

Primary Importance

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE POLITICAL LIBRARY HAS ESCAPED THE AX AND LIVES TO CHRONICLE MORE OF THE STATE'S QUIRKY POLITICS

For a few scary months in 2011, the staff of the New Hampshire Political Library feared it was being voted down. But with a recent infusion of private donations and the merger with the New Hampshire Political Institute (NHIP) at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, Director Neil Levesque says its future is looking brighter.

Founded in 1997 by New Hampshire Gov. Hugh Gregg and Secretary of State Bill Gardner, the nonpartisan nonprofit maintains a historical collection of 30,000 items — political memorabilia, photos, facts and trivia — and assists reporters, candidates and political junkies in their quest to document the state's first-in-the-nation presidential primary. The library also presents special exhibits and hosts programs and events (such as Politics and Eggs, Kids Voting and televised presidential debates).

"When key activists pass away, we often get their papers," says Levesque. Not just papers stored in damp, dusty garages and barns, though. A mixture of the weird and mundane, library archives comprise key chains, clothes, bumper stickers, buttons, collectibles such as sculptures and sunglasses, and even a psychedelic poster from George Romney's 1968 election. The recent Republican presidential primary contributed mainly traditional "Vote for ____" posters, says Kate Giaquinto, NHIP communications spokesperson, but candidate Rick Santorum's lawn sign is embellished on the standard injunction with the catch phrase "the courage to fight for America," and Congressman Ron Paul donated a hand-held fan that proclaims "I'm a liberty FAN." Says Giaquinto, "It's pretty neat."



2012 Republican primary candidate Vermin Supreme leaves some of his campaign memorabilia at the NH Political Library.

Another library attraction, until April 30, is the Bridges House Exhibit, which refers to the state's historical gubernatorial residence and furnishings such as china, furniture (including chairs that comforted many a president's derriere), silverware, paintings and books; also, a miniature cypress tree made from copper, which Levesque says the Reagans gave New Hampshire Governor Walter Peterson at a national governors' conference in California. The Library and Institute are located at 100 Saint Anselm Drive (on the college campus) in Manchester; hours are Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Admission is free. — Janice Arenofsky

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