



The beauty of the Keeneland Library is matched by the wealth of its resources.



# UNRIVALED COLLECTION

Eighty years ago Arnold Hanger donated a collection of rare books that became the nucleus of the Keeneland Library, the sport's unrivaled reference and research repository

By Tom Pedulla | Photos By Kirk Schlea Photography



Patrons and researchers make use of the library's extensive resources.

**L**aura Hillenbrand, author of the 2001 best seller *Seabiscuit: An American Legend*, said it best when she wrote, "The Thoroughbred industry has many treasures, none greater than the Keeneland Library."

From its massive contents to its ever-helpful staff to the stately building itself, the library adheres so closely to Keeneland's mission of perpetuating the sport based on its finest traditions that it was honored with a Special Eclipse Award in 2002.

William Arnold Hanger, an original Keeneland Association director, started it all when he donated 2,300 rare books in 1939. The collection has grown to be one of the world's largest repositories of information related to Thoroughbreds, comprising nearly 30,000 books, approximately one million photographic negatives, and thousands of newspaper and magazine articles.

"No other repository open to the public has holdings that approach the breadth and depth of the Keeneland Library collections," said Roda Ferraro, head librarian. "You could spend years working your way through these collections and still discover something that amazes you every day."

The current 10,000-square-foot building that opened in July 2002 has developed into an invaluable resource for writers, researchers, and fans.

In the last year alone, visitors from 25 countries and nearly every state ventured to the library. For those who must work remotely, help can be only an email request or a phone call away. Ferraro notes that research requests from patrons around the world number in the hundreds each month.

"The library epitomizes Keeneland's mission to better the Thoroughbred industry and preserve racing's rich history," Keeneland President and CEO Bill Thomason said. "Since its founding in 1939, the library has been defined by the pride of its staff in offering outstanding customer service and a passion for continually moving the library forward."

The library recounts the history of racing through so much more than books. The first three decades of the 1900s are documented in more than 18,000 glass plate negatives of Charles Christian Cook, one of the first photographers in the United States to specialize in racing.

More than 200,000 film negatives from photographer Bert T. Morgan depict major figures from the 1930s to the 1960s. Negatives from Joel Clyne "Skeets" Meadors extend from 1947 until his death in 1987. He specialized in conformation images of stallions, mares, and yearlings in the Bluegrass.

Racing in California is documented from the 1970s to the present through a collection of approximately 12,000 slides acquired from noted Southern California photographer Katey Barrett. From these collections the library grants permission to use thousands of photographs in print and electronic publications each year.

This is a library that seemingly has it all.





Bronzes of famous horses such as Serena's Song are among the library's art collection.

Want to view the work of Pierre Bellocq, the celebrated artist known as "Peb"? Approximately 3,000 pieces of his work are readily available. Thanks to a 1954 donation by the family of Dr. Fred W. Rankin, a Keeneland Association founder, visitors can see one of the shoes worn by Man o' War in his final race, when he defeated Sir Barton on Oct. 12, 1920. Shoes from Citation, Seabiscuit, and War Admiral also are displayed.

How about a blanket worn by Nashua? Stop by any weekday from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and check it out. Jockey scales from the 19th century? Those are there. A bronze of the great filly Serena's Song? Also there. A sample from Queen Elizabeth II's tea set? That too.

New physical and virtual exhibits are constantly being developed.

"Our reading room definitely has a museum-like look and feel," said Becky Ryder, director of the library. "People walk in and they refer to it as the cathedral of racing."

Then there is a space known as "The Vault," which features its own fire suppression system and strin-

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Head librarian Roda Ferraro shows Kirk Hoefling photographs from the current exhibit "From The Vault — Historic Tracks."



An English jockey scale from the mid-1800s is among the library's fascinating artifacts.

gent climate control. The temperature is kept in the 60s with 40 percent relative humidity in order to preserve a treasured donation made by Daily Racing Form in 2000. It includes more than 5,000 volumes of the Form dating to 1896, a complete file of the American Racing Manual, and a large number of issues of The Morning Telegraph, known as "America's Oldest Authority on Motion Pictures, Theatre and Turf."

The creation of "The Vault" delights Nick Nicholson, Keeneland's former president and a driving force in the decision to build the library, as much as its contents do.

"Every time I think of that room, I'm very proud," he said. "Even though nobody sees it, it's documentation that Keeneland has done right by these historical archives."

The Form's game-changing donation stemmed from a timely dinner meeting in February 2000 between Nicholson and Charles Hayward, who had become president and chief executive officer of the paper the month before. Among other things, the men compared notes about issues they faced in their new positions.

Hayward was extremely concerned about his inability to properly preserve archives so extensive that two 18-wheel tractor-trailers were ultimately needed to move

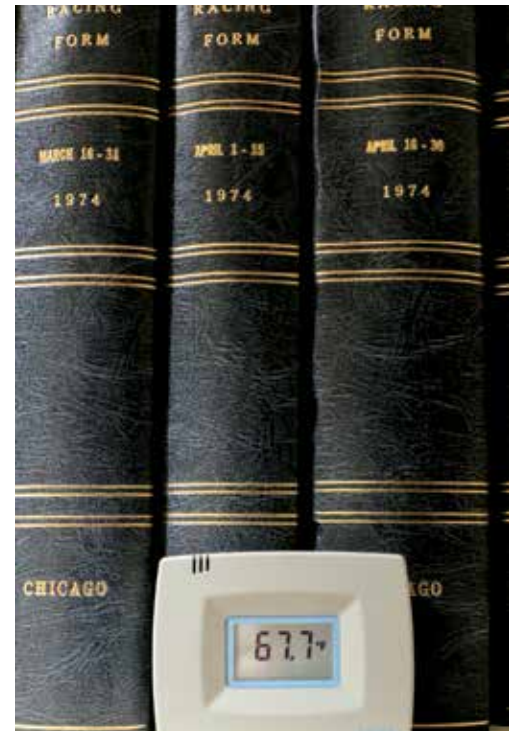


Horse of the Century Man o' War wore this shoe in his last race, against Sir Barton, the first Triple Crown winner.





Library director Becky Ryder wears cotton gloves to handle a book from 1599.



Temperature is regulated in "The Vault" to ensure an ideal environment.

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The late architect Mario Kow designed the library so it would blend with other buildings at Keeneland.

them from an outpost in Phoenix. Nicholson worried that he lacked adequate space for a growing collection of books, photographs, and other valuable material already stored at Keeneland.

The meal turned into an after-dinner drink and cigar. As the night wound down, Hayward recalls Nicholson telling him, "It sounds like we have two different problems that might have the same solution." They agreed to talk again soon.

When Nicholson arrived at his office the following day, he pursued in earnest an idea that had previously intrigued him — the construction of a library. He received enough encouragement that he told Hayward to direct the tractor-trailers to Lexington instead of New York, where the collection faced an uncertain future. The material was too valuable to be put at risk.

The challenge then became constructing a building that would do

justice to its contents while fitting in seamlessly with those already in place. According to the late architect Mario Kow, who designed the library among other edifices at Keeneland: "You'll never know it wasn't always there."

In all, 325 tons of Kentucky limestone were used once ground was broken in 2001. Each piece of limestone was hand chiseled. Once it was clear that machine-cut stone would not blend in with the structures already in place, a sample wall was built to allow masons to make sure the stone would look just right.

"It's a small story," Nicholson said, "but it goes to show you the dedication of the people who work at Keeneland."

The interior design features a cathedral ceiling and three massive arched windows at each end of the main room. The northeast portion of the building bathes in morning sun; the southwest side enjoys that light in the afternoon. In addition to the



The Charles C. Cook Collection is among the library's important photograph treasures.



The Daily Racing Form archives are preserved in "The Vault."

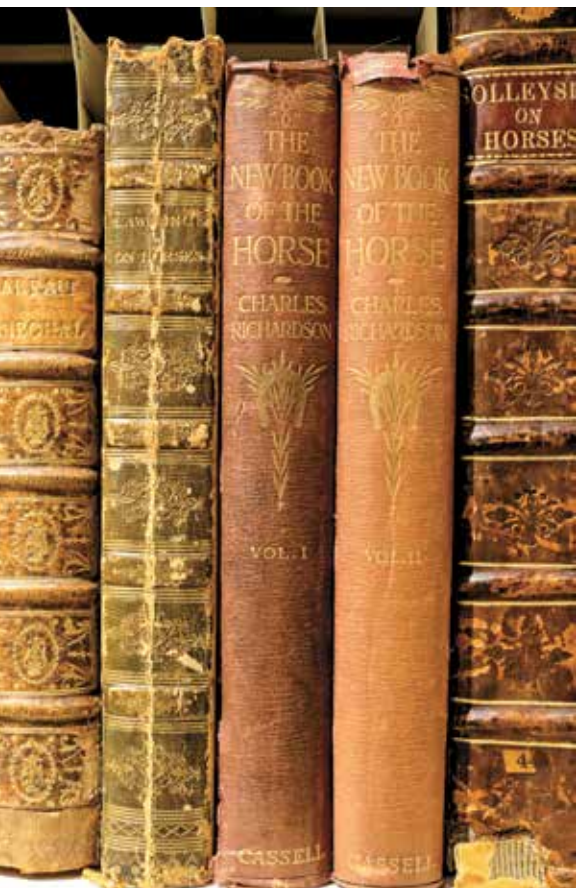
rich collections, the pleasant reading room features spacious tables, public computers, wireless access, and copying services — everything needed for comprehensive research. The library's greatest strength, though, stems from its people. A tradition of excellence began with Amelia King Buckley in the 1950s and continued with Cathy Schenck. The National Turf Writers and Broadcasters saluted Schenck for her work by presenting her with the Joe Palmer Award for meritorious service in 2015. Schenck closed her 38-year career in May 2017.

The staff is led by Ryder, Ferraro, and library associate Katie Farmer with help from associates Dan Prater, Kim Glenney, and intern Kelly Coffman. They receive rave reviews, whether it be from





Ryder files a historic glass plate negative in "The Vault."



Historic books, which launched the Keeneland Library, are handled with care.

those who deal with them in person or those who work remotely. Ryder and Ferraro said their patrons are passionate about the industry, its current issues, and its history. That passion is contagious and it energizes and rewards the entire library team. Librarians review online content daily, resulting in the addition of more than 5,000 articles to research files in the past year.

"As we've increased our online presence, people are finding us more and more often from all over the world," Ryder said. "Only about 10 percent of our effort goes to serving the customers who walk through the door, whereas 90 percent of our effort goes to serving people who are outside of Lexington or just can't come to the library for whatever reason."

Edward Bowen, author of 18 books and a former editor at BloodHorse, described the library as a "fundamental resource" whose existence often guided his planning in behalf of BloodHorse. "In the decision-making about what stories to pursue, you always had it in the back of your mind that the Keeneland Library would make sure you were able to get to the finish line," Bowen said.

Authors Mark Shrager, Jennifer Kelly, and Cathy Moser all say their labors of love would have been difficult, if not impossible, to complete without the library.

Shrager said of *The Great Sweepstakes of 1877*, published by Lyons Press in 2016, "There is no way I could have done that book without their help."

The work delved into a highly anticipated post-Civil War race at Pimlico Race Course involving Tom Ochiltree, Ten Broeck, and Parole. Shrager said the turning point in the project came when he traveled from his home in Altadena, California, to Lexington. "They began pulling out old books and old newspapers. It was just amazing," he said. Copies were made and he was on his way.

"I took home all these materials," Shrager said, "and suddenly this book that might never happen happened."

Kelly made the same pilgrimage from her hometown of Huntsville, Alabama, while researching *Sir Barton and the Making of the Triple Crown*, due to hit bookstores next May. "The thing the library does is it focuses all of these resources in one place," she said. "The vast majority of the research I needed was centered in Lexington at Keeneland."

Kelly also appreciated how efficiently she was able to work remotely.

"It literally didn't matter what time of day it was. If I had a question, they were willing to answer it," she said. "If they couldn't answer it at that moment, they would get back to me within a day and have whatever I needed or I knew how to find that information."

Moser, from Lewistown, Montana, has spent most of the last decade researching Thoroughbred breeding and racing in Montana in the late 19th century. "When I get stuck, really stuck, I turn to the Keeneland Library," she said. Her book *In the Winner's Circle: How Montana Thoroughbreds Upset the Nineteenth Century's Racing Establishment*, is close to publication.

Keeneland's administration understands the increasing need to make help just a few laptop keystrokes away.

"We face the tremendous challenge of heightening access to our unique holdings through digitization projects," Ferraro said. "Digitization is a labor-intensive, expensive undertaking, but we continue to chip away at that mountain as resources permit."

Ferraro identified community outreach, particularly with schools and equine management programs, as a "major strategic priority." Significant steps already are being taken.

"We are piloting this effort through a series of research workshops with undergraduate students who are poised to be our industry's next leaders," Ferraro said.

As much as the Library celebrates the rich tradition of racing's past, its ability to advance boldly into the future will provide the key to ongoing success. **KM**