

U.Va. Library Celebrates Completion of New Building with Opening of Harrison Institute and Two New Exhibits

Images available for download

Charlottesville, Va. — A new resource for programs and exhibits centered on the University of Virginia Library's collections is now open: the Mary and David Harrison Institute for American History, Literature and Culture. The institute shares its home with the recently opened Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library. Together they occupy a newly completed 72,000 square-foot building adjacent to Alderman and Clemons libraries, facing McCormick Road.

The Harrison Institute, named for U.Va. alumnus and benefactor the late David Harrison and his late wife, Mary, was created so the U.Va. Library could share its rich resources with a wider audience through public readings, exhibits and special programs, and to encourage collaboration among faculty and students. The institute, located in the aboveground portion of the new building, features exhibit galleries, two seminar rooms, studies for visiting scholars and a 200-seat auditorium below ground.

To celebrate the opening of the institute, two new exhibits are open to the public beginning on Thursday, Dec. 9: "Flowerdew Hundred: Unearthing Virginia's History" and "American Journeys: Columbus to Kerouac."

The first exhibit honors the Harrisons' keen interest in Virginia history. Based on archaeological finds from a James River land grant made in 1619, the "Flowerdew Hundred" exhibit illuminates ways of life of Virginians over time, from Native American villages, a fortified frontier settlement and a thriving plantation, to a major Civil War encampment.

Items on display include Native American pottery sherds, arms and armor used to defend the frontier colony, refined imported wares from Europe and American-made goods, including artifacts from the Civil War. Images from 16th and 17th century books in U.Va.'s Special Collections accompany the artifacts and illustrate the importance of the historical record in the study of material culture.

The Harrison Institute's beautiful main gallery opens with the second exhibit, "American Journeys: Columbus to Kerouac." It showcases more than 250 treasured manuscripts, books and artifacts drawn mostly from U.Va.'s Special Collections. This unique selection of rare objects, which date from the Age of Exploration to the mid-20th century, explores the remarkable journeys of people to and from and across the Americas and examines the forces that led to monumental clashes — and innovations — in American history, literature and culture.

Treasures on display include rare 15th century items related to Christopher Columbus and the discovery of the New World, an early Spanish–Aztec language dictionary, the first Bible printed in the North America, and rare books and documents that illuminate the colonial years.

Continuing the display are items such as Thomas Jefferson's "A Firebell in the Night" letter, in which he predicts civil war as a result of the Missouri Compromise; a notebook made by Walt Whitman in which he chronicles his visits to Civil War hospitals; pages from the manuscript of Whitman's Leaves of Grass; a letter from Langston Hughes in which he describes writing while traveling in "a Jim Crow car"; and Travels in the Interior of North America, a lavishly illustrated book that documents the geography and peoples of the early American West.

"The Harrison Institute serves as a lively intellectual crossroads for the University," said University Librarian Karin Wittenborg. "It brings together students, faculty, visiting scholars and the community on a regular basis, and provides a wonderful place for interdisciplinary work to flourish."

"With the new Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library now open as well, the community has a wonderful new place for viewing and exploring the past, present and future of our culture," said Hoke Perkins, director of the Harrison Institute.

David A. Harrison III earned a bachelor's degree from U.Va. in 1939 and a law degree in 1941. A lawyer, investment banker and philanthropist, he became one of the University's most generous alumni during his lifetime. Among his many extraordinary gifts to U.Va., Harrison made a substantial donation toward the construction of the University Library's new building. The Harrison family's generosity continues to support professorships in law, medicine and historical archaeology, and programs in athletics and undergraduate research.

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Links:

Images and an electronic version of this press release:

Download from the Library's online pressroom: <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/press/>.

Library Hours:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/hours>

PLEASE NOTE: The Harrison/Small building is closed on Sundays. Library hours will change for the exam period and holidays. Please check the "hours" page before planning your visit.

Online exhibit previews:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/flowerdew>

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/journeys>

Harrison Institute information:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/harrison>

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small>

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