

2022

Documenting COVID-19 at UAB: A Library's Role in Preserving Accounts of the Coronavirus Pandemic

Margaret Wood Balch

University Of Alabama At Birmingham, pbalch@uab.edu

Anna L. Kaetz

University Of Alabama At Birmingham, akaetz95@uab.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/fw-libraries>

 Part of the [History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Balch, Margaret W.; Kaetz, Anna L. (2022). "Documenting COVID-19 at UAB A Library's Role in Preserving Accounts of the Coronavirus Pandemic." *Journal for the Southern Association of the History of Medicine and Science* , 4(1), 30-41. <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/fw-libraries/8/>

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the [UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication](#).

Documenting COVID-19 at UAB: A Library's Role in Preserving Accounts of the Coronavirus Pandemic

Margaret W. Balch, MLIS, MA, and Anna L. Kaetz, MLIS, MA

Respectively, Assistant Professor and Curator of the Reynolds-Finley Historical Library; Assistant Professor and Digital Strategy & Metadata Librarian, Reynolds-Finley Historical Library, of UAB Libraries, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama, United States.

Email: pbalch@uab.edu; akaetz95@uab.edu

Abstract

In August of 2020, UAB Libraries of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) launched the *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB* project,² seeking the stories of UAB students, faculty, staff, and health care workers navigating life during COVID-19 to preserve them in a born-digital collection. Since then, ninety-five items have been added to the collection, including photographs, video/audio productions, news items, and personal written accounts. This article discusses the planning and creation of the *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB* collection and highlights several submissions that provided uniquely insightful information about the pandemic. It also addresses how libraries play a key role in preserving history.

Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic that hit in 2019 set the world in a panic in many unique ways. For some, the simple, but newly impossible task of getting toilet paper became the priority. For others, the transition to remote work and education was suddenly overwhelming. For everyone, trying to survive a pandemic that was ravaging the world was the central reality. Medically, socially, and intellectually, the world began facing new and, often, daily challenges together. As caretakers of a collection focused on the history of medicine and the health sciences, our priority was to document the pandemic for posterity and future historical research. In April of 2020, the authors of this paper began brainstorming an idea that would eventually become known as the *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB* project. Driven by the all too common experience of trying to

The authors thank UAB art student, Cinamon Airhart, and Marketing Manager, Malcolm Lunceford, for permission to reproduce their work in this paper. They also thank the UAB Libraries faculty and staff members who were instrumental in helping establish the *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB* collection, especially Kasia Gonnerman, Tim Pennycuff, and Kevin Hebert, as well as those within University Relations, especially Rosie O'Beirne, Andrea Reiber, Annee Cook, and Hayley Zorn. Lastly, the authors greatly appreciate all those who have submitted content to this collection to help preserve the historical record of COVID-19 at UAB.

² <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19>

find rare primary sources for the Spanish influenza, or even more obscurely, the Black Death, we had a special window into the important role we had in preserving the first-hand accounts of the current pandemic in which we found ourselves. This initiative sought, and still seeks, to gather the stories of UAB students, faculty, staff, and health care workers navigating life during COVID-19 in an effort to preserve history as it is happening. As remote workers living in the digital age, this was to be a fully born-digital collection. We saw this significant project as an opportunity to contribute to the preservation of medical history in a new way. Since the project started, we have worked with UAB students, faculty, and staff to collect ninety-five items and preserve them in our library digital collection, *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*.

Establishing the COVID-19 Stories Project

Planning for the “COVID-19 Stories Project” (as it was originally called) began in spring of 2020, early in the University’s closure and remote work. The authors of this paper are librarians working in a rare books and manuscripts library devoted to the history of medicine and the health sciences, who initiated the project and continue to maintain the data in a digital collection. Through prior experiences with providing reference and research support to those interested in pandemics and epidemics of the past, we were acutely aware of the challenges to finding primary source information on such events. Suddenly an answer emerged as to why: In the midst of a health care crisis of this magnitude, everyone is preoccupied, simply trying to figure out how to live and what needs to be done to maintain their lives; documenting the experience is seldom the top priority. But the need became more and more apparent as the days of consistent abnormality continued. During those early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic, as statistical data on cases and deaths was updated seemingly instantly online, as almost all news media focused on the pandemic, social media spun out of control, email announcements related to our work changes overflowed, as change upon change in daily life overwhelmed us all, and crises of health, supplies, social issues, curfews, and so much more bombarded us, we were also struck by the realization that we should be documenting all of this for future historians, as well as to provide a venue for those living through this experience to share their stories. While frontline healthcare workers engaged in early response and the popular mantra of those days was “we’re all in this together,” we were inspired to recognize a role for ourselves in preserving their stories, as well as everyone else’s. Our motto became, “everyone has a COVID-19 story.”

As most of the pandemic information was being transmitted online and updated in real time, we were also acutely aware of the barriers that our normal role as rare book librarians presented, since we spent most of our time preserving and digitizing old book and paper documents in the library. Due to the pandemic closures and work-from-home requirements, this project had to be born-digital. From the very start this project involved a range of collaborators from throughout UAB Libraries, including the University Archivist, Museum Curator, Head of Technology and Technical Services, Dean of Libraries, Clinical Services Librarian in our hospital library, and several others who consulted on particular issues of relevance. These colleagues were involved in setting up the digital collection on the technical side, discussing rights considerations, including those involving privacy and copyright issues associated with collecting and making this information public in a digital collection, and making connections with people around campus for the project’s promotion. The library’s newly formed Digitization and Digital Preservation department will be instrumental in helping to ensure the long-term preservation of the submissions moving forward. This involves such considerations as updating files to new formats as needed,

managing digital storage space, hardware, and software, and many other technical and systems issues to ensure the materials are kept and their quality is maintained for posterity.

Early in the development process, we worked with UAB's University Relations department, that created the submission form process and marketed the project to the UAB community. University Relations used Qualtrics for the submission process to collect the data we received until we were able to transfer it to a more secure location. After some discussion with our technical services department regarding file sizes and limitations, we agreed on the formats that could be included: written accounts such as narratives, blog postings, and diary entries; photographs or digital artwork; and audio and visual recordings. These different formats would be collected and then preserved in a library-hosted digital collection, which would be managed by us, the Reynolds-Finley Historical Library (RFHL) staff. The goal was to keep the format options broad so that we could appeal to a wide range of perspectives, from the quick snapshots of pandemic life, such as the photo received of two undergraduate students on a quarantine date,³ to the Zoom recording of a virtual lecture by the Director of UAB's Division of Infectious Diseases.⁴ The message presented to the UAB community has always been that everyone has a unique story to share and we want to help preserve them all.

Rights considerations also had to be addressed in the submission process to avoid legal concerns. Past RFHL digital projects largely consisted of materials published far enough in the past to fall under the public domain. As we were creating a collection of current materials, some of these rights issues needed to be reviewed in more depth. With health care professionals potentially submitting their accounts, this discussion had to consider HIPAA patient privacy compliance, while also addressing concerns about copyright and permissions for publicizing and redistributing the material in publications such as this. As the main goal has always been to document the pandemic, and exhibition of the submissions was secondary to that, we wanted to allow individuals to submit their stories for preservation but not require them to allow publication on the digital collection if they preferred their submission to remain private. After several discussions among the UAB Libraries and University Relations team, the following statement was included on the submission website:

As our plan is to add your submission to a COVID-19 collection in the UAB Digital Collections website, participants will be asked to accept a deed-of-gift to transfer the material to the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a media release form which allows UAB to use the material in print and online publications. However, the media release is not a requirement for submission and if permission is not granted, your submission will still be preserved for research and archival purposes. Finally, participants are asked to ensure that no personally identifiable patient information is disclosed in compliance with HIPAA laws.⁵

Appropriate statements with check boxes were included in the Qualtrics form. Though we had originally believed that some people might want to submit and keep their material private, that was not the case. To date, no submitters have denied the media release, and, in fact, many have expressed excitement that their stories were being published.

³ Paige Hanscom, "Quarantine Date," *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries' Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, Summer 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/10>.

⁴ Jeanne Marrazzo, "The COVID Pandemic in 2021: Where Have We Been and What Can We Expect?" *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries' Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, February 26, 2021, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/161>.

⁵ "COVID-19 Stories," UAB Libraries, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://library.uab.edu/special-collections/covid-19-stories>.

Promoting the COVID-19 Collection: Soliciting Submissions

Once the submission form was ready to go live, University Relations developed a marketing plan to promote it across campus. Some of the tools that were used included a promotional film; a promotional webpage for the UAB Libraries website; news items that were distributed regularly through the circulating university-wide newsletter, the *UAB eReporter*; social media announcements; and a banner featured on the main UAB website. All of these were implemented by August of 2020, just a few months after the first discussions about the project. At the start of the fall semester, with everything in place, and marketing tools circulating, further promotion took the form of reaching out individually to university faculty, staff, and students to encourage participation. What we discovered early on was that getting submissions was going to be much harder than we originally thought, and so began our path down the road of what later became known as “the used car salesman” approach. We mentioned it to every class we spoke to, at every meeting we attended. We got together and brainstormed about what connections around campus

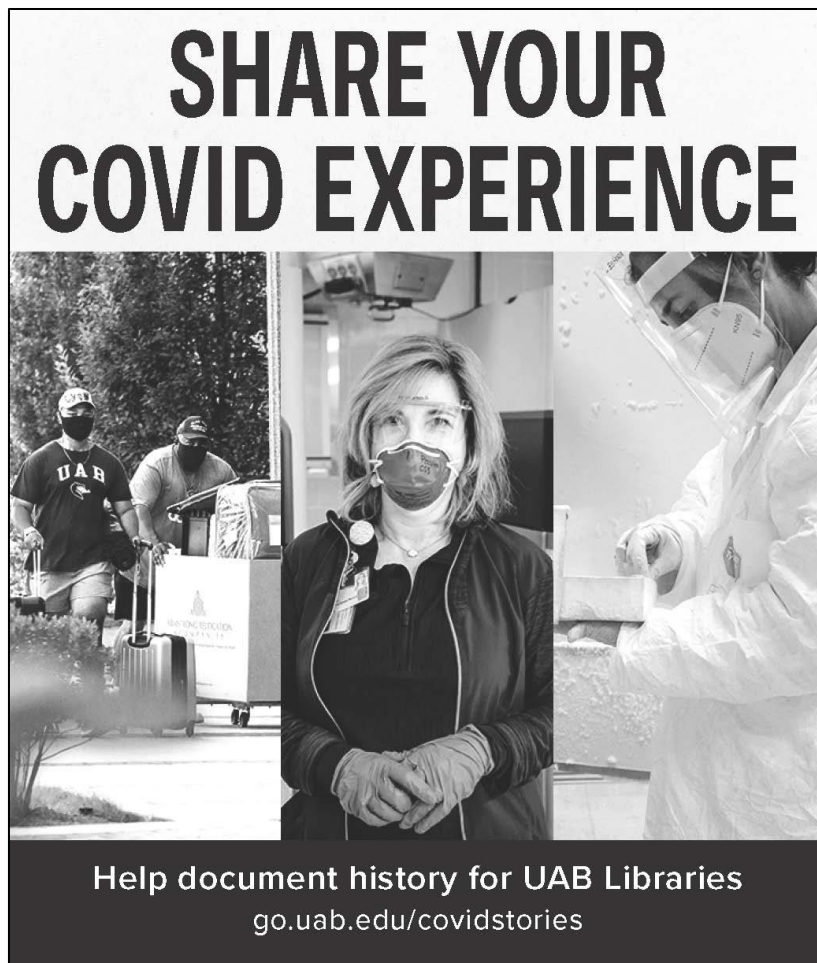


Figure 1. Graphic used for promoting the project through UAB media channels, created by Malcolm Lunceford, Marketing Manager, Digital Strategy & Marketing, University Relations.

could lead to more submissions, and then followed through diligently. We worked with several UAB faculty members to integrate a project submission into their curriculums; we continued to promote the project on the library news site and via email correspondence; and we added another member to our team, a senior English student who began the first-ever virtual internship in RFHL in the fall of 2020.

Juggling both our first virtual internship at RFHL and our first born-digital collection, all while working remotely during a world-wide pandemic, was certainly challenging, but it allowed for a unique experience. Since we had just begun heavily promoting the COVID project, and were working to collect and add the submitted materials to the digital collection, this was the perfect opportunity to incorporate the project into our fall internship curriculum. This unique internship in special collections librarianship focused on the role of special collections in preserving history, and the overarching assignment for our student surrounded the COVID-19 stories project. It was a good match for the Senior English major focusing on Creative Writing. Over the course of the semester, her primary duties involved helping us reach out to the professors and students at UAB, and most significantly, those in the Creative Writing program, to promote the collection; writing up newsletter items about the project; creating content for the collection; and other outreach activities associated with the project. One of her lasting contributions was to coordinate with the university's Writing Center for the library to preserve the COVID stories that they had received during an essay competition initiative called the "COVID-19 Flash Non-Fiction Contest." Through this collaboration, we received several short personal accounts from UAB students and staff who took part in the competition, such as this humorous piece titled "Virtual Teaching" that highlights a parent's experience with remote work:

Week 1: hair done, makeup fixed, work clothes, baby peacefully naps through the lesson.

Week 2: ponytail, mascara only, casual Friday look, baby wakes early from nap and happily waves "bye" at the end of the lesson.

Week 3: messy-bun, no make-up, Spit-up covered T-shirt, baby refuses to nap and tries to initiate food-fight halfway into the lesson.

Week 4: hair hasn't been washed in days, what is makeup? workout clothes that closely resemble pajamas, baby on napping strike and enacts an endless game of hide and seek for the entire lesson.⁶

The student intern also contributed content to the collection, including her own experiences completing her undergraduate education and graduating during a pandemic. This submission, and others that she offered, as well as her work on the project, greatly contributed to the overall quality of the collection.

The Submissions

The collection and promotional efforts of the previously mentioned team has so far garnered ninety-five submission which are currently public within the digital collection, and over one hundred news items that still need to be uploaded. The effort was certainly successful in getting submissions in all of the various formats, including thirty news items, twenty-nine personal written accounts, eleven videos, sixteen submissions of photographs and/or artwork, and nine audio

⁶ Kirsty Burkart, "UAB Writing Center Entry 'Virtual Teaching,'" *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, May 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/103>.

recordings. This section will highlight some of the fascinating and historically significant accounts received from the UAB community.

From Antarctica to Alabama: A Scientist's COVID-19 Log

One of the earliest submissions received was a diary kept by a scientist from the UAB Department of Biology that documents her travels from Antarctica to Alabama, provides an international perspective of the pandemic, and tracks its early stages of development. The excerpts from this diary began in early February at Palmer Station, Antarctica, and ended in September at her remote UAB office in Pelham, Alabama. Her first entry, written on February 7, ominously referenced COVID-19, saying that a cruise ship visit was canceled due to “reports of a highly contagious virus reaching epidemic scale in China.”⁷ Just 2 days later, on February 9th, she writes of the first thirteen reported cases in the United States. Below is a brief COVID timeline taken from her diary:

12 March 2020

Real world: Covid-19 declared a pandemic. The US reports 1600 cases, 41 deaths.

Palmer Station: ...I host another algal art and jewelry-making session after dinner with 7 station folk; a little more subdued than previous sessions given disturbing news of the day.

19 March 2020

Real world: The US reports 13,000 covid cases and 195 deaths.

Palmer Station: ...We have to end and dismantle our experiment, clean, dry and pack everything. An impossible mission!

1 April 2020 morning

Miami Airport: Landed in an alien world of sparsely-peopled concourses, everyone masked, closed shops and restaurants. Date is ironic yet this is clearly no joke.

4 August 2020

Birmingham, AL: Attended first ever virtual SCAR (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research) conference rather than traveling to Hobart, Tasmania. Antarctica, a continent of science for all countries, remains covid-free yet like the rest of the world, is severely covid-impacted. Science in the world's largest natural laboratory is all but cancelled or extremely limited due to covid concerns. Meanwhile, another global calamity will carry on largely unmonitored in Antarctica as ice sheets break out, glaciers melt and surface waters warm.⁸

A Student's Documentary Film Raises Social Issues

Another early submission came from an undergraduate English student who created a short documentary film on the experience of a young Chinese man during the pandemic, raising some of the social issues sparked by the pandemic, such as xenophobia. Titled, “Divided: A Story of Quarantine, Intolerance, and a Man from China,” her description for our metadata reads:

Raised in a Chinese family all too familiar with poverty, he's finally able to do what they never have: travel to America. Once he arrives, a pandemic unlike what anybody has seen in their lifetime hits, surfacing underlying xenophobia and polarization that only adds to division that has existed for

⁷ Margaret O’Leary Amsler, “Antarctica to Alabama: A COVID-19 Timeline,” *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries’ Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, February-September 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/4>, p. 1.

⁸ Margaret O’Leary Amsler, “Antarctica to Alabama: A COVID-19 Timeline.”

years. Hear Hanchao's view, conducted over a zoom interview, as he proves that every voice deserves to be heard, especially within a nation so torn apart.⁹

A Frontline Worker's Experience

Documenting an experience of a healthcare worker during a shift in the MICU, one account provides a unique perspective of caring for patients who were unable to be visited by their families during the pandemic, and specifically, one patient in her final moments. This submission showed the compassion and emotions felt by the healthcare community as they struggled to care for patients and combat the coronavirus. This healthcare worker sums up his perspective of COVID-19 with the following:

As I walked out of the COVID ICU that evening, I passed by an empty room being diligently cleaned by custodial staff, a group of nurses reviewing new COVID protocols, and the oncoming resident retrieving a fresh N95 mask...I felt the weight of our responsibility as medical providers, but I was also incredibly proud of our staff, our patients, and their families for the camaraderie and compassion I had witnessed in the prior month. And for the first time in several weeks, I left the unit with a little bit of hope.¹⁰

Here it should also be noted that the author from the School of Medicine changed names of the patients and families in this story for privacy purposes, a quick and simple way of complying with HIPAA regulations.

UAB MedCast Podcasts Capture the Work of Medical Professionals

UAB Medicine submitted several significant continuing education podcasts they developed concerning COVID-19 for UAB medical professionals. Topics such as best practices for "Making the Operating Room Safe During COVID-19" and the innovative work of UAB clinicians and scientists are covered, including the below excerpt from one titled, "The Pathologist's Role in COVID-19":

Sixto Leal, Jr., MD (Guest): Thank you for having me. I'm the director of clinical microbiology at UAB. And my role in this is to help coordinate COVID-19 testing. Like you said, to handle the pandemic, we've definitely switched our focus to COVID-19. I direct two reference laboratories and the clinical microbiology lab. And as soon as the pandemic started, we realized that we needed to bring up testing so all our research efforts that were going down and the diagnostic testing efforts that we were doing definitely shifted to COVID-19.

Host: How have your department, faculty and staff been both proactive and nimble in your response to the COVID-19 pandemic? Because it must have really shaken things up and you've had to respond in ways you weren't used to.

Dr. Leal: Right. One of the main things that was needed was a COVID-19 PCR test and at the time, none of these tests were available. So, we had to scour the literature and check the genome of the virus and develop a test ourselves. And that's what we did in one of the laboratories allowing us to be able to provide a test and be able to identify patients that are affected so that we can triage them

⁹ Skylar Summers, "Divided: A Story of Quarantine, Intolerance, and a Man from China," *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries' Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, Spring 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/8>.

¹⁰ Salmaan Kamal, "Hope in COVID-19: Reflection from the MICU," *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries' Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, May 1, 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/42>.

appropriately, put them in negative pressure rooms and also conserve PPE which is extremely important.¹¹

Dr. Leal went on to further explain how his team made UAB “among the first academic medical centers in the country to offer in-house testing by launching this laboratory.”¹² He also discussed the daily volume of testing, transport for tests, and the behind-the-scenes work of pathologists during the COVID-19 pandemic. This kind of interview offers invaluable insight for future historians of medicine.

Collaborative Efforts

While this project will preserve important history, it also has provided opportunities for collaboration with other groups on campus, who also have prioritized documenting the pandemic. For example, from the UAB School of Optometry we received a virtual School of Optometry Graduation Awards Ceremony held in May of 2020, instructional safety protocol videos for students and Optometry patients, as well as permission to publish several circulating departmental publications. Through this collaboration we also received a personal account from a School of Optometry resident that graduated during COVID, as she reflects on her unique final months of training, and the lasting impact that this had on her medical perspective. In this piece, she states, “As a Class of 2020 graduating Resident, I am confident to saying that I am leaving my UAB family with unconventional skills and abilities that can benefit patient care in more ways than ever before.”¹³

Student Assignments Broaden Perspectives

The goal of Documenting COVID-19 at UAB project has always been to cover a wide range of experiences. Certainly, this involves the stories of those caring for patients and finding new ways to combat the illness, but also accounts of how the pandemic has impacted all different walks of life. One approach to broadening the range of perspectives was to collaborate with faculty members to integrate project-related assignments into their syllabi. One such collaboration led to the acquisition of five oral history recordings of students interviewing family members, friends, and coworkers for a fall 2020 history class. In these, the students captured the stories of others that would not have otherwise been part of our target audience within the UAB community.

Additionally, numerous accounts came to us from English writing class assignments which help us better understand the academic and social impact of the pandemic on college students, including this reflective excerpt from an undergraduate student paper titled “Adaptive Resilience at the Height”:

I write this as a UAB freshman (class of 2024), sitting at my dorm desk having just listened to a podcast on surge capacity. It is a concept I had never considered in regards to prolonged, global

¹¹ Sixto Leal, Jr., MD, and Melanie Cole (host), “UAB MedCast Podcast “The Pathologist's Role in COVID-19,” *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries’ Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, May 19, 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/62>.

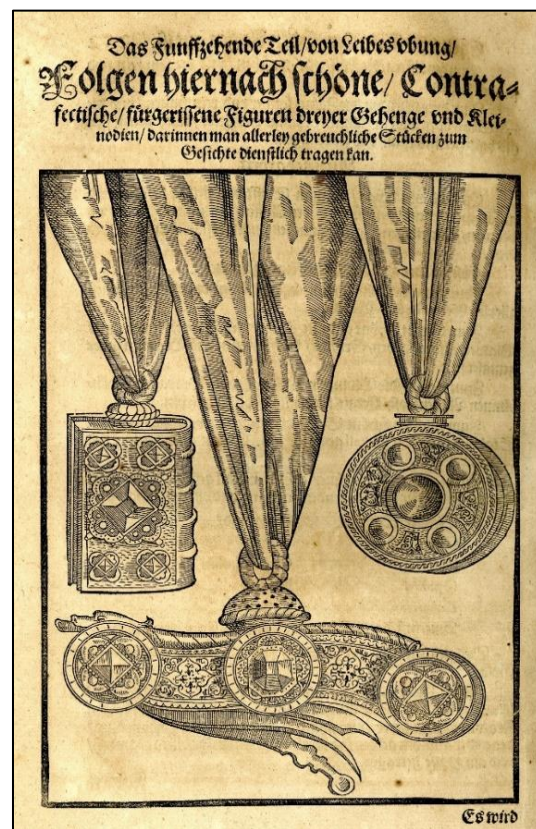
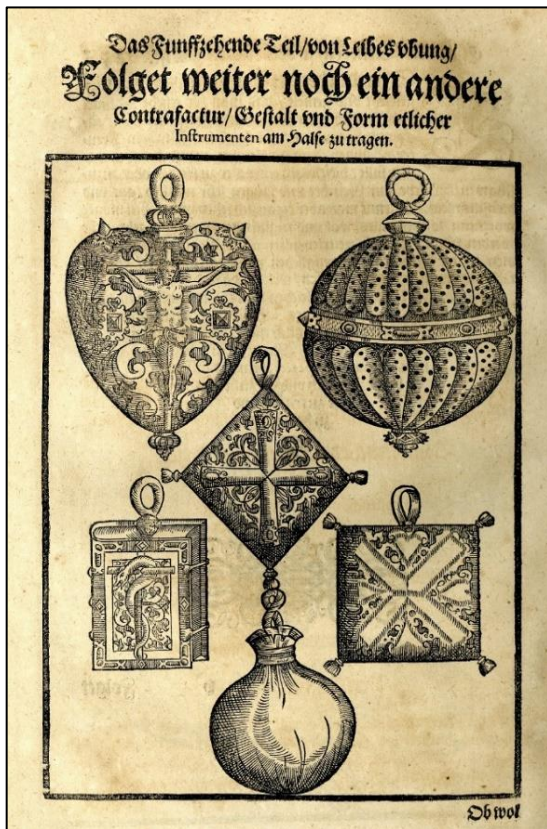
¹² Sixto Leal, Jr., MD, and Melanie Cole (host), “UAB MedCast Podcast “The Pathologist's Role in COVID-19.”

¹³ Ranjit Kaur, “Tough Times Make Tougher Doctors: Why 2020 Graduating Residents have a Clinical Advantage,” *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries’ Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, July 14, 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/5/rec/3>.

trauma (if you call it what it truly is), but it encompasses the point at which our adaptive coping mechanisms have reached depletion. Brené Brown, the show host, spoke in depth on the six month mark of surge capacity often referenced in military combat situations, and how many of us are reaching this point in our struggle on adaptation to this COVID-adjusted world.

I think back to just over six months ago: March 13th, exactly, as it was the last day I attended high school. Looking back, I have no doubts that if I ever questioned superstitious validity of Friday the 13th, I had my answer not too long after the school closures. I certainly never thought that walking to my car as a half-day student, I would never enter the doors of James Clemens High School again.¹⁴

Another student project involved an illustration class taught by a UAB art professor in the spring of 2021. Making a parallel between the Coronavirus pandemic and plague outbreaks of the past, the students were tasked with using plague imagery from the Reynolds-Finley Historical Library to draw inspiration and create art that connected the two diseases, using a method called swiping. These pieces were then digitized and added to the collection. For example, the first two images below (Figures 2 and 3) are original illustrations of religious and supernatural amulets believed to ward off various diseases such as the plague.¹⁵ Figures 4 and 5 are illustrations of



Figures 2 and 3: George Bartisch, *Ophthalmodouleia* (1583), Reynolds-Finley Historical Library, the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

¹⁴ Gillian Acker, "Adaptive Resilience at the Height," *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries' Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, September 29, 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/33>.

¹⁵ George Bartisch, *Ophthalmodouleia* [Greek title transliterated], *das ist, Augendienst* (Dresden: Gedruckt zu Drezden durch Matthes Stöckel, 1583).

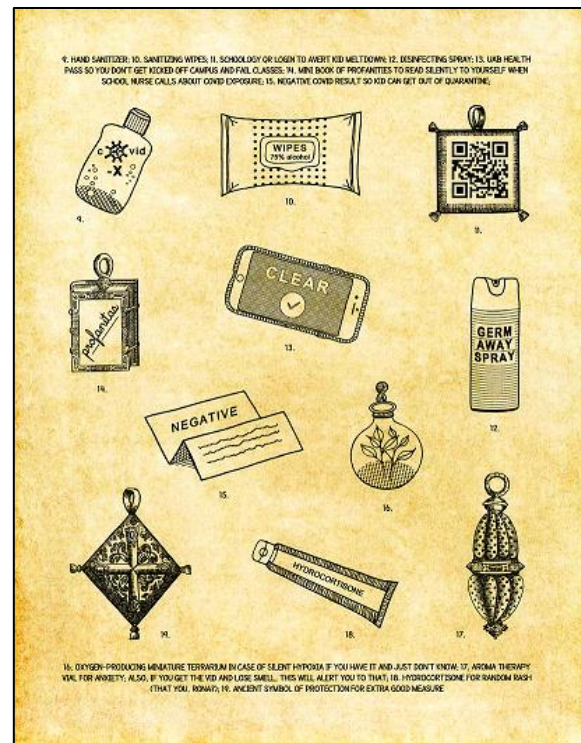
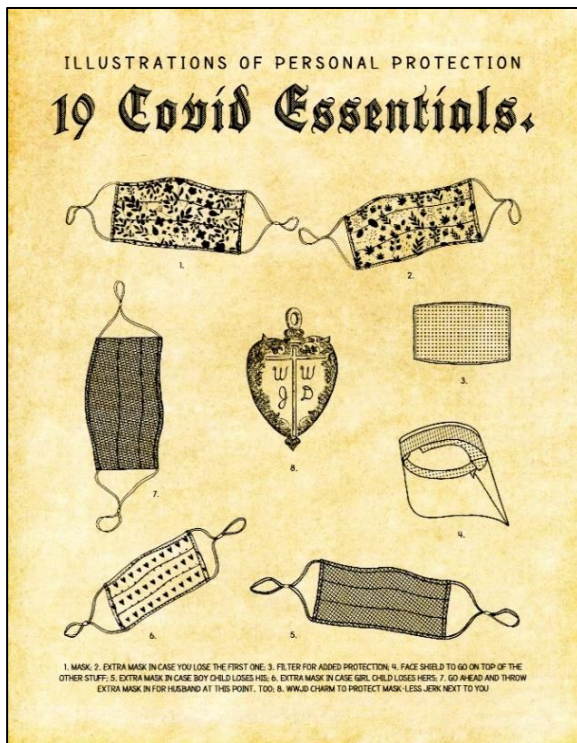


Figure 4 and 5: Cinamon Airhart, “19 COVID Essentials: Illustrations of Personal Protection,” 2021.

student Cinamon Airhart, in which the amulets are replaced with some of the essential items used to ward off COVID-19, including hand sanitizer, masks, and cleaning supplies.¹⁶

Preserving UAB COVID-19 News and Media

In addition to collaborating on setting up and promoting the collection with University Relations, their Media Relations department also gave us permission to preserve COVID-related news items distributed to the UAB community. As a way of both highlighting these items, and separating them from the personal accounts received, we created a subcollection titled “COVID-19 UAB News Collection.” To date, we have added thirty news articles or videos to this subcollection and will continue to add relevant content. Topics discussed include safety and social protocols to follow over holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas), advice on staying physically and mentally healthy during quarantine and socially distanced gatherings, information about treating and combating COVID, the introduction of vaccines, and many others. University Relations has also permitted us to preserve a collection of eighteen infographics they created to

¹⁶ Cinamon Airhart, “19 COVID Essentials: Illustrations of Personal Protection,” *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries’ Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2021, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/180>.

provide public health information to the UAB community, including the one featured here (figure 6).¹⁷



Figure 6: UAB News, "UAB COVID-19 Infographics," 2020.

Conclusion

In late April and early May of 2020 when planning for this project began, there were only a handful of similar projects with submission processes available online. Now, libraries and archives all over have established similar sites and are actively collecting. Rest assured, the history of this pandemic is being properly preserved. In February 2021, the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) sent out to members of its Special Collections Interest Group a Google doc listing twenty COVID-19 documentation projects hosted by ASERL libraries, which, of course, is

¹⁷ UAB University Relations, "UAB COVID-19 Infographics," *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB*, UAB Libraries' Digital Collections, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, March-October 2020, <https://uab.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/COVID19/id/88>, Infographic 18.

regional to the Southeast. Likewise, an article on the Association of Research Libraries website¹⁸ that was last updated on February 2, 2021, cites fifty-four institutional libraries with known projects. And the National Library of Medicine began a web archive for the pandemic before the disease even had a name.¹⁹ Librarians and archivists who work with historians and other researchers understand the value of documenting such events in each locale. In a place like the University of Alabama at Birmingham, which not only serves as a major medical center for Alabama and the region, and a hub of COVID-19 research and pandemic response, but is also the largest employer in the state, we knew there would be a plethora of significant perspectives to preserve. As of the spring of 2022, we have added ninety-five items (and counting) to our *Documenting COVID-19 at UAB* digital collection, and we are still seeking submissions from the UAB community. This project has not only given those in the UAB community a platform to share their stories, but has largely impacted the stories of these two authors. It has instilled a fresh perspective on the importance of preserving information from both the past and the present, and has rejuvenated our motivation to do so. As we continue with this project, we recognize that there is still much work to be done documenting such a unique time in our contemporary history.

¹⁸ Kaylyn Groves, “Research Libraries, Archives Document Community Experiences of COVID-19 Pandemic,” Association of Research Libraries, last modified February 2, 2021, <https://www.arl.org/blog/research-libraries-archives-document-community-experiences-of-covid-19-pandemic/>.

¹⁹ Laura Spinney, “What are COVID Archivists Keeping for Tomorrow’s Historians?,” published December 17, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03554-0>.