

OPENERS

Celebrating Special Collections

by Lyn C. A. Gardner

On Wednesday, October 28, at 4 p.m., attendees of the 2009 VLA Annual Conference had the opportunity to tour the Earl Gregg Swem Library's Special Collections Research Center (<http://swem.wm.edu/scrc/index.cfm>) under the guidance of Director Bea Hardy. This behind-the-scenes look showed many fascinating treasures of the collection, such as documentation related to Thomas Jefferson's time as a student at William and Mary; rare books that included that artistic early anti-theft device, fore-edge paintings; maps dating to the earliest days of Williamsburg; and even a collection of dog knickknacks. VLA members got to not only examine these unique items, but also discover how the Special Collections team preserves, houses, and catalogs them.

The tour party also learned about the Warren E. Burger Collection (<http://swem.wm.edu/scrc/Burger.cfm>). Though the collection is being cataloged now, these professional and personal papers and memorabilia can't be shown to researchers until 2026. However, VLA members were able to observe

several glass exhibit cases of photographs and memorabilia and a full-room replica of late Chief Justice Warren E. Burger's office, which includes many original items as well as appropriate substitutes. Archivist Ute Schechter outlined Burger's historical contributions,

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including his seventeen years as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, his tireless work to improve the administration of justice, and his devotion to the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution (appropriately reflected in the handout of free copies of the Constitution). In the end, despite the mystery that must surround the collection for the moment, these glimpses of Burger's accomplishments and ethics provide a foretaste of the important

material that we will one day have at our disposal.

The tour concluded with an introduction to the SCRC Database (<http://scrc.swem.wm.edu/>), created by Swem personnel using open-source software. This catalog, which is so well tailored to the Swem collection, offers browsing by collection title, record group, subject, and creator. A valuable supplement to the Swem Library catalog, it offers unprecedented access to the archives, and additional content is being added daily.

The preconference tour of one of Virginia's largest special collection facilities was not only fascinating, but particularly well suited to our upcoming *Virginia Libraries* themed issue on special collections, libraries, and archives. We encourage all those who work with special collections to share their love of these marvelous repositories by providing articles and interviews that celebrate our intriguing heritage. With a deadline of August 1, 2010, the issue will be published as Volume 56, Number 4, October/November/December 2010. **VL**