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New exhibit highlights library treasures

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New exhibit highlights library treasures

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The collection includes baseballs from the William "Fishbait" Miller political collection, signed by such pro legends as Ty Cobb and Ted Williams.

An exhibition of historic artifacts, representing some of the University of Mississippi's most unique and interesting pieces from the Department of Archives and Special Collections, is on display in the J.D. Williams Library.

"Preserving Our Past: Highlights from Archives & Special Collections" features treasures ranging from rare 78-rpm recordings by bluesman Robert Johnson to medieval manuscripts. The 18-case exhibit opened April 25 and will be on display through January 2014.

"The exhibition has a little something for everyone," said Jennifer Ford, head of Archives

and Special Collections and associate professor. "We chose items from our collections that each of the curators felt were highlights from each unit and specialty."

Included in the exhibition are baseballs from the William "Fishbait" Miller political collection, signed by such pro legends as Ty Cobb and Ted Williams, as well as the letters of Belle Edmondson, a female Confederate spy, and a piece of the shack in which bluesman Muddy Waters grew up. Literary cases devoted to William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Ellen Douglas, Larry Brown, Barry Hannah and Willie Morris are also in the display.

A case dedicated to civil rights leaders Episcopal priest Duncan Gray Jr. and university chaplain Wofford Smith illustrates the hardships the two men faced as well as support they received from individuals such as Faulkner, whose letter to Gray is on display.

"We were delighted to receive Bishop Gray's collection last year," said Ford. "We wanted to represent graphically what Duncan Gray and Wofford Smith went through as people who stood up for integration in that time period."

Gray, former rector at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford, was instrumental in civil rights issues in Mississippi. The night of the 1962 riot on campus, he and Smith moved through the crowd, taking bricks and other weapons from the hands of angry rioters and encouraging them to go home.

Ford said the collection's diverse artifacts all tie back to Mississippi through their donors or the actual pieces.

"It's a wonderful exhibit, and we really enjoyed putting it together," she said. "I hope that anyone who views it will understand the enormity of the contributions Mississippians have made to the world of arts and letters and culture."

"Preserving Our Past" opened April 25 with a ceremony. Charles Wilson, Cook Chair of History and professor of Southern studies, spoke on "Mississippi Religion and Social Change: Duncan Gray and Religious Currents in the Civil Rights Era" to commemorate the event.

The exhibit is open during Special Collections' regular hours of 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Fridays, except university holidays. The Department of Archives and Special Collections is on the third floor of the J.D. Williams Library.

For questions or more information, contact Jennifer Ford at 662-915-7639 or jwford@olemiss.edu.

Keywords Menu

- Keywords Main Page
- University Libraries
- Ask A Librarian
- Give to UM Libraries
- Contact Us
- Ole Miss Home
- Keywords – Past Issues
 - Keywords – Spring 2012
 - Keywords – Winter 2012
 - Keywords – Summer 2013
 - Keywords – Winter 2013
 - Keywords – Fall 2014
 - Keywords – Spring 2015

Spring 2015 – Table of Contents

Local Authors Honored at Friends Reception

New collections from Archives & Special Collections

Spring Coffee

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UM Archives Celebrates Arts and Entertainment

Library campaign surpasses goal

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