History of the Westfield State College Archive

Dr. Raymond G. Patterson started the college archive with a $1,000 donation at his retirement. He taught History at Westfield State College from 1920 until his retirement in 1951. Dr. Robert T. Brown, History professor, was director of the archive from it’s inception in 1974 until his retirement in 1998. The archives started with 20 cartons of pictures, letters, record books and keepsakes. Three more cartons of 19th Century material were located. While Dr. Brown was searching for all of the college material he learned that the bulk of the material plus much exhibit material had been stored on the third floor of the Washington St. School and was probably discarded a few years ago.

After 1974 the archives were located on the mezzanine of the library in a small room that had a desk and a lamp. The cartons were in this room as well.

In 1993 Mr. Hal Gibson became the Library Director. After Dr. Brown’s retirement, he moved the archives to the sixth floor of the Library. This location was much bigger and provided a place for researchers to work. It also had much better lighting. Mr. Gibson also arranged the archive in filing cabinets. This provided a safer environment for the material because it was taken out of acidic boxes. There was more room to store the material and this provided easier access for the staff in the new location.

Mr. Gibson retired in 2003. Mr. Brian Hubbard took over as Acting Library Director. Under Mr. Hubbard’s directorship the collection was inventoried and a container list was created to help archives staff members answer patron questions. The process of removing acidic folders replacement with non acidic file folders began. Staples, paper clips and elastic bands were removed as well.

Ms. Catherine Doyle became Library Director in 2005. Ms. Doyle was instrumental in advising the archives staff to apply for a grant for a Preservation Survey. That grant was written and submitted. In 2007 the archive received a Preservation Survey Grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. The grant is given by the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners administers the grant money. This enabled the archive staff to hire a conservator to provide assistance with a five year preservation plan for the archives. This plan will enable the staff to establish priorities in the archive in terms of preservation needs and address these needs by seeking out money in the form of grants when necessary.

In March of 2009 movable archival shelving was installed in the archives room. The money came from the library budget that year. The shelving vendor was Donnagan Systems from Wethersfield, CT. The next big project is moving all of the material from the filing cabinets to the shelving.

Over the years I have had the pleasure of working with some fascinating people. I helped Ms. Linda Mourice from the University of Indiana find information about Flora and Mary
White. These two women were sisters and graduated from the Westfield Normal School in 1877. Flora White went on teach Physical Culture at the Westfield Normal School. She taught here from 1892 – 1895.

Flora and Mary White were quite fascinating women as they wrote a book of poetry and also opened schools in Springfield and Concord, Massachusetts. You may see the paper *The Progressive Legacy of Flora White*, by Linda C. Morice in the archives as well as the book of poetry by them and a letter written by Flora White.

Ms. Susanne Conley wanted to do research about Higher Education in Massachusetts. She wanted to do a demographic study of faculty over a 25 year period from 1945 - 1970. It was interesting to hear how higher education has changed over the years. She looked at a great deal of information that was in the archives while doing the research for her dissertation and was pleased to see all that was here.

I frequently get questions about people who attended the Normal School. I provide as much as the person needs. While we do not have genealogical tools here I can provide a glimpse of what their loved one’s life was like while they attended classes at Westfield Normal School.

Submitted by Karen Canary