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Penn Libraries receive \$4.25 million gift for Special Collections Center

PHILADELPHIA, PA – The Penn Libraries have received \$4.25 million for the renovation of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library (RBML) and the creation of a Special Collections Center. The donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, is a member of the Libraries' Board of Overseers. This is the largest gift to the Libraries from a living donor.

“Because of this gift, we will have a multi-purpose space in our Rare Book & Manuscript Library that is equal to the scholarship that our special collections inspire,” said Penn President Amy Gutmann. “Students will now have a place where they can physically experience the past as part of their preparation for the future. We are thrilled and enormously grateful.”

The gift will support the first phase of a \$15 million expansion project whereby the collection, study, and curatorial facilities on the sixth floor of the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center will be transformed into a new Special Collections Center. The redesigned Center will play to the strengths of the rare book library's teaching and digitization program. The Center will encourage the use of special collections in both research and in the curriculum; a fully equipped and staffed conservation suite will ensure continued effective stewardship of Penn's rare book and manuscript collections. The new design will also include much-needed additional classrooms, improved reader spaces, and a media lab. Its new consultation areas will foster interaction between curators and scholars.

The Rare Book Library's existing spaces, including its Furness Shakespeare Library are to be remodeled and improved. And the Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image will have an entirely new home, one that enables humanities researchers to create—and experiment with—a wide range of digital content.

The centerpiece of the Special Collections Center will be Penn's more than 250,000 rare books, representing subjects as diverse as Aristotle, the history of chemistry, Shakespearean and Renaissance literature, the 18th Century, the Spanish Inquisition, comic books and cookbooks, and the Gotham Book Mart Collection. In addition to 800 medieval manuscripts, notable manuscript collections include those of Theodore Dreiser, Lewis Mumford, Marian Anderson, Alma Mahler Werfel, Howard Fast, and, most recently, Chaim Potok, as well as the



Lenkin Family Collection of Photography, which comprises nearly 4,000 historical photographs of the Holy Land taken between 1850 and 1947.

“This gift will energize fundraising efforts to reach our \$15 million goal for the Special Collections Center,” said Carton Rogers, Vice Provost and Director of Libraries. “It is a truly momentous gift for Penn and the Libraries.”

The first phase of construction of the Penn Libraries’ Special Collections Center will begin in late summer 2010.

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