

Hidden Collections Initiative
for
Pennsylvania
Small Archival Repositories
Processing Workshop



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Processing in 5 basic steps

Step 1. Familiarize yourself with the collection

Step 2. Arrange the collection

Step 3. Describe the collection

Step 4. Proofread your work

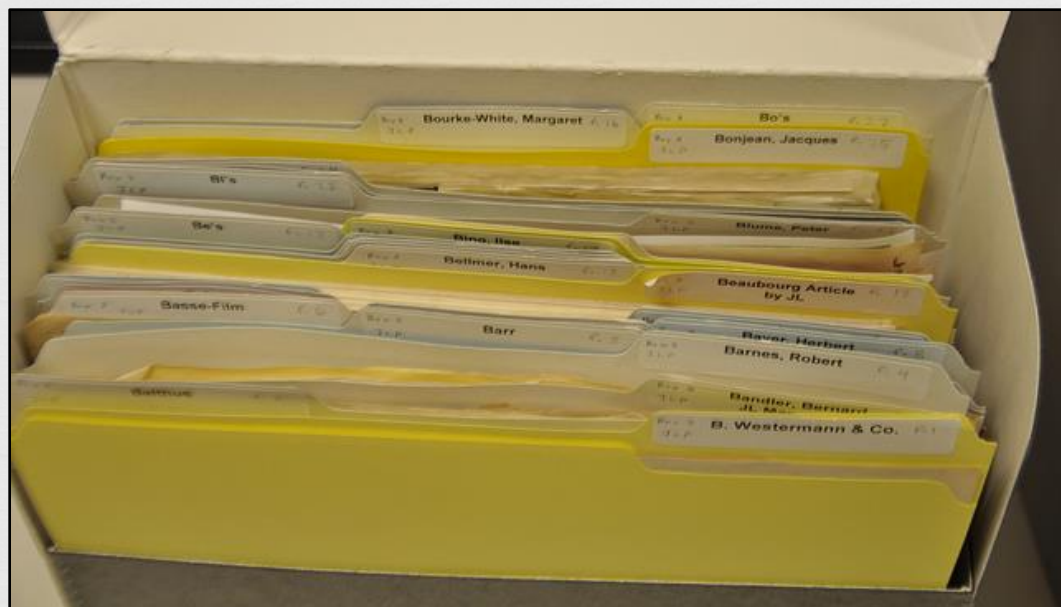
Step 5. Tie up loose ends

Bonus step: Promote your collection!

Step 1:

Familiarize yourself with the collection

- Before you do anything ...
 - Gather all information about the collection
 - Deed of gift
 - Biographical information
 - Collection descriptions
 - Ask
 - How did you receive the collection (gift or purchase, from whom?)
 - How much stuff should you have ... do you have it?
 - What sort of stuff should you have ... do you have it?
 - Who or what is the collection about?
 - Look at the collection
 - Use information on boxes and folders to help you!
 - What is in the boxes?
 - Identify groups of material that exist in the collection



Step 2: Arrange the collection

- Look through the groups you identified in step 1 and assess the material more carefully
 - Let the collection guide you ... don't make it more complicated than it needs to be!
 - Original order: if a logical order exists, keep it! It tells you how the creator thought and worked
 - However, no order is not original order ... if no order exists, you will need to impose order!
 - To do this, try to think like a researcher!



Step 2: Arrange the collection

- The groups you identified may be series ...
- Series and subseries
 - Archival collections are arranged hierarchically, so, it is no more complicated than an outline.
 - Series are groups of materials within the collection (same topic, time period, type of record)
 - Subseries are groups of materials within a series
 - Series and subseries ARE NOT REQUIRED in archival collections
 - BUT if you create one series, all material must fit within that or another series
 - IF you create one subseries, all material within the series must fit within that or another subseries
 - A list of well-titled folders can often be just as effective

Step 2: Arrange the collection

- Next, physically re-arrange the collection based upon your groups identified earlier and put the material in piles.
- Identify possible series names.
- Then, deal with each pile (series):
 - Determine what should go into folders together
 - Determine what does NOT belong in the pile (series)

Step 2: Arrange the collection

- Folders...
 - If material is already in a folder and that folder title is accurate, take advantage of the existing information
 - Ideally, place the material into acid free folders
 - Use the expandable fold at the bottom of the folder to make the material safe
 - Record essential information on the folders
 - Collection name/number
 - Box and folder numbers
 - Folder title and folder dates

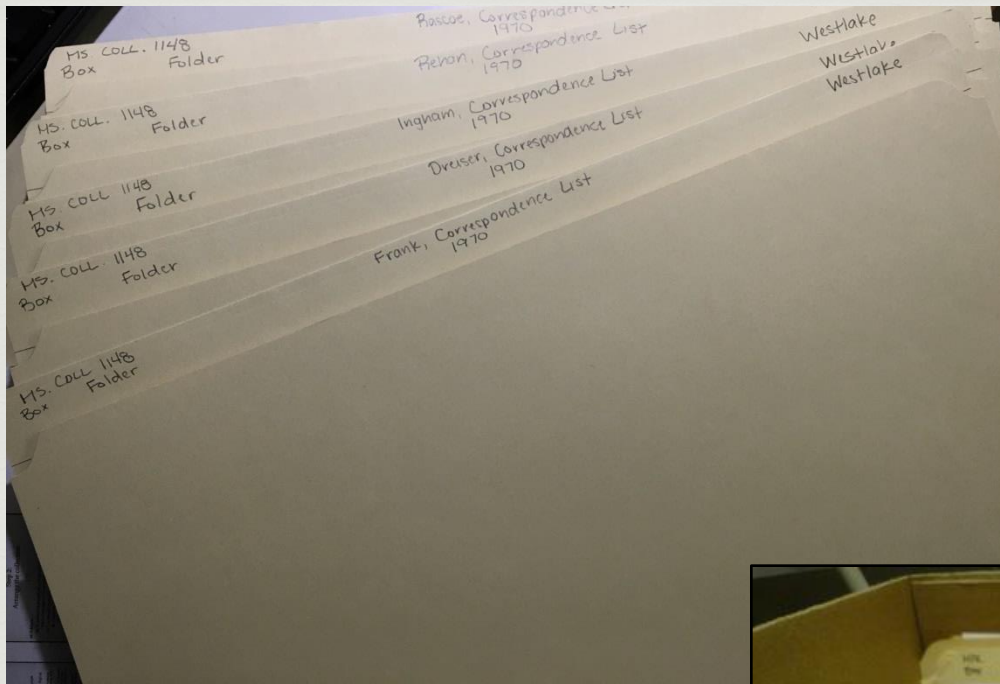
What does your folder look like?

[Collection number]

Box Folder

[folder title, folder date]

[Collection name]



Step 2. Arrange the collection

- Once a group is in acid free folders, arrange it in a logical order.
 - Example: if you have a pile of correspondence, you may want to arrange that correspondence by date or by author (remember, if it was arranged by the creator, preserve that order)!
 - Example: If you have family papers, and there is a group of papers by a certain family member, you may want to arrange that group alphabetically by type of material (so, a folder of correspondence, a diary, a folder of financial records, etc.)
- Each group of material must have an order, but each individual group does not need to have the same order within the collection
- Arrangement is often alphabetical or chronological, but it is sometimes more complicated.

MS. COLL 1148
Box Folder

Zigrosser, Correspondence List
1970

Behan, Correspondence List

Westlake

Bascoe, Correspondence List
1970

West

MS. COLL. 1148

Box Folder
COLL. 1148

Mordell, Correspondence List
1970

Ingham, Correspondence List
1970

W

S. COLL 1148
x Folder

S. COLL. 1148
x Folder

Franklin, Correspondence List
1970

S. COLL 1148
x Folder

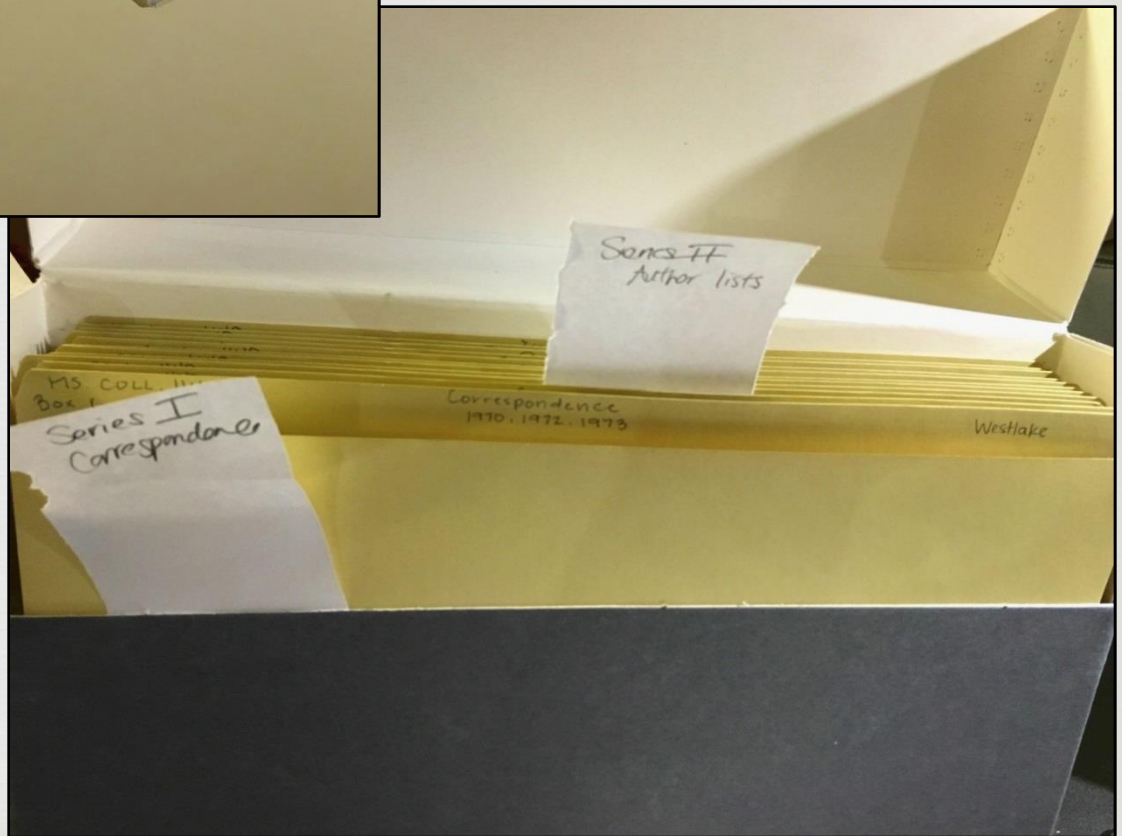
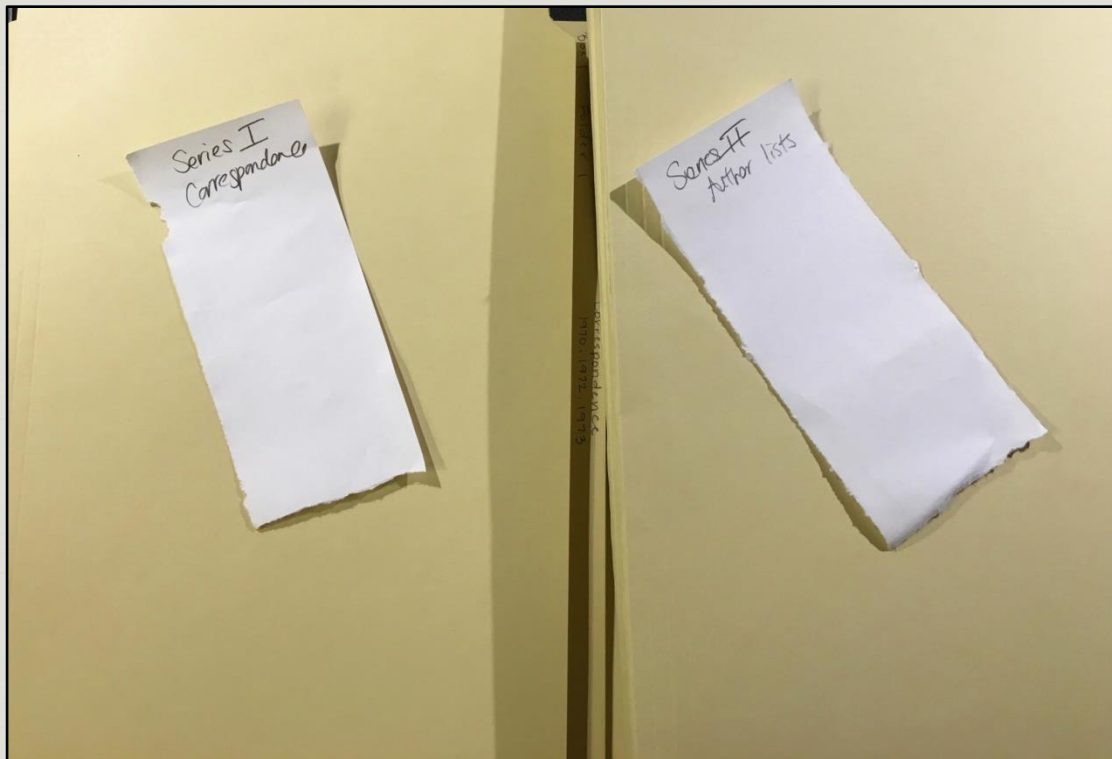
Frank, Correspondence List
1970

COLL. 1148
Folder

Dreiser, Correspondence List
1970

Step 2: Arrange the collection

- Continue arranging the groups until everything is in a folder and on an organized pile.
- Now, put all the arranged piles together (in other words, assign an order to all of your series)
 - Alphabetical or chronological often works
 - If it is an organization, think about the hierarchy of the organization
- Place the foldered and organized material into acid free boxes
 - Don't over-stuff or under-stuff the boxes
 - Oversized material
 - Place all your oversized material in suitably oversized boxes and folders at the end of the collection, or in drawers

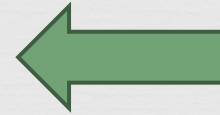


Step 2: Arrange the collection

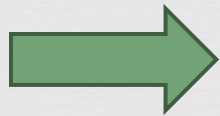
- Look at your arrangement:
 - Will it make sense to someone who will not have already looked at the collection?
- Place box and folder numbers on your folders ONLY after you are completely happy with your arrangement!
- Don't begin describing the collection until you are completely happy with your arrangement!



Before processing the Anny Elston papers, at the Drexel University College of Medicine



After processing the Anny Elston papers, at the Drexel University College of Medicine



Step 3: Describe the collection

- Create the finding aid
 - This can be done in many ways ...
 - Microsoft word
 - The Archivists' Toolkit, Archon, Archives Space, Access Database, Past Perfect, etc.
 - Consists of
 - Administrative information
 - Collection notes
 - Container list

University of Pennsylvania
Kislak Center for Special Collections Rare Books and Manuscripts
3420 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

Corneille McCarn Rucker papers, 1893-1987
Ms. Coll. 286

1 linear foot, 3 boxes

This collection is open for research use.

This is the biographical note. Here we will write what we know about Corneille McCarn Rucker.

This is the scope and content note. Here we will write about the collection: how it is arranged, what is in it, and how it might be useful to researchers.

Container list:

Series I. Correspondence

Jefferson <u>McCarn</u> , letters to Corneille, 1910-1918	Box 1, Folder 1
Mary Allison <u>McCarn</u> , letters to Corneille, 1910-1928	Box 1, Folder 2
Warren Rucker, letters to Corneille, 1915-1945	Box 1, Folder 3
Friends, letters to and from Corneille, 1917-1918	Box 1, Folder 4

Series II. Diaries

1913-1915	Box 1, Folder 5
1918	Box 2, Folder 1
1929	Box 2, Folder 2

Step 3: Describe the Collection

- Administrative information
 - Title and date of collection
 - Where it is located (repository, address, etc.)
 - Restrictions and issues with access
 - How big is the collection

Step 3: Describe the Collection

- Create your container list
 - Even though the container list follows the notes in the finished finding aid, you should create the container list *before* writing the collection notes
 - It should tell the researcher (and you) what is in each box and how to access it
 - Intellectual and Physical arrangement
 - These are separate, but often mimic each other
 - Intellectual arrangement is for the researcher
 - Physical arrangement makes it so that you, the archivist, can physically find the material

Step 3: Describe the Collection

- Container list, continued

Intellectual
arrangement

Series 1. Correspondence

Physical
arrangement

From John Smith to Jane Smith, 1921-1923	<i>Box 1, Folder 1</i>
From John Smith to Isabelle Taylor, 1922-1943	<i>Box 1, Folder 2</i>
From John Taylor to John Smith, 1918-1944	<i>Box 1, Folder 3</i>
From John Taylor to John Smith (oversized), 1922 May 8	<i>Box 4, Folder 1</i>

Series 2. Diaries

Jane Smith diary, 1918-1922	<i>Box 1, Folder 4</i>
John Smith diary, 1921-1923	<i>Box 1, Folder 5</i>
John Smith diary, 1924-1926	<i>Box 1, Folder 6</i>
John Smith diary at Princeton, 1927-1931	<i>Box 1, Folder 7</i>

Step 3: Describe the collection

- Container list, continued
 - You should have a standardized format for your folder titles
 - Determine conventions for your repository and specific collections
 - How do you record dates?
 - What sort of information do you want to record about the contents of folder?
 - » Example: Coal Subcommittee, meeting about mining, Scranton, PA, 1950 January 5

Step 3: Describe the Collection

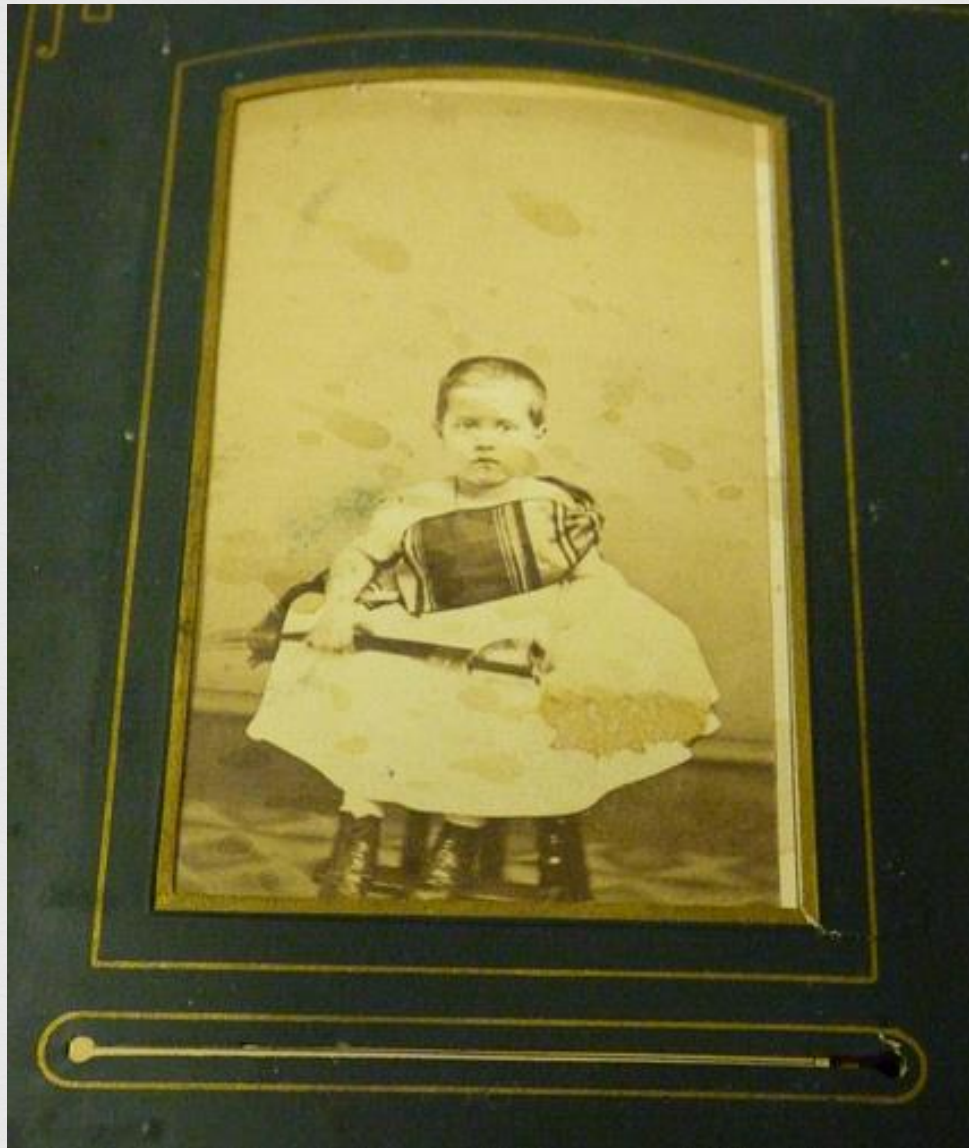
- Container list, continued
 - Materials from different series can be housed in the same box
 - This is possible because of separating intellectual and physical order
 - Numbering folders
 - Each new box should start with folder 1
 - If you make mistakes (and you or your volunteers **WILL**), you only need to fix one box worth of folders!

Step 3: Describe the collection

- Write the collection notes:
 - Biographical OR Historical note
 - Scope and Contents note

Step 3: Describe the Collection

- Biographical OR Historical note
 - Biographical note (about the creator)
 - Written when the creator of the collection is a person or persons. It should include items such as birth dates and location, family, education, occupation, reason for importance (or lack of importance), historical context, death dates, etc.
 - Historical note (about the creator)
 - Written when the creator of the collection is an institution, a business or corporation, or an organization. It should include items such as dates of incorporation/organization, location, type of work conducted, reasons for importance, context, etc.



Biographical/Historical note:

About the creator
of the collection

Step 3: Describe the Collection

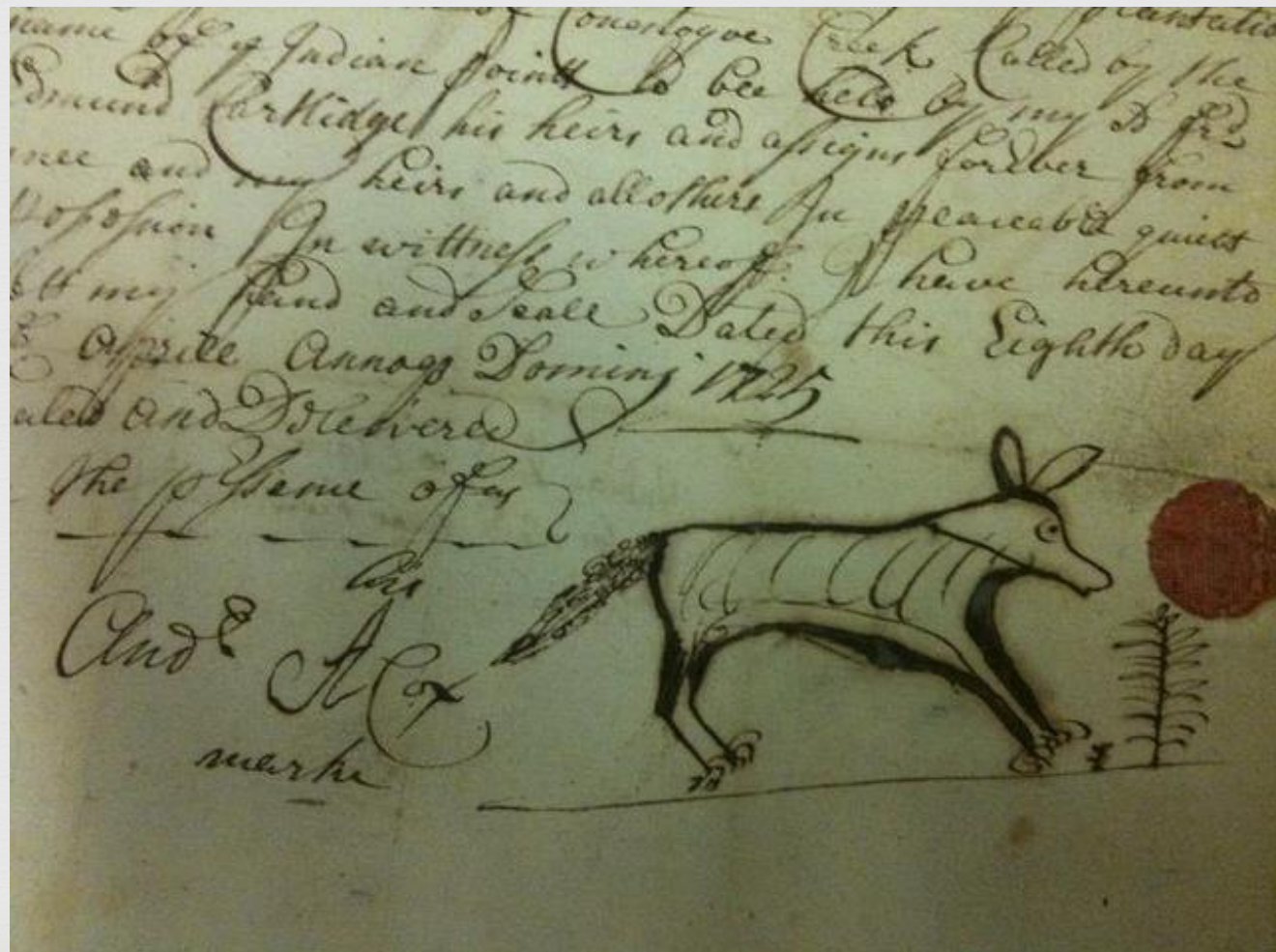
- Scope and Contents note (about the collection)
 - Include
 - Types of records (genres)
 - Topics and subjects addressed in the collection
 - Inclusive or bulk dates of material in collections
 - Highlights and/or concentrations
 - Outliers (things that ARE there that you would not expect to find)
 - Things that ARE NOT there that you would expect to find

Step 3: Describe the Collection

- Scope and Contents note, continued
 - You will not be able to talk about everything, so decide what is most important
 - The notes should be narrative—write in complete sentences
 - A potential model
 - Describe the collection overall
 - Describe the arrangement of the collection
 - Describe each series individually (if series exist)
 - Explain why the collection is useful

Scope and contents note:

About the contents
of the collection



Step 3: Describe the Collection

- A note, generally, about notes
 - Your finding aid notes should be honest and unbiased: you may love or hate the subject of your collection, but the researcher should not know that.
 - This is technical writing, not creative writing—your notes should be based upon what is in the collection
 - This does NOT mean, however, that your notes have to be boring ... use quotes from published accounts or material in the collection—just don't forget to cite your sources!

Step 4: Proofread your work

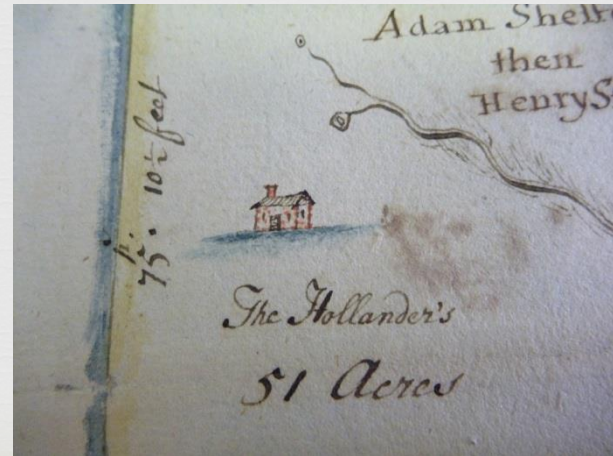
- A finding aid is:
 - An archives' primary public product, therefore quality is important
 - How a researcher determine whether or not a collection will be useful to him or her
- Spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors are embarrassing and, if finding aids are available electronically, can actually prevent researchers from finding pertinent information
- Ask someone who has never seen the contents of the collection to proofread!

Step 5: Tie up loose ends

- All loose and miscellaneous bits are foldered and represented in the finding aid
- All boxes are labeled and placed on shelf where you would look for them
- The finding aid is edited and available for researchers and/or reference staff
 - Add your finding aid to the PACSCL Finding Aids site: findingaids.pacscl.org

Bonus step: Promote your collection

- The whole point of our work is to make certain that these collections are used by researchers
- If your institution has a website, add a notice that a new collection is available (you can create an abstract—most important information about the creator and the most general description of what is in the collection)
- If your institution has a blog, write a post!
 - You are probably understaffed, but this does not need to take loads of time! Copy and paste the bio/hist note and scope and content note into wordpress and publish!
 - If you have students, interns, or volunteers, ask them to look through the collection and write a more creative blog post! Take photographs with a cell phone to jazz up the post





• PRAISE THE LORD AND PASS THE AMUNITION