

Buncombe County Special Collections Library

Collection Development Plan and Access Policies

Mission and Purpose

The Buncombe County Special Collections Library is dedicated to actively collecting, preserving, promoting, and providing equal access to the history of Asheville, Buncombe County, and the surrounding area. We are proud of our historic resources and are committed to preserving them for the future, through preservation, digitization, and decreasing barriers to public access.

History and background

The Buncombe County Special Collections Library (formerly the North Carolina Room) is a medium-sized archival facility located on the lower level of Pack Memorial Library in Downtown Asheville. Buncombe County Special Collections specializes in the social, cultural, and natural history of Asheville, Buncombe County, and Western North Carolina.

The personal library of Foster Alexander Sondley forms the nucleus of Buncombe County's special collections. The Sondley gift is an expansive collection of books, papers, and artifacts. A prominent local attorney and historian, Sondley bequeathed this large personal library, including all of the "brick-a-brac" therein to the City of Asheville upon his death in 1931. The collection was originally housed at Asheville City Hall and opened to the white public in 1935, but was moved to Pack Memorial Library in 1943 as a result of talks between the City of Asheville and the Library Board of Trustees, as well as the occupation of Asheville City Hall during wartime. In 1945, a librarian was named director of the Sondley Reference Library for the first time. At this time, the Sondley Library remained separate from the general reference collection at Pack Memorial Library until 1953, when the two libraries merged and duplicate materials were transferred into storage.

The stipulations in the will of F.A. Sondley compounded with cultural norms in the Jim Crow South prevented the integration of the Asheville Buncombe Library System. There was, however, a segregated branch library known as the "Market Street Branch" that operated independent of the public library system from 1927 until 1951 when the library, headed by Irene O. Hendrick, became a branch of the Asheville Buncombe Library System. Throughout the 1950s there were attempts to integrate the system, but the racist restrictions in the Sondley will prevented any progress. Eventually, on September 15, 1961, after facing pressure from a group of local students known as the Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (ASCORE) the Board of Trustees voted to integrate the library system. The library was officially integrated on September 29, 1961.

In 1973, the Sondley Library moved once again to the new Pack Memorial Library building on Haywood Street. At the time of the move, there were some 31,500 volumes in the collection, 1200 of which were rare and antique materials sequestered in a secure storage vault.

In 1987, Judge C. Walter Allen granted the Board of Trustees of the Asheville Buncombe Library system permission to proceed with the sale of a large portion of the Sondley Library. The sale included material that was “no longer to the benefit to the citizens of Buncombe County the patrons of the Asheville-Buncombe Library System.” The material was sold to Chapel Hill Rare Books for \$375,000. Those funds went to establish a trust that can be utilized for the care and maintenance of the collection.

Buncombe County Special Collections the way we know it today began in the 1990s after the Sondley sale. In 1990, using a portion of the funds from the sale, the library hired a special collections consultant, Morgan Barclay (East Carolina University), to evaluate the library’s materials and storage facilities. Barclay outlined a 5-year plan to ensure the library’s rare and unique materials would be preserved. This plan resulted in new staff, and the eventual severance of the “North Carolina Collection” from the general reference department.

In 2009, during a major renovation of Pack Memorial Library, what was then called the North Carolina Collection was relocated from a corner of the reference department, to its own space on the lower level of the library. The move and renovation included the installation of a separate HVAC system that would help better preserve special collections materials. The move also ensured that a number of works in the book collection were saved from deteriorating UV damage, as many were stored in direct sunlight in their former location.

Buncombe County Special Collections is home to thousands of unique historical documents including maps, photographs, diaries, letters, books, and other archival material. Some of the material is housed in open stacks and are available without restriction for use within the BCSC reading room. Other collections, including, but not limited to, rare and antique books, maps, photographs, artifacts, artworks, and other material may be held in secured storage in light of their fragility, format, scarcity, or monetary value being among the considerations. Access to the library's Special Collections will be as open as possible given the need to preserve the materials.

Collection Description

The Buncombe County Special Collections Library is home to thousands of unique historical records including photographs, maps, books, and other materials that provide researchers the resources they need to understand and interpret the history of Western North Carolina. The collection is not restricted to Buncombe County Public Library card holders; anyone can visit and utilize the resources of the Buncombe County Special Collections Library.

The collection is especially rich in photographs of Downtown Asheville and other commercial, social, and residential districts, as well as tourist attractions like the Great Smoky Mountains

National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Many of the photos in the collection are attributed to important photographers including Thomas H. Lindsey, George Masa, and Andrea Clark.

The manuscript collection exists to preserve the social, economic, and cultural history of Asheville and Buncombe County. Collections may be acquired through donations by individuals or by purchasing materials from reputable dealers in fine manuscripts. Occasionally, the library will purchase materials directly from individuals when appropriate. Manuscript collections can contain the records of families, businesses, organizations, and communities. These special collections provide researchers with important details and nuances of daily life and important events in the past.

Buncombe County Special Collections will not collect artifacts and objects traditionally found in a museum. The library will not collect most artworks, though they may be considered for inclusion in the collection if they contain useful information for researchers, for example, an oil painting of the now razed N.W. Woodfin house painted contemporaneously. Overall, Buncombe County Special Collections strives to preserve unique communication and documentary materials not otherwise maintained by other public records offices like the Register of Deeds and Clerk of Court.

Guiding Values and Core Principles

The Buncombe County Special Collections Library adheres to the guiding values and principles for archives and archivists as described by the [Society for American Archivists](#).

As a public community archive, we condemn racism and align with the Society of American Archivists statement on Black Lives and Archives.

Collections Guidelines and Objectives

Books for General Use

1. Materials will be arranged in such a way that they are easily accessible for both staff and patrons.
2. BCSC will collect new books relating to Western North Carolina and the greater Southern Appalachian region that provide context for the study of local and regional history. The acquisition process will be selective rather than comprehensive; rare books and works published by university or other peer reviewed presses will be prioritized.

- a. The following Southern Appalachian counties will be prioritized for inclusion:
(North Carolina) Buncombe, Henderson, Burke, Madison, Haywood, Transylvania, Polk, Rutherford, McDowell, Yancey, Mitchell, Avery, Jackson, Macon, Clay, Cherokee, Graham, and Swain, (South Carolina) Cherokee, Spartanburg, Greenville, Pickens, and Oconee, (Tennessee) Polk, Monroe, Blount, Sevier, Cocke, Greene, Washington, Union, Carter, and Johnston, (Georgia) Fannin, Union, Towns, Rabun, and Habersham.
3. BCSC will collect genealogy books that are relevant to Buncombe County and Western North Carolina. Books or other hard-copy works about specific families will not be purchased. However, the library will accept them as donations on a case-by-case basis. Family bibles containing genealogical records will be accepted at the discretion of the collection manager.
4. BCSC will collect quality fiction, poetry, essays, and drama that is closely bound to Asheville, Buncombe County or Western North Carolina due to the content or the setting.
5. BCSC will collect annuals, student and/or parishioner directories, and yearbooks for Buncombe County schools and churches that are at least 50 years old. Materials of this type will only be collected at the discretion of the collection manager.

Local Reference Collection

1. BCSC will provide patrons an up to date collection of general reference material related to Buncombe County and Western North Carolina including city directories, atlases, state and local laws and ordinances, and other publications of local government and social agencies.
2. BCSC will collect and preserve either digitally or in microform popular and/or locally published newspapers, newsletters, journals, and magazines, and provide access to back issues of small, local publications not otherwise available.
3. BCSC will provide access to peer-reviewed, academic journals that publish work concerning the history, culture, and literature of Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian region.
4. BCSC will collect articles and other writings relevant to Asheville, Buncombe County or Western North Carolina, published in print or digital format, that will not be microfilmed or otherwise preserved. *An effort should be made to select only those articles containing*

information not found elsewhere and/or those that may be difficult to access at a later date.

5. BCSC will maintain access to statistical information, both historical and current, provided by the State Data Center and other sources.
6. BCSC will collect detailed and up-to-date maps of hiking trails, state and national parks, the Blue Ridge Parkway and other areas of interest in Buncombe County and Western North Carolina.

Special Collections and Rare Books Archive

1. BCSC will collect and preserve rare and unique materials that will assist historians and other researchers in their efforts to investigate the past and plan for the future.
2. BCSC collections may include both physical and digital records. Collections may be entirely physical or entirely digital.
3. BCSC will not accept artifacts, but may borrow them from other local institutions for exhibition purposes. The library may choose to create photo documentation of select artifacts.
4. BCSC will actively seek to acquire collections documenting the history and culture of Buncombe County including Asheville, Weaverville, Black Mountain and surrounding communities.
5. BCSC will collect materials that document Western North Carolina as a tourist center and the effects of tourism on our environment, economy, and culture.
6. BCSC will collect materials documenting the civic activism and the cultural, ethnic, religious, and political diversity of Western North Carolina residents.
7. BCSC will collect maps that document the historical, physical, legal, and geological aspects of Asheville, Buncombe County, Western North Carolina, and other nearby areas of interest.
8. BCSC will continue to preserve and make available materials included in the gift of F.A. Sondley.

Objectives of the Thomas Wolfe Collection:

1. BCSC will collect books, stories, and articles by Thomas Wolfe.
2. BCSC will collect biographical material concerning Thomas Wolfe, his family members and close associates.
3. BCSC will collect critical works which focus on the writing of Thomas Wolfe.
4. BCSC will collect materials documenting Thomas Wolfe's association with other literary figures.
5. BCSC will strive to collect all materials available relating to Thomas Wolfe's years in Asheville, including photographs and items that document his presence at a given place and time, such as school records.
6. To collect and preserve audio recordings related to Wolfe, his work, or his family.
7. To collect commemorative material recognizing Thomas Wolfe's impact on American literature, such as material compiled for the Thomas Wolfe Festival.

Retention and Weeding Policies

Newspaper Retention Policy

Back issues of newspapers will only be retained until they are available in a more stable format such as microfilm or digital scans.

Weeding Schedule and Policy

The open stacks should be completely evaluated on an annual basis by the collection manager or their designee. The collection manager will approve all selections for weeding before they are discarded.

Any material part of the gift of F.A. Sondley may not be discarded.

First adopted 1992 – Updated Jan. 2021

Rules for Accessing Special Collections and Rare Books

Buncombe County Special Collections is open to anyone to conduct research for any reason. Special Collections staff will follow these general guidelines in making rare and unique materials available to the public:

1. All Special Collections users must sign in.
2. Due to the limited number of PCs in the Special Collections reading room, computer access is restricted for use by researchers only.
3. To access the rare books and special collections archive, patrons will provide staff with a library card or other identification.
4. Ink pens, any food or drink, and oversize bags must be kept in a locker while using materials from the rare books and special collections archive. Researchers may keep a water bottle with a lid near their workstation.
5. Patrons may not browse materials in secure storage areas. A staff member will be happy to assist you to identify collections relevant to your project.
6. Originals of especially rare or fragile materials will not be made available when copies are available. Originals will be provided at the discretion of the collection manager.
7. Materials may not be removed from the Special Collections reading room.
8. Determination of the security needs of Special Collections materials will be made by the collection manager and approved by the Library Director.