

**Customer**

University of Rochester  
River Campus Libraries

# Kodak Alaris digitizes historic Susan B. Anthony letters

**Key Benefits**

- 1,470 images scanned from 100-year-old documents
- Historically significant collection made available to a worldwide audience



# Kodak Alaris digitizes historic Susan B. Anthony letters

## The client

University of Rochester River Campus Libraries, Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation

## The challenge

When curators receive a collection of 100-year-old handwritten letters, among their greatest challenges are preserving the delicate materials so they can catalogue the contents and make them available to others. Once catalogued and opened to researchers, the next step toward insuring these

items will be used by students and scholars is to digitize them. Digitization and transcription ensures that the collection can be accessed online by a worldwide audience.

## The situation

In July and August of 2014, the University of Rochester (UR) purchased a large collection of correspondence between American activist and women's suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony and her close friend and colleague, Rachel Foster Avery. An

Avery family member had uncovered the collection in his parents' home and reached out to the National Susan B. Anthony Museum and House in Rochester, NY to find the best home for the letters. The House referred him to UR, where a large number of letters between the two activists have already been catalogued and preserved. The University planned to digitize the new collection and when Kodak Alaris' Bruce Holroyd learned of the project, he reached out to offer his assistance.

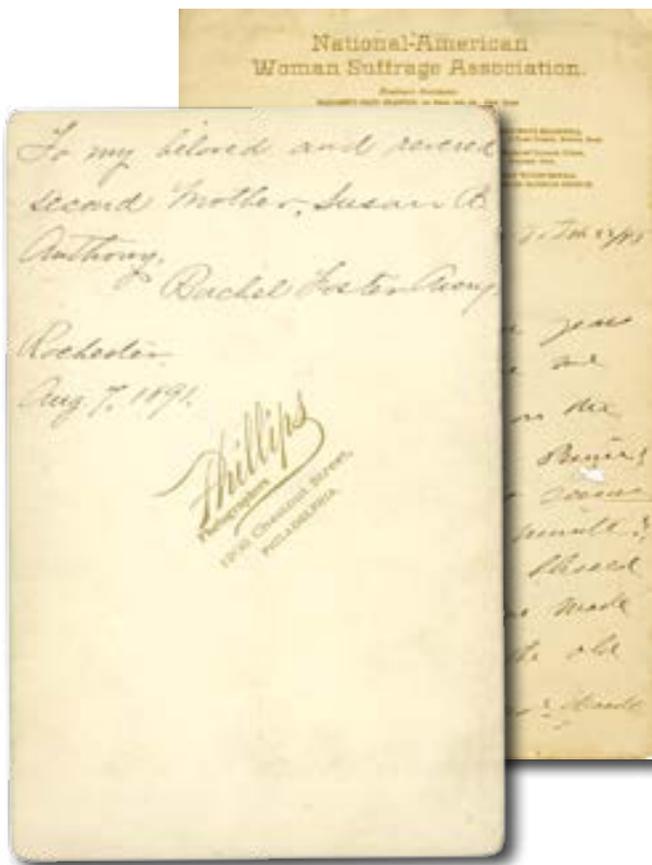
The timeline for the Anthony-Avery Papers began at UR in 1972 when the River Campus Libraries purchased hundreds of letters from Anthony to Avery at an auction.

An anonymous donor provided funds for UR to buy this original collection which had been in the Avery family's possession until that time. The 2014 acquisition added about 100 more letters from Anthony to Avery, along with Avery family correspondence and photographs. The total collection now spans from the 1880s – around the time the two women began their friendship – to 1919, near the time of Avery's death.

## Requirements

Because the collection had been held by the family for so many years, it had never been available to researchers before. Carefully digitizing the entire collection was essential to ensure widespread access.

The University believes this is now the largest collection of letters written by Susan B. Anthony to any single person. As part of a teaching institution, the library provides access to primary source material in both classroom settings and through digital reproduction, encouraging students to transcribe manuscripts. Working with these resources allows students to develop strong research and analytical thinking skills.



**“These letters provide researchers with human, personal perspective on Susan B. Anthony, as well as details about the groundbreaking work she was doing for women’s rights.”**

Lori Birrell, Curator of Historical Manuscript Collections,  
River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester

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## The solution

After testing a few workflows at the library, Bruce Holroyd, Kodak Alaris' Worldwide Product and Integration Manager for Photo Capture Products, decided to use the **Kodak** Picture Saver Scanning System PS50 with the **Kodak** A3 Size Flatbed Accessory (12" x 18"). While he considered using even faster and higher resolution options, the flatbed allowed for greater



flexibility in handling varying sizes, scanning each fragile item individually and capturing with a color correction bar. Because the letters varied greatly in

brightness and whiteness, a precise color correction process needed to be completed in-house by UR photographers. The UR conservator worked directly with Kodak Alaris to agree on handling techniques for the century-old materials.

This workflow enabled scanning of 1,470 images, including approximately 50 photographs, in just over 20 hours. The final outputs were 600 dpi TIFF files.

To achieve the University of Rochester's goal of fully reuniting this collection and making it available to students and researchers for the first time, Holroyd didn't just scan the recent additions to the collection; he went back and scanned more than 90% of the collection – all the way back to pieces purchased in 1972.

## Results

The images are now being linked to an inventory of the manuscript [collection](#), and others can be found at an [online exhibit](#). New letters that are already online include:

- Handwritten letter signed from Susan B. Anthony to Rachel Foster Avery, Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 21, 1889: *Anthony writes to Avery and asks her about contacting Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female doctor in the United States.* [Link to letter, page 1](#) and [page 2](#).
- Handwritten letter signed from Susan B. Anthony to Rachel Foster Avery, Tenafly, New Jersey, January 2, 1881: *Anthony describes the arrangements for an upcoming National Woman Suffrage Association convention and current fundraising efforts.* [Link to transcription \(pdf\)](#).

The Anthony-Avery collection provides great insight into the lives and work of Susan B. Anthony and her fellow activists. One example is a newly-acquired March 7, 1890 letter Anthony wrote to Avery about balancing motherhood with the important work the two women were doing for women's rights.

A September 29, 1899 letter describes the impact of installing the first telephone in the house where Susan B. Anthony lived. The docents of the Anthony House now have precise information about the room in which it was installed and how this affected her daily life and work.

This is only the beginning of the discoveries now possible. Digitizing these images will allow an unlimited number of students, scholars and researchers to access these letters and images in support of the important work they carry out each year.

## "Digitizing this collection gives scholars access to what has never been publicly shared before."

Jim Kuhn, Director of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester

### Want to learn more?

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