



Creating Access to the Perra Bell Library



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INTRODUCTION

The Jack Hadley Black History Museum (JHBHM) is Thomasville's first black history museum. Now consisting of thousands of artifacts, the museum is also home to a research library, where the Perra Bell collection is stored and being cataloged. The Perra Bell collection, while of course generally helpful in examining African American history as a whole, is especially fascinating in that the extensive amount of her notes truly highlights Mrs. Bell's personal perspectives on the topic both in and outside of academia.

BACKGROUND

Mrs. Perra Bell was a scholar of African American history and culture and taught in those subjects at Towson State University for over twenty years. Before passing away, she bequeathed her collection of over 4,550 books, manuscripts, notes, and ephemera to the JHBHM. Our goal at the museum is to ensure that the collection is made available to the public for research and enjoyment in many future years. The process includes organizing and cataloging Mrs. Bell's books; analyzing her notes, manuscripts, and ephemera for historical significance; and digitizing and storing the collection in museum-quality containers.

METHODS

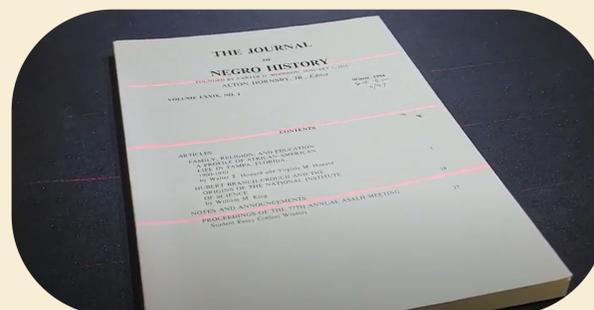
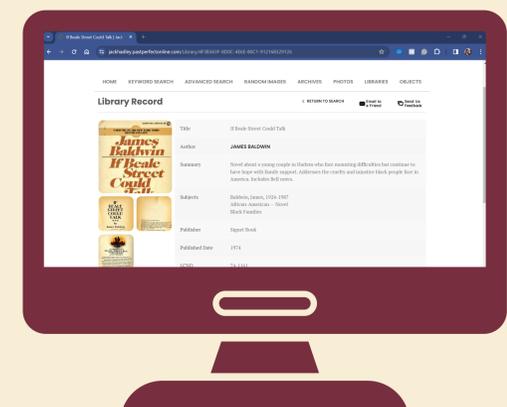
There are four main parts to the cataloging and preservation of the materials in the Perra Bell collection.

- **Organizing & becoming familiar with the material.** Artifacts are grouped based on content, then alphabetized and chronologically ordered. Each material is examined for its main purpose and more specifically, how Mrs. Bell interacted with it.
- **Digitizing the material.** Materials are digitized via photographic scans. Future researchers will be able to see materials online before deciding to visit/utilize the physical library.
- **Logging materials onto Past Perfect.** Materials are logged onto a Past Perfect database, which is how they will be accessible online. Recorded there are the title and photograph, as well as important information and/or summary of each artifact.
- **Repairing and packaging the material.** Some books are damaged with age; they are repaired so that they can more easily be used and preserved. Fragile materials are stored in archival bags.

RESULTS

From September until now, we have successfully digitized all of the books in the Perra Bell collection, as well as organized, labeled, and repaired them. We have also made significant progress with the journals, magazines, lecture notes, and other materials within the collection. Significant progress has been made towards the transition from the current library to an improved one at the Jack Hadley Yards in 2026. The Past Perfect database, where our digitized materials are being made available, is already accessible on an online website. However, a lot of work does remain. As we make progress with processing the Perra Bell collection, we continue to find more materials than we initially knew we had— hidden between pages of books or inside the folders of Mrs. Bell's lecture notes, for example.

Past Perfect Screenshot



References (& general resources to learn more about and stay engaged with the JHBHM and the Perra Bell Collection)

