

Galter's Rare Books and Treasures Highlighted on Instagram



In March 2017, Galter Health Sciences Library launched an [Instagram account](#) showcasing materials from our Special Collections. Library Assistant Matt Messbarger manages the account, posting photos of rare items and related information several times a week. We asked Matt about his inspiration for starting this endeavor and which items make the Instagram grade.

Why did you start an Instagram account for Galter's Special Collections?

In October 2016, I attended a rare books conference at the Newberry Library here in Chicago. The talks focused on how to preserve as well as showcase rare books and historical materials in a 21st century library. Christine Nelson, a curator of literary and historical manuscripts at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York, presented on how Instagram is an ideal medium for libraries to feature their rare books. This piqued my interest in its potential for our special collections. We have several medical books that go back to the 16th century, along with all kinds of interesting materials, including death masks and antique medical instruments. It's a great collection that would appeal to different kinds of people beyond just scholars of medical history.

Why is Instagram a good medium for featuring rare and archival materials?

Ordinarily you'd have to make an appointment to see any of the materials we have in Special Collections. With Instagram, and social media more generally, we can share our rare books with other special collections libraries, museums, and archives as well as anyone with an interest in the materials. It makes sense to try and connect these materials with an audience that goes beyond the faculty and students of the Feinberg School of Medicine. Instagram is a visual medium so I like featuring materials that have some visual distinction. Luckily there are lots of materials in the collection that are visually striking for one reason or another.

How do you measure the impact of the posts?

Social media analytics tools are available but the simplest way to measure impact is by counting the "likes" each post receives. Sometimes the posts are "regrammed" (reposted and shared by other Instagram users), which is great because

then your content takes on a different life cycle. Instagram is not a scholarly form of communication, though many scholarly institutions use it. I like the fact that it's primarily for fun but can still be used to promote discovery and has wide appeal for different groups. For example, I posted an image of a book on mentalism and hypnosis, and because I used hashtags related to magic and trickery, several magicians found it. Similarly, a post of an image of a coffee plant from a 17th century book grabbed the attention of some coffee roasters. When working with a collection that spans several centuries you can find different audiences of varied interests who will enjoy it.

What is your favorite post?

My favorite post might mean more to me than anyone else who follows the account. I have a background in film studies and a particular interest in the films of Orson Welles. Welles's guardian, Maurice Bernstein, was a graduate of Northwestern Medical College, Class of 1908. Welles even named a character in *Citizen Kane* after him. I was excited to find his class photo, something I imagine no Welles scholar had previously sought to look for (although I could be mistaken). I posted his class photo and a brief biographical sketch of his life and career on the library's Instagram feed. It wasn't the most popular post that I've done, but it was definitely the most fun.

How can people access the Galter Library Special Collections Instagram account?

On Instagram, find our feed at: https://www.instagram.com/galter_special_collections/
You can also see the latest additions in a gallery at the top of the [Special Collections](#) page or right here!

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