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Documenting African-American role in urban design



Joan Krizack, the university archivist, inspects the newly-acquired records of Stull and Lee Inc. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill.

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The University Libraries has acquired the records of Stull and Lee Inc., a Boston-based African-American architectural firm. The one-of-a-kind collection gives the University more than 40 years of sketches, designs, and other documents of historical significance in the industry, and is a substantial addition to Northeastern's growing archive of materials related to Boston's African-American community.

The firm was founded in 1966 (as Stull Associates) and was one of the first registered African-American architectural firms in the country. Stull and Lee Inc. has been involved with projects in and around the University for decades, including Northeastern's John

D. O'Bryant African-American Institute, the MBTA Ruggles Station, and numerous housing developments in the Roxbury area. The firm has also worked on projects around the country and received national recognition, including the Presidential Design Award presented by the National Endowment for the Arts.

"The evolution of African-Americans in the architectural profession in this country is a very important story to be told, and to have the records of a firm that participated in that evolution available to scholars is important," said Don Stull, the firm's founder.

The collection includes original architectural drawings, project files, photographs, slides, financial documents, and promotional materials.

"This is the biggest collection we have by far," said Joan Krizack, university archivist and head of special collections.

William Wakeling, dean of University Libraries, said this acquisition supports the Northeastern libraries' focus on collecting records from Boston's African-American community, such as those of Paul Parks — an engineer and civil rights activist who shaped local and state educational policy and worked on some of Stull and Lee's projects.

Students and faculty could use these archives to study topics in architectural history, urban planning and design, urban renewal, African-American business history, and diversification of the architectural profession, as well as topics relating to specific buildings and institutions, Krizack said. Northeastern plans to make a portion of the records digital over time to provide online access.

"This collection is extensive and has great research potential," she said.

The University Libraries include 967,000 volumes, 126,000 e-books, and 35,000 electronic journals. The libraries provide award-winning research and instructional services and a pioneering multimedia production facility, and house internationally recognized special collections that document social justice efforts in the Greater Boston area.

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