

Mardi Gras Artifacts Inspire Designers

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Academics and float designers alike find inspiration in a treasure trove of Mardi Gras memorabilia nestled on the second floor of Jones Hall on Tulane's uptown campus.



This watercolor of an 1885 float design from the Proteus parade is from Tulane's Special Collection Division.

The Carnival Collection is part of the [Special Collections Division](#) and houses printed Carnival mementoes, including many original drawings of costumes and parade float designs.

While float and costume designers use the collection to explore ideas for their next Carnival creations, manuscripts librarian Leon Miller says that academic research is also a major use for the archive.

“Academic researchers from many fields use the collection for a tremendous variety of research projects,” says Miller.

“English literature specialists have traced how the designs reflect ways different cultural concepts filtered through society, and political scientists have studied how float designs reflect changing political factions.”

There is also an [online exhibit](#) available for a peek into what the collection contains.

“We have one of the larger collections of Carnival ephemera in the world,” says Miller. “Ephemera are small printed items meant to be read or used and then tossed away, such as brochures, flyers and invitations. Our collection of Carnival ephemera extends back to the 1850s and continues to the present, as we document new Carnival events every year.”



This drawing shows a proposed costume for a “rainbow sprite.”

Mary LeBlanc knows her way around the collection. As a library staff member for more than 30 years, LeBlanc is now a volunteer in the Special Collections Division where she works exclusively with the Carnival collection.

After sauntering through the collection's 130 cubic feet of materials, LeBlanc finds a box labeled “krewe medals,” from which she pulls kings' and queens' pins bedazzled with rhinestones and now withering feathers.

“The Carnival collection is a work in progress,” she says. “It has importance to both New Orleans history and American history.”

According to Miller, the library is accepting new donations to add to the Carnival collection.

“If someone attends a ball, has a Carnival invitation collection or kept minutes, newsletters or other records from a krewe, we hope they will remember to save their invitations, place cards and dance cards and donate them to us,” says Miller.

The collection's librarians suggest that anyone planning to visit should call ahead and first review the [guest guidelines](#).