



Project Overview

Schaffer Library at Union College in Schenectady, NY celebrated its 125th anniversary as federal depository library in 2026. We engaged two student library workers to curate an exhibit of our rich depository collections.

The resulting physical display was unveiled on Union College's 2026 Alumni Weekend and a more extensive exhibit was published online.

This gave our students the opportunity to interact with our deep collection of government documents, encouraging experiential learning and new insights. We highlight some of their curatorial experiences here.

The Curatorial Team

Rebecca Berak

Cataloging Student Library Worker

Ethan Snowball

Resource Management Specialist - Monographs

Kim Mitchell

Collection Development and Government Documents Librarian

John Myers

Metadata and Catalog Librarian

Alli Smith

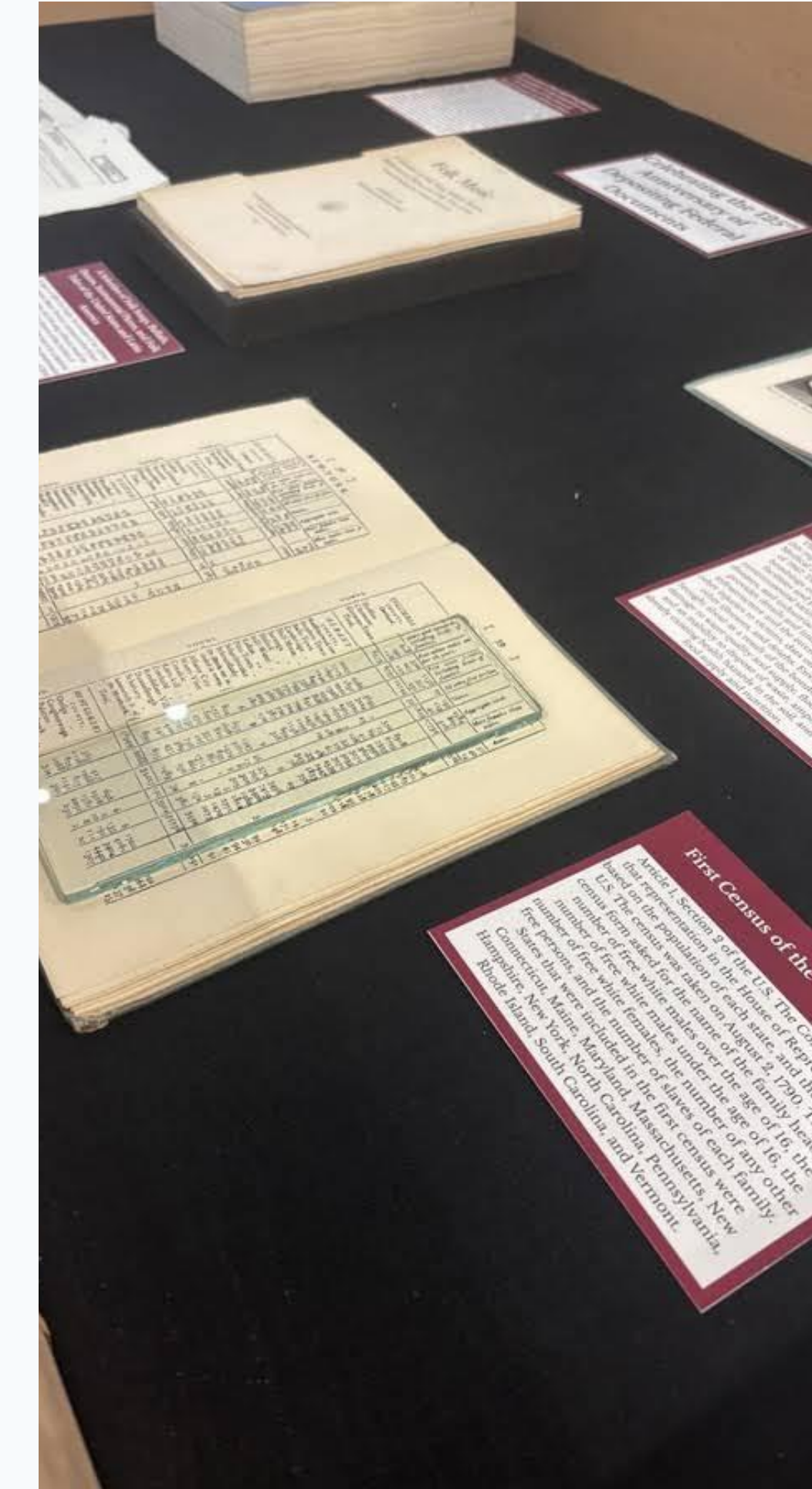
Digital Projects Student Library Worker

The Curation Process

- John compiled spreadsheets containing all the documents for each government department in our collection, highlighting points of interest.
- Rebecca, with supervision of Ethan, decided upon 10 items for display
- Items were selected for illustrative content, impactful titles, as well as for their ties to major historical events
- The dimensions of the case were only 52 × 32", so we selected our 5 best items
- Rebecca wrote up a short description for each item in the case
- Rebecca arranged the display case to make each object visually appealing

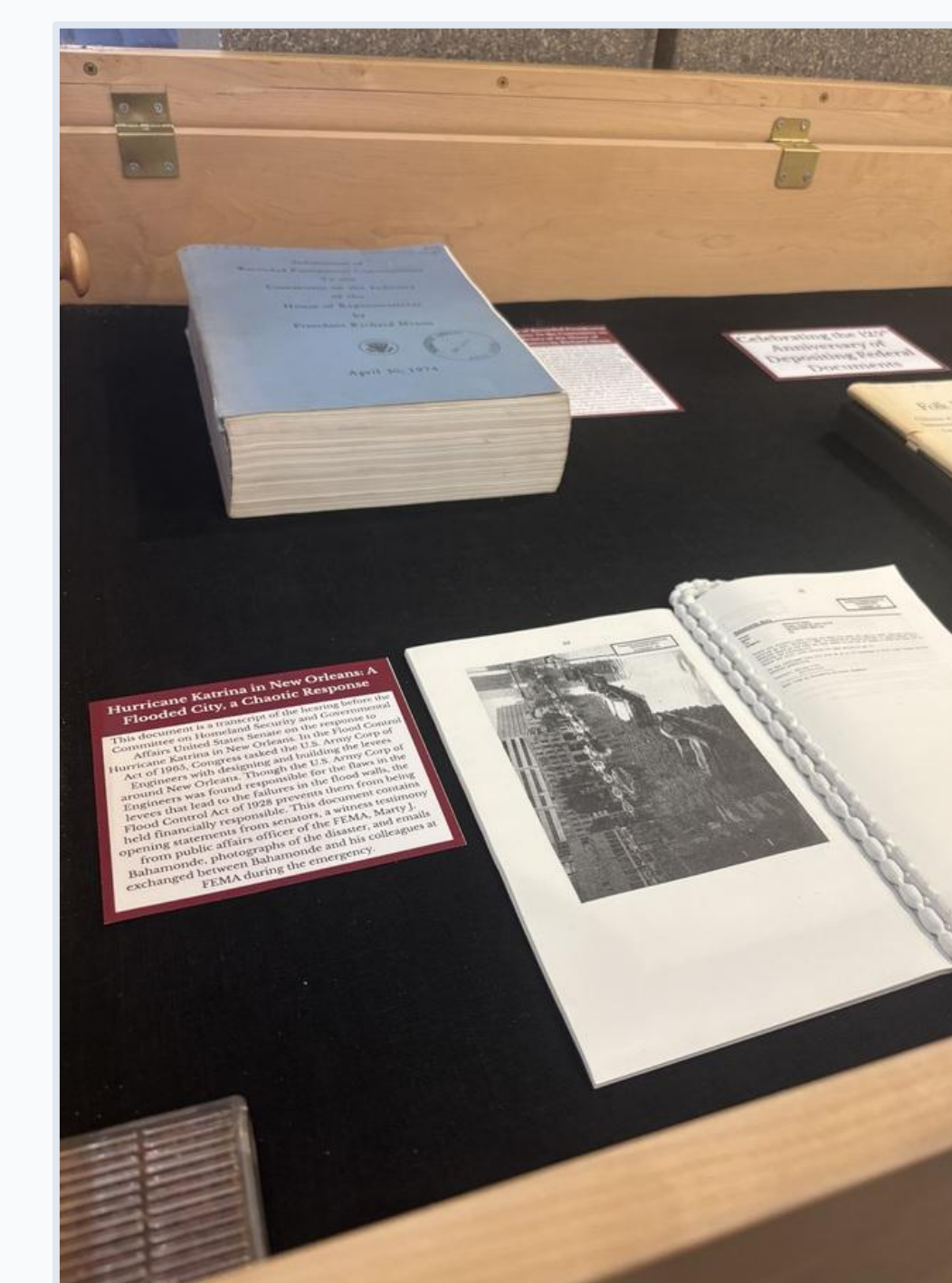
Rebecca's Curatorial Experiences

"In selecting documents for the display case, the First U.S. Census was the most obvious to include. The document is visually simple, making it conducive for a display case as it presents the five demographic questions in a simple chart organized by state and county. We chose to display the page on which Schenectady County was represented; the students of Union College come from a diverse range of backgrounds but Schenectady is one thing we all have in common. It was not only interesting to look at the outdated nature of the questions (such as 'number of slaves of each family') in addition to the simplicity of the questions relative to modern day."



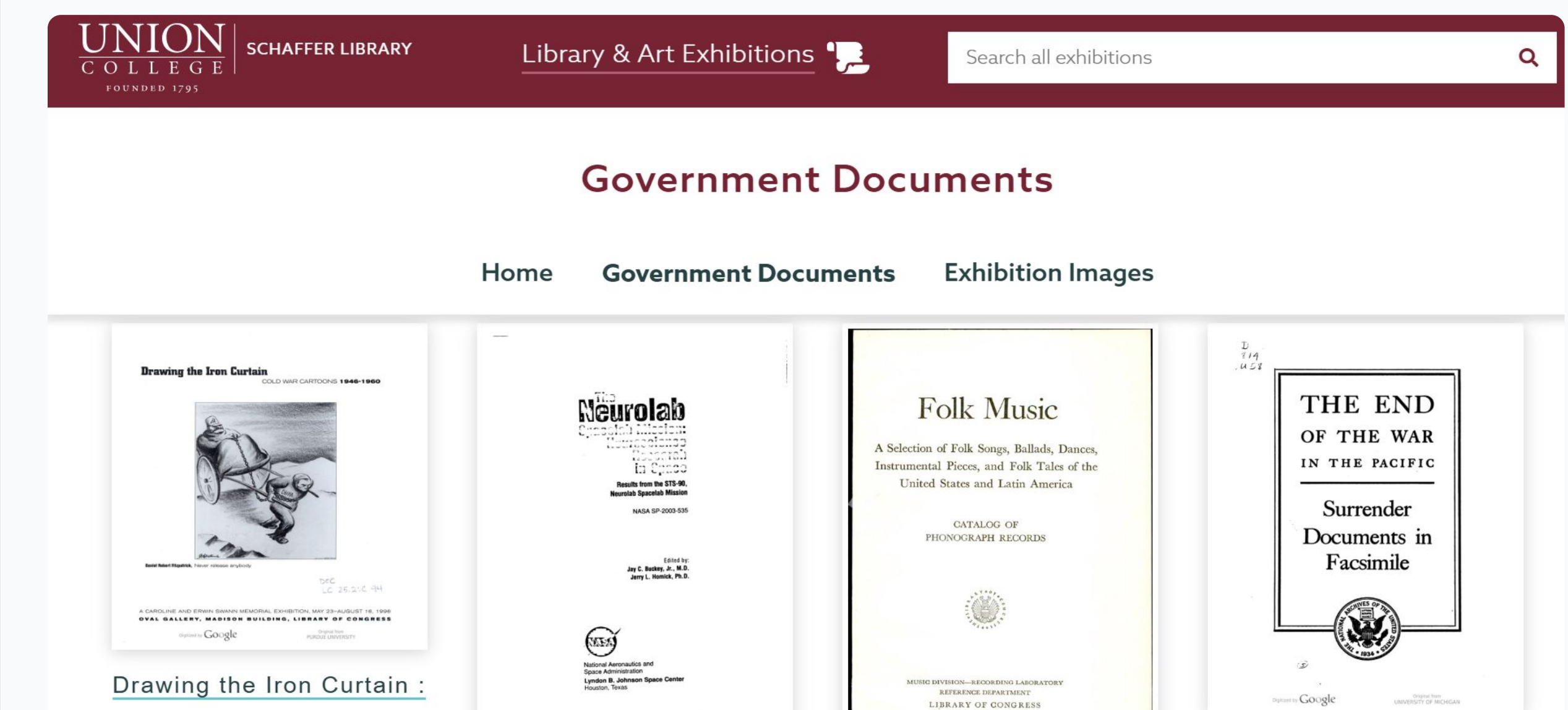
Display case: First U.S. Census

"As an environmental policy major, this U.S Senate hearing sparked thoughts about how the mistakes made in the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, have allowed the nation to learn how to better handle natural disasters. In the same vein, the time that has passed while those lessons were learned has allowed for greenhouse gases to accumulate in the atmosphere, global temperatures to rise, and consequently, if Hurricane Katrina were to happen today, the intensity of the storm would have been more devastating than it was two decades ago."



Display case: Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans : a flooded city, a chaotic response : hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, One Hundred Ninth Congress, first session, October 20, 2005 4.G 74/9:S.HRG.109-482

Omeka Digital Exhibition Platform



The online exhibit provides a comprehensive digital archive accessible globally, preserving the curated documents and their historical context with rich metadata.

Alli's Digital Exhibition Experiences

"This was a really cool project that allowed us to interact and learn more about, not only government documents, but also Union's history."

Key Takeaways

- **Collaboration:** Students working with library staff on selection and description bridged academic research with library metadata systems.
- **Accessibility:** Dual format (physical and digital via Omeka) maximized reach and preservation.
- **Experiential Learning:** Hands-on student archival work fosters deeper historical and research insight.
- **Outreach:** A physical government documents collection provides pathways to audiences including present and past students, while highlighting library support freedom of information and adding prestige to our library's rich history that is intertwined with the FDLP.

Visit Our Exhibition

Explore the online Omeka gallery!

<https://exhibits.schafferlibrarycollections.org/s/gov-doc/page/gov-docs>