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UNC's Digital Heritage Center knits state's history together

By Stephanie Soucheray

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UNC Library Science masters student Audra Green, left, places yellowing pieces of a 1950s-era barbecue scrapbook from Stanley County, NC, onto a flat plate digital scanner while fellow UNC masters students Sarah Bost background, and Amber Sherman, right, also work on their digitization projects last Thursday in UNC-CH's Wilson Library. The UNC students work for the NC Digital Heritage Center at the library.

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- How to access the archives

To access the collections that have been digitized by the Digital Heritage Center visit <http://digitalnc.org/>. The center does not have regular visiting hours, but does accept visitors by appointment. To make an appointment call **919-962-4836** or digitalnc@unc.edu.

CHAPEL HILL — In the information age, libraries can seem like antiquated relics; quaint places where three-dimensional books gather dust. But librarians across the state are working hard to digitize their collections, and now treasures that have long sat in archive rooms are available for public viewing.

"We have 125,000 items currently digitized," said Nicholas Graham, the program director at the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center, the statewide digital library that enables cultural heritage institutions across the state to share their collections online. "When we're done there will be over half a million documents."

Last month the Digital Heritage Center, housed in the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's Wilson Library and supported by the State Library of North Carolina, was named the state's hub for the Digital Public Library of America.

"As the state hub for the DPLA, we gather digitized materials from other libraries, archives and museums to share with the national digital library," said Graham.

The brainchild of the nation's top librarians and researchers, the DPLA became available online last spring. Housed on the site dp.la are more than five million pictures, sound clips, government records, fliers and other documents from across the country. Universities, national museums and county libraries are all adding their archived materials.

"This is unique material," said Sarah Bost, a second-year library science graduate student at the School of Information and Library Science at UNC-CH. Bost, originally from Davidson, works as a graduate assistant digitizing documents at the Digital Heritage Center. "These [documents] are not just the latest bestseller, which is what a lot of people come to the library for. A lot of times, people don't even know these materials exist."

Each collection unique

By digitizing, using scanners and cameras to put images online, librarians across the state are finding new audiences for some of the more surprising items in their collections.

Graham said photographs are often some of the most telling materials digitized for the DPLA. He said a photo of a river baptism in Haywood County is one of his favorite images. Often the documents show how civic society ran in a bygone era; there are scrapbooks from women's groups, Masons, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. A Rockingham Community College quilt from 1976 celebrates the bicentennial with patriotic squares.

"We've worked with old newspaper clippings, store ledgers, even a framed gold record," said Graham. "That's part of the fun – every library has collections that are unique to their community."

On dp.la, visitors can search by a keyword or phrase. They can also use an interactive map to find archives by state and county, and another interactive timeline allows users to search for documents by year.