Masons and Mentoring: Student Internships at Amistad

The Amistad Research Center works to mentor undergraduate and graduate students in the field of archive and library work to enhance their studies and exposure to primary source research, as well as expand their knowledge of career options post-graduation. The Young Archivists Mentoring Program initiative assists in preservation and increased access to the archives and manuscripts collections by helping our small staff to meet Amistad's mission as a home to primary and secondary sources documenting America's ethnic and racial history and the contributions of underrepresented groups.

Amistad partnered this fall with the History Department at Xavier University of Louisiana to host two student internships within the Processing Department. With the support of Sister Barbara Hughes at Xavier, two undergraduate interns, Alexis Parker and Joi Martin, joined the processing team in September to tackle a large and complex project, the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons of Louisiana records (circa 1855-2002). The records consist of an extensive collection of Masonic and collected publications, correspondence, financial records, and photographs (50 linear feet). The records are significant, documenting the post-Reconstruction "long civil rights movement" (1877-1955); the modern civil rights movement (1955-1968); community development programs generated by the Lodge and its members; affirmative action and minority education in Louisiana; and internal administration and politics of the various lodges and orders within Louisiana and nationally.

Alexis Parker, a Xavier freshman from California, was trained to handle and clean fragile photographs, identify individuals and groups, and arrange them for cataloging. Alexis worked diligently with early portraiture of the many Masons and their family members dating from the 1880s and later gelatin professional prints used for Masonic publications (circa 1950-1970). The portraits within the records not only provide images of Grand Masters John Parsons, John G. Lewis, Sr., and John G. Lewis Jr., but represent a wonderful collection documenting professional photographers and studios within the State of Louisiana, such as Roy B. Moss, E.M. Robinson, John H. Williams, Nolan A. Marshal, Jas. Soler, Walter Allen Studio (Minden), Brennan's Studio (New Orleans), Kerr's Studio (Natchitoches), and Uhrbach's Studio (Natchitoches).

LaPlace, Louisiana, native Joi Martin, a senior at Xavier, worked with one of the largest physical portions of the records, Masonic proceedings and publications (20 linear feet). This extensive amount of printed proceedings for the Louisiana Grand Lodge and collected proceedings from other Prince Hall-affiliated lodges and orders in other states (circa 1855-1986) is rare for archives or library institutions to have within their collections. These materials required a great amount of care in handling with many from the mid-to-late 19th and early 20th century publications in extremely fragile condition. The significance of the proceedings provides documentation that tracks the history of Black Masonic lodges not only within Louisiana, but also throughout the United States. They also highlight a network of prominent citizens engaged through a spirit of philanthropy and brotherhood.

Haitian Delegation Visits Center