WELCOMING MALINDA JOHNSTON

MALINDA JOHNSTON joined the Science Library staff in June as library assistant V. She brings excellent library experience and technology skills from her work at Manchester Community College, where she was responsible for circulation, reserves, and supervising student employees.

Johnston holds a degree in environmental science and received several awards as an undergraduate. She has a strong background in biology and an interest in ecology. She regularly runs 5K races and is currently training for her first half marathon in October. She is a member of the Run 169 Towns Society with the goal of running a road race in each of Connecticut’s 169 towns. When not running, she enjoys yoga and spinning.

In the Science Library, Johnston will have primary responsibility for Division III print reserves and journal and media collections. She will co-manage circulation and stacks maintenance, as well as scheduling and supervision of student employees with Linda Hurtse. The Science Library is delighted to welcome her to the staff.

— MELISSA BERNHEY, SCIENCE LIBRARIAN —

EXPLORING WESLEYAN’S PAST IN PLACE

What happens when you bring together a group of 18 students with different disciplinary backgrounds to collaborate on a digital humanities project? As I learned in teaching Wesleyan’s Digital History course last spring, the process is as thrilling as the outcome. Over the course of the semester, we conceived, designed, built, tested, and launched “A Spatial History of Wesleyan University,” an interactive website that allows visitors to explore the changing campus and its community through narrative, oral history, quantitative analysis, and historical mapping. We launched the site on May 11, 2015; you can check out the project yourself and read more about our process at http://spatialhistory.wesleyan.edu/.

Teaching this course brought together my interests in using digital formats to advance the public communication of historical work and in using local history to deepen students’ engagement with the past. The collaborative, project-based class format was inspired by my experiences at several digital humanities gatherings, where the process of figuring out what you want to make and how you’re going to make it has been integral to the learning experience. This made for a different mode of teaching in which I was as much project manager as professor, and in which students took on leadership and organizational roles that were quite impressive. The project itself also required us to ask for help from many quarters, from Special Collections and Archives to Academic Computing to WesGIS to ITS. Collaboration happened not just in the classroom but across the campus.

The response to our work has been incredibly satisfying, and the resulting site stands as a public testament to the students’ efforts. It’s also possible the site may grow: Professor Gary Shaw will be teaching Digital History this fall and is planning on building on the framework our class created, giving students the option to add functionality to the site, create additional layers for the map, and explore new narratives about Wesleyan’s past. I can’t think of a more rewarding result.

— AMEY MILLIANS, VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY —

CHECK IT OUT — FALL 2015

FALL 2015

WESLEYAN JOINS EASTERN ACADEMIC SCHOLARS TRUST (EAST)

As libraries continue to acquire materials but have been challenged by an increase in shelf space as well as the need to repurpose existing spaces, libraries have adopted a wide variety of solutions. Like many libraries, Wesleyan University added compact shelving in 2006 to hold older materials that are not frequently circulated, but are still important for the preservation of the scholarly record. Other institutions, typically larger research institutions, build off-site storage facilities, but these still require regular maintenance including staff to properly manage those spaces.

More recently, many academic libraries have used their existing consortia to coordinate collections to ensure that at least one member retains the “last copy” of a particular item. The CTW Consortium prepared such an agreement several years ago in light of a planned programmatic evaluation of Wesleyan’s book holdings to accommodate new purchases and the transfer of books from the Art Library, coupled with a similar but smaller project at Connecticut College’s Shain Library to allow for renovations. Such a document provides insurance that lesser used, but still important material, remains within easy reach of faculty and students.

In 2013, institutions affiliated with the Oberlin Group of 17, a subset of liberal arts institutions in the Northeast Region and part of the larger nation-wide Oberlin Group, recognized that despite these deliberative arrangements, there was no coordinated effort in ensuring older print materials (books or bound journals) would be retained within a close geographic area for easy borrowing purposes. As a consequence, working groups from libraries in the Northeast Region formed to seek a solution.

Starting in summer 2013, members of these groups worked to determine the necessary steps to create what is now called Eastern Academic Scholars Trust (EAST), a multi-institutional, collaborative, storage mechanism for older monographs and serials. These steps included criteria for selecting which items should be retained, the retention period, how items could be requested and retrieved easily, as well as governance procedures. In fall 2014, the Boston Library Consortium was secured to act as the host institution for EAST, including responsibilities related to staffing, fiscal management, and coordination of grant proposals to support the project. In December 2014, Wesleyan University Library committed as a retention partner, agreeing to serve as a regional storage library for monographs selected to be part of this initiative. In June 2015, EAST received support in the form of grants from the Mellon Foundation and the Davis Educational Foundation.

Over the next several months, retention libraries, including Wesleyan, will contribute their catalog information for a monographic collections analysis to determine holdings overlap between institutions and then a validation test to confirm those physical holdings. In the fall, an Executive Committee will be elected to oversee ongoing operational support and governance. Further information is available at blc.org/east-project.

While some outside observers have suggested that the future of libraries lies only in digital information, Wesleyan’s commitment to the EAST project confirms that it is also fully engaged with our past.

— DIANE KLAER, INTERIM UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN —
SHERMAN n help the library fulfill its mission as the intellectual and information hub of originally having some trouble deciding on a book, but after seeing it I'm was a great experience to open it up and see my name in there. I remember Cole '15 wrote: “It’s a privilege to be able to become have felt like home for the past four years.” Brendan Grauer (MA '64), another former graduate student of David McAllester’s who had preserving traditional Navajo culture. Blessingway is considered a center-piece of the Navajo religion, not a curing ceremony but a protective one, and the subject in this particular filmed ceremony was one of Mitchell’s own daughters, who was about to give birth to her fourth child. Filming and audio-recording were done several over nights in December 1957, and David McAllester later worked with Wesleyan graduate student Victor Grauer (MA ’91) to produce an edited version of the footage, which was shown to the Mitchell family. In using the film for educational purposes at Wesleyan, McAllester created a soundtrack, mixed from Frank Mitchell’s singing and his own narration of the events of the ceremony, and eventually a number of copies were made on VHS tape in the late 1980s/early 1990s, combining the edited film and the soundtrack. Meanwhile, all the raw footage and the edited version on 16mm film were deposited in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives. When David McAllester passed away in 2006, it was unknown how many VHS copies still existed, aside from the one he owned, which was given to his daughter, Bonner McAllester. While eventually a copy surfaced belonging to the Mitchell family, it was becoming clear that VHS tape was no longer a viable medium for viewing the film and that any hope for its long-term preservation would require making a digital transfer from the original. With the passing of both Frank Mitchell and David McAllester, the authority to grant permission for viewing and copies of the film was transferred to Bonner McAllester of Frank Mitchell, and the Sandoval Mitchell had expressed to his daughter the hope that viewers of the film should have an understanding of the ceremony, that to watch in ignorance would be dis-respectful, and so one condition for the viewing was that no copies be made by the company of someone who could explain it. The prospect of digitization, therefore, opened up several concerns, including the possibility of many unknown people watching the film in the course of the digital transfer, as well as the relative ease of making unauthorized copies that might put out the material. Fortunately, Augustine Sandoval was eventually persuaded that preservation was of paramount impor-tance and that Wesleyan would guarantee security for the film, and gave her approval for the digitization. In this we received invaluable help from Charlotte Fairchild (MA ’94), another former graduate student of David McAllester’s who had joined the Frank Mitchell Blessingway project in the 1960s and collaborated in pro-duction of Mitchell’s autobiography, Navajo Blessingway Singer (University of Arizona Press, 1978). Fribbie has remained close to the Mitchell family through the years and recorded many other Blessingway songs sung by Frank, and she was in an ideal position to convey our assurances to Augustine Sandoval. In May of this year, after extensive con-sulting with our University Archivist Leith Johnson to evaluate the condition of the reels and prepare them for transport, I traveled to Philadelphia with the two-reel edited copy of the film and several reels of raw footage for inspection and evalua-tion, and had the edited copy transferred to hard disk at George Blood, L.P., a firm specializing in the preservation of audio, video, and film. While the digitized copy, which has no soundtrack, will provide a much better quality viewing of the cer-eemony than the earlier VHS copies, and copies will be made for both the Mitchell family and the Olin Library. Restrictions on public viewing will remain the same. The value in preserving a recording of an event of such importance to tradi-tional Navajo culture is that it not be lost to future generations of Navajo, as well as those who wish to learn and under-stand Navajo culture. It is also a very private documenting of Mitchell family history. Hopefully future viewers will appreciate that the film embodies these complexities and will accord it the proper respect.

— ALEX MCLANE, MUSIC LIBRARIAN AND DIRECTOR, WORLD MUSIC ARCHIVES —

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY PRESS TITLES AVAILABLE ONLINE TO STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF

W esleyan University Press’s complete digital collection is now available for free use by all library patrons. The Press, under the direction of Suzanna Tamminen, editor-in-chief, and with the cooperation of Proquest/EBL, a leading e-book and content provider, generously enabled digital access to more than 30 prizewinning titles in poetry, dance, film studies, and cultural criticism. Now in its 58th year, the Press has a distinguished history of publishing and has garnered an impressive list of awards. Interim University Librarian Diane Klare says, “Wesleyan University Press has made substantial contributions to the cultural and artistic inspiration of our academic community for decades. This gift allows the library to provide the rich, critical content of Press titles in a new format to the entire campus community. We are so grateful to the staff of Wesleyan University Press for their willingness to share their books for the benefit of our current and future students, faculty, and staff.” Wesley Press digital editions may be accessed here: http://bit.ly/1Jr1pRw.

— AMANDA SANDOVAL, MONOGRAPH ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIAN —

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