Museum spotlights life, works of William Carey

Mary Lett  10 p.m. CDT September 9, 2014


These artifacts and manuscripts are among thousands collected and housed in the Center for Study of the Life and Work of William Carey in Donnell Hall at William Carey University.

"With the collection, we're trying to show the breadth and depth of Carey's life work. He was a missionary but that work was not a narrow endeavor," said Myron Noonkester, co-director of the center.

Carey (1761-1834) was a Baptist missionary in India and so much more, Noonkester explained. Born in England, Carey worked as a social reformer, linguist, botanist and educator. In 1793, he left England and moved his family to a Danish colony in Serampore, India, were he served as a missionary.

About 250 pieces are on display in two galleries at the center, but Bennie Crockett Jr., also co-director, said thousands of additional items are in a vault.
Crockett said the artifacts and manuscripts — including Bibles that Carey translated into Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi, Oriya and Marathi — were purchased from or donated by rare book collectors, antiques dealers and private collectors. He said many leads also come by way of the center’s website, which has garnered more than 1 million hits since it went live in 2001.

“Some people are happy to know that their item is coming to a museum where it will be well-cared for and preserved,” said Crockett, who added the museum’s concept was initiated in 2000, with the actual facility opening in 2006.

The center is open from 1-5 p.m. Monday through Friday and by appointment.

Students at the university are impressed with the collection, which is one of the most wide-ranging stockpiles of William Carey artifacts.

“The amount of work he put into the Bible translations is amazing,” said Sara Jolley, 19, a sophomore majoring in religion, who interns at the center. “And he didn’t have a formal education.”

Beth Mayes, 22, a senior majoring in psychology, who also interns at the center, agreed.

“I knew about him as a missionary but wasn’t aware of his work as a botanist, translator and his work in social justice,” said the Jacksonville, Alabama, native.

“The fact that he did so much on so many different fronts for the people he went to serve is so impressive.”

Center for the Study of the Life and Work of William Carey

• Where: William Carey University’s Donnell Hall

• Hours: 1-5 p.m. Monday-Friday and private tours by appointment

• Information: Bennie R. Crockett (601) 318-6116 or Myron C. Noonkester (601) 318-6164
Co-directors of the Carey Center at William Carey University, Bennie Crocket, Jr., left, and Myron Noonkester, discuss a piece displayed in the museum and research collection that bears the Serampore College blazon. William Carey, after whom the university was named, founded Serampore College while in Benghal, India with several of his colleagues. (Photo: Kelly Price-Hattiesburg American, Kelly Price/Hattiesburg American)