**Nomination for the Center for Research Libraries Primary Source Award, Access Category (**[**http://www.crl.edu/primary-source-awards**](https://mail.ufl.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=0df7b44f90da4fac8c2fa8dd9c707140&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.crl.edu%2fprimary-source-awards)**)**

*This nomination resulted in the successful award for Dan Reboussin for his work with the Derscheid Collection:* [*http://www.crl.edu/primary-source-awards/past-awardees*](http://www.crl.edu/primary-source-awards/past-awardees)

**Nomination Summary**

Access to primary sources is essential for researchers, but effective online access requires a range of support extending beyond traditional methods. Catalog records and finding guides are still necessary, but search engine optimization (SEO) is also required to create effective, full access to online collections.

This nomination is for Dan Reboussin, Head of the University of Florida (UF) Libraries’ African Studies Collections, for his efforts in creating effective access to the *J.-M. Derscheid Collection*.

Reboussin has created complete access to the Derscheid collection, a rich set of manuscripts relating to pre-colonial and colonial era Burundi, Eastern Congo and Rwanda. These unique and rare materials document the history of the region. They were created and collected by Jean-Marie Derscheid, a zoologist and conservationist who undertook historical research on Rwanda and the Eastern Congo from 1924-1939. Among other things, he criticized Belgian colonial agricultural policies promoting cultivation in the sensitive environments of the Virunga Mountains. He recognized the importance of their conservation as supporting one of only two limited habitats of the endangered Mountain Gorillas.

Derscheid’s scholar-curated collection of primary research materials is a critically important resource for interdisciplinary research in the area as noted by René Lemarchand, professor emeritus of political science and author of *Rwanda and Burundi* (1970). Reboussin worked closely with Lemarchand to enhance access to and preserve the microfilm collection. He ensured long term scholarly access to the materials by securing permission from Derscheid’s heir to distribute the collection and by creating a complete, verified, item level index.

This year, Reboussin led a project to digitize the Derscheid manuscript collection in accordance with standards for digital preservation to ensure ongoing access. Digitizing primary source materials clearly enables access. However, access is limited without additional support. Building on prior work with the catalog record and index, Reboussin set out to ensure this rich collection was fully accessible by developing several innovative, enhanced means to support online access. The project began with the digitization of the Derscheid collection from microfilm and the creation of complete, item level metadata using the existing index. Additional support provided includes:

* Digitizing the complete index to enable researchers to review the entire collection at a glance (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00103116>)
* Digitizing (after securing required permissions) Lemarchand’s book, *Rwanda and Burundi* (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00103151>), to provide access to the complete research context relating to these materials
* Researching the life and work of Jean-Marie Dersheid and translating his biography, now accessible online in the UF Digital Collections or UFDC ([http://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00000442](http://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00000442/))
* Creating a Wikipedia biographical entry for Derscheid, specifically intended as part of a broad SEO strategy to ensure full public access to the primary research materials (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Marie_Derscheid>)
* Creating the specialized Derscheid digital collection within the UFDC (powered by the SobekCM software engine, optimized to allow Google and other search engines to easily access and automatically index or ‘crawl’ included materials). The creation of a separate collection frames the research materials, providing enhanced access to the critical support materials and ensuring complete, integrated access to the entire collection (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/derscheid>)

**Nomination Documentation**

The *J.-M. Derscheid collection of materials on Rwanda and Burundi* includes approximately 2,500 manuscript items, illustrations and maps relating to Rwanda and Burundi (former Ruanda-Urundi), with some research materials on the Kivu and Oriental provinces of the former Belgian Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo). These materials include administrative reports of District Commissioners and Governors, genealogies of clan chiefs from ca. 1859-1940, the collector’s research notes, correspondence with colonial administrators and missionaries (members of the Roman Catholic missionary society known as the White Fathers or *Pères Blancs* in French).

The University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries hold the master negative of this scarcely held microfilm collection privately created in 1965 under the direction of René Lemarchand, professor emeritus of political science, which preserved and provided scholarly access to a unique manuscript collection held by the collector’s family in Belgium since his death in 1944. While the microfilm has been made available at cost to scholars through academic libraries, in fact distribution until now has extended to only a handful of libraries in the US: Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, Yale University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (per *WorldCat* search 10/28/11). Even fewer copies are available elsewhere, for example at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (Linden and Linden 1977: xvi) and possibly at academic libraries in Belgium (this can’t be confirmed by a library catalog search of the Catholic University of Leuven or the combined catalog for Belgian university libraries at <http://www.unicat.be/> while the Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren doesn’t appear to have a publically searchable library catalog online).

Lemarchand alerted Reboussin to the existence of these microfilm reels at the University of Florida Libraries around the year 2000. Finding that the master microfilm negative reels were shelved alongside a circulating copy, Reboussin facilitated their transfer to a non-circulating location for preservation purposes and had a new print duplicate made to provide adequate film leaders, match the number of reels to the original set, assure durability and adherence to preservation standards and to improve physical access. In 2002, Reboussin corresponded by postal mail with Jean-Marie Derscheid’s son (now himself deceased) to successfully secure his permission as heir to distribute the contents of the collection for the purpose of facilitating scholarship. Because the collection is on microfilm only (the collector’s family holds the original manuscript materials in Belgium), no finding aid was produced. Lemarchand transferred to the UF Libraries a partial inventory in his possession, which Reboussin (2004) used to create a complete itemized index to the entire microfilm collection (verified with a frame by frame comparison and substantial editing).

Reboussin conducted wide-ranging bibliographic research on Derscheid around the time he was preparing the collection index. Because of the author’s extensive publishing, along with that of relatives and others named Derscheid (his father was a well-known tuberculosis doctor, for example), Reboussin looked for a biography that might sort out the confusion for him: “I thought I was working with at least three different people for a long time and was simply taken by what I began to appreciate was one man’s unfaltering energy and powerful personality.” Jean-Marie Derscheid published on African history and culture, the creation of the *Parc National Albert* in Congo (including his work on the Mountain Gorillas with Carl Akeley’s final expedition), many widely diverse biological science articles, a book on European bird conservation and a number of practical articles on the captive breeding of wild ducks. People who were aware of some of these activities were unaware of his significant contributions in other areas. He was also a veteran of the Belgian resistance during World War II who was captured and later executed by the Nazis. Reboussin finally identified a biography in a scarce French language reference source. Based on this experience, he prepared a bibliography of Derscheid’s many publications and translated the existing biographical article into English.

During the summer of 2011, Reboussin coordinated the digitization of the microfilm set using funds provided through the UF Center for African Studies (designated by the US Department of Education as a Title VI National Resource Center). Metadata creation was facilitated by availability of the complete index in digitally readable format, but the index itself was also uploaded for research use. Lemarchand granted the UF Libraries permission to distribute in digital form his 1970 book that relied to a great extent on the Derscheid collection, as a way to provide scholarly context for further research as well as to facilitate access to the out of print book itself. Finally, Reboussin wrote a Wikipedia biography on Derscheid, in part to tie together these various online resources in one highly visible place online. While before and after Google rankings are not available, Reboussin reports that finding some of the disconnected and fairly obscure resources relating to Derscheid on the web is much easier as a result of creating the Wikipedia article. This is a strategy he plans to repeat with other collections and to promote among his colleagues, because it is relatively simple and has a big impact in the public arena as well as providing specialized help for researchers. Finally, Reboussin prepared a “landing page” at the UFDC site to point users of the University of Florida’s Digital collections to the various research and support files now available on this open access website.

**References**

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