



A Friend of Books

*A visionary donated his library,
a scholar's wonderland,
to Catholic University.
More than 100 years later,
two of his compatriots hope
to fulfill his legacy.*

By Greg Varner



CARTE DU B

On Election Day in 1912, a portly man with a walrus mustache entered the lobby of the Ebbitt House Hotel in Washington, D.C., where he was acclaimed by a group of well-wishers. Mistaken for William Howard Taft, the incumbent president of the United States (who, it turned out, was not reelected that day), the rotund figure was actually Manoel de Oliveira Lima, a distinguished Brazilian diplomat, journalist, and historian.

Today, two Brazilians at Catholic University, intent on bringing Oliveira Lima the recognition he deserves, are working to preserve and protect the library he donated to the University more than a century ago. Professor Duília de Mello, an astronomer in the Department of Physics and vice provost and dean of assessment, leads the effort to secure her compatriot's legacy. Nathalia Henrich, a postdoctoral scholar preparing her dissertation, on the role of the United States in Oliveira Lima's writing, for publication, is the library's interim curator.

Oliveira Lima's career took him to diplomatic posts around the world, from Caracas to Washington, D.C., to Tokyo, with assignments in several European capitals along the way. A prolific writer, he authored books on a range of subjects, among them a revisionist appraisal of John VI, king of Brazil, Portugal, and the Algarves from 1816 to 1825. Oliveira Lima maintained a steady correspondence with Brazil's most admired intellectuals, including Machado de Assis, Euclides da Cunha, Gilberto Freyre, and many others. Two weekly columns for a newspaper in São Paulo, "National Things" and "Foreign Things," reflected his reach; while commenting on Brazilian politics and culture, he also interpreted the wider world for his readers.

He wrote on subjects ranging from Japan to how people danced the tango. He wrote about World War I, which he opposed. Though he was an admirer of the United States, he was a sharp critic of Teddy Roosevelt's "big stick" policy.

"I cannot help buying books," Oliveira Lima once confessed. His connections to an international network of booksellers and auctioneers made it possible for him to acquire thousands of treasures, including rare early editions of *Os Lusíadas*, the Portuguese national epic by Camões, as well as a copy of Jean-Baptiste Debret's *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil*, with detailed engravings showing scenes from 19th-century Brazilian society. The oldest book in Oliveira Lima's collection, produced by the Italian cartographer Fracanzano da Montalboddo in 1507, contains the first printed account of the "discovery" of Brazil seven years earlier by the Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral.

In 1916, Oliveira Lima donated his library, containing thousands of rare and valuable items, to Catholic University, still a young institution at that time. In a letter to Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, the University's rector, Oliveira Lima wrote that he and his wife, Flora, "are both Roman Catholics, and anxious not only to see our faith prosper in America, but to see the Catholic University of Washington raised to an international center of learning in the New World."

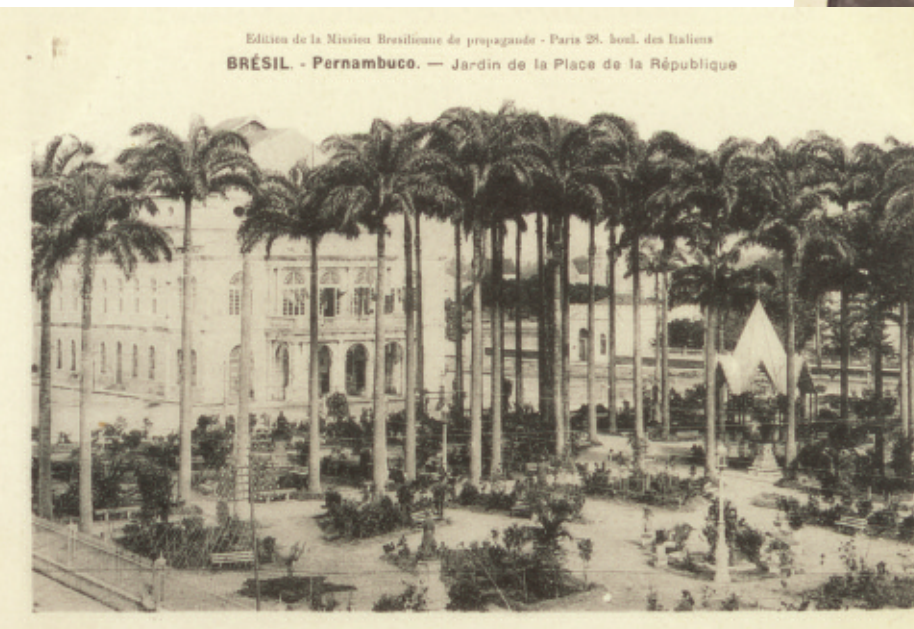
One hundred years later, the gift of his library, reopened this year, is still a jewel in the University's crown.

Plan B

For Oliveira Lima, the donation of his treasure to Catholic University was a logical plan B. He had hoped to retire to London, where he and Flora kept an apartment, but the British government designated him a *persona non grata* because of his criticism of World War I and his admiration for German

Preceding page: An engraving from Jean-Baptiste Debret's *Picturesque and Historical Voyage to Brazil*, one of hundreds of rare books in the collection.

Left: Manoel de Oliveira Lima and his wife, Flora, in Japan, c. 1902.



This postcard offers an early 20th-century view of a public square in Recife, Oliveira Lima's hometown in the state of Pernambuco.

culture. When his plan for retirement in England fell through, he offered his library to Catholic University on two conditions — that it would be kept separate with his name attached, and that he would be its keeper.

"It's easy to see why Washington would be a logical second option for him," said Henrich, who hopes to finish writing a biography of Oliveira Lima in the next two years. "He was really very impressed with the University when he first came to Washington, D.C., in 1896. He also always liked Washington — it's the capital, and he was very involved with the peace movement and various organizations at a time of so much political and social change."

By the time he came to Catholic University, Oliveira Lima had sampled the academic life by lecturing at Stanford and teaching a course at Harvard. He taught international law in the School of Canon Law and continued to build his invaluable library. The collection, patiently assembled over decades, includes not only books, but paintings and other art objects, including landscapes by Nicolas-Antoine Taunay and Frans Post (the latter's *Brazilian Landscape, Probably Pernambuco*, c. 1660, is on loan to the National Gallery of Art), as well as works by the Brazilian master Antônio Parreiras, a friend of Oliveira Lima's. There are thousands of photographs and postcards as well as numerous maps, drawings, prints, manuscripts, and sculptures.

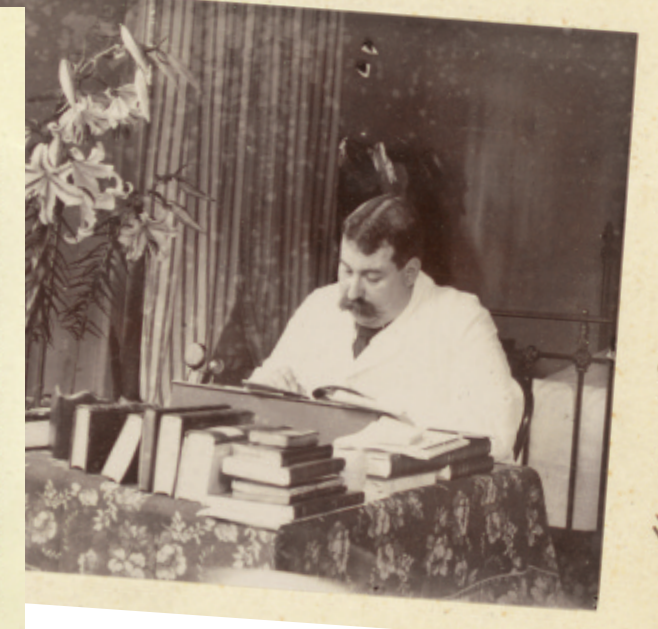
In addition, the collection is home to thousands of pamphlets, some dating back to the late 18th century, on subjects such as public health, women's rights (encouraged by her spouse, Flora was a noted supporter of women's suffrage), World War I, the arts, and many other themes. The pamphlet collection is especially rich on matters surrounding Brazilian independence. Many items from this trove of ephemera have been digitized, and can be viewed online by members of the Catholic University community.

Letters from more than 1,400 correspondents round out the collection, along with scrapbooks, medals, and other items. The Lima Library is a wonderland for scholars interested in a plethora of topics, from slavery and diplomacy to religion and literature, especially as they relate to the history of Portugal and Brazil.

For all his wide and seemingly disparate interests, Oliveira Lima did not pursue his collecting in a haphazard way.

"He was not hoarding books," Henrich said. "He was really curating — he knew what he was buying."

After her husband's sudden death in 1928, Flora took charge of the library,



Oliveira Lima works at his desk while on assignment as a diplomat in Japan (1900-1903) in a photograph taken by his wife.

she served as librarian until she died in 1940. Succeeding her, two faculty members from the Department of History, first Manoel Cardozo (from 1940 until 1985) and then Thomas Cohen (until 2015), became curators. Due mostly to lack of resources, the library was effectively closed two years ago.

Finding Things

Now, an ambitious plan to bring the collection to the prominence it deserves is in the early stages of action. Removing old, broken furniture and repainting the collection's current quarters, in the southwest corner of the Mullen Library basement, were early steps.

"I'm cleaning house," said de Mello, who is highly esteemed in her native Brazil for her scientific achievements. "Now we're in the process of discovering things, because they were not in catalogs, or were forgotten and not properly displayed. We're finding amazing things every day."

De Mello and Henrich are confident that the collection houses many important items that researchers still don't know about. It is not unusual for them to discover a forgotten letter from a Brazilian luminary such as Gilberto Freyre or Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto tucked between the pages of a book. Recently, they stumbled on a medal showing that Pope Pius XI knighted Oliveira Lima in 1924, probably in connection with the donation of his library.

"This medal was given to people who did good for the Church," de Mello said. "It was 1916, so the University barely had a library, and then here comes a person who had 40,000 books."

In Rio de Janeiro, de Mello's native city, there is a museum devoted to the art of Antônio Parreiras. She was delighted to find six of his works in the collection.

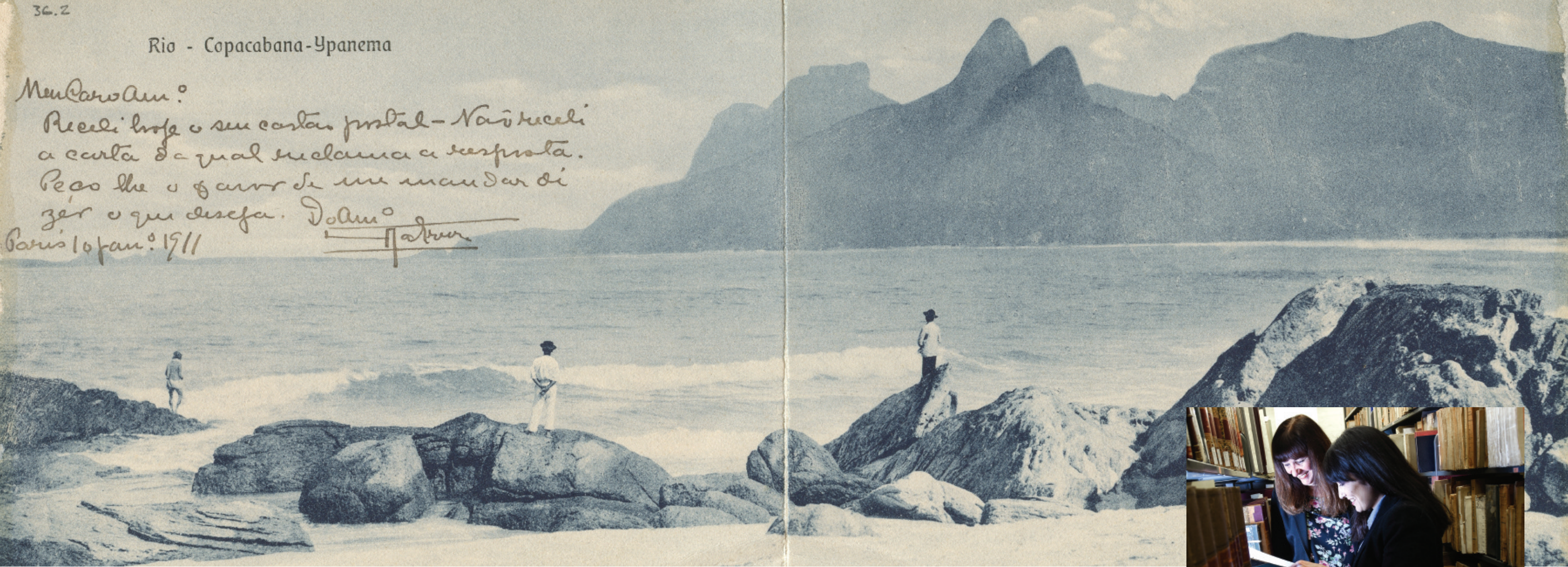
"He's a really accomplished painter," she said. "We had a list of paintings, but things were moved around, so we had to go digging and identify them. These works are not cataloged in Brazil because they were given to, or bought by, Oliveira Lima. He and Parreiras were very good friends. This has been really exciting for me!"

"I found one of Flora's necklaces," Henrich said, "with a pendant with a lock of his hair and his picture in it. It was at the bottom of the box. It really sums up the feeling of working here: It's amazing, being among these things with so much history and so much meaning, but at the same time, it was just total luck that the locket was in good shape. It makes you wonder how many other things haven't survived."

Rio - Copacabana - Upanema

Mau Mau Mau?

Receli hoje o seu cartão postal - Não receli
 a carta de qual melancolia a respirata.
 Peco lhe o favor de me mandar di
 zer o que deseja. Dolim^o
Antônio Parreiras
 Paris 10 Jan. 1911



This postcard presents a photograph by Marc Ferrez (1843–1923), a trailblazing photographer who captured many iconic images of his era. The painter Antônio Parreiras (1860–1937) sent this card to Oliveira Lima in Paris in 1911. Several works by Parreiras are in the Oliveira Lima Library.

The Next 100 Years

Next, de Mello hopes to assemble a team qualified to catalog every item using the most up-to-date methods. Fundraising is a major part of the project — funds are needed to hire expert catalogers and at least one resident librarian. University Trustee Enrique Segura and his wife, Alejandra, recently donated funds to fill a curatorial position and to provide seed money for a marketing effort to heighten awareness of the collection.

“We are looking at the next hundred years,” de Mello said. “Things that are made of paper are going to disappear if we don’t take care of them.”

Digitization will help preserve items as well as widen their availability. Preservation work must be undertaken to protect the collection’s treasures; artworks need restoration.

“We have broken frames, holes in paintings, tape on paintings, and things like that,” Henrich said. “We need space to properly display the artworks. With a bigger endowment, we could also have grants for researchers. We always have people requesting material and wanting to come here.”

Finally, there is the dream of building a new, modern Brazil Center on

campus, where the Oliveira Lima collection can be more appropriately housed and his legacy completely fulfilled. An artist’s rendering shows the proposed structure in the style of Mullen Library, with a white granite façade and red tile roof. The proposal calls for gallery space and an auditorium for performances and lectures, as well as reading rooms and space to host scholars interested in public policy, diplomacy, or the history, literature, and culture of Ibero-America and Brazil.

To elicit support, de Mello and Henrich have traveled to Brazil, where the collection is well known among scholars, for meetings with government officials, foundation administrators, and journalists. The Brazilian ambassador to the United States, Sérgio Amaral, came for a tour of the collection in January; his efforts will be instrumental in keeping members of the Brazilian diaspora in the United States and others informed of the library’s progress.

“The Oliveira Lima Library is a genuine treasure,” the ambassador said. “I was honored to visit the library on its reopening, and cherish the work that The Catholic University of America has done to preserve these pieces of history that have shaped our nation. Continuing this effort and expanding

the research on the collection is a project that is historically meaningful and culturally relevant to every Brazilian.”

“We are fulfilling Oliveira Lima’s vision,” Henrich said, “because his idea from the beginning was that the library could be the seed of a place that would attract people interested in learning about Brazil and the Ibero-American world. He wanted this enormous source of information to be used by scholars, to attract and inform people. That’s what he did his whole life as a diplomat; he was a strong believer in cultural diplomacy.”

Some day, perhaps, visitors to the new Brazil Center will take some time in Washington, D.C., to pay their respects to Oliveira Lima and his wife, buried in adjacent plots at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Flora’s grave is unmarked, though de Mello hopes that will change. In the Brazilian manner, a flat sheet of stone covers the visionary scholar’s grave. His name appears nowhere on it; there are no dates. After his death, friends acquired the stone from Pernambuco, Oliveira Lima’s home state in Brazil, and inscribed it according to his wishes, with only six words: *Aqui jaz um amigo dos livros* (“Here lies a friend of books”). **CU**



Duilia de Mello and Nathalia Henrich frequently discover forgotten treasures in the stacks.

Did you ever use the Oliveira Lima Library?

Tell us about it! Email us at cua-magazine@cua.edu. We’ll publish some responses in an upcoming issue.