

Paper proposal for the 15th Assembly of IAMS in Sydney

“Library Without Walls” -- Digitizing a Unique Historical Collection

The William Smith Morton Library at Union Presbyterian Seminary is an academic research library with deep roots, established in 1806 by an act of the Presbytery of Hanover, to assist in the formation and training of young persons for the ministry. The Library has grown to encompass a full collection of current and historical materials for the support of graduate study in religion. But many of its most unique and significant archival collections are locked away in climate-controlled storage.

In 2019, we began a new digitizing project to create high-quality images of some of these special collections, placing them online where they can be discovered and used by scholars and researchers. Of particular interest are the manuscript minutes of the Presbytery of Hanover (founded in 1755) and the Synod of Virginia (1788). These historical documents have been available only in very poor microform reproductions, and the original handwritten volumes are too fragile to withstand much handling. Our aim is to make them easily accessible to everyone who is interested in American history in the colonial, revolutionary and early federal periods.

I would like to share this work in progress with my colleagues in the DABOH Study Group. I don't envision it as a formal paper, but as more of a tactical session in which others can contribute their experiences and concerns about digitization. To present it, I would need a reliable high-speed internet connection and a digital projector (a Power Point format would not be adequate). If that can be arranged, I believe those who are engaged in or are contemplating such a project would be interested in it.

Dr. Paula Skreslet

Reference and Archives Librarian

William Smith Morton Library

Union Presbyterian Seminary

Richmond, Virginia USA