Laura Michelson

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she/her/they

Grinnell College Burling Library - Special Collections & Archives

Education

University of Iowa — Iowa City, Iowa

MA in Library and Information Science — May 2020

& University of Iowa Center for the Book: Certificate in Book Studies

Cornell College — Mount Vernon, Iowa

BA in Medieval-Early Modern Studies — *Magna Cum Laude* — May 2016

ACM Newberry Library Seminar: Research in the Humanities — Chicago, Illinois

Internship: Conservation Lab — Fall 2015

Work Experience

Project Archivist — Grinnell, Iowa

Assistant Professor, Grinnell College Libraries — August 2020—July 2024

- Curate the Salisbury House Library Collection, including processing and collection organization, provenance and collection history research, creation and enhancement of metadata, and finding aid creation.
- Assist instruction in Special Collections with visiting courses, including faculty outreach, class planning, activity design, and instruction.
- Coordinate loan process in collaboration with Salisbury House (museum non-profit partner based in Des Moines) with a rotating loan commitment including packing and transporting rare materials, installation, and interpretation. A new process for Grinnell, I created the policies and workflow of this ongoing arrangement.
- Interpretation and curation of physical and digital exhibits, including managing physical gallery cases, supporting items for display, running a Magic Box digital display case, and digital content.
- Evaluation of collection materials for preservation and conservation needs and establishing a conservation workflow.
- Assisting researchers and answering reference inquiries for visiting and virtual patrons.
- Research including collection history, provenance, and materials.
- Design digital content using StoryMaps, Omeka, WeVideo, WordPress, and Adobe Creative Cloud systems.
- Selection of high-end book scanner (book2net book scanner) and establishing workflow and use.
- Outreach projects to promote the SHLC collection and its holdings, as well as serving on the library Outreach Committee for library projects. Planning major collection events and visits.
- Collaborate on Special Collection's new collection development initiative, identifying acquisition priorities, recommendations for purchase, and drafting collection development policy.
- Identify priority materials for conservation across SCA collections and facilitate ongoing conservation work with outside contractors, including identifying midwest based servicers and establishing these connections. Facilitating inhouse preservation and conservation measures based on current best practices.
- Beyond Special Collections & Archives, active role on the Libraries Outreach team including event design and creation of the recurring Productivity Cafe engagement events and library career panels, support of an expanded faculty and staff speaking series, and creating marketing and social media content.

Interim Humanities & Research Librarian during the 2022-2023 academic year for Anthropology, German Studies, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. Continuing Anthropology liaisonship in 2023-24.

- Assisting faculty as a library liaison, planning and instruction including introductory library sessions on resource gathering and databases, information literacy, research skills, and tailored sessions to support coursework; reference support through library labs and drop in office hours; reference and engagement statistics tracking.

Olson Graduate Research Assistant Iowa City, Iowa
University of Iowa Special Collections January 2019—July 2020

- Assisted department with daily operations, including paging, weekly reference desk shifts, assisting patrons (faculty, staff, students, and community) and monitoring reading room use.
- Daily use of Aeon, ArchivesSpace, Past Perfect, Alma, and OCLC systems and Microsoft suite.
- Classroom instruction including tutorials on handling materials, classroom monitoring, and collaborating with visiting instructors to plan and implement activities and informative sessions on various topics, particularly medieval manuscripts, the Romantic era, and artists' books.
- Extensive collections project with a prominent collection, including inventory, shelf guides, and recommendations for reorganization, record enhancement, and creation of collection guides.
- Exhibit curation for main library gallery, reading room, and popup exhibits including planning, research, interpretation, and collaboration with Conservation for proper item support with co-curators and in independent exhibit projects.
- Processing collections and contributing to finding aid creation and enhancement.
- Ongoing social media content creation, including managing scheduling on a weekly basis and series planning as well as item photography and interpretation.
- Supervisory experience with hiring, training, and managing undergraduate and intern positions.

Special Collections Graduate Student Worker Iowa City, Iowa
University of Iowa Special Collections August 2017—December 2018

- Assist Special Collections projects, including barcoding and rehousing archival materials, as well as daily operations such as paging to the reading room, shelving material, & duties as assigned.
- Shadowing and assisting rare book cataloger on creating original catalog record, particularly artists' books.
- Learned standards for rare book handling and supports for use and exhibits; assisted in selecting materials for pop-up exhibits and events.
- Event staffing, including monitoring handling of material with visiting patrons, as well as pop-up exhibit set up and tear down.

Graduate Research Assistant Iowa City, Iowa
Carnegie Libraries in Iowa Project August 2017—December 2018

- Furthered a digital humanities project with website maintenance and capacity building through creating and processing scans of materials on loan; managed a WordPress platform, including creating descriptive metadata and interpretive material.

Graduate Research Assistant Kalona, Iowa
Kalona Community Heritage Project August 2017—May 2018

- Established and maintained workflow processes for a community digitization project, including drafting training guides for volunteers and staff as well as community engagement through outreach, project events, and drafting sustainable plans.

AFHA AmeriCorps at Arthurdale Heritage, Inc. Arthurdale, West Virginia
Arthurdale Heritage New Deal Museum and Homestead September 2016—August 2017

- Assisted museum visitors and led daily personal tours around historic grounds and buildings.

- Managed non-profit social media accounts, marketing, and website and created quarterly newsletter and mailings.
- Event planning including craft classes, a 5k run/walk, fundraisers, and festivals.
- Recruited and managed volunteers and ongoing projects preserving local history.

Conservation Intern Chicago, Illinois
The Newberry Library Conservation Lab September 2015—December 2015

- Assisted Conservation Staff with various daily tasks and long-term projects in book conservation; trained in basic hands-on conservation and preservation skills including mold removal, cleaning velum, treating damaged leather bindings, sorting and cleaning letterpress type, and book box making.

Publications

forthcoming | "Imagined Libraries and Immersive Special Collections Instruction: A Visit to Enlightenment Britain" chapter in New Prairie Press Archives and Primary Source Handbook co-authored with Allison Haack, Grinnell College

Michelson, Laura, Christopher Jones, and Allison Haack. "Defending Wonder: Adapting an Archival Tour in a Digital Environment." In Brick & Click Libraries: Proceedings of an Academic Libraries Conference (November 2021). Maryville, MO: B.D. Owens Library, Northwest Missouri State University, 2021.

Continuing Education

California Rare Book School -- History of the Renaissance Book UCLA | August 2022

Rare Book School – C90a. Provenance: Tracing Owners and Collections Online | UVA RBS July 2021

Actively attending many online programs and lectures on book history and library topics from

Formal Presentations

Special Connections with Special Collections & Archives: Embedding Primary Sources into Pedagogy | a faculty pedagogy workshop | August 8-11, 2023

For the Love of Books: the Salisbury House Library Collection's New Chapter | collection history talk at Salisbury House, Des Moines, Iowa | April 27, 2023

"The Salisbury House Library at Grinnell College: Collection History, Present, and Next Chapter" co-presented with Christopher Jones University of Iowa December 14, 2022
A public book history lecture for Iowa Bibliophiles. Available on YouTube from the University of Iowa Special Collections Bibliophiles series.

"Medieval European Books of Hours" Grinnell College Virtual Alumni College course April 2022
co-taught with Sharon R. Clayton, Grinnell College

Defending Wonder: Adapting an Archival Tour in a Digital Environment November 5, 2021
Brick & Click Conference | virtual session co-hosted with Christopher Jones and Allison Haack

Around the Library Table: An Evening with Luther Brewer & Leigh Hunt November 11, 2020
A public book history lecture for Iowa Bibliophiles. Available on YouTube from the University of Iowa Special Collections Bibliophiles series.

Training Aeon Remotely: Learning to Enhance Virtual Learning During COVID-19 panel
Atlas Systems | Aeon Virtual Symposium June 2, 2020

Exhibitions

University of Iowa

Book Scouts | a collaborative exhibit curated for UI Special Collections — January-April 2019

Stories Worth Telling: Marking 20 years of "The Greatest Generation" — September 2018 - January 2019
Main Gallery Exhibit | exhibition guide available online

Around the Library Table — October 2020-January 2021
an exhibition of the Brewer-Leigh Hunt Collection | UI Special Collections

Grinnell College

[forthcoming] Yours Truly: Traces of Connection through Correspondence — Spring 2024
Burling Library Gallery Exhibit & digital site in process and to be installed in January 2024

Book Fool: Reading a Bibliophile's Library — Fall 2021
Burling Library Gallery Exhibit & digital (https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1be1136b0c4e436ba434df17bbe7a854)

Ex Libris: New Acquisitions at Grinnell College — Fall 2022
Burling Library Gallery Exhibit and digital (https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/309e800db4f84b8b8908025ffd8677ab)

In the Magic Box:

Leaves of Grass | Adobe | August 2022
https://express.adobe.com/page/cmAJziKrQrTJw/
100 Years of *Ulysses* | Adobe | February 2022
https://express.adobe.com/page/rZYdz46cwUJyD/
Order of the Garter | Adobe | November 2021
https://spark.adobe.com/page/DRUCaJU6h6LOg/

Digital Portfolio

Salisbury House Library Collection | https://salisbury.speccoll.sites.grinnell.edu/

Illuminated Works at Grinnell | https://illuminated.speccoll.sites.grinnell.edu/

August 2022 | Whitman | Digital interpretation through Adobe Creative -- Magic Box display
https://express.adobe.com/page/cmAJziKrQrTJw/

February 2022 | 100 Years of Ulysses | Digital interpretation through Adobe Creative -- Magic Box display
https://express.adobe.com/page/rZYdz46cwUJyD/

October 2021 | Order of the Garter | StoryMaps feature for Magic Box installation
https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/651fab699a614b85adb019958958d94f

September 2021 | Book Fool: Reading a Bibliophile's Library | Digital exhibit
https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1be1136b0c4e436ba434df17bbe7a854

Crowdsourcing the Archives at the Grinnell College Libraries | a Grinnell Archives community project
https://crowdsourcing.speccoll.sites.grinnell.edu/

Major Events: Grinnell College Libraries

SHLC Spring Open House — May 2022
Autumn in the Archives Open House — October 2022
Productivity Café — 7 hosted since December 2022
Special Collections Open House — May 2023

Hosting casual talks and curated collection tours and selected materials for visiting Grinnell College alumni, library guests, and community groups including a local Rotary Club and Lions Club.

Research Interests

Book collection and library history, especially "gentleman's libraries", the 1920s, & Iowa book culture
Critical librarianship & conscious curation Instruction Accessibility in the archives
Exhibits and interpretation Preservation Book as object Provenance research
Bindings and book structures Digital humanities Creative bibliography

Professional Memberships

Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium
Board Member 2021-present
Midwest Archives Conference
Society of American Archivists
Association of College & Research Libraries
ACRL: Rare Books & Manuscripts Section
ACRL: Library History Roundtable
American Library Association
Iowa Library Association
Librarians for Social Justice: Iowa City Chapter
Co-leader 2018-2020

Diversity Statement

Conscious curation is an essential perspective that daily informs my work. Equity, diversity, and inclusion work are necessary for effective library work and service and I am committed to this work. Continual self-education is needed to be informed and effective--I find this is particularly true beyond professional development and for self-education. I strive to be an active and engaged member of my communities both local, culturally, and professionally, especially in advocating for my LGBTQ+ community as well as BIPOC and disability communities who are historically excluded from library spaces. Recognizing and having active conversations with colleagues, students, and student workers about the weight of historical--and recent--harmful practices in library and archival settings of exclusion, erasure, and discrimination are essential in effective work in this field. Addressing how historical structures and practices continue to influence academia and the archival world today is overdue work I'm committed to. In my recent work, this has been through frank and open conversations with colleagues, student workers, and student researchers, in creating contextual documents for interpretation of materials tokenized in the collection and neglectfully described (notably a Toussaint L'Ouverture document, leaf from the Eliot Bible, and manuscript leaf from an early quran) as well as consciously considering the use of materials inextricably linked to violence and colonialism which may cause harm if presented as 'exemplars' without context. Staying up to date on the effective work of peers and library leaders has been an excellent way to stay engaged in ongoing conversations, articles, and conferences that have been essential in my ongoing education, most notably concerning critical librarianship and advocacy. In 2020, I drafted along with a colleague the Grinnell College Libraries anti-racism statement. Accessibility in the archives and implementing sustainable practices are areas I seek to learn more about and implement in every archival setting I work in. DEI is inherently linked to collection development and the necessity for conscious work in recognizing how library history, centuries of censorship and bias have perpetuated practices of systemic exclusion and how to address them today. Reparative work begins with recognizing gaps in collections, their resonance, and how to meaningfully acquire material to bridge these gaps without denial that they occurred and tokenizing acquisitions as patches to past practice. Responsible acquisition and custodianship is an ongoing and evolving practice which I am dedicated to upholding. A large part of conscious curation is active listening and consideration of the multiple perspectives and lived experiences each person carries with them that impacts their experience in an archive and beyond and being cognizant of the impact and weight materials hold. From considering the language and techniques of description to accessibility of an exhibit, event, or classroom activity, I strive to bring cognizance and compassion to my work.