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## John Martin Papers a huge project for UMFK library

April 23, 2015

NR15037



Fox and Ginn Movers, from Bangor, Maine, delivered the last 100 boxes of John Martin Papers. T.J. Lancaster and Chris Lancaster moved these boxes to the second floor of the UMFK Blake Library.

Over 350 cardboard boxes are in haphazard stacks within a room on the second floor of the University of Maine at Fort Kent Blake Library. The boxes contain the John Martin Papers, including a recent shipment that arrived on Monday, April 13, which the famous politician donated to the university.

"These are the culmination of John Martin's career from the late '60s to 2012," said Assistant Director of the Acadian Archives and Library Kathryn Donahue. For the past several years, Donahue has conducted an inventory of, and is currently processing, the boxes of documents.

Donahue, who had made significant progress with the documents, said a new shipment which arrived on April 13 has extended the length of time to complete the project. "I was about 40-percent complete until they delivered this last shipment Monday."

The boxes contain letters, emails, drafts of bills, interoffice memos, memorabilia, clippings, and speeches. Just the inventory took years, said Donahue, and included hours and hours of effort from a series of work study students and library staff. "Really, it's everything you can think of that passed through his hands while he was in office."

When anyone speaks of the collection, the capital letters are apparent in the way they

refer to the battered cardboard boxes as the "John Martin Papers". Everyone involved recognizes their historical significance.

John Martin, who is currently a state representative in Augusta, said the collection includes the lands claim case, settlements with Native Americans under former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and many other pieces of information about important Maine legislation. "All that material would be there," said Martin.

It also includes his own correspondence. Martin said people would contact him for countless reasons. "Anything from problems getting food stamps, problems with a son in the military, you name it, there was every kind of issue you can imagine."

Once she had partially completed the inventory, Donahue has been processing the boxes to determine what the library should keep and what it should discard. She said the library wants to protect the privacy of individuals who wrote to Martin, so she plans to offer anything that contains personal and confidential information pertaining to constituents back to Martin.

"One picture you get is how much he helped people," said Donahue. Martin received thousands of requests for help, and Donahue said it appears he responded to all of them.

Opinions of Martin as a person and as a politician vary widely. Many people hold strong negative views of the powerful politician, and others are staunch defenders of John Martin. The documents, according to Donahue, present a more nuanced picture.

"He played such a huge role in contemporary politics, and I think John Martin is such a fixture up here, but people may not recognize his influence on the greater Maine political environment."

Donahue said she is leaving the Fort Kent area soon, and someone else will need to process and then catalog the papers. She said it is important that the person, who comes after her have a strong working knowledge of recent Maine history and Maine politics, be able to recognize names of state personalities, and also know local history and names. The person must recognize what to keep, discard, or send elsewhere. "The fact is, archival work is an art and a science," she said.

The John Martin Papers, according to Donahue and others, constitute a living history stretching across half a century. "I can't think of a more complex political career in the state," she said.

Before receiving permission to inventory the documents, the university kept the collection in the attic above the gym under a plastic tarp. Donahue received written consent from John Martin to inventory the collection in 2010. Once the material came to the library, Donahue began inventorying the documents from January of 2010 until April of 2012.

Martin signed over the papers to the library through a Deed of Gift in August of 2012.

After the inventory, she began processing the papers for items to keep or discard. After the processing, someone will have to catalog the material so scholars can use the collection for research.

One educator has already featured the collection in a lesson. UMFK President Wilson Hess said it was a useful tool in his history class. "I was just so excited about the historical insights that are in there. It was neat to give my students in my class a taste of that," he said.

Among the topics people will eventually find in the collection are documents related to Martin's work to set up veteran nursing homes in Maine, including the ones in Caribou and St. Francis. There are documents related to the acquisition of the old armory for the university to use, the establishment of the Acadian Archives and the development of the psyche unit at Northern Maine Medical Center.

Hess said he regards the John Martin papers as a valuable addition to the legacy of the university. "This is the type of thing scholars travel to study. It's really quite a coup for the town of Fort Kent and the university."

As a historian, President Hess said he has an interest in working with the collection. "The opportunity to potentially play a role in the editing of the John Martin Papers would be an enormous honor and privilege if I could arrange for that to happen," he said.

Martin appeared indifferent whether the papers might change some people's opinions of him. He said, "I follow the motto of Edmund Muskie. If you try to please everyone all the time, you are not doing your job."

Martin said he hopes people will come away with one lesson from the papers. He said, "I think they will be surprised to some degree on how one person can make a difference if they work at it."

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