

Tag and Release: The Role of the Academic Archivist in Documenting Campus History

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Rethinking the Archivist's Role



Researchers and university personnel consistently turn to UNCG archivists when there is a question about the history and location of campus artifacts not held in the archives. There is often an expectation that archivists record the location of these items and will accession those which no longer have a place in university buildings. Inspiration for this project resulted from the numerous queries relating to missing university artifacts, such as the mold of artist David Caldwell's statue "The Student." The search for this statue and other artifacts led UNCG archivists to rethink their role in tracking, documenting, and preserving historical items across campus.

Saving Campus History

Increasingly, colleges and universities are losing much of their history because they are not adequately tracking campus artifacts. While it is usually the task of archival staff to collect historical documents relating to the history of the university, larger objects such as paintings, statues, and furniture, are often scattered across campus and left undocumented. Typically, there are no provisions made to track items that are too large to store in the archives, are attached to specific buildings, or do not fall into the traditional purview of archival collections. Often, these artifacts are lost to history.



Tag and Release

UNCG archivists are instigating a "tag and release" program, whereby campus artifacts are systematically recorded with no intention of adding them to the permanent collection. Instead, they will be identified as historically significant and "tagged" with a barcode and a request to contact the archives when the artifact is moved. The artifacts are then documented on a spreadsheet with related images, appropriate metadata, and exact location. The spreadsheet will be updated annually.

For example, this plaster "Winged Victory," an important survivor of the school's early years, will be tagged, documented, and tracked according to this system.



What Has Been Lost

Significant examples of lost artifacts are a portrait of an important alumna and a plaster cast of Minerva. The portrait was last reported in a survey of campus paintings in the 1980s and cannot be traced.



The Minerva statue was a gift from the Class of 1907 and stood in the Students' Building from 1908 to 1950. It was still intact and photographed at a flower show held in the 1950s. Although there was a discussion about restoring what remained of the crumbling statue, by the early 2000s, it was missing.

Please feel free to contact me at kmsmi24@uncg.edu for more information