CONSERVATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

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Director of Conservation and Preservation

Hidden away from public view and far from the reference desks, the Conservation and Preservation unit has been working to save and repair Smathers Libraries collections for over 30 years. Begun in 1987, when the Libraries decided to send a librarian to the newly formed library preservation training program at Columbia University, the program has grown and developed to meet UF's changing needs for its collections and the research mission of the university.

Bone and teflon folders used in bookbinding and book conservation work.

La Correspondencia de Puerto-Rico, *digitized as part of the NDNP grant,* "Film on a Boat" *project.*

At the beginning, the unit was housed in backrooms of the Smathers Library (then Library East) and focused on caring for the Libraries many print collections, ensuring that they are available to current and future researchers visiting the library. To this end the program developed a robust microfilming unit that participated in many of the national grant programs to preserve brittle books and newspapers by microfilming them before their acidic paper became too fragile to handle. This microfilm was made available to institutions across the world, and today, it forms the basis for many of our mass digitization projects, such as the National Digital Newspaper Program and the CLIR Digitizing Hidden Collections "Film on a Boat" project. For most of our monographs and journals, the biggest risk was the regular wear and tear that comes from heavy use by the students and faculty who are the primary readers of our collections. For the volumes on the stacks in our branch libraries, the Conservation team manages a library binding program, where heavily used volumes or years of loose journals are sent out to a vendor to be sturdily bound in heavy buckram meant to protect against the rigors of being thrown into a backpack or stacked on a desk in a pile of research. The Conservation team also oversees a book repair program, where books that have had pages accidentally (or intentionally!) torn can be mended, bindings that have failed can be resewn, or damaged book cases can be rebacked.

For much of its existence, the conservation lab was housed on the ground floor of Smathers Libraries, in a space which would come to be

Washing a document from the Judaica Library to remove discoloration and degradation byproducts. This challenging artifact is being preserved to help future scholars understand the political and social situation surrounding the events of the Holocaust.

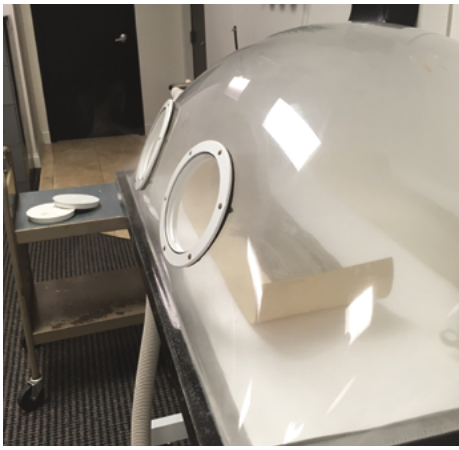
Map & Imagery Library. The lab occupied a long, narrow, and dark space, on two floors. It was a tough fit for the large equipment, such as the board shearer and ultrasonic welder, that the conservators frequently use in their work, but the space was conveniently located near many of the Libraries collections and allowed the unit to grow and develop in close proximity to the collections and staff that we serve.

As the library world has changed over the decades, particularly as digital resources and digitized books have become more widely available, the Conservation and Preservation work has also changed. Microfilming was ended in 2005 as the library opened their Digital Collections and the Digital Support Services began digitizing materials in place of microfilm. The rise of Google Books, online databases, and other digital resources has also meant that many of the damaged books that came through Book Repair are now available online for an international community to access and are no longer priorities for local conservation.

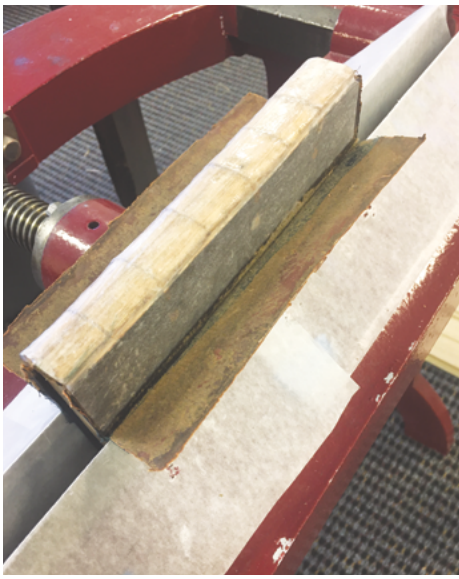
The unit moved from its original home in Smathers Library to the new Interim Library Facility in 2012, bringing with it all of the tools and equipment required in conservation. Some of these would be familiar to a 17th century bookbinder and others that have been developed for more modern materials, such as our sturdy work benches, cast iron book presses, paper guillotines, job backers, ultrasonic welder, and blast freezers.

This digital shift has also been felt in the rising research usage of the unique print collections in the Special and Area Studies Collections

Blast freezers used to eliminate pest infestations and to freeze dry water-damaged collections.



A humidity chamber slowing introducing moisture to flatten rolled panoramic photographs.



A book in a backing press undergoing a reback to replace its damaged spine.

Fig.1 - Interim Library Facility (ILF)

(SASC), whose content is not readily available online or at other institutions. These unique collections require much more intensive conservation treatment than our circulating items, as the special collections frequently have material value that is of interest to researchers and which we must preserve. Oftentimes, the most appropriate response is simply to gently clean the item, stabilize it with minor mends, and construct a custom box of acid free materials to ensure that no further damage can take place. This ensures that as much of the original object is available to our researchers with only minimal materials being added by our conservators. We have many important collections where this kind of work has been done, such as the Zora Neale Hurston Collection, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Collections, Jerry Chicone Jr. Florida Citrus Label Collection, and the Elias "Bo Diddley" McDaniels Collection.

Many of these materials remain fragile, but they have been stabilized so that no damage can happen while they are stored in the stacks of SASC. Their biggest risk comes from being used, and so these materials are only available for researchers in the Grand Reading Room where they can be handled with care to minimize any chance of accidental damage.

Other collections have their own unique needs. Our conservators do a lot of work to prepare materials for digitization, which may involve surface cleaning with erasers and HEPA vacuums to remove dust and dirt; humidification and flattening to gently unroll posters and architectural drawings; or removing old adhesive tapes that have stained and disfigured these rare items.

In 2012, the unit moved off campus to the newly developed Interim Library Facility (ILF), with floor to ceiling windows along two sides bringing in lots of natural light *(Fig.1)*. The new space allows for all of the lab equipment to be spaced out to facilitate better workflows for treatments. Initially, the ILF space contained all of the old work benches and furniture, but we have been steadily updating the space, with new shelving to hold in process collections and bigger work benches for treatments. We have also brought

PRESERVING THE PAST, WHILE KEEPING UP WITH THE FUTURE

Above: Binding of Isaac (1542) was so extensively damaged, that a complete rebinding was needed. Led by The Head of Conservation, John Freund (retired), worked closely with the Curator of the Price Library, Dr. Rebecca Jefferson, to identify a treatment approach and historically accurate rebinding, including wooden boards and a packed and raised double cord sewing, so that this important volume can be used as a classroom teaching tool for book history classes at UF.

Above: Conservator Katie Smith making a four-flap wrapper to house a Special Collections book. Katie has been the Conservator at the Libraries since 2018. She is a graduate of the bookbinding and book conservation programs at the North Bennet Street School and West Dean College (UK). She previously worked at the National Archives (Washington, DC) and Church Library (Salt Lake City, UT).

in a new generation of staff, with Fletcher Durant joining the team in 2015 from NYU Libraries to become the Director of Conservation and Preservation; Jimmy Barnett taking on the role of Collections Care Associate in 2019; and Katie Smith joining as our Conservator.

The work of the Preservation and Conservation unit will continue as our diverse and growing collections continue to age and receive heavy use from our communities. The goal of the team is to leave the Libraries collections in a better condition than we receive them so that they can continue to be of interest for researchers around campus, the state, and the world.

https://conservation.uflib.ufl.edu/

UNMASKING: *Archival unboxing show-and-tell, providing a first-hand look at some of the techniques that the Libraries conservators employ to preserve, process and protect rare items.*