



MILNER LIBRARY

2026 Annual Report



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Message from the Dean

As we celebrate Milner Library's 50th anniversary

during this 2026-2027 academic year, I find myself reflecting on both our history and our future. For five decades, Milner Library has supported learning, scholarship, and discovery at Illinois State University. While much has changed since the library opened its doors in 1976, our commitment to connecting people with information, ideas, and opportunities remains as strong as ever.

The accomplishments highlighted in this annual report demonstrate the many ways that mission came to life during the 2025-2026 academic year. From helping students save nearly \$10 million through our eTextbook Program, to supporting transformative undergraduate research with rare manuscripts, to preserving and sharing Illinois State's history through Special Collections and University Archives, Milner Library continues to create meaningful opportunities for learning and engagement. These pages also showcase the expertise and leadership of our faculty and staff, whose scholarship, innovation, and service extend the library's impact far beyond our campus.

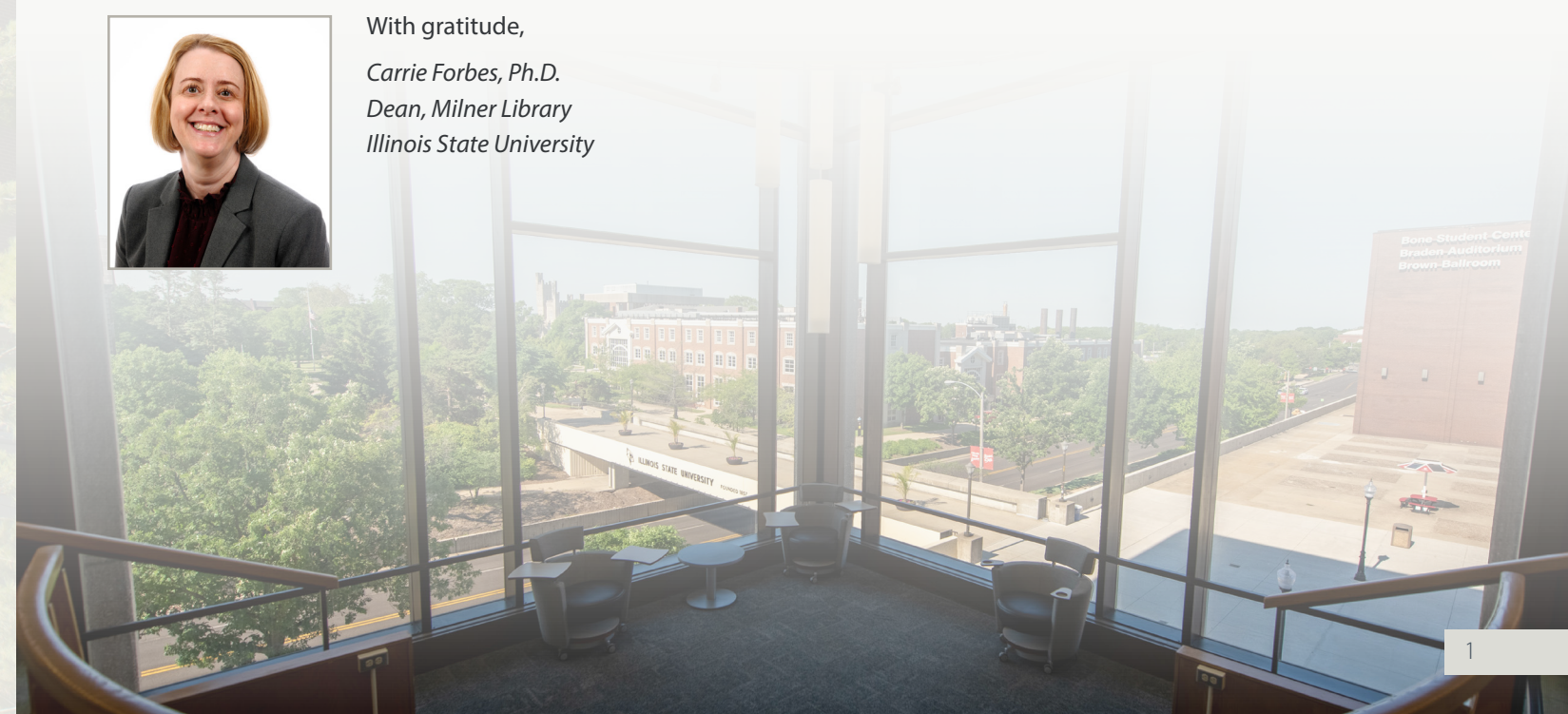
What connects these stories is a shared commitment to student success and lifelong learning. Whether we are helping students access affordable course materials, supporting faculty teaching and research, preserving historical collections, or creating new pathways to knowledge, we are building on a legacy of service while adapting to meet the evolving needs of our community.

As we mark this milestone anniversary, we are grateful for the many alumni, donors, and friends who have supported Milner Library over the past fifty years. Your generosity has helped shape the library we celebrate today and will ensure that future generations of Redbirds benefit from the resources, expertise, and opportunities that define the Milner experience.

I invite you to explore this annual report and celebrate the achievements made possible through our collective efforts. Together, we honor Milner Library's first fifty years while looking ahead to the possibilities of the next fifty.



With gratitude,
Carrie Forbes, Ph.D.
Dean, Milner Library
Illinois State University



Milner Library's eTextbook Program approaches milestones

Illinois State University students have saved a significant amount of money—**almost 10 million dollars**—thanks to Milner Library's eTextbook Program. Piloted in the spring semester of 2021, the program has continued and expanded to serve students across all Illinois State colleges. In celebration of its fifth anniversary, we offer some highlights from research conducted along the way.

Students

As part of the program, a group of Milner Library researchers conducted surveys and focus groups with ISU students. In *"Supporting an Inclusive and Equitable Classroom: Student Perspectives,"* Julie A. Murphy, Rachel E. Scott, Anne Shelley, Mallory Jallas, and Rachel Park report that students consider a variety of factors when deciding when and if to purchase assigned texts. For example, they look at how frequently the book appears on the syllabus, previous students' reported experiences, RateMyProfessor testimonies, free online availability of textbooks, textbook price, whether the textbook purchase can be delayed, if it will be useful for future classes or careers, and how difficult or important the course is. Shopping for a good deal is time-consuming and stressful; the eTextbook program takes one worry off students' plates. In response to a survey question about having access to the library's e-book, one participant noted, "Without the stress of running around to find a textbook at a reasonable price, I was able to dive into the course and semester right away with no hesitation. It has allowed me to prepare and do well in all tests and other assignments thus far."

Students reported overwhelming appreciation for the library-provided e-books because they are free, can be accessed from anywhere, are easy to use, allow keyword searches, can be saved and/or annotated, allow users to find related materials in the library databases, provide a smoother start to the class, and reduce anxiety and stress. More importantly, perhaps, are findings related to how access

to these free texts improved their learning and engagement. Free access to the e-books enabled participants to:

- Gain a better understanding of material or learning, complete assigned work,
- Study more effectively,
- Complete assigned work,
- Do better on assigned work and assessments,
- Read and use the book more,
- Follow along or keep on top of the class better,
- Feel more prepared, participate from "day one" (first day of class),
- Improve their organization,
- Increase their engagement with the course, and
- Enhance their work ethic.

Faculty

Like students, ISU faculty have responded quite positively to Milner Library's eTextbook program. Faculty shared their complex criteria and considerations for adopting texts via focus groups and surveys. In *"Exploring Faculty Perspectives on Text Selection and Textbook Affordability,"* Rachel E. Scott, Anne Shelley, Julie Murphy, Rachel Park, and Mallory Jallas considered the implications of these for library services. Specifically, we asked how faculty balance affordability, accessibility, copyright compliance, quality, and other factors when they select and assign texts; what they consider to be the benefits and challenges of using library-provided e-book(s) in undergraduate classes; how having access to

free e-books impacted students' learning experience; and what role might the library play in advancing textbook affordability.

Faculty particularly appreciated that e-textbooks reduced the financial burden on their students, noting that it was "truly a godsend," leveled the playing field, and better enabled them to "treat every student the same." Another faculty member stated, "It has made my teaching a lot easier—I am able to access the book from anywhere (if I'd like to brush up on the chapter reading), and I also know that all students have access to the reading." When asked how Milner Library could support faculty going forward, one professor immediately replied, "Keep this program forever! Can we please continue this?" Another shared, "Students who can't access these resources are at a serious disadvantage, and finances seem like one of the top reasons students leave our college [...] I see centrally accessible textbooks like this as contributing to that process as well—this seems like a wise use of our university funds/ tuition dollars."

Library

In *"Assessing the Value of Course-Assigned E-Books,"* Rachel E. Scott, Mallory Jallas, Julie A. Murphy, Rachel Park, and Anne Shelley investigated the financial value of licensing e-books assigned in courses by leveraging evaluative methods, including analysis of benefit-cost ratio, usage, quality (using Resources for College Libraries, RCL), and the persistence of assigned titles across semesters. We found that an investment of \$10,000-\$14,000 a semester yields a total potential student savings of around \$200,000 to \$260,000; assigned e-books are used at a rate of at least four times e-books that are not assigned; licensed, assigned e-books are about twice as likely to be designated as an RCL Outstanding Academic Text; and around 40% of titles are assigned more than once in a four-semester period. Assigned e-books are a wise investment of library funds across all of these measures.

The path forward

When we piloted this work in spring 2021, we didn't know if the eTextbook Program would be successful or sustainable. Semester after semester, we have received positive feedback and sourced funding to continue this work. We are grateful for the leadership of Dr. Carrie Forbes in supporting this program and her willingness to help tackle the issue of textbook affordability. We look forward to continuing to support student engagement and success by providing cost-free e-books.

Angela Bonnell elected chair of U.S. Government Publishing Office Depository Library Council

Angela Bonnell, associate professor and head of government information at Milner Library, was elected by her peers as chair of the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) Depository Library Council (DLC) for the 2025–26 term.

Bonnell began a three-year term on DLC in 2023 following her appointment by GPO Director Hugh Nathaniel Halpern. DLC serves as an advisory committee to the GPO director and the superintendent of documents on policy matters relating to the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and access to U.S. government information.

Bonnell is an active member and leader in the American Library Association's Government Documents Round Table and the Illinois State Library's Illinois Government Depository Council.

Milner Library is among the oldest federal depositories in the nation, dating back to 1858 when it was designated by Rep. Owen Lovejoy. In addition to Milner Library's extensive historic depository print collection, it offers no-fee access to online government titles. The depository collection offers curricular and research support for Illinois State University and to the general public.

GPO is the resource for publishing trusted information for all three branches of the Federal government to the American people. It provides permanent public access to government information at no charge through [govinfo.gov](https://www.govinfo.gov) and through its partnerships with approximately 1,100 libraries nationwide participating in the FDLP.

GPO

☼ Paleography Illuminated ☼

Manuscript translation project connects language, history

Dr. Kathryn Jasper can't help but smile when her research students nervously and cautiously turn the pages of a medieval text for the first time. "They come in and they're really reticent to put their hands on them, like, 'Oh my god, I can't touch this!'" Jasper said, laughing. "But we ease them into it. We have weights to hold down the pages. We remind them to wash their hands."

"And they usually end up loving it."

For more than a decade, Jasper has engaged students in research translating medieval texts from Latin to English. A professor in the Department of History, Jasper's teaching and research interests include paleography—the study and deciphering of historical handwriting and manuscripts—and the interdisciplinary research she conducts with students transcends the discipline of her home department to also include archaeology, foreign language, and more.

With support from Milner Library's Special Collections, Jasper's research group has access to a unique mix of manuscripts. They include a 15th-century breviary from northern Italy, a 15th-century pocket-sized prayer book, and a 13th-century record of misdemeanors and penalties logged in an Italian village that's the oldest item held in Special Collections.

The most recent acquisition arriving on campus this spring is a 15th-century collection of lease agreements for properties owned by a French cathedral. It's the first manuscript Jasper's group has worked on that's on paper instead of vellum, so it's more fragile than the others.

"It's full of really cool information like who lived on the land and what the land produced," Jasper explained. "It's a very practical document and gives you a sense for the people on the ground—people who don't normally show up in historical records—so it's really exciting."

The translation work builds language skills and teaches history, but students say they learn even more. Lucas Chase, a junior from Oswego, said he's learned patience and perseverance through the work.

"Sometimes you'll spend 10 minutes looking at one word wondering what it means," said Chase, a double major in history and anthropology also minoring in classical studies. "You'll look at the rest of the sentence, the grammatical structure, and that's been useful: learning to really focus and figure it out."

The students see those doodles and are like, 'Oh my gosh, this monk must have been so bored.'

Student researchers also learn about the human condition. They find mistakes in the centuries-old handwriting. They're amused when they see doodles in the margins of religious texts scribbled by a monk almost 700 years ago.

"It's fun to see because you can forget these were made by a human hand," Jasper said. "The students see those doodles and are like, 'Oh my gosh, this monk must have been so bored.'"

Jasper's research group has the support of Special Collections, which has worked to secure funds to obtain more medieval manuscripts for the group to work with. Special Collections benefits from the research.



Dr. Kathryn Jasper, left, examines a medieval manuscript with student researcher Lucas Chase in Milner Library's Special Collections.

"It's a really wonderful, real-world learning experience for these students," said Rebecca Fitzsimmons, Special Collections librarian. "And it benefits us, too, because then we get transcriptions of these materials that can otherwise be really difficult to read, and eventually we hope to incorporate their transcription work into our digital collections."

The collaboration between Jasper's research team and Special Collections was recently validated when Dr. Raymond Clemens visited. The former Illinois State faculty member, who is now a curator of early books and manuscripts at Yale University Library, said his current Ivy League institution would be proud to hold the manuscripts Jasper's team uses for its source material.

"This (research) is generally the kind of thing that students do at a place like Princeton or Harvard," Jasper said. "It's not something that I think elite universities would expect from a public, state institution, but I say, 'Why not?'"

"I think these students should have the same opportunities, the same experiences. So, I'm really pleased to give that to them."

The hands-on experience complements Jasper's work at the Valle Gianni archeological site in Italy where she,



Jasper and student researcher Alivia Mani read from a pocket-sized prayer book from the 15th century.

along with Illinois State Professor of Art History Lea Cline, has taken students to conduct field work. The manuscript translation project is a comparable method of learning by doing.

"The goal is to create another way to learn Latin, and one in which the students will be engaged in a way that they're doing exactly what a professional historian would do," Jasper said. "It's similar to what the sciences do in labs where students actually do the stuff they're studying."

"We don't have that so much of that in the humanities, but in this case, you take students to an archive, they're reading and translating materials, and that's no different than what I do in my research, so I really like that aspect of it."

Alumni of Jasper's research group have gone on to careers in history, archeology, languages, and special collections. Chase hopes to soon join that club. He wants to work at a museum and is already getting a taste interning at the McLean County Museum of History this semester.

Chase first met Jasper when, as an Honors Program student, he was assigned the task of interviewing a faculty member his freshman year. He chose Jasper, learned about her teaching and research, and enrolled in her class. He fell in love with history, archaeology, and Latin. He's found other ways to engage with his passions, brushing up on other languages and becoming president of Illinois State's Latin Club.

Yet, even now, when he opens a medieval manuscript, he feels a familiar feeling when his fingertips gloss across a page of handwritten text produced hundreds of years ago.

"I keep doing it because I can feel it in my chest that this is history," he said. "And I like to feel that feeling."



Archival treasures showcased in pop-up museum during Founding Celebration Week

For a few days of Illinois State's Founding Celebration Week, the University's 169-year history was not confined to the Dr. Jo Ann Rayfield Archives in a warehouse three miles north of campus; it was front and center, inviting students to take a closer look and reconsider what they know about Illinois State.

The inaugural Redbird Reflections Pop-Up Museum was held in the Circus Room at the Bone Student Center from Tuesday, February 17, through Thursday, February 19, as part of the University's **Founding Celebration Week**.

Inside the Circus Room, a 15-foot-long replica of the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry regimental flag stretched through the middle of the space, surrounded by several glass case exhibits full of Illinois State history, from remnants of a long-demolished building to a rivalry axe.

For April Anderson-Zorn, who has served as university archivist for 15 years, **the reasons to understand and celebrate Illinois State's history are endless**, especially as the first public university established in Illinois in 1857.

"There's an almost 175-year-long history here that we are very proud of who we are, and we should be, to have made it this far. So, who are our

forebears? Who are the people that got us here? We can learn a lot from those people who got ISU to 2026 and beyond," Anderson-Zorn said.

On Wednesday, attendees explored the room of artifacts, asked questions, and enjoyed a schedule of mini presentations by Anderson-Zorn. Around 50 guests visited the museum by noon on Wednesday.

Junior financial accounting major Alexis Fardel heard about the event from an Instagram post and stopped by, along with junior construction management major Carson Lohrenz.

"I think it's really important to see the history of the school because it's how it came to be today," Fardel said. "There's so many things that we have the opportunity to do because of the history of the school, and so, it's really cool to see who really made this opportunity to be able to happen for us today."

Rubble from Old Main, the University's first building which was demolished in the 1950s, was on display.

"I really like the part where you can see all the nails and the bricks from the Old Main Building," said Fardel.

Sophomore geology major Alli Locke was intrigued by the event while

walking by with a group of friends and decided to take a look. Locke's father attended Illinois State, and Locke found it very interesting to learn about that time in the University's history.

Freshmen mechanical engineering majors Isaiah Kerr and Cayla Weygand, who shares a birthday with Illinois State, visited the pop-up and agreed that Illinois State's unofficial and beloved canine mascot during the 1920s, Wahoo, stood out the most.

"That was the dog in the early to mid-20s that the Fell women sort of took in is as a stray, and they dressed him in a red letter N sweater that they had made for him," Anderson-Zorn said. "They loved Wahoo."

Many attendees pointed their attention to the Illinois State University vs. Illinois Wesleyan University rivalry trophy axe. With one side painted red and the other painted green, in the 1950s, the winning football team would write the game and score on their side.

"You're obviously going to see the side that says ISU on it when you look in the case, but

when you look at the other side, there's Wesleyan, and there's only two games listed, the one year that they won and the other year that they tied with us. If you flip it to the ISU side, there's lots of

winning scores on the other side. So, I like to get that out and have fun with Wesleyan a little bit," Anderson-Zorn said.

Kerr mentioned that he learned many new things about the University.

"I was born here, I've been raised here, and I didn't know that they had classes in Downtown Bloomington. That was interesting," Kerr said.

One of the six-case exhibits focused on the women of Illinois State's history, featuring June Rose Colby, the first female faculty member hired in the 1890s; **Dr. Mildred Pratt, a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology who fought racism, segregation, sexism, and generational poverty; and Angeline "Ange" Vernon Milner, the University's first full-time librarian from 1890 through 1927.**

"I'm real big about representation in the archive," Anderson-Zorn said. "We just don't really focus on some of these very impactful women, and it's high time we do."

University Archives is an extension of Milner Library and strives to collect, protect, and preserve the University's history while making it accessible.

"We not only teach students and community members about what it

is that we do and our importance in protecting that history and making it accessible, but also how to get to it, how to answer those really important questions that you've got about your time at ISU," Anderson-Zorn said. "Archives is for everybody, and we want those archives to be used across the spectrum."

University historical materials are open to the public and campus community through research appointments. To ask a question or set a research appointment, email Archives@IllinoisState.edu. Digital materials are also available on the **University Archives website**.

Anderson-Zorn said that she hopes this pop-up museum event continues in future years during **Founding Week Celebrations**.

"We have so much left to accomplish, but I look at what we've been able to do to this point, and it's a lot," Anderson-Zorn said. "I mean, I could fill the Bone Student Center from top to bottom and still never hit every little, wonderful nugget of history that we've contributed, both to this community and to the nation."

Milner Moves

New Hires

Josh Altshuler
Morgan Bueza
Kennedy Coe
Carrie Forbes
Traci Givens
Colleen O'Keefe
Diamond Smith
Andy Wesolek

Retirees

Maureen Brunsdale
Scott Bye
Tammie Dean



University Archivist April Anderson-Zorn gives students a glimpse into the past of Illinois State University.

Milner Library launches virtual Framework for Inclusive Teaching Excellence display

Milner Library's virtual Framework for Inclusive Teaching Excellence display will support instructors across campus.

The Center for Integrated Professional Development (CIPD) and Milner Library are pleased to announce the [virtual Framework for Inclusive Teaching Excellence display](#).

The [Framework for Inclusive Teaching Excellence](#) (FITE) is the foundation for professional development and teaching at Illinois State University and supports the University's strategic plan, [Excellence by Design](#). The six dimensions of the framework address critical concerns for student success and pedagogical thinking.

In summer 2025, David Giovagnoli, assistant director for scholarly teaching and learning, began to wonder how to highlight CIPD's physical resources. Milner Library had been helpful in providing book study texts for CIPD Learning Community members and in running partnered programming, such as the Open Educational Resources series, so Giovagnoli reached out to discuss a project.

The FITE guides CIPD's inclusive teaching efforts by supporting instructors at all career stages across six key dimensions.

"Libraries and centers for teaching and learning (like CIPD) are natural partners because of our shared purpose: to enable our students and faculty to succeed in and out of the classroom," said Giovagnoli. "This collaboration between Milner Library and the scholarly teaching unit to develop a virtual collection is one of many ways that our two units work together."

After contacting Joshua Altshuler, education and psychology librarian at Milner Library, Giovagnoli learned more about transferring CIPD's materials to Milner Library. After sorting through the materials, Altshuler and Giovagnoli decided to collaborate on a virtual display.

"The power of a collection that is supported by CIPD is that it's transdisciplinary, and it is meeting all of our students," Altshuler said. "When we're talking about materials on learning, motivation, diverse ways of knowing—all of those ideas affect every student that we have in our classrooms."

Altshuler assessed the current literature on pedagogy and Milner's resources to curate items for the display, organized by FITE dimension. The virtual display contains subcollections with books related to each of the six framework dimensions: Science of Learning, Impact of Course Design, Evidence-Based Pedagogy, Classroom Climate and Culture, Feedback and Assessment Loop, and Data-Informed Reflection.

With the support of Electronic Resources Librarian Grace Norris, who helped build the virtual display, the team published the project.

"A library is based in things, both digital and physical, but it's also built upon our relationships and our people," Altshuler said. "This is a library for all of campus, not just our students. We are lucky to have world-class faculty and staff, and I want them to know that our shelves, our collections are for them as well. We are a living collection, and it has to represent the interests and passions of our faculty and staff."



The FITE guides CIPD's inclusive teaching efforts by supporting instructors at all career stages across six key dimensions.

Faculty Publications

Milner metadata librarian

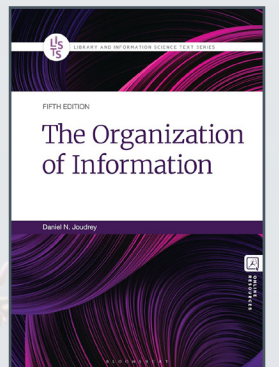
Emily Baldoni co-authors textbook

Milner Library's metadata librarian Emily Baldoni recently co-authored a fifth edition of the book, *The Organization of Information*, by Bloomsbury Publishing, along with primary author Daniel Joudrey. This foundational guide is the most recent offering guiding the rapidly changing field of information science.

The Organization of Information is a major textbook used by library schools across the country to provide library and information science professionals with a foundation in the principles of library cataloging, archival description, metadata for digital collections, and museum registration.

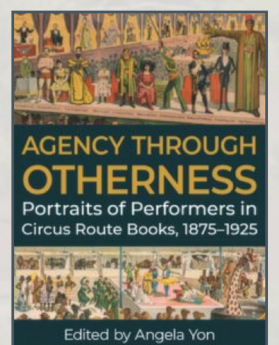
The fully revised fifth edition contains updated content on recent developments in cataloging standards, linked data, and the Semantic Web, and serves as a key resource for anyone seeking guidance on the complex challenges of today's information organization environment.

Milner Library Dean Dr. Carrie Forbes praised Baldoni's efforts: "So many students and faculty use library services, so we are proud of our ability to help them find needed information. The process of organizing that information is essential to anyone collecting research information in a systematic way."



Anglea Yon edits *Agency Through Otherness: Portraits of Performers in Circus Route Books, 1875-1925*

Originally created as a digital exhibit with funding from a CLIR Digitizing Hidden Collections grant, this peer-reviewed, multimodal book was [published by the Illinois Open Publishing Network](#) (IOPN). The book was edited by Angela Yon and includes contributions by Milner Special Collections Librarian Rebecca Fitzsimmons and Digitization Technician Ellie Harman. In addition to showcasing unique materials from Milner Library's [Circus Route Book Collection](#), *Agency Through Otherness* is also a fantastic example of digital storytelling that leverages deep historical research, metadata analysis, and innovative data visualizations to explore the lives of circus performers in their broader social and political context.





**ILLINOIS STATE
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