

UWYO

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A MOUNTAIN of History

The American Heritage Center houses 70,000 cubic feet of documents and artifacts.

UW's American Heritage Center is home to 3,000 collections and millions of items for students and researchers worldwide.

By Doug Hecox

The sleek architecture of the mountain-like Centennial Complex, home of the University of Wyoming American Heritage Center, towers above the surrounding Great Plains. In the world of repositories and archives, the AHC cuts a similarly imposing figure.

More than 3,000 collections, encompassing millions of items, call the AHC home—from photographs of cowboy life a century ago to the state's earliest road maps, saddles used by the Cisco Kid and Hopalong Cassidy, paintings and sculpture by Frederic Remington, centuries-old books and antiquities, even original sketches from comic book legend Stan Lee and actress Barbara Stanwyck's honorary Oscar. The AHC's collection is as diverse as it is nationally renowned. In 2010, it received the Society of American Archivists' Distinguished Service Award, the group's highest honor for a single repository.

Since its creation in 1945, the AHC has grown to 70,000 cubic feet of documents and artifacts—one of the largest non-governmental archives in the nation. Over the last 20 years, requests from researchers have more than tripled.

"We have researchers around the world every year doing work with us, but our primary mission is to serve as a resource for the university's undergraduate students," says AHC Director Mark Greene.

"[The AHC] has helped me a ton on finding primary source material from

eyewitness accounts to violence in Rock Springs,” says Jamie Gooch, a history major from Douglas, Wyo., researching the Union Pacific Railroad’s role in the infamous Rock Springs Massacre. “It started as just a paper project for my Historical Methods class ... but has now carried over to my senior capstone class and will be my presentation for the Phi Alpha Theta conference. This project is the pinnacle of my undergrad research, and the AHC is a central part of it.”

New York Times–bestselling author C.J. Box, originally from Casper, Wyo., says the facility’s diverse resources helped him write a forthcoming short mystery. “I happened on several historic photos in the Charles Belden collection,” Box says. “In one ... bizarre photo, a man ... cradles a baby pronghorn antelope

delivered from Wyoming while the Hindenburg—sporting a swastika on its tail—lands in Lakehurst, N.J., to pick it up to take it to the Berlin Zoo in 1936. The photo inspired a tale called ‘Pronghorns of the Third Reich,’ which will appear in an anthology called *Shots Fired* this summer.”

“We rely heavily on donated items, and only rarely can we purchase a collection or rare book,” Greene says. “We don’t take everything we’re offered, but we are always interested in items that are relevant to our students or scholars.

“Our faculty archivists are superb at what they do,” he adds. “The variety of work that goes on here—both among our archivists and our researchers—is what makes me look forward to coming to work every day. No two days are ever alike.”

Staff members such as Toppan Rare Books Library Curator Anne Marie Lane help students utilize the center’s resources.



Toppan Rare Books Library

AMERICAN HERITAGE CENTER STAR ATTRACTIONS

In addition to its world-class research capabilities, the UW’s American Heritage Center is home to thousands of collections—spanning journalism, mining, natural resources, transportation and even 20th century entertainment. Some of the star attractions include:

University Archives: the history of UW in all its facets.

C.J. Box Papers: early drafts of his award-winning Joe Pickett books, screenplays, correspondence and interviews.

Richard Throssel Photographs: nearly 2,500 glass plate negatives and lantern slides documenting the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Indians.

Jack Benny Papers: scripts, correspondence and photographs from all aspects of the world-renowned comedian’s life.

Toppan Rare Books Library: 65,000 items, including rare newspapers, magazines, broadsides, illuminated manuscripts, maps and dime novels.