An Interview with Edward Gaynor ’81

Special Collections Librarian, University of Virginia

How did your Davidson education lead you to your work in librarianship and special collections? How did you decide to become a special collections librarian?

Nothing and everything about my time at Davidson prepared me for the work I do now. I never intended to be a librarian—just like I never intended to be an English major at Davidson. My plan from high school was to major in history and become a college professor teaching 19th-century American history. Somewhere along the way in my sophomore year at Davidson I was seduced by 17th- and 18th-century British literature and decided I could still read about history while majoring in English. So the plan altered only slightly: English major, then Ph.D. and teaching.

I applied to a number of graduate programs and the only one that was forthcoming with financial assistance was the University of South Carolina. The School of Library and Information Science contacted me and asked if I would consider joining the joint M.A./M.L.S. program; if so, I would get tuition remission and a job in the university library. That seemed like a good deal, so I said yes. During my first year at USC, I worked in three library departments and got a view of libraries I’d never had before. By my second year, I realized two very important things: 1) I didn’t really like, wasn’t especially interested in, or outstandingly good at the kind of research and writing you have to do to be a college professor; and, 2) in the middle of the early 1980s recession, there were no jobs for professors of 17th-century English literature anyway. Library work appeared to be a positive and nothing about it seemed to violate the few ethical tenets I had, so librarian it would be.

I became a special collections librarian because I asked to be one. When I first came to UVA I was managing the central library’s original cataloging department, which included rare books cataloging. One of my semi-official responsibilities was to handhold the manuscripts cataloging staff as they made the transition to an online catalog. The combination of those responsibilities gave me lots of chances to learn about special collections in general and UVA’s special collections specifically. A few years later an opportunity to move to special collections arose and I asked for it. I’ve never regretted it. I sometimes forget how lucky I am to work in the midst of all the amazing items that help document our history. Then I come across some wonderful book or letter in our collections and I’m convinced all over again that what we do is a positive good, no matter how small or limited it might be.

How do you still benefit from your Davidson experience?

I realized many years after I graduated that the most important thing I learned at Davidson is that individual people matter.

What is the oldest item in your special collections?

Two Babylonian clay tablets from ca. 2350 BCE. Both are receipts for wheat donated to temples.

What is your favorite item in your special collections?

A fragment of a human skull. David Steele was a private in a company of Virginia riflemen that served
in Nathanael Greene’s army at the Battle of Guilford Court House. Steele was severely wounded several times, including once by a sword blow to his head that sheared off a small piece of his skull (which must have been very thick!). Steele picked the fragment up and carried it home to Rockbridge County, Va., when he was paroled after the battle. Until his death, he covered the spot with a small silver plate. In his book Travels in North America, in the years 1780, 1781 and 1782, the Marquis de Chastellux describes seeing the bone fragment and silver plate and listening to Steele tell the story of his adventure. Steele’s great-great-great-great-great grandson donated the bone fragment to the UVa library in 2004.

What is the item most requested by your patrons?

There’s no single item that users most want to see. Depending on class schedules, faculty research projects, visiting academics and the like, any part of our collections can become the most requested, at least for a short time. When we have drop-in visitors they most often want to see either something by Thomas Jefferson (who has a connection of sorts to UVa) or something by William Faulkner (whose literary manuscripts and papers are here).

What is your favorite memory of Davidson College?

Any late afternoon in spring, lying on the grass in front of Chambers, pretending to read something for a class assignment while really looking up at the Carolina-blue sky, hearing music from the dorms and thinking Davidson was generally a fine place to be on such a beautiful day. Bonus points if a friend happened to be “studying” with me.

What is your favorite technological development that has impacted your life as a librarian?

Obviously, the entire Internet architecture and supporting technologies has radically altered how we can deliver access to and facsimiles of our materials; however, nothing has so completely changed the way we interact with our users, dealers, donors and colleagues as basic email.

With books and communications becoming mostly digital, what will special collections from this era look like in the future? What was your reaction to this Rick Anderson piece? (To view the piece, go to www.sr.ithaka.org and search Rick Anderson)

Special collections will continue to look much like they do now in the foreseeable future. We have made a commitment to maintain our collections, many of which have been built up over hundreds of years and I can’t see that we will abandon anything we have. I also believe that some analog formats will continue to be produced—physical books as we know them, for example. Special collections and archives have to commit now to finding effective and scalable ways of preserving at least a part of the world’s digital output. Despite what Rick Anderson says, the format shift is crucial for libraries in general and special collections specifically. UVa’s special collections are particularly strong in American literature, both in print and manuscript forms. We know that the ways most authors work have changed significantly in the last 20 years or so. How then do we capture the same edits and rewrites that were made on paper 100 years ago but now are made in word processing software, generally leaving no trace of earlier versions or states? Until commercial software can provide comprehensive versioning (and authors learn or remember to use it) we probably will lose that glimpse into an author’s mind as she works out problems of character, plot and language. It is a daunting proposition, but one that young students with an elite education are well positioned to solve.

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What are you reading now?

A Slaveholder’s Union: Slavery, Politics and the Constitution in the Early American Republic by George William van Cleve, a scholar-in-residence at UVa. It is illuminating and horrifying in equal measures and makes plain how decisions about race and status made 400 years ago affect our country today. Death In a White Tie by Ngaio Marsh. I’m trying to hit the ones I haven’t read yet.
Meet the Staff

Mericle, King, and Nguyen Join Little Library

Over the last several months, we have been busy hiring and orienting some new employees to the Davidson College Libraries.

Wilson Mericle ’12

Wilson Mericle ’12 is the new collections assistant for serials. As a student, he worked at the circulation desk, so he is a familiar face in the library. Mericle is originally from Morganton, but is happy to be returning to what was essentially his home for four years.

Mericle graduated as a music major, so throughout his Davidson student career he spent roughly 75 percent of his time in the music building. He spent at least 12-14 hours a week singing either in voice lessons, the Davidson Chorale, the madrigal (of which he was a co-founder) or in everyday practice. He also performed in three of the Music Department’s Opera Theatre Workshops. His favorite role was that of Count Almaviva in the January 2012 production of Mozart’s Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro).

The remaining 25 percent of Mericle’s time was spent either studying or working behind the circulation desk in both the main and music libraries. He started off his work in the E. H. Little Library as a shelve then moved to a circ-student position. He also worked for us during the infamous summer of 2011, witnessing the construction of WKFH, the shifting of multiple collections and locking WSH.

Although he is not a new face, Mericle will now get to experience the “other side of the library” in his new role as a Davidson staff member. He will be working with serials, accounts payable and various other duties behind the scenes in the library. We are very happy to have him back!

Hannah King

Hannah King, another new face in the library, is Davidson’s new music library manager. She is a recent graduate of Westminster Choir College in Princeton, N.J., where she earned a B.M. in piano and a B.A. in music, with minors in philosophy and piano pedagogy. She is very excited to be here in Davidson’s music library! King is primarily a classical musician (baroque and French are her favorite styles), but she also loves musical theater, semi-obscure hipster-y music and folk music.

She grew up in Connecticut and lived in Charlotte for a few months before moving to Princeton for her undergrad. She has been a piano teacher, nanny, camp counselor, waitress, theater musician, retail saleswoman, store window designer and florist. She is very excited to finally settle down into a more long-term relationship with a career field.

King loves dogs, coffee, snow, concerts, Indian food and long walks in the music library. Since she’s new to the area and has an awful sense of direction, she has been asking for help learning about fun things to do around town and ways to get involved. We are all happy to help her find her way around Davidson and the surrounding communities.

Clara Nguyen

Clara Nguyen, our new collections assistant for government information, is a familiar face to many on campus. Last fall, Nguyen served as interim assistant curator in the Van Every/Smith Galleries. She’s now getting settled in on the east side of campus and is excited to be back at Davidson.

Nguyen’s background is in art history. She has a B.A. from East Carolina University and an M.A. from George Washington University. While completing her M.A., she held internships at the National Portrait Gallery, the National Archives and Records Administration (where she worked in the vault—where most of the treasures are stored), the private collection of the Kiplinger Washington Edition and the Ellen Frank Illumination Arts Foundation. She acquired extensive experience cataloging and researching documents, art objects and artifacts, and also became a proficient illuminator.

Her cataloging experience is serving her well in her new position in the library, where she manages the day-to-day operations of our federal depository collection. With her experience processing and researching art objects and documents, the vagaries of government publications do not daunt her. As she notes, after moving and handling so many large framed paintings and prints, the library’s collections are usually—maps aside—quite manageable!

Nguyen recently revisited some of the paintings and prints that she cataloged in the Van Every/Smith Galleries, in the library. Several information literacy librarians took part in the “Art in Offices Program” offered by the gallery, and when they proudly showed Nguyen their selections, she smiled at the familiar pieces and started telling her new colleagues all about them. We are delighted to welcome Nguyen to the library.
DONOR LISTS

Each year, we are so grateful for the generosity of people who contribute in many different ways to the library. The following lists encapsulate some of the ways people honor loved ones, friends, esteemed scholars and others through their contributions. You’ll find contributions to existing endowed funds, new funds that have been established, book and archival donations and funds given by the Alumni Office to memorialize former students. To all who have honored us this year with gifts, we extend our most heartfelt thanks. Your gifts greatly enhance our collection and the educational experience of Davidson students.

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The Paddison-Cunningham Fund
The Leland Madison Park ’63 Fund
Mrs. Joyce S. Davis
Mrs. William B. Hight, Jr.
Dr. Paul Wesley Hofferbert ’88
Dr. George Wilkinson Poe ’74
The Rebecca Leland & Arthur Harris Park Fund
The Coach Charles W. Parker ’38 Fund
The Kenneth F. Parks ’73 Fund
The Ernest F. Patterson, Sr. Fund
The William Clayton Patton, M.D. ’58 Fund
The Robert Rudolph Perz, M.D. ’79 Fund
The Edward William Phifer, Jr., M.D. ’32 Fund
The Thomas Bryan Phillips ’80 Fund
The James Faulkner Pinkney ’27 Fund
The Fradon Brown Porter Fund
The Elizabeth Bradley Purcell Fund
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The Charles Edward Ratliff, Sr. Fund
The William McClintock Reid, Jr. ’34 Fund
The William T. Reilly III ’80 Fund
Mr. Harold A. Lloyd ’81
The V. O. Roberson, Jr. Fund
The Martha Byrd Roberts Fund
The William Cumming Rose 1907 Fund
The Helen B. & Norman C. Ross Fund
The Sue Fields Ross, Ph.D. Fund
Mrs. Barbara Ashley Griffith ’81
The James Henry Rostan’67 Fund
Mr. James Henry Rostan ’67
The John Peter Rostan III ’66 Fund
The Ralph Corvlett Sadler, M.D. 1908 Fund
R.C. Sadler Foundation
The Margaret Salter Fund
The Joan M. Scandling Fund
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The Neal Anderson Scott ’40 Fund
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Mrs. Jocelyn T. Shaw
The J. Alexander Shaw, M.D. ’18 Fund
The Della Shore Fund
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The Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity Fund
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The Samuel Reid Spencer, Jr. ’40 Fund
The Richard A. Stoops ’68 Fund
The James G. Swisher Fund
The Melton Hill Tankersley ’59 Fund
The Farish Carter Chip Tate V ’65 Fund
Mr. Charles L. Dibble ’65
The Archibald B. Taylor 1911 & Margaret Taylor Williams Fund
Dr. Archibald B. Taylor, Jr. ’42
The Amelia Paul Thomas Fund
The Thomas G. Thurston II, M.D. ’37 Fund
The Isabelle White Trexler Fund
Trexler Foundation
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The Mary Jane Mcgee Vernon Fund
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Dr. George Wilkinson Poe ’74
Ms. Catherine Walker
The Carolyn A. & Wayne M. Watson Fund
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The Lacy Donnell Wharton, Jr. ’27 Fund
The L.D. & Lilian Benton Wharton Fund
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The Rev. Edward Lee Willingham III ’48 Fund
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The Jack Womeldorf ’61 Fund
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The Robert Davidson Woodward, Jr. Fund
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More than Harvard, more than Yale
(even Duke cannot compare)

How can a small liberal arts college library have more than Harvard, the largest academic library in the U.S.? More than Yale? More than… any other library? Sometimes small … or, more accurately, Little … is more.

We don’t have Harvard’s volume count or budget; we don’t have a rare book collection as big as the Beinecke or Bodleian. Our aging facilities can’t compare with the renovated Perkins or the new Hunt Library, let alone the Mansueto Library at Chicago or the new Library at Alexandria. But we have more thanks to strategic acquisitions and an exciting new partnership with Gale—a leading publisher of research collections in the humanities.

Over the past decade, through careful planning and budgeting, our library has acquired many online resources, including every digital collection published by Gale (that’s the “more”!). We are, to date, the only library in the world with all of these Gale titles.

How are Davidson students and faculty using these resources? What impact are they having on student and faculty research? How can they be used in the classroom? How can they be used to support Digital Studies? What additional tools and resources are needed to better meet learning outcomes? Faculty, students and staff from Davidson are partnering with staff from Gale to answer these questions.

Gale and Davidson launched the partnership in August, when seven Gale staff members visited campus to meet with faculty and librarians in a series of workshops and discussion sessions. Given the number of great questions and ideas generated from that day, we expect very good things to come from this partnership, which will extend over the next three years.

In addition to participating in ongoing discussions and collaborative projects, Gale has generously agreed to fund an interdisciplinary research prize for student work in Digital Humanities. We’ll have more information about the prize later this fall.

We are very excited about this partnership with Gale, and the timing is fortuitous, given the launch of Davidson’s new Digital Studies Program and Gale’s introduction of Artemis, a new platform for digital collections. In time, most Gale databases will be migrated to Artemis, which means that Davidson students and faculty will be able to access these important digital collections using one tool. “More” indeed!