CELEBRATING TEN YEARS
THE PANAMA CANAL MUSEUM COLLECTION
EXHIBIT CURATORS
JOHN NEMMERS AND BETSY BEMIS

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UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

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TRANSITING TEN YEARS WITH THE PANAMA CANAL MUSEUM COLLECTION

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We dedicate this book and exhibit to our community of supporters, researchers, library personnel, educators, and students who make the Panama Canal Museum Collection at the University of Florida a constantly evolving, preeminent research collection.
Construction Crews in a Lock Chamber of the Panama Canal, 1913. 2011.999.248. Gift from Curtis A. Bliss
It is impossible to single out any one person to receive credit for the successes we have realized in the past ten years...

It is impossible to single out any one person to receive credit for the successes we have realized in the past ten years, but it is easy to say that the one person who has provided vision and leadership throughout the decade has been Judith Russell, Dean of the George A. Smathers Libraries. Dean Russell was instrumental in building the relationship with the Panama Canal Museum that led to the University of Florida (UF) acquiring the collection in 2012, and she has had a lead role in shaping the collection and its activities over the years. Thanks for your leadership and commitment, Dean Russell!

We also want to acknowledge the Friends of the Panama Canal Museum Collection, particularly President Joe Wood and Vice President Kathy Egolf and the other members of the Executive Council. We benefit greatly from their guidance and support, as well as the incredible depths of their knowledge and passion.

Finally, we do want to thank everyone at UF who contributes to the Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC) in countless ways large and small. As Dean Russell is fond of saying, to list is to exclude, so rather than trying to list everyone who contributes to our successes we will simply close by saying that our incredible team includes multiple librarians and archivists, our exhibitions team, administrative and development personnel, and many others who support communications, printing, fiscal services, facilities, storage, and public services.
In the past ten years, we at UF have endeavored to continue developing the collection and services so that the PCMC is the leading research collection for the study of the American era of the Panama Canal.

In 2012, the Panama Canal Museum entrusted the University of Florida (UF) George A. Smathers Libraries with the stewardship of its remarkable collection, and we are so thrilled to be celebrating in 2022 the ten-year anniversary of the Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC) at UF.

Of course, the history of the collection stretches back to 1998 with the founding of the Museum, and it is fair to say that the good work we have achieved at UF is an extension of the good work accomplished by the Museum in its fourteen years of existence. The collection that was transferred to UF in 2012 included over 12,000 objects consisting of millions of pages and items, so it cannot be overstated that the Museum did a terrific job developing a premier historical collection. Likewise, the Museum successfully established educational and outreach activities and developed an outstanding network of supporters, and we have followed this example and worked to expand those activities and grow our community of supporters. In the past ten years, we at UF have endeavored to continue developing the collection and services so that the PCMC is the leading research collection for the study of the American era of the Panama Canal.
We did not set out to select the rarest or most valuable objects. Rather, our intention was to select items that are representative of significant acquisitions or exemplify collecting priorities.

In brainstorming ways to celebrate this anniversary, we hit upon the idea of identifying ten objects in the collection that we could spotlight in order to represent important collecting areas or significant activities. We did not set out to select the rarest or most valuable objects. Rather, our intention was to select items that are representative of significant acquisitions or exemplify collecting priorities such as unique letters, scrapbooks, and photographs that document the lives and perspectives of individuals and families. The majority of the selections were acquired over the past decade, but a few of the objects represent important activities and milestones during this period including digitization efforts and community engagement activities. We hope that you will enjoy learning more about the development of the collection and the diversity of our activities over these ten years.

JOHN NEMMERS, CURATOR, PANAMA CANAL MUSEUM COLLECTION
BETSY BEMIS, ASSOCIATE CURATOR, PANAMA CANAL MUSEUM COLLECTION

PANAMA CANAL MUSEUM COLLECTION
https://pcmc.uflib.ufl.edu/
Fancy Diving Contest
July 4, 1912
Balboa, Canal Zone
2012.115.1
Gift from
Karen Nadeau Price
This photograph was donated in 2012, the year marking the transfer of the collection from the Panama Canal Museum to the University of Florida. Moreover, this was one of the first items to be added to the PCMC. The image shows a diving contest on the Canal during July 4th festivities. A companion photo in the collection includes a caption noting that the diving distance was 85 feet! Photographs such as this are invaluable because they depict the lives and activities of people who lived and worked on the Canal.

Donations are an essential part of the PCMC’s success. They will continue to be a foundational element of its growth and ability to preserve the history of the Panama Canal in the future. Every year, hundreds of photos are added to the collection, and a large percentage of these are personal photos taken by individuals and families.
Postcards are wonderful windows into the changing world of Panama and the Canal Zone. We have acquired numerous postcards over the past decade. However, a recent donation of over 15,000 digitized postcards will significantly impact scholarship and teaching for years to come because of the sheer quantity of the postcards and the breadth and depth of their photographic documentation of the Canal Zone and Panama. Although it is still being fully processed and organized, the Brad Wilde Postcard Collection has already been used in classes, exhibitions, and multiple research projects. Many of the postcards are mass-produced by well-known companies like I.L. Maduro and Foto Flatau. Over 6,000 of the postcards, however, are real photo postcards (RPPC), which are postcards made from unique photographs taken by individuals that depict images of people, families, places, and personal moments not found in the postcards printed and sold by publishers.

This image of the U.S.S. Arkansas in the Gatun Locks at the end of World War I reminds us of the critical relationship that existed between the Panama Canal and the U.S. military. From its opening, the Canal served as a vital path for U.S. Navy ships and ally ships during wartime. The Canal Zone also served as home to a significant military community stationed at numerous bases spread across the isthmus. Many of those military individuals and families have enhanced the collection over the past ten years through donations and oral history interviews.

Donor Brad Wilde funded the digitization of his postcard collection. He also spent a great deal of his time organizing and describing the postcards to be more easily discoverable and accessible to researchers. We continue to improve the organization and description of the digital collection with Wilde’s support and guidance, and we plan to release the collection in multiple batches as work progresses.
Digitization has been a high priority over the past decade, and it will continue to be a high priority for years to come. Accessibility and preservation are core missions of the George A. Smathers Libraries at UF, and digitization enables scholars, students, and other researchers around the world to access unique and rare resources. UF has digitized more than 12,680 PCMC items with over 250,000 individual pages. This includes everything from school yearbooks and newspapers to photos and artifacts. Remarkably, these digitized items have been viewed almost 38,000,000 times in the past ten years.

The *Panama American* newspaper exemplifies this effort. *The Panama American* was founded in 1925 by Nelson Rounsevell as an independent, bilingual newspaper that targeted residents living in the Canal Zone, Panama City, and Colón. This issue from 1939, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Canal’s opening demonstrates how newspapers are invaluable tools for researching the past. The issue also presents the ephemeral nature of many historical resources; the highly acidic newsprint is fragile and discolored and only exists because someone made an effort to preserve it properly.

Issues dating from the 1950s have been available for several years in the digital collection. A project is currently underway to digitize issues from the 1920s through the 1940s held on microfilm by the New York Public Library. Generous donations to the Janice G. Grimison and Edward “Ted” W. Scott Library Memorial Fund have supported this vital work. The demand for these papers is very high, and the numbers speak loud and clear: There have been almost 14,000,000 views of the digitized issues of *The Panama American* in the past decade.

PANAMA CANAL 25 YEARS OLD TODAY

400 Year-Old Dream Realized When Panama Railroad Co.'s SS "Ancon" Made 1st Transit

Big Ditch, Engineering Marvel Of Modern Times, Is Monument To Hardy American Pioneers Who Fought, Dominated Nature

When the Panama Railroad Company's S.S. "Ancon"" passed through the last gates of the Miraflores Locks Sunday before noon on the afternoon of August 15, 1914, it brought into realization the ancient dream of emperors, kings, and conquerors, who, for over four hundred years, had dreamed of a channel connecting the Old World with the fabulously rich and little-known New World.

It was during the course of 14 hours by a short passage of the Atlantic and Mediterranean that Christopher Columbus discovered the New World. The famous Italian navigator of commerce and science, who was the discoverer of America, had not been able to pass the Isthmus of Panama, which he found in the course of his Pacific voyage. Looking back over the land which he had discovered, he asked why his ship could not have sailed on her way to the Indies, and it was then that the idea of an interoceanic ship canal was conceived.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt

An unusual illustration of the extraordinary progress of the Panama Canal was made by the American government during the canal's 25th anniversary. The Panama Canal is the greatest engineering achievement of the modern world and has been described by many authorities as the greatest engineering achievement of the world.

The Panama Canal was opened for navigation in 1914, and since then it has been the most important waterway in the world. It has played a vital role in the development of trade and commerce, and has been a great asset to the United States and other countries.

The Panama Canal was planned and constructed by a team of engineers and architects, who designed and built the canal in a time of great uncertainty and hardship. The canal was completed in 1914, and has since become one of the most important waterways in the world.

The Panama Canal is a symbol of the American spirit of enterprise and innovation, and has been a source of great pride and accomplishment for the United States.

The Panama Canal has been described as the "8th wonder of the world," and has been a source of great pride and accomplishment for the United States.

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One of the best sources for individual stories of history are the personal letters written between family and friends. Written more candidly than published materials, they often reveal real experiences and capture voices commonly unavailable in official documentation and secondary sources.

This letter of Lela McCane was penned in 1940 and mailed to her mother, Mabel Day, in Illinois, not long after Lela had relocated to the Canal Zone when her husband took a job with the engineering supply department. Although Lela’s complaints about the weather are hardly unique, this two-page letter packs a lot of information about the Panamanian presidential election, the growing community of Diablo Heights, and the events leading up to World War II.

This letter, acquired in 2018, is one of several dozen letters written by or to Lela McCane throughout the 1940s. In the past three years alone, the PCMC has acquired over fifteen collections of personal and family letters. At a time when hand-written letters are a fading method for connecting with one another, the PCMC will continue to preserve these historic correspondences as evidence of the lives of individuals, families, and communities.
Monday

Dearest Mother:

Well its hot - as usual, guess I’ll have to stop mentioning the weather as it doesn’t change much. It thunders and lightnings around every day, but quite often it’s a considerable distance away, up in the hills or out over the Pacific. I’ve never seen heavier rain than comes down here - makes such a noise on the roof you can scarcely hear yourself think. But there is something rather fascinating about the place - it’s like grapefruit you learn to like it little by little maybe that’s what is meant by saying “the tropics get you.”

The Republic of Panama just had a presidential elections. My what an issue they make out of it - everything closes down and not even the trolleys run. Everyone is asked to be in their homes by nine P.M. and people from the zone are asked to stay out of Panama unless it is absolutely essential they go there. Soldiers were stationed at the streets.
The richness of the collection is a testament to the commitment of our donors and supporters.

It is not an overstatement to say that the development of the Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC) in the past ten years has relied almost entirely on donations from our large community of supporters. More than 95% of our acquisitions have been donations, which is important because rather than spending our funds to purchase materials we can instead dedicate our resources towards activities such as digitization, conservation, exhibitions, and employing students to arrange and describe the collection. Similarly, donors have supported important endeavors financially, such as the Oral History program and the creation of the Albert H. Nahmad Panama Canal Gallery at UF. Our community of supporters have also contributed something just as valuable as their historical treasures or their funding: they have donated their time and their knowledge. The richness of the collection is a testament to the commitment of our donors and supporters.

THANK YOU!
Tracy MacKay-Ratliff, Albert H. Nahmad Panama Canal Gallery, 2019
3 1/2 H. Culebra Cut. Completion of bottom pioneer cut. Steam shovels #230 and #222 meeting at grade. Looking south from west back, May 20, 1913.
II.2019.999.554
The PCMC receives dozens of requests for research and instruction annually, and without fail, one of the top requested topics is the construction of the Canal.

The PCMC receives dozens of requests for research and instruction annually, and without fail, one of the top requested topics is the construction of the Canal. Researchers are fascinated by all aspects of the construction period between 1903 and 1914, including the special machinery created for the endeavor, the large West Indian labor force, the health and sanitation efforts necessary to protect lives, and the development of the Canal Zone and infrastructure needed to operate and defend the Canal.

This image depicts steam shovels #230 and #222 meeting in the middle of the Culebra Cut on May 20, 1913, after their crews had worked from opposite directions. The laborers still had a few months of work ahead of them before the Canal’s completion, and the waters between the two oceans were connected for the first time, but this image certainly captures a milestone moment.
This 1920 yearbook, *The Caribbean*, showcases a year in the life of the students at Cristobal High School in the Canal Zone. It includes photographs of students and faculty, creative writing, class favorites, jokes, local advertisements, and signatures. The PCMC preserves most of the yearbooks created for the schools in the Canal Zone, and the digitized reproductions are some of the most frequently viewed resources in the digital collection. Some volumes of *The Caribbean* and *The Zonian* from Balboa High School have been accessed more than 100,000 times in the past decade. Yearbooks and other school publications such as literary journals and catalogs are frequently used by scholars and students.

The Caribbean

1920
Scrapbooks and diaries are among the most personal and unique items found in the Panama Canal Museum Collection. They offer access to stories that the official records and reports don’t capture, recounting family memories, individual thoughts and emotions, and the everyday experiences of their creators. This scrapbook belonged to Betty Chan, class of Balboa High School 1945.
Created during the 1940s, it includes many elements one would expect to see from that time in a young person’s life: letters to friends, dance invitations, newspaper clippings, drawings, photographs, and ephemeral objects from events she attended. It also provides valuable insight into the life of a Chinese American family living in the Canal Zone during World War II.
Multiple generations of young people grew up in the exceptional environment surrounding the Panama Canal, and naturally, they were shaped by their childhood experiences there. Sports and recreation were a big part of life for children in Panama and the Canal Zone, and scouting was one of the most prevalent activities. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, International Scouts, Sea Scouts, Explorers, and other scouts could participate in activities such as camping, jamborees, cayuco races, sailing, and parades.

According to a handwritten caption, this photograph depicts the first scout troop in the Canal Zone in 1911, a year after the founding of the Boy Scouts of America. Based on the number of creases, it appears this photo was rolled at some point and it is fortunate that the image has survived for more than a hundred years.

Memories of scouting are frequently discussed in the oral history interviews preserved in the PCMC.

“I’m an Eagle Scout, and I have a lot of memories about what I had to do to earn it. In the 1940s at that time, some of the Boy Scout requirements had to do with seasons, like camping. Camping was a required merit badge to be an Eagle. One of the requirements was that I would display the abilities to camp out in the winter time. Panama doesn’t have winter time. Coordinating with the American program in the States, it was agreed that rainy season would qualify as the winter camps. If you go camping in the rain—my town had 180 inches of rain every year. If you could go camping and survive then you could earn the merit badge.”

- Dorn Thomas
The Panama Canal Company produced this map of Gamboa as part of a series of maps documenting the townsites of the Canal Zone and printed in telephone directories. While maps of Gamboa and the other townsites aren’t particularly unique or rare, this map represents the manner in which the PCMC uses exhibits to engage closely with a large community of people who are passionate about preserving information about their history. In 2013, UF exhibited this map along with other enlarged copies of the townsite maps at the Panama Canal Society Reunion in Orlando, Florida, and invited attendees to identify buildings and add the names of former residents in order to document the history of the communities. This practice of using the maps interactively was started by the Panama Canal Museum. This map thus also represents how the PCMC has continued the excellent work undertaken by the Museum in its fourteen years.

The exhibit, *Hometowns of the Canal Zone*, was a terrific success with hundreds of names added to the maps, and following the reunion, the maps were scanned and published online so that these contributions would be preserved and made available to researchers globally.
Mola with four red flowers on a black background, 2012.99.13
Molas are an important part of Panama’s cultural heritage.

This mola, which depicts four colorful flowers on a black background, exemplifies the beautiful molas that the PCMC has collected in the past decade. Molas are an important part of Panama’s cultural heritage. These textiles, originally handmade, are a part of the clothing traditionally worn by the women of the Guna, one of the indigenous peoples of Panama. After ten years of working closely with hundreds of donors, one thing is very clear: molas are also an important part of the history of the Americans and others who lived and worked on the Canal.

Many Zonians treasure the molas they acquired while living in the Canal Zone and Panama. The PCMC has developed an extensive collection of over 700 molas in all shapes and sizes, everything from blouses and panels to purses and pillows. These molas allow scholars and students to study the construction techniques, designs, and subject matter as they evolved over the 20th century. Because the collection of molas is so extensive, both in terms of the quantity and the variety, only truly exceptional and unique molas are now accepted into the collection.

This mola also represents another important type of object that the PCMC routinely preserves: artifacts. The collection includes everything from textiles and porcelain to toys and paddles and bottles, and these artifacts are frequently used in exhibits and instruction, as well as by researchers.
FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PANAMA CANAL MUSEUM COLLECTION, PLEASE VISIT https://pcmc.uflib.ufl.edu/