

SMU LIBRARIES

SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER



BUILDING ON HISTORY

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The Rees-Jones Library of the American West
breaks new ground in the SMU Libraries' story

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honors a legend in
her own time

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30 years of support
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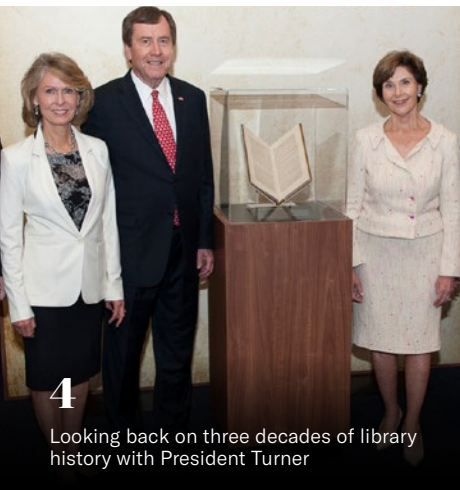
Inspiring future
Mustangs, one research
project at a time

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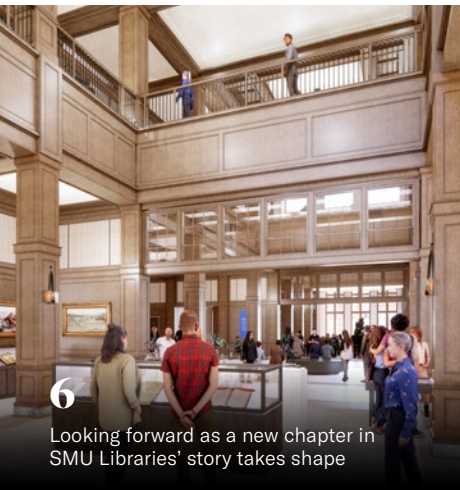
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ON THE COVER

The architectural rendering captures the beauty and character of the future Rees-Jones Library of the American West. It's an exciting time to be part of the SMU Libraries community, as construction begins. Stay tuned for progress updates as we count down to the 2027 opening.

SMU Libraries Newsletter is published twice a year by the SMU Libraries, which retains the right to determine editorial content and manner of presentation. The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect official University policy. Letters and comments welcome. Send to: SMU Libraries, PO Box 750135, Dallas, TX 75275-0135. **Dean of SMU Libraries**, Holly E. Jeffcoat; **Editor**, Amy Carver '94; **Contributors**, Jolene de Verges, Ramón García, Sarah Jenkins, Russell L. Martin, III '78, '86, Jack Meehan '25, Grace Morison '28, Pamela Pagels, Brynn Price '23, Patricia Ward, Christina Wood; **Copy editor**, Ellen Rossetti; **Photographers**, Kim Leeson, Jeffrey McWhorter, Lana D. Phillips '13, Guy Rogers, III; **Graphic design**, Brooke Carlock Design. To support SMU Libraries visit smu.edu/libraries/giving or contact Brynn Price at 214-768-7034 or brynnp@smu.edu.

A groundbreaking beginning for our new stories

The settlement of the American West calls to mind stories of adventure, challenge and discovery. Though we did not experience this chapter firsthand, we all share in its legacy – whether our roots run deep in the land, or we are recent arrivals to these magnificent spaces.

At May's groundbreaking for the Rees-Jones Library of the American West, we began a new era of exploration, one rooted not in myth, but in authentic voices and images preserved across generations.

This remarkable library, anchored by the Rees-Jones Collection and the Western Americana collection shaped by E.L. DeGolyer, will be a crossroads for new generations of scholarly explorers. Here, personal narratives of overland travel, maps that shaped exploration, and artistic depictions of the land and its people will come alive through access to primary sources. These treasures will bring us as close as possible to the dramatic experiences of this bygone era.

This achievement is possible thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Jan and Trevor Rees-Jones '78. Their support will uplift SMU and its libraries for decades to come, distinguishing our University as a leader in research and learning. We are certainly building on history – and with the groundbreaking comes a new chapter in the stories of SMU and SMU Libraries.

To me, a story is more than a sequence of events; it's a tapestry woven from characters, places and moments, real or imagined, crafted to spark emotion, share experience and reveal meaning. Stories connect us. They have a beginning, a middle



and an end, but their impact lingers long after the last page. Within this newsletter, you'll find short stories that aim to do just that. Each is unique in plot and setting, but all are shaped by the steady hand of one person who has profoundly influenced our campus library experience: President R. Gerald Turner. Every great story needs a strong connection at its heart – and that's exactly what he's given us.

It is a new chapter on the Hilltop, as we look forward to welcoming Dr. Jay Hartzell and Dr. Rachel Davis Mersey to the SMU community, the construction of the Rees-Jones Library of the American West, and more. We hope you will join us as the stories of SMU and SMU Libraries continue to unfold.

Holly E. Jeffcoat
Dean of SMU Libraries

“
At May's groundbreaking for the Rees-Jones Library of the American West, we began a new era of exploration, one rooted not in myth, but in authentic voices and images preserved across generations.”

A modern tribute for a legendary medievalist

A change of setting for Tables of Content transformed the Gene and Jerry Jones Grand Atrium in Owen Arts Center into a glittering salon humming with thoughtful conversation and lighthearted asides. Presented each spring by Friends of SMU Libraries, this year’s fundraiser was especially memorable as SMU President R. Gerald Turner helped honor one of the University’s legendary scholars.

With his lauded three-decade tenure nearing its conclusion, Turner’s support for Friends came full circle that evening. He presided over the inaugural Literati Award presentation in 2010 (see Page 4). On March 29, he presented the 2025 award to Associate Professor Bonnie Wheeler, who has taught at SMU throughout his presidency.

Wheeler arrived at SMU in 1975 and serves as director of medieval studies. Her major academic interests encompass medieval narrative (especially Arthurian romance), Chaucer’s poetry, medieval gender studies

and interdisciplinary pedagogy. She received SMU’s Outstanding Teacher Award six times and is a recipient of the Phi Beta Kappa Perrine Prize for excellence in scholarship and teaching.

Her scholarly impact as an author and editor is profound. She is the founder of *Arthuriana*, the first peer-reviewed journal of Arthurian studies, which she edited from 1994–2009. In addition to several articles on medieval Latin, English, French and Japanese literature, Wheeler has edited, co-edited or co-authored 11 peer-reviewed books of essays, most of which provoke richer understandings of significant medieval women. She is series editor for two book series, *Arthurian and Courtly Cultures* and *The New Middle Ages*, with more than 250 peer-reviewed books in print.

Through the years, her academic influence gained worldwide acclaim. In 2010, an international committee of professional colleagues and friends founded the Bonnie

This page Family, friends and many other admirers gathered at Tables of Content to honor Bonnie Wheeler (bottom left). The celebration began with a reception where guests mingled and chatted while enjoying the beautiful setting – the Gene and Jerry Jones Grand Atrium in Owen Arts Center at Meadows School of the Arts (top). Among the attendees were last year’s Literati Award recipient, broadcasting legend Norm Hitzges, and his wife, photographer Mary Danz-Hitzges (center). SMU Libraries Executive Board members Juli Harrison and Paula Whisenant ’71 peruse a book written by one of the evening’s distinguished table hosts (bottom).



Wheeler Fund (bonniewheelerfund.org), which supports women faculty, in her honor. In 2013, the publication of *Magistra Doctissima: Essays in Honor of Bonnie Wheeler* commemorated her many contributions to medieval studies. At the May 2023 International Congress on Medieval Studies, the world’s largest medieval conference, she received a multitude of honors for wide-ranging work in her field, including the 2023 Medieval Foremother Prize for her extensive publications and support for research on medieval women. The Teaching Association for Medieval Studies announced that a national Bonnie Wheeler Award for Teaching Excellence in Medieval Studies will be presented annually at the congress.

Wheeler also is active in efforts involving local historic preservation and in second-wave feminism. She serves on the board of Veteran Feminists of America, which preserves the history of American feminism and advocates for constitutional implementation of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Many family members and at least 18 of her fellow SMU Department of English faculty members applauded Wheeler. In fact, her colleague Stephanie Amsel and former faculty members Diana Blackman ’93, ’95, ’14 and Jo Goyne ’87, ’90 were honorary chairs of the occasion. All three are active Friends: Blackman serves as board president, Goyne is a board member, and Amsel recently



“The better I get to know my students, the more I can help them discover their own interests.”

Bonnie Wheeler

completed her board term.

After the presentation, guests enjoyed dinner and conversation led by engaging experts in their fields. Table hosts included Tony Award-winning set designer John Arnone; Will Evans, founder and CEO of Deep Vellum Publishing and Bookstore; Joel Lagrone ’85, engineer and famous NorthPark Santa Claus; author and journalist Dave Lieber; photographer Laura Wilson; KERA-

TV executive Bill Young; and SMU faculty members Andrew Graybill, Alida Liberman and Dan Moss.

Proceeds from Tables of Content benefit the Friends annual grants program and impact student success on campus by enhancing student learning environments and supporting the addition and upgrade of student spaces in Fondren Library. ■

This page SMU Libraries Dean Holly Jeffcoat and SMU President R. Gerald Turner presented the 2025 Literati Award to legendary scholar Bonnie Wheeler (top right). Others enjoying the evening included: from left, Scott Rohrman ’92 and Laura Rohrman; SMU Trustee Bill Vanderstraaten ’82 and Mimi Vanderstraaten, a member of the SMU Libraries Executive Board; and Joseph Cahoon, director of Cox’s Folsom Institute for Real Estate, and Nicole Cahoon (top left); table host Russell L. Martin, III ’78, ’86, director of DeGolyer Library, and guests (bottom left); event co-chair Stephanie Amsel, Friends Director Amy Carver ’94 and event co-chair Jo Goyne ’87, ’90 (center); and table host Will Evans, founder and CEO, Deep Vellum Publishing and Bookstore, and guests (right).



Saluting a 30-YEAR PARTNERSHIP

When I arrived on the Hilltop as dean of SMU Libraries August 1, 2018, the list of University accomplishments attained under President R. Gerald Turner's leadership was already staggering. From the beginning, it was clear to me that he valued our libraries as vital partners in SMU's success.

There has been no stronger vote of confidence in our mission than his ongoing support. In his first year on campus,

President Turner joined with his wife, Gail, to establish the R. Gerald

& Gail O. Turner Library Fund in 1995 to help subsidize library acquisitions. The following year, he created the Gail Turner Hamon Library Fund to honor his wife and her interest in the arts. The Turners hold the distinction of being SMU Libraries' longest-standing consecutive donors.

We're honored to have provided a fitting bookend to his presidency as we broke ground for the Rees-Jones Library of the American West just weeks ago (see Page 6). His first SMU groundbreaking in 1998 made way for the Fondren Library main desk link and iconic Laura Bush Promenade.

On these pages we offer a time capsule, of sorts, as we reflect on major milestones in SMU Libraries' history realized during President Turner's three decades on the Hilltop. By any measure, the strides made by SMU Libraries are impressive. We're grateful to have experienced such a steadfast friend. Thank you, President Turner, and Mrs. Turner, from the heart of the University!

– Dean Holly Jeffcoat

1999: Iconic dedication

The Fondren Library link opened. It was the first construction project to be completed that was funded by *A Time to Lead*, Turner's first fundraising campaign at SMU.

The same year, former President George W. Bush, then governor of Texas, dedicated the Laura Bush Promenade to honor his wife's work on behalf of libraries and literacy. Friends of SMU Libraries would recognize that advocacy by presenting the 2011 Literati Award to Laura Welch Bush '68.

2004: Expanding in Taos

To better support students and faculty in the SMU-in-Taos program, the Fort Burgwin Library was constructed in 2004. It contains materials focused on the history, literature, cultures and environment of New Mexico and the Southwest. Housing approximately 9,000 books and a small collection of journals and maps, it features the Fred Wendorf Information Commons and a computer lab.

2010: Literati Award

Turner presented the first annual award to screenwriter James V. Hart '69. The Literati Award was created by Friends of SMU Libraries to commemorate its 40th anniversary and recognize significant creative achievements.

2012: Renovation begins

SMU Libraries staff joined Turner to break new ground in library history with the renovation of Fondren Library. This and other new projects supported by the *Second Century Campaign* were introduced to the University community as part of 2012 Founders' Day Weekend festivities.

2013: Year of the Library

Turner launched the yearlong tribute by declaring the libraries "fundamentally important" to SMU's rise in stature and future success. Throughout the year, special

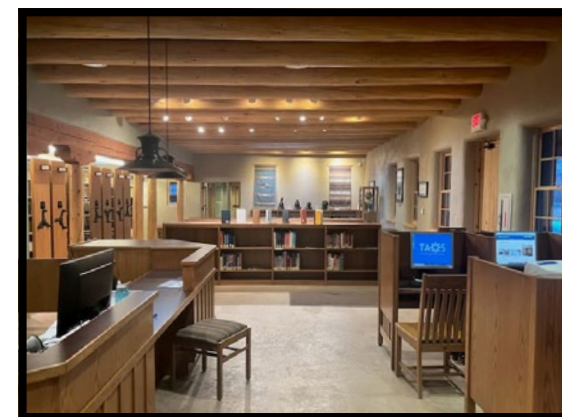
programs, exhibits and events commemorated the first hundred years of library growth and excellence.

History was made April 19 when a previously unknown journal by American explorer John Maley was presented to DeGolyer Library, representing SMU Libraries' 4 millionth volume. The gift from the SMU Board of Trustees was made in honor of former President and former First Lady Laura Bush and the opening of the George W. Bush Presidential Center the following week.

Another high point was DeGolyer Library's exhibition of George Washington's personal copy of the *Acts of Congress*, July 14–27. Thousands of visitors took advantage of the opportunity to see Washington's annotated copies of the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights and other legislation passed in the first session of Congress. While on display, it became part of an expansive exhibition of presidential materials from various DeGolyer collections. Like all visitors, Laura Bush had the opportunity to sign the guest book. In a graceful, cursive hand she wrote: "I'm proud that the DeGolyer had the first George W.'s exhibit!"

2016: Fondren reimaged

The restored Fondren Foundation Centennial Reading Room and the new Hillcrest Foundation Exhibit Hall were dedicated April 15 as part of the finale of the record-breaking \$1.15 billion *Second Century Campaign*.



Turner declared the library "central to teaching and learning" and described the renovation as "a successful balancing act that respects the history of the building yet opens its doors to emerging technologies."

SMU Libraries continued to celebrate in the fall with the opening of the Prothro Learning Commons, Starbucks café, the Collaborative Commons, the revamped fourth floor study areas, and the Office of Information Technology and help desk hub. These spaces transformed Fondren into a community gathering place central to the social and academic lives of our students. On any given day, almost every nook is now filled with students studying, researching or just hanging out with friends.

2024: A premiere resource

When classes started August 26, students marveled at the new Duda Family Business Library. Positioned off the new Arnold Commons, on the lower level of the David B. Miller Business Quadrangle, the new library boasts high-quality specialized resources and quick access to librarians with expertise in relevant subject matter.

It's no surprise that SMU Libraries achieved distinction as Texas' largest private research library system during Turner's tenure, expanding to seven facilities – and soon to be eight – that embody the type of innovation, collaboration and partnership he has championed across the University.



Ready. Set. Westward ho!

Construction begins on the Rees-Jones Library of the American West to house the illustrious Rees-Jones Collection of Western Americana, blazing a new trail for research, discovery and engagement with the past to yield insights about the present and beyond.

There's nothing like the excitement energizing every corner of campus as another academic year nears its end. This spring was capped by a momentous flourish when our community gathered May 1 to celebrate a milestone in the history of the University and SMU Libraries. As dignitaries turned symbolic shovels of soil, they launched a truly groundbreaking project – construction of the new Rees-Jones Library of the American West.

This new chapter in SMU Libraries' story officially opened May 5, 2023, with the announcement of a \$30 million commitment to construction and endowment, plus the gift of the Rees-Jones Collection, valued

at over \$100 million, by Jan and Trevor D. Rees-Jones '78. Since then, the donors have continued to make significant contributions for collection enhancement and expenses related to the incorporation of the collection into the SMU library system.

"In every way, this gift reflects Jan and Trevor's vision, not only to preserve history, but to bring it to life in ways that inform and



inspire generations to come," says SMU President R. Gerald Turner. He characterizes their gift as a "profound act of generosity, foresight and faith in the power of education." As the last groundbreaking of Turner's presidency, the event added an exclamation point at the conclusion of his monumental 30-year career on the Hilltop, already punctuated by many library high points (see Page 4).

Envisioning a landmark

By fall 2023, it was all hands on deck as the staffs of Fondren and DeGolyer libraries paved the way for a smooth transition into the construction phase. They weeded collections, updated catalog records and prepared materials for migration to the off-site Iron Mountain storage facility.

Student study space had to be reconfigured as Fondren's north wing came down to make way for the new facility. More seating in the Learning Commons, the Centennial Reading Room and the fourth floor helped fill in the deficit.

As work on the new building gears up, SMU Libraries will rely more than ever on staff members' flexibility and ingenuity to maintain normal operations.

For a glimpse of what's to come, architectural renderings of the Rees-Jones Library adorn the fencing around the construction site. With expansive windows, elegant woodwork and thoughtfully designed interiors, the space promises to offer a warm and inviting setting for research, study and collaboration.

But the true treasures of this landmark library will be the historic collections it's built to preserve.

With a diverse array of thousands of works created as early as the 17th century, the Rees-Jones Collection features everything from the rarest first editions to quotidian examples of ephemera, including:

- Nearly all the major color plate folios published on the trans-Mississippi West during the 19th century
- Albums of masterworks by pioneering photographers

- Unique and highly significant manuscript maps, as well as landmark sheet maps, atlases and foldout maps in books
- Correspondence and documents from major historical figures

This collection complements the strengths of DeGolyer Library, which houses approximately 180,000 volumes; over a million photographs; and a wide array of manuscripts, maps, newspapers and ephemera.

"By combining these two distinguished collections, SMU will house extremely rare materials as well as 'ordinary' Western imprints, the raw materials of what scholars call 'print culture,'" says DeGolyer Library Director Russell L. Martin, III '78, '86.

Together, these resources position SMU as a leading academic center for Western history, offering a balance of breadth and depth that supports specialized research and interdisciplinary teaching.

Inside the Rees-Jones Library

Thoughtfully planned to optimize its resources, the Rees-Jones Library of the American West will be a distinctive place for students, researchers and the public to connect with collections and each other.

The elegant glass-and-brick building accommodating the Rees-Jones Collection will take over the substantive footprint of the former Science Information Center (also known as Fondren Library Blue). There will be a stately, formal entrance facing University Boulevard, while the main desk link will provide easy access to Fondren Library.

"The library is being designed to foster collaboration, innovation and deep



“

Formed over the past 20 years by Dallas entrepreneur Trevor D. Rees-Jones '78, the Rees-Jones Collection has become one of the most significant private holdings of Western Americana in the country. Focused on the exploration and settlement of the trans-Mississippi West, the collection includes thousands of rare and historically significant books, pamphlets, broadsides, maps, atlases, documents, manuscripts, photographs, prints, archival materials and printed ephemera.”

Curator Rick Stewart



engagement with the history of the American West. With flexible workspaces, seminar rooms and reading areas, it will support interdisciplinary research and immersive learning experiences,” Dean Holly Jeffcoat says.

“Advanced technologies will support digital scholarship and bring new tools to students and researchers, opening up exciting ways to explore our collections,” she adds. “The Rees-Jones Library will not only house invaluable materials but will also serve as a catalyst for discovery and dialogue. It will be a place where history comes to life, inspiring new generations to explore and understand the rich tapestry of the American West.”

The Rees-Jones Library will also be home to new staff appointed to support the library (see Page 11), as well as special collections staff, collaborative research librarians, and digitization and conservation experts.

Look for construction updates in future newsletters as work progresses on this transformative resource.

Looking forward to 2027

Plans are for the Rees-Jones Library of the American West to take shape over this year and next, with the opening and dedication set for 2027.

A second-generation SMU alumnus, Trevor Rees-Jones earned his Juris Doctor from the SMU Dedman School of Law after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts from Dartmouth College. In the years since his graduation, Rees-Jones has become a renowned presence in the Dallas law, business, and oil and gas industries, establishing Chief Oil & Gas in 1994.

An alumna of Texas Tech University, Jan Rees-Jones is an active Dallas community member and volunteer, with SMU service including the George W. Bush Women’s Initiative Advisory Council and the SMU John Goodwin Tower Center Board of Directors, as well as in women’s ministry at the couple’s church.

Trevor and Jan Rees-Jones are longtime supporters of SMU and founders of The

Rees-Jones Foundation, which focuses on the personal development, protection, and physical and mental health of children and youth. Jan Rees-Jones currently serves as the vice chair and director of the foundation, which has also contributed greatly to SMU initiatives across campus, particularly those focused on child advocacy and education.

Their commitment is the largest and most impactful received by SMU Libraries during the *SMU Ignited* campaign, Jeffcoat says.

“Thank you to Jan and Trevor Rees-Jones, whose incredible generosity will uplift SMU and its libraries for decades to come,” she says. “Their continued support has made possible the construction and endowment of this magnificent site on SMU’s campus – one which will distinguish our University as a leading institution, and a beautiful one, at that.” ■

Below This architect’s rendering shows a beautiful outdoor area that will provide a welcoming, alfresco option for reflection and conversation.



A SMU President R. Gerald Turner shares a laugh at the groundbreaking with donors Trevor D. and Jan Rees-Jones. **B, D, H** Architect’s renderings depict interior spaces to support engagement with the collections and immersive learning experiences. **C** The new building will be located adjacent to Fondren Library. **E** Guests view selections from the Rees-Jones Collection at a preview event hosted by SMU Libraries. **F** Trevor D. and Jan Rees-Jones (center) are flanked by sons Trevor '19 (left) and David (right), along with SMU dignitaries, at the groundbreaking. **G** David Rees-Jones, former First Lady Laura Bush '68 and Gail Turner, first lady of SMU, enjoy the celebration.

Centuries-old materials impart enduring insights

When asked about Rees-Jones Collection items that have recently caught her eye, archivist Christina Wood zeroed in on these fascinating records of the human experience in the early history of our state and our nation.

Capturing ‘a grand finale’

Untethered curiosity and an adventurous spirit seem to have guided Théodore Pavie’s wanderings in New England, Canada and the Louisiana-Texas borderlands from May 22 to November 6, 1829. It was the young Frenchman’s first trip to the United States and Canada, a seminal experience he documented in daily journals.

Researchers today prize the journalistic quality of his writing, particularly his observations about vanishing Franco-Spanish cultural borderlands along the Red River in the months leading up to the Texas Revolution.

His candid accounts fill seven separately stitched folio booklets. Each volume, written in French, contains an illustrated title page and at least one additional sketch or draft



on the last page. Some include additional pencil sketches.

Pavie was the son of a prosperous printer in Angers, France. A branch of his family settled in Louisiana during the Napoleonic wars. Following his 18th birthday, he set out to visit them. This would be the start of his long and successful career as an author and world traveler.

After arriving in New York, he followed a path up the East Coast into Canada, later venturing to Pennsylvania before voyaging down the Ohio River to the Mississippi River and on to New Orleans. After visiting the Crescent City, he stayed for several months with his uncle in Natchitoches on the Texas-Louisiana border before returning to France.

Pavie’s journals in the Rees-Jones Collection constitute an unpublished manuscript draft of what would eventually be expanded into the book *Souvenirs atlantiques* (*Atlantic Memories*). This manuscript affords scholars the opportunity to examine Pavie’s original text and his unvarnished, immediate observations.

In the book *Pavie in the Borderlands*, scholar Betje Black Klier writes: “*Souvenirs atlantiques* rescued from extinction some of the ephemeral sights, sounds, motions and feelings of the vivid borderland cultures: Indian, Spanish or Mexican, and French. Although his visit was brief, the event-hungry young writer captured for us a grand finale. He seems to have sensed that the years 1829 and 1830 would be one of the last times that these vulnerable groups could live out their distinctive cultures in all their finery.”

First Texas ‘road map’

When the Spanish government appointed Teodoro de Croix commander general of its newly created Interior Provinces of New Spain (*Provincias Internas*) in 1776, he lacked accurate geographic information about the vast area under his command. As a solution, he embarked on a lengthy inspection tour. De Croix was accompanied by engineer and cartographer Josep de la Barcanda, who recorded all the information needed to plot the region encompassing present-day Texas and northern Mexico.

Pedro de Ormedo, a Jesuit priest, used Barcanda’s surveys to meticulously draw a map that included the roadways traveled by the inspection party, making this the first known road map of Texas and the northern Mexican borderlands.

The circa 1778 map can be appreciated as much for its artistry as its information. De Ormedo’s rendering incorporates



decorative baroque motifs and a distinctive color scheme – red for presidios and towns, and yellow for roads. The style fuses a traditional geographic depiction and a bird’s-eye view.

Academic researchers and history buffs alike will be intrigued by this pioneering document depicting a sparsely populated territory dotted with familiar places like San Antonio, Chihuahua, Saltillo and Durango.

Presidential prescience from 1805

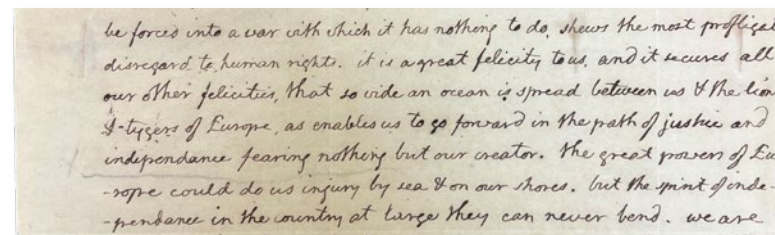
In a letter written on July 6, 1805, Thomas Jefferson’s ruminations about international relations and the indomitable American spirit remain relevant.

“Any letter by Thomas Jefferson is historically important, but this one stands apart,” Wood says. “Jefferson briefly, but elegantly, touches on multiple events of lasting consequence in this substantive piece of correspondence.”

The president was in his second term and writing to William Jarvis, who represented the U.S. in Portugal. In fewer than 400 words, Jefferson’s newsy dispatch shared his thoughts on the growing threat of Napoleon, an update on the Lewis and Clark expedition, and an appreciation for the “very superior quality” wine from Portugal’s Arruda region.

With the Napoleonic wars taking a toll across Europe, Jefferson remained guarded about Portugal’s future, writing, “It gives me much pleasure to see a hope that Portugal may be able to preserve her neutrality. That a government so just and inoffensive should be forced into a war with which it has nothing to do, shows the most profligate disregard to human rights.”

He expressed gratitude that the Atlantic Ocean separated the U.S. from the “lions and tygers [sic] of Europe,” enabling “us to go forward in the path of justice and independence fearing nothing but our creator.” ■



Top The circa 1778 document is the first known road map of Texas and the northern Mexican borderlands. **Bottom** Shown is an excerpt from a letter written by President Thomas Jefferson in 1805. **Opposite page** Théodore Pavie illustrated the travel journals he filled shortly before the Texas Revolution.

MEET OUR NEWEST ARCHIVIST AND CATALOGER

Two academic librarians bringing their expertise to the work of the Rees-Jones Library of the American West are DeGolyer Library’s own Christina Wood and Meg Wang, a new member of the SMU community.

Wood fulfills the archivist role for the new library, and Wang serves as cataloger of the Rees-Jones Collection. They are vital to the task of preparing the collection for research accessibility when the library opens in 2027 and keeping pace with processing new acquisitions as the collection expands.



As the head of public services at DeGolyer Library for the last six years, Wood concentrated on providing the best experience possible for researchers and other users, which she’ll continue as an archivist. To that end, she led class sessions and created research guides that streamlined access to materials and assisted scholars utilizing rare books and resources in DeGolyer’s reading room. She also showcased the library’s holdings by curating exhibits in both physical and digital spaces.



“I’m thrilled to have the opportunity to accession, process and share the incredible Rees-Jones Collection,” Wood says. “I can’t wait to help make it available to students, researchers and the public.”

Wang combines expertise in conservation with a passion for preserving the stories and knowledge of the past. Now specializing in rare books, Wang has contributed to some of the world’s most renowned institutions, including the British Museum, the Louvre and the National Palace Museum in Taipei.

“From museums to rare book libraries, my journey as a conservator and cataloger has been shaped by a deep respect for history,” Wang says. “Every rare book I handle is a connection to the past; in cataloging them, I’m not just organizing – I’m helping ensure they are preserved and accessible for generations to come.”

Archivist Christina Wood (top) and Cataloger Meg Wang (bottom)

Behind the scenes

Meet Jesse Hunt, the conservator saving some of Bridwell Library’s most prized materials for generations to come

A key component of the new Rees-Jones Library of the American West will be a conservation lab, where historical materials will be repaired and protected. To learn more about the painstaking process of safeguarding such treasures, members of Friends of SMU Libraries Board met with conservator Jesse Hunt for a tour of Bridwell Library’s conservation lab, which has been in operation since the early 1990s.

Hunt, who celebrated his 13th year with the University in March, pulled back the curtain on the interventions combining art and science to save rare books and documents from the ravages of time.

“What makes jobs like mine necessary is that many of our rarest collection items are already several centuries old. Many have seen better days, but the fact that they haven’t completely fallen apart after hundreds of years is a testament to the quality of craft that went into their creation,” he says. “My goal is not to make these items like new, but to ensure they last a few hundred years more, when they can be reassessed by future conservators.”

His expertise demands a complex skill set shaped, in part, by the collections he tends. Hunt must be familiar with all the materials

“
My goal is not to make these items like new, but to ensure they last a few hundred years more.”

Jesse Hunt

used to make a book, such as the leather, paper and ink, as well as the more technical aspects of putting them together, including the binding and printing processes. He also must combat the chemical and environmental factors that degrade materials and threaten their longevity.

While some of the tools of his trade, like needle and thread, harken back to antiquity, others rely on technology bringing new techniques to the mix. One such piece of

equipment that always seems to catch the eye of lab visitors is the humidification chamber.

“It looks extremely sci-fi with its big plexiglass dome for holding in aerosolized water vapor,” Hunt says. “It’s unusual, although its actual purpose of helping to soften and flatten brittle material may not sound very exciting.”

Vellum, for example, can become rigid and brittle over time, a challenge Hunt confronts as he cleans and reconstructs a book of sacraments from the early 1700s. It suffers from unintentional damage inflicted by a treatment years ago, much like another of his current projects, maintaining a centuries-old printed book of epistles. He describes it as “a really beautiful example of early printing and typographic layout.”

“I would say the binding is probably German, late 1500s or early 1600s,” he says. “In the past, another conservator was a little overzealous with the leather dressing, and the binding needs to be cleaned and rehoused.”

The conservation of library materials has been called a cornerstone of cultural stewardship. Hunt sees himself as one in a “long line of stewards working behind the scenes to keep these collections intact.” ■



Above Jesse Hunt uses a board shear to cut book board. Right Visitors are often intrigued by the “sci-fi” look of the humidification chamber, which is used to help soften and flatten brittle materials.



MY SMU LIBRARY

Finding solace among the stacks

There’s something timeless about a library. In a world where nearly everything has moved online, it’s easy to forget that knowledge still lives on shelves as bound paper books, tucked into the quiet corners of campus. I learned that lesson one evening in the old Science Information Center at Fondren (fondly remembered as the “blue side”) in a way that still gives me chills.

I was working on a brutal multivariable calculus assignment, and I’d exhausted every online resource I could find – nothing had what I was looking for. Frustrated and tired, I decided to take a break to wander the math aisles, more to clear my head than anything. I had already been clicking through every online forum I could think of, so why not see if maybe a book has my answer.

Upon turning down a random aisle, there it was: a book ever so slightly jutting out, almost as if it was waiting for me. To my surprise, it was an old multivariable calculus textbook. I pulled it off the shelf and started flipping through the pages, not expecting much. But to my complete shock, one of the pages had been earmarked – and it just so happened to have the exact equation I needed. Not just close. Exact. Detailed explanation and all.

I stood there in stunned silence, alone in the quiet wing of the library, wondering how on earth it was even possible. Maybe it was just a coincidence. Maybe it was another student who beat me to the idea. Or maybe, just maybe, one of Fondren’s rumored ghosts decided to lend me a hand.

I still smile when thinking about that moment. There was something fitting about finding the answer in an old textbook when all the high-tech tools of today had failed me. It reminded me of why I love SMU’s libraries in the first place.

To me, they have always been more than study spaces. While they certainly offer relief from distraction when concentration is necessary,



they are also places of warmth and joy. I’ve laughed with friends over coffee, pulled late-night marathons of studying before exams, and sometimes retreated to a quiet corner to relax and get a change of scenery. Whether I was cramming for a test or just looking for a place to feel grounded, the library has always been there.

Even as everything else in college seemed to move fast, the library stayed still for me – and in that stillness, I found what I needed time and time again. On the days where focus and determination weren’t quite enough ... well, a little supernatural intervention never hurt. ■

Jack Meehan ’25

Hometown: New Braunfels, Texas
Majors and minors: Mechanical engineering major (premedical biomedical specialization) with a minor in mathematics
SMU activities: Morrison-McGinnis Commons Council president (2022–23), SMU-in-Oxford, honor roll with distinction, University Honors Program, SMU Libraries Student Advisory Board and a grader in the Mechanical Engineering Department

Library research visits inspire future Mustangs

When Fenix Collins '28 and Lesley Salmeron '28 visited Fondren Library as high school juniors, they weren't sure where they would go to college. Now as first-year Mustangs, they look back on that experience as a turning point.

"It was cool to see the libraries and all the resources available to students," says Collins, who is an advertising major (creative track). She is in the University Honors Program, a Mustang Scholar and active in an array of student organizations.

Salmeron is a Rotunda Scholar planning a double major in political science and public policy with a minor in Spanish. Attending the University had seemed like an unreachable goal, "but I am glad to say SMU has offered many resources to help me succeed."

A partnership between SMU Libraries and Garland High School brings teens in the prestigious International Baccalaureate Diploma Program to campus to make the most of library materials for a required class project. SMU Libraries hosted the first group in 2018.

This year, Undergraduate Success Librarian Ramón García and Social Science Research Librarian Naomi Schemm served as co-instructors. Interns Jordan Allen, Matthew Fenner and Taelor Fisher '10 pitched in during the visits.

García collaborated with Garland High School Librarian Paige Portele to jump-start the learning experience by visiting the school for a research session. He covered "developing a research topic, thinking about what kind

of sources could fulfill their information needs, creating a strategy for finding those sources and evaluating the sources."

With that preparation in mind, 100 high schoolers visited SMU's libraries over two days in the fall to put their skills to the test. "Students were able to use the library catalog to find digital and physical resources with help from SMU librarians and interns," García says.

The participants not only flex research know-how that they'll continue to rely on as their education progresses, but they also begin to picture themselves in college.

Portele credits the experience with influencing four of her former students to make attending SMU their post-graduation objective.

In addition to Collins and Salmeron, Daressalam Ayalew '28 and Lilian Thai '27 are also alumnae of the Garland High program.

"The library visits have been amazing for our students," Portele says. "First, with the librarians meeting with us beforehand for a research lesson, and then the welcoming feeling we get from the visit."

She says many students report "going back to SMU for research purposes throughout the next two years."



Or even longer.

Collins says, "I love Fondren as a study space." This spring, she has been a regular, utilizing varied resources for a writing class. "And I've been taking that knowledge about databases from high school and putting it to good use." ■

Above Undergraduate Success Librarian Ramón García and Social Science Research Librarian Naomi Schemm served as co-instructors for Garland High School students doing research for a class project.



Looking forward to the future

The SMU Libraries community welcomes Rachel Davis Mersey to the University. She will join SMU as executive vice president and provost June 1. In that role, she will oversee University research and overall academic quality, including SMU Libraries, as well as admission, faculty development, international programs and eight degree-granting schools.

A digital media expert and champion of high-impact research, Mersey succeeds Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Elizabeth Lobo, who announced her decision to complete her service when the fiscal year ends May 31.

Mersey currently serves as executive vice president and provost at The University of Texas at

Austin, overseeing a broad portfolio that includes enrollment management and the university's billion-dollar research enterprise.

Her research has been published in journals across a variety of disciplines and presented at academic and industry conferences. She is author of two books, *Can Journalism Be Saved? Rediscovering America's Appetite for News* and *Mobile Disruptions in the Middle East*.

Mersey holds a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an M.S. from Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism and a B.A. with honors in communication and studio art from Wake Forest University.

Thoughts from a grad student

With librarians for research guidance and the quiet company of peers, I always find my center in Fondren Library's Centennial Reading Room

Moving to Dallas last August to begin my studies at SMU has been a whirlwind, one filled with challenges, discoveries and a growing appreciation for the spaces that make the rigorous journey toward my doctorate possible. After spending my undergraduate and master's years at TCU, transitioning to the Research One institution of SMU has been both exhilarating and demanding. Yet through it all, SMU's libraries have become much more than just places to study – they have become my anchor.

Fondren's Centennial Reading Room, in particular, has been a place of consolation. It's here that I can gather my thoughts, settle into a productive rhythm, and push through long hours of research and reading. Whether I'm accessing library databases, sifting through their archival collections, or meeting with librarians for guidance on sources, the library supports virtually every step of my research process. Often, I am surrounded by the quiet company of focused peers, and because of that, Fondren has quickly become a place where I can always find my center!

Libraries are not just the heart of a campus; they are the cornerstone of personal and academic growth. They are where I have found my footing in this new chapter, where I have discovered the resilience required to navigate the demands of doctoral studies at SMU. Whether it's finding the perfect study nook, diving into research or simply taking a breath between assignments, Fondren Library is a constant. From locating primary sources to conducting literature reviews, I rely heavily on the library's digital and physical resources to expand my work.

For anyone else navigating a transition to a new school, a new city or a new academic challenge (or all of the above), I can say with confidence that the library is always a good place to start. ■



Grace Morison '28

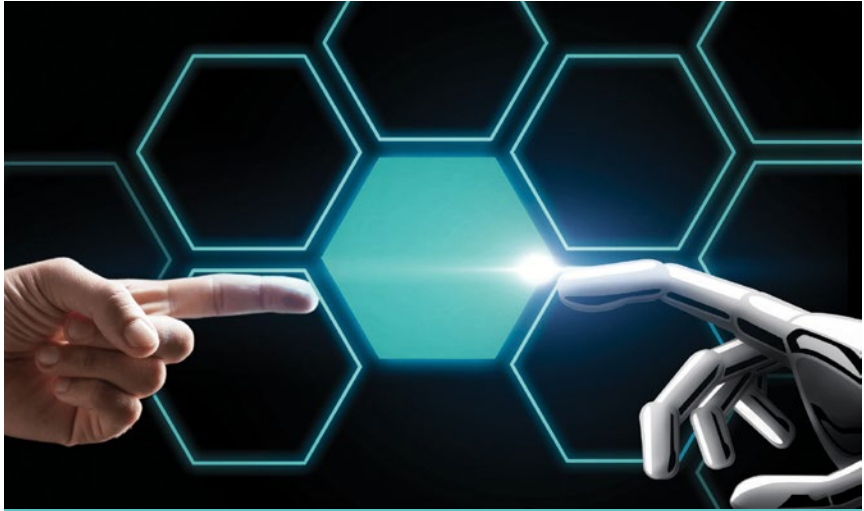
Hometown: Santa Barbara, California

Program: Simmons Ph.D. in education

Hobbies: Long-distance running, traveling, pickleball, baking, hiking, shopping and spending time with friends and family



Libraries are not just the heart of a campus; they are the cornerstone of personal and academic growth."



Using AI tools – and your noodle

Many of SMU Libraries' subscription databases are adding their own generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to their products. Humanities Librarian Rebecca Graff, Social Science Research Librarian Naomi Schemm and Business Librarian Melissa Johnson decided to take some of these custom features for a test drive to evaluate their effectiveness. They looked at two categories of databases: scholarly literature and business. The librarians found the summaries crafted by "scholarly literature" AI tools could be helpful in determining the relevance of an article to a research topic. Parsing the generative AI tools for business was trickier, because there were more variations across databases in the way AI is incorporated and its purpose. In the end, the librarians agreed that "applying critical thinking skills to the information" was crucial in any research context. Their advice: "Read the original articles, review the abstracts, and review the transcripts and other content to make the most informed decision. ... Generative AI can get you started, but the end is up to you."



\$2.5 million grant boosts Bridwell Library projects

A \$2.5 million grant through the Lilly Foundation's Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative will support an array of enhancements to Bridwell Library. The grant will enable such projects as the renovation of the Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Galleries; the partial reconfiguration of the library's "Blue Room" to accommodate the World Methodist Museum collections; the construction of an antiquities museum to exhibit special collections, some of which are currently on display at the Dallas Museum of Art; and the development of a state-of-the-art historic printing and papermaking lab. With this grant and the opportunities it provides, Bridwell Library is well-equipped to preserve history and the arts in a digital age, while providing exceptional educational and research experiences for all who visit, according to Anthony Elia, J.S. Bridwell Foundation Endowed Librarian and director of Bridwell Library.

Making sure history is heard

Thanks to SMU Libraries, the Hilltop and beyond are alive with the sound of music. Investment in digital preservation is a key strategy for ensuring that treasures held in archives across campus endure. A case in point is the collaboration between Hamon Arts Library and Meadows Division of Music, in concert with Norwick Center for Digital Solutions' preservation experts, to protect the University's rich musical legacy. One of the team's toughest challenges is working with the varied formats – everything from reel-to-reel tape to cassettes and more. "Preservation, archiving and management requires format and audio-engineering expertise," notes Arts and Humanities Librarian Pam Pagels. She partners with James Williamson, digital preservation librarian, on managing and storing audio files for the long term using the Rosetta digital asset management platform. As a result of these efforts, in fall 2024, Dallas' WRR-FM classical music radio station treated listeners to a recording of the 2017 Meadows at the Meyerson benefit. The recording is part of a curated collection of graduate degree recitals, faculty performances and performances by major ensembles available in the SMU Scholar digital repository.



MUSTANGS ON THE MOVE



A–C The SMU Libraries team drummed up support during SMU Giving Day March 11. **D–E** Great conversation and good books were on the Tables of Content menu March 29. **F–H** John Arnone talked about his Tony Award-winning set designs at an exhibit of his work in Hawn Gallery this spring. **I–J** Scenes captured at groundbreaking events for the Rees-Jones Library May 1. **K–M** Friends of SMU Libraries hosted its annual dinner and program May 6.



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Breaking ground for the Rees-Jones Library of the American West

On May 1, members of the SMU Libraries community gathered with well-wishers from near and far to witness history.

President R. Gerald Turner officiated the campuswide celebration marking the beginning of construction on the new Rees-Jones Library of the American West. (From left) Joining him for the groundbreaking ceremony were SMU Libraries Dean Holly Jeffcoat, Provost Elizabeth G. Loba, donors Trevor D. Rees-Jones '78 and Jan Rees-Jones, SMU Board of Trustees Chair David B. Miller '72, '73 and Brad E. Cheves, SMU senior vice president for Development and External Affairs. The library, which is expected to be completed in 2027, will house the Rees-Jones Collection, one of the most significant holdings of Western Americana in the country. Thoughtfully designed to optimize its resources, the Rees-Jones Library of the American West will be a distinctive place for students, researchers and the public to connect with collections and each other. As President Turner stated, "In every way, this gift reflects Jan and Trevor's vision, not only to preserve history, but to bring it to life in ways that inform and inspire generations to come."