

SLIDE – INTRODUCTION

The Archives Exposed

For those who don't know me, my name is Brigette Kamsler and I am the project archivist at the Burke Library. I've been at Columbia for almost four years. I have a masters in library and information science from the University of Pittsburgh, where I specialized in archives, preservation and records management. I have always been an archivist and worked in archives.

SLIDE - OVERVIEW

So today we are going to talk about a variety of basic things related to archives. Some of this you may already know, but to some of you this may be completely new. All of you are expected to work with archives in your respective languages, so I'm going to break it down into these topics.

A word about terminology: archivists generally use the terms archival collections, papers, records, or just collections to talk about a group of material created by the same entity. Academics and curators refer to these as archives. Archivists rarely use archive as a verb, we would say process, preserve, describe, make available.

These will be the goals of what we will cover today!

SLIDE – What are archives?

Archives are the **non-current records** of individuals, groups, institutions, and governments that contain information of **enduring value**.

Formats represented in the modern archival repository include photographs, films, video and sound recordings, computer tapes, and video, as well as the more traditional unpublished letters, diaries, and other manuscripts. Archival records are the products of everyday activity.

Researchers use them both for their administrative value and for purposes other than those for which they were created. For example, Native Americans may use archival records to establish legal claims to land and privileges guaranteed by federal and state governments; medical researchers utilize records to study patterns of diseases; authors use archives to acquire a feel for the people and times about which they are writing; and historians and genealogists rely on archival sources to analyze past events to

reconstruct family histories. In short, archives benefit nearly everyone, even those who have never directly used them.

Also just because something is old does not mean it should be kept and has value. Just because something is new, does not make it LESS valuable.

SLIDE – Who Are Archivists?

Archivists are more than just people who love “old stuff.”

According to the Society of American Archivists, North America's oldest and largest national archival professional association, archivists are:

Individuals responsible for appraising, acquiring, arranging, describing, preserving, and providing access to records of enduring value, according to the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control to protect the materials' authenticity and context. I will explain all of these things a bit more later in the presentation.

An individual with responsibility for management and oversight of an archival repository or of records of enduring value.

An archivist's work with records of enduring value may be at any stage in the records life cycle, from creation onward. In some organizations, an archivist may be responsible for management of active, inactive, and archival records. In other organizations, an archivist may be responsible only for those records transferred to the archives. In a large repository, a practicing archivist may specialize in only one or a few archival functions noted above. A teaching archivist may not be currently responsible for collections but is familiar with the theory and practice of archival functions.

The Work of Archivists

The primary task of the archivist is to establish and maintain control, both physical and intellectual, over records of enduring value. Archivists **select** records, a process that requires an understanding of the historical context in which the records were created, the uses for which they were intended, and their relationships to other sources. Archivists need to have a broad perspective – records perform not just one service, but a whole range that we cannot possibly anticipate. For example, our collection of Missionary materials is used by historians, anthropologists, and filmmakers just to name a few – not just those in theology or religion. Making this “variety of use” possible is the archivist’s goal.

The archivist then arranges and describes the records, in accordance with accepted standards and practices; ensures the long-term preservation of collections; assists researchers; and could plan and direct exhibitions, publications, and other outreach programs to broaden the use of collections and to enlist support for archival programs.

The work of the archivist is related to, but distinct from, that of certain other professionals. The **librarian and the archivist**, for example, both collect, preserve, and make accessible materials for research; but significant differences exist in the way these materials are arranged, described, and used. The **records manager** and the archivist are also closely allied; however, the records manager controls vast quantities of institutional records, most of which will eventually be destroyed, while the archivist is concerned with relatively small quantities of records deemed important enough to be retained for an extended period. The **museum curator** and the archivist are associated; however, the museum curator collects, studies, and interprets mostly three-dimensional objects, while the archivist works with paper, film, and electronic records. Finally, the archivist and the **historian** have had a longstanding relationship; the archivist identifies, preserves, and makes the records accessible for use, while the historian uses archival records for research.

SLIDE - A few other tips from archivists for those who want to be archivists:

- Context is key. Always provide context.
- Be prepared to work in an archives that's completely unorganized!
- Must be willing to succeed/fail and then TALK about that success/failure with community so that everyone is on same page.
- You have to like talking about your collections, why they and your professional skills matter to anyone who will listen
- It can be exciting and fun but it can also be boring! Removing paperclips, staples, etc...

Misconceptions about archivists:

- That we work with dusty things all the time! Every article mentions dust! Yes, we deal with it sometimes, but not all the time
- That we deal with the past -- technically speaking, we're dealing with the future.
- That archivists know all & can find needle in hay at drop of a hat in time 4 evening news

SLIDE - What is an archival collection?

Archivists generally use the terms archival collections, papers, records, or just collections to talk about a group of material created by the same entity.

What do archival collections look like?

SLIDE 1 – Some finished boxes and ReCAP. Nice and Pretty!

SLIDE 2 – Past places I have worked, and more often the reality.

SLIDE - Functions

The basic functions or tasks of an archivist:

Appraisal is the process of identifying the research value of materials. This is not financial appraisal. Guidelines to use involve: the completeness of the material as a whole, the authenticity or originality of material, the physical condition, and any sort of research value. Appraisal can happen before acquisition. It can also occur during processing which might take the form of weeding, e.g. getting rid of duplicates.

Acquisition is the process of buying or being given materials, generally a legal document is associated called a deed of gift or purchase agreement which outlines the transfer of rights and other specific details.

Accessioning is the process of archivists first taking physical and intellectual control over a collection. This usually involves description of the collection and will note the date the repository took in the collection. The more information the better. A catalog record or other descriptive entry could be created to officially add it to the library's holdings.

Processing involves arranging, describing, and preserving materials within a collection with the ultimate goal of providing access to the collection. Finding aid and more complete catalog records are also created. Preserving can be as simple as putting the materials in new acid free folders and boxes, and making note of prior damage, like from pests or water.

Access is the process by which archivists locate information using catalogs, finding aids, or other resources, this happens for internal and external purposes. Reference involves assisting users find what they need and pointing them to potentially relevant sources.

Outreach and advocacy – alerting people what you have, why you have it, telling them it is newly available, and also being a cheerleader for your institution.

SLIDE - Archival Theory

So, what archivists do is not pulled from thin air. It has been tried and tested for years, and eventually we reach an agreement which are known as standards and best practices. The last hundred years of theory can be traced first to:

1. Dutch Manual, 1898 – Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives – 100 rules outlined in manual debated by Dutch Association of Archivists. Defined archives and outlined twin principles of provenance and original order.

2. Sir Hilary Jenkinson was a British archivist who published the second major treatise on archival theory and practice in 1922 – main themes were that archives provided impartial evidence and that archivists were the guardians of this evidence. “The Archivist’s career is one of service.”

Basically, whatever was given should be kept as is.

American archivist Gerald Ham recently, starkly, but correctly commented on the central Jenkinson dilemma about appraisal: "Allowing the creator to designate what should be the archival record solves the problems of complexity, impermanence, and volume of contemporary records by ignoring them.”

3. Contemporary society brought with it voluminous backlogs of material in United States which created a need for records management and a concept that not all materials could be described and saved. Theodore Roosevelt Schellenberg, an American archivist who worked mostly at the National Archives, insisted that the administrator (donor) did not determine what made it into the “memory house” but rather the archivist did with training and help from subject specialists. Use-defined archives, archivists determine informational value (appraisal) by studying past and present uses of material and speculating future uses. Has problems and is haphazard, excludes populations.

More Product, Less Process – was an article written in 2005 that completely changed how many people think about processing. It is the idea that traditional processing is too slow when we have so much backlog and materials piling up, not accessible to users (the whole reason we are here). We have to make collections available more quickly so that people have access to the collections. Why spend so much time on a collection when we don’t know if/how it will be used?

Involves not removing paperclips and staples, and sometimes not even changing out the boxes.

By making a collection available quickly, it can get out there for potential research. If people start using the collection more often, and want more detail, then you have a reason to go back and do more-detailed processing.

We continue to theorize as a profession about the profession, about information organization, about best practices, and impact. Numerous peer-reviewed journals and monograph literature as well as an active social media sphere.

Now we will take another look at the actual principles that we follow with all of our work.

Principles of Archival Arrangement

Archival arrangement is based on two core principles: provenance (or *respect des fonds*) and original order.

SLIDE – Provenance [and original order]

Fulfilling the principle of provenance requires that collections of different origins, or provenance, be maintained as discrete entities in order to preserve context within each collection.

Thus, individual archival collections should not be merged, or dismembered and rearranged, on the basis of subject, form of material, chronological period, or some other classification scheme.

As an example: We have the papers of Charles Augustus Briggs. Charles Briggs was a Presbyterian minister and professor at Union. He was charged with heresy by the Presbyterian Church because of something he wrote, and he went to trial. So, we have his personal papers which include information on this heresy case.

Along with that are materials in the Burke Archives from other professors who were affected by this heresy case, some of whom even left the Presbyterian church because of this trial. These are all unique sets of collections; while they all have to do with Briggs and his trial, they all have different origins and creators and would be kept separate. We would cross reference them in the finding aids as “Further Sources” but we would not intermix them into one huge collection.

Provenance reflects the idea that materials generated by the same creator, be that a person, corporate body, or family are kept together and not intermingled with material from other creators.

Exception would be the creation of an artificial collection, assemblage of material generally related to the same subject created by a collector or library, but that is noted in finding aids.

Pulling documents from one collection to create an artificial collection means losing any context that the document might have had in its original location. Since that context can provide valuable information about how or when a document was created or what other documents were associated with it, individual collections are best kept as separate entities.

Original Order

While the principle of provenance is of concern to the stewardship of a collection as a whole, the principle of original order applies to the **arrangement within** a collection.

Original order is something archivists strive to ascertain and if identified, maintain. Not only is it more time-efficient for us, it can also reveal to users something about how the person or organization thought and organized their materials. This is more easy to determine with records rather than papers.

Fulfilling the principle of original order requires keeping the material within a collection in, well, its original order, and not rearranging or organizing the material in some fashion deemed more appropriate by the archivist.

If the creator, for example, kept the correspondence within the collection in chronological order, the archivist should not re-arrange the correspondence alphabetically. To facilitate a search for individual correspondents within the chronological order an index, a list of correspondents or some cross-referencing scheme could be generated. Thus the material, while remaining in its original order, would become more readily accessible to researchers.

Maintaining documents as the creator arranged them provides contextual information about both the documents and their creator, and may be vital even to understanding the collection as a whole.

Unfortunately many collections arrive without any signs of order, let alone original order. A collection may be in disarray for any number of reasons: damage due to water or mold which requires re-housing; parts of the collection arrived at different times and from different persons or places; perhaps someone just dumped the files randomly into

boxes; or the creator of the collection was a particularly disorganized person or organization.

If no original order can be discerned, or the original order is deemed detrimental to research or to preservation of the material then the archivist must impose some order upon the collection.

SLIDE - What is Archival Processing?

Archival processing is the work of arranging, describing, and housing archival collections in an effort to both preserve archival material and to make it accessible to researchers.

Archival collections in the United States generally are divided into two categories: **Papers**, collections created by individuals or families, and **Records**, collections created by organizations and institutions. Archival collections of former Union Theological Seminary faculty, for example, are papers: the Philip Schaff Papers and the Charles Augustus Briggs Papers; while collections from organizations and offices are records: the World Council of Churches Records or Near East Relief Committee Records.

Outside of the United States, the term **Fonds**, defined as records created by individuals, families, institutions and organizations, and therefore including both records and papers, is the preferred term for archival collections.

We have to sometimes look at the trivial and mundane items within a collection and yet simultaneously step back and see the collection as a whole, to see the collection in the context of the collections at Burke, at Columbia University, to see my work on that item and the necessary work that needs to be done, but to also see that work in the context of my role in the library, in the profession.

I think processing involves much starting and stopping, assessing and evaluating. What's working and what isn't. It involves some reading, but a lot of scanning, identifying, and categorizing.

Arrangement and description are essential to ensure that records brought into the archives are understandable and accessible, to identify and explain the context and content of archival material in order to promote its accessibility.

SLIDE - Key Concepts

Archivists arrange and describe aggregates of material, hierarchically, in order to provide context, and to achieve physical and intellectual control over the materials.

SLIDE - Aggregates: These are some examples of typical aggregates of materials. These can be both physical groupings of actual documents or also intellectual groupings.

SLIDE - Hierarchy: Collections are further subdivided into series, sub-series, files, and items.

Series are groupings of similar material within a collection. Defining the series in the collection, or at least a rough outline of the series based on the work plan, provides intellectual control of the collection. Series also give the collection a structure and form with which to facilitate the physical processing of the material

Series may be based on unique groupings of material within a collection or the genre or format of the materials within a collection.

Genre: Administrative files, correspondence, legal documents, subject files

Format: Photographs, audio-visual materials, diaries, printed material, clippings

[FINDING AID EXAMPLE] There are many examples out there of finding aids showing how people group LIKE material. All archives have similar materials depending on the genre or format. If you're not quite sure how to categorize something, check out some other examples either at Burke or RBML.

If you are working on an organization's records, you will probably have minutes, board records, reports, foundational documents – should these go into an “administrative material” section? Or should you just have it be broken down by Minutes and Reports, then Foundational Documents, etc...? Each collection is different. Ultimately does it make sense, does it reflect what the organization had set up, and can people find the material again?

SLIDE - Context: Items are always associated with the level above them, files same thing, series as well.

SLIDE - Standards

DACS is a content standard, so it tells us what types of information go where.

There are other standards, but DACS is the main one for physical processing. This is available online for free, and really I consult it bit by bit, not reading from cover to cover.

Use this for the finding aids, arrangement and description.

DACS follows a statement of about eight principles – I have printed that section for you.

[DACS handout]

SLIDE - Arrangement and Description

Arrangement is the process of physically organizing records in accordance with accepted standards of provenance and original order. Will usually involve re-boxing, labeling and shelving. We are trying to accurately reflect the way records were created and used by the person or organization.

Description is the process of recording standardized information about the arrangement, contents, and formats of the records so that people reading the descriptions will be able to determine if the information is relevant to their research.

****We are not here to do the research for the individual. We are here to make the collection stable for use, and describe is so people can find the information.****

Arrangement and description are normally happening together – filling out the finding aid while physically putting materials into new boxes and folders.

Some collections may still be in their original order, while others may take extensive reorganization either to restore order in which they were created and used, or to impose a new order if none previously existed.

MRL/WAB had no real original order due to water incursion.

I should also mention that I am focusing on and showing examples of arrangement and description of primarily papers records, and also photographs, other audio-visual materials, etc... There are other techniques for taking care of electronic records when it comes to arrangement and description but we can talk about that another day!

SLIDE - Where to begin?

1. Planning is where to begin! Organizing your archival effort itself is the first step towards organizing the archives. Firstly is the clear mission or vision statement, which we have. As part of Columbia University Libraries, the work of the organizational structure is already in place.

2. Identification: After the archives is established, the next step is identification.

Survey what you have – do you have accession/donation records?

Do you have a list or inventory of your collections? What about how big the collections are and how many boxes there should be? How much do you have (amount)?

What state is it in? Some archival boxes, some cartons, completely moldy?

If not, create some documentation about what you have, what state generally it is in. Before you can tackle it, you have to know what you have.

I think this is important not only for the entire body of archival records that Starr has, but then when you get down to the record groups (like MRL/WAB/UTS for Burke) and then down to the individual collections.

Some fundamental questions you can ask are:

-Who produced them?

-What are they?

-What are the reasons and purposes that the records were created?

-When were they produced, what period do they cover?

-How many of them are there? How many feet?

-Where are they? Spread throughout Starr or in one specific storage location? Can you pinpoint specific boxes within that space?

Appraisal: should all of these records be kept here?

During this survey you can also see if you have generally any material that may need to be restricted – student records, health information, etc...

Accessioning gives initial but limited control. It clearly defines the extent of a collection of records on the basis of its provenance (or history), and ensures that it doesn't become intermingled with other collections.

→ Processing plan

Once you know what you have generally, and know what state it is in, you can start to create priorities.

Other things to consider:

- Templates? Standardized sizes for things like boxes and folders? (ex: all legal size)
- Burke, RBML and Avery all have templates and plans that we follow which we would be happy to share, and the Archives Working Group has been gathering in general for all people's use.

How much time do you/other staff have?

- Do you have the space for the completed collections?
- Do you currently have supplies on hand?
- Do you know how you want to write the finding aids – do you have templates?
- How will you provide access to these materials once they are processed?

Setting Processing Priorities:

- Are people asking for specific collections?
- Do you have a future digitization or exhibit project in mind?
- Are there other preservation issues?
- Do you have staff with specific expertise that won't be there in the future?

Identify the collections and place them in context.

How will you make these materials available? Will you post finding aids on the website like Burke does or do what RBML does and use EAD?

SLIDE – REMEMBER

Anything that you do is better than it was previously. You have many resources at your fingertips and other people you can ask for help, like me. I would be happy to provide you with readings, templates, and examples of all of what I have talked about today. I also have a processing manual that I have updated recently which may be useful. I purposefully did not bring copies of those today – I can provide them after if there is an interest.

SLIDE - Thanks!