

# Advice for Museums with Archival Collections

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Question of the Week

What was the name of the Philadelphia Phillies ballpark once located at North Broad Street and West Lehigh Avenue?

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This page provides information and resources for small repositories about managing archival collections. This page is a work in progress; more will be added as the Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small

Resources for Small Archives

Archival Repositories (HCS-PSAR) continues.

- I. Archival basics
  - Archival theory and practice
  - Archivists' organizations
  - Learning opportunities
- II. Preservation
  - Preservation basics
  - Resources for more information
- III. Description and cataloging
  - Theories of arrangement
  - PastPerfect
  - Electronic finding aids
  - Archivist Toolkit and ArchivesSpace
  - HCS-PSAR finding aid worksheets
- IV. Institutional development

Archival basics

The overview of general archival information and resources that is included in the HCS-PSAR survey report can be downloaded in PDF format [here](#).

Archival theory and practice

Archivists think about the materials they manage primarily in terms of collections rather than individual items. Understanding archival holdings in larger groupings makes it easier to summarize the entirety of the materials, and also helps maintain the connections between interrelated items. Archivists define collections according to the principle of provenance, which is one of the primary tenets of archival theory. Provenance asserts that the basic defining element of a collection is its creator, which could be the individual, family, or organization who created or received the items in a collection. Materials created or collected by the same individual or group should be kept together. Therefore, the creators or collectors of the materials should determine the various collections in your repository. Repositories can acquire provenance-based collections from creators or third parties, or they can create collections themselves by assembling materials from different sources together by format or subject (e.g., "Photograph collection," "Civil War collection"). In the latter

Related

[Landing Page](#)  
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Find the whole presentation here:

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# Overview

1. Key archival concepts
2. Preservation
3. Description (cataloging)
4. Further resources and community

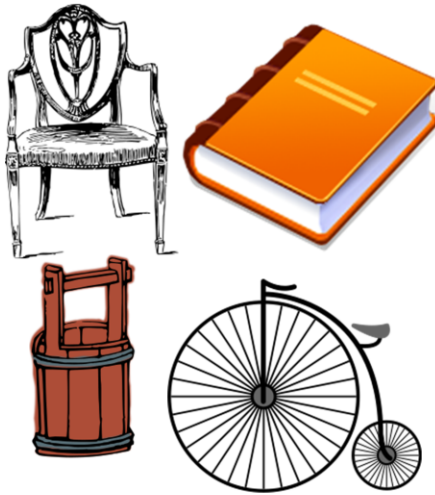
# Key Archival Concepts

1. Collections
2. Provenance and Original Order
3. Hierarchical Arrangement and Description

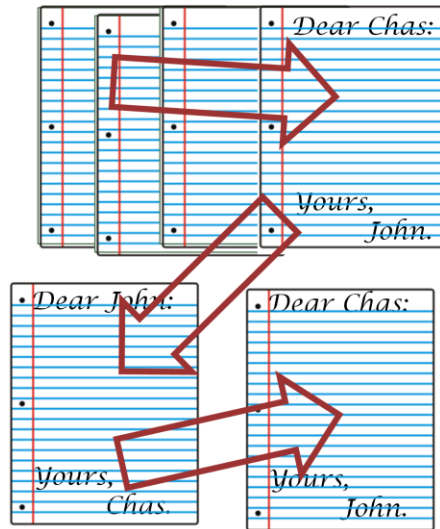


Image rights: African American Museum in Philadelphia,  
Anna Russell Jones papers

## Item vs. Collection



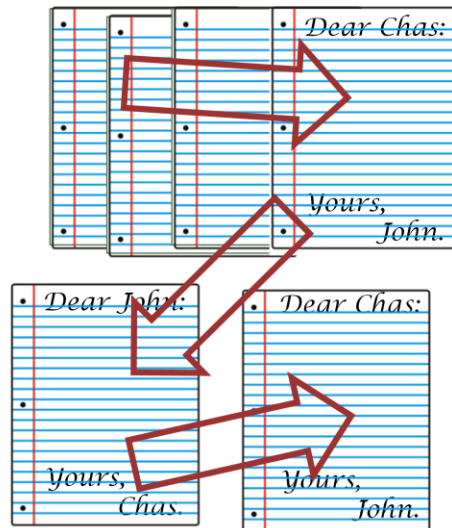
All images from <http://openclipart.org>



Archivists think about the materials they manage primarily in terms of *collections* rather than individual items. Understanding archival holdings in larger groupings makes it easier to summarize the entirety of the materials, and also helps maintain the connections between interrelated items.

## Provenance and Original Order

- **Provenance:** keep documents grouped into collections by creator
- **Original order:** respect original order established by creator *[note: rule doesn't extend to original DISorder]*



Images from <http://openclipart.org>

The principle of provenance dictates that documents created by different entities should be kept in distinct collections according to creator. Do not divide or disperse collections based on other factors, do not add materials from other creators into collections, and do not co-mingle materials from various creators. A corollary to the principle of provenance is that of original order, which dictates that, to the extent possible, materials be kept in the order in which their creator kept them. However, the archivist's principal duty is to render archives accessible and useable. In cases where there is no discernible original order, or if the original order is impractical, it is necessary to impose an order on materials in order to facilitate their use. Archivists must use their judgment in determining when and how to impose an order on a collection.

# Hierarchical Organization and Description

## **Homer Simpson papers, 1987-2014**

Series I. Family papers

Subseries A. Letters from Marge

Subseries B. Bart and Lisa report cards

Series II. Work papers

Subseries A. Nuclear Power Plant

Folder: Paychecks

Folder: Probation warnings

Subseries B. Mr. Plow

Folder: Receipts and invoices

Folder: Commercial planning and script



Image copyrighted ©2006 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, released for promotional use.  
Source: Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Homer\\_Simpson\\_2006.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Homer_Simpson_2006.png)

If a collection is complex, archivists identify logical groupings of materials within the whole: series, subseries, and files into which individual items are organized. Archival description should summarize the entire body of a collection, and it may also (but need not) exist at lower levels in the organizational hierarchy. This is called multilevel description. Descriptions given at higher levels are assumed to be valid at lower levels unless otherwise specified. For example, unless the date range of a series is indicated, it is assumed that the date range of that series is the same as the range for the whole collection.

# How to Parse Series

*Follow the existing organizational scheme if it makes sense*

- Document type
  - Series: Correspondence, Scrapbooks, Financial records
- Topic or phase
  - Personal papers series: Education, Military, Career
  - Business records series: Miller Co., Miller & Sons, Ark & Miller
- Department or person
  - Business records series: CEO, Sales department, Finance office
  - Family papers series: Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa



# Preservation

1. Environment
2. Supplies



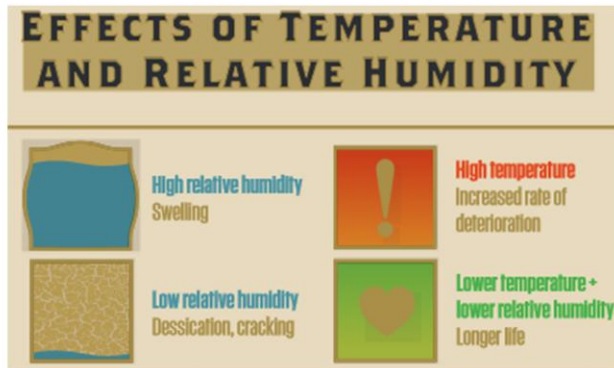
Image rights: African American Museum in Philadelphia, Anna Russell Jones papers

# Environment

Keep temperature and relative humidity stable!

Temperature: 65-70°F. Humidity: 30-50%.

All day, every day. Avoid extreme fluctuations and UV light.

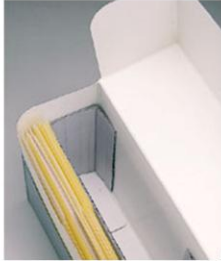


Preservation infographic by Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts and University of Pennsylvania Libraries,  
[http://www.ccaha.org/uploads/media\\_items/preservation-infographic-color.original.pdf](http://www.ccaha.org/uploads/media_items/preservation-infographic-color.original.pdf)

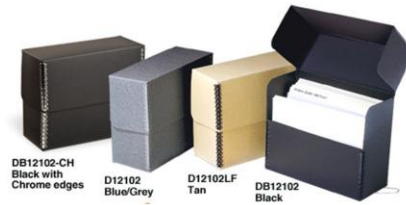
Mention tracking environment with data loggers and how showing temp and RH inconsistencies can help you get funding.

## Supplies

- Use archival grade, acid-free folders and boxes from an established supplier



Spacers



Document boxes  
(aka Hollinger boxes, flip-top boxes)

- Large papers should be stored flat, not folded or rolled
- Papers should be properly supported, neither bulging nor slumping. Use spacers as needed.

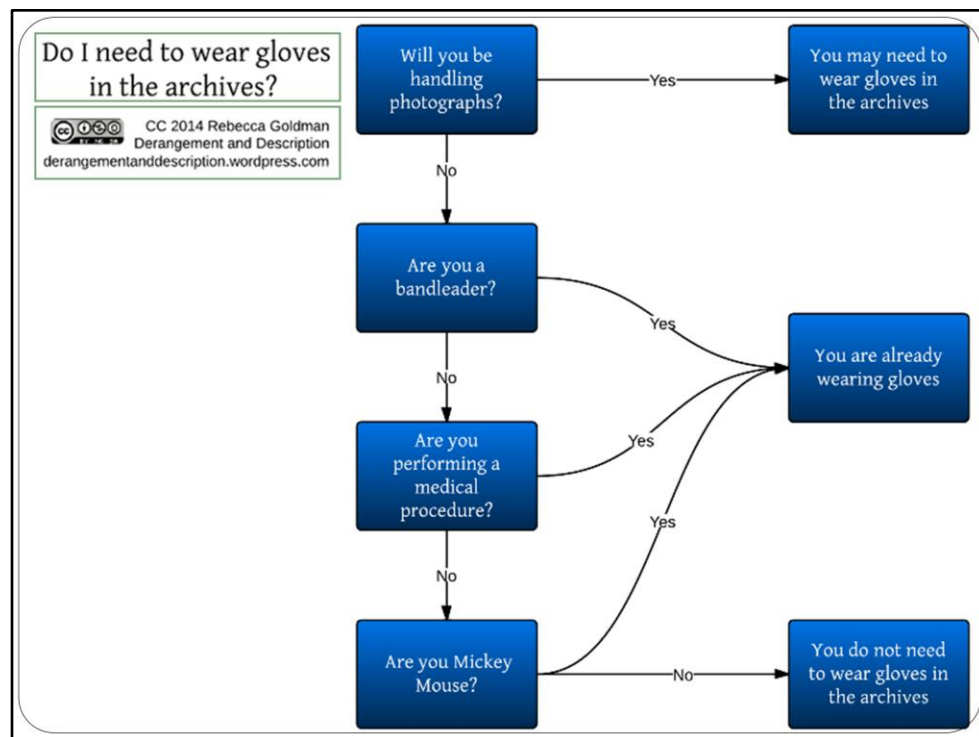
Oversized materials can be stored in acid-free oversized boxes and folders or in oversized folders placed into flat files. Archival suppliers include Gaylord, Hollinger Metal Edge, and Light Impressions. Tip: Check Craigslist for architecture firms that are getting rid of flat files and restaurant supply stores for lower-priced metal shelving.

## Top Recommendations to Repositories

- Use *foil-backed* labels for labeling boxes
- Remove rubber bands, paper clips from collections
- Store boxes at least 6" off floor
- Choose metal shelving – avoid wood
- Oversize rolled items – roll around OUTSIDE of tube



Images from The National Archives (UK), "Preparation of records: Maps and plans,"  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/maps-and-plans.pdf>



## Description (Cataloging)

1. Reviewing key concepts
2. Metadata
3. Computer programs
4. HCI-PSAR finding aid worksheets



Image rights: Fireman's Hall Museum

## Reviewing Key Concepts

1. Collections are the organizing units of archives
2. Collections should be provenance-based
3. Organize and describe materials within each collection according to a hierarchy

## Reviewing Key Concepts

1. Collections are the organizing units of archives
2. Collections should be provenance-based
3. Organize and describe materials within each collection according to a hierarchy

- When cataloging, start by creating a record for each COLLECTION as a whole!
- Adding lower-level description is optional depending on the complexity and importance of the collection



## Metadata is “data about data”

It just means the descriptions of your collections /  
documents / objects  
(Title? Creator? Date? etc.)

Using **standardized and structured** metadata is a must if you want to ensure your materials are **findable** by researchers and that your descriptions are **shareable** with other computer systems

Two of Homer's photographs, 1990s

vs.

Title	Creator	Date
Photograph of Bart	Simpson, Homer	1995 August 5
Photograph of Lisa	Simpson, Homer	circa 1997

# Metadata Standards

Metadata Standards	Used to	Examples
Content Standards	Determine kinds of information you use in the description	Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)
Value Standards	Determine terms used to name people and subjects represented	Library of Congress Subject Headings and Name Authority Files (LCSH, NAF)
Format Standards	Determine how the metadata should be structured/encoded	Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI), Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC)

## Content Standards: Important for Collection Description

“Describing Archives: A Content Standard” (DACS) – free online at  
[http://files.archivists.org/pubs/DACS2E-2013\\_v0315.pdf](http://files.archivists.org/pubs/DACS2E-2013_v0315.pdf)

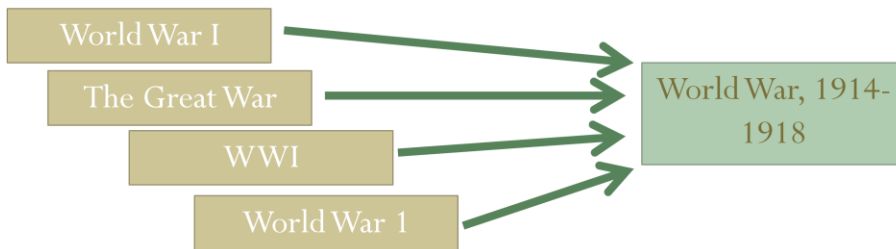
- Collection number /ID
- Name of repository
- Title of collection
- Dates of collection
- Extent (size) of collection
- Name of creator
- Scope and contents note (What types of material are included in the collection? What topics are covered?)
- Conditions governing access
- Language of materials

## Content Standards: Recommended for Collection Description

“Describing Archives: A Content Standard” (DACS) – free online at  
[http://files.archivists.org/pubs/DACS2E-2013\\_v0315.pdf](http://files.archivists.org/pubs/DACS2E-2013_v0315.pdf)

- Source of acquisition
- Biographical/historical note
- Subjects ("access points" or keywords and names)
- Shelf location
- Related archival materials
- Other finding aids
- Cataloger

## Value Standards



- Robert G. Chenhall's nomenclature – lexicon of object names common in museum cataloging
- Library of Congress – Subject Headings and Name Authority File, <http://id.loc.gov>
- Getty vocabularies – Art & Architecture Thesaurus, <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies>

## Format Standards

Common format standards make it possible to **share** records in different computer catalogs and use advanced **search** capabilities (like faceted searching and filters)

- Librarians use MARC (MAchine Readable Cataloging)
- Archivists use EAD (Encoded Archival Description), an XML schema
- PastPerfect exports Dublin Core in XML

If your metadata is structured, i.e. in a spreadsheet, you can plug the same metadata into different formats depending on your need

## Common Computer Programs

- Word Processor (Microsoft Word)
- PastPerfect
- Archivists' Toolkit and ArchivesSpace



## What Program to Use?

Program	Ease of Use	Hierarchical description	Structured format	Cost	Integrated
Word processor	Very easy	Unlimited	No	Free	No
PastPerfect	Easy	+1 level: easy 2+ levels: hard	Yes, but not archival	\$870	Integrated catalog and other features
Archivists' Toolkit & Archives Space	Moderate	Unlimited	Yes, standard archival format	Free	Integrated catalog only

## What Program to Use? (WP)

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## What Program to Use? (PP)

Program	Ease of Use	Hierarchical description	Structured format	Cost	Integrated
Word processor	Very easy	Unlimited	No	Free	No
Past Perfect	Easy	+1 level (container list): easy 2+ levels (linked records): hard	Yes, but not archival	\$870	Integrated archives, photo, object catalogs; volunteer, donor database
Archivists' Toolkit & Archives Space	Moderate	Unlimited	Yes, standard archival format	Free	Integrated catalog only

## What Program to Use? (AT/AT)

Program	Ease of Use	Hierarchical description	Structured format	Cost	Integrated
Word processor	Very easy	Unlimited	No	Free	No
PastPerfect	Easy	+1 level: easy 2+ levels: hard	Yes, but not archival	\$870	Integrated catalog and other features
Archivists Toolkit & Archives Space	Moderate	Unlimited	Yes, standard archival format (EAD)	Free	Integrated archives catalog, accessions

## HCI-PSAR Finding Aid Worksheets

<http://hsp.org/hcipsar/resources> :

- Word version (DOC)
- Excel version (XLS)

Worksheet: Creating a Basic Finding Aid for an Archival Collection				
<small>This worksheet was created by Celia Causi Ellenbogen in 2011-2014 as part of the Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (<a href="http://hsp.org/hcipsar">http://hsp.org/hcipsar</a>), a project of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation</small>				
<b>Finding aid author:</b>				
<b>Repository:</b>				
<b>Collection title:</b>				
<b>Creator:</b>		<b>Type:</b>		<b>Source:</b>
<b>Dates:</b>				
<b>Collection No.:</b>				
<b>Extent:</b>		<b>Linear feet</b>	<i>or</i>	<b>Cubic feet</b>
	<b>Note:</b>			
<b>Provenance:</b>				
<b>Access:</b>	Contact the repository for information about accessing this collection.			
<b>Related archival collections:</b>				
<b>Languages:</b>	English			
<b>Biographical / Historical Background:</b>				
	<b>Bibliography:</b>			
<b>Scope and Content note:</b>				

Microsoft Word  
(DOC)  
worksheet

✓ Inventory list  
option  
x EAD output

Worksheet: Creating a Basic Finding Aid for an Archival Collection

This worksheet was created by Celia Cusack Ellerbe in 2011-2014 as part of the Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (<http://hup.org/scipar>), a project of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Finding aid author:

Repository:

Collection title:

Creator:

Type:

Dates:

Date expression:

Date begin:

Date end:

Bulk date begin:

Bulk date end:

Collection No.:

Extent:

Linear feet

or

Note:

Provenance:

Access:

Contact for information about accessing this collection.

Related collections:

Languages:

English

Biographical / Historical Background:

Page 1

1 <?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" standalone="yes" ?>
2 <ead xsi:schemaLocation="urn:isbn:1-931666-22-9 http://www.loc.gov/ead/ead.xsd"
3 xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/1999/xlink"
4 xmlns="urn:isbn:1-931666-22-9"
5 <eadheader repositoryencoding="iso15511"
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Microsoft Excel (XLS) worksheet

x Inventory list option

✓ EAD output

## Further Resources and Community

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## Resources for Small Archives



This page provides information and resources for small repositories about managing archival collections. This page is a work in progress; more will be added as the Hidden Collections initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) continues.

The Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) is supported by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation U.

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## [hsp.org/hcipsar/resources](http://hsp.org/hcipsar/resources)

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## Highlighted Resources

- American Association for State & Local History online webinar, “Basics of Archives”: [resource.aaslh.org/view/basics-of-archives/](https://resource.aaslh.org/view/basics-of-archives/)
  - Complete the 15-20 hour course at your own pace over 4 weeks
- Connecting to Collections Care online community: [connectingtocollections.org/](https://connectingtocollections.org/)
  - Free resources for cultural institutions provided by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.
- Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts ([ccaha.org](https://ccaha.org)) and Northeast Document Conservation Center ([nedcc.org](https://nedcc.org))
  - Resources for collections care, preservation, disaster planning, and other topics

## Highlighted Resources

- Books to consider purchasing:
  - Zamon, Christina. *[The Lone Arranger](#)*: Succeeding in a Small Repository.
  - Hamill, Lois. *[Archives for the Lay Person](#)*: A Guide to Managing Cultural Collections.
  - Carmicheal, David W. *[Organizing Archival Records](#)*: A Practical Method of Arrangement & Description for Small Archives. 3rd edition (2012).

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