN

Can't find THIS online

Archivists say primary source material is crucial to combating misinformation — and teaching students how to access it is key

BY LIZA N. BURBY
Special to Newsday

A rare 12th century manuscript decorated with gold and silver borders, a style known as “illuminated.” A letter signed on March 19, 1777, declaring Township of South Hempstead property owner John Birdsall Jr.’s allegiance to the king of England.

Photos and articles from Jonathan Larson’s college theater projects before he wrote the musical “Rent.”

Rare Long Island maps, spy letters, war posters, yearbooks, political papers, cartoons and even costumes.

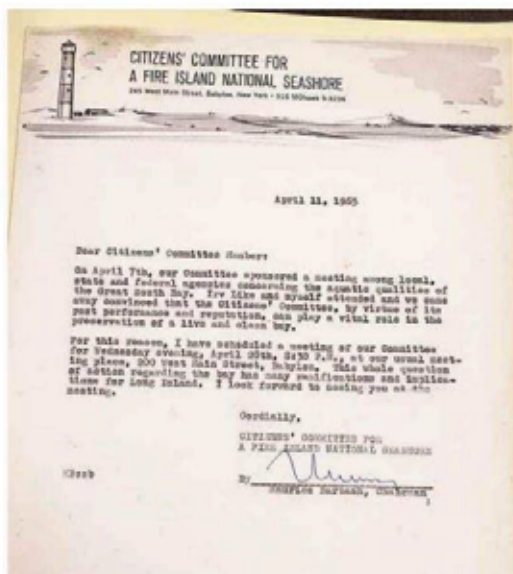
These are just some of the notable items among the special collections at Adelphi, Hofstra and Stony Brook universities available for researchers, students and the public to view, learn from and appreciate. But unlike a typical library, these are closed stack collections: noncirculating materials that can be

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viewed in person by appointment or accessed through advanced databases that can then be shared in digital formats.

Often these are unique or hard-to-find materials, said Lorrie A. McAllister, dean of the Joan and Donald E. Axinn Library, which houses Hofstra’s special collections, including its Long Island Studies Institute, which has the Birdsall document.

“Special collections at universities are important because

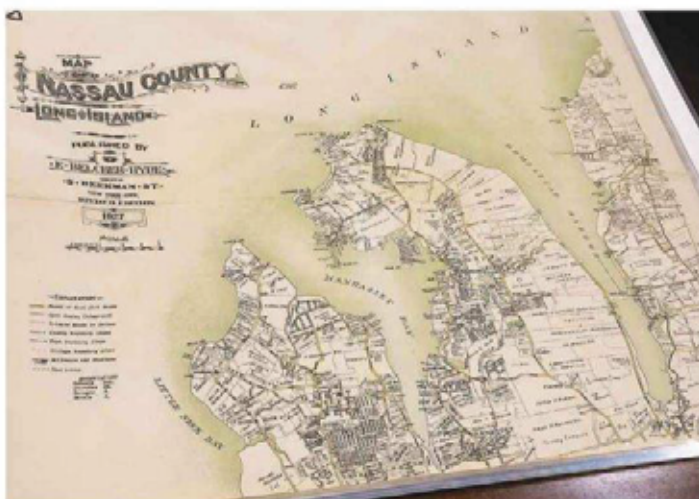


Stony Brook University's archives include materials that document the successful campaign to block Robert Moses' proposed highway through Fire Island, culminating in the establishment of the Fire Island National Seashore.

RICK KOPSTEIN



DAWN MCCORMICK



A 1927 Nassau County real estate map of a section of the North Shore is part of the Stony Brook University collection.

RICK KOPSTEIN



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At Adelphi, whose archive includes swords, a parasol and nurse uniforms from the 1940s, Ashley Kranjac said that an important part of the job is cataloging the items in a way that allows researchers to find them.

they provide opportunities for researchers to research with primary source materials, like Civil War letters and the papers of various faculty members or of prominent individuals or groups within the region," she said. "That allows researchers to find new connections between what is happening now and what has happened in the past."

McAllister said university archives often collect materials that represent the history of the institution, like campus planning and student life, including student newspapers. All three of the Long Island universities that Newsday visited have materials focused on documenting regional history, including old maps and letters.

PRESERVATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

A focus of these collections is preservation, said Kristen J. Nyitray, director of Special Collections and University Archives at Stony Brook.

"[We're] committed to stewarding and preserving historical research materials that represent diverse histories and cultural heritages, including distinctive collections that document Long Island, New York," she said.

Another goal is accessibility, said Ashley Kranjac, digital collections manager of Adelphi's University Archives and Special Collections in Garden City. "That means cataloging the items and making them accessible to the community through finding aids like online databases, which are critical to communicating to researchers what sort of special treasures are in our archives. How do we make sure that the description of our materials is easily findable, usable, searchable? It's a challenge for every library and archive."

Making material accessible means fielding inquiries from researchers looking for information for books and documentaries or just a yearbook photo



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A first edition 1755 dictionary, left, and a photo of playwright and Adelphi alum Jonathan Larson.

of a person's father for their milestone birthday, said Michael O'Connor, the archivist for Special Collections at Hofstra University in Hempstead.

WORKING WITH LOCAL SCHOOLS

Part of that accessibility is doing outreach so Long Is-

landers are aware of the collections, said Debra Willett, a senior library assistant at Hofstra, who said she works with local school districts.

"We've gone to middle and high schools, or the students have come to us, and we help them do research projects," she said. "We might bring local

census records or old yearbooks. It gives them pride in their schools, but we're also teaching them how to use the collections."

Nyitray said two letters written in 1779 and 1780 by George Washington to Ben-

See COVER STORY on E6

Artifacts that touched LI

COVER STORY from E5

jamin Tallmadge about Long Island's Culper Spy Ring are part of Stony Brook's collection included in the annual Culper Spy Day event in Seatauket.

"People are very interested in that history, but I also find increasingly they're also interested in learning how to care for their own family papers, letters and photographs; their own historical documents," said Nyitray, who shares information about conservation (which can include repairs), preservation and storage.

HANDS-ON STUDENT EXPERIENCE

David Ranzan, university archivist and special collections librarian at Adelphi, said special collections are also an educational resource for professors and their students.

"The core thing is hoping that people will use primary source material because it is so important these days with misinformation," he said. "Having students learn about how to evaluate and have access to primary sources is one of the key ways of doing that."

For instance, Nyitray, who is also the SBU archivist and associate librarian, said that an English professor at Stony Brook regularly brings his classes to see — and touch — their medieval illuminated manuscript to learn publishing history, and a creative writing class will be using a Tuttle-Hawkins Family Collection of more than 1,000 postcards for writing prompts.

BASED ON DONATIONS

The universities' collections often are donated by alumni and others who might see a connection between their materials and the university, said Kranjac. For instance, the best-selling author Alice Hoffman ("Practical Magic"), who graduated from Adelphi in 1973 and runs a summer writing program there, has donated about 150 boxes of her materials, including manuscripts and letters.

But the administrative process of cataloging and preserving these collections takes time and funding — and not everything fits their mis-



Nineteenth century fans and daguerreotypes, below, are part of Hofstra's Hart Nichols Collection, which spans 200 years, from 1730 to 1930, in the lives of two Long Island families.



sions — so archivists and librarians said anyone considering a donation must first make an appointment with staff.

"We don't want plastic bins of materials left outside our doors," O'Connor said.

ADELPHI'S ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Website: bit.ly/4nKPriP
Established: About 1967
Collection: Special Collections contains the University Archives and about 75 other collections, approximately 25,000 images and around 9,500 rare books and other manuscripts. Topics include the Spanish Civil War, Panama Canal history, dance and performing arts, modern British radicalism and the social, political and cultural history of Long Island.

Highlights: The Timothy Lester Woodruff Papers includes about 6,000 letters. He served three terms as lieutenant governor of New York from 1897 to 1902 and was the first president of the Adelphi College Board of Trustees. The Bill and Bunny Hoest Comic Art Collection includes images from "The Lockhorns," "Howard Huger" and "Agatha Crumb." Bunny Hoest graduated from Adelphi in 1953. The Ruth St. Denis Collection includes the choreographer and dancer's costumes. She founded the Department of Dance at Adelphi in 1938.

Requests: Kranjac said she hears from about five people a week, worldwide, asking for information. For the 2021 film "Tick, Tick . . . Boom!" about "Rent" creator Jonathan Lar-

son, who graduated in 1982, she was contacted for materials about his student projects. Kranjac said the BBC often requests caricatures poking fun at England and France from their William Hone collection, which includes the work of George Cruikshank. Cruikshank was a popular caricaturist who collaborated with William Hone, an early 19th century British writer, reformer and satirist. Adelphi houses many of his illustrations.

How to access: To request materials or visit during open hours, contact uasc@adelphi.edu or 516-877-3588 to schedule an appointment.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AT HOFSTRA

Website: bit.ly/4mSQY61

Established: Early 1950s

Collection: Rare books and manuscripts brought together by theme; University Archives, which focuses on the history of the university; and the Long Island Studies Institute, a major center for the study of the area's local and regional history. O'Connor said there are more than 400 collections, approximately 40,000 books, more than 12,000 rolls of microfilm (newspapers and other records) and 450-plus maps.

Highlights: The Long Island Business and Industry Catalog project has 43 business and industry collections, ranging from a small general store and grocery in Sag Harbor at the end of the 19th century to the Grumman Aerospace Corp. The War Posters Collection includes poster artists of the World War I and World War II eras who illustrated familiar slogans like "I want you for the U.S. Army" and "Loose Lips Sink Ships." The Weingrow Collection of Avant Garde Art and Literature has 4,000 original illustrated books, manifestos, periodicals, catalogs, posters, prints, manuscripts, photographs, film and records, which represent the Dadaist, Surrealist and Expressionist movements.

Requests: O'Connor said they get about five requests a week from those locally and internationally "who say they're writing books and need information from one of our collections in relation to Long Island

or New York State, like an 1873 Long Island map or a newspaper from the 1700s or 1800s." Willett added, "We did get a request for material about Francis Ford Coppola, who graduated from Hofstra in 1960. There's no graduation photo of him, but he was covered in the student newspaper, the Hofstra Chronicle."

How to access: Special Collections are open by appointment only by calling 516-463-6411. For Long Island Studies information, email lisi@hofstra.edu.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES FOR STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Website: bit.ly/468HGvD

Established: 1969

Collection: Rare books, manuscripts, historical maps and university archives and memorabilia that date to the 17th century. There are 675 collections and about 700 maps and atlases. The rare book collection includes more than 30,000 titles.

Highlights: The Senator Jacob K. Javits Collection houses nearly 2 million items — including speeches, letters, photographs, audiovisual recordings and memorabilia — chronicling the entirety of Javits' career in public service. Nyitray said the Citizens' Committee for a Fire Island National Seashore Collection documents the successful campaign to block Robert Moses' proposed highway through Fire Island, culminating in the 1964 establishment of the Fire Island National Seashore. The Dan's Papers Digital Archive contains 60 years of the East End newspaper.

Requests: Nyitray said she gets about 700 inquiries a year, ranging from people researching the American Revolution, Colonial history and the history of local properties and transportation. "There are always the requests for year-book photos and past campus events like Stony Brook's concert history," she said.

How to access: Virtual research consultations and class session planning are available via Zoom, and physical access to all collections is by appointment. Contact the director at kristen.nyitray@stonybrook.edu.

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