Museum for a Day: Student-designed exhibit shines spotlight on Henry Archives

Historical photographs, posters, documents and other artifacts from the George T. Henry College Archives played a starring role at the college’s Defining Moment: The Campaign for Coe kickoff event on December 8, 2007, through a captivating “Coe Museum” created by members of the Student Campaign Committee.

On a stormy winter night, more than 400 members of the college community, alumni and friends made their way to campus to participate in the campaign launch, which included a stirring program in Sinclair Auditorium — broadcast to alumni gatherings around the country — followed by a formal dance at Dows Theatre. Enthusiastic attendees also reminisced their way through the artfully arranged Coe Museum installed in the Mills Theatre space adjacent to the Dows Fine Arts Center lobby.

“The Coe Museum was entirely student-instigated,” says Lisa Pritchard, director of the Coe Fund, who worked with the volunteer Student Campaign Committee co-chaired by Megan Olson ’09 and Paige Knebel ’08. “They truly embraced the idea that this would be a monumental moment in Coe’s history and knew that the focus of the campaign that night would be on Coe past, present and future.”

The students decided that the campaign kickoff would be an ideal time to showcase Coe artifacts that are rarely seen by the Coe community, much less the broader audience of alumni and friends. “Megan just ran with it,” Pritchard says of the energetic junior from Postville, Iowa. After meeting with Library Director Rich Doyle and getting a first-hand look at the treasures held in the archives, she wrote to her committee: “I am soooo excited for the ‘Coe Museum’ we are going to have in Dows. Have any of you been down to the archives? It is amazing.”

The students worked with library staff members including Archives Assistant Sara Pitcher ’07 and Head of Reference Jill Jack to select an assortment of colorful materials that included poster-sized photos from the 1920s and 30s, views of the campus from different eras, original documents, letter sweaters, beanies, buttons, sorority dance cards, and a recently discovered 1939 silent film about Coe College. They organized the materials into an eye-catching exhibit that used table and wall space to display hundreds of items — and then assembled much of it twice!

Because a student production was underway in Mills Theatre, the students spent hours creating the Coe Museum exhibit on-site, disassembling parts of it before an afternoon theatre performance, then re-creating the exhibit beginning at 3 p.m. the afternoon of the kickoff.

The favorable response from museum visitors made it all worthwhile, says Pritchard. “For some people it was just exciting to see the history; for others, it evoked memories and took them to a place they had long since forgotten.”

Jill Jack, Coe’s archivist, says the Coe Museum performed an essential function at this juncture in the college’s history. “It was particularly important to have this as part of the campaign because the campaign is about the future, and in order to get excited about where you’re going, it’s critical to understand your past and the role that the college plays in the community and, in a larger sense, in the world. It’s important to show off the students and faculty who have gone on to do incredible things.”

This message was not lost on the students who invested many hours researching and designing the Coe Museum even as they reflected on their own place in Coe’s history, says Pritchard. “They realized the significance of that night. They really knew that this was a defining moment in Coe’s history, and their pride in Coe College was remarkable.”

Members of the Coe family — young and old — were entranced by the display of artifacts that made up the Coe Museum on campaign kickoff night.
Archives discovery rekindles spirit of Engle poem

The poem generally known by the title “Library” has been beloved by the Coe community, as well as other book and library fans, since it was written by Paul Engle ’31 for his 50th Coe College class reunion. A copy of the poem is displayed at Stewart Memorial Library, and it has been reproduced on special occasions by Coe and other organizations, such as the Cedar Rapids Public Library. But until recently, the college did not realize that Engle’s original handwritten draft of the poem was contained in the archival materials donated to the college by Engle’s wife, Hualing Nieh Engle, after the death of the renowned poet and educator in 1991.

Coe’s Head of Library Technical Services Hongbo Xie, who has been processing the Engle archives for more than a year, came across the fragile pages with the poem written in pencil in Engle’s hand this past fall. “I knew this would be important and I went to tell Rich [Doyle, Stewart Memorial Library director] right away,” she recalls.

Notably, the title of the handwritten version is “Coe College Library,” although the poem usually appears under the more concise heading of “Library.” Engle was clearly paying tribute to the Coe library in particular, says Doyle.

Paul Engle’s handwritten draft of his poem “Coe College Library” — today known simply as “Library” — was discovered in the college’s Engle archives this past fall.

“When I first saw the handwritten draft I was pleased to see the original title. I was also struck by how close the draft is to the finished piece; in fact, the first six lines are the same while the rest of the changes are minor but provide greater emphasis.”

Enhancements to the Cone collection

Jean Ashby ’43 has bequeathed to Coe a Marvin Cone painting titled Mountain Patterns, painted by Cone in Mexico in 1939. The 13x15-inch oil-on-canvas-board work was one of 48 Cone paintings exhibited at the Cedar Rapids Art Association in October of that year. The exhibit, which was the largest in Cone’s lifetime, fulfilled an agreement with his friends and admirers who had raised $3,710 so he could take a year off from teaching to concentrate on his art. The Ashbys were part of that agreement, and Mountain Patterns has been in the family since then. Cone described that interlude in his life as “a year of freedom” during which he produced many of his best pieces.

Another work painted during that time, Triptych Panorama, which has long been part of Coe’s collection, has been remounted in the Cone Gallery to display it as Cone intended. The side panels are hinged to be brought forward at an angle from the main panel. The barn door on the left now looks down river, and the river bend is more pronounced as the artist intended.

LIBRARY

Written on the 50th Anniversary of the Coe College class of 1931

Fire burns the trembling hand.
Cold freezes the five fingers.
Rock breaks the unbending bone.
But books can grab you by the throat and kill.
Go to a library, listen. You can hear
The books inside their bindings breathe aloud,
Hear reckless phrases howling from their type,
Hear jokes tickling your ear like a fine feather,
Hear screams of rage, delight and agony.
Some books have brutal teeth that snap and bite,
Collared like dogs we lead them on a tight leash.
Passions of men and women cry
Out of the silence from that printed page.
Some books, soft as a hand, caress your hand.
Beware the library, its books are sticks
Of dangerous dynamite that men have dropped.
When they explode, governments disappear.
Some covers hold ideas like live steam —
Open them, they can shatter your live face.
The mind is a gun shooting at history.
The brain is under pressure in a book
Whose words are stronger than a rocket’s fuel —
The sky’s the limit in a fury of fire.
Libraries are alive, walls tremble, books
Bounce on their shelves. In terrible times
Enter, your life comforted by their lives.

PAUL ENGLE
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Donor interests spur collection enrichment in diverse areas

It’s possible — but not likely — that titles such as *Power and Resistance: Critical Thinking about Canadian Social Issues* and *Southern Women’s Writing: Colonial to Contemporary* would be part of the collection at Stewart Memorial Library without the generosity of alumni and friends of the college with interests in specific subject areas. Over the years, several donors have made ongoing gifts to the library with requests that the funds be used to strengthen Coe’s collection in areas of special interest to the donor. Among them are:

- Patricia Ely Toogood ’58, who married a Canadian and has encouraged the library to enrich its collection of Canadian literature and other materials related to Canada.
- Jerry Miller ’63, who majored in German under Coe Professor Herb Wiese and has requested German history, language and literature books.
- Steven Hicks ’72, a novelist, who has asked the library to increase its holdings in the area of Southern literature.
- Charles J. Lynch III, the son of 1926 Coe graduate and Lifetime Trustee Charles J. Lynch Jr. The elder Lynch collected materials on Lincoln and bequeathed his collection to the college. His son has made ongoing donations to the Coe library in memory of his parents, Charles Jr. and Dorothy, to be used to enhance the Lincoln collection as new materials become available.

Such donations are especially valuable to research-oriented historians on the faculty, says Library Director Rich Doyle. “We should not be neglecting any areas, and all of these areas support the curriculum here at Coe. With limited dollars, these generous annual donations help us balance our collection across the spectrum.”

While donors often request that books be purchased to bolster holdings in a given area, actual book titles are chosen by the college, Doyle notes. “We rely heavily on faculty recommendations in all of these areas.”
Alumni and faculty publications added to the George T. Henry College Archives

Carol Gorman, an award-winning children’s author/illustrator and Coe College adjunct instructor in English, has presented many of her titles for inclusion in the George T. Henry College Archives. Among the items she has donated are galley proofs of various titles and translations of some of her most popular works. “Coe has been so wonderful to both Ed and me,” says Gorman. “It’s my home now. I teach there, I love my colleagues, and my students are wonderful. It just felt right that I should donate my papers to Coe.”

The library has a total of 38 titles authored by Carol. New to the collection are:


Ed Gorman '68 has been working with Rich Doyle to fill the gaps in his archives at Stewart Memorial Library. In the past year, 14 new titles have been added (five carry a 2007 imprint date).


Other works added to the collection:

- Steele, Shelby. A Bound Man: Why We are Excited About Obama, Why He Can’t Win. Free Press: NY, 2008. (Shelby Steele, class of 1968)