



# PRESERVING OUR HISTORY TODAY

BY ASHLEY NIETFELD

A student employee adjusts an item before capturing the image on a high-quality camera. This adjustable-height camera can be calibrated to change the white balance, color and focus.

When students hurry across the university lawns to make it to their next class, don their purple and white for a football game or turn in a paper at 11:59 p.m. before collapsing into bed, most of them aren't thinking about how they're part of the university's history, an archive of how people lived, studied and worked. A quick perusal of the university's digital archives shows just how much university life has changed — and how much has stayed the same.

These digital archives are the work of the Richard L. D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections and the Butler Digitization Lab. Established in 2021 with help from the Butler Family Community Foundation of Manhattan, Kansas, the Butler Digitization Lab was built to make existing collections, including the university archives, available online where they can be accessed by anyone around the world.

The work is time intensive — a print piece can be scanned and saved relatively quickly using the lab's high-resolution cameras and software, but metadata, such as the date, description and copyright information, needs to be added to make it searchable to users based on content and keywords. Even determining what should be digitally archived takes time and an archivist's specialized training.

One of the priorities for the lab is to archive the university's history, including a vast photo collection, past issues of the "Royal Purple" yearbook and other university memorabilia. They've also partnered with the K-State Alumni Association to digitize all back issues of "K-Stater" magazine.

The Libraries is working to launch this digital archive on a new online platform that will make searching for and accessing the records easier and more user-friendly, especially as the collection continues to grow.

"The Butler Digitization Lab is essential to our mission of making special collections materials more widely available," said Cliff Hight, head of the Morse Department of Special Collections. "The Butler Family Community Foundation and the Friends of the K-State Libraries have supported important progress

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with these K-State materials, along with manuscript cookbooks and other collections. The lab also supports our work on current efforts to preserve and manage access to born-digital files."

When you think of archives, you might be picturing black-and-white photographs and yellowed letters. But they also include today's digital files — and the digital files from 40 years ago. Rapidly changing technology means old digital storage options quickly become outdated and hard to access. Anyone can comb through a pile of paperwork, but very few have the technology needed to access a floppy disk. The Butler Digitization Lab staff use digital



forensics technology, the kind used by law enforcement, to archive files from floppy disks and hard drives without corrupting them.

Another priority of the lab is managing and archiving records produced by the university, such as e-newsletters, websites and even

social media posts. Staff use web crawlers to comb the university's digital footprint, which is sprawling, ever-changing and ever-growing. The university is required by state law to preserve and make available these records, and the lab's work is a large part of that effort.

One significant change between university life in 1863 and today? Our modern technology allows us to produce records in significantly higher quantities. But without places like the Butler Digitization Lab, records would be as difficult to find and access as they were in the past.

**In 2021-2022, the Friends of the K-State Libraries focused their fundraising efforts on the Butler Digitization Lab. In total, the campaign brought in \$20,000, which was used to support student employee salaries.**

Access the digital archives at [lib.k-state.edu/research-find/digital-archives](http://lib.k-state.edu/research-find/digital-archives).



See the Butler Digitization Lab in action at [youtube.com/watch?v=HYMTXW-PJ2U](https://youtube.com/watch?v=HYMTXW-PJ2U).

