

TOMORROW'S TREASURES

Movie posters, kryptonite rocks are favorites in BGSU's pop culture library

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BOWLING GREEN — It started with a fight.

With a librarian.

Ray Browne, who founded Bowling Green State University's popular culture department, still remembers the first time he tried to place some books reflecting pop culture in the library.

It was 1967 and he wanted to teach popular culture as contemporary folklore. So he dropped off an armful of books that would be useful in his class. Let's just say, the librarian wasn't amused.

"[He] told me to get that junk out of my library since libraries were for serious and high quality literature," the soft-spoken 85-year-old Mr. Browne said.

Forty years and well over 190,000 pop culture items later, you know who won that argument.

The popular culture library, formally created in 1969 and later named for its founder, Mr. Browne, and his wife, Pat, has become one of the top such collections in the country.

It is a place where everyday favorites find a home: Classic movie posters share a room with old copies of TV Guide and comic books. A Shakespeare play translated into Klingon mingles with used postcards and JCPenney mail-order catalogues.

This is where people come when they want to study how small towns are represented in romance novels. Or how Hillary Clinton has been portrayed in tabloid magazines. It's the kind of collection that invites inquiries about ... anything.

"Sometimes I get questions, like the history of the cream pie in America," said Nancy Down, the collection's head librarian.

It's also the kind of material that other libraries ignored.

"Chances are what [other] libraries didn't collect is what the popular culture library did," said

Bill Schurk, the university's original popular culture librarian. "If they didn't want it, it's because it was popular."

Times have changed in the last four decades. The biggest problem these days is finding space for everything on the fourth floor of BGSU's Jerome Library, where the collection is housed.

"We were motivated by noble purpose," said Mr. Browne, now a distinguished university professor emeritus. "What we're trying to do is save the junk of today until it becomes the treasure of tomorrow, as indeed it will."

Looking back at 40 years of this "junk," it's hard not to get attached to some of the items. We asked several people who are familiar with the library and its contents to pick their favorites.

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This Batman bubble bath container is one of the items housed in BGSU's pop culture library. (THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY)

Plastic Batman bubble bath (1995)

“This is really popular culture. It’s an item you’d see in everyday life. ... I remember reading Batman comics when I was younger, and now I like to read the graphic novels. The Batman character has really evolved over the years. ... I think he is a character that you can grow up with but still find of interest as an adult.”

— Nancy Down, head librarian for the popular culture library

Audographed poster for the 2004 movie *Napoleon Dynamite*

“The poster always reminds me of the power of pop culture to make a connection with the masses. The film is so popular that many of my students have seen it at least 50 times. For some reason, it speaks to their generation.”

— Charles Coletta, popular culture instructor. (The poster is signed by three members of the film’s cast who visited campus two years ago.)

Poster for the 1951 movie *The Red Badge of Courage*

“[I chose it based on] the strength of the novel from which it was made. It’s one of the great novels.”

— Ray Browne

“Audie Murphy was a fine soldier. He just wasn’t much of an actor.”

— Pat Browne

The Brownes are major donors and the namesakes for BGSU’s popular culture library, which Mr. Browne founded.

Kryptonite rock (1977)

“I really like superheroes. I think it also shows all the mass-market tie-ins that are so much a part of popular culture. Still, it’s more natural and creative than a lot of the merchandise out there because it’s actually tied to the Superman story line. Plus, I think it glows in the dark.”

— Tony McCosham, graduate student who works in the popular culture library

Laser sculpture of the U.S.S. Enterprise from *Star Trek* (1992)

“I chose it because I’ve just always enjoyed the original Star Trek movie [and series]. I just always liked the camaraderie of the cast and characters ... It’s good entertainment.”

— Sara Bushong, chairman of archival collections and branches.

***TV Guide* (Week of June 7, 1969)**

“In recently uncovering an audio tape reel I made in 1969 of the premiere of *The Johnny Cash Show* television program, I went to the [library] to obtain the complete broadcast information to document my digitizing the show for the BGSU Music Library and Sound Recordings Archive. I found the information in the June 7-13, 1969 issue of *TV Guide*, among the almost complete holdings in the library of that very significant magazine.”

— Bill Schurk, sound recordings archivist and the original librarian for the popular culture collection.