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Center for Archival Collections: 40 Years and Going Strong!



By the late 1960s Bowling Green State University had made the change from a teachers' college to a modern American university. The first doctoral degrees were awarded in that decade and the faculty, too, were dedicating more of their time outside of class to research and publishing. At the same time, the realization that there were untapped resources at the state, regional, and local level, as well as new approaches to traditional academic subjects opened tremendous possibilities for interested researchers. BGSU was ready to embrace these opportunities.

Dr. Richard J. Wright of the Department of History had long been interested in all aspects of the maritime history of the Great Lakes and had amassed a large collection dealing with trade on the lakes and the vessels that made it possible. The Northwest Ohio-Great Lakes Research Center (today called the Center for Archival Collections) was established in 1969 to make this collection more accessible to researchers and soon added newspapers, local government records and manuscripts documenting the history of the surrounding Ohio counties. The August 1993 issue of the Archival Chronicle gives a more detailed history of the first twenty-five years as the CAC's program grew to

include the University Archives, microfilming, document conservation, rare books and special collections.

With the solid support of our donors and a host of researchers from around the nation and the world, the CAC established a reputation as a first-rate repository for the study of northwest Ohio and Great Lakes history. Our collection strengths continue to lie in local history, Great Lakes maritime history, women's history, the Civil War, education, and all aspects of the social, cultural, economic, and industrial history of northwest Ohio. Our challenges in the years since our twenty-fifth anniversary have been many.

Computerization has given us tools for improved access to the detail level of many of our collections, and the internet allows researchers to preview our holdings and make better use of their time once they arrive. The online Archival Chronicle no longer needs to restrict the length of articles, has been able to expand its use of photographs, and remains digitally "in-print" for as long as the information is useful. The challenge behind-the-scenes is to keep the digital foundation up-to-date.

We maintain our **micrographics laboratory**, which continues to provide a useful service in transforming newspapers, local government records, and other documents into an easily reproducible, archivally stable format. In the future, we hope to be able to transform microfilm into a digital format, and electronic format documents into microfilm, but technical problems persist.

The economy has been perhaps our greatest challenge. Our staff has been seriously affected by university-wide budget cuts, and as key staff members have retired or moved on to other employment, their positions have not been refilled. By sharing some job responsibilities among ourselves and re-working other responsibilities, we have been able continue to meet our service goals. As part of an institution of higher learning, we continue to employ and train undergraduate and graduate students who play a vital role in reference service, preparing collections for use, and other support functions.

--Lee N. McLaird