Research Assistant (Casual)
The Gwillim Project

Research Assistant (Inventory and Documentation)
MIST (in process)
Contract: 10 hours/week, October 2019-April 2020
Hourly rate: $16.61
Supervisor: Lauren Williams

Housed within the Blacker Wood Natural History Collection in the Rare Books and Special Collections department of McGill Libraries, the Elizabeth Gwillim collection contains over 200 watercolours of birds, fish, and flowers painted in the Madras region of India between 1801-1808. This collection is the subject of a SSHRC-funded Partnership Development Grant, titled “The Gwillim Project,” where a global network of researchers and institutions have been brought together to investigate various aspects of Gwillim’s life, work, and surroundings.

Working with Lauren Williams, Blacker Wood librarian, the research assistant will perform a preliminary inventory of uncatalogued manuscript material in the Blacker Wood Collection, followed by documentation and organization of the material (potentially also some re-housing, if time permits). The resulting documentation will serve as the basis for item records to be uploaded to McGill’s Archival Collections Catalogue. This work will play an important role in the SSHRC Gwillim Project, as it will facilitate access to the Blacker Wood Collection’s uncatalogued holdings for the research network.

Required Skills

- Demonstrated interest in libraries, rare books and archives
- Demonstrated interest in the history of science / natural history / women’s history is an asset
- Strong interest or experience in cataloguing and/or archival processing is preferred
- Excellent organizational skills, attention to detail and ability to perform tasks in a very careful and deliberate manner is required
- Excellent communication skills, both written and verbal
- Proficiency in Excel is also an asset

About The Gwillim Project

The Gwillim Project is a SSHRC-funded Partnership Development Grant that centres around the unpublished correspondence and artwork of two sisters who lived in Madras at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The two sisters created an extraordinary visual and written record of the landscape and inhabitants of Madras and environs; the original watercolours are held in the Blacker Wood Collection at McGill and in the South Asia Collection in Norwich, UK. The letters challenge our too-easily held assumptions about women’s work, interests, and social position, in both England and India, revealing deep attention to natural science, politics, and local...
cultures. Their letters and drawings also provide marvellous insight into the landscape, climate, and ecology of the Coromandel coast, documenting birds, animals, fish, insects, flowers, trees, as well as the lives of the human inhabitants.

The partnership grant has three objectives: The first is the establishment of a research network that will collaborate to explore the existing collections from multiple perspectives, and to participate in a process of discovery to locate additional and ancillary material to enrich the existing core collections of text and image. The second is the development of a collaborative shared research space that brings together widely separated and unpublished texts and images, recreating a complete archive online, available to an expanded public of scholars and readers. The third is the dissemination of both original materials and the new knowledge generated by the partnership to scholars through a research symposium, scholarly publication, and conference, and to a larger audience through both traditional and interactive media, including popular publication, collaborative museum exhibitions with broad diffusion strategies, and a web presence throughout the life of the project and beyond.

Interested applicants should submit a cover letter describing their interest/experience and their C.V. no later than October 18th, 2019 to Student-employment.library@mcgill.ca