Whether you're studying for finals, doing research for a paper, or just looking for a quiet place to get work done, libraries are one of the most useful buildings for students on a college campus. But there's often much more available within those libraries than even the most studious undergrads realize when they first arrive as a freshman. Lipscomb's Beaman Library, which houses a top notch group of Archives and Special Collections, is no exception. So you may find yourself asking, what exactly makes up those archives and how can I access them?

Welcome to Bison Talk!

My name is Logan Butts, and I'm here today with Elizabeth Rivera, the special collections librarian at Lipscomb, to talk about Beaman Library's Archives and Special Collections, the importance of primary sources, and the new Marie Potter Byers Endowment. Elizabeth, thanks for joining me today.

Bison Talk

We're here with Elizabeth Rivera on Bison Talk. She is the Special Collections and Archival librarian here at the Beaman Library. I'm going to talk to her about that, the importance of primary resources, and the new Marie Potter Byers Endowment among other things. Elizabeth, thanks for joining me today.

Elizabeth Rivera

Hey, Logan, it's my pleasure. It's great to be with you.

Bison Talk

Let's start a little bit with your background. You know, how did you develop your passion for research and archiving?

Elizabeth Rivera

I always loved research as a student, just the time to be able to discover and access information and find new answers was always inspiring for me, but I didn't know what an archive was as an undergraduate student. And I certainly didn't know that I could become an archivist. I just enjoyed learning. And I think that's the biggest thing that brought me to archives is my love for learning and in archives, there's always something else to learn.

Bison Talk

Sure. And I know the Beaman Library Archives and Special Collections has got a lot of interesting things, how does it differ from other collections among other libraries?

Elizabeth Rivera

That's a great question. A fundamental question to ask is, what is an archive because an archive is what makes every library distinct. Libraries all across the country provide information and resources to both scholars and students and faculty members. But the archive provides pertinent information that isn't discoverable anywhere else, right. So it could be manuscripts that could be documents that faculty members create, or the university produces. Or it might be a manuscript of an acclaimed author, right. But those are materials that haven't been published in a book form or in a documentary or in any other form. And so what is available in an archive generally is not

accessible anywhere else. And so what's available in Beaman Library Archives and Special Collections is not available anywhere else.

Bison Talk

Yeah. So it definitely differs from what you would find in the regular library collection, it stands out from that.

Elizabeth Rivera

Absolutely, it stands out. And that's one way that an institution can capitalize on its library and its distinction from other places, right? Both are distinguishing the university from other entities, and also demonstrating its rigor in research.

Bison Talk

For sure, so what are some of the examples of some of the unique things and collections you could find here at Lipscomb's library?

Elizabeth Rivera

One of the collection scopes that Ed Gleaves developed in 1965, when the collections first started, is the school is founded in religious faith, Churches of Christ out of the Second Great Awakening, right? So you have Martin W. Stone and Alexander Campbell. And so from those movements, you have Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and Christia Churches, and Lipscomb has been affiliated for years with Churches of Christ. So we have an incredible, rich collection of materials, both books, right, but also manuscripts pertaining to what's called the restoration movement. Outside of that religious spectrum, we have an incredible collection of hymnals. It pertains to the restoration. But it's also separate from that because it's not limited in

its scope to just those three denominations. The hymnal collection includes all Protestant hymnals, whether it's Presbyterian, or Baptist, but also has some great Catholic hymnals, as well. And one of the earliest books that is in the collections from the 1700s. It's a French Psalter, which is just Psalm, a book of Psalms.

Bison Talk

Yeah, that's really cool. And so this might be too broad of a question or two nitty gritty either way, how do you get into finding those archives? And how does that collection process work?

Elizabeth Rivera

When a researcher is trying to discover information, one of the best ways to do that is to reach out to the archivist at that location. Because so many places like Lipscomb have materials that haven't been cataloged, haven't been added into a discovery system. And so when you're just searching through Google, you can become frustrated and think, oh my goodness, I can't access something. So I always tell students, the best way to eliminate that frustration is just to go straight to the source. And that archivist is going to know that collection better than anybody else. So for example, who would ever imagine that at Lipscomb, we have a great collection from the American fashion designer Halston. Roy Halston Frowick, known as Halston in the industry, his collection is here and that's because of a relationship that Kathy Bates had and got to know Georgette Mosbacher. And relationships, people always say it's who you know. Because of who Kathy knew, she cultivated a relationship and Georgette Mosbacher gifted the Halston collection to Lipscomb. So Lipscomb has an incredibly rich collection on Halston's work that includes scrapbooks, includes his original sketches that are incredibly beautiful, and also some of the original pieces and patterns from what he created. And just knowing who Halston is for the

average person. You may not know, but I guarantee you would know he was a Milner and he created the hat that Jackie Kennedy Onassis wore when JFK was inaugurated. Yeah, now, you know who Halston is right. So that's always a connecting point for people. So we have the restoration collections, we've got the Halston collection. And then if you think about outside of fashion and biblical studies that keeps going, because your special collections at your school is to incorporate faculty and in research and to weave that teaching and learning into every component of the school. So that's another reason why the scope of a special collection is not limited or confined in any way. It's to be able to show the depth and the breadth of the entity it represents.

Bison Talk

Yeah, that's really fascinating to dig into so many different types of collections that we have just here on campus. So say a student wants to view one of those archives or special collections, you know, could you walk us a little bit through the process of how they would do that?

Elizabeth Rivera

We schedule research appointments, just the way archives all across the country do. And the student sends an email two weeks in advance, and we make an appointment, and the student comes in for that appointment, and when they enter the archive, they set their backpack aside, we make sure that they've gone to the restroom and wash their hands, not hand sanitizer, because that alcohol can be damaging to materials, just good soap and water. I used to laugh because I would wear masks on campus long before COVID because of just protecting different things at different times. So sometimes I wear white gloves, and that protects the documents, especially

when you're working with photographs, you want to do that. But it just depends on the material type. So gloves and masks were already here in the archive long before COVID.

Bison Talk

Ahead of its time in a number of ways. So in reading your section on the website and on the library's website, I know you're a very strong advocate for the use of primary sources for students. Why do you think primary sources are so important for the research process?

Elizabeth Rivera

Primary sources cause students to ask questions, right? It's not just taking the synthesis of someone else's work and digesting it. You approach that primary source and ask questions of it. So that you can begin to think critically, to examine and to learn deeper than you would if you just read the basics. Primary sources is taking you to that next level. You need those secondary sources and those tertiary sources. As you're being able to craft and know what's been written already, it's called a literature review. You see what's already been published, and you figure out what is missing? Where's the gap? You identify that so that you as the up and coming researcher or the scholar, know where to enter that dance within the literature, right? You're entering into a conversation. And anytime there's conversation, it's always two ways and that primary source asks you questions, and you can interpret and through that interpretation, it teaches students that there's not one history. There's interpretations and if you as that scholar or that student do not approach it, then we won't know your interpretation. And so one of the reasons why I promote primary source research is not only just for the student to learn how to analyze those primary sources, but for the students also to begin to engage and to realize they have something to contribute. Their story matters. As you begin to think like that, you begin to realize, it's not just

the history of the elites, or the history of those in power that we need to consider. And this is becoming more and more popular. Within our culture today, people are wanting to hear from the common man. But until you are empowered to encounter a primary source, it's very difficult to figure out, why does this story even matter? Don't we only care about what has traditionally been taught or what has traditionally engaged with? And so primary sources begin to show to students that they can begin to think differently, and to show how to do that. And it's just an easy way to enter into that conversation.

Bison Talk

Yeah, I love the way you describe that as entering into a dance or a conversation. That really accurately portrays the importance of that relationship. So to get into specifically some of the new things you have going on, there's the new Marie Potter Byers Archives and Special Collections Endowment fund. That was created earlier this year, I think, and can you explain to us who she was and what this endowment is going to fund?

Elizabeth Rivera

So when you think about an archive, you think that it’s the place where documents of enduring value can come and to be, instead of things being lost into a garage or an attic and are ruined. Marie Byers was one of the founders here at the archive at Lipscomb. Ed Gleaves started the archive in 1965. But it was really no more than a closet in Crisman when the library was in Crisman then. And then in 1991, when Dr. James Ward had the opportunity to partner and build this library, he created this space where I'm seated right now. It's the maiden reading room. And it's a space for special collections. And on either side of me is what's called a vault. And these vaults are temperature controlled spaces for the materials to be preserved. What he didn't create

at that time was an archive, which is different than a special collection and my title is Special Collections librarian, but they're not one in the same. And it's always important to consider that one way that Lipscomb will continue to move forward as we are working towards growing Archives and Special Collections is to provide financial support for the entity. And understanding where we've been in the past helps us move forward. And if it weren't for Dr. Lowry, President Lowry, we would still not have a special collections librarian because when I was hired in 2014, he had hired Sandra Parham in 2014, the library Dean, and under her administration, within three months, she hired me in September of 2014. And under that leadership of President Lowry we, Lipscomb, obtained its first Special Collections library. And that's important, because until that time, Lipscomb had never had a full time Special Collections librarian and certainly not a full time archivist. But it did have Marie Byers, and in 2000, Marie began to work upstairs, here in the archive, half of a day and half of the day at the reference desk. She had been a reference librarian here at Lipscomb for many years. And in 2000, she began to do half and half. And then she finally retired in 2008, and continued to work some part time here in the archives. So because of Dr. Jim WArd, and his vision for creating a space for Special Collections and moving from a closet to an actual beautiful, welcoming Reading Room, to President Lowry hiring Sandra Parham, and Sandra Parham hiring me, I learned that up here at Lipscomb, we not only respect the past, but we also give honor to whom honor is due. And Marie Byers worked so hard to grow this Special Collections and Archives and to place an importance on both the past and the future. Because within a democracy, you cannot have people who are informed if they don't do not have access to information, right. And that's what a special collections librarian does, provides access and information to the people and brings what may have been forgotten or hasn't been fully disclosed out into the open. And so Marie Byers worked

so hard for both the growth of Lipscomb, but also for the promotion of Archives and Special Collections that when slowly but surely have worked to get to know donors and for people to see the value of this work, both for this institution, but also for our city. People have given money, and so we wanted to name it in honor of Marie.

Bison Talk

Yeah, it seems like she really was a special person on campus, and all the work that she did. So I think that's all the questions we have for today. Where can students and faculty stay up to date on all things Beaman Library and specifically with the Archives and Special Collections.

Elizabeth Rivera

Follow us on Facebook. That's the first point of contact. We do a lot of special stories when things are related to a collection, or want to highlight maybe a person or an event. Facebook is always a great way to know what's happening here in the archive. And hopefully here in a few weeks this summer, we'll be able to update some more of our holdings in archive space. ArchiveSpace is searchable through Google. And that's why we use it so that as we add things into ArchiveSpace, you can discover it also through Google. Those are two great things.

Bison Talk

All right. Well, thank you for coming here and being on Bison Talk with us today, Elizabeth. We really appreciate it.