Hello, and welcome to TeachStrong, the teaching and learning podcast for the Armstrong campus. I'm Nancy Remler, the Director for The Center of Teaching and Learning, and today, we're talking about a valuable information resource specific to Armstrong's Lane Library, the Florence Minis room. Here with me today are two of our librarians Caroline Hopkinson.

Hello.

And Kristi Smith.

Hi, everybody.

They're going to explain not only the purpose of the Minis room and how they're involved with its holdings, but also, a recent project. They've begun to collect Armstrong artifacts and archive them to preserve Armstrong's recent history post-consolidation. Welcome, ladies.

Thank you, Nancy. We're happy to be here.

Yes.

I was wondering if you could just take a few minutes to explain how the Minis room came to be, a little bit of its history.

Sure, the Minis room opened in 1978 based on a monetary gift. We have an endowment from the Minis family, Robert Minis and his sons, to honor his wife and their mother, Florence Powell Minis. It opened then and its mission is to collect book about Savannah, this area, the coastal empire and also, collect Savannah authors, so that's what we've been doing since the early '80s. In 2000, we added to the special collections our university archives as preparation for the history of the university that Janet Stone wrote; but it was published in 2008.

That history of the university is titled, "From the ... "?

"From the Mansion to the University: A History of Armstrong".

The mansion meaning the Armstrong mansion downtown?

Downtown.

Okay, so I hadn't realized there was a connection between this room and that book. Yeah.

Right, yeah. We started with this book collection and we added the university records because Janet needed that to write the book. She needed a place, so that expanded our special collections in 2000.
N Remler: All of those records are now here in the Minis room?

C Hopkinson: Yes, and we've had the reading room where the books are stored and then, we also have a storage room connected to it.

N Remler: That's great.

C Hopkinson: Yeah.

N Remler: Okay, so how do faculty access these resources?

C Hopkinson: Right, the physical access to the Minis room and the archives is by appointment, so for example, a faculty member emailed me yesterday and said, "Oh, I need to come in and do some research the next couple of days." She's coming at 10 this morning and students also. The physical access is by appointment. A lot of times with students who need books in the Minis room, it can be the same day and the reference librarians can help those students get those books. The special collection on Savannah history, it's nice to come in and browse, so the students and faculty might just want to arrange a time to come in and browse what's in this collection because from arts and architecture, history, and literature, it's all in one room, so that's a nice, nice thing.

N Remler: We do have a good number of students accessing these materials?

C Hopkinson: Yes, specially students who are doing local history and that can be anything from students in 1101 who have a local angle on a topic they're researching, to history students and graduates in history who are doing more in depth research about Savannah and this area.

N Remler: What are some of the more interesting artifacts in this part of the library?

C Hopkinson: We have first editions. Some of our rare books are first editions by Conrad Aiken and Flannery O'Connor.

N Remler: Oh, look at that.

C Hopkinson: Some of the local books, we have "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil". Since the collection has started, we purchased that and have signed copies.

K Smith: Signed by Lady Chablis and the author, John Berendt.

N Remler: Oh, it is? Oh, gosh.

C Hopkinson: Some of the books are local history books, but are not particularly rare or expensive in themselves. But it's important to preserve because they're part of our local history. Here's one that is not an expensive book in itself, this is "The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers" by Virginia Spencer Carr. In her
inscription, she acknowledges that when she was teaching here is when she first heard about Carson McCullers. She went on to write an important biography, so there's these books that are special just because of their Armstrong connection.

N Remler: This is inscription reads, "For Armstrong State College Library. The students, and faculty, and staff helped make this book possible for it was my teaching here when I just discovered Carson McCullers."

C Hopkinson: It was actually a student who asked a question about Carson McCullers and that was her start.

N Remler: That was all it took and Carson McCullers led such a fascinating life. I could see how that would start a snowball effect of interest in her. Great. Well, Kristi, once consolidation became an actuality, the Lane Library faculty put out a call for Armstrong photos and other artifacts. What was your mission for this project?

K Smith: Mostly to preserve Armstrong's history and obviously, especially now, during our consolidation with Georgia Southern University. We wanted to collect any sort of records that documented Armstrong's history, whether it be photographs, or books, or actual documents.

C Hopkinson: For example, we collected the faculty minutes, right? Up-to-date and that's something. Well, we have more time to collect those; but we did a focused collection of the things that we needed to fill in gaps.

N Remler: Okay, so faculty minutes, minutes of the faculty meetings is what you're talking about?

C Hopkinson: Right.

N Remler: But what other kinds of artifacts have you collected?

K Smith: We've collected Armstrong course schedules dating back to, I believe, '89 or early '90s.

C Hopkinson: A little treasure trove of a faculty member who had carefully collected all those course schedules ever since she made the connection.

N Remler: Wow.

K Smith: It turned into every semester.

C Hopkinson: What it documents is what courses are actually offered. We had to catalog and we carefully collect that, we haven't always collected course schedules because that's quite a bit of work to collect that as we go along, like this treasure trove
we found, and that really would tell a researcher what courses were actually offered, and when, and who offered them, and that's a nice little find.

K Smith: Yeah, it started out more as a newsletter, late '80s, early '90s and then, it evolved into a book as we offered more courses. We've received a lot of materials from the athletics department, so we have historical newspaper clippings from, I believe, the '60s, 1960s through the 1990s. People really took their time in that department to scour newspapers and compile scrapbooks. They donated all of that to us.

N Remler: Great.

K Smith: Yeah, items from the President's Office. President Bleicken, before she left donated many items, lots of old student activities calendars. We got in touch with ... C Hopkinson: Al Harris.

K Smith: Who is Dean of Student Affairs, I believe.

C Hopkinson: Student Activities.

K Smith: Student Activities. He came out of retirement to donate.

C Hopkinson: He donated his attic, he's got some more in his attic, he's gonna get up there.

N Remler: That's great.

K Smith: Lots of fun photos from previous years' faculty field trips. The photos were fun things to look at.

C Hopkinson: Right.

K Smith: Yes, lots of really interesting artifacts.

N Remler: What do you still need?

K Smith: We still need to fill in the gaps, we have, for example, Armstrong Publications. We have some missing issues, so when we were Armstrong Atlantic State University, it was Compass Magazine. It evolved into The Armstrong Magazine. However, we do have some gaps to fill in the Compass Magazine. We need more stuff from student organizations, so any campus student groups that might dissolve because of the consolidation because there's only one group allowed for the university. For example, I believe, it's The American Chemical Society. We've been in contact with them, so any founding documents for student organizations, photos, anything anybody feels is of value to Armstrong's history.
C Hopkinson: We’re certainly willing to consider it.

K Smith: Yes.

N Remler: Okay.

K Smith: Absolutely.

C Hopkinson: This is the time to send out the call as Kristi did. Obviously, people responded and there’s some things we target that we already know about; but a part of what the university archives does is preserve the things created by Armstrong. A lot of times, that’s faculty members and students and so, faculty members know a student who took tons of photographs when they were here. They are maybe looking for a place to put those, that would be great. If faculty members themselves are doing scholarship or community service projects, a lot of times, those are the things that become the more interesting and useful parts of the archives and special collections here.

N Remler: Okay. Well, you were collecting things as we speak.

K Smith: Yes.

N Remler: I expect that will continue for some time now, so tell me about the job of cataloging all of these items.

K Smith: That takes time. Since we’re the only institution that has these items, I cannot go out and find library of Congress records on these. While it would be nice to have help for those types of things, it’s really a one person job to create original cataloging records. What that is essentially is what the user sees on our library website when you’re searching for a book, so that is my job. I have to put in all the metadata, all of the information, so I haven’t started cataloging the artifacts that are rolling in because they’re still rolling in. I’ll put out another campus-wide APB once Fall Semester starts to get all the professors that have just come back to campus, for more materials.

C Hopkinson: This is another way that students and faculty have access to these materials. There’s physical access, coming in and browsing; but put Kristi’s put all of the books in the Minis room are in the catalog.

N Remler: Okay.

C Hopkinson: When she’s cataloging that, that means that when you search our local catalog, they’ll be able to find the thing in the special collections, both the Minis room and the archives, so that’s one place they can go to see what’s here is online. We also have digitized some of the major publications of Armstrong.

N Remler: Okay.
C Hopkinson: The Geechees, for example, are all digitized, available for you, so that's another kind of access.

K Smith: The Inkwells.

C Hopkinson: Kristi's department provides the description, so that there's good access to that material online.

N Remler: For those listeners relatively new to Armstrong, The Geechee was the yearbook that was published for many years and was suspended in the early 2000s. Is that right?

C Hopkinson: It was, it was published from '37 through 1995 and along with many other college yearbooks, it just became expensive to publish the physical, and that's why in some ways, with things like the faculty field trips, that are donated, those photographs that are donated make up for not having a yearbook, which was a key way to find photographs by year. The Inkwell has been published continuously since September 1935 and we've started digitizing that, too.

N Remler: Well, I was going to ask you if there's any chance these artifacts will be digitized, so some of them already are. Is that going to be an ongoing project?

K Smith: We would like to continue that. Yes, and actually the cool thing about our consolidation with Georgia Southern is their library, the Zach Henderson Library, uses, it's called, the digital commons, and that serves as Georgia Southern's institutional repository where they digitize all of Georgia Southern's documents, any historical or professors' publications, for example. My department is training on using the digital commons to put Armstrong artifacts essentially into it. It would be digitized. Students will have access, faculty, staff, to discover these documents and then, hopefully, the photographs and the student activities calendar. Initially, the focus will be on materials that are born digital, which means their just born as a website. It's easier that way. You don't have to have all the manpower to scan and upload and assign metadata to, which you still have to do with things born digital.

Metadata's just a fancy word for keyword, so that people can find what they need. You have to assign the keywords to it. Yes, that is our hope, to get everything digitized and we do have a priority list for more digital items that need to get digitized. I'm sorry, not digitized. They're already digitized. I have to put into the digital commons, as well as print materials. We have a priority list for those items, which need to be digitized and uploaded.

N Remler: Okay, great. Caroline, how long have you been at Armstrong?


N Remler: Okay.
C Hopkinson: I don't know what the math is.

K Smith: 28 years.

C Hopkinson: 28 years. Oh, my gosh.

N Remler: You have some really great Armstrong stories and I recently heard you conversing with Judge Ronald Ginsberg about some historical documents that you found from the time that he was an Armstrong student.

C Hopkinson: Right.

N Remler: Could you share that story about it?

C Hopkinson: Right, I got a million of them. Ron Ginsberg was a student here at Armstrong in the 1960s and actually he donated and he had kept the newspaper that was a special issue of The Inkwell about a project that he spearheaded to bring the Governor of Georgia to the Armstrong campus for the students to thank him for his effort in bringing Armstrong into a four-year university. I could just imagine what our administrators would be so happy if the students would bring the Governor here to campus now. You could imagine it of course, so that was a big event in Armstrong's history. We didn't have that much documentation of it, we didn't actually have that issue of The Inkwell. There's always missing issue, so that's why you need somebody to be vigilant and fill in those missing issues; but Ron Ginsberg actually donated two copies of the issue that he had just kept all these years because it was, of course, a big event. It was just a thrill to get a missing issue of The Inkwell.

K Smith: That's a good deal.

C Hopkinson: Mostly it has come from some of those to fill in those missing issues, but that really was through a faculty member that he knew, Janet Stone. I was really just thanking him for thinking of us and reminded him how important that was for our collection.

N Remler: We're blessed to have so many local alums who still have Armstrong in their hearts and are still invested in keeping the history of Armstrong alive. Most of us who are still here after a long time, still don't have the history prior to our arrival.

C Hopkinson: Right, right.

N Remler: Thank goodness for those alums and how active they are with the university, but I bet you have many other good Armstrong stories. Is there one of your favorites?
It’s every week. Recently, we had a visit as part of the alumni gatherings, an alum came back who is Orson Beecher’s daughter. Orson Beecher was a faculty member from World War II era through the early ’80s. He was a history professor and administrator and she came to attend the alumni event, but then, she also wanted to see what we had about her father. We had some files of his letters and an interview with him that she hadn’t seen. She just hadn't really seen a lot of his business correspondence and things like that, so it was really important for her and helped connect with her father. It was heartwarming, it was fun to talk to her. Again, like you say, I never met Dr. Beecher and he had some great character and so, it really filled in for me some of his story. I had a museum studies student from Georgia Southern use our archives there, adding a display about Armstrong's history to their display of Georgia Southern’s history.

Oh, how nice.

This will be in the Continuing Education Center up there and so, that was his student project. He's working on it this summer and so, he came to find materials and so, really the student and faculty alums, there's a lot, some, also, researchers who come from outside. Our university archives doesn't have a lot of rare material, but it very much documents the history of the university during this time period, time period of desegregation and so, that's mostly what we've gotten outside researchers. Some of our little manuscript collections, some student projects that they come and us and then, also that period of desegregation. Our archives documents that pretty well.

Well, Kristi, you're relatively new here at Armstrong. You've been here a year, right?

Correct, a year. August 1st.

Okay, so I see you as looking toward the future of Armstrong's campus, so how do you see Armstrong's story unfolding from here?

Well, I hope to mesh well with Georgia Southern for all of us, students, and everybody, just to continue to document Armstrong's history if people retire and clean out their offices. We're a great repository for any documents that they may have, but also, going forward, continuing to gather materials that, it's funny to call, a present-day material and archival material. But 10, 20 years from now, if a researcher or a current student needs to access anything in our archive, we would have it, so just really working closely with Georgia Southern's archives and special collections. Am I missing anything, Caroline?

I think that's it. Actually, in a digital environment and especially in an environment where there’s so much information produced, everybody is a publisher in a way. It’s important to have that awareness and the tools in order to capture that information and also, make it available through this description.
The metadata is really important and somebody who goes back and make sure that all the gaps are filled it, it's well-described and it's understood. It's also these technology tools, like the digital commons, that will make that less overwhelming than it seems to me right now; but I think one thing that will benefit us is we'll have more access to some of those tools that really only a big institution can afford.

N Remler: Well, I think that while it's important to embrace and preserve the history of Armstrong as an individual campus, we're actually making history also as we face consolidation. There are different ways to look at that. We could perceive our history as disappearing, but we could also say this is just the next step to becoming part of a larger picture. It's encouraging to know that there are students on the Statesboro campus who are already investigating the history of this campus and how it becomes part of the larger Georgia Southern history. I hope that that sense of collaboration continues and I hope that the faculty and students on the Statesboro campus will come down to Savannah and visit the Minis room and see all the wonderful resources we have here.

C Hopkinson: Learn from our experience because it was a wonderful experience for us.

N Remler: Learn from our experience. Yes, yes. One thing, before we finish up, there are also exhibits that you create from the resources in this room, correct? Can you talk a little more about those exhibits?

K Smith: Yes, I'm gonna let Caroline address that.

C Hopkinson: There are some ongoing online exhibits and again, some of the technology that we can jump onto when we get to Georgia Southern, there's a software that will create permanent online exhibits that are a nice way to share that information; but yes, physical exhibits in our case downstairs, at Georgia Southern, and this display case. We don't have a permanent museum kind of display, but they rotate around. Right now, in the library display case is actually a display done by Armstrong archeology students. They're displaying some of their artifacts, but it's also been used to display the myriad of different collections that come up. We recently acquired Dean Props' papers and we did a display on his life here. He started at Armstrong and went on to become Chancellor of the University System of Georgia, so that was a fun display to connect to start strong.

N Remler: That display, I'll add, is still online and if anyone is interested, you can go through Armstrong's website and click on "course guides".

C Hopkinson: You can also click on "special collections" and those are linked from the special collections page.

N Remler: I happened upon that page recently and browsed around it and it was really interesting. I have an affinity for the history of Dean Props because I used to have his office in Gamble Hall. While I was in his office, that was the year I won
the Props award and then, he signed my diploma when I graduated from college.

C Hopkinson: Wow. Oh, yeah.

N Remler: I feel like we have this little connection there.

C Hopkinson: That's a good story.

K Smith: Yeah, that's a good story.

N Remler: Those are the kinds of interesting exhibits that you can see online or here, in the library, and as I sit here in the Minis room, it strikes me as a mini museum. There is a photograph on the wall of Florence Minis and I'm looking at a larger photograph on display of the student body of Armstrong in front of the Armstrong Mansion, it looks like, that looks to be from the '40s.

C Hopkinson: That's '35-'36, so that's the whole group.

N Remler: That's all the students.

C Hopkinson: It was a two-year college and that's the first, the golden grads.

N Remler: Lots of really interesting things to see and read here, so I would encourage everyone. If you weren't aware of the Minis room, please come learn more about it and contact the librarians to make an appointment.

C Hopkinson: Yeah, contact us. We're happy to show it anytime, especially faculty when you're on the campus, when you're in the library and wondering about what's behind that door, stop by. We'll show you.

N Remler: Well, thank you for being with us here today. I've really enjoyed talking to you and learning a little bit more about the Florence Minis room. For those of you who are listening today, I hope you will join us for other episodes of the TeachStrong podcast. We plan to not only cover topics that have to do with the Armstrong campus and the resources that it provides, but also, we're going to talk about different important teaching and learning concepts that can help us become more innovative and more effective teachers. I hope that you will tune in to other episodes and until then, so long.