

Mission and Collecting Policy

Special Collections

Milner Library, Illinois State University

About Special Collections

Archival materials are records of human experience, collectively documenting pieces of the past that are essential to an understanding of how people have lived, worked, interacted, and thought about the world. They make visible the role that people and organizations have within the scope of history, societies, and individual experiences. Archival materials offer patrons the chance to see these relationships firsthand, through the primary sources, objects, and rare materials that form the bedrock of research, personal inquiry, and teaching practice.

Special Collections are often formed from a mixture of archives, rare books, artwork, ephemera (such as posters, flyers, and programs), objects and textiles, photographs, and original manuscripts that are related to specific topics or collecting areas.

The Special Collections Department at Milner Library holds archival materials including diaries, scrapbooks, institutional and organizational records, circus route books, ledgers, correspondence, photographs, books, works on paper, posters and broadsides, and circus costumes.

Our collecting areas:

The Rare & Fine Books

Primarily books spanning nearly all subjects, from general works to bibliographies. Books in this collection date from ca. 1250 to the present and include first and limited editions, autographed, and/or inscribed books along with those featuring fine bindings, interesting typographies or artworks.

Circus and Allied Arts

One of the largest special collections of its type in existence. While the primary focus of the collection is on the circus, related arts such as carnivals, sideshows, carousels, conjuring, music halls, and vaudeville are also represented. In addition to over 8000 books, this collection includes photographs, circus posters, programs, route books, correspondence, business records, band scores, assorted media, and realia.

Children's Literature and Historical Textbooks

Special Collections is home to several noteworthy children's literature collections, including a Lois Lenski Collection that has published books, handwritten and typescript manuscripts, dolls, original illustrations, and research notes and materials. The Will Johnson Collection holds 19th and 20th century books from around the world and the historical textbook collection contains materials on a wide range of topics dating from 1537-mid 20th century (bulk being 19th century-mid 20th century).

Lincoln Collection of H.K. Sage

This collection of Abraham Lincoln-related materials was given to Milner Library in 1979 by Harold K. Sage. As described by its donor, this is a "working Lincoln library" and today contains over 2,600 books and pamphlets which cover all aspects of Lincoln's life.

Visit Special Collections

To maximize your time with us, it's best to notify us before a visit so that we can have materials pulled and waiting for you. Please contact us by [email](#) or phone at [\(309\) 438-2871](tel:3094382871) to assist us in preparing the materials you may need. If you don't know which materials you would like to view, you can search our online list of finding aids to find archival materials or our library catalog to find books.

Reading Room Procedures

Some of the materials in Special Collections are fragile so there are special handling and copying procedures in the Reading Room:

- All bags must be left at the front of the room
- Photography of materials is allowed with phones or digital cameras, as long as the flash is turned off
- Not all materials can withstand photocopier use, but if staff agrees that items may be photocopied the cost is 10 cents per page
- Only pencils and laptops are permitted for note taking in the Reading Room

Usage of Copied Materials

A [Materials Usage Agreement Form](#) needs to be filled out, signed, and returned to the address indicated on the form for materials requested to be reproduced for use elsewhere.

Planning a Class

One of the goals of Special Collections staff is to integrate materials held here into the curriculum offered at Illinois State University. Please contact us by [email](#) or phone at [\(309\) 438-2871](tel:3094382871) to facilitate your class visit.

Information that we will find helpful includes your name and department, the course name and number, the number of students enrolled, and tentative dates for a visit. We will work with you to identify the best materials to use in your class.

Note: All class sessions need to be held in Special Collections (or online with prior arrangement).

Support

It takes generous support to grow and care for collections. From buying new materials to proper storage in acid-free containers, your donation helps to preserve our collections for generations to come:

[Support Special Collections](#)

To donate materials that fit within our collection scope, please contact us directly to discuss a potential donation:

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(309) 438-2871