



UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES  
*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA*



**INSIDE: UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES PARTNERS WITH FREEDOM  
CENTER, CIVIL RIGHTS ICON CLARA LUPER ARCHIVES**

## SOONER HORIZON

University of Oklahoma Libraries, Special Research Collections  
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“  
*As an organization,  
 we recognize  
 that community  
 engagement is  
 essential to our  
 continued success.*  
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**Greetings Friends of the University of Oklahoma Libraries,**

I am humbled to introduce myself as the associate dean of Special Research Collections at the University of Oklahoma Libraries. Since I assumed this role in October 2022, I have been overjoyed by the warm and gracious welcome I have received from colleagues and collaborators throughout the university community. Furthermore, I have been inspired by the Libraries’ bold strategic vision that recognizes the immense value of distinctive library collections for scholars, students and community members.

As associate dean, I am committed to creating and communicating a visible, unified identity for special research collections at the University of Oklahoma Libraries that emphasizes our unique collecting areas, assets and expertise as well as our shared services, mission, values and priorities.

Creating transformative learning and research opportunities will remain a hallmark of our work in special research collections. Leveraging unit expertise, collection assets and learning technologies, we will sustain our commitment to the delivery of services that empower campus, regional, national and global scholars, and learners to use these materials to imagine, explore, discover and create knowledge that changes lives.

As an organization, we recognize that community engagement is essential to our continued success. Special Research Collections will continue to prioritize forming and strengthening trusting, reciprocal and socially responsible partnerships that advance the preservation of our shared cultural heritage, honor our diverse identities and experiences and support the betterment of our communities.

We will privilege inclusive collection building and continue to invest in the excellent stewardship of our collection resources, ensuring their long-term preservation and access through a commitment to processing, preservation and metadata practices that are informed by professional standards, emerging research and inclusive value systems.

In this issue of *Sooner Horizon*, my colleagues and I are proud to highlight the excellent, visionary work being done across the Special Research Collections unit to advance these aims and goals. In this issue, you will learn about unique projects and initiatives to digitize and provide online access to unique archival resources, community partnerships to advance the preservation of Oklahoma’s diverse heritage, global research partnerships that foster unique scholarly opportunities on campus and exhibitions that shed light on OU Libraries’ profoundly rich collections.

As friends and supporters of OU Libraries, your support is invaluable to our continued success in achieving our goals and fulfilling our vision. I look forward to meeting you, working with you and learning from your knowledge and perspective as I continue to navigate my first year as associate dean for special research collections.

The support of a robust and engaged community of friends is essential to the continued success of our collections, programs and services. I am so very grateful for your interest in the mission and work of OU Libraries and hope you enjoy the snapshot in this edition of *Sooner Horizon*!

Sincerely,

**MICHAEL SZAJEWSKI**

*Associate Dean for Special Research Collections*

**UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA*

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## SPECIAL RESEARCH COLLECTIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES

The University of Oklahoma Libraries' Special Research Collections advances innovative scholarship, transformative learning and the preservation of invaluable cultural heritage. The unit serves a diverse range of students, faculty, visiting scholars and community members by providing access to a breadth of one-of-a-kind primary and secondary source materials, many of which are unique to the University of Oklahoma. Our holdings include rare books, manuscripts, maps, photographs,

sound recordings and artifacts. Our curators actively pursue strategic collection growth to continue to advance our institutional mission.

The UL Special Research Collections include the Western History Collections, the History of Science Collections, the John & Mary Nichols Rare Books and Special Collections, the Harry W. Bass Business History Collection, the Bizzell Bible Collection, the Chinese Literature Translation Archive, and the Daniel J. & Ruth F. Boorstin Collection.

### *Western History Collections*

Curator: TODD FULLER, PH.D.

Associate Curator: LINA ORTEGA, M.L.I.S.

The Western History Collections is an internationally known center for the study of the American West. The collections contain more than 80,000 books, 2,700 manuscript collections and 2 million historic photographs that are a rich resource for scholarship and teaching. These focal collections are complemented by maps, sound recordings, graphic materials and ephemera that illustrate the colorful, complex history of the American West from the early 19th century to the present. Visitors can access these treasures in the reading room of Monnet Hall, where exhibits display intriguing collection items.

The Western History Collections also houses other collections, including the University of Oklahoma Archives, the Diplomatic Archive and others dedicated to documenting and preserving the records of Indigenous tribes. The University Archives contain the official and per-

sonal papers of OU's presidents, administrative records and official publications such as yearbooks and directories. The Diplomatic Archive, established in 1997 by President David L. Boren and Ambassador Edward J. Perkins, features official declassified and personal papers, books, photographs and memorabilia of former U.S. ambassadors and presidential appointees with Oklahoma ties, such as Everett F. Drumright and Jeane J. Kirkpatrick. The Doris Duke Collection contains typescripts of oral history interviews (1967 -1972) conducted with Native Americans in Oklahoma regarding the histories and cultures of their respective nations and tribes. Native American Manuscripts is composed of selected manuscript collections, primarily from tribes headquartered in Oklahoma such as the Choctaw and Seminole nations.



### ◀ *The History of Science Collections*

Curator: KERRY MAGRUDER, PH.D.

Founded in 1949 with an initial gift from Everette Lee DeGolyer, the History of Science Collections at the University of Oklahoma is a premier research collection. Its holdings include nearly 100,000 print volumes and current publications in the field. The collections support multidisciplinary research in every chronological period, geographic region and subject area of science, technology and medicine. Among the oldest items are a cuneiform brick (ca. 1300 BCE), a small number of medieval and early modern manuscripts, and the collections' oldest printed book, *Hrabanus Maurus, Opus de universo* (1467). Astronomy, physics, natural history, geology, technology, and science and religion are traditional areas of strength for the print holdings. Areas of recent concentration include women in science, Islamic science, star maps, and science and technology in Asia. Collection holdings also include archival manuscript materials supporting research in the history of geology, meteorology, technology and physics, among other topics.

### *The Daniel J. & Ruth F. Boorstin Collection*

The Boorstin Collection is used for quiet study and reading books from the collection of Daniel J. Boorstin, one of America's most distinguished and influential historians and author of more than 20 books. He was awarded the Bancroft Prize for American history in 1959 and the

Pulitzer Prize in history in 1973. Boorstin served as the 12th Librarian of Congress from 1975 to 1987. His wife, Ruth Frankel Boorstin, collaborated with him as editor and was a full partner in all of his endeavors. The facilities for the Daniel J. and Ruth F. Boorstin Collection were made possible by a generous gift from ConocoPhillips Inc.



### ▲ *The Bizzell Bible Collection*

William Bennett Bizzell, president of the University of Oklahoma from 1925 to 1941, purchased his first old Bible for \$1 while a col-

lege student in Boston. That Geneva Bible is just one of the 665 Bibles included in the Bizzell Bible Collection.

In addition to more common European languages such as Greek, Latin, German, French and Spanish, President Bizzell collected many Bibles in numerous other languages such as Cherokee, Muskogee, Hindi, Swahili, Javanese, Mongolian, Tartan, Mooltan and Turkish. Additional related works include commentaries, textual studies, illustrations, geographies and histories of the holy land, works on the life of Christ, prayer books and hymnals. The collection includes several incunabula (books published in the infancy of printing, before 1500). The oldest book is a hand-painted manuscript prayer book written on vellum in the 15th century.

The collection was given to the university in 1949 by Bizzell's family, with the provision that it be kept intact. Since 1987, the collection has been housed in the Gaylord Room of the Bizzell Memorial Library. President Bizzell's love for scholarship and books is reflected in his drive to complete the University Library in 1930. A statue of President Bizzell gazes perpetually on the south entrance to the library which now bears his name.

### *The John & Mary Nichols Rare Books and Special Collections*

Curator: JOANN PALMERI, PH.D.

Named for John and Mary Nichols, longtime supporters of the University of Oklahoma and OU Libraries, this collection is composed of more than 15,000 rare books and special materials in English, European and American literatures dating from the 15th century to the present. These holdings offer outstanding opportunities for research and teaching over a wide range of fields, including fine arts, folklore, history, law, literary studies, politics, publishing and book history, religious studies and theatre.

The university established the collection in 2001 to promote scholarship in the field of English literature and to provide stewardship for the general collection of rare books within the library system. The collections contain a broad spectrum of key titles and authors in English literature from 17th century through the 20th century. Most major

English literary figures are represented, often by first edition or rare limited editions of their works. Among these is the rare Smithwick first issue of Shakespeare's *Second Folio*, published in 1632, and the 1678 edition of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Also present are works by Jane Austen, Lewis Carroll, Cervantes, Dante, Arthur Conan Doyle, Victor Hugo, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley and Mark Twain. A collection of general rare books, including incunabula, bibles, books on English history, and 17th- and 18th-century English plays, complement the focal literature collections. In addition to the Dickens Collection, several named collections are held within the Nichols Collections, including the Bob Burke Bible Collection and the Lois Lenski Children's Literature Collection.



### ◀ *The Chinese Literature Translation Archive*

Curator: JONATHAN STALLING, PH.D.

The OU Libraries Chinese Literature Translation Archive provides students and scholars with a wide range of rare books, reference materials, translation drafts, correspondence, notes, ephemera and other historical materials that provide context for Western readers to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese literature. The archive currently houses nearly 10,000 volumes and thousands of documents from some of the greatest translators of modern Chinese literature in the West, including Howard Goldblatt, Wolfgang Kubin, Wai-lim Yip and the "William Bikales and Margaret Eliot Grady Collection" of Arthur Waley.

The purpose of the archive is to improve the material conditions for translation students and for comparative and world literature by providing the materials necessary for historically informed research supported by the richly textured intellectual environments within which translation takes place.



C/O THE OKLAHOMAN

Clara Luper at John Marshall High School in 1989

## COLLABORATION PRESERVES CIVIL RIGHTS ICON'S LEGACY, STATE'S ROLE IN THE MOVEMENT

*OU Libraries and the Freedom Center in Oklahoma City partner to preserve the center's extensive collection of materials, including those of prominent civil rights activist and OU alumna Clara Luper.*

While the civil rights movement usually evokes eponymous cities like Birmingham or Selma, Alabama, there was a significant mobilization happening right here in Oklahoma.

Two years before the legendary Greensboro sit-in, educator and OU alumna Clara Luper spearheaded one of the country's first sit-ins at the Katz Drug Store lunch counter in downtown Oklahoma City. This event would inspire similar non-violent segregation protests in the city and across the state, contributing to a national desegregation campaign that culminated in the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Throughout 2022, OU Libraries' Special Research Collections collaborated with the OKC nonprofit Freedom Center to preserve its vast collection of materials documenting the state's civil rights history, including Clara Luper's work. The Oklahoma Heritage Preservation Grant Program funded the initiative, which was led by OU Libraries' Metadata and Collections Management archivist Bailey Hoffner and Freedom Center project director Christina Beatty. The archival process includes arranging and describing over 60 feet of historical materials and eventually establishing a community archive at the Freedom Center.

The joint effort between a community-based organization and a larger well-resourced institution has been critical to the ongoing work of organizing the archive.

"When I first encountered the historical materials housed inside the Freedom Center, I immediately recognized that this would be a whole other project requiring highly specialized support," said Beatty, who led the Freedom Center's input and effort on the undertaking. "This partnership with OU has allowed us to realize our intention to be the best possible stewards of these irreplaceable items by transforming them into a formal archive."

The goal is to prepare the community archive so that it can be used by Freedom Center staff and the board of directors for institutional planning in the short term and then in the future, open it up for public access. Establishing a community archive helps the Freedom Center further its goal "to educate, empower, and enlighten our nation to reflect on the past, present, and future of the civil rights movement in Oklahoma."

For Hoffner, the project doesn't just benefit the Freedom Center, it also benefits the university, its library professionals and the state.

"This was an excellent opportunity for OU Libraries to partake in a new, community-engaged and service-oriented approach to archival work," said Hoffner. "With this archive, I think the community will continue to gain invaluable insights into Oklahoma's radical civil rights history, thanks to the work of the Freedom Center, Clara Luper and everyone else who continues to live out her legacy."

CHRIS LANDSBERGER, C/O THE OKLAHOMAN





Clara Luper in 1958

Located in northeast Oklahoma City, the organization's building was acquired in 1967 as the home for Oklahoma City's NAACP Youth Council, with a focus on civil rights education and local activism. The materials held at the center document decades of that activism, containing organizational records of the NAACP Youth Council and the Oklahoma and Regional NAACP as well as correspondence, pamphlets and teaching materials from community leaders and educators. Some of the archives even trace the organization's history to earlier civil rights activism in the state, with materials dating back to the 1930s and 40s.

The collection significantly reflects the pioneering work of Clara Luper, who earned her master's degree in history of education from OU in 1951. An activist and public school educator, Luper rose to prominence through her leadership of the NAACP Youth Council during a nearly six-year-long sit-in movement in Oklahoma City. She provided leadership for the NAACP Youth Council and the Freedom Center from 1957 until her death in 2011.

University of Oklahoma graduate assistants Martha Beliveau, Tuesdae Pelt-Willis and Mary Brinkley, along with a team of four undergraduate students, worked alongside Hoffner to diligently process the collection.

"The project would never have gotten halfway off the ground without the work of the three graduate assistants," said Hoffner. "It was also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them to work with such historically significant civil rights materials."

The team first sorted through the extensive archive to create an initial inventory. Next, materials were organized thematically and rehoused in archival-grade boxes and folders to ensure long-term stability. Then, the project team began creating a detailed archival finding aid, employing professional standards and best practices to describe the collection's contents in detail.

Possibilities for future projects and collaborations have grown thanks to this foundational work. Hoffner will rotate off the project in 2023 and is currently collaborating with Beatty and scholars from across the state on a grant application for the coming year. The next phase of the



1958

project will focus on community-centered photograph identification as well as a thorough review, restriction and redaction process. Before portions of the collection are made available to the public, this critical work will protect the privacy of many individuals and ensure culturally appropriate access to the collection.

The community archive will ultimately be housed in the Clara Luper Civil Rights Center — slated for construction between 2024 and 2026. Together, the historic Freedom Center building and the new Civil Rights Center will create a five-acre campus stretching three blocks along Martin Luther King Avenue just north of Northeast 23rd Street.

Project collaborators hope this community-engaged and service-oriented approach provides a model for institutions in the state to continue to advance grassroots efforts to preserve local history, prioritizing cultural sensitivity, accessibility and opportunities for collections to remain in communities of origin.

"This project was a profound opportunity professionally for me and the university. This initiative supports an independent and thriving Freedom Center Community Archive for the future. We're also paying directly into the community by committing time and resources. The Freedom Center gave so much to the civil rights movement, and we feel honored that they trusted us with this collaboration," said Hoffner.

For more information on the Freedom Center, visit [freedomcenterokc.org](http://freedomcenterokc.org).



1988



Clara Luper circa 2006

## OKLAHOMAN EDITOR REFLECTS ON LUPER'S LEGACY

By ED KELLEY

Dean of the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication

Plans to renovate and fund centers in northeast Oklahoma City to honor Clara Luper and others active in the civil rights movement will be complemented by recognition at the University of Oklahoma, where she helped break the color barrier more than 70 years ago.

Ongoing work by OU Libraries' staff with the renovated Freedom Center is the latest example of the university's long relationship with Luper and the history she made tearing down the walls of segregation in her native state.

Call roll of the most important Oklahomans in the second half of the 20th century and Clara Luper would be on it, and perhaps at the top. Her most valuable contribution? She spoke uncomfortable truths, of where people of color stood in relation to the white majority and why those truths shouldn't be tolerated any longer.

For years she led sit-ins, marches and protests in Oklahoma City and beyond to make her point. There were confrontations. It was often noisy and occasionally bitter. The aforementioned Freedom Center was firebombed. But ultimately the arc of the moral universe, the phrase made famous by Martin Luther King, proved her correct.

Not surprisingly, it took much of the rest of her life before what she spoke in the 1950s, '60s and '70s was accepted — readily, grudgingly or somewhere in between — by most of her fellow Oklahomans.

I am fortunate to have known her. As editor of *The Oklahoman* when it was the state's largest news organization, I interacted with lots of well-known people. Nearly all who called the newspaper looking for me could wait if need be.

But not her. My instructions to colleagues who fielded her occasional phone call were to put me through immediately, whether I was across the room or across the country.

Believe me, I was an attentive listener. She was older, maybe a bit less feisty but still a teacher at heart and a passionate promoter of children doing good things on Oklahoma City's northeast side. She wanted me to be aware of those young people who she believed deserved attention from their hometown paper. By then her "kids" must have numbered in the many hundreds, across at least two generations and maybe a bit more.

Years later, news of her death, in June 2011, filled the front page of the paper.

It's never more timely than now at OU to examine her legacy leading efforts to integrate Oklahoma. The year 2023 is the centennial of her birth as well as the 65th anniversary of the first sit-in, in downtown Oklahoma City.

History's not always correct. The birth of the sit-in movement often is credited to Greensboro, North Carolina. In fact, it launched two years earlier at Katz Drug Store, in August 1958, at Luper's behest.

How frightening it must have been: A 35-year-old mother of three, a black schoolteacher with little to no power, taking on the establishment that held limited regard for Clara Luper and her willingness to disrupt its world in Oklahoma City.

Her strategy was simple. Instead of adults, she had her own young children, and their friends, park themselves at Katz's lunch counter and order Cokes. The harassment they faced was nasty and brutish, but it worked. Katz a few days later agreed to integrate. Similar protests at lunch counters, restaurants, hotels and elsewhere followed. Success seldom was immediate. But ultimately, she won out.

As the state's flagship university, it's important that OU, and particularly Libraries, be engaged as the Freedom Center, the home of the NAACP Youth Council that Luper sponsored, is renovated and the nearby Clara Luper Civil Rights Center is constructed.

Her legacy at OU is strong. She was one of the university's first Black graduates, earning a master's degree in 1951. The university's Department of African and African American Studies was named for Luper in 2018. More than a few of the young people she taught — and inspired — over a career that spanned 40 years are OU graduates.

No institution of higher education is better positioned than OU to ensure that the story of Oklahoma's struggle for civil rights, led by Luper, be told for future generations. And Libraries is at the center of telling that story, playing a unique role that goes to the heart of its objective: serving a university community with roots as deep as any other in Oklahoma.



BECKY HOLLADAY

## UL HIGHLIGHTS PIVOTAL MARY ANNING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Scholars Hugh S. Torrens and Tom Sharpe contributed materials and expertise to the new exhibit in the UL's History of Science special research collection.

In an age when sexism and classicism ruled, a young woman from a working-class family in 19th-century England would shake up the world of paleontology, not just once, but several times.

Even though she was restricted from participating in formal academic communities, the self-educated geologist and fossil collector Mary Anning (1799-1847) would go on to make groundbreaking discoveries that significantly influenced the development of paleontology, all the while working outside the structures of England's mainstream scientific establishment.

"Mother of Dragons: Life and Discoveries of Mary Anning" — an exhibit featuring rare books, maps and illustrations from the History of Science Collections — is an attestation to the impact of her work.

Anning grew up in an area of southern England now dubbed the "Jurassic Coast" for its 185-million-year-old fossil-rich cliffs overlooking the English Channel. Her father, a cabinet maker and amateur fossil collector, taught his two children how to find, clean and sell specimens. When Anning's father died, this would become an important way for the otherwise poor family to put food on the table.

In 1811, her brother uncovered an unusual-looking skull, and young Mary then spent several months digging the outline of a 17-foot skeleton. No one had seen anything like it, and its classification would be debated by scientists for years before finally being named a prehistoric

Ichthyosaur, which we now know is an extinct marine reptile. Mary was the first person to discover its existence and she was only 12 years old at the time.

Throughout the course of her life, Anning would go on to make invaluable discoveries of plesiosaurs, pterosaurs, ammonites and other fossil animals, which proved crucial in informing 19th-century scientific understanding. Despite this, she was rarely credited for her work when male scientists wrote about the findings, and, as a woman, she was denied entry to the Geological Society of London.

On display at "Mother of Dragons: Life and Discoveries of Mary Anning," are two plates from the 1830s and '40s books by English geologist Thomas Hawkins featuring full illustrations of ichthyosaur and plesiosaur fossils based on Anning's findings. The works are part of the collection of Hugh Torrens, a renowned modern-day historian of geology and paleontology who conducted significant research on Mary Anning's life and career. Torrens donated a significant collection of books and archival manuscript materials to the University of Oklahoma, and they are now accessible to researchers in Bizzell Memorial Library's History of Science Collections.

The exhibit also features publications that reported on Anning's discoveries. Her unearthing of an almost-perfect plesiosaur specimen is

documented by geologist W.D. Conybeare in an 1824 issue of "Transactions of the Geological Society of London." In 1829, Anning's finding of Britain's first pterosaur fossil was reported on by William Buckland; a plate depicting the event is a highlight of the exhibit. In the same volume, Buckland also announced Anning's breakthroughs in the identification and understanding of coprolites.

Contemporaries and colleagues of Anning's feature significantly in the exhibit. The work of geologist and fossil collector Charlotte Murchison is documented in James Sowerby's 1829 "Mineral Conchology of Great Britain"; Sowerby named a species of ammonites, *Ammonites Murchisonae*, in her honor after she discovered the specimen in the Isle of Skye. Also included in the display is a reproduction of "Duria Antiquior," a watercolor by the prominent geologist Henry De la Beche, who was a close friend of Anning's. Anning's work informed De la Beche's artistic envisioning of prehistoric life, which in turn spurred public interest in paleontology.

The exhibit was curated by James Burnes (exhibits coordinator), Aja Tolman (History of Science Collections graduate assistant) and Kerry Magruder (curator, History of Sciences Collection), with special thanks to visiting scholar Tom Sharpe.

Scottish geologist Tom Sharpe, who visited OU Libraries on an Andrew W. Mellon Travel Fellowship in the summer of 2022, served as a special consultant on the exhibit. Sharpe's 2020 book, "The Fossil Woman: A Life of Mary Anning," presents the most up-to-date published scholarship on her life and career.

Public interest in her accomplishments and legacy continues to flourish. In May 2022, a public statue of Anning was unveiled in Lyme Regis, her childhood village in West Dorset where she began her work as a paleontologist.

“*Mary Anning would go on to make groundbreaking discoveries that significantly influenced the development of paleontology, all the while working outside the structures of England's mainstream scientific establishment.*”

BECKY HOLLADAY



Ghost in the Shell. Invertebrate fossils like this Ammonite (on loan from the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History) are plentiful in the rocks around Lyme Regis. Mary Anning would have collected many of these to sell as curiosities in her fossil shop. They would have helped fund her larger excavations.



An extra large foldout of an ichthyosaur fossil discovered by Mary Anning. This is from geologist Thomas Hawkin's 1840 book, "The Book of the Great Sea Dragons, Ichthyisauri and Plesiosauri," which is part of the Hugh Torrens Collection at the University Libraries' History of Science Collection.

*"Mother of Dragons: Life and Discoveries of Mary Anning" is located both on the Main Floor and continues on the 5th Floor of the Bizzell Memorial Library, in the History of Science Collections.*

*Materials are available for viewing 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and will remain on display through July 2023.*



An extra-large foldout of an ichthyosaur fossil discovered by Mary Anning. This is from geologist Thomas Hawkin's 1834 book, "Memoirs of Ichthyisauri and Plesiosauri, Extinct Monsters of the Ancient Earth," which is part of the Hugh Torrens Collection at the University Libraries' History of Science Collection.

BECKY HOLLADAY

BECKY HOLLADAY



Stone Girl, Bone Girl. Tom Sharpe, Mary Anning's most recent biographer, has noted that Mary Anning first appeared in a children's book in 1832. Since then she has been a regular sight among children's collections and libraries continuing to influence and inspire children — especially young girls — in the sciences.



Cliffs to Culture. It took less than a century for Mary Anning's discoveries to make their way into permanent popular cultural staples. Plesiosaur fossils were refleshed in "The Land that Time Forgot" and became the avatar for the Loch Ness Monster, so much so that many new plesiosaur finds are announced as a "new nessie." The 1980s would take it a step further and posit that the Loch Ness Monster was the ghost of a plesiosaur. One can only wonder what Mary Anning would think of that.

BECKY HOLLADAY



James Burnes, exhibits coordinator for the University Libraries

# Q&A

with TOM SHARPE  
By Michael G. Sjarveski, Associate  
Dean for Special Research Collections



JIM WILSON

**Could you describe your professional and academic background as a scholar and historian of geology?**

I read geology at the University of Glasgow and then went on to the University of Leicester for a postgraduate course in Museum Studies, which at that time was the only one of its kind in Europe. I returned to Glasgow briefly to work in the university's Hunterian Museum before moving south to join the Department of Geology at the National Museum of Wales. I planned to stay there for three years, but in the end I was there for 35 years as curator of palaeontology and archives. I retired early from the museum and have spent the last 10 years pursuing my interests in the history of geology.

**What drew you to study the history of geology, and more specifically, the life and contributions of Mary Anning?**

As a museum curator, you are very aware of the importance of the provenance and history of the collections. I was interested in ichthyosaurs, a group of extinct marine reptiles which looked like today's dolphins and porpoises. When I started at the National Museum of Wales, I discovered that it was home to a large collection of these fossils which had been collected in the 19th century. I also found that it housed the papers of Henry De la Beche (1796–1855), a geologist who founded the British Geological Survey in 1835 but who had also made a study of some of the first ichthyosaurs to be discovered. So a colleague and I prepared a small exhibition about the history of their discovery and study, and this led to the publication in 1981 of a small book, *Ichthyosaurs: a history of fossil 'sea-dragons'*, written in collaboration with Hugh Torrens, a historian of geology at the University of Keele.

This drew me in to finding out more about the early days of what was then the new science of geology in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and in learning more about Henry De la Beche. He lived in Lyme Regis, a small town on the south coast of England, which was also home to the fossil collector, Mary Anning. They became friends when both were teenagers, and met at the time when her family were recovering the first ichthyosaur fossil which would be scientifically described. So my interest developed broadly around Mary Anning, her discoveries, and her circle of scientific friends.

I became more focused on Mary Anning's life and work when, at Hugh Torrens's suggestion, I was invited to write her biography. A movie was being made about her and its approach was based more on fiction than fact, so there seemed a need for a biography that presented the true story of Mary Anning, at least as much as we know it from the limited archive that survives.

**Could you tell us about your Mellon Fellowship and what attracted you to conduct research at the University of Oklahoma Libraries' History of Science Collections?**

Again it was my old friend Hugh Torrens who was behind this. He suggested I should head to the University of Oklahoma through a Mellon Fellowship. The OU Libraries History of Science Collections have recently acquired Hugh's papers and research files, and as our research interests have overlapped over the years and as I am following in his footsteps in pursuit of Mary Anning it was an unmissable opportunity. I'm working on a companion volume to my Mary Anning biography and Hugh's papers contain a lot of relevant material and suggestions of avenues to pursue.

Also, the chance to have access to such a good academic library, and its special collections, was a huge bonus. At home I can make use of the National Library of Scotland, but there's nothing to beat the serendipitous discoveries that can only be made by browsing open-access library shelves.

**What do you hope to achieve and accomplish as a result of your visit to OU? Are there any upcoming scholarly projects that will be informed by your research here?**

Much of what I learnt on my visit will find its way into various projects I'm currently working on. The Mary Anning companion volume that I'm now writing is certainly making use of my research at OU, and I have a few other projects in mind, some, I hope, in collaboration with Hugh Torrens.

**What may be the legacy of OU's History of Science collections for future generations of scholars?**

Aside from the historical collections which are exceptional, the acquisition of the papers of modern researchers like Hugh Torrens and Martin Rudwick will be of enormous value to scholars in future, when the time

“  
*In more recent years we've seen an increased awareness of the under-appreciated and poorly recorded contribution to science made by women.*  
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comes to explore how research into the history of geology was conducted and the nature of our understanding. The Torrens and Rudwick collections will be a key resource for anyone studying the history of British geology, and the history of that study. Martin Rudwick approaches it from a philosophical viewpoint, in contrast to Hugh Torrens who has always sought out the unknown practical workers in early British geology who left little or nothing by way of a published record. The two collections complement one another perfectly.

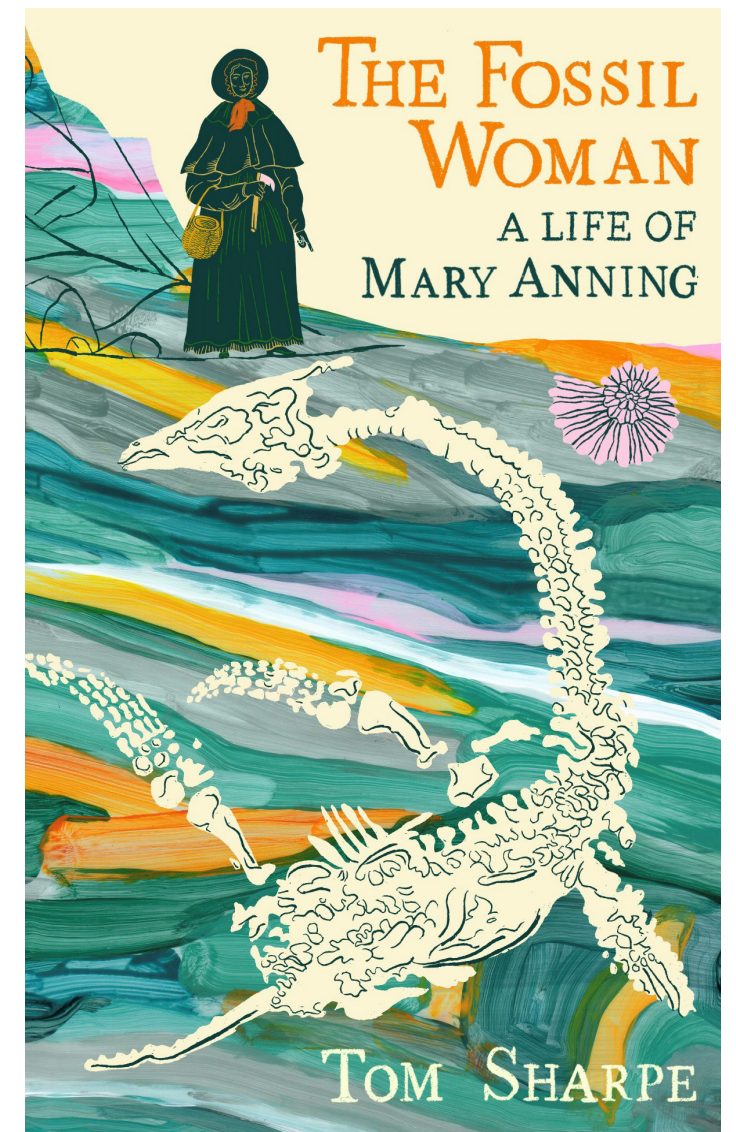
**There seems to be a strong, recent resurgence in public awareness of Mary Anning's accomplishments. What do you think has contributed to an increasing interest in her life and legacy?**

Yes, there is a huge amount of interest today in Mary Anning and her work. This really starts sometime around 1980 with renewed interest by palaeontologists in fossil marine reptiles which involved new studies of specimens collected by Mary Anning, along with a growing interest in the 1970s and '80s in the history of geology. And in more recent years we've seen an increased awareness of the under-appreciated and poorly recorded contribution to science made by women. There was a best-selling novel about Mary Anning, *Remarkable Creatures* by Tracy Chevalier, published in 2009 and recently a well-publicised and successful campaign to erect a statue of Mary Anning in her home town and these have certainly contributed to her being better known.

Mary Anning was first featured in a book for children in 1832 – during her lifetime – and has appeared in over a hundred children's books just since 2000. She makes a great role model for encouraging children, and girls in particular, to pursue and interest and career in science.

**Is there anything else you think we should know?**

I was really impressed by the beautiful OU campus and its well-tended grounds, and by the amazing Bizzell Library – both the building itself and its contents. It was a lovely place in which to work and my only regret is that my time there was so short and busy. I managed to achieve a lot during my visit and that was really down to the brilliantly helpful staff at the History of Science collections.





## WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTIONS COMPLETES “SCHOOL OF THE AIR” PROJECT

*1950s radio show recordings are an invaluable resource for education, media and Native American studies scholars.*

In spring 2021, the Council on Library & Information Resources awarded the Western History Collections a prestigious grant to preserve and digitize at-risk recordings of the 1950s-era radio broadcast, “Oklahoma School of the Air.” And now, librarians have published 138 digitized audio recordings in the OU Libraries Digital Collections. This audio archive gives modern-day scholars and learners a novel view into the history of Oklahoma media, culture, education and identity.

Decades before the proliferation of home computers and internet access, “Schools of the Air” radio broadcasts were providing the original “distance education” for K-12 students living in smaller, less-resourced rural school districts across the United States, including Oklahoma.

“Oklahoma School of the Air” was launched by the university’s extension division in 1946 and continued through the 1950s. Two shows, “Know Your Oklahoma” and “Oklahoma Portrait,” taught state history to schoolchildren using innovative, storytelling-based methods.

The “Know Your Oklahoma” series dramatized historical events in the state. A 1954 episode, “Okmulgee, The Creek Capital” is a 16-minute radio drama about the Creek Nation’s founding of their capital city in 1865. A 1953 episode performs the story of Oklahoma’s first airplane flight, piloted by stunt flier Charles F. Willard.

“Oklahoma Portraits” presents biographical documentaries on significant historical figures in the state. Included is a 1950s broadcast about the life of Sequoyah, the creator of the Cherokee alphabet, and a program about Mary Alice Robertson, the second woman to hold office in the United States Congress.

The digital collection not only illustrates the evolution of broadcasting and education in the state but also serves as evidence of the dominant culture’s prejudice. Listeners should note that many of the recordings include language and framing that is now considered offensive and inaccurate, especially in their depiction of Indigenous communities.

Lina Ortega, the associate curator for the University of Oklahoma Libraries’ Western History Collections, served as principal investigator to digitize the audio recordings and led fund-seeking efforts. The “Recordings at Risk” initiative through CLIR, a national regranting program funded by the Mellon Foundation, seeks to support the preservation of audio and audiovisual content that offers high scholarly value. Ortega knew that the “Oklahoma School of the Air” radio show recordings fit that bill.

“These broadcasts provide important information about how history was taught to schoolchildren in elementary and middle school, or perhaps how college-level professors who scripted the show thought that it should be taught, so there’s incredible research value in them,” says Ortega. “The 138 tapes that make up this collection are the only known surviving recordings of this radio program, which was offered by the university as a public good to the state.”

Prior to digitization, the collection’s contents were stored on 8mm audio reels that, due to the obsolescence of single-reel audio playback technology, were functionally inaccessible to modern researchers. Additionally, the format of the tapes themselves are not known for their longevity. Digitizing the items will ensure the content is preserved.

“Magnetic media, such as the reel-to-reel tapes used to record the

broadcasts, degrade over time. ‘Sticky shed syndrome’ and loose tape pack are common threats,” says Ortega. “With these recordings being more than sixty years old, there was little time to lose.”

The University of Oklahoma Libraries partnered with the Northeast Document Conservation Center to digitize the recordings. They cleaned and preserved the at-risk archival assets, produced digital recordings of each, and enhanced the audio quality.

After the recordings had been digitized, Department of History Intern Emma Van De Wiele listened to each program and created detailed descriptions to aid researchers in discovering collection assets of interest.

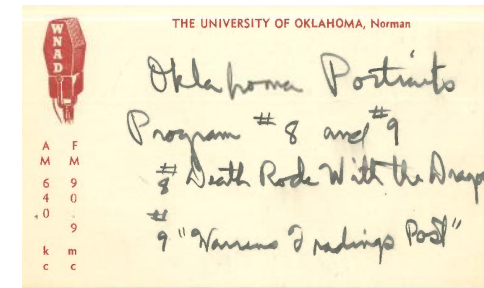


*School of the Air students vote on the name of the health program that was a part of the broadcasts. The bottom right image on the opposing page lists the possible names with the final winner on the bottom: Spotlight on Health.*

Once the initial descriptions were completed, metadata and collections management archivist Bailey Hoffner and director of digital collections and digitization Barbara Laufersweiler formatted metadata describing each digitized recording’s title, contents, format and original broadcast date. This information will aid researchers in navigating the collection and understanding each asset’s historical context. Tyler Pearson, director of informatics at OU Libraries, published the audio files to the digital repository and then transformed and uploaded the accompanying metadata, enabling freely accessible public discovery of the collection assets.

The “Oklahoma School of the Air” digital collection provides researchers with significant flexibility in the online repository environment. Audio recordings can be adjusted for volume and playback speed, and digital audio files can be downloaded and incorporated into original research projects and presentations.

This resource expands upon an already-exemplary selection of archival radio programming in OU Libraries Digital Collections. In 2019, OU Libraries published a digital collection of nearly 200 broadcasts from the “Indians for Indians Radio Show” which, from 1941 to 1976, provided a groundbreaking intertribal forum for Native self-expression.



*The WNAD postcard was found in one of tape boxes seen in the image below. These postcards listed the names of broadcasts.*

“*Oklahoma School of the Air*” was launched by the university’s extension division in 1946 and continued through the 1950s. Two shows, “*Know Your Oklahoma*” and “*Oklahoma Portrait*,” taught state history to schoolchildren using innovative, storytelling-based methods.

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*Students listen to the radio as part of the “School of the Air.”*



## NATIVE AMERICAN AUTHOR COLLECTING INITIATIVE GROWS

*Western History Collection's Contemporary Native American Authors adds commitments from important literary figures*

The Contemporary Native American Authors Collection was established at the UL's Western History Collections in 2019. Since then, six prominent authors have donated their papers to WHC: Sly Alley, Lance Henson, LeAnne Howe, Adrian Louis, Devon Mihesuah and Carter Revard. Several other Native creatives and/or scholars have also provided verbal intentions to donate their papers to the Collections.

The purpose of the initiative is multi-layered. The justification for doing so centers on:

- Reexamining the primary/dominant narratives of the American West by identifying underrepresented perspectives, including those of Native authors
- Establishing collaborations with individuals and organizations that seek to celebrate Native/Indigenous creative expressions and intellectual pursuits
- Creating dialogues with Native/Indigenous authors, scholars and others that will result in the WHC preserving individual and cultural legacies for future research
- Raising awareness about Native/Indigenous authors and their work through programming activities, including lectures, exhibitions, publications, presentations, traveling classrooms and via the web
- Serving as an inclusive research destination for scholars, researchers, students and tribal citizens and tribal historians for inquiry about Native/Indigenous creative expression
- Developing a space that provides visual acknowledgement of multiple narratives, including Native narratives and histories

By working toward inclusive special research collections, the WHC seeks out Native authors, scholars, activists and other creatives whose perspectives and knowledge will positively deepen and broaden narratives of the American West. Establishing the Contemporary Native American Authors Collection will allow the WHC to assist authors and tribal nations in their efforts to preserve legacies of sovereignty, culture (including language), history, creativity and scholarship.

**LEANNE HOWE:** Award-winning Choctaw author LeAnne Howe has written and/or edited 11 books, including six poetry/mixed genre collections, two edited volumes, and three plays. She was honored with an American Book Award in 2002 and an Oklahoma Book Award in 2006. The LeAnne Howe papers include correspondence, drafts of poems, fictional stories, essays, drafts of books and plays, galley proofs of her published works, and other archival records documenting her work as the Eidson Distinguished Professor at the University of Georgia.

**ADRIAN C. LOUIS:** Adrian Louis was poet, journalist, and member of the Lovelock Paiute Tribe, whose 19 published works won him acclaim and a wide readership. His novel, *Skins* (1995), was adapted into a 2002 film which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. The Adrian Louis papers include notebooks, journals, drafts of poems and manuscripts, correspondence, and unpublished works of poetry.

Collections will be available once processing is complete:

**SLY ALLEY:** Born in Ada, Oklahoma, and raised in Tecumseh, Oklahoma, Sly Alley is a poet and writer whose published collection of poetry, titled *Strong Medicine*, won the Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry in 2017. The Sly Alley papers will contain drafts of poems and galley proofs for *Strong Medicine*. He is an enrolled citizen of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and is also part Otoe-Missouria.

**LANCE HENSON:** Lance Henson is a Cheyenne poet, storyteller and educator whose poetry has earned him international recognition. To date, he has published 28 collections of poetry, which have been translated into 25 languages. In 2020, he received a lifetime achievement award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas. The Lance Henson papers will contain drafts of poems, galley proofs of manuscripts, and video recordings of interviews, lectures, and poetry readings.

**DEVON MIHESUAH:** Writer and scholar Devon Mihesuah has won numerous awards for both her academic and creative work and has published 18 monographs, novels, and edited volumes to date. She also served as both an associate editor and editor of the *American Indian Quarterly* (from 1993-2007). She is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation. In addition, Mihesuah has written award-winning books and articles about colonization, boarding schools, and Native American stereotypes, among other topics. The Devon Mihesuah papers will include research files for monographs and creative projects, drafts of chapters and novels, galley proofs, notebooks, and correspondence with collaborators.

**CARTER REVAR:** Poet and scholar Carter Revard grew up near Pawhuska, Oklahoma, with his Osage and Ponca relatives. Though his initial scholarly work focused on medieval British manuscripts, in the late 1960s and early '70s, he began writing and publishing poetry much more concerned about situating Indigenous identities and place in and around Oklahoma. He published numerous articles and books, among them *Family Matters*, *Tribal Affairs*, *An Eagle Nation*, and *Cowboys and Indians Christmas Shopping*, which won an Oklahoma Book Award in poetry. In 2005, He received a lifetime achievement award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas. The Carter Revard papers include galley proofs of published work, completed manuscripts, drafts of works, early articles, and extensive correspondence, with other scholars, poets, students, and family members.

## UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES ANNOUNCES OPENING OF THE ROMANOFF COLLECTION

The Romanoff Collection in the University Libraries opened to public research January 2023, after a generous \$2 million gift to the University of Oklahoma in late summer 2022.

The collection is part of a gift by Princess Janet Romanoff to the university that also established the Romanoff Center for Russian Studies on the OU Norman campus, creating the only academic entity named after the Russian royal family in the United States.

The collection contains over 50 cubic feet of archives that includes letters, photographs and mementoes primarily documenting the lives of Prince "Nikita" Nikitich Romanoff, the great nephew of Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia, his wife, Princess Janet, and their son, Prince Theodore in New York City during the 1970s-2000s, and their travels around the globe.

The papers also contain academic works and research by the Romanoffs on Russian history and literature, and a bound copy of Grand Duchess Xenia's diaries from the Russian revolutionary period. An assortment of Russian postage stamps and original letters by Nikita's parents, Prince Nikita Alexandrovich, and Countess Maria Vorontsova-Dashkova, complete the collection.



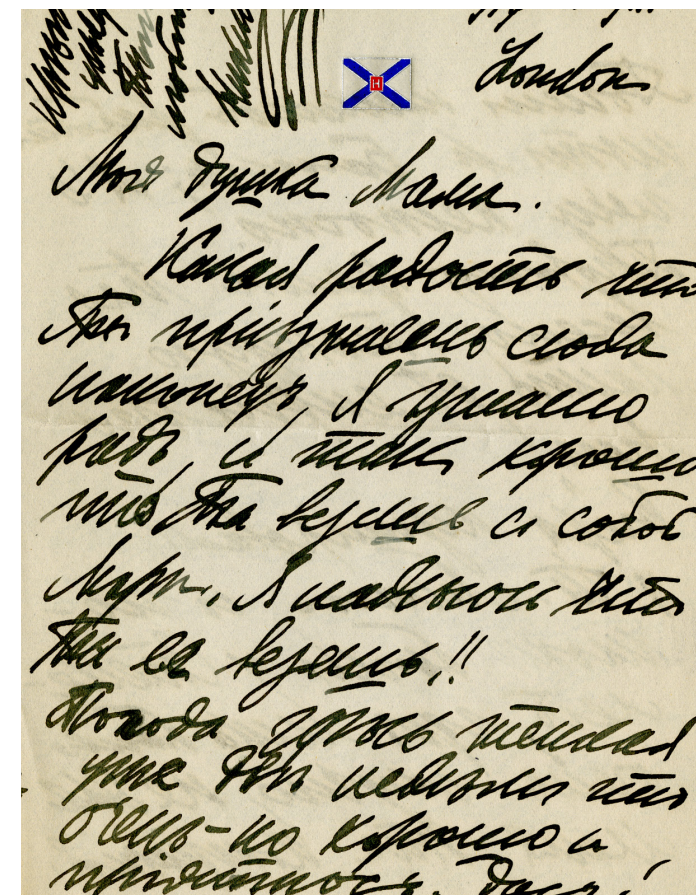
This invitation to the 2004 Russian Summer Ball in London is one of many invitations to social events that can be found in the Romanoff Collection.

The University Libraries is working to catalog the Romanoff family library of over 900 volumes.

The Romanoff Collection is available for research by appointment at Bizzell Memorial Library's 5th Floor Special Research Collections. A guide to the collection is available online at the University Libraries' ArchivesSpace site.



These Russian stamps likely belonged to Prince Nikita Alexandrovitch, who was known to be an avid stamp collector.



The collection contains many handwritten letters in Russian between Romanoff family members spanning the 20th century.



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