

A LETTER — from the — DIRECTOR



Dear friends,

In 2005, with the relatively new capability to make archival materials available on the web, the West Virginia & Regional History Center (WVRHC) launched the online photographs database, West Virginia History OnView. The digital collection was the WVRHC's first large-scale digital project. Now, 20 years later, the History Center is making another leap forward in regard to digital archives.

After several years of planning, the WVRHC is investing in critical infrastructure and skills to improve our ability to preserve and provide access to digital materials for the long term. With the support of WVU Libraries, we are gaining on-site and cloud storage space to support the ever-growing amount of digital content we receive from donors and create through digitization. The WVRHC's digital collections archivist and WVU Libraries' Systems department staff are also implementing open-source applications, meaning community-supported and maintained, to this end.

The WVRHC's new digital repository, Hyku, will enable us to share digital materials with the WVU community and public. Behind the scenes, WVRHC staff use a suite of tools to process and preserve content from obsolete media, such as floppy disks, and more modern applications and services, like email.

Additionally, the WVRHC and the WVU Libraries are part of a pilot group that is using and testing Seeklight, a human supervised artificial intelligence tool for archival description developed by JSTOR, one of the leading digital libraries and content aggregators.

Seeklight creates quick, first pass descriptions of digital objects, and WVRHC staff assess and refine their accuracy and relevance. This can accelerate the intensive process of describing large sets of digital objects and enhance their discoverability once online.

We are planning a soft launch of the new public digital repository in the spring of this year.

Eventually our digital collections, including West Virginia History OnView, will look just a little different and will have improved and consistent descriptions. Over the next few years, we will be able to make thousands of digital files available online for the first time.

We will significantly expand our capacity to reach our researchers in West Virginia and across the world. These investments in digital infrastructure will ensure West Virginia history is preserved and only a few clicks away.

Sincerely,
Lori

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori Hostuttler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

WEST VIRGINIA DAY 2025

WEST VIRGINIANS IN WORLD WAR II: IN THEIR OWN WORDS



Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Hershel "Woody" Williams' records being presented to the WVRHC.

The WVRHC marked West Virginia Day, June 20, 2025, with a program honoring West Virginia veteran, Hershel "Woody" Williams that culminated with the History Center accepting his papers as well as opening a new exhibition on World War II in the WVRHC's Davis Galleries.

Keynote speaker Bryan Casey, grandson of Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Hershel "Woody" Williams and Woody Williams Foundation Board Member, discussed Williams' life and legacy. Williams was a West Virginia veteran known for his devotion to duty and service — both on and off the battlefield — who dedicated his post-military work to fellow service members, veterans, and their families. His relentless commitment to his community led to the creation of the Woody Williams Foundation, which is responsible for establishing 144 Gold Star Families Memorials Monuments across the United States to date, with more underway.

Gifted to the History Center, the Hershel "Woody" Williams Papers (A&M 4700) are now available. The collection consists of 14 boxes of correspondence, news clippings, audio and visual recordings, publications, speeches, and more.

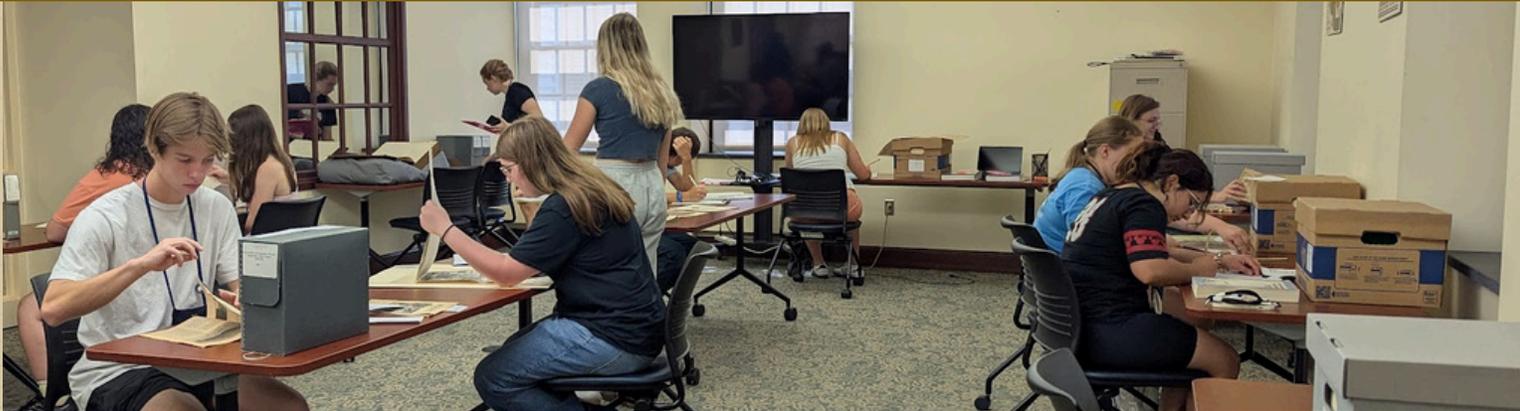
Williams grew up in the Fairmont area, served in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and fought with the Marines in World War II. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery at the Battle of Iwo Jima. After the war, Williams worked as a counselor for the Veterans Administration, served in the Marine Corps reserve, and ran a training barn for horses. He co-founded the Woody Williams Foundation to serve Gold Star families who lost a loved one while in the line of duty.

WVRHC Director Lori Hostuttler noted, "The Woody Williams papers offer insight into the life and work of an extraordinary West Virginian. We are honored that the WVRHC is now their home."

Williams is featured in the new exhibit, "West Virginians in World War II: In Their Own Words," that opened on West Virginia Day. It highlights the experiences, archives, and artifacts of West Virginia veterans and volunteers. Their "own words" are gleaned from letters, diaries, oral histories, and essays, and in particular, the World War II Veterans Papers Project (A&M 120) — approximately 1,400 papers of recorded experiences of servicemen and women and others who participated in the war.

This speaks to one of the biggest challenges of creating the exhibit — featuring only a select few individuals. Over 200,000 West Virginians participated in the war. The WVRHC's collections hold the stories of many more people and history than we can highlight in a single exhibit. We invite you to visit the WVRHC to see the exhibition and access other collection materials that further expand upon the role of West Virginians in the war.

The "West Virginians in World War II: In Their Own Words" exhibit will be on display in the WVRHC's Davis Galleries through May 2026.



Governor's Honors Academy students dig in to their assignment.

History Center Hosts Governor's Honors Academy

This July, over a hundred rising high school seniors from throughout the state arrived at West Virginia University for the Governor's Honors Academy, a two-week summer residential program that aims to stimulate and support excellence in education for incoming high school seniors who are residents of West Virginia. Fifteen of them had the opportunity to spend quality time in the WVRHC for a week-long course titled "The Earth in the Archive."

The academy keeps students busy with activities, field trips, and many courses taught by faculty from throughout WVU's colleges. Here in the WVRHC, we were able to offer an experience unique to WVU and unlike anything these students had done before. To connect to this year's academy theme of Appalachia Envisioned, "The Earth in the Archive" highlighted WVRHC collections that relate to the environment.

The environment intersects with many areas of West Virginia history in which students can make connections between the past and future of Appalachia — industry and labor, politics and government, activism and conservation, recreation and agriculture, and natural and man-made disasters, to name a few. The intention was for students to find something compelling or relatable within the collections, regardless of whether their interests were more inclined to the humanities or to the sciences.

Meeting four times over the course of the week, students practiced the foundational skills of archival research. They learned to distinguish between primary and secondary source material, using examples from the WVRHC's collection. They learned to read a finding aid and find the folders that contained the items they wanted to see. Together, we practiced historical analysis skills

on a 1903 letter from a lumber company account book: finding date and location information, considering creator and recipient, and even puzzling out some messy cursive handwriting.

Having covered some of the basics, students had time to explore as we asked them to consider what particular primary sources could tell us about the relationship between people and the earth. From a pool of 20 possible primary sources, students were encouraged to spend time with whatever material they found compelling.

The students chose primary sources such as a speech given at a coal industry conference in the 1980s, an outdoor sports and recreation magazine from the 1930s, a calendar of artwork created by labor activists in the 1970s, and an illustrated poem about a chemical spill from the 2010s. They shared the ways they found words from past familiar to their lives, or surprising and confusing, and they shared their agreements and disagreements with historical perspectives.

Four class sessions went by quickly, but students finished the course with hands-on experience interpreting primary sources, an understanding of what resources may be available to them at WVU and other institutions, and practical guidance for future academic research.

The WVRHC also reached academy students beyond the course, supporting one-time visits from three other academy courses and displaying materials from the Katherine Johnson, Mathematician Papers at a “Hidden Figures” movie night.

It was truly rewarding to introduce the possibilities of archival research to young students and to learn from their inquiries and discoveries.

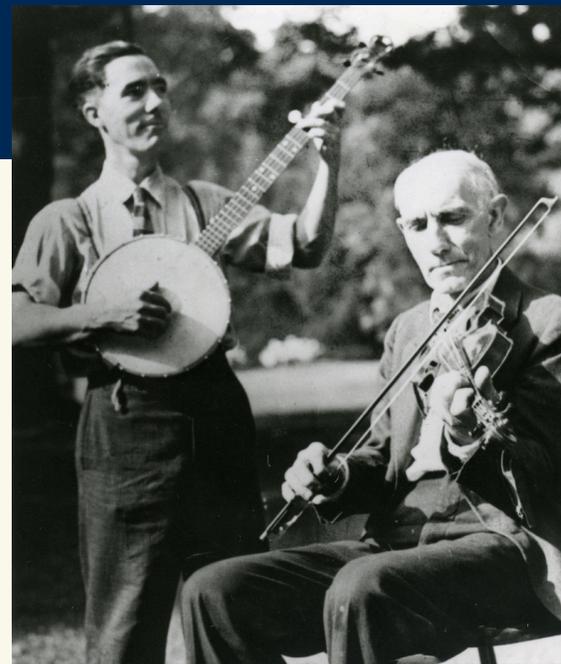


Governor's Honors Academy students dig in to their assignment.

Funding secured to digitize folk music collection

In the fall of 2025, the WVRHC received nearly \$45,000 from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) to digitize recordings from its expansive folk music collection. With this funding, an important collection of early field recordings of folk music will become digitally accessible for the first time.

As an internationally recognized collection of West Virginia and Appalachian folk music recordings dating from the 1930s to the 1980s, the West Virginia Folk Music Collection includes early noncommercial field recordings, African American folksongs recorded in southern West Virginia in the mid-20th century, and folk music collected in the 1970s during a revival of interest in Appalachian folk culture. The collection's breadth, as well as its documentation of traditions of performance technique and repertoire, make it a unique and significant resource for scholars. However, original analog formats make this collection difficult to access, currently limiting its reach to researchers and the public.



Edden Hammons (seated) playing fiddle and his son James (standing) playing banjo, undated.

“While the History Center has always treasured the collections, they are now fully capable of and ready to bring the collection up to modern standards in terms of preservation and accessibility,” said Chris Haddox, associate professor in West Virginia University’s School of Art and Design. “There are so many wonderful digital folk music collections out in the world today, and to have the Chappell, Gainer, Reece, Carvell, and Brown collections added to that mix will be a boon to both performers and scholars around the globe.”

The musical talents of everyday West Virginians are showcased in these recordings. They have long been an important resource for people studying arts and culture in the region. Online access will expose them to a much larger audience. We are grateful to CLIR for the funding to make it happen.

LORI HOSTUTTLE, DIRECTOR, WVRHC

The CLIR “Recordings at Risk” grant, made possible by the Mellon Foundation, will support the digitization of 488 aluminum discs, 324 reel-to-reel tapes, 43 audio cassette tapes, among other formats. Recordings come from the collections of Louis Watson Chappell, Cortez D. Reece, Kenneth L. Carvell, Thomas S. Brown, and Patrick Ward Gainer.

For more information about the West Virginia Folk Music Collection or the digitization project, please visit folkmusic.lib.wvu.edu.

Remembering our friend Stewart Plein

University Librarian Emerita Stewart Plein passed away on August 16, 2025, after a short illness. Her loss is deeply felt on the campus of West Virginia University and across the Appalachian region.

Stewart joined WVU Libraries as a volunteer in the Rare Book Room in 2004 and earned her Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) in 2009. She participated in numerous courses at the University of Virginia’s Rare Book School and earned a Certificate of Proficiency. She began her career as a special collections librarian in 2011 at the WVU Law Library and in 2014, joined the faculty of the WVRHC. In August 2024, she retired after a 13-year career at WVU.



Stewart was a book expert, and she developed the Rare, West Virginia, and Appalachian book collections at the WVRHC with skill and heart. She built and maintained strong donor relationships to the benefit of the Rare Book Collection in particular. During her tenure, she added significant collections such as the Presgraves Appalachian Collection, the Ebersole gardening and cookbook collections, and the Lowell and Susan Thing Margaret Armstrong Collection.



Stewart was also a gifted teacher whose enthusiasm and expertise inspired students of all ages. She was sought out on campus and shared her love of books with classes in a wide variety of academic disciplines at WVU.

She also taught Osher Lifelong Learning classes and gave presentations across the state. She was a supportive mentor to students, researchers, and colleagues who wanted to learn more. If you showed an interest, she made time to share her knowledge and passion with you.

In addition to the book collections, Stewart managed the WVRHC's newspaper collection and led the work of federal grants to make them more accessible. Her work resulted in the digitization of approximately 150 historic West Virginia newspapers and their addition to the Library of Congress' Chronicling America website. She also conducted pioneering research on Black newspapers in West Virginia, discovering new titles and information.

Stewart's curiosity was continual and infectious. She was a natural scholar who contributed articles, book chapters, blog posts and essays on a variety of book-related and historical topics. She led engaging programs, delivered talks, and created exhibitions that beautifully highlighted WVRHC collections.

She was also an active member of the Appalachian Studies Association (ASA), always dedicated to promoting and improving the region that she dearly loved. Stewart served on the Special Collections committee for many years and organized the silent auction for the 2021 conference in Morgantown. She felt great joy and satisfaction that she could make a difference in Appalachia, her heart and home.

Stewart's contributions are numerous and lasting. She is missed at the WVRHC and WVU Libraries.



Welcome to our new archivist and staff



**Rare Book and Print
Collection Archivist
Rigby Philips**

With extensive experience in special collections, instruction, outreach, and collection management, Rigby Philips' unique perspective fuels her role as the new rare book and print collections archivist.

Philips focuses on acquisition and preservation of the Rare Book Collection, the West Virginia Book and Serials Collection, the West Virginia Newspapers Collection, and the Appalachian Book Collection. In addition, she provides research and teaching support for a variety of disciplines across WVU's colleges and schools. Philips also develops exhibitions and displays featuring rare books and materials from the WVRHC's collections.

Previously, Philips worked to create and enhance bibliographic data for rare and special collections materials at the University of Maryland (UMD) Libraries. She earned her Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) from UMD, in addition to a master's in history and a bachelor's in history, with a concentration in women and gender.



**Remote Education Specialist
Beth Shaver**

Beth Shaver is the WVRHC's new remote education specialist. Beth has 14 years of history teaching experience in the 7-12 school system and 4 years of teaching social studies methods courses at Duke University, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and North Carolina State University.

She is responsible for the American Congress Digital Archives Portal project, managing plans, designs, creations, and implementation of instructional materials and learning objects.

Beth graduated in December 2025 with her PhD in Teacher Education and Learning Science at North Carolina State University.



**Reference Supervisor
Jack Weaver**

Jack Weaver is the WVRHC's new reference supervisor. Jack holds a doctorate in history from WVU. His dissertation examined riflemen on the Appalachian frontier in the eighteenth century, and how the perception of them shaped early American national identity.

In his new position, Jack will supervise the reference staff and the public services student workers.

COLLECTION SPOTLIGHT: *The Journals of Maryat Lee (1923-1989)*

Maryat Lee, born Mary Attaway Lee in Covington, Kentucky, is typically remembered for three things: her relationship with famed author Flannery O'Connor, pioneering street theater in Harlem through the Salt and Latin Theater (SALT), and founding EcoTheater, an indigenous theater that created plays out of oral histories in Appalachia and used non-actors in its productions.

However, despite the overwhelming acknowledgement of Lee's impact on theater and the arts, an untapped well of research can be found within the detailed and deeply personal journals she kept from 1936 until her death in 1989. Save for a lack of writing in the 1940s, Lee kept up her diaristic practices religiously and took it just as seriously as her work in theater.

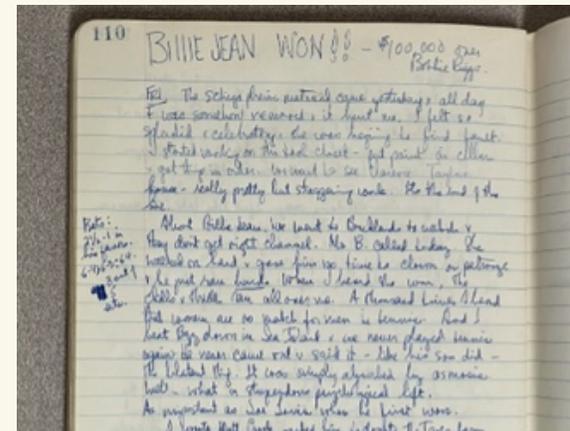
A large part of her journaling details her relationship with Fran Belin, a Brooklyn-native pianist and photographer, who left New York City with Lee to create The Women's Farm in Powley's Creek, West Virginia in 1973. While The Women's Farm would go on to be overshadowed by the creation of EcoTheater some years later, it aimed to be a retreat for artists and intellectuals, primarily women and feminists. Some prominent visitors that Lee would write about included the "grandmother of Appalachian Studies" Helen Matthews Lewis; Paul and Nanine Dowling of the America the

Beautiful Fund; music critic Howard Klein and realist painter Patricia Windrow as well as their two sons, Adam Klein and Moondi Klein; artist Maxi Cohen; writers and activists Toni Cade Bambara and Sonia Sanchez; playwright Clare Coss; and theater producer Susan Richardson.

Visitors of The Women's Farm often became long-time friends with Lee and Belin, who were involved in the feminist movement and often attended women's workshops and events with people they had met through The Women's Farm.

Throughout her journals, Lee's descriptions of people are oftentimes frank and unforgiving, such as referring to writer James Dickey as "gross," journalist Dorothy Day as "sunken and ravaged," and writer Hannah Tillich as "smug in a very European way."

Lee also wrote about world events that interested her. On the day she found out that Billie Jean King beat Bobby Riggs in the Battle of the Sexes tennis match in 1973, she expressed her excitement by scrawling "BILLIE JEAN WON!!" at the top of the page, starkly out of place surrounded by her otherwise contained penmanship.



Maryat Lee's reaction to Billie Jean King winning the Battle of the Sexes tennis match in 1973.



A selection of Maryat Lee journals and diaries from Maryat Lee, Playwright, Papers (A&M 3300) at the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

Some pages are written in a variety of different inks, showcasing Lee's tendency to return to old passages to provide updates, clarify issues, and include more detailed descriptions.

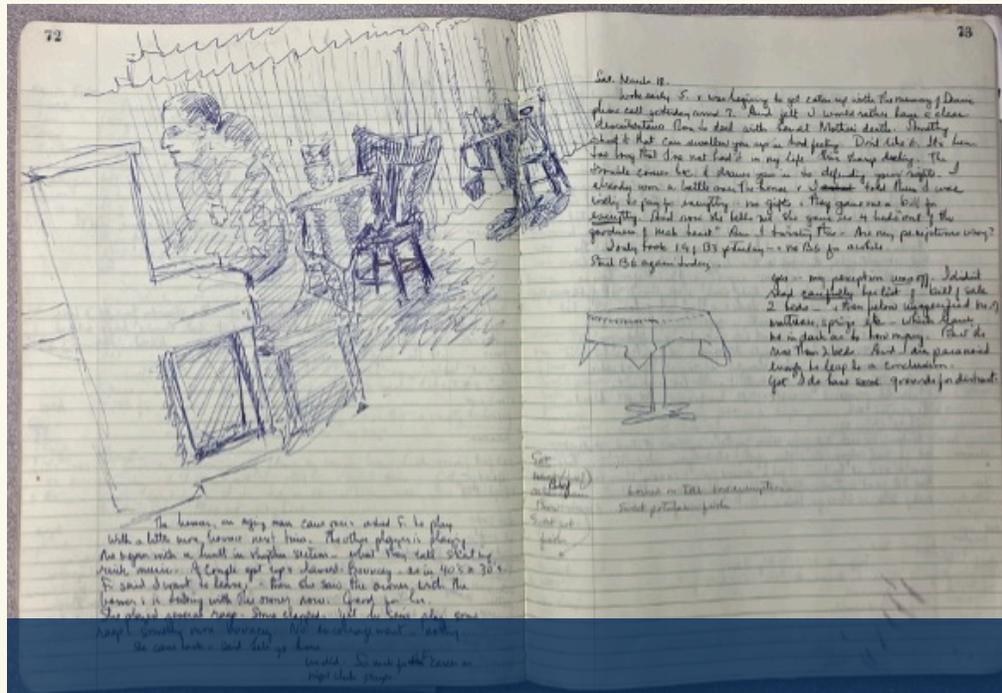
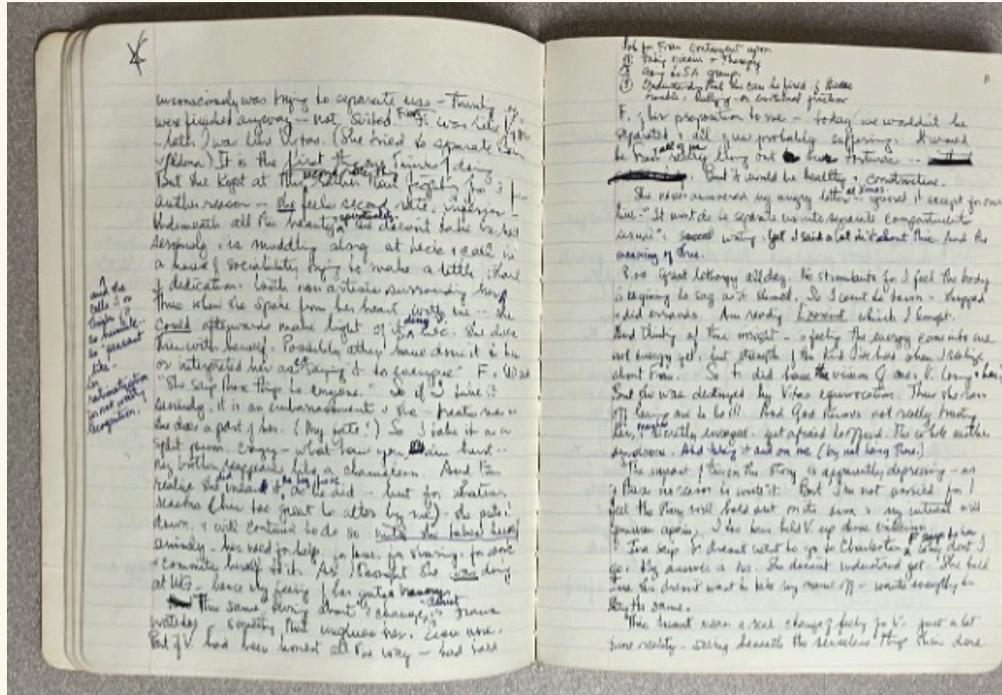
Apparent in all journals are the inclusion of materials she references in her writings: letters, newspaper clippings, cards, and other ephemeral material like bird feathers and pressed flowers. Occasionally, Lee would sketch scenes to accompany text.

If Lee could not immediately access her journals when the urge to write struck, she would record her thoughts on any nearby paper. This can be seen with a few pages torn from a spiral notebook that she must have scavenged and wrote on during a hospital stay, which she later stapled into her journal.

The surprising details found throughout Lee's journals are numerous and showcase her deep inner life alongside the practical realities of the unconventional life she led, whether that be as an emerging playwright in Harlem, New York City or as a farmer in the countryside of Powley's Creek, West Virginia.

Lee's journals, as well as countless other materials related to her life and works, can be found and accessed in the [Maryat Lee, Playwright, Papers at the WVRHC](#).

This article is made possible with support from the National Historic Publications and Records Commission.



Women's history at the WVRHC



Women on Motorcycles, Albright, Preston County, West Virginia
Photographer Scott Gibson (circa 1910).

The WVRHC is actively seeking women's history collections. Since 2017, the West Virginia Feminist Activist Collection project has sought to document the many contributions of women to the history and culture of the state and region. That work has expanded to include women's history beyond activism to ensure we are preserving a more complete historic record.

Thanks to a grant from the National Archives, we currently have an archivist, Abigail Moncus, dedicated to arranging and describing women's collections to make them more discoverable by researchers. See her article on playwright and theater director Maryat Lee on the preceding pages. Funding for Abigail's position will expire soon. We are soliciting donations to support a permanent archivist position for women's collections.



Please contact WVRHC Director Lori Hostuttler by email at Lori.Hostuttler@mail.wvu.edu or by phone at 304-293-1116 if you have questions or want to donate materials or support the archivist position.

Featured New Accessions

Fawn Valentine, Historian, West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search Records and Research Papers

[A&M 4687](#)

Fawn Valentine (1949-2025) was a weaver, fiber artist, and preeminent historian of historic quilts in West Virginia. The collection includes oral histories of West Virginia quilters and accompanying transcripts prior to 1940, West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search files, and assorted other research. It also includes the project's unquilted quilt top (circa 1930s), as well as Valentine's personal research papers on quilts, quilt history, piecemaking techniques, and more. The collection consists of nearly 12 linear feet and 126 GB of content.

Judge Robert E. Maxwell Papers

[A&M 4701](#)

The Maxwell papers include 45 feet of legal papers, correspondence, and memoranda documenting the career and life of Robert E. Maxwell (1924-2010), United States district judge of the United States District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia.

**KEEP READING FOR MORE
ACCESSIONS →**



Men sitting in front of Lucian Downey's store in Pentress, West Virginia, circa 1900.

Downey Family Papers

[A&M 4722](#)

The Downey Family Papers include 1.25 feet of photographs, ledgers, business records, and other materials related to the Downey family in and around Pentress.



← J&J Amusements Advertisement drawn by John Mowder, undated.

John Mowder, Artist, Sculptures and Other Material

[A&M 4478](#)

John Mowder (1948-2024), artist and native of Moundsville, worked for a circus in many roles including painter, artist, and ringmaster. A graduate of WVU, he taught art to junior high school students and steelworkers, became a flight attendant, and later operated a gallery in Pittsburgh, PA. In 2025, additional material was added to his collection. The nearly 7 feet of material now includes bronze sculptures, coloring books, sketch books, photos, scrapbooks, correspondence, and more. It also has an autobiography by Mowder.

Lisa Millimet, Documentarian, Papers and Recordings regarding Larry Gibson and Kayford Mountain

[A&M 4686](#)

The Millimet papers contain documentation on Larry Gibson, an environmentalist and anti-mining activist from Kayford Mountain, West Virginia. The papers include video and audio recordings of the interviews Millimet conducted with Gibson and other Kayford Mountain residents, publications, and more.

West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence Records

[A&M 4680](#)

The records of West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a non-profit network of domestic violence service providers and experts of West Virginia, contains 4.08 feet of meeting minutes, publications, conference proceedings, state legislative reviews, state and federal recognitions, and more.

Delphian Book Club

[A&M 4683](#)

The Delphian Book Club records include meeting minutes and event programs of the women's book club founded in 1925. The club was inspired by the Delphian Society, a national organization promoting women's education in the United States.



For a full list of accessions, read the WVRHC newsletter online at exlibris.lib.wvu.edu/wvrhc-newsletters/winter-2026.