

*Catalyst Profile*  
**Catherine Brown**

Since joining the State Archives of North Carolina, Catherine Brown, who graduated from WCU in 1985, has dedicated her career to “protecting history as it exists.” As an information management archivist, this former Catamount has spent nearly eleven years scanning and digitizing antique documents in hopes of perpetuating the truth.

“The basis of history is that we shouldn’t repeat the things not worth repeating,” said Brown. “America is unique in that the government allows us to preserve history as it actually happened. From there, we can chart a course for the future.”

Brown began charting her own course nearly 30 years ago in the heart of Appalachia. As a history major, professors emeritus Max Williams and Jim Lewis helped her foster a passion for the past. While in the Whee, Brown also learned to strike a balance between academia and leisure, spending much of her time canoeing and hiking in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park.

After graduating in 1985, she began working as a state archivist. In 1991, Brown began mulling over The Black Mountain College Project, an attempt at compiling records of the experimental college near Asheville, North Carolina. The final virtual exhibit, which can still be found online, features anything from memoirs by students such as Mary “Molly” Gregory to yellowed school bulletins.

From there, Brown was assigned to the United States Newspaper Program, an initiative to locate, catalog, and preserve national newspapers on microfilm. Through conducting genealogical research, the WCU alumna was able to document the merging, splitting, and ultimate demise of various news outlets. The “defunct and rotten” papers were also given a digital home.

Throughout the next decade, Brown would work in a conservation lab, preserving and restoring the antiquity of documents. She would also write the first in-house technical manual on the Manuscript and Archives Reference System, better known as M.A.R.S. In 1996, with years of experience behind her, Brown graduated from North Carolina State University with a master’s degree in public history with a concentration in archival management.

Though she took time off from her professional pursuits to raise two daughters, this former Catamount plans on returning to the field. This time around, however, perhaps with Williams and Lewis in mind, teaching may be on the radar.

“My undergraduate degree further developed an interest I already had. When I got to WCU, I had a love for history,” said Brown. “And I carried it with me when I left.”