Donation puts FAU on American history map

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STAFF WRITER

For more than 60 years, Boca Raton resident Marvin Weiner saved his lunch money to collect items that would make history buffs swoon, including the original Articles of Confederation drafted in 1777. Now, Florida Atlantic University Libraries is home to this treasured historical document and others.

A retired businessman from Philadelphia, Weiner and his wife, Sybil, donated a collection of 13,000 printed items from the pre-American Revolution era.

The Marvin and Sybil Weiner Spirit of America Collection of Colonial Imprints is worth $3.8 million, university officials said.

FAU announced the donation Thursday during a news conference attended by top university officials, the Weiner family and a man dressed up as Benjamin Franklin, Marvin's Weiner's icon.

On display were some of the centuries-old items, including the first printing of the Declaration of Independence in the Pennsylvania Evening Post dated July 1776, an early printing of The Federalist, the series of essays arguing for a U.S. Constitution written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, and a copy of Thomas Paine's The American Crisis, whose opening lines "These are the times that try men's souls..."
times that try men's souls," have stirred generations.

"This is indeed a wonderful gift for FAU," said University President Frank Brogan. "I felt buoyed by the Weiners' generosity because there is a passion that was created with the collection that has not diminished with its donation."

A history buff, Weiner, 88, purchased most of the items from private collectors and small stores, where he would spend hours "rummaging."

"My whole life, he's ruined all my vacations because he'd disappear to these small stores to find things for his collection," said Sybil Weiner, his wife of 67 years.

Weiner began collecting in the 1940s. He would save money whenever he could to buy historical items. He is still collecting today, Howard Weiner said.

The Weiner Collection will be housed on the third floor of the S.E. Wimberly Library on FAU's Boca Raton campus. Library officials plan to build a suite just for the new collection. On July 2, to honor the Weiner family, the FAU Libraries will present "Spirit of America: The Concert," featuring the 22-piece Klezmer Company Orchestra performing American folk songs, music by Aaron Copland and more.

Though Marvin Weiner did not speak publicly at the news conference, his son, Dr. Howard Weiner, said the family decided to donate the collection to FAU in January. Marvin Weiner also considered his alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, Howard Weiner said. FAU won out because it pledged to build a special suite and show the entire collection.

Howard Weiner and FAU officials believe the Weiner Collection is the largest private collection of pre-American Revolutionary imprints in the world.

"Usually, whenever you want to see historical items of this nature you have to go to Philadelphia, Chicago or somewhere in the Northeast. There's nothing south of the Mason-Dixon line. . . . It can now be appreciated by those in the southeast part of the U.S."

The collection also will be shared with local schools and, of course, university students.

"My classes will visit every semester," said Andrew Frank, a history professor at FAU. "No one has ever had a chance to read these documents because they have been scattered all over and what gets published in the history books for the masses are only small excerpts. Here they will get to see whole documents. It's like taking in a piece of Americana."

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