

LIBR 289 e-Portfolio
Fall 2008

Evidence for Competency F

LIBR 256 – Archives and Manuscripts

Final Assignment

December 8, 2007

The Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs (ALUA) at the Walter P. Reuther Library received a call from Mary Citizen, a political figure of Detroit unions. The documents comprise Detroit unions, her times as a local union president for the Detroit Teachers Federation of Teachers, her political work in Detroit, and her hobby of collecting modern art.

She would like to donate these records to the library. Following a series of steps ensured that the archivist focused on the archival goal of identifying, preserving and making available a valuable historical collection. Each stage of the process is detailed under sub-headings in the essay that follows:

Non-repository Survey

The first step taken was visiting Ms. Citizen to conduct a non-repository survey in order to identify any documents or materials of historical value that were not under the immediate control of the library. By conducting the survey, the archivist was able to determine what records met the mission of the archives and could potentially foster the archives' existing collections. In conducting the survey, the archivist had to also take into account the audience for the material. In this case it was determined that researchers interested in the political, labor, and civil history of Detroit would benefit from having access to this wealth of information, which could be best preserved in the archive's facilities than in Ms. Citizen's.

Selection & Appraisal

Selection involves the process of choosing what materials to acquire. Appraisal is the process of determining the value and disposition of those materials while taking into account the operational, legal, informational, and intrinsic value of the items, their arrangement and physical condition, and their relationship to existing records.

A total of twenty boxes were surveyed. Out of those, fifteen boxes contained items that were deemed to be worthy of preservation by ALUA. The theoretical model followed to select and appraise the materials was the Minnesota Method which strategically combines aspects of collection analysis, documentation strategy, appraisal, and functional analysis. As such the selected materials met the mission of the archive, enhanced existing collections, prioritized materials from Detroit's labor and political arena, comprised unique items related to the archive's mission, and had intrinsic, enduring, historical, and informational value to researchers. This series was indeed a rational addition to the archive's goals and resources. As time passes the series will be reappraised in the future to re-evaluate its research value.

The majority of the items consisted of printed materials although there was also a box of photographs and videotapes. Those materials not selected for acquisition included any containing personnel information since none of the people concerned in them had given permission to have these documents available to the public. Also not selected for acquisition were any items from Ms. Citizen's personal art collection as they were determined to not be coherent with the archives mission pertaining to labor and political history.

The materials that were selected for acquisition comprised union documents, meeting minutes, media articles, documentation on strikes and rallies, membership rosters, financial statements, news clippings, union activities, pictures, and videos. A series inventory of the selected items was then conducted.

Series Inventory

A series consists of documents that have certain relationship with respect to their creation, receipt, or use. In this case, the items donated by Ms. Citizen were kept together because they related to a particular subject.

Performing a series inventory helped the archivist determine the extent, type, and relationship of the materials. For each record series, the archivist completed an inventory form. Each form contained a title for reference, dates comprised, a general description of the series (that shows purpose, use, and subject content of the records), the medium of the materials (i.e. paper, audiovisual, etc.), the condition of the items, volume of records, and any existing filing arrangements. Once this step was completed, the materials were formally acquired.

Acquisition & Accessioning

The acquisition process was set in motion after Ms. Citizen executed a Deed of Gift (DOG) which effectively transferred legal ownership of the material to the archive. This document served the interests of both parties as it governs the legal status and disposition of the materials. As such this properly executed DOG included the names of the donor and recipient, the title and description of all the materials that were donated, the transfer of ownership language, any restrictions to sensitive material, separations clauses, and signatures.

Once the legal formalities were addressed, the archivist transferred the materials from Ms. Citizen's house to the archive. At this point, the archivist formally brought the material under the physical and legal control of the archives through the process of accessioning. The group of items was given an accession number which is a unique number that identified all the items in the group from others in the archive. Accessioning served a twofold purpose. First it documented the acquisition of the new group of records by the archives serving as proof of possession and ownership of the documents. Second, it acted as the records' primary source of information: what is in it, where it is kept, where it came from, as well as any arrangement plan for the series.

Arrangement

An arrangement order was determined before any sort of processing could take place. The records provenance was noted as Ms. Citizen since she was the individual who created and put together this collection. The original order of the collection was respected as it was already arranged in chronological order which was the most logical form of organization for the items. This way the organic organization of the collection was followed honoring the basic principle of archival arrangement.

The collection was then grouped into two series: The Detroit Teachers Federation of Teachers Files and the Mary Citizen Political Files. They were sub-grouped as follows:

1. The Detroit Teachers Federation of Teachers Files
 - a. Correspondence
 - b. Financial statements
 - c. Marketing materials
 - d. Memorandums
 - e. Meeting minutes
 - f. Reports
 - g. Press coverage
2. The Mary Citizen Political Files
 - a. Detroit Unions

- i. Correspondence
- ii. Memorandums
- iii. Reports
- b. Documentation of political events
- c. Photographs of political events
- d. Press coverage
- e. Videotapes of political events

Processing & Preservation

Processing the collection entailed a high degree of meticulous work and preservation. All staples were removed and any needed paper clips were replaced by rubber or vinyl coated ones. The archivist also used acid-free paper sheets to separate any deteriorating items and documents on low-grade paper, as well as to photocopy all the newspaper clippings which when then discarded. Other discarded items included blank pages, binders, covers, and envelopes. Wherever these contained important un-duplicate information, the portion of the item was trimmed and kept with the document.

The photographs and videotapes were kept separate from the paper items in a cold temperature and low humidity room with good air circulation and UV filtered light.

The preservation of the archives' collection is driven home by the maintenance of the archival rooms. Periodically, the repository's fire and plumbing systems are checked for malfunctions. As well, the environmental conditions in the storage, work, reference, and exhibition areas are constantly monitored to ensure the correct temperature, humidity, and degree of cleanliness are maintained.

Description & Finding Aids

Once the collection was processed, a finding aid was created. A finding aid is a descriptive tool, such as an inventory or a guide, created to allow the discovery and retrieval of information in archival materials.

This finding aid contained different pieces of information that are important to researchers such as details on the materials' provenance, creator's background history, language type, extent of the series in linear feet, collection summary, scope and content of the collection, administrative information (filing numbers, copyright and access status, processing staff, etc.), important subjects, and related collections. A notation was made in the finding aid that refers the researcher to the photographic and videotape collection which is kept separate from the manuscript portion. Finally, the finding aid also contained a detailed list of the contents of each box as well as an index of terms to facilitate discovery.

Once finalized, the finding aid was digitized and entered into the archive's database using standard encoded archival description (EAD) for finding aids which allows for the standardization of finding aids across repositories and which has been in use in the archival community for over ten years. At this point the new series was ready to be used.

Security

One important consideration when adding new materials to the repository is their security. The current archives security procedures ensured this series was kept safe.

For example, the archive facility is equipped with an alarm system that is directly connected to the nearest police station. The storage rooms are locked at all times being only accessible in pairs by the head and assisting archivists. Researchers must make appointments

beforehand to see the collections. At the archive, the researcher must read and sign a form agreeing to adhere by the repository's regulations. His or her identity is also fully established by presenting valid identification. During the appointment, the requested materials are brought into the discovery room. At all times there is also a member of the staff present who can monitor the researcher's compliance with the archives procedures.

Outreach & Access

The last step in making this a successful acquisition was to make the collection known to the public. This was achieved in three phases. The first phase involved placing advertising in the state's newspapers, school, public and private libraries, state's website, and the archive's website and newsletter. The second phase entailed mailing out notifications of the new series to the archive's mailing list, state and federal labor union contacts, state and federal government contacts, and contacts at other archives around the nation that house similar or related collections. The third and last phase involved a methodical approach to updating the archive's website with a virtual exhibition of the contents of the collection as well as the finding aid.

Conclusion

From the minute the phone call from Ms. Citizen was received, the archivist followed the correct methodology for successfully processing a collection. Only by adhering to the steps outlined in this essay was it possible to maintain the integrity of the collection while ensuring that the core mission of identifying, preserving, and disseminating valuable material was met.