Preservation of Emory University’s African American Scrapbook Collection

By Kim Knox Norman

Rare scrapbooks that document African American life in the United States from 1890-1975 are being preserved with support through a Save America’s Treasures (SAT) grant in a collaborative project with Emory University Libraries Preservation Office, Digitization Center, and the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL). The SAT grant was awarded through the Department of Interior and the National Park Service, in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

The African American scrapbook collection is housed at the Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL), in the R.W. Woodruff Library. It consists of dozens of scrapbooks and memorabilia albums, created by ordinary and extraordinary people between 1880 and 1980. This span of almost 100 years describes a slice of American life often overlooked in scrapbook form. A bold undertaking, the Emory Conservation team and MARBL staff have been hesitant in the past to address the problems presented by scrapbooks. With this project, we are concerned with preserving the materials while simultaneously preserving the scrapbook experience, two aspects that often do not pair well as evidenced by the poor condition of the items.

Turning the pages of the scrapbooks and absorbing the material within each one is like having an intimate conversation with the author. The deliberate process of assembling the scrapbook becomes visible, revealing the importance of each piece of ephemera and its position on the page. Whether tucked in an envelope or taped in chronological layers, there is a striking thoughtfulness to each of the books, no matter how unpolished. It levels the playing field among these varied individuals.

Preservation Effort

It is common for scrapbooks in library collections to be boxed for protection without any further conservation treatment. In fact, some archives purposely restrict the use of scrapbooks in order to postpone complicated treatment decisions. For example, removing tape from pages and items could put them...
at a high risk for damage. Since standard conservation practices for treating all types of adhesives are often complicated and time consuming, the question for conservators then centers on the necessary time and overall value of performing such treatments.

Is it important to remove all the tape or adhesive for the sake of protecting the original materials? Would it be just as well to stabilize the scrapbook and its parts, scan each page as it currently exists and rehouse the original item for future protection? From a conservation perspective, our treatment process for this particular grant project varies with each scrapbook. Since no two are alike, we approach it one book at a time, recording our choices and decisions in the form of a monthly blog. There have been more than six items discussed. All entries can be found on the Emory Libraries website.

**Flournoy Miller, Vaudevillian**

The first scrapbook treated was created by Flournoy Miller (1887-1971), a vaudevillian entertainer whose career began in the late 1920s. The 54 pages of his oversized scrapbook were extremely brittle. Each page was covered front and back with newspaper clippings of the time, adding another layer of acidic and brittle material. The book itself was completely in pieces and needed to be stabilized before any further treatment could be done. There were a number of broken pages, missing pieces and necessary repairs to be done. We decided that each page would be encapsulated between two layers of DuPont Melinex #516, allowing them to float in a completely protected environment. New pages were made with extra margin on the left, allowing enough room for a final post-binding of the original covers and all pages in newly constructed covers.
Post-bindings are a typical structure used in conservation, binding all pages together with screw posts and ensuring a flexible spine.

**Robert Churchwell, Journalist**

Journalist Robert Churchwell (1917-2009) was born and raised in Clifton, Tennessee. As a reporter assigned to the Nashville education beat, he was the first African American staff writer to work for the Nashville Banner. One of Churchwell's two scrapbooks in the MARBL collection was presented to him in 1974 by the Tennessee Education Association in appreciation for his coverage of education at the time.

This scrapbook structure is different than any of the others in the Emory collection. The hand-carved, wooden covers are thick, heavy, and three-dimensional. The multi-colored pages were bolted together with the covers as a make-shift post binding structure, using long screws secured by nuts at the back. The front and back covers are only able to flex at the full-length piano hinges used to attach the cover boards to the spine pieces. The rubber cement adhesive that once attached articles and ephemera to each page had failed. On each page was a stain map of adhesive residue, which made it obvious where the detached items belonged. They were reattached with wheat starch paste.

**Reverend Ollie James Turner, Baptist Minister**

The Reverend Ollie James Turner was born in Penn Station, Lowndes County, Mississippi, in 1894. He was ordained as a Baptist minister at the age of 16. Turner’s scrapbook spans his life and service, covering decades of his family history, travel experiences and dedicated pastoral career. Empty file folders were used to create the scrapbook pages, while photographs and printed ephemera were taped onto the four surfaces of each folder. The majority of items taped into the scrapbook pages were affixed with pressure-sensitive, masking, and packing tape, predominantly yellowed and releasing as the adhesives failed over time. The fragile pages and attached items needed to be stabilized before digital scanning could occur. Each page, or file folder surface, was scanned as it appeared, in order to preserve the overall scrapbook structure and creative experience.

In response to the December blog post about Reverend Ollie Turner's scrapbook, Emory’s Woodruff Library staff received an interesting email from a current Emory student. While studying at the library, the student read a newly published blog entry and realized very quickly that this particular scrapbook in MARBL depicted her great grandfather’s life and career. The January issue of Emory Report features an article about the subsequent Turner family reunion event hosted by Woodruff Library in January.

**William Sanders Scarborough: Educator, Activist, University President**

The small scrapbook of William Sanders Scarborough (1852-1926) was full of newspaper articles, invitations, and extremely rare, valuable broadsides specific to Scarborough’s life and work. Contents of this particular scrapbook documented Scarborough’s life. It was so full that the duct-taped spine became detached from the book as the covers separated from the text block.
In 2001, the William Sanders Scarborough Prize was established by the Modern Language Association, awarding outstanding scholarly study of black American literature or culture. Professor Lawrence P. Jackson of Emory University received the award most recently for his book, The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960. A nice coincidence!

**African American Miscellany Collection**

During the initial assessment of the project, similarities appeared between and among the scrapbooks, underscoring connections in subject matter, authorship or book structure. Three of them shared the subject of African American collegiate experiences and societies. These were all compiled by young women describing college experiences in Georgia and Florida with dates ranging from 1914 to the 1960s.

Cleopatra Love’s scrapbook, circa 1914-1916, was a bound volume, originally a blank journal or diary, overstuffed with ephemera and broken at the spine. The scrapbook of Helen Louise Wallace was created during the 1930s on very fragile support pages and includes newspaper clippings, postcards and a 1932 graduation program from Mayo High School in Atlanta. A resident of Jacksonville, Florida (from 1936 to 1949), Lettie Anne Holt created a scrapbook which opens with her school photo and a postcard from home, addressed to her on its last line as “Tampa Negro.” This scrapbook contains collected clippings, programs and writings concerning her membership in Zeta Phi Beta at Florida A&M College in Tampa.

**Benny Andrews, Artist**

Best known to the public for his paintings, artist Benny Andrews is not remembered by most people for his years spent in the military. It was during his tours of duty that Andrews constructed scrapbooks in traditionally bound album structures, documenting his travels, squadrons and military experiences. Three by Andrews have been preserved at Emory—one scrapbook chronicled his family life; the other two scrapbooks described Andrews’ military career.

A different conservation treatment approach was required for Andrews’ albums, but the two military volumes with extra layers of tape needed the most attention. Yellowed and brittle, most of this tape failed over time and released easily. The brittle paper support pages are covered with Andrews’ handwriting describing important occasions or identifying photographs. Removing all of the tape and items from these pages would have risked losing his original handwriting (as some were written directly on the tape) and the integrity of the fragile ephemera.
Digitization Effort
All treated scrapbooks have been scanned in the Digital Services department at the Emory University Woodruff Library for future research and scholarship; however, some of the albums needed to be stabilized before scanning could occur. In the April 2012 blog entry, Digital Imaging Technician Brian Methot discussed his team’s digitization practices and efforts as an important link in the overall preservation of these important items. Capturing the experience of flipping through a scrapbook, now rendered in a two-dimensional format, has presented challenges, particularly when dealing with cards inside envelopes, folded and layered newspaper clippings or a stack of 18 telegrams all adhered on one page. Methot wrote, “Not only were we faced with the questions of what equipment to use with these timeless books but how we would consistently shoot such a varied collection of items.

While each item has a unique set of considerations, many are treated, scanned and require nothing more. All finished scrapbooks have been boxed, individually rehoused in custom-sized protective enclosures from Custom Manufacturing, Inc. (CMI) and archived in MARBL. The Emory Libraries Preservation monthly blog documents the conservation treatment and digitization process of each item. This project continues to be a challenging test-case for addressing conservation questions and establishing precedents for other institutions to consider when weighing treatment options.

Phase One camera table with color bars and rulers for accurate scanning

Sources
3. Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library: http://marbl.library.emory.edu/.
8. Emory University Woodruff Library blog: http://web.library.emory.edu/blog/beautiful-chaos.

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The Repair of Large-Scale Theater Posters

By Craig Fansler

DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS, the Z. Smith Reynolds Library Special Collections has uncovered two separate collections of theater posters, both of which date from 1914-1918. The first collection of posters is from the Gertrude Hoffman Theater Collection. Hoffman was a noted dancer and choreographer during the early part of the 20th century. The second group of posters is part of the Clarence Herbert New Collection. Clarence Herbert New was a prolific writer and world traveler. Both poster collections are housed in the Special Collections and Archives of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University. Wake Forest University is a small, private, liberal arts university with about 4,500 undergraduates located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The Z. Smith Reynolds Library holds print collections that number approximately 1.7 million volumes and recently won the 2011 ACRL Excellence in Libraries Award. My position as Preservation Librarian means that I tackle the stabilization and possible conservation of materials like these film posters.

Gertrude Hoffman Theater Collection

During the fall of 2010, I was presented with a collection of theater posters found in our collection during the processing and inventory of the Gertrude Hoffman Theater Collection. These posters were literally folded up in an old wooden trunk—and had been stored there for many years. The name, Gertrude Hoffman, was hand-painted on the outside of the trunk. As I unfolded one of the posters, I found it was actually four panels that formed a larger poster. When fully spread out, this poster was a 6’ x 9’ chromolithograph in full color.

Many of the posters were smaller and printed in one or two colors. Some posters are simple, and contain the title, place and time of a Hoffman dance with few decorative embellishments. I spent a few weeks thinking about how I’d treat the posters and doing research.

Gertrude Hoffman (1885-1966) was a well known dancer and choreographer, who was actually arrested for indecency in 1909 after dancing Salome in New York City. She danced on Broadway and in a variety of Vaudeville shows. Hoffman later developed her own troupe called “The Hoffman Girls.” The Hoffman Girls were sort of an athletic version of chorus girls. Hoffman’s troupe toured the US and Europe, and some of the posters are from their appearances in Europe. Some of the Hoffman Girls appearances were
The majority of our posters were from engagements in France by The Hoffman Girls. Most of the posters are undated (with the exception of two dated 1911 and 1934).

I left the posters all over my lab with some assembled together on the floor. In the end, each poster received a different treatment. The largest poster was flattened using weights and backed with a very thin Japanese tissue purchased on a roll. I used rice starch paste as the adhesive. Most of the smaller posters were encapsulated in Mylar polyester or repaired with heat-set tissue. The smaller posters were in much better physical shape than the larger ones. They had not been subjected to folding and were printed on a heavier weight paper.

Following these treatments, the posters were stored in large Bristol folders to prevent physical handling and light from damaging them. The Hoffman posters can now be used with the rest of this collection which included scrapbooks, photographs, theater ephemera and music scores.

**Clarence Herbert New Collection:**
*Thanhouser Theater Posters*

The second collection of posters I worked with is a set of Thanhouser Theater Posters. I recently brought these 100-year-old theater posters out of the flat files where they had been stored for an assessment of their condition. These posters are part of the larger Clarence Herbert New Collection at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University.

I was prompted to look at them because the processing of the collection is almost completed. These posters were about the only part of the Clarence Herbert New Collection I had not examined for preservation needs. The Thanhouser posters were printed for films based on the adventure stories written by Clarence Herbert New. These stories were primarily the stuff of pulp fiction: adventure and intrigue. The Thanhouser posters were in much better condition than those in the Gertrude Hoffman Theater Collection.

The posters had tears and some paper losses mostly on the folds. For these posters, I used heat-set tissue exclusively for the repairs. I usually tore the heat-set tissue into strips which I then tore to the right length, because the damage was primarily on the folds of each poster.

There were six posters: all large in two, three or six panels. The posters advertised films from 1913-1914 which were based on the writings of Clarence Herbert New. Mr. New was a prolific writer, editor, novelist and adventurer. Adventure, which was an actual part of his young adult life, became part and parcel of his writings. He wrote for a few publications, now largely forgotten which were entitled: *The Red Book* and *The Blue Book*. New, who had a number of pseudonyms, wrote stories which had titles...
such as: *The Hatching of a Pirate* (1919) and *A Great Ruby Disappears* (1921).

This same man incredibly lost an arm to a bear in New York City’s Central Park Zoo and was shipwrecked twice in his youth. This collection was processed by two archivists at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Audra Eagle Yun and Rebecca Peterson. These two young archivists regularly funneled materials from this collection to me for repairs. It took very little time for me to become interested in the collection and Clarence Herbert New. The collection is visually rich and is full of New’s photographs, scrapbooks of two round-the-world trips, his summer vacations in Lake Pennesseewassee, Maine, and lots of interesting ephemera and maps.

The Thanhouser Film Corporation made films from 1910-1918. Still in business today, it is operated by the grandson of the founder as a film preservation company. The posters are very large and I assume these would have been applied to walls in New York City as advertisements. The colors are incredible and rich especially since these are almost 100 years old, being printed in 1913 and 1914. It is one of the joys of preservation work to be able to handle and repair these materials for future researchers.

Sources
1. Wake Forest University: http://www.wfu.edu/.
2. Z. Smith Reynolds Library: http://zsr.wfu.edu/.
3. ZSR Library Special Collections: http://zsr.wfu.edu/collections/special/.
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