

Special Collections

The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection, Monmouth University.

“The truly essential works by biographers, critics, scholars, journalists, and fans are together in one place. The Collection documents all phases of Springsteen’s career and should be an indispensable tool for researchers and fans alike.”

– Christopher Phillips, Editor, *Backstreets*

What makes The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection unique is the way in which it was compiled—somewhat like Ridley Scott’s crowd-sourced video montage, *Springsteen and I* (2013). The creation of this culturally-important archive was given impetus by *Backstreets* editor Christopher Phillips. Concerned over the dwindling availability of magazine and newspaper articles on Springsteen’s early career, *Backstreets* initiated a fan-to-fan campaign in the summer of 2001 with the purpose of gathering donations world-wide of the significant documents and artifacts from each phase of Springsteen’s career. The intent was to develop a repository of Springsteeniana that would be publicly accessible and of interest to both fans and scholars. The result is a collection of documents, recordings, and memorabilia that reflects the international scope of Springsteen’s art and influence: donations have come from fans in 48 countries, from Argentina to Zimbabwe.

Housed on the campus of Monmouth University in West Long Branch, New Jersey—just 20 miles from Springsteen’s childhood home in Freehold—The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection contains over 17,000 items. Along with books and articles in journals and magazines, print materials include songbooks, tour books, comic books, and newspaper clippings. The Collection houses an extensive resource of vinyl and CD recordings, both official and unofficial releases. One intriguing oddment is an interview with Springsteen recorded on a motorcycle-shaped 45 rpm

BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies 2.1 (2016)

<http://boss.mcgill.ca/>

disc pressed in the United Kingdom. Though extensive, the Collection is far from complete: a link on the homepage presents a lengthy wish-list of hard-to-find items—by title, genre, country, and state—that should be preserved and would be happily catalogued and archived. Donators to the Collection are acknowledged and thanked on the Collection’s website.

The attractive, well-developed website offers a thorough catalogue of holdings and a list of straightforward answers to frequently asked questions about the Collection and its policies. Browsing the site one discovers a smattering of obscure biographical facts. Interested to read about Springsteen’s youthful adventures in Little League baseball, or to learn that instances of his often-misspelled surname include his birth announcement in the *Asbury Park Press* on September 24, 1949? Other nuggets of interest on the website pages include snippets from early reviews in college newspapers of fledgling performances by Springsteen and the E Street Band and references to rare juvenilia—teasers to the “hidden gems” housed in hard copy at the Collection.

And here’s a notable fact not listed on the website: Bruce Springsteen visited the Collection in 2015.

The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection is not a fan shrine nor a museum, but a research center, located in Archives House on the Monmouth University campus. On average, the Collection hosts 50 visitors annually from all parts of the globe, making brief visits or extended research stints. Roughly 30 per cent of these are scholars, graduate students, or writers conducting research, according to Eileen Chapman, Associate Director for the Center for the Arts at Monmouth University and Director of the Special Collection. Visitors must make an appointment: complete details on how to do so are available at the “FAQ” tab on the Collection’s website. Scholars and fans wishing to visit this research center must also come prepared. Items in the Collection are filed in special archival folders and stored in archival boxes. Reference numbers to

individual archival boxes are available via the Collection's website, and visitors are required to provide appropriate box numbers for items they wish to view. According to Chapman, the most frequently accessed items relate to Springsteen's high school days and his brief stint at Ocean County College – at which time he published his first poem, an item of considerable interest in the Collection.

None of the Collection's materials is available in an online format. Limited copying of print resources – including photographs – is possible for research purposes. No audio or video resources may be copied.

The custodians and financial supporters of the Special Collection have a separate website under the moniker "The Friends of the Bruce Springsteen Collection." A three-year membership costs \$50 (US) and is tax deductible in the United States. Members' fees help to fund the "state-of-the-art archival techniques" used to ensure that items in the Collection are well preserved and accessible for future generations of fans and researchers.

The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection website can be accessed at the following link:

<http://brucespringsteenspecialcollection.nexxtblog.com/>

Readers interested in learning more about The Friends of the Bruce Springsteen Collection can find information and details regarding membership at the following link:

<http://friendsofthespringsteencollection.nexxtblog.com/>

This website also includes links to 13 fan sites as well as to the Bruce Springsteen Official Website – and, of course, to *BOSS*.