Four hundred films and videos of Northwestern bands, spanning almost 60 years, have been digitized and preserved thanks to gifts from the John P. Paynter Foundation and Paynter’s daughter and son-in-law, Megan Paynter Anderson ’76 and John Anderson ’76, KSM ’77. The films are now publicly available at the Libraries’ digital repository (except where music copyright issues apply).

The 16mm films and VHS tapes come from the John P. Paynter Collection, housed in the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives. Paynter was only the second director of bands at Northwestern, taking the position in 1953 at the age of 23 and holding it until his death in 1996. The voluminous collection tracks his storied, influential career and includes materials dating back to 1923 that document the tenure of his predecessor and mentor, legendary band director Glenn Cliffe Bainum.

Many of the films are of the Northwestern University Marching Band (NUMB), including some from the era when Bainum was pioneering the use of charts that allowed bands to make formations on the field. A 1930 film, shot in black and white without audio, shows a sizable Wildcat band marching on the field in Dyche Stadium (now Ryan Field) in parade formation alongside two bass drums the size of tractor tires. The band moves to spell HELLO facing the visitors’ stands, followed by NOTRE and then DAME, before marching a massive GO U toward the home stands.

The films also capture the whimsy of NUMB performances in Paynter’s era. In perhaps the least ribald burlesque of all time, a 1970s-era band plays a tribute to the musical Gypsy before an interlude in which each band member teasingly slips off one white glove and twirls it up high. Shows from earlier seasons include formations of a stick figure kicking a football, and a moving typewriter carriage that “typed” messages like “Hello Alumni!”

The films include an array of other performances, such as Bienen School of Music concerts and events unaffiliated with Northwestern, like Drum Corps International competitions. View the films at libraries.nu/PaynterFilms.
Giant sketchbooks anchor New York exhibition

Last summer, the Morgan Library & Museum in Manhattan mounted an exhibition that made a centerpiece of two unusual sketchbooks from the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives. The New York Review called Northwestern’s contributions “the raison d’être” of the show.

Writing a Chrysanthemum: The Drawings of Rick Barton highlighted the works of this lesser-known artist from the early 1960s beatnik scene—though special collections curator Scott Krafft believes the critically successful show will raise Barton’s profile significantly.

The McCormick Library loaned the Morgan two folding books known as leporellos. Stretching between 15 and 20 feet each, the dramatic accordion-style sketchbooks required a custom display case so that they could be presented in their entirety.

The continuous line drawings in each book flow from one scene to the next, drifting from San Francisco cafés to apartment interiors and incorporating faces, still-life vignettes, and even Barton’s own pen-gripping hand in the river of imagery. The details of the sketchbooks’ creation pose a compelling riddle, Krafft said.

“We don’t understand Barton’s methodology with the leporellos,” he said. “There are no preparatory drawings in pencil. He forms these complicated lines with no mistakes, no margin for error—and this goes on for 15 feet. It’s mind-boggling.”

Barton’s fluid drawings are as mercurial as was the artist himself, Krafft said. Born in 1928, the artist grew up in poverty and later struggled with mental illness and drug use. By 1971 he had lost an eye in a drunken rage, when he wrenched a toilet from a wall.

During a decade of activity in the San Francisco arts scene, he became what Krafft called a mythical character, running an after-hours gay bar where he would draw while playing Bach on the jukebox. In the early ’70s, he moved away from San Francisco; either he quit making art then, or all his subsequent works are lost. He died in 1992.

Krafft is grateful he has had the opportunity to gradually acquire a collection of 13 Barton sketchbooks since becoming curator in 2009. He became aware of the artist through the Libraries’ long-standing relationship with San Francisco printmaker and publisher Henry Evans. Krafft quickly identified Barton as a good fit for the Libraries’ “long ‘60s” and gay subculture collections. Acquiring complementary materials is satisfying enough for a curator, he said, but to have the works discovered and used for such a prominent exhibition was a professional delight.

“The long game of curating a collection is like building a cathedral over centuries,” he said. “For the most part, each curator is just an anonymous craftsman over the years, and I do think that’s a beautiful idea. That said, when you get to see people taking an interest in something you’ve bought, it’s fun and satisfying.”
A project to take harmful language out of library collection descriptions led to a timely exhibition marking Northwestern’s first observance of Juneteenth. Freedom for Everyone: Slavery and Abolition in 19th-Century America was curated by Marquis Taylor, a history PhD student and library worker, who found himself in the right place at the right time to get the rare—and career-enhancing—assignment.

Taylor had been working for the Libraries on a redescription project—reviewing old finding aids (the detailed write-ups of collections that include inventories, contextual information, and historical notes) and rewriting any that are deemed harmful, contain unexamined biases, or no longer reflect the current understanding of the past.

Taylor’s task was to examine the language describing slavery in the African American Documents Collection in the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives. As part of the work, he gathered several documents that pertain directly to Frederick Douglass to create a standalone collection with a finding aid. (The rest of the collection was redescribed with a more precise title: Slavery, Enslaved Persons, and Free Blacks in the Americas.) Douglass, a former enslaved person, eventually arranged for the purchase of his freedom after his escape and became an abolitionist.

“Separating the Douglass materials into a new collection makes them more evident,” Taylor said. “They could have languished there unseen, and we wanted to make sure that didn’t happen.”

That was particularly important, Taylor said, because the Douglass materials contain astonishing correspondence—originals and contemporary copies—between Douglass and his former enslavers. The collection also contains a copy of Douglass’s 1845 bill of sale between brothers Thomas and Hugh Auld, a move seemingly made to clarify ownership as the popularity of Douglass’s autobiography brought him into the public eye.
Charla Wilson, archivist for the Black experience, realized a serendipitous opportunity while reviewing Taylor’s work on the collections: In 2022 Northwestern was going to mark its first observance of Juneteenth, the new federal holiday commemorating emancipation in America, and the Douglass materials could anchor a meaningful exhibition in the lobby of Deering Library. Taylor was happy to take on the challenge.

With just three months until the June 19 holiday, Taylor curated the exhibition with more materials from the McCormick Library and the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies. Juxtaposing the writings of 19th-century abolitionists with the official documentation of slaveholding institutions, Taylor highlighted the work required to make a nation face its conscience—and how that work continues today.

“The discipline of history is interested now in having scholars who are engaging the broader community,” he said. “This was an opportunity to be a practitioner of history and live by my philosophy that history should be accessible to people.”
A recent graduate who has made hair care science and culture the focus of her undergraduate experience capped her Northwestern education with an exhibition about African hair.

In the Same Follicle: African Hair across Cultures, which ran through fall quarter in the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, was conceived and curated by chemical engineering student Ayinoluwa Abegunde ’22. The exhibit examines cultural attitudes about coily hair, both among Africans living in Africa and Africans living in the diaspora. Her curated collection of books and journals from the Herskovits Library includes personal essays by natural-hair enthusiasts, children’s books promoting hair positivity, studies of hair representation in popular media, and hair photography—all telling a story of how African people have expressed their culture through hairstyling.

In support of the exhibit, Abegunde gave talks in the Herskovits to groups such as Northwestern’s Pan-African Students’ Union, the Black Professionals Network, and the visiting fellows of the Young African Leaders Initiative through the Program of African Studies.

Abegunde’s fascination with hair culture and its underlying science stems from being a Nigerian who has lived abroad, witnessing hair acceptance and hair discrimination from several vantages.

Helping transgender studies journal redefine the field

The Libraries’ second copublishing project is a peer-reviewed journal that breaks ground in a relatively new field of study. The Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies, edited by a Northwestern faculty member, is an open-access journal published with the Center for Applied Transgender Studies (CATS).

Digital publishing librarian Chris Diaz said the journal is trailblazing because it fills a gap in the literature about transgender matters. The few outlets publishing about the topic tend to be focused on health, but this journal addresses the social, cultural, and political aspects of transgender life.

The first issue opens with “Whither Trans Studies? On Fields, Post-Disciplines, and the Need for an Applied Transgender Studies,” a defining essay arguing that the nascent field needs to orient itself “toward addressing the material conditions of transgender existence.” Thomas J. Billard, assistant professor of communication studies at Northwestern and executive director of CATS, wrote the piece.

Diaz said that at a virtual conference where Billard and others enumerated the concerns at
“In Nigeria, access to hair care was ever-present and affordable, but in Europe and the U.S., I found access to Black hair care was minimal,” she explained. Surprisingly, the most logical road to a hair care career for her seemed to be chemical engineering.

“A chemical engineering degree at Northwestern is not about hair care, of course,” she noted. “What got me through classes was finding a way to infuse hair care into the work. It became, ‘What hair question can I solve with this class?’”

For example, in a class about heat transfer between materials, she reasoned, “Well, hair is a material”—and she used her classwork to study how to heat-dry hair without damaging it.

Abegunde also worked as a docent for the Block Museum of Art to hone her ability to speak about art and culture. She used the opportunity to host an online art talk, in which she and another student docent examined two prints that reveal artists’ impressions of Black beauty standards in Western society.

After the pandemic delayed her sophomore-year internship with the cosmetic research nonprofit TRI Princeton, she pivoted and founded her startup company, KOYLD, with the help of the Garage, Northwestern’s entrepreneurship support program. KOYLD is Abegunde’s home for future development of hair care products. Until then, it’s a brand-building social media community for coily hair positivity.

“For now, KOYLD is my space to do research and an avenue to create a product at my own pace.”

The heart of the journal, the chat window “blew up” with attendees exulting about witnessing the open discussion of their experiences, especially in an academic setting.

“It’s an emotional topic,” Diaz said. “People were crying tears of joy, so happy to have a symposium about things they care deeply about.”

Much like a copublishing initiative with the Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs last year to produce an open-access monograph with an anthropology faculty member, this partnership leverages the Libraries’ strengths to help researchers make their work available to a wider audience. Diaz arranged for the CATS editorial team to get support for project management, web development, copyright permissions, digital production, metadata creation, and access to all-important software that allows editors to manage the intricate peer review process.

The journal uses the “platinum” open-access model, which requires no fees from either the authors or the audience. For scholars who want their work to reach the general public, journalists, and public policy makers, those fees are a barrier to spreading knowledge, Diaz said.

“The more expensive access is, the harder it is to get participation from the public, especially marginalized communities,” he said. “There’s a corpus of scholarly information in the world, and only a portion of that is open access. Our goal as a library is to enlarge that portion, ideally until it becomes the entirety.”
2021–22 by the numbers

For more facts, visit libraries.nu/LibFacts.

Open-access scholarship

43,924
Page views of documents in Arch,¹
a 58% increase over 2020–21

AV preservation

170
Hours of audiovisual material
digitized by staff, a 100%
increase over 2020–21

Digitized collections

17,719
Images digitized by digital curation staff,
almost twice the volume of
the previous two years combined

Growing repository

186,582
Digitized works² accessible in Meadow,
the staff tool for publishing
digital collections

¹ The open-access repository for Northwestern researchers
² A work is a single intellectual object, like a manuscript or
multipage letter; any number of digital files can make up
a work. A total of 358,535 files are accessible in Meadow.