

News Release

Contact:

Tom Caswell
Associate University Librarian, University of Florida,
Curator of St. Augustine Government House Research Collections
(352) 273-2805
tcaswell@ufl.edu

University of Florida Libraries receive \$265,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant award

Online resource will provide first time access to hidden St. Augustine treasures

Gainesville, FL, May 1, 2012 – In preparation for the 450th anniversary of the founding of St. Augustine in 2015, the University of Florida (UF) George A. Smathers Libraries has been awarded \$265,000 by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). This is the largest award in Florida (one of only four) and one of 34 nationally this year. The *Unearthing St. Augustine* grant, led by project director Thomas Caswell and co-director James Cusick, will establish a specialized computer digitization lab at the Government House in St. Augustine, Florida to build an online collection of hidden and fragile resources related to colonial St. Augustine. This two-year project will create an interactive digital collection consisting of 10,000 maps, drawings, photographs and documents available freely online. Partnering with the Smathers Libraries to realize this project are the City of St. Augustine departments of Heritage Tourism and Archaeology Program, the St. Augustine Historical Society, the UF College of Design, Construction and Planning and the Government House, which is managed by UF.

The *Unearthing St. Augustine* materials are scattered among four different repositories which have been previously inaccessible to researchers worldwide and will soon be available in a freely searchable online database. Among the important items to be “unearthed,” which date from the 16th century to the present, include archival materials from the following:

- ... Government House – maps and overlays of the city, architectural drawings of historic structures and related government documents
- ... St. Augustine Historical Society – Spanish documents, transcriptions and English language translations
- ... City of St. Augustine Archaeology Program – records, photographs and site summaries for 100 excavations conducted over the past 20 years
- ... Herschel Shepard Collection at UF – drawings, photos and documents related to Shepard’s restoration and reconstruction of the city’s colonial buildings

The collection will support research in a broad range of subjects: Florida and U.S. history, Spanish colonies, Native Americans, slavery, exploration, architecture and urban planning, social and economic development, missionary work, military defenses and warfare. When completed, *Unearthing St. Augustine* will not only satisfy the needs of a wide variety of researchers including historians, archaeologists, architects and historic preservationists, but the project will also help in telling St. Augustine’s unique “story” on a global scale.

In support of the grant, Kathleen Deagan, distinguished research curator at the Florida Museum of Natural History, wrote: “Digital access to primary materials is probably the single most important factor in stimulating new and diverse scholarship on St. Augustine’s colonial history.

This is also a very timely project, in that the 450th anniversary of St. Augustine's founding will occur in 2015, providing an opportunity to focus both public and scholarly attention on the role of Florida in our nation's history."

Jane Landers, professor of history at Vanderbilt University, added: "I have long recognized the international significance of St. Augustine, as well as its importance in our national history. I can attest to the unique nature of the city's historical documents, maps, and artifacts and firmly believe they constitute a national treasure that should be made more accessible to a wider public. These records and archaeological reports document much about the material culture, economy and social and political organization of St. Augustine and its indigenous and African hinterlands."

The George A. Smathers Libraries at UF is both the largest public and academic library in the state of Florida. The libraries' collections are located across the Gainesville campus and throughout the state. The libraries house more than five million books and the UF Digital Collections (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu>) contain over seven million pages of historical documents, archival letters, maps, photographs, museum objects, books, newspapers and more. The functionalities and features of the UF Digital Collections are supported using the UF-developed SobekCM software. SobekCM is released as open source software under the GNU GPL license and can be downloaded from the SobekCM Software Download Site: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/software>. To learn more about the technologies, please visit the SobekCM page: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/sobekcm>.

Government House is one of 38 separate historic buildings and 23 state-owned historic parcels located in the City of St. Augustine and managed by the University of Florida in support of programs in preservation, education and interpretation.

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The National Endowment for the Humanities: Humanities Collections and Reference Resources