Shaking the Trees for New Resources

By Michael Taylor, Special Collections Librarian

In March, Special Collections Librarian Michael Taylor traveled to Berkeley, California, to visit a donor and pick up two eighteenth-century editions of *A Voyage Round the World* by the Comte de Lapérouse, an early explorer of the Pacific Ocean and a contemporary of Cook and Vancouver. Lapérouse sailed down the coast of Washington in 1786 enroute from Alaska, whose coastline he charted, to California, where he made notes on the treatment of indigenous people by Spanish colonists.

During some free time, Michael went hiking in the East Bay area and found an opportunity to add to the instruction kit that he uses to teach students about the history of books and printing. There were many oak trees along the trail, and remembering that oaks are the source of gall nuts—an essential ingredient in medieval ink—Michael climbed one of the trees and collected a few. (Continued on page 4)
Welcome to the twentieth issue of *Heritage Highlights*, now in its tenth year of publication. This milestone offers an excellent opportunity to showcase a few “highlights” of the past decade. The units of Heritage Resources—the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, University Archives & Records Management, and Special Collections—work together to document the history and culture of Western, the region, and the world for the purposes of teaching, learning, research, and public programming.

Our teaching initiatives are designed to offer high-quality educational experiences for students from all academic fields who are interested in using primary sources, and we regularly collaborate with faculty to develop collections and curricula that support specialized instruction needs. Over the past decade we have taught over 650 classes reaching nearly 10,000 students from academic departments across the university. Our collections supported over 12,500 research inquiries from around the world that have resulted in documentary films, scholarly articles and books, and student, faculty, and community research activities.

Heritage Resources continues to refine and develop our collections to meet the teaching and research needs of our faculty, students, staff, and community patrons. In recent years we have acquired thousands of new books and dozens of archival collections. These include over 3000 Judaica volumes donated by University of California, Berkeley, to WWU to support curriculum related to Holocaust and Genocide studies, as well as important additions to our Mountaineering, Children’s Literature, and Rare Book collections.

We also offered a wide array of public programs including a regular schedule of lectures and exhibits that explore topics and themes found in our holdings. Over the past ten years we sponsored over 50 events featuring scholars who have used our collections in their original research, as well as community-based workshops, tours, and presentations. These included Ron Judd’s “The Liberal Arts on Trial in Bellingham: The Inside Story and Legacy of the 1939 Firing of College President Charles H. Fisher”; a visit by Gregory Fields, the Children of the Setting Sun song and dance troupe, and Lummi elder Pauline Hillaire to celebrate the publication of *A Totem Pole History: The Work of Lummi Carver, Joseph Hillaire*; and John Scurlock’s lecture on his book of photographs, *Snow and Spire: Flights to Winter in the North Cascade Range*. We also hosted Arlene Blum, world-renowned climber and environmentalist, who discussed “Women in High Places: To Annapurna and Beyond.” More recently, we arranged a groundbreaking panel presentation entitled “Making and Unmaking Histories of Settler Violence and Colonialism in the Pacific Northwest,” that featured two of our James Scott Fellowship recipients who engaged in discussion on this important topic with representatives from the Native community. As an example of our high-quality exhibitions, be sure to check out our current offering, *Silence Speaks: The Quiet Power of Wordless Novels*, that explores the complex relationship between power, knowledge, and silence, and reflects on how wordless books inform our understanding of communication more broadly.

This newsletter, now distributed to over 600 recipients locally and around the world, has allowed us to share our work with you over the past decade—and we thank you for your interest. If you haven’t done so recently, I encourage you to visit us in person to explore our wonderful collections and learn about our services. As always, your support is vital to the fulfillment of our mission to provide high quality instruction, research support, and public programming. We welcome inquiries about how you might donate to our collections and services with a financial contribution.

~ Elizabeth Joffrion, Director
Heritage Resources is pleased to introduce Elizabeth (Liz) Hendershott, who entered the role of Lead Records Management Specialist in December 2021. This position plays a key role within University Archives & Records Management, serving as the university’s lead consultant on records management issues, managing the university’s official retention schedules, and liaising with the State Records Committee. Through these activities (and much more!) the Lead Records Management Specialist aids in the efficient strategic growth of the University Archives.

Liz holds a BS in Business Administration from the University of New Orleans, and a MLIS with Graduate Certificate in Archival Studies from Louisiana State University. Prior to her arrival at Western, Liz worked for several years at the Roseburg Public Library (Roseburg, OR), Corvallis Benton Public Library, and Lane Community College (Eugene). At the Roseburg Public Library Liz managed a volunteer program that included over 70 volunteers and also wrote the Library's emergency management plan. At Lane CC, one of Liz’s roles involved managing the college’s archives and records center, including helping them implement Oregon’s public records retention schedule for community and technical colleges. The experience of implementing public records retention schedules in higher education and in conjunction with an archival collection has proven a great asset to Liz at WWU.

We also wish to extend our congratulations to Special Collections Manager David Schlitt who is this year’s recipient of the Marian Alexander Staff Professional Development Award. The award recognizes the critical contributions made by classified staff to the success of Western Libraries, and is designed to complement and enhance existing professional development opportunities in order to foster deeper knowledge related to job responsibilities and interests.

In his application materials David expressed a desire to expand his knowledge of rare books and grow in his position, as well as contribute more broadly to Western Libraries’ culture of inclusive excellence. He sought professional development opportunities whose objectives support Western Libraries’ mission, vision, and values, and advance strategic goals, ultimately choosing to enroll in a hybrid course of study at Rare Books School which starts this summer with “African American Print Cultures in the Nineteenth-Century United States.” After completing his training, David will host a public forum to share his experience with Western Libraries personnel.

We are so excited for David, wish him all the best in these endeavors, and look forward to learning from his enhanced knowledge and expertise.

**Featured Exhibition—Silence Speaks: The Quiet Power of Wordless Novels**

Wordless novels, a genre of visual storytelling that paved the way for today’s graphic novels, developed during the years of artistic, social, and political turmoil between the First and Second World War. This exhibition introduces some of the major themes wordless novels express and highlights their connections to early cinema. In addition, it explores the complex relationship between power, knowledge, and silence, and reflects on how wordless books inform our understanding of communication more broadly.

The exhibition is free and open to the public, and can be viewed in Special Collections (Wilson 6th floor) Mon.-Fri. from 11:00am to 4:00pm or by appointment (closed weekends and holidays). An online version is also available. For more information or to inquire about class visits to view the exhibit, contact Special Collections Librarian Michael Taylor (taylo213@wwu.edu | (360) 650-3097).
Oak galls form when a gall wasp lays an egg in the bud of an oak tree. The gall protects the developing larva, which eventually turns into a baby wasp and eats it way out. Long ago, someone discovered that oak galls are a source of tannic acid. When mixed with iron sulfate, the substance turns black. Add in a little gum arabic from the sap of the acacia tree, and the result is a shiny, waterproof ink that is perfect for writing on parchment.

Although Michael has not yet made ink the old-fashioned way, during classes on medieval manuscripts he often has students write with quill pens on parchment to help them directly experience and understand the difficulties that were involved in producing books in the Middle Ages. From there, they discuss the implications of those difficulties on knowledge, literacy, and power.

In the undergraduate survey on book history that he is teaching this quarter, Michael also had his students write on birch bark as part of a unit on the development of writing and writing materials. In medieval Russia, people used birch bark as a substitute for parchment, which was too scarce and expensive for everyday use. More than 1,000 birch-bark documents, preserved in mud, were excavated in the 1950s at Novgorod, one of the oldest cities in Russia. Using bark that Michael found in the woods near his house, students copied one of those documents—an alphabet probably written by a young boy. They learned that humans have an innate desire to record information and, with a little help from Mother Nature, are always finding clever new ways to do it.

LIBR 297C—History of the Book—was offered for the third time this spring. The class introduces students to major topics in the history of books and printing, and involves extensive use of rare books and manuscripts from around the world. The course emphasizes books as physical artifacts and explores how scholars study them in ways that extend beyond their texts.

Hands-on activities offer students a deeper understanding of historical book production processes, such as papermaking and bookbinding. Many of the in-class projects use examples taken directly from Special Collections’ holdings. Students have reflected that these activities make the course unique, and well-suited for learners of all types and interests.

For more information about the History of the Book course, please contact Special Collections Librarian Michael Taylor at Michael.Taylor@wwu.edu or (360) 650-3097.

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