Call me magpie, collector, pack rat, Kansasphile. I started kindergarten the same year Kansas celebrated its Territorial Centennial and grew up steeped in Kansas history and lore. I was read to by teachers who favored Little House on the Prairie and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. I became a fiction writer, and academic, and in both capacities spent years building a collection of books by Kansans and/or about Kansas in order to teach courses at the University of Kansas (KU) and then at Washburn University of Topeka. For over forty years I studied and taught Kansas literature, Kansas folklore (co-teaching with Jennie Chinn of the Kansas Historical Society), Kansas film, and special topics courses, including Mapping Kansas Literature and The Wonderful World of Oz. The fiction-writer part of me has most often set work in Kansas, contemporary and historical. In fact, while studying with writer Edgar Wolfe at KU, I attempted a novel of pioneering set in central Kansas. Wolfe finally said to me, “You haven’t studied many of our Kansas writers, have you?” I confessed that I had not, and he gave me a reading list. I did not continue with that project, daunted as I was by my lack of knowledge. The books on that reading list, though, became the seeds of a future library and of future novels.

During that period, roughly the decade of the 1970s, I researched all things Kansas in order to create, for three years running, A Calendar of Kansas History (1978, 1979, and 1980). I traveled the state. I visited many libraries and archives. I met Gene DeGruson, who was diligently building the Kansas Collection at Axe Library at Pittsburg State University (PSU). There, I researched writers Marcet and Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, Edythe Squier Draper, Nora B. Cunningham, William Inge, and other southeast Kansas writers. I became familiar, too, with the Kansas Collection at the Spencer Research Library at KU, the carefully curated local history and literature collections of various Kansas public
Cover of Margaret H. Sanger’s What Every Girl Should Know published in 1919. Courtesy of the Thomas Fox Averill Kansas Studies Collection, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.
libraries (Salina, Larned, and Topeka, to name a few), the Kansas Heritage Center at Dodge City, and, of course, the Kansas State Historical Society Research Center.

During part of that time I was an adjunct teacher at KU and wrote a correspondence course in Kansas literature for what was then called continuing education. I attended a Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature Conference, one of my first as an academic, and at our initial social gathering I was asked what I taught. “Kansas literature,” I said. “Oh,” said one of the group, “and what do you have to teach in that class?” Feeling on the spot, I stumbled through my limited canon: William Inge, Langston Hughes, L. Frank Baum, William Stafford, Truman Capote. “Well,” the man said, “I suppose you have something, anyway.” I went home determined never to stumble again through the naming of all the fine Kansas writers who might be included in a literature course.

Gene DeGruson gave me a copy of *A Centennial Bibliography of Kansas Literature*, created in 1961 by Ben Fuson, then of Kansas Wesleyan University, and also the supplement, *Kansas Literature of the 1960s*, printed in 1971. These became my guides as I tried to locate as many Kansas books as possible. I attended library sales and studied the shelves at flea markets, antique shops, and used bookstores. I kept up with what my contemporaries were publishing. By the early 2000s I had around 2,500 books crammed into my Washburn University office. Two things precipitated the move from personal library to the Thomas Fox Averill Kansas Studies Collection (TFAKSC). The first was a request to box all my books and put them in storage for a summer while Washburn’s physical plant relaid the flooring in my office. Afterward I faced the unpacking of my library, and as I began, I realized how many books sat on my shelves that I would never read again, never need for my own research, never lend to students or colleagues. Around the same time, my mother died, and my siblings and I had to sort through her accumulations. I thought about how, years from then, my own children might have the daunting task of dealing with my library, wondering what had value, sentimental or monetary. I wanted to save them the trouble and grief.

Actually, none of the books and other materials I’d collected over the years had great monetary value. Some were rare and/or unique, but their value came from being together as a collection, as companions that might whisper across the shelves to each other. They had a shared history. They had influenced one other. Their authors had been or were friends and acquaintances—many were my own friends and colleagues. The books belonged together. I approached Alan Bearman, dean of university libraries at Washburn University, who was immediately interested. He wrote, “I was genuinely enthused by the opportunity for Washburn’s Mabee Library to host the Kansas Literature Collection. I saw the opportunity to honor Averill, preserve materials too often overlooked, and to create a collection Washburn students and others could use in their research and scholarship.”

Thus, by 2010, my 2,500-plus books began their migration to custom wood bookcases with glass doors on the lower level of the Mabee Library. I was reluctant to give my name to the collection, but since the materials did in fact reflect my interests, tastes, and habits—of reading, research, teaching, and gathering—I was convinced to make it eponymous. If for years I’d been one of the pack rats of Kansas, a magpie who indiscriminately collected, I began to see the “method in my madness” and the potential for building areas of study and expanding my collection tendencies. Both of these impulses—building and expanding—will become clear as I describe the collection below.

At the time of the materials donation, I also created the Thomas Fox Averill Kansas Studies Collection Endowment Fund, partnering with Lisa
Heitz and her husband, Mark, who have been generous contributors to the endowment at the Washburn University Foundation. Lisa is the author of *Haunted Kansas* (University Press of Kansas, 1997) and has conducted statewide, exhaustive research into what her subtitle calls *Ghost Stories and Other Eerie Tales*. Lisa wrote, “After hearing about Tom Averill’s vision and all of the manuscripts he had collected and donated to Washburn, I said we would really like to be involved in supporting an important resource for all Kansans and all scholars of U.S. literature and history.” Eventually, all her research will become part of the collection. Now in its tenth year, the TFAKSC has doubled its holdings to over five thousand cataloged items and continues to expand the range of materials being collected. Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist Martha Imparato has worked tirelessly and enthusiastically to see that the collection is cataloged, maintained, and expanded. She has also helped researchers—students, teachers and scholars—in their use of the materials.

**Defining the Collection**

The TFAKSC has the overarching purpose of collecting a broad range, historical as well as contemporary, of writing by Kansans, or about Kansas, as well as documenting the artistic activities that define and express Kansas as a place. The TFAKSC hopes to illuminate the rich and varied history of Kansas literature and its relation to the larger literary, political, and natural worlds, helping to show the wide web of connections between writers of literature and scholars of history, geography, culture, politics, environment, and folklore, with attention as well to publishers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, and practitioners of the crafts. The collection offers researchers, particularly students, primary and secondary Kansas documents that will help them understand how the literary and other arts have reflected and created historical Kansas and how current writers and artists will shape the future of the state.

In order to create this literary portrait of the state, the TFAKSC collects books, manuscripts, documents, and even personal libraries that show the relationship Kansans have had to books and how these books reveal the lives of Kansans.

**Current Holdings**

Books by Kansans and about Kansas make up the bulk of the collection. The canonical Kansas writers are well represented: William Allen White, Margaret Hill McCarter, Langston Hughes, Gordon Parks, Paul I. Wellman, John Ise, Julia Ferguson Siebel, Kenneth S. Davis, May Williams Ward, and Edgar Watson Howe, to name just a few. Charles Sheldon, a Congregational minister in Topeka, wrote one of the best-selling books ever, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* Because he did not copyright the novel, many editions have been printed over the years, and we try to show the book’s reach by collecting as many of those editions as possible. Topekan Rex Stout, who created detective Nero Wolfe, is an early mystery writer of importance to that genre, and we have as much of Stout’s oeuvre as possible; in addition, through the generosity of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, we have hundreds of translations of Stout’s work (in Japanese, Spanish, Italian, and Russian, to name a few) that demonstrate the tremendous popularity and reach of this great mystery writer.

We are also interested in non-Kansans who have written important work about the state or used Kansas to conjure an image. Most famous of those is L. Frank Baum, creator of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), along with sixteen other Oz titles. We are attempting to collect not only Baum’s writings but also the innumerable scholarly studies, novels, comic books, posters,

Probably the book of greatest monetary value in the TFAKSC is by another non-Kansan, Truman Capote. This volume of *In Cold Blood* was a 2012 gift of Topekan Lynn Wilkerson, who, while auditing my course in Kansas literature, toured the collection. “I have a signed copy of Capote’s *In Cold Blood* for you,” she said. When she brought the book to class, she apologized, “There are some other signatures here, too.” She had thought about whiting out those signatures, but it’s a good thing she didn’t. This seventh printing of Capote’s masterpiece was signed and also inscribed by the author to Maxine Manchester, who worked at the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) from 1959 to 1967, and the other signatures are from Logan Sanford, KBI director; Roy E. Dyer, KBI assistant director, who retired in 1961; and investigators Alvin Dewey, Roy Church, Harold Nye, and Clarence Duntz, all of them mentioned in Capote’s nonfiction novel.Courtesy of the Thomas Fox Averill Kansas Studies Collection, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.
Lawrence, Kansas, who helped us research the book, the first printing of *In Cold Blood* was in January 1966 but had a 1965 copyright because of its earlier appearance as a series of articles published in the *New Yorker* that year. Patrick researched and confirmed that Maxine Manchester of Topeka was indeed a KBI employee, and Roy E. Dyer signed the book because of his longtime employment with the KBI—he retired two years after the Clutter murder. Maxine Manchester, then, was the first owner of the book. Another owner was Zula Bennington Greene, also known as “Peggy of the Flint Hills,” longtime daily columnist for the *Topeka Capital-Journal* (the books she wrote are also in the TFAKSC). Peggy died in 1988, and her estate sale included the book, which was purchased by Wilkerson. Even after learning the value of the book, a one-of-a-kind find because of the signatures, Wilkerson decided to give it to the collection. “But you’ll have to pay me what I paid for it,” she said. “How much is that?” I asked. “A dollar,” she said. I still owe her that dollar, and I owe her what I think of as my *Antiques Roadshow* moment.

With the recent trend toward self-publication, collecting contemporary Kansas literature has become a challenging task. Kansans have always self-published, of course, and the collection contains some gems such as an 1898 signed copy of *The Ojibue Conquest: An Indian Episode, with Other Waifs of Leisure Hours* by J. T. Clark, who happened to live in the Potwin neighborhood of Topeka, Kansas, and in the same house where Topeka poet Ed Skoog grew up. Other early self-published books were often printed by Topeka’s Crane & Co., and the collection now has forty-four of those volumes and is adding titles whenever possible. Recently, Kansans have increasingly taken advantage of CreateSpace (nearly twenty volumes), PublishAmerica, and Amazon, among others, to create Kansas literature. The TFAKSC may be somewhat unique in welcoming such volumes, but they represent a part of contemporary Kansas writing.

Kansas is home to the Little Blue Books, that “University in Print” first published in 1919 by Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, who had come to Kansas to work on *The Appeal to Reason*, the largest-circulation socialist newspaper in the world, in the early part of the twentieth century. Emanuel Julius married Marcet Haldeman; they hyphenated their names and started what some call the first mass-market paperback book business, reasoning that anyone and everyone should be able to build a library consisting of classic literature and the political and social theories of the time. The Little Blue Books grew to over 2,000 titles and sold 500 million books, reprinting standard, out-of-copyright literary works by Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Edgar Allen Poe and Oscar Wilde, among others, and also introducing Will Durant (with what would become *The Story of Philosophy*), Margaret Sanger (on birth control), lawyer Clarence Darrow, and free thinkers such as Robert Ingersoll. The range of subjects was remarkable: how-to instructions, humor, science, grammar, and sexuality along with short stories, novels, plays, and poetry.

Some of the writers who worked for Haldeman-Julius were Kansans, including Nelson Antrim Crawford, John Gunn, and Vance Randolph. The Haldeman-Juliuses, too, wrote novels and short stories that were reprinted as Little and then Big Blue Books (a later iteration of their publishing venture). Since I taught these books in my Kansas literature courses, I began collecting Little and Big Blue Books. I also used my capacity as fellow of the Washburn University Center for Kansas Studies to reprint titles by the Haldeman-Juliuses (just as they had done with books no longer copyrighted) in one large volume, *Dust and Short Works*. The TFAKSC has increased my original holdings to over one thousand titles. Jake Gibbs,
who collected, researched, and created a complete bibliography of Little Blue Books, donated more than three hundred titles to the TFAKSC in the summer of 2019. Unfortunately, Gibbs died in early March of 2020, marking a great loss to Blue Book scholarship and the sharing of duplicates.

In addition to books, the collection includes photography, films, art, and fine printing, not only of special-edition books but also of posters and broadsides. In the spring of 2018, Washburn student Jason Hanna, a double major in art and English, created an exhibit of these kinds of materials for the Mulvane Art Museum on the Washburn campus. Titled *Illuminated Authorship*, the exhibit delineates the relationship between art and the printed word. Jason wrote, “The artwork in this exhibition shows the interplay of authorship and illumination: the drawing inspired by landscape or poem, the art illustrating the poem, the printer seeking to enhance text with font, paper, and pictorial elements. Art helps us see more than text; text helps us see the story in the art.” Hanna created a website that represents these kinds of holdings in the TFAKSC (http://thejasonhanna.com/illuminated-authorship/).

The TFAKSC also has a particular interest in small-press publications and literary magazines. The earliest work of many Kansas writers first appeared in such outlets, whether the *Kansas Magazine* (1933–1968) or its successor, *Kansas Quarterly* (1968–1993), published at Kansas State University (KSU). Other literary magazines were, and some still are, edited and produced by the English departments of Kansas universities and colleges, among them *Cottonwood* (KU), *Quivira and Flint Hills Review* (Emporia State University [ESU]), *Ark River Review and Mikrokosmos* (Wichita State University [WSU]), *Midwest Quarterly and Cow Creek Review* (PSU), *Inscape* (Washburn University), and *New Letters* (University of Missouri–Kansas City). Many of these institutions have also housed or been affiliated with small presses such as Little Balkans Review Press, Woodley Press, BkMk Press, Cottonwood Press, and others dedicated to advancing the work of regional writers. Independent literary magazines in the state have included *The Harp, Little Balkans Review, Coal City Review and Coal City Press, Naked Man,* and *Tellus.* Stephan Bunch of Lawrence, *Tellus* editor, has donated not only past issues but also correspondence between him and many of the writers who appear in the magazine. Other literary magazine collections include those from all over the country that published specific Kansas writers, with significant holdings that feature the work of former Kansas Poet Laureate Denise Low, Yale Younger Poets winner James Tate, Wichita poet Irma Wassall, and me, Thomas Fox Averill, as collection founder. These gatherings of serials will help researchers and writers who might want to trace the development of these writers, including their communities and editors.

As well as literary magazines, the collection holds the literary archives—including manuscripts, correspondence, and more—of Wichita poet Irma Wassall, novelist James Mechem, and, again, me. Other writers have donated correspondence, either original documents or photocopies (the copies as valuable as the originals to a collection that would rather have breadth of material than exclusive possession).

Since the founding of the TFAKSC, some special opportunities have expanded its holdings and broadened its focus. The first was the donation of the library of James R. Mead by his grandson, Dr. Schuyler Jones. Mead was an early trader with Native Americans in territorial Kansas. He went on to become a founder of Wichita, a developer, a Kansas congressman, and a judge. His papers are housed at WSU, but the university did not accept his library of over four hundred books. We took the volumes, most of them copyrighted between 1839 and
1907, because they are an important window to what an educated nineteenth-century Kansas family might have collected and read, including children’s books, ethnographies, encyclopedic volumes, novels, poetry, and textbooks. The library also includes Mead’s memoir, published posthumously, Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859–1875, and A Stranger Abroad: A Memoir, by Schuyler Jones, CBE, who is said by some to have been the model for Indiana Jones. He wrote, “Gradually I learned that there was a widespread belief among Oxford students that I was the ‘original Indiana Jones’, which caused me to wonder if that was why attendance at my lectures had recently risen from about 100 to 300” (p. 292).

Topeka was home to the renowned Menninger Clinic (later Foundation), and the TFAKSC is collecting the work of the Menninger family (mother Flo and Drs. Karl, Will, and Edwin) as well as the literary and scholarly output of many brilliant minds that have been associated with Menninger. This subcollection of over one hundred books includes works by the extended psychiatric/psychological community, including the children of Menninger employees. For example, psychologists Steve and Harriet Lerner came to Topeka to work at Menninger. Steve is also a filmmaker and songwriter, Harriet is the best-selling author of books about relationships (her first, The Dance of Anger, appeared in 1985), and their son Ben Lerner is a poet and novelist, with his recent The Topeka School (2019), a Pulitzer finalist, very much about Topeka and the Menninger community. Menninger also had a regular periodical, the Bulletin; newsletters; programming distributed through videos and tapes; and other special publications. We have tried to make all of those a part of the TFAKSC. We have also accepted another library from Dr. Roy Menninger, who collected books and periodicals by and about Samuel Johnson and James Boswell. Although these are not Kansas materials, they reflect the interests of a prominent Kansas family and are thus worth preserving as part of the Kansas literary legacy.

Finally, the TFAKSC has a wide variety of ephemera collected by me, the Kansas pack rat, or donated by others. This includes an effort to collect community cookbooks, those plastic-spiral-bound recipe gatherings from groups such as churches, schools, women’s clubs, and other organizations. They open a window to the culinary practices of the state, and the collection has nearly one hundred cookbooks dated from 1950 to 2013. Other ephemera, too numerous to list, include souvenir plates, watering cans from the Menninger horticultural therapy program, pins, buttons, coins, bumper stickers, programs, maps, and banners, all reflecting the Kansas of the time and place they were created.

The TFAKSC and Defining Kansas Literary History

Ben Fuson, with his Centennial Bibliography and the supplement ten years later, created the best record of the literary output of Kansans and books about Kansas over the first one hundred years. Centennials, as it turns out, act as an impetus for research and writing about place. Books set in Kansas, or examining Kansas, mushroomed during the 1960s and after, giving the state such remarkable works as A West Wind Rises, by Bruce Cutler, a long narrative poem about the Marais des Cygnes massacre of 1859. Another anniversary, the bicentennial, in 1976 saw the publication of The Kansas Art Reader, edited by Jonathan Wesley Bell, which assessed and stimulated Kansas contributions to art, literature, music, folklore, folk arts, and photography.

University creative writing programs grew rapidly in the 1980s and brought writers to Kansas as faculty: Bruce Cutler, Tony Sobin, and James Lee Burke (WSU); Keith Denniston (ESU); James Gunn, Edgar Wolfe, and Victor Contoski (KU); and Elizabeth Dodd and Jonathan Holden (KSU). These programs nurtured such Kansas writers as Robert Day, Paul Lim, Denise Low, and Stephen Bunch, to name a very few.
These writing programs held regular conferences, workshops, meetings, and readings, and each had a literary magazine to showcase local writing and cultivate the skills of local editors. The TFAKSC has tried to document this explosion of literary activity.

Kansas writers have also been part of national literary trends, such as the beat movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the TFAKSC pays attention to the importance of writers such as Charles Plymell and Michael McClure as well as the later appearance in Kansas of William S. Burroughs. Along the same lines, Kansans contributed to broader social and political movements. The Menninger family pioneered mental health reform. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Gordon Parks, Eva Jessye, Franklin Marshall Davis, and Kevin Young created important work exploring race. The environment has spurred writers historical, such as Kenneth S. Porter, and contemporary, such as Elizabeth Dodd. The peace movement of the 1960s looked to poet William Stafford, who once wrote, “Every war has two losers,” and “At least on the battlefield, the flies don’t care who won.”

Journalists have always been part of our literary heritage as well, from William Allen White and Edgar Watson Howe to Rolla Clymer and Zula Bennington Greene (“Peggy of the Flint Hills”). Arthur Capper, with his Capper Publications, especially Capper’s Weekly, showcased Kansas and rural America.

The TFAKSC also includes Kansans who are part of expanding genres, whether the graphic novels of Ande Parks; the science fiction writing of Lee Killough and James Gunn; or the mystery and detective writing of Rex Stout, Nancy Pickard, James Lee Burke, and Sara Paretsky. Books for children and young adults are important, too, from L. Frank Baum and Laura Ingalls Wilder to contemporary writers such as Lois Ruby and Angela Cervantes. Topeka West High School librarian Mike Printz was a champion of young adult literature, and the American Library Association gives an annual prize in his name.

The TFAKSC is dedicated to helping to define and illuminate the literary history of the Sunflower State, even acting as an archive where possible. Recently it became the archival depository for Topeka Magazine of Sunflower Publications. This is in addition to the Irma Wassall collection, the James Mechem papers, and my own literary archives. The TFAKSC is also the digital repository of a set of letters written between 1923 and 1941 by Karl Menninger to Lilian Stone Johnson. Lilian graduated from Washburn University in 1915 with a degree in English, was active in theater,
was a lifelong writer, and knew both Karl and Grace Menninger from childhood on. She and her husband, Beryl Johnson, also a 1915 Washburn alumnus, helped to finance the first Menninger Clinic in 1925, and the two couples traveled together. Lilian and Karl had their most intense relationship, the subject of many of his letters to her, during the writing of his first book, *The Human Mind*. On the flyleaf of the copy he gave her, he wrote, “For one with whom this book was conceived and who helped with the birth and nurtured its childhood.” The letters will soon be available to scholars and researchers.

**Programming and Projects**

Since its inception, the TFAKSC has engaged the public with lectures and readings by Kansas writers and scholars. Beginning in 2016, the collection made possible the annual Hefner Heitz Kansas Book Award, a $1,000 prize for the best book published in the prior three years in poetry, then fiction, then literary nonfiction. The five winners so far have been Amy Fleury, poetry 2016, for *Sympathetic Magic*; Andrew Milan Milward, fiction 2017, for *I Was a Revolutionary*; Louise Krug, literary nonfiction 2018, for *Tilted*; Patricia Traxler, poetry 2019, for *Naming the Fires*; and Ben Lerner, fiction 2020, for *The Topeka School*. Each of these writers has visited Washburn University to accept the award, read from his or her work, and answer questions. When Patricia Traxler won this honor, she donated her award money back to Washburn University as the first Judith Jacobson Traxler Award for Excellence in Writing, a scholarship for a nontraditional female creative writer. Traxler has committed to providing the scholarship for at least ten years, thus supporting future Kansas writers. Of the book award, Dean Alan Bearman wrote, “This initiative has exceeded all expectations, and also done much to enthuse the Friends of Mabee Library who now also regularly support the Hefner Heitz Kansas Book Award.”

Where important, the TFAKSC will also consider acting as a publisher. The first venture presented itself when Topekan Jodi Smith, related to Leroy Dick, who investigated the murders committed by the Bloody Benders of southeast Kansas, approached me (it turned out we both live in the Potwin neighborhood of Topeka) with the family copy of the manuscript, which had never been published in book form. In 2018 I edited the manuscript and wrote a preface to *The Bender Hills Mystery: The Story behind the Infamous Murders from 1870s Kansas* by Leroy F. Dick, as told to Jean McEwan.

Recently, to promote use of the collection, we have begun to create research stipends for students, an award of $500 per semester for the selected applicant who will use the primary resources of the TFAKSC for a class paper, a senior thesis, or other scholarly/creative work that fulfills a university requirement.

In a similar vein, Washburn faculty have used the TFAKSC as the “text” for two courses. The Adventurer’s Library, taught by History Professor/ Honors Director Dr. Kerry Wynn, used the James R. Mead collection. Each student read all of, or at least excerpts from, Mead’s *Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859–1875*. They also read about the history of books and how to write “microhistory.” Then the class was turned loose on the Mead library, which is not only a family library but, as Wynn put it, “a snapshot of the intellectual world of an upper-class Wichita family in the 1800s.” Each student was tasked with finding a research focus. One student wondered how the library might have affected and influenced Mead’s grandson Dr. Schuyler Jones, who became an anthropologist and was for years the director of the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford. Might Jones have read the copy of *Gulliver’s Travels* or the various ethnographies of Indigenous nations that Mead collected in order to better understand the Native Americans he traded with during his days in Kansas Territory? Another student took a
close look at the books most likely read by the children and women in the Mead household, speculating about their influence on defining femininity during that period. These and other papers were presented in two sessions of the Kansas Association of Historians conference.

Wynn joined me in using the TFAKSC as text for a course called Digital Storytelling. We started by giving students an overview of Kansas history, literature, and culture and introducing the Kansas Studies Collection. Wynn began teaching the skills of digital humanities, and I helped the students group together and select topics that could be researched using the resources available in the TFAKSC. The topics included murders, trails, paleontology, art, and images/stereotypes, and each was expressed on a web page designed by students. Some of these were also presented at the Kansas Association of Historians conference.

Of these courses, Special Collections Librarian Martha Imparato wrote, “Several classes have used all or parts of the collection as their textbook and list of resources. It’s gratifying to work with students and faculty and see what they are interested in. I think it’s very helpful to have such a large collection all in one place, giving researchers a wide range of works about Kansas and works that Kansans have created over the life of the state.”

Liaisons

The TFAKSC is not in competition for materials and resources with any other entity in Kansas. In fact, we have tried to create partnerships and have shared resources with other institutions. Special Collections Librarian Steve Cox, of PSU, has been a partner in the mutual sharing of duplicates, PSU being particularly generous with Little Blue Books. The Kansas State Library, which houses the Kansas Center for the Book and each year administers the Kansas Notable Books program, shares information and occasional duplicates of the more than one hundred books submitted for that notable designation each year. The Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library has shared duplicate copies as well, those in their old Kansas Center for the Book holdings and extras of books donated to their friends organization. Since libraries and collections thrive on access, these partnerships help enhance research and writing, extending the reach of all institutions interested in preserving the Kansas legacy.

Future

The TFAKSC intends to continue the current programming, especially encouraging the
involvement of students, scholars, and community researchers. Beyond that, our desire to collect “all things literary” allows us flexibility in gathering holdings and in adopting new areas of collection. We invite writers, publishers, editors, bookstore owners, and all literary Kansas collectors to join us in creating an archive that reflects these interests and occupations within the state and among those with Kansas ties and interests.

The TFAKSC is currently in need of shelf space. My motto since the inception of the collection has been a misquotation of the “Build it and they will come” line from Shoeless Joe (film title Field of Dreams). Instead, why not “Build it—they’re here”? Mabee Library’s commitment to the collection, as well as the generous support of Lisa and Mark Heitz, have ensured that shelving and other necessities have been and will continue to be forthcoming. Beyond space, we need display areas and a well-controlled environment to house rare and vulnerable books, magazines, and manuscripts. Such opportunities will move us into the future.

In the ten years of its existence, the TFAKSC has evolved from my personal library, the holdings of a Kansasphile, into a resource for everyone. We invite any and all to investigate, to share materials and research, to contribute books and documents, and to make suggestions for holdings. We will continue to preserve the heritage and shape the future of literary Kansas.

Poet Patricia Traxler of Salina, Kansas, Hefner Heitz Kansas Book Award winner in poetry for Naming the Fires, donated her prize money toward a scholarship for a nontraditional female writer at Washburn University. She is pictured here with Jossie Hicks, the first recipient of the Judith Jacobson Traxler Award for Excellence in Writing, Courtesy of the Thomas Fox Averill Kansas Studies Collection, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.