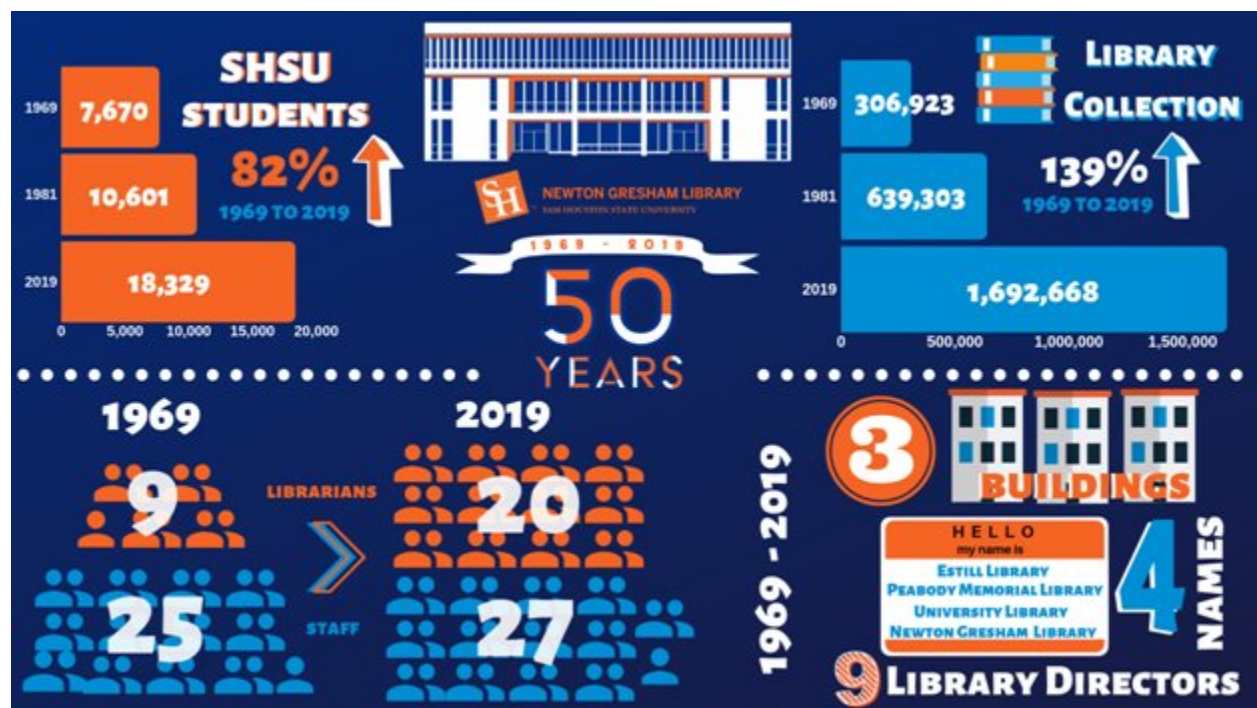


Newton Gresham Library, Sam Houston State University (Huntsville, TX)

by Susan Elkins, Soo-yeon Hwang, and Trent Shotwell

Honoring the Past, Inspiring the Future

The Newton Gresham Library (NGL) at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) just celebrated its 50th anniversary. The Library has had four names, nine directors, and been located in three different buildings since as early as 1902. The current Library was opened in 1969, and was named the Newton Gresham Library in 1985, in honor of 1924 alumni, benefactor, and longtime Board of Regent, Newton Gresham.



50 Years of the Newton Gresham Library (Credit: Kat Landry Mueller (Electronic Resources Librarian) and Sarah Sellers)



Exterior of the NGL building



Inside the NGL

NGL serves the research needs of the SHSU community. It holds over 1.6 million books, bound periodicals, and government documents and a variety of formats, including multimedia, digital collections, microforms, microfiche, phonograph records, videotapes, and newspapers. There are also paperbacks for recreational reading, current periodicals, and a collection of children's books and instructional materials. For the convenience of students and faculty, NGL provides a multimedia lab, music listening room, study rooms, a small lounge area with vending machines, and a copy center.

Library holdings information can be accessed through an online catalog (electronically searchable since 1986) as well as a discovery service search engine called Engine Orange (since 2012). NGL is run by a team of professional librarians, staff, and student assistants, providing reference, interlibrary loan, circulation, acquisition, and other library services to the faculty, staff, and students of the University, as well as to visiting scholars and off-campus users.

The Library's mission is to support and enhance the development of critically thinking, educated, and informed lifelong learners. To that end, for example, NGL's Special Collections not only collects and displays unique materials, but also collaborates with faculty and students for an educational program that provides first-hand experience working with the archives.

Thomason Room - Special Collections



Entrance to the Thomason Room Special Collections

The Thomason Room of the NGL has been home to SHSU's Special Collections for the last fifty years. The collections of the Thomason Room have provided many patrons with precious and unique resources for both personal and professional research. The room was named for John W. Thomason, Colonel USMC, author, and self-taught artist. The John W. Thomason Collection contains roughly 2,000 pieces of his artwork and includes much of his original family correspondence and photographs. The Room currently has 20,000 volumes of rare books and manuscripts along with nearly 200 processed archival collections.



Inside the Thomason Room

The focus of the collection is Texas history and culture, however the collection also contains items and artifacts that are unrelated to the lone star state. Notable collections include Texana, Civil War, Criminal Justice, and local history. The collection also holds original and reproduction literary works from authors like William Shakespeare, Mark Twain, and H.G. Wells. The Thomason Room's Criminal Justice Collection contains early American monographs and periodicals on policing, prisons, juvenile delinquency, probation and parole. The Criminal Justice Collection is made up of the personal and professional works of Sanford Bates and James V. Bennett, the first and second Directors of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The Criminal Justice Collections also includes several collections on the Texas Death Penalty and early capital punishment opponents.

Recent Collaboration with the Public History Class

Special Collections and Digital Resources recently had a collaboration with Dr. Zachary Doleshal's Public History class, an upper division undergraduate course. Dr. Doleshal likes to bring his students to Special Collections because "archival materials have the

power to bridge a person's transition from a passive recipient of history to a practitioner of it."

The students were divided into groups and each group was assigned a project. The projects included collection processing, transcription, digitization, library display curation, and archival research. The students really connected to the primary source documents they got to hold in the hands. They enjoyed learning to use the collections and handle the material properly. One of the students said that he enjoyed "going through old first-hand accounts of correspondence... History was unfolding in my hands. Literally."



Students learning about the projects on the first day





Students working on the projects

All groups had their struggles as part of the experience. The transcription groups learned how much work goes into transcribing audio recordings as they dealt with the thick accents and sound quality issues. Others found the materials to be like a puzzle and that they had to put them all together. Another student said, "I learned that sometimes a trip to the archives is a bust and boring. However if you are lucky it is an enriching and fascinating experience." Dr. Doleshal says that the "value of the collaboration has been the practical experience for the students. For me, it has been an insight into how many specialized tasks are manageable for the Special Collections staff. Their approachability and willingness to give to and work on a variety of projects with the class was simply incredible."



Group picture of the Public History class in the Thomason Room

This is only one example of classes coming to use the Special Collections for class projects. The Thomason Room Special Collections adds to the scholarly experience at NGL and SHSU.

Future Plan

Beginning in early 2020, in a joint effort with the Academic Success Center which provides tutoring and mentoring services to support student learning and success, NGL will embark on a substantial renovation project. NGL's Executive Director Eric Owen says, "This renovation will ultimately transform the Newton Gresham Library into a more inviting, technologically accessible and collaborative academic learning space for all students and the broader campus community." Everyone at NGL strives to work towards the 50th anniversary slogan, "Honoring the Past, Inspiring the Future."

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About the authors:

Susan Elkins is originally from Columbia, South Carolina. She got her undergraduate degree in history from Brigham Young University and her MLIS from the University of South Carolina. She moved to Texas in 2010 and is now the Digital Resources Librarian at Sam Houston State University.

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Trent Shotwell is the Special Collections Librarian in the Thomason Room of the Newton Gresham Library. He is from Huntsville, Texas and received his Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from SHSU in 2010. He worked for ten years at the Texas Prison Museum as Assistant Director and has always been a student of Texas history. He started with SHSU in 2012 and quickly began working on his Master's degree in Library Science at the University of North Texas. Graduating from UNT in 2016, he accepted the position as Head of SHSU Special Collections and University Archives.