Virtual Reality Pivot: How Institutional Collaboration Allowed for Digitized Collections to be Exhibited During COVID-19

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In March of last year, NC State University Libraries' Special Collection Research Center (SCRC), pivoted to working from home because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The majority of my work in Special Collections required me to physically process archival materials, however this was no longer possible in a pandemic. I needed to rethink the way I work. One of the projects I created during this time was an architecture walking tour. This tour connected digitized archival materials to modern architectural landmarks near NC State University's campus. I reached out to colleagues in Learning Spaces & Services and together we figured out how virtual reality could allow us to exhibit these materials and connect with people from all over the world. Together with University Library Technician, Colin Keenan, we created "Modern Raleigh: An Architecture Exhibit." This exhibit highlights the NC State University Libraries' digitized archival holdings that represent the College of Design's significant relationship with Raleigh's residential and commercial landscape. This virtual exhibit focuses on the legacy of five distinguished architects whose careers intersected with the NC State University's College of Design--G. Milton Small Jr., Eduardo Catalano, George Matsumoto, Brian Shawcroft, and Philip Freelon. Using photographs, video, and 3D modeling, we hoped to immerse the audience in the sights and sounds of the life and work of architects that helped define a half-century of Raleigh architecture. This project taught us how interinstitutional collaboration allowed the libraries to connect with our community during these most unusual times.

About the author:

Phillip MacDonald holds an MS in Library Science from UNC-Chapel Hill where he completed his final project entitled, "Pop-Up Archive: How to Get the Public into Archives, by Taking the Archive to the Public." His project focused on the intersection of personal meaning and community archives. In addition to archival work, he fell in love with the DIY ethos and makerspace technologies- especially 3D modeling and printing, Augmented Reality, Microcontrollers, Drawing Machines, and Laser Cutting. Before discovering his passion of librarianship and archives, Phillip received an MA in Folklore from UNC-Chapel Hill where he completed his thesis entitled, "Birthplace of the Blues: Dockery Farms, The Mythic South, and the Erasure of the African American Lived Experience in Mississippi Blues Tourism." Phillip continues to engage with questions raised in his thesis, examining the intersectionality of identity, culture, and landscapes