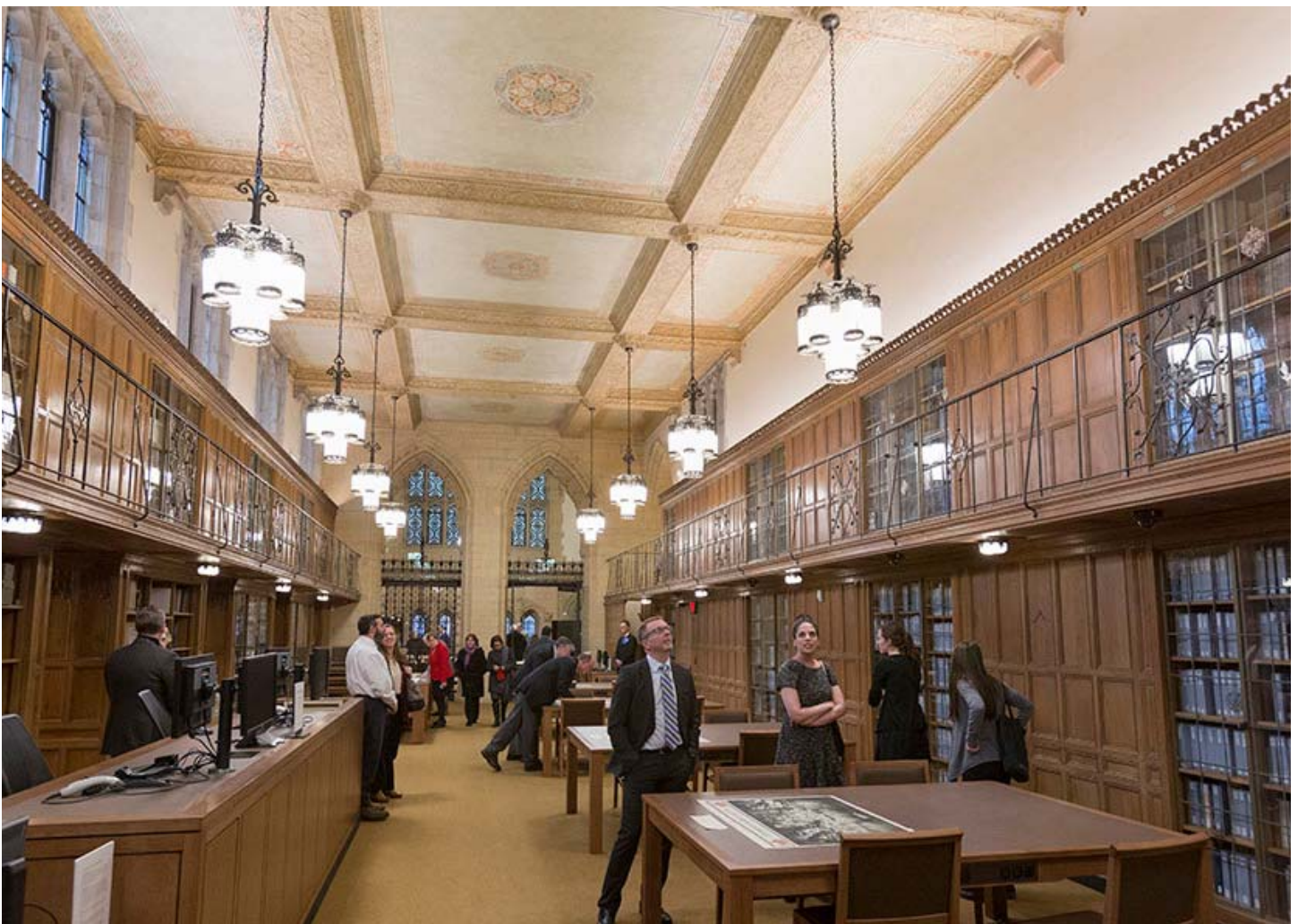


## History comes alive at renovated Manuscripts and Archives Department

By Mike Cummings | FEBRUARY 6, 2018



Air conditioning and improved lighting help transform the dark and drafty reading room into a world-class research center. (Photo credit: Harold Shapiro)

A renovation has revitalized the Yale University Library's Manuscript and Archives

Department's dark and drafty space in Sterling Memorial Library, creating a warm and bright research center for students and scholars to study archival collections documenting America's political, legal, diplomatic, social, and cultural history to the present day.

In remarks at a ribbon cutting ceremony at the library on Feb. 2, Yale University Librarian Susan Gibbons recalled a sweltering day in July 2011 when she first set foot in the department's reading room, which was dimly lit and lacked air conditioning.

"The patrons in the reading room were flush-faced from the stifling heat of the un-air-conditioned space," said Gibbons, deputy provost for collections and scholarly communication. "It was immediately clear that we had a major renovation ahead of us."



University Librarian Susan Gibbons described the depth and breadth of the department's collections during remarks at a Feb. 2 ribbon cutting ceremony. (Photo credit: Harold Shapiro)

Paid for in part through private donations, the renovation, which began in December 2016, has modernized the facility, adding air conditioning and proper environmental controls, improved lighting, and enhanced security measures. A new classroom will provide Yale students increased exposure to the collections, which include the

university's records dating to its founding and more than 16 miles of archives containing the papers of hundreds of historical figures and influential thinkers.

These modern amenities had to be “nested in a rich historical space of carved wood and stone, vaulted ceiling, stained glass, and wrought iron,” Gibbons said of the James Gamble Rogers-designed space. “It was our challenge to harmonize the past with the present to create a space where the history comes alive.”

Yale President Peter Salovey, speaking at the ribbon cutting, praised the library's staff, builders, and architects for “working tirelessly together to restore the surpassing majesty of one of Sterling Memorial Library's most beautiful spaces.”



Yale President Peter Salovey praised the addition of a classroom, which will expose more students to the department's collections. (Photo credit: Harold Shapiro)

Apicella + Bunton Architects, a New Haven-based firm, designed the project.

“They took the time to understand our vision and brought genius solutions to this renovation,” Gibbons said.

Improved lighting draws attention to old details, such as the reference area's elaborately painted ceiling, which had been concealed in shadow for years. A new

stairway in the reference area leads to a small mezzanine overlooking the reading room. Previously accessible only to library staff, the mezzanine was converted into a meeting space — one with a view of the reading room through carved wooden archways.

The new classroom will help meet increasing demand from faculty to teach in the collections, Gibbons said. It is located in the Gutenberg Room, a space located behind the reading room where Yale's copy of the Gutenberg Bible was housed before the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library opened in 1963.

Students will access the room, which features a large fireplace and vaulted ceilings, from the Linonia and Brothers Reading Room, so that class sessions will not disrupt those in the reading room.

Previously, department staff had to transport collection material to classrooms in the Bass Library. The new classroom simplifies the process and will enable more classes than ever to work with the department's collections.



The reading room's layout was redesigned to improve sight lines. (Photo credit: Harold Shapiro)

“The opportunity for our students to learn through personal engagement with artwork,

specimens, rare books and documents is part of what makes a Yale education distinctive,” Salovey said. “Now I’m thrilled that students will work in that very same way here in Manuscripts and Archives. It underscores the university’s mission to share its collections and other intellectual assets more broadly.”

A new consultation room off the reading room provides a much-needed space for patrons and library staff to speak privately without disturbing other researchers. An elevator has replaced a small and antiquated dumbwaiter used to transport 12,000 containers of collection material annually delivered to Manuscripts and Archives from the offsite Library Shelving facility, making life easier for the department’s access-services staff.

The reading room’s layout was altered to improve sight lines, enhancing security. Lockers and coat racks were moved from the reading room to the reference area to improve security and reduce noise. Security cameras were upgraded and public access staff were equipped with screens at their desk to monitor activity in the reading room. A new glass entranceway allows visitors to catch a glimpse of the reading room without having to negotiate registration protocols.



A view of the mezzanine from the reading room floor. (Photo credit: Harold Shapiro)

Throughout the renovation, Manuscripts and Archives staff continued to provide patrons access to collection material in a temporary reading room in Sterling Library's Franke Family Reading Room.

Gibbons described the breadth of the Manuscripts and Archives collections, noting that they encompass the handwritten words of figures as diverse as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Lindbergh; the heart-wrenching letters and diaries of soldiers from the American Revolutionary War onward; 12,000 hours of shattering testimonials from the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies; and records of organizations and individuals who advocated for the rights of the LGBTQ community.

The renovation has enhanced the ability of the Yale Library to share these materials with students, scholars, and the public, she said.

“There are thousands and thousands of voices awaiting the opportunity to whisper to our students from across those 16 miles of archives,” she said



The new classroom is located in the Gutenberg Room, which once housed Yale's copy of the Gutenberg Bible. (Photo credit: Harold Shapiro)

The renovation was supported through the generosity of John Robinson Block '77,

Stephen F. Gates '68, Mark Gimbel '92 and Dede W. Welles '92, Noreen Roth Henig '87 and David Henig, Elai Katz '92, Frederick H. Lovejoy Jr. '59, the family of Leonard Marx '25, William S. Reese '77, David Alan Richards '67, J.D '72, and the Cornelia Cogswell Rossi Foundation.

Manuscripts and Archives is open Monday through Friday, 8:45 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., with the exception of Wednesday, when the department opens at 10:30 a.m. [Information on planning a visit is available on the department's website.](#) (<http://web.library.yale.edu/mssa/hours>)

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