



**READ IT  
TONIGHT!**

**The literary life  
and times of  
Professor  
William Blissett**

# NOTEWORTHY

**Spring 2025**  
News from the University of Toronto Libraries



# **A Message from the University Chief Librarian**

**As I write this note, many students here at the University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) have yet to bask in the spring sunshine. Instead, they're deep in study mode for the home stretch before exams, using every square inch of our spaces — from carrels to newer group study rooms.**

Photo by Paul Terefenko





Photo by Hanna Borodina

It's at this time of year that the libraries at U of T truly feel like they're buzzing with activity — and much like the onset of spring itself, it brings a wonderful and invigorating energy to our campuses.

This issue of *Noteworthy* focuses on the many important people who make up our UTL community and bring life to our spaces and projects. Our cover subject is a library patron who is a familiar sight to many of us at Robarts; U of T English professor emeritus William Blissett is 103 years old and still visits Robarts once a week to conduct research in his study carrel, which he's held since Robarts' opening! In this story, you'll learn how this brilliant and witty scholar inspires a devotion to books and lifelong learning in nearly everyone he meets — leading to many rich and enduring friendships forged in the stacks.

We'll also be sharing a story of a groundbreaking new library partnership cultivated across time zones and continents. A few years ago, UTL librarians connected with the Khama III Memorial Museum in Serowe, Botswana and learned about some fantastic holdings in their collection, including materials from the Khama family, who helped forge Botswana's independence. The two teams are now working together to set up a permanent digitization program to preserve and share these materials with scholars at U of T and globally, while ensuring the physical holdings remain with the museum. This is a unique partnership focused on sustainability and capacity-building, forged through mutual respect and friendship over many months of work — and I'm very proud that the foundation for this partnership began with UTL.

Student workers make up a huge part of our library community, whether they're answering questions at various services desks, providing IT support or supporting collections development. We're taking a moment in this issue to salute the many students who help keep our libraries running, and profiling our latest addition to the library communications team, Master of Information student Rosie Sadoquis. Rosie is using her time in the communications office to design and support social media campaigns that amplify library events and services in a fun and lively way for students. It's also provided an ideal opportunity for Rosie to engage with the wider library community and develop new skills that will support her throughout her career.

As we all emerge from hibernation, I'm reminded that the work never stops at UTL. And whether it's adopting new digital tools or renovating our physical spaces, it's critical to remember **who** we're doing this for. Our many diverse users ensure that the libraries remain lively hubs of information, learning and togetherness. We will continue to dedicate our expertise, our resources and our knowledge to drive academic discovery. We will continue to provide a safe and welcoming environment for everyone who enters our spaces. Thank you for supporting us. By doing so, you're helping to enrich and enliven our wider U of T community, and ensuring students and faculty can reach incredible new heights.

Larry P. Alford  
University Chief Librarian  
[chieflibrarian@utoronto.ca](mailto:chieflibrarian@utoronto.ca)

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Cover: Professor Blissett on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of Robarts Library.  
Photo by Hanna Borodina.

## NOTEWORTHY

News from the University of Toronto Libraries

### University Chief Librarian

Larry P. Alford

### Editor in Chief

Alison Lang

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### Managing Editor

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#### Julie Hannaford

Deputy Chief Librarian

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Interim Director of Advancement

#### Alison Lang

Communications Writer

#### Maureen Morin

Graphic Designer

#### Larysa Woloszansky

Director of Communications

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Comments should be addressed to:

Noteworthy

130 St. George Street

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Photo by Daria Perevezintseva

Sakuras in blossom outside the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.





# Read it tonight!

## The literary life and times of Professor William Blissett

If you've been around Robarts Library anytime in the past few decades, chances are you know Professor William Blissett.

A slight man with a white beard, always clad impeccably in a tweed jacket, Blissett usually shows up at Robarts Library every Thursday morning, with a well-practiced routine. From 10 am to 11 am, he enjoys coffee, tea and treats with his longtime friend, access services associate Glenn Levin. At 11, he heads up to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor, to work in the study carrel he's maintained for over 50 years. Here, he pores over various texts and makes notes for article ideas on cue cards. At 3 pm, he leaves Robarts and returns home for the day.

Not an unusual routine for the average library patron—but Professor Blissett is rather exceptional. At 103 years old, the professor emeritus of English at U of T is one of the libraries' most devoted and long-standing users, and his reputation—as a brilliant scholar, beloved mentor, gifted writer and most of all, a devoted friend—has enlivened Robarts for decades.

Levin recalls a student colleague pointing Blissett out one day as they were shelving books: "That's Professor Blissett—literature is his life!" the student said.

One day, Blissett forgot his photocopy card at the library. Levin tracked it down for him and Blissett invited him for coffee as thanks. "That was about 20 years ago," he laughs.

Photo by Hanna Borodina

Initially, their conversation revolved around books. Over the past two decades, a true friendship developed between the two men—one that has spanned long past Blissett's retirement in 1987—and this camaraderie is evident to anyone joining them during their weekly discussions.

Here, Levin drinks tea and Blissett enjoys a mug of coffee, with an array of sweet treats spread before him, which he refers to as “elevenses.” When discussing his life and work, the professor speaks thoughtfully, considering each response deeply. His eyes glitter with good humour and wit, especially when he gets an opportunity to recommend a book or an author with his trademark catchphrase: “Read it tonight!”

Born in 1921, Blissett had a sickly childhood in Saskatchewan. He moved with family to southern California at age eight to recover in a warmer climate. It was here that he first engaged with libraries and fell in love with reading.

“The little school library in California had a lot of books to occupy me, in addition to my lessons,” Blissett recalls. “The library didn't limit my number of books—I took home as many as I could carry. I would go one afternoon returning books and getting other books because I couldn't carry enough to last me a week.”

By the time Blissett returned to Canada, around grade 11, his reading average was about one book a day. (This prodigious output continued until his early eighties). It's no wonder, then, that Blissett turned to academic scholarship as his vocation—a space where he could engage with literature through discussion and writing, inspiring students and colleagues alike to track down his many recommendations.

He started his career at Victoria College (now Victoria University) in British Columbia and went on to graduate school at U of T, where he studied under Northrop Frye. After earning his PhD, Blissett taught at the University of Saskatchewan and then at Western University. In 1965 he returned to teach at the University of Toronto and was on campus for the opening of Robarts Library in 1973. That same year, he received his study carrel on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor.

It was at U of T that Blissett made his mark on students and mentees like Gordon Teskey, now the Francis Lee Higginson Professor of English Literature at Harvard University. Teskey first read Blissett's writing on Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene* in an English lit journal as an undergraduate student in 1977. “The first thing I noticed was his style, rapid and buoyant, sparkling with humour,” he wrote in a 2021 essay commemorating Blissett's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. “I knew I wanted to learn from this magus, wherever he was, little suspecting he was down the road in Toronto, my hometown.”

Teskey went on to work with Blissett as a graduate student in the late 1970s. He recalls that Blissett, like clockwork, would invite the English graduate students up to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor at Robarts each day at 11 am for coffee. “There he held court, sometimes joined by other faculty, and sometimes former students, now professors themselves, always talking about the collections,” Teskey says. “Going up on the elevator, he would meet new people by noting what floor they were getting off on and guessing their field of research.”

This encyclopedic knowledge of the libraries comes from Blissett's rigorous research process, which



Facing page: Professor Blissett in his 13th floor study carrel. Above: Glenn Levin and Professor Blissett enjoy their “elevenses”.

Photo by Hanna Borodina

continued long past his retirement — he wrote, published and presented academic articles and books well into his nineties. He firmly believes in reading every book on a particular subject before writing about it: “I’m a great reviser—I read enormously on any topic I’m going to write on, and sometimes the farthest reaches of the topic,” he says. “If you go to the T.S. Eliot stacks in the library, you’ll find a lot to be said about him—but a lot is rehash! If I want to write about him, I want to say something new and definitive. Whether anyone agrees that *I’m* definitive is another question.”

For Blissett, Robarts provides endless opportunities for literary exploration, and this is what draws him back week after week. “It’s a very considerable presence,” he says. “And in many ways, one can rediscover and review books that one might have previously overlooked. It is a maze to navigate the shelves, and the items hidden on every floor, but it can be a pleasurable way to get lost.”

This practice of deep and comprehensive reading has informed Blissett’s friendships in the literary world too. He is well known for his lifelong study of the Welsh poet David Jones, cultivated through lively correspondence and a series of visits in the early 1960s. This warm and collegial approach has extended to longstanding relationships with many Canadian authors, “some of them of real attainment,” Blissett says. And indeed, this seems to be how Blissett himself approaches friendship in general—a multi-faceted relationship

that, in his words, contains “literary attention, concern and scholarship”.

“Jones is the first writer I befriended—but not the last one,” Blissett says. “In any language, if you start with one poet, he is the one. Read him tonight!”

Blissett’s literary friendships and devotion to books has led to his own personal library ballooning to over 3,000 titles. They’re arranged in his apartment, in shelves built for him by another longtime friend, the Hamilton-based poet and carpenter John Terpstra. Some of Blissett’s materials and books are already part of the Fisher’s collections, and he has arranged a planned gift to donate the remainder to the library.

An hour has nearly passed in the Robarts cafeteria and the coffee mugs have long been drained. It is time for both men to return to work—Levin at the first-floor information desk and Blissett to his books and his carrel on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor. After over 40 years at U of T, Levin is set to retire soon himself. He says that one of the things he’s most excited about is having more time to sit and chat with Professor Blissett.

“I’ve always felt honoured to have this type of friendship,” Levin says later. “Our conversations are always filled with little gems and ideas that help me with my own understanding of things because of his wisdom and his experience, and all the people he’s known. There’s a line in a Tennyson poem that says, ‘you are a part of all that you’ve met.’ It’s the same kind of thing with Professor Blissett.”

*By Alison Lang*

**A planned gift** like Professor William Blissett’s, of any size, is a powerful way to support our mission.

Your generosity helps preserve, expand, and care for our collections, leaving a lasting legacy of learning and cultural enrichment. Through gift planning and bequests, you can make a meaningful contribution to U of T Libraries while aligning with your financial and philanthropic goals.

**If you are interested in learning more, please contact:**

Mimosa Kabir Ketley  
Interim Director of Advancement  
University of Toronto Libraries  
[mimosa.kabir@utoronto.ca](mailto:mimosa.kabir@utoronto.ca)







Photo by Kristina Dy-Liacco

Growing up in the 1960s in Delhi, India, Samphe Lhalungpa had always known that his father—the eminent Tibetan scholar, translator, radio broadcaster and former monk-official Lobsang Lhalungpa—had maintained a significant library of traditional Tibetan texts and manuscripts. In their family home, some of the precious oblong-shaped texts—known as pechas—lined a shelf on their altar. But it wasn’t until 1971, when the Lhalungpa family moved from India to Canada, that Samphe got a full understanding of the vastness of his father’s collection.

“He had something like 15 wooden trunks specially constructed so he could bring his collection to Canada,” Samphe recalls. “It was a huge enterprise—my mother had to go order these trunks, and in various sizes. They didn’t bring any household goods when they emigrated—but they brought the pechas.”

Lobsang Lhalungpa continued to collect pechas and other rare texts, some dated as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as part of a living library that informed his teaching, translation work and scholarship right up until his death in 2008. Now, a sizeable portion of this collection—over 800 items, amassed over 60 years—has found a home at the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library

(EAL) thanks to a generous donation from Samphe Lhalungpa and his brother Tenzin.

“Lobsang Phuntsok Lhalungpa was a towering figure who shaped our understanding of Tibet in the twentieth century,” said Professor Rory Lindsay, Department for the Study of Religion at U of T. “His translations include foundational works such as *The Life of Milarepa* and *Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā*, and his collaborations with leading Western scholars like George Roerich and David Snellgrove helped bridge Tibetan and Western intellectual worlds. Having used his masterful translations in my own teaching, I can personally attest to his exceptional skill in making Tibetan literature accessible to English-speaking audiences. His carefully assembled library reflects this unique position, housing precious texts on religion, history, and other fields, some of which exist nowhere else today. Having direct access to these materials is extraordinary, as they will fundamentally advance our grasp of Tibet’s rich intellectual and political heritage.”

Lhalungpa was born in Lhasa in 1926. At age eight, Lhalungpa became an ordained monk and continued his studies related to Buddhism and Tibetan history. This put him on a path of learning, teaching

Above: A selection of wrapped pechas from the Lobsang P. Lhalungpa collection.



Photo courtesy of Samphe Lhalungpa

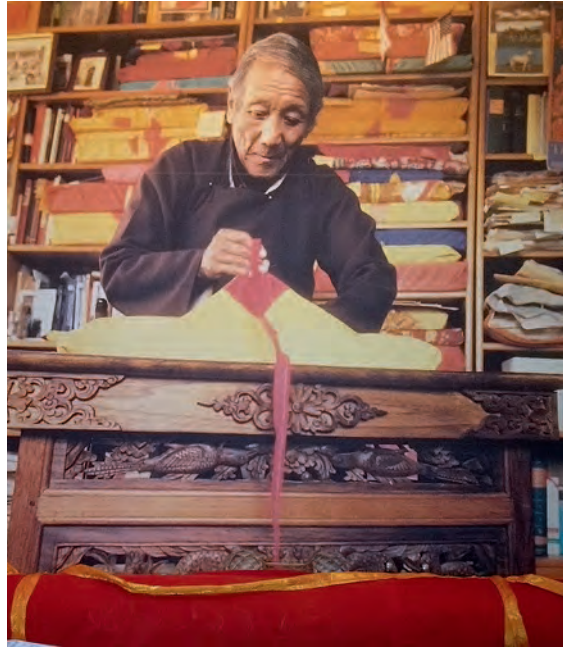


Photo courtesy of Samphe Lhalungpa

and scholarship engaging with all aspects of Tibetan culture—he worked frequently with lamas, political luminaries and many leading scholars. Lhalungpa’s vast understanding of Tibetan philosophy, religion and culture served him in a variety of important positions, including as a government official working with the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. In the late 1950s, Lhalungpa pioneered Tibetan language broadcasts at All India Radio, connecting Tibetans in India and Tibet to the outside world. Later in his life, Lhalungpa taught Buddhist philosophy at the University of British Columbia and even had a brief foray into the world of Hollywood cinema,

acting as a technical advisor for *Kundun*, Martin Scorsese’s 1996 biopic of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.

Like many Tibetan refugees, Lhalungpa’s life was marked by political upheaval and a long period of separation from his family. This may have made his growing collection of rare materials all the more important and meaningful. This can be seen in the many hand-copied texts in the pecha collection, along with the meticulous notes he folded within them, written in his beautiful script carefully placed inside. “This was his life’s work—not just the collection, but his close involvement with the collection,” said Samphe. “Some people collect books and never read them, but these were not just books to be collected—they were texts to be read, learned from and interacted with.”

“The Lhalungpa Collection provides deep insights into indigenous Tibetan scholarship and perspectives,” says EAL director Hana Kim. “It represents a transformative addition to our holdings, further enhancing the largest Tibetan collection in Canada.”

“This is a tremendously important gift,” said Frances Garrett, Associate Professor, Department for the Study of Religion. “Through his work with many of

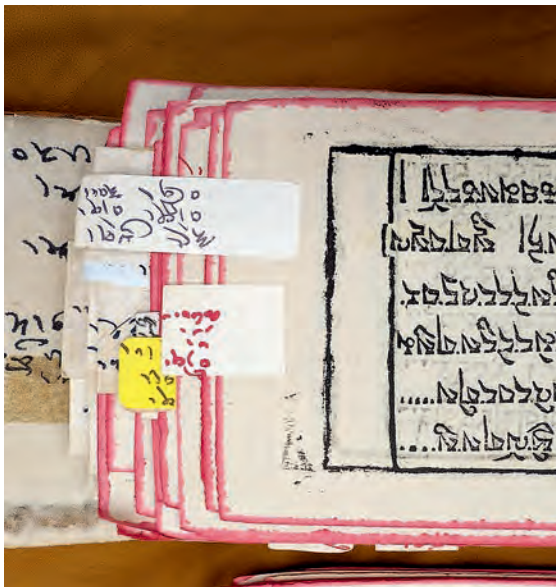


Photo by Kristina Dy-Liacco

This page, clockwise from top left: Lobsang and Diki Lhalungpa at work at All India Radio. Lobsang Lhalungpa, with Tibetan manuscripts. A few of the Lhalungpa pechas with hand-written notes slipped inside. Facing page, top to bottom: A rare manuscript on the history of Tibetan medicine including a dedication composed by the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (1617–1682). The text reveals that it was hand-copied by the Dalai Lama’s personal assistant. More examples of pechas.



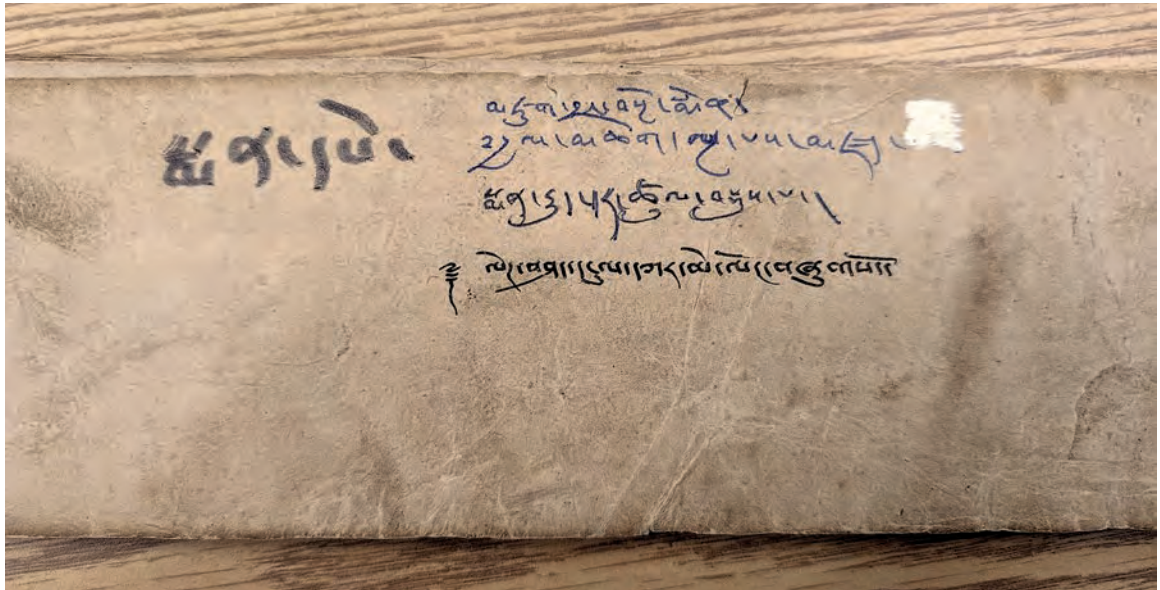


Photo by Kristina Dy-Liacco

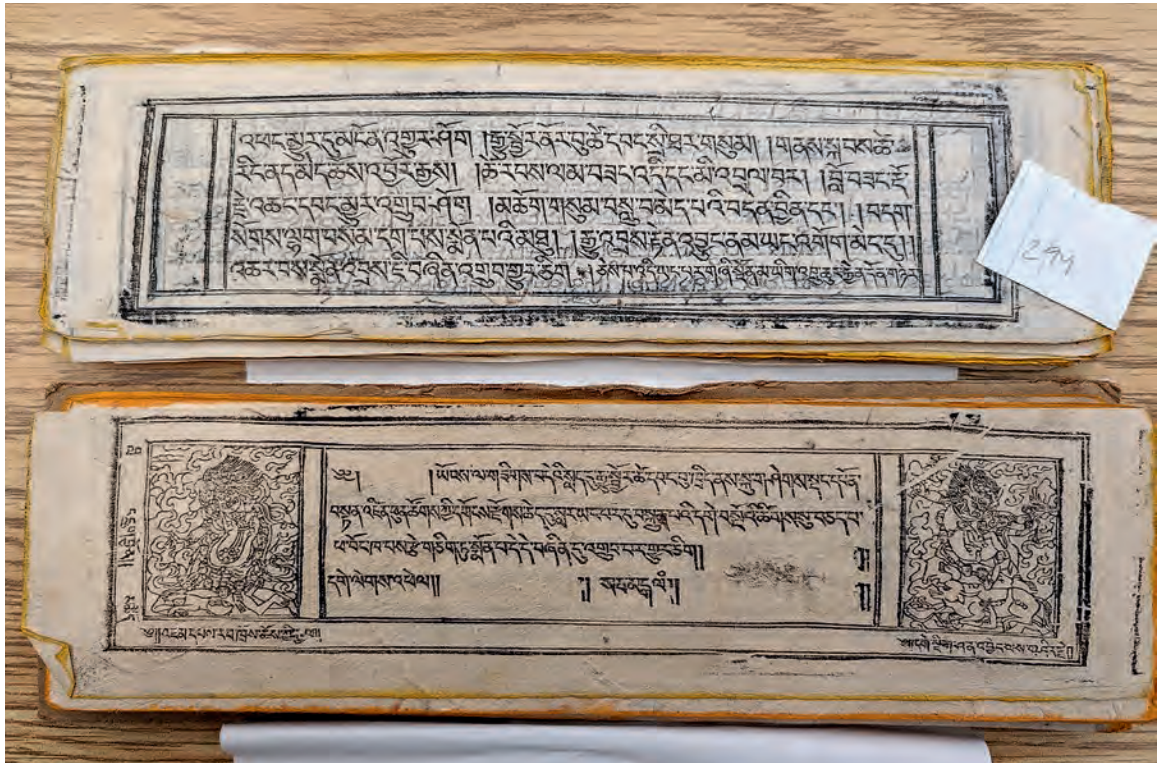


Photo by Kristina Dy-Liacco

the most renowned Buddhist scholars and with the Dalai Lama's government in Tibet and later in exile, Lhalungpa was able to amass a collection of very carefully curated, diverse Tibetan texts on a wide variety of topics. It's hard to overstate the impact that this collection will have on our continuing development of knowledge about the Tibetan intellectual and political world." The EAL's highly engaged stewardship of Lha-

lungpa's materials will ensure the collection remains alive and active in the hands of academics, students and the broader Tibetan community. This legacy of scholarly value and cultural significance was one that Lhalungpa held dear throughout his life—no matter how far away he lived from his roots. "Tibet was always in his heart," Sampe says.

By Alison Lang



Blue Rodeo in 1993; photo by John Bentham. From the Blue Rodeo Fonds, courtesy of Media Commons Archives. Used with permission of Starfish Entertainment

# The story of a musical legacy

**Media Commons gets  
*Lost Together* with  
Blue Rodeo doc**

If you're watching *Blue Rodeo: Lost Together*, look closely and you'll see rare materials from the University of Toronto's media archive holdings that help to tell the story of one of Canada's best-loved bands.

Working closely with the team at Cream Productions over several months, UTL's Media Commons Archives provided key materials for this 2024 CBC documentary from the Blue Rodeo Fonds. This extensive collection spans three major donations that were made in 2003, 2012, and 2017, and includes a diverse range of items, from tour itineraries and press clippings, to rare photographs, audiovisual recordings, merchandise, and awards. This collection provides a unique behind-the-scenes perspective on Blue Rodeo's decades-long

career, charting their evolution from local Toronto musicians to icons of Canadian music.

With a vast collection of scanned images and archival documents available, the Media Commons Archives continues to be a vital resource for researchers, filmmakers, and music historians. This inclusion in *Blue Rodeo: Lost Together* highlights the crucial role our archives play in preserving Canada's cinematic and musical history, ensuring that these cultural treasures are accessible for future generations to explore and appreciate.

*Blue Rodeo: Lost Together* is currently streaming for free on CBC Gem.

*By Larysa Woloszansky*





# Two birds grow old together

A wedding  
heirloom  
tells  
stories of  
Chinese  
traditions  
and protest

Photo courtesy of Dr. Wei Djao



Photos by Paul Terelenko

Among the many significant and beautiful works of art in the holdings of the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library (EAL), there's one piece in particular with a very special story. It is a three-panel embroidery artwork in the style of Chinese painting, adorned with calligraphy characters and a beautifully embroidered image of two birds sitting on a hillside.

Created by an unknown artist, the panels were gifted to Rosy Muriel Wing and Steven Benny Chan on their wedding day on August 8, 1932 in Victoria, B.C. Their son and daughter-in-law Dr. Anthony Chan and Dr. Wei Djao inherited the panels in 2000. As longtime friends and supporters of the East Asian Library, the couple donated the panels to the EAL in 2010.

The panels are significant for a number of reasons. They feature Chinese embroidery, a centuries-old rich and complex artistic practice that was often passed down through families.

"The artist would have done the calligraphy first, and then a skilled embroiderer (most likely a woman) would have embroidered on top of it," says Dr. Djao. "I don't think you'd be able to find this type of work easily today—if you really searched, you might find people making embroidery art, but it would be quite expensive."

The centre panel features a beautiful image of two birds drinking at a stream, which was common imagery for Chinese weddings at the time.

"The image represents the couple — the two birds are ones that mate for life. They will not have another partner, even if one of them dies. The idea with wedding imagery is that the two people will grow old together until 'we are both white heads.' In the same way, these two birds will grow old and white-headed together," says Dr. Djao.

The gift also represents the larger significance of the Chan wedding, which was a rare occasion for a Chinese couple who were both born in Canada (Rosy in Vancouver, and Steven in Victoria). The fact that the couple married during the height of the Exclusion Era (July 1, 1923 to January 1, 1947), is also notable — it marks a long period of anti-Asian discrimination, when Chinese immigrants were excluded from Canada, and economic opportunities for Chinese people in the United States and Canada were severely limited due to government prohibitions.

The panels also hold significance against the backdrop of Dr. Djao's relationship with Dr. Chan, a pioneering figure in Asian-Canadian studies who passed away in 2018. The couple met as young academics in 1979 and their relationship deepened later that year, when both were in Toronto to participate in protests as part of the anti-W5 movement—perhaps one of the biggest Chinese Canadian protests in the country's history. That year, CTV's W5 news program broadcast a segment erroneously depicting Chinese Canadian students on University of Toronto campus as "foreigners". A nationwide protest followed, leading to the creation of the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) among other movements.

"We certainly strengthened and fortified our views about Chinese Canadian identity together," Dr. Djao laughs. "It was a very unprecedented time."

Thanks to the donation, visitors to the EAL are able to view and reflect upon this artwork for themselves, and experience a moving piece of Chinese history, one that continues to hold many layers of meaning for Dr. Djao and her family.

"I first used the EAL in 1969 as a student and always felt at home there," she says. "It has an amazing history and we're so proud that this family item is part of its legacy."

By Alison Lang

Opening page: Rosy Muriel Wing and Steven Benny Chan on their wedding day on August 8, 1932 in Victoria, B.C. This page: The embroidered panels that were given to Rosy Muriel Wing and Steven Benny Chan on their wedding day.





# Preserving history across continents

## U of T Libraries and Botswana's Khama III Memorial Museum launch digitization project

In the southern African country of Botswana, in the town of Serowe, a small museum with a bright red roof holds the stories of a nation's soul.

Since 1985, curators and staff at the Khama III Memorial Museum have stewarded collections that include the papers of the Khama dynasty—the family of political leaders who, through skill and resistance, helped Botswana become the proudly independent and resource-rich country it is today.

As part of a groundbreaking new partnership with a group of University of Toronto librarians, the museum will soon be able to digitize, preserve and share these remarkable holdings with scholars all over the world, while ensuring the physical items remain with the museum, where they belong.

Dating from 1876 to 1959, the collection includes government letters, invitations, photos and lists of transported cattle that document Botswana's journey to self-determination. "Khama III's contribution was huge—not only to Serowe, but to the tribe, the regime and the entire southern African region," says museum curator Gase Kediseng.

The project first took root at a roundtable hosted by the American Library Association in 2022. As part of a three-month peer support program, Jordan Pedersen, a metadata librarian at U of T, connected with Olga Tladi, a librarian at the Botswana International University of Science and Technology, and discussed new U of T funding to build equity and diversity in collec-

tions through innovative practices such as digitization. While Tladi didn't have suitable projects at her university, she connected Pedersen with curators from the Khama III Memorial Museum.

"This is the family that guided Botswana through independence up to the current political moment," says Jeff Newman, college librarian at New College and an African history specialist who joined the Botswana project after initial meetings. "It's very important to get insight on these materials from an African perspective, and from these rare first-hand accounts."

In addition to the historical significance of the materials, there was an urgency to digitize—many of the items in Khama family collection are extremely delicate and in threat of erosion.

"A lot of the material was very sensitive because it was written with ink on paper," Pedersen said. "So there was a countdown before the material totally disintegrated. We realized we really needed to get the funding landed soon."

When U of T reached out, Kediseng says her small group—currently consisting of six full-time staff, plus a clutch of volunteers—felt a palpable sense of relief that this important work could finally begin.

"The opportunity was a godsend, something we really wanted," she says. "Because digitization does not just cover easier access—the main thing is preservation. That is something we were looking for, and very excited about."

Photo courtesy of Gase Kediseng

The Khama III Memorial Museum.



Photo courtesy of Gase Kediseng



From the British Museum Mechanical Collection

ples of universities going to Africa, finding large collections of documents that are important in a political or cultural context, and they box them up and take them back to the States. And that doesn't help anyone in Africa." "We really tried to think—what would it look like to have a project like this?" Pedersen says. "Something that isn't colonial and extractive, but instead very supportive and builds capacity? This is uncharted territory — this is not something commonly done within

the building of library collections."

The museum had final input on the digitization provider and selected the necessary equipment, taking into account its rural location and environmental considerations like rolling power outages.

Through the collaborative efforts of both teams, the funding agreement with U of T was landed in early fall of 2024. The final arrangement will see the digitization of 100,000 items at a cost of \$130,000 over two years, with funding covering equipment and staffing for physical processing, scanning and metadata creation. The eventual outcome is that the museum will receive royalties once materials are digitized, shared and properly licensed.

On U of T's side, the libraries will receive perpetual access to the digitized materials, supporting valuable African scholarship for faculty and students for decades to come.

As far as international partnerships go, the Botswana/U of T project is unprecedented and groundbreaking—built on a foundation of collegiality and mutual respect during monthly Zoom meetings across time zones and continents.

"We had a lot of exchanges—not really related to the project, but that helped us build a relationship—a real friendship," Pedersen says. "I don't think any of the work we had done would have been possible if the two sides had not expressed genuine curiosity about the other. It was always the highlight of my day, talking to Gase and her team."

"Respect is important to me because we're a small institution. There are other larger institutions, even in our country, who would look down on smaller museums like us," says Kediseng. "We might be small, but we are professionals as well. We know our job. When you work with people who understand and respect you, it's huge—and with this partnership, it was special, different and beautiful."

By Alison Lang



Photo courtesy of Gase Kediseng

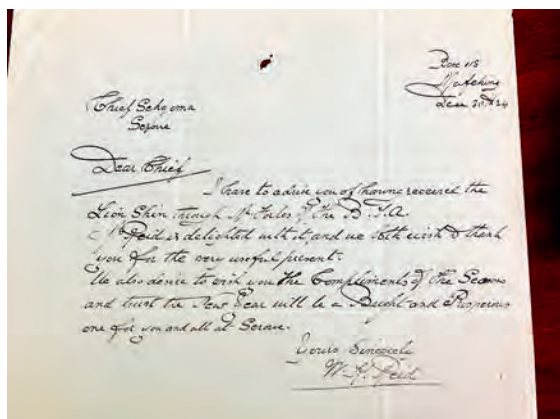


Photo courtesy of Gase Kediseng

The building blocks for a plan were set into place. Over the next two years, Pedersen and Newman brought on more colleagues to the U of T team to lend their expertise to various aspects of the project. These included digital preservation librarian Steve Marks, coordinator of Humanities collections Eva Jurczyk, electronic resources librarian Erin Calhoun, and outreach & engagement librarian for Black studies Amal Hussein. As plans developed, two key considerations were always at the forefront: the Khama III Museum would keep the physical materials, and the museum had to reap the benefits of the collaboration locally, on their own terms. "Institutions have a history of going in and taking things," says Newman. "There's a lot of exam-

The Khama III exhibition at the Khama III Memorial Museum in Botswana. Undated photo of Khama III. Postcards of Serowe in the sixties at the museum. Letter to Chief Sekgoma.



# Student Life

## Bringing the film archives to life: The U of T Pop-up Cinematheque

In the fall of 2024, the University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Institute and UTL Media Commons Archives presented the U of T Pop-Up Cinematheque—a captivating eight-part 16 mm screening series that showcased rare films from our extensive collections. Conceived by the Cinema Studies Institute's Diana Sanchez, the series took audiences on a cinematic journey through history, with each screening accompanied by an insightful talk that explored the film's unique features and its archival status.

The screenings spanned a fascinating range of genres and time periods, starting with the silent classic *So This is Paris* (1926), brought to life by Charlie Keil with live piano accompaniment by Jordan Klapman. Colin Geddes introduced *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1971) and *Magical Death* (1973). Christina Stewart provided context for *The Spanish Heart* (1937), while Alberto Zambenedetti guided viewers through *The Malombra* (1942). Diana Sanchez presented *The Pearl* (1947), and Thomas Chan shared insights on *The Naked Island* (1960). The series also featured *Moving Mountains*

(1980) and *Yes, We Can* (1984), presented by Rachel E. Beattie, before closing with the iconic screwball comedy *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), introduced by Charlie Keil. Each screening was sold out, underscoring the excitement generated by this remarkable archival experience.

By Loryl MacDonald

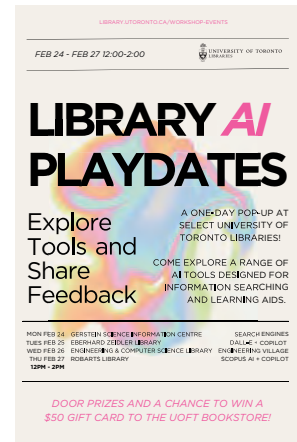
## Libraries and AI: Supporting students in the digital age

AI is transforming how students learn and engage with academic resources in our libraries. To explore this impact, a collaborative effort led to AI Pop-Up Playdates at various library locations from February 24–27. These interactive events introduced students to AI-powered research, writing, and productivity tools, inviting them to test the technology, provide feedback, and discuss their AI habits with librarians. The primary goal was to understand how students incorporate AI into their studies and to gather insights on both AI tools and library services to better support their academic needs.

A total of 100 students participated in the pop-ups, engaging in discussions with librarians and completing feedback surveys to help shape future teaching practices and student support initiatives. Feedback revealed that students frequently use ChatGPT, Copilot, and Perplexity for tasks such as scheduling, writing assistance, and exam preparation. However, students also expressed concerns about academic integrity, ethical AI use, and potential impacts on study habits. Students also voiced uncertainty about when and how AI use is considered appropriate in their studies, highlighting a gap that libraries can help fill through guidance and resources.

While responses on desired AI support were limited, two key needs emerged: access to AI tools for literature searching and natural language academic search, as well as guidance on how to use AI tools effectively, such as prompt engineering techniques.

By Devon Stolz



# Students who shine

## Rosie Sadoquis brings library stories to life

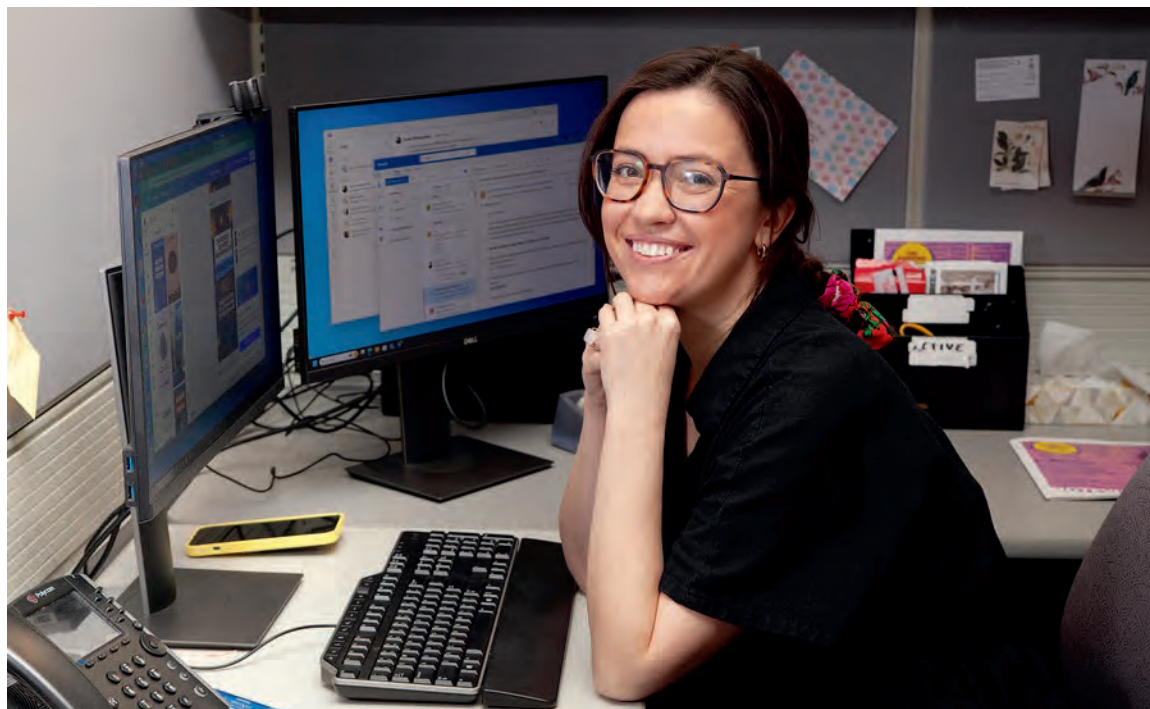


Photo by Hanna Borodina

Libraries have always been a huge part of Rosie Sadoquis' life. But she never saw herself working in one until she returned to her hometown of Sarnia, Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic. After years working in non-profits in Toronto, Sadoquis got a job as a branch assistant running children and adult programs at the public library she'd grown up using. She quickly found the work fulfilling and even transformative.

"I was getting a lot of satisfaction out of getting to know patrons, seeing people every day and helping them find resources, and just helping people—ending the day and feeling good about it," she says.

As the world began to reopen, Sadoquis saw how people were flocking to the library and its services more than ever, seeking a gathering space and community. She realized there was an opportunity here to expand her career and make more impactful changes, so she applied and was accepted for the Master of Information program at U of T's Faculty of Information (iSchool) and moved back to Toronto. As classes began, she knew she also needed a job, and the graduate student library sciences assistant (GSLA) position at the library communications office leapt out immediately. With a focus on social media, graphic design and writing, Sadoquis knew the position would be a great

fit for her skill set—and moreover, it would provide an opportunity for her to integrate with the many libraries on central campus.

"Other library student jobs are very specialized, and more academic—I wanted to get to know the other libraries and learn how to communicate with the many different teams working there," Sadoquis says.

In her first year working in library communications, Rosie has designed social media campaigns, shareables and copy for everything from Nobel Week to "High Five a Librarian" Day, with a focus on playful, engaging and informative storytelling designed to reach students and amplify lesser-known tools and services. She's particularly gratified by projects that allow her to bring library offerings to life through creative and lively storytelling.

"I've always felt comfortable in libraries, but I know that's not the case for everyone," Sadoquis says. "Students are often flooded with so much practical information that they need to be reminded the library isn't just for schoolwork. We have so much here to help them de-stress, like leisure reading and unstudy spaces. I want students to know the libraries can be accessible and fun places too—to see the library not just as an academic resource, but a friend."

*By Alison Lang*



# Brain Matters

## Going deeper into the Fisher Library's *De Cerebro* exhibit

Emily Dickinson once wrote that the brain is deeper than the sea—and nowhere was this more evident than in the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library exhibit *De cerebro: An Exhibition of the Human Brain*, which ran for the winter and early spring of 2025.

Curator Alexandra K. Carter spent several years trawling the Fisher's vast collections to dig up work examining the history of the human brain and the many ways humans have tried to understand it. Her selections went far beyond medical texts into the realms of philosophy, explorations of human consciousness, psychology, pharmacology and even the paranormal.

For Carter, the initial inspiration for the exhibit came from a personal experience. "My father had a stroke a few years ago," she says. "It was a major stroke, but he suffered very minimally from the effects of that. It got me really thinking about the brain and how very little we really understand about what's going on."

As the Fisher's science and medicine librarian, Carter had a deep familiarity with the library's extensive materials on those subjects. She soon realized, however, that she was drawing from all the Fisher's collections. "I knew that I wanted to look at the exhibit from multiple perspectives, not just a medical perspective—and I knew our collections would support that," she says. "But I didn't quite know exactly which direction it would go. Ultimately, three or four themes emerged as I began working and they all correspond to collections at the Fisher."

These themes included the Fisher's big philosophy collections, with many thinkers examining what it means to have a brain, and the competing ideas that came from those texts, many of which originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Carter also pulled items from the Fisher's psychiatry collection, including works by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and their contemporaries. "I pulled Rorschach tests, and the Binet-Simon Intelligence tests—I wanted to highlight these items because they're not actually books,

they're cards—and they're ephemeral items that you can use to understand the history of psychology," Carter says.

Fascinatingly, Carter also built a section examining the brain from a social perspective, including people experimenting with drugs, and exploring anti-drug propaganda. The section includes a fake pulp novel called *Marijuana Girl* aimed at warning teens away from drug use. Carter also included a number of phrenology busts, exploring the scientific origins of a practice that became rooted in decontextualized pseudoscience.

Carter hoped that visitors would leave the exhibit with more questions than answers—and plenty of food for thought.

"I'm hoping the exhibit provides a similar experience to what I had with my dad—a mix of awe, wonder and fear," Carter says. "By presenting these ideas about the brain from different angles, I hope it gives people a sense of how challenging it can be to think about the brain. People have been trying to solve this problem for a long time and we're still not even close to fully answering these questions—and that's quite remarkable."

By Alison Lang



Photo by Paul Terefenko

# Her Suitcase

A tribute to the migration stories of Chinese Canadian women

On March 8, as part of celebrations for International Women's Day, the Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library invited guests to take a look inside *Her Suitcase*. This moving exhibition by artist-curator Jessica Cheng invited visitors into an immersive exploration of the migration journeys of Chinese Canadian women, spanning from the 1950s to today. Inspired by the Honourable Dr. Vivienne Poy's research, the exhibition highlighted both the resilience and struggles of women who navigated new beginnings in Canada.

The stunning installation included manuscripts from the library's collections and publications related to Chinese Canadian women. Free-hand machine embroidery characters and typewritten accounts of migration hung from the lighting fixtures, and the embroidered pieces cast delicate shadows spreading across the floor as the sun dipped below the windows.

The launch event included remarks from York University professor Guida C. Man, the Honourable Dr. Vivienne Poy, Jessica Cheng and Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library director Maria Lau. Afterwards, guests gathered to gaze at the hanging artworks, read the accounts on display and browse through the archival materials.

*Her Suitcase* offered a rare and moving opportunity to engage with the resilience and struggles of women immigrants across generations, and reflect upon the many common threads of connection with newly arrived immigrants to Canada today.

*With files from Larysa Woloszansky*



Photos by Hanna Borodina





# Stories of resistance, stories of community

A showcase of the Richard Charles Lee Chinese Canadian Archives

On February 4, the seventh day of the Lunar New Year, the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library buzzed with excitement as UTL welcomed a sold-out crowd of attendees for the inaugural showcase of the Richard Charles Lee Chinese Canadian Archives.

It contains a wide array of materials, from photos to music recordings to oral histories. Records span from the early 1900s in Victoria, to documents of post-war activism, including the anti-W5 movement and its assertion of Chinese Canadian identity.

The materials showcased at the event came from the holdings of the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library and the Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library. These collections were assembled and cared for by these libraries in partnership with the Chinese Canadian community.

The event commemorated a generous donation from an anonymous community member, which ensured UTL could bring on two Chinese Canadian archivists with the expertise to make these important materials accessible and discoverable.

Loryl MacDonald and Larry Alford provided introductions for the evening and welcomed the Honourable Dr. Vivienne Poy (pictured right) to the stage. Dr. Poy, a longtime and steadfast supporter of the collection, has donated many of the Poy family's own materials to the archive, many of which were on display at the event. She shared a few words about the importance of community and the archival preservation of collective memory. Chinese Canadian archivists Nicole Yang

and June Chow both spoke at the event about the significance of the materials in the collection.

Following the remarks, the audience, which included members of the Chinese Canadian community, academics, and archivists from across the province, spent time mingling and discussing the materials on display. It was an important occasion to reflect upon the importance of community archives and archivists, and the work that goes far beyond cataloguing and acquiring resources. This archive, and others like it, provide tangible evidence of lives lived, and ensure that important stories will remain alive for generations of students, scholars and community members to come.

*By Alison Lang*



Photos by Paul Terefenko



# Gatherings of friends old and new

Fisher event highlights





### George Kiddell Memorial Lecture

On February 6, the 30th annual George Kiddell Memorial Lecture: *What's Cooking in Guyana? A Conversation about Food Cultures* brought together a lively audience to explore the deep connections between memory, storytelling, and identity through Guyanese cuisine. Shereen Simic, bakery owner and chef, and Althea Brown, cookbook author and chef, joined Alissa Trotz, Professor of Caribbean Studies at U of T, in a conversation about the ways cookbooks preserve history and cultural identity across generations.

Against the backdrop of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library's diverse collections, including materials on Caribbean history and literature, guests enjoyed a selection of traditional Guyanese dishes from Shereen's Bakery and Roti Shop. The flavours sparked reflections on migration, memory and belonging. The event highlighted the power of food to connect people, making space for shared histories and cultural exchange. It also reinforced the Fisher Library's role as a place of discovery and community. Through food, storytelling, and scholarship, the lecture celebrated the richness of Guyanese culinary traditions and their enduring legacy.

### Johanna and Leon Katz Memorial Lecture

On February 27, the Johanna and Leon Katz Memorial Lecture welcomed Maurice Vellekoop to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library for a captivating discussion on his award-winning graphic memoir, *I'm So Glad We Had This Time Together* (winner of the 2024 Toronto Book Award). Blending nostalgia with critique, Vellekoop's work serves as both a love letter to his hometown and a lament for Toronto's disappearing landmarks.

Guests journeyed into the past as Vellekoop revisited long-lost city staples like Simpsons and Eaton's department stores, Britnell's Book Shop, and the University Theatre, reflecting on emotions evoked by the loss of these once thriving spaces. With wit, charm and a keen artistic eye, he challenged Toronto's ongoing neglect of its own history, prompting discussions about memory, preservation, and the cultural fabric of the city.

The evening brought together history, art, and storytelling, honouring the city's past while reflecting on how it shapes us as individuals. Generously endowed by the late Johanna Sedlmayer-Katz, this annual lecture continues to inspire dialogue on history and culture.

*By Mimosa Kabir-Ketley*

Facing page, left to right: Alissa Trotz, Shereen Simic and Althea Brown. This page: Maurice Vellekoop.



Photos by Paul Terefenko



FRIENDS  
OF THE  
FISHER  
LIBRARY

## Join the Friends of the Fisher

Step into history at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library—home to one of Canada's most significant collections of rare books, manuscripts, and archives. From literature and philosophy to science and art, the Fisher preserves the past and fuels discovery.

Join the Friends of the Fisher to help protect these collections, support exhibitions, lectures, and publications, and be part of a community that champions the preservation of knowledge and the stories that shape our world.

<https://go.utlib.ca/fof>





# Friends in focus

**It was a busy fall at the Fisher, where longtime Friends and new guests mingled at exhibits, lectures and showcases celebrating memory and community. See if you can find yourself in our gallery!**





### **De Cerebro Exhibition Opening**

- Mark Andrews, Alexandra K. Carter, Garrett Herman
- Renata Dzikowski, Michael Torosian, John Shoesmith
- Orysia Goddard, Alexandra K. Carter

### **Richard Charles Lee Chinese Canadian Archives Showcase**

- Alice Chan
- Julie Jai, Stephen King
- Lian Chan, Dr. Wei Djao, Hana Kim
- Lily Cho, Larissa Lai
- Marie Korey, Loryl MacDonald
- Larry Alford, Arlene Chan, Justin Poy, Neville Poy,

Dr. Vivienne Poy, Loryl MacDonald, Maria Lau

- Carole Moore, Larry Alford, Dr. Vivienne Poy, Neville Poy, Justin Poy, Maria Lau, Diamond Yau

### **Johanna and Leon Katz Memorial Lecture**

- Mark Andrews, David Fernández, Loryl MacDonald
- Steven Gera, Warren Estabrooks, Jordy Paat
- Tim Lynch, Maurice Vellekoop, Harry Kooy
- Ross Winter, Richard Davidson, Dave Dickson

### **George Kiddell Memorial Lecture**

- Alissa Trotz, Shereen Simic, David Fernández, Althea Brown, Liz Ridolfo
- Racquel George-Hypolite, Jaya Karsemeyer Bone, Simone Sheriff, Jonelle Douglas, Shereen Simic



Photos by Paul Terefenko



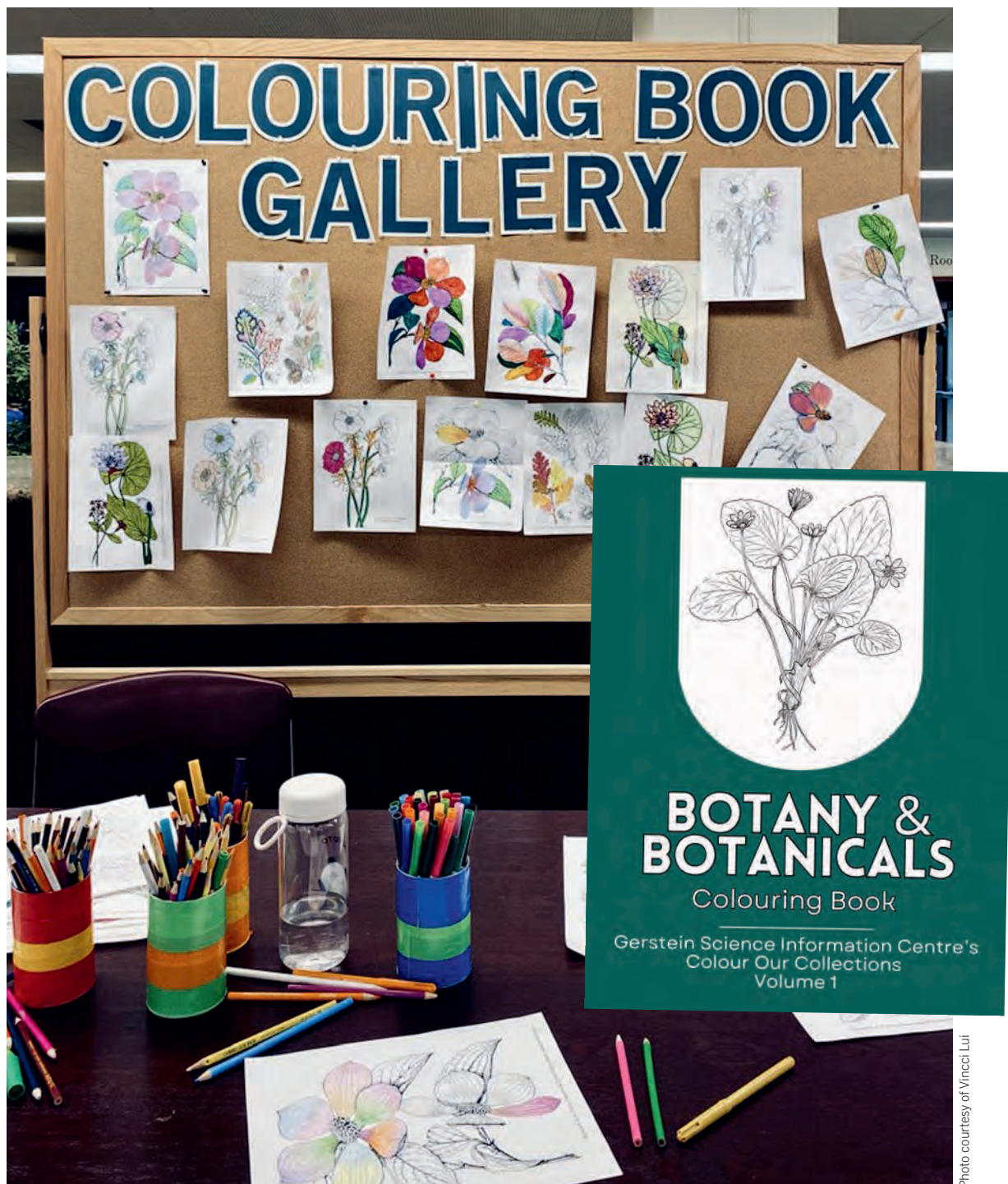


Photo courtesy of Vincici Lui

# Colour our collections

Take a peek inside  
Gerstein's  
botanical  
colouring book





## BOTANY & BOTANICALS

### WORD SEARCH

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- WATERSHIELD
- HIBISCUS
- TRILLIUM
- ORCHID
- MARIGOLD

- COTTONWOOD
- GRANULOSA
- BUTTERCUP
- WILLOW
- FUNGI

- EVERGREEN
- MARIGOLD
- PARSNIP
- SYCAMORE
- FERN

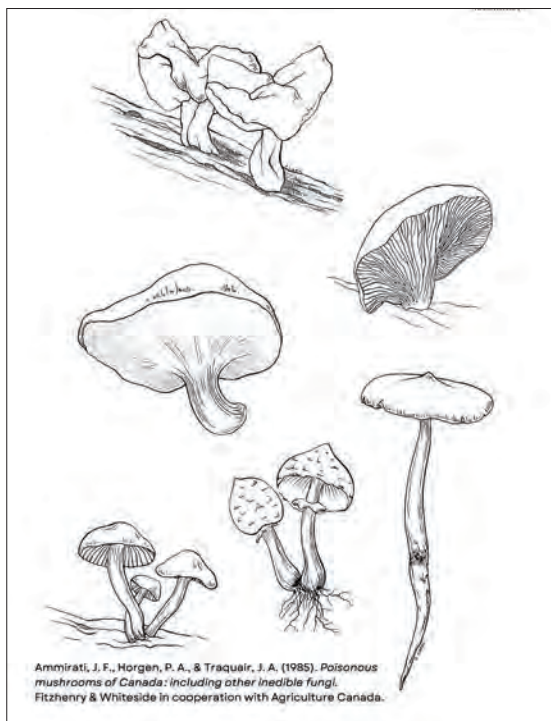
The Gerstein Science Information Centre recently launched the first volume of *Colour Our Collections*, a limited-edition colouring book that brings library collections to life. The book features historical botanical illustrations from Gerstein's collections, spanning nearly a century with images from the 1890s to the 1980s.

*Colour Our Collections* not only showcases some of the many hidden gems in Gerstein's collections, but also offers students, faculty, and staff an activity to de-stress, disconnect from their screens, and engage in self-care and mindfulness. By offering free take-home copies as well as a downloadable, print-at-home version, this latest wellness initiative from Gerstein aims to support mental well-being both on and off-campus.

To celebrate the launch, Gerstein hosted a series of pop-up giveaway events in January and February 2025, distributing over 200 free copies of the colouring book. The giveaways were paired with a colouring station that remained open for several weeks, offering visitors the opportunity to show off their creative colouring skills and leave their work on display for everyone to enjoy.

*Colour Our Collections: Volume I — Botany & Botanicals* was compiled by Gerstein librarian Glyneva Bradley-Ridout, with graduate student library assistants (GSLAs) Maggie Nevison, Emily Woehrle, and Jacqueline Parry. You can download it from [gerstein.library.utoronto.ca/colour-our-collections](https://gerstein.library.utoronto.ca/colour-our-collections).

By Jacqueline Parry, GSLA  
(Gerstein Science Information Centre)



Facing page: Colouring station at the Gerstein Science Information Centre and cover of the colouring book. This page: Illustrations and word search from the book.



It was the most wonderful day of the year—therapy dog day at Robarts Library!

Students took a brief break from exam prep and chilly mid-March weather to stroll down the portico to the front of the Fisher Library to visit two new friends from Sunshine Therapy dogs, including Dafu

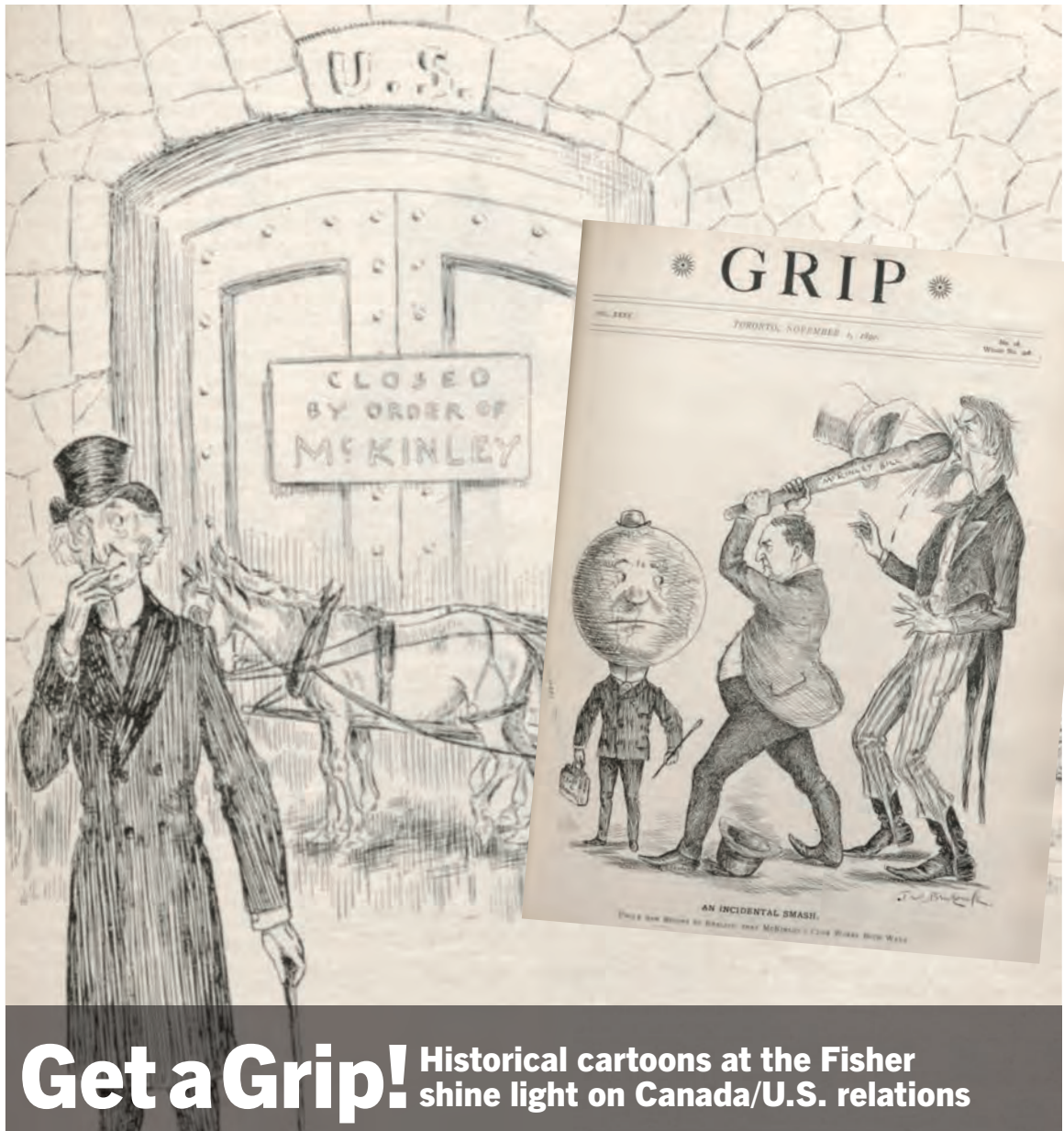
the golden doodle, an extremely good boy. Thanks to Student Life Health and Wellness, attendees were grinning from ear to ear and many ear scratches were enthusiastically received by Dafu.

Take a closer look at the event highlights in this photo gallery.



Photos by Alison Lang





## Get a Grip! Historical cartoons at the Fisher shine light on Canada/U.S. relations

Tariffs have undoubtedly been the biggest news stories of the past few months, providing editorial cartoonists with a rich topic to explore.

Canada's identity has long been intertwined with its relationship with the United States. Themes of economic dependence and political influence are at the heart of this connection. Historical satirical cartoons from UTL's Rare Books and Special Collections offer valuable insights into today's news, revealing how little has changed over time.

In 1890, the United States passed the Tariff Act, which imposed tariffs of up to 50% on imports. One of the motives behind the tariffs was to encourage

the annexation of Canada. The U.S. sought to make Canada more reliant on its market, hoping that this dependence would eventually lead to Canadians becoming the 45<sup>th</sup> state. In response, Canada retaliated with tariffs of its own and sought to strengthen trade ties with the British Empire rather than the United States.

The images on this page come from *Grip*, a satirical magazine published in Toronto by John Wilson Bengough between 1873 and 1894. They highlight the issues of their time, and yet resonate as strikingly modern to us today.

By Loryl MacDonald

Caption reads: "An Incidental Smash. Uncle Sam begins to realize that McKinley's club works both ways."





# Defy Gravity Campaign Update

Propelling U of T to new heights of achievement



The University of Toronto's Defy Gravity campaign is the largest fundraising and alumni engagement initiative in Canadian history. Publicly launched in 2021, the campaign aims to raise \$4 billion to advance the university's highest priorities and engage 225,000 alumni. By fuelling innovation and collaboration, it is driving solutions to urgent global challenges—from climate change and chronic disease to the development of ethical AI.

In December 2024, the university celebrated two major milestones in the Defy Gravity campaign. A total of 170,283 U of T alumni have engaged with the university 771,870 times — achieving 75% of the alumni engagement target and 77% of the engagement instances target well ahead of schedule. Additionally, the campaign has raised \$2.054 billion at a record-setting pace, with contributions from 54,302 donors across 86 countries supporting a diverse range of initiatives across U of T's three campuses.

At the heart of the campaign is a commitment to inclusive excellence, ensuring that students, faculty, and scholars have access to the best resources, spaces, and opportunities to drive discovery and learning. As one of the top three research library systems in

North America — within a university ranked 21<sup>st</sup> globally for teaching and research — U of T Libraries is bridging the past and the future, empowering scholars to engage with the world's knowledge while shaping new discoveries.

The way knowledge is created, accessed, and preserved is evolving rapidly, and libraries must adapt to meet the needs of scholars today and in the future. Thanks to the generosity of donors, Defy Gravity is empowering U of T Libraries to remain at the forefront of research and learning, helping to push the boundaries of knowledge and innovation. As we look ahead, we invite you to be part of the conversation about the future of libraries and their role in shaping the next generation of discovery.

Photo by Daria Perevezentseva



# MAKE AN IMPACT

The University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) is one of the world's leading research library systems, driving discovery, learning, and collaboration across the university and around the globe. From rare and distinctive collections to welcoming, accessible spaces and groundbreaking work in digital scholarship and preservation, UTL is constantly evolving to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic community.

Your support makes all of this possible. You help open doors for students and scholars, protect our cultural and intellectual heritage, and ensure knowledge remains accessible to all.

Join us in shaping a world-class library system that leads with purpose, sparks curiosity, drives change, and preserves the past for the future. **Support the University of Toronto Libraries today.**



Photo by Matthew Dochstader / Paradox Images

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More than ever, libraries and library workers are a critical resource. As access to information grows increasingly complex, we equip students and researchers with the resources they need. To continue leading in this new era, UTL must evolve rapidly to embrace new technologies, expand access and safeguard our academic and cultural heritage for generations to come.

With your support, we can continue to build a world-class library system that drives innovation while preserving the past.

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Photo by Moussa Faddoul