

GUIDE~ LINES FOR

ARCHIVES AND
MANUSCRIPT
REPOSITORIES

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GUIDELINES for

Archives and Manuscript Repositories

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PREFACE

In August 1981 the Steering Committee of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, chaired by Arthur Breton, mandated that a Task Force establish guidelines for archives and manuscript repositories. The Task Force drew upon the varied archival experience and training of its members to prepare and revise a draft. Steering Committee members as well as MARAC members Sandra Chaff, Bob Morris, Annamarie Sandeck, and Jill Gates Smith submitted comments and suggestions that Erika Thickman Miller and I used in the final editing of the document. Miller, assisted by Margaret Terrido, prepared the printer's copy using a word processor made available by the Medical College of Pennsylvania.

The narrative of this second printing remains the same but we have updated the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

These Guidelines will inform the novice about what an archivist does and should do, and where the books and people can be found to provide further assistance. They also may serve to remind seasoned archivists of their many responsibilities.

The Guidelines are divided into two sections: management and operations. A selected bibliography of archival reference sources, organizations, and suppliers follows the text. The management section discusses the purpose of archives and manuscript repositories, institutional mandate, collection policy, physical planning, staff, and budget. Operations includes appraisal, accessioning, processing, and reference and outreach. The bibliography provides the titles of basic texts, many of which contain bibliographies pertaining to more specific topics. A list of national and regional organizations which offer useful advice and programs for archivists, and a list of dealers of archival-quality supplies complete the bibliography.

Archivists sometimes distinguish between an archives, which retains the significant records of its parent institution, and a manuscript repository, which collects papers and records of individuals and organizations not necessarily related to its parent

institution. Most but not all of the functions described in the Guidelines are applicable to both types of repositories, but may be given different priorities. Since "archives" is a generic term that represents both archives and manuscript repositories, it is used throughout these Guidelines.

Archivists, like other professionals, have developed their own language. If certain concepts remain a mystery, check some of the references in the bibliography. A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers (see bibliography for full citation) provides definitions for most of the archival terms used.

MANAGEMENT

Purpose

The primary purpose of an archives is to appraise, collect, preserve, arrange, describe, and make accessible those materials having permanent administrative, legal, fiscal, informational, or historical value. Archival holdings may include textual, cartographic, audio-visual, and machine-readable records, as well as photographs, prints, graphics, paintings, and artifacts.

An archives, when properly managed,

will ensure appropriate care for records having permanent value. An institution may use its archives for legal research, review of past operations and policies for current decision-making processes, employee and client relations, and public relations. The primary focus of most manuscript repositories is to aid a broad range of researchers which might include historians, genealogists, journalists, picture researchers and other commercial users, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and lawyers.

Institutional Mandate

The archivist's first job is to define the archives' purpose, functions, and goals; and secure a mandate from the governing authority of the institution. The archives should receive adequate personnel and financial resources to carry out its stated responsibilities. It also should be autonomous and on the same administrative level as other offices with corresponding functions. Make sure the archivist has the responsibilities of granting and limiting access to the archives, preparing the budget, and determining what materials belong in the archives. Prepare and obtain approval of job descriptions for each archives' staff member.

Collection Policy

When defining the archives' purpose, functions, and goals, the archivist must establish a policy that states the repository's collecting area. The collection policy may be limited to the parent institution's records, special subjects, geographic regions, time periods, or types of materials. The collection policy should be in writing and be formally approved by the governing authority of the institution.

In establishing the collection policy, consider the overall purpose and goals of the parent institution; present and projected research use; and the ability to provide adequate care for what the archives accepts. Manuscript repositories also should know the collection policies of other repositories in their geographic area and coordinate their collecting efforts. Periodically review the collection policy and make appropriate changes when warranted.

The collection policy will give the archivist authority to negotiate for and accept gifts of archival materials, and to define the terms (if any) under which items may be accepted on loan or deposit. The collection policy may prove helpful in diplomatically turning down unwanted materials, and may be the first step in eliminating those items acquired indiscriminately in the past. Where

appropriate, the archivist should participate in the establishment of records disposition schedules, and should oversee the examination and transfer of records to the archives.

Physical Planning

In the physical planning of the archives, location, environment, and equipment needs must be considered. Do not expect an architectural designer to know the requirements of an archives. Read the pertinent literature and consult other archivists before approving any plans.

Locate the archives in a fire-resistant building above ground level, some distance from areas where insects, extreme ranges of heat and humidity, or fire and water damage may occur. Make sure there are no overhead pipes, except dry-pipe sprinklers or a halon system. Allocate adequate space for the storage and processing of archival materials, as well as room for researchers.

The archives should provide the proper environment for its holdings. Protect materials in the archives against natural and fluorescent light by means of curtains, shades, UV (ultraviolet) filters, or incandescent lights, and by locating the archives on the north side of a building. Also maintain as constant a temperature and humidity as possible

throughout the year (60-70 F. and 40-50% R.H. are usually suggested as proper for paper documents). Restrictions against smoking; and the installation of fire extinguishers and smoke, heat, and water detectors all can help to prevent fire or water damage. In order to reduce the danger of theft and vandalism, install locks for all archives' areas with limited access to the keys; also install a security alarm system. Prepare a disaster plan so that everyone knows what to do should fire, water, or any other physical damage to the archives occur.

Obtain sufficient metal shelving to store existing materials and to accomodate growth in the collection. Special types of storage equipment, such as map files and microfilm cabinets, also may be necessary. Acquire other furniture and equipment (e.g., work tables, tables for researchers, typewriters, and lockers for researchers' coats and bags). Fumigation and conservation equipment also may be desirable. Try to gain access to a photocopier, microfilm reader, audio-visual equipment, word processor, water supply, loading dock, and freight elevator.

Staff

Select staff members from applicants with the best qualifications

to meet the archives' goals. Give preference to those with specialized archival education or training, an academic background that emphasized research and writing ability, and prior work experience with professional archivists. Ask for and check the applicants' references.

Budget

Keeping accurate financial records will aid in planning the budget, preparing special project proposals, and justifying costs. Gather financial data for each function: management, appraisal, processing, and reference and outreach activities.

Management costs include payroll, overhead (maintenance and utilities), clerical supplies, subscriptions and dues, reference and bibliographic materials, attendance at archival and related professional meetings, training, postage and freight, and outside services. Appraisal expenses include payroll, travel, acquisitions, postage and freight, and outside services. Processing costs consist of payroll, equipment, archival and conservation supplies, and fees for outside conservators. Reference and outreach activities include payroll; reproduction costs, some of which may be passed on to researchers; and publicity expenses.

Monitor actual expenses against the budgeted figures on at least a quarterly basis.

OPERATIONS

Appraisal

The task of appraising materials is one of the most important responsibilities for the archivist. The collection policy has set the archives' acquisitions strategy. The archivist then must determine which specific materials that meet the policy's general guidelines have sufficient value to warrant the time, space, and money necessary to preserve, arrange, and make them accessible. Only materials having permanent administrative, legal, fiscal, informational, or historical value should be considered archival. Keep in mind the archives' purpose and goals, and use good judgment and knowledge of the present holdings when making appraisal decisions.

Once it is determined that the materials have archival value, execute the appropriate legal forms: a deed of gift if the materials are from an outside donor, or a transfer form if the materials belong to the parent institution. Indicate what will happen to materials that the archives does not wish to retain. Prepare standard forms for

accepting materials into the archives, and have a lawyer review them.

Access to unpublished materials may be restricted by the donor or office of origin. Make sure that such restrictions are included on the deed of gift or transfer form, and that they are limited to a fixed term. Avoid agreements that restrict access to materials for the lifetime of a person, as well as other agreements that appear difficult to administer. Encourage minimal access restrictions consistent with the legal rights (property, literary, and privacy) of all concerned. Also obtain and keep on file information about the materials and their arrangement prior to the shipment or transfer to the archives.

Accessioning

The archivist should know where each collection is located within the archives and have a general idea of its contents. The procedures which bring materials under the physical and intellectual control of the archives are called accessioning and processing.

Accessioning is the first step in recording the contents of the collection. It establishes the archives' responsibility for the materials and, until processing begins, will be the only source of information about the contents and research value of the collection, as

well as its location in the archives. All collections, whether just acquired or discovered in the archives after years of neglect, should be accessioned.

The archivist assigns each collection a number. The most common accessioning systems follow a numerical sequence which incorporates the year as part of the accession number (e.g., 83001). Other data entered in the accession record includes: name of the collection, name and location of the donor or office of origin, types and subjects of the materials, date received, any restrictions on use, date processed, location of the collection, and person preparing the form. A loose-leaf binder or card file may house the accession records. Separate donor and collection location files also may prove helpful.

Processing

Although accessioning provides preliminary physical and intellectual control over an archives' holdings, further work usually needs to be done to arrange, preserve, and describe each collection. Since processing is time-consuming, a backlog of unprocessed but accessioned collections often results. Therefore, the archivist must set priorities to determine in what order collections should be processed.

Arranging means organizing a

collection based upon the archival principles of provenance and original order. When the original order within the collection cannot be determined, use common sense to arrange the materials in the way that makes them most readily accessible (e.g., types of materials, function, chronological, or alphabetical order). Determine whether to arrange the collection to the series, section, file, or folder unit level. Use good judgment and common sense in deciding whether to weed the collection of voluminous items of minor importance.

During the arranging, perform basic conservation measures, i.e., flatten paper; remove paper clips, string, rubber bands, and staples; photocopy newsprint and other paper that deteriorates rapidly; and encapsulate fragile documents in mylar. Place the materials in acid-free folders and boxes, clearly labelled with the name of the collection, contents, dates, accession number, and box and folder number.

While the collection is being arranged and individual items preserved, the processor should begin to write a finding aid which will provide access to the collection. A finding aid usually includes the collection title; a biographical or historical sketch; a brief essay about the scope and contents of the collection, describing its arrangement, and noting informational

strengths and weaknesses; any restrictions on collection use; and a container or folder list. The total size of the collection, the name of the person donating or department transferring the collection, and the name of the person preparing the finding aid also are given. The size, form, and detail of the finding aid will depend upon the collection. Archivists may select index terms from the finding aid, and may prepare card catalog entries for each collection, but they rarely produce detailed item indices.

Reference and Outreach

An active, highly visible repository should be every archivist's goal. Well-directed publicity will provide information about the repository and encourage research use. One effective way to promote the archives and its activities is to distribute an informational handout. Also make sure the archives is included in all descriptions of the institution. Short-term and traveling exhibits can highlight the archives' holdings. Publish a newsletter or write a regular feature for the parent institution's newsletter. Report the archives' collections to appropriate special subject, regional, and national guides (e.g., Sources for the History of Women in the Philadelphia

Area, The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections). Also periodically publish a guide to the archives' holdings. Advise professional journals of any significant acquisitions, activities, or events.

Once researchers become aware of the archives and its collections, the archivist must perform the dual function of protecting the materials and making them available. Prepare and display a written statement indicating who can use the archives and under what conditions. All users should receive this policy statement and should also be required to complete a standard registration form recording the researcher's name and address, topic, records requested, and date. The archives should retain these registration forms indefinitely for analysis and in case of theft of records.

Access to unrestricted materials should be on equal terms to all researchers who abide by the archives' rules. Observe the Society of American Archivists' guidelines regarding access to records.* Sometimes the originating office or donor may grant access to restricted materials. Such special permission should be in writing and retained indefinitely by the archives.

*Policy may be found in Sue Holbert, Archives and Manuscripts:Reference and Access (Chicago:SAA), 1977.

Access to unaccessioned or unprocessed collections should be strictly limited but not arbitrarily denied. Become familiar with state and federal laws affecting privacy and freedom of information.

An archivist can help to protect collections by providing only a limited amount of material at one time to a researcher, and making sure the material is used only in the reading area and is returned to the stacks immediately after use. The stack area should be restricted to staff members. Monitor the researchers' area at all times when records are in use. Locating the supervisor's desk next to the exit may prove helpful. Retain researchers' request slips in addition to the registration forms. Prepare a security plan so that staff members know what to do in the case of an attempted theft. Also make sure everyone is familiar with applicable state laws regarding the theft of archival materials.

The rules governing the use of the archives should specify that researchers cannot use pens or indelible markers, nor eat, drink, or smoke in the archives; and that they should not bring coats or briefcases to their work tables. Make available to all researchers a summary of fees and conditions for reproduction of all archival materials. Photocopying policies should consider the fragility of

materials, and researchers should be informed of the copyright law. Observe the Society of American Archivists' guidelines regarding the reproduction of archival materials.*

The amount of reference service provided by the archivist will vary with the type and volume of requests, but should include, at a minimum, detailed guidance in the use of the finding aids. Interviewing researchers who make extensive use of the repository will benefit both the archivist and inquirer: the archivist will learn whether the finding aids, arrangement of materials, and staff service has helped the researcher; and the researcher may learn of other pertinent sources of information in the archives and other repositories.

The archivist should answer written or telephone requests for information from specific records when possible. Set a time limit for different types of questions, and encourage those within a reasonable distance to visit the archives and do their own research.

The archivist may wish to keep a detailed log or index file of inquiries, listing research question, answer, sources used, and date. This information can reduce the time required to answer similar questions and also may provide useful statistics.

*Ibid.

Conclusion

In working to establish and improve an archives, the archivist must fulfill all obligations to the institution and researcher. The success of the archives depends upon good planning, responsible management, capable personnel, and adequate funding. Every aspect of management and operations, from the approval of the institutional mandate to the acquisition of materials to the reliability of reference tools and services, should reflect the archives' stated purpose, functions, and goals. Beyond these primary duties remain the archivist's responsibility to sustain and improve the profession.

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Duckett, Kenneth W. Modern Manuscripts: A Practical Manual for Their Management, Care and Use (Nashville, TN: Am. Assn. for State & Local History), 1975.

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Schellenberg, Theodore, R. The Management of Archives (NY: Columbia University Press), 1965.

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The Society of American Archivists publishes two Basic Manual Series consisting of booklets that provide "how to do it" information.

Basic Manual Series I

Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning, Maynard J. Brichford
Archives & Manuscripts: Arrangement & Description, David B. Gracy II
Archives & Manuscripts: Reference & Access, Sue E. Holbert
Archives & Manuscripts: Security, Timothy Walch
Archives & Manuscripts: Surveys, John A. Fleckner

Basic Manual Series II

Archives & Manuscripts: Exhibits,
Gail Farr Casterline

Archives & Manuscripts: An Introduction
to Automated Access, H. Thomas
Hickerson

Archives & Manuscripts: Public Programs,
Ann Pederson & Gail Farr Casterline

Also available from the SAA are Problems in Archives Kits (PAKS) containing reports, manuals, forms, and sound recordings. Appraisal, security, starting an archives, and processing costs are some PAKS subjects.

A Selected List of Organizations

American Assn. for State & Local History
1400 8th Ave. South
Nashville, TN 37203

Publishes monthly magazine, History News, that sometimes includes a "Technical Leaflet" of use to archivists. Active publications program; publications list available. Annual meeting.

American Association of Museums
1055 Thomas Jefferson St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20007

Monthly Aviso newsletter reports on public policy decisions, funding affecting museums. Bi-monthly magazine, Museum News. Annual meeting.

Library of Congress
Publishing Office
Washington, D.C. 20540

National Archives & Records Service
Publication Sales Branch (NEPS)
Washington, D.C. 20408

Society of American Archivists
330 South Wells St.
Suite 810
Chicago, IL 60606

Publishes bi-monthly newsletter and

quarterly journal, American Archivist.
Active publications program including the
Basic Manual Series and booklets aimed at
different types of repositories;
publications list available. Annual
meeting; periodic workshops.

The following regional organizations hold
periodic meetings:

Archivists' Round Table of Metro. N.Y.
Ellen Sowchek
Pace University Archives
Pace Plaza
New York, NY 10038

Delaware Valley Archivists
Joe Anderson
The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies
18 S. 7th St.
Philadelphia, PA 19106

D.C. Archivists
Jacqueline Goggin
621 Hamlin St., #5 NE
Washington, D.C. 20017

Lake Ontario Archives Conference
Bruce Dearstyne
State Archives
Room 9C49 Cultural Education Center
Albany, NY 12230

Long Island Archives Conference
Rev. Harry Culkin
Cathedral College
7200 Douglaston Parkway
Douglaston, NY 11362

Metropolitan Area Religious Archives
Denis Sennett, S.A.
Graymoor
Garrison, NY 10524

Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference
Laura Grotzinger
1509 Country Lane
West Trenton, NJ 08621

Publishes quarterly newsletter,
mid-atlantic archivist; semi-annual
meetings; occasional publications.

A Partial List of Suppliers

The suppliers listed below have been frequently used by MARAC members. MARAC does not necessarily endorse their products over those of any other supplier.

Conservation Materials, Ltd.
340 Freeport Blvd.
Box 2884
Sparks, NV 89431
(702) 331-0582

Conservation Resources Intl., Inc.
1111 North Royal St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 549-6610

Gaylord Brothers, Inc.
P.O. Box 4901
Syracuse, NY 13221
(315) 457-5070

The Hollinger Corp.
P.O. Box 6185
3810 South Four Mile Run Dr.
Arlington, VA 22206

Light Impressions Corp.
P.O. Box 3012
Rochester, NY 14614
(716) 271-8960

The Paige Company
432 Park Ave. South
New York, NY 10016
(212) 679-6626

Pohlig Brothers, Inc.
P.O. Box 8069
Richmond, VA 23223
(804) 664-7824

Process Materials Corp.
301 Veterans Blvd.
Rutherford, NJ 07070
(201) 935-2900

TALAS
130 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011
(212) 675-0718

University Products, Inc.
P.O. Box 101
South Canal Street
Holyoke, MA 01041
(413) 532-9431