

Archives

Fall 2020

Hi all,

This week in class we spent some time together learning about what an archive *is*, the typical characteristics of an archive, and how to use them (and we dug around a bit with the finding aid for Marian McPartland's archive at the Eastman School of Music).

We also discussed some of the ways archives can reproduce or challenge power; remember our discussion of the "activist archive" ("Archivists should use their power—in determining what records will be preserved for future generations and in interpreting this documentation for researchers—for the benefit of all members of society. By adopting a social conscience for the profession, they can commit themselves to active engagement in the public arena. Archivists can use the power of archives to promote accountability, open government, diversity, and social justice. In doing so, it is essential to distinguish objectivity from neutrality. Advocacy and activism can address social issues without abandoning professional standards of fairness, honesty, detachment, and transparency.")

I've attached our slides for this week's class to the end of this document if you want to review any of that work.

For the archives assignment I'd now like you to complete:

This is a fairly straightforward assignment, with the idea that it gets you moving around a bit on an archival website, checking out its details, organization, materials, strengths and weaknesses, etc.

The assignment is due Friday, November 6, 11:59pm in the Moodle folder.

Here's the details:

1) Please choose one of the archives listed below. Spend some time navigating through the archive's website, looking at various headings and materials. Don't spend 8 hours doing this, but you will need to dig in a bit to see some of what's available, organization, etc.

2) Write a blog post about the archive. It should be well-written (and proof-read!) and informative, but does not need to be scholarly or include other research or footnotes. If you'd like, you can include images or other multimedia. The blog post should be formatted in a word-processing document (you do not need to actually post it as a blog entry!)

3) **This blog post should be about 2 pages in length** (double-spaced, Times New Roman). You may write more if you'd like.

4) **What kinds of things should you address in your blog post?** You should not answer the following questions in a step-by-step format—instead you should pick some of the questions below to focus on and write some nicely worded, well-framed paragraphs incorporating some of these.

Here's some things to consider:

- What kinds of materials does the archive include?
- How are they organized?
- Where did they come from?
- Does this somehow represent a kind of "activist" archive like we discussed on Thursday?
- Are there multiple different media types (books, letters, recordings, represented?)
- Where is the archive housed?
- How long has it been there?
- Is it an online only archive or does it have a physical home?
- If there are materials digitized, how much of the collection is digitized? Are there things that you cannot find online? (Probably a lot....)
- Is the website easy to navigate or confusing?
- Is there a clear pedagogical purpose or way the materials could be used pedagogically? Are there actual pedagogical materials on the website?
- Who do you think might be interested in using these kinds of materials?
- Finally, you might pick an item or two from the archive to highlight.

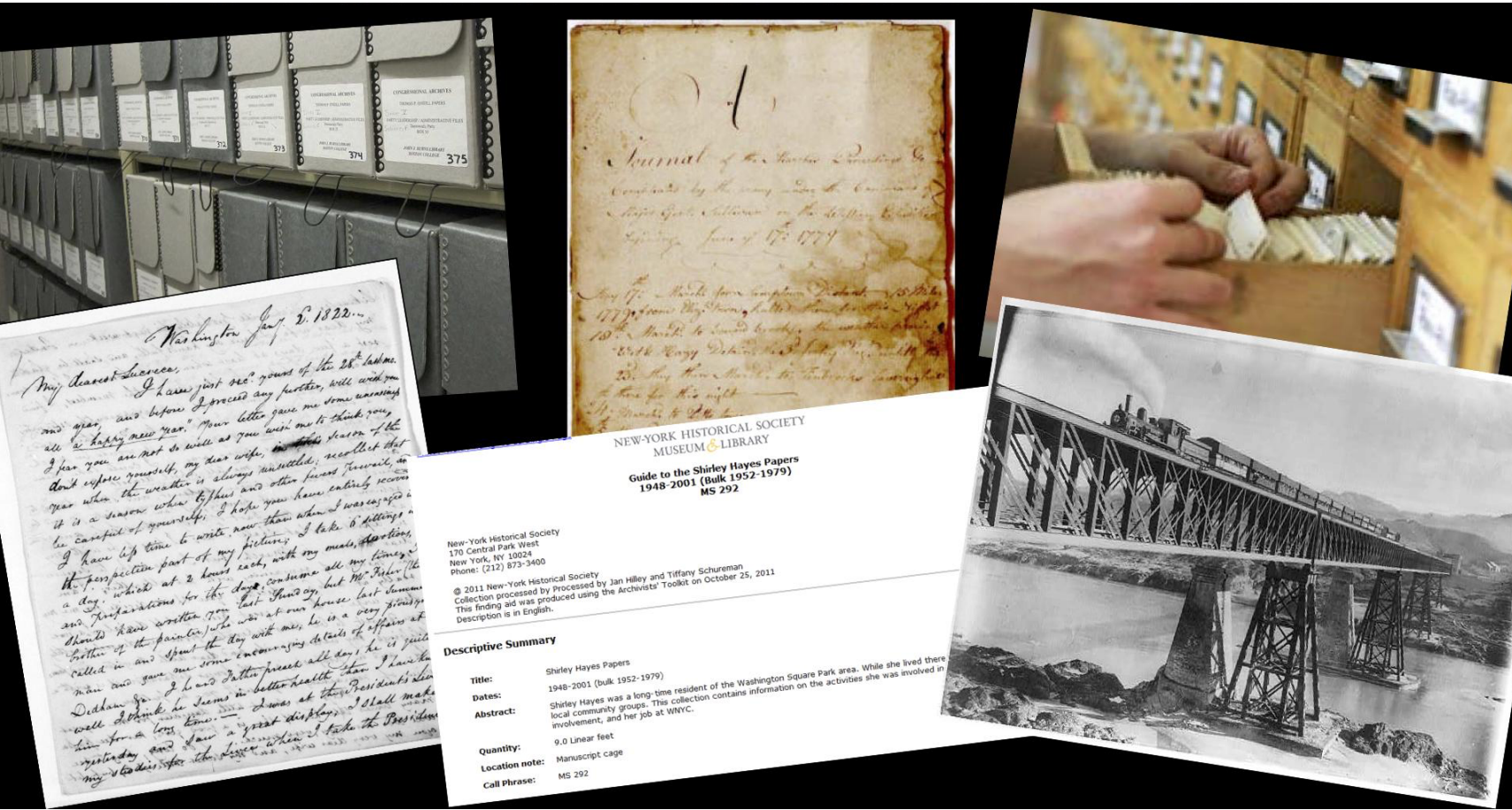
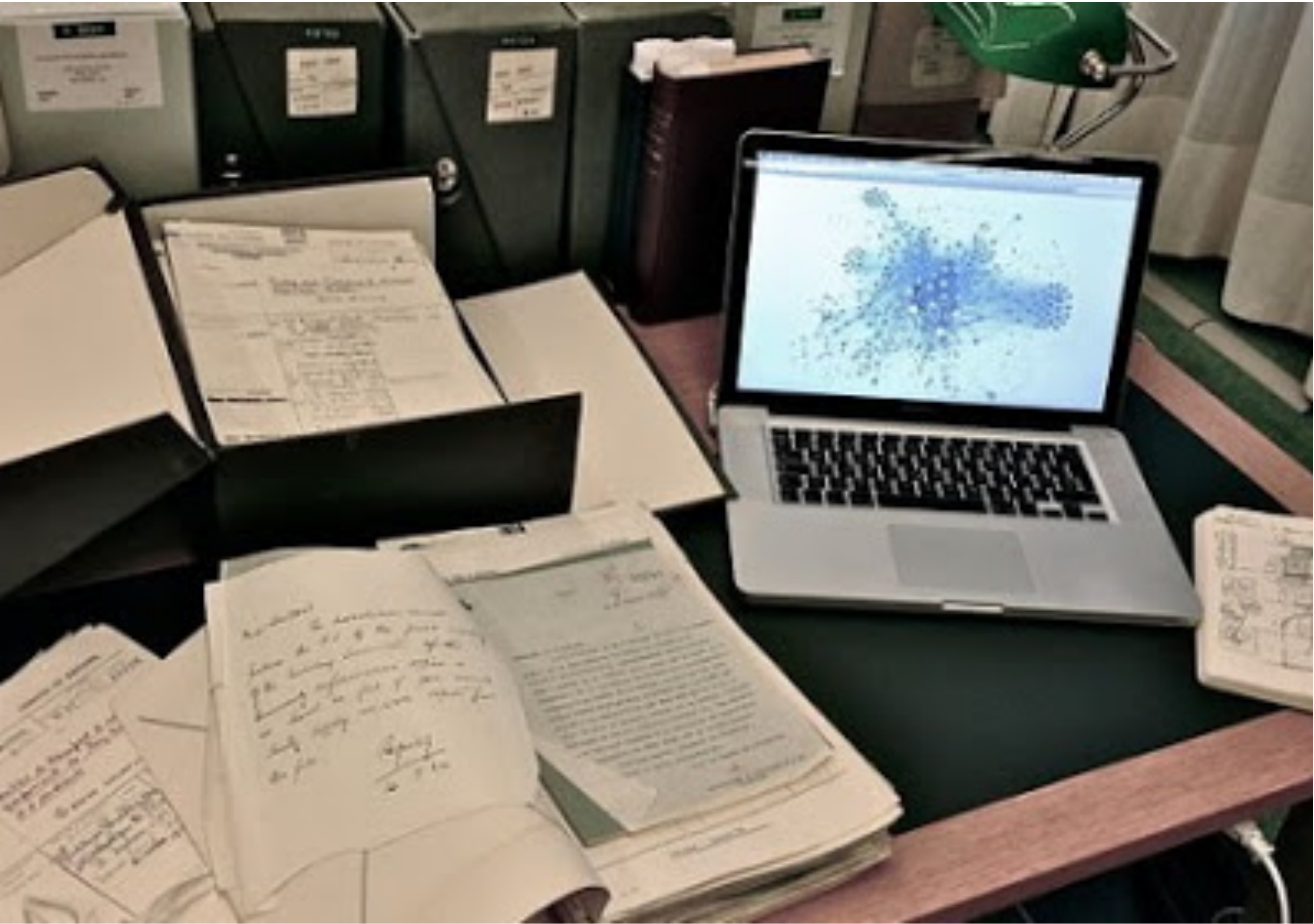
Archives to Choose From:

Finally, the list of potential archives--just pick **ONE** of these to look at in detail:

- Cornell Hip Hop Collection (CHHC) <https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/hiphop/>
- Harvard The Hip-hop Archive and Research Institute <http://hiphoparchive.org/about/mission>
- Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism <https://riseupfeministarchive.ca>
- The Women's Liberation Music Archive <https://womensliberationmusicarchive.co.uk>
- Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/ingham>
- Hogan Jazz Archive: <https://jazz.tulane.edu>
- Archives of African American Music and Culture: <https://aaamc.sitehost.iu.edu>
- John Philip Sousa Archive: <https://www.library.illinois.edu/sousa/>
- Silent Film Sound & Music Archive: <http://www.sfsma.org>
- New York Philharmonic Digital Archives: <https://archives.nyphil.org>
- Archives of Traditional Music (will probably want to look at collection highlights) <https://libraries.indiana.edu/archives-traditional-music>
- Cuban Heritage Collection: <https://www.library.miami.edu/chc/>
- Gladys Palmera Archive: <https://remezcla.com/music/gladys-palmera-collection-online-archive/> and <https://gladyspalmera.com/coleccion/> (note: mostly in Spanish)
- Queer Music Heritage: <http://www.queermusicheritage.com>
- Digital Transgender Archive: <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net>
- Holocaust Music Archive: <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/collections-highlights/music-of-the-holocaust-highlights-from-the-collection/music-of-the-holocaust>
- Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections & University Archives: Cello Music Collection <https://uncg.libguides.com/scua/cello>
- Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music: <https://www.diamm.ac.uk>

ASSESSING AND ARCHIVES

Week 9



Archives

In 1970, at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, gadfly historian Howard Zinn gave a seminal speech in which he challenged one of the core foundational principles upon which modern archives practice was built, that of neutrality. The whole notion, said Zinn, was a “fake,” a cop-out, a dangerously passive avoidance of the inherently political nature of the archival endeavor. Neutrality allowed the archivist to perpetuate the status quo, to reflect and reinforce society’s economic and political disparities, and to preserve the interests of the rich, powerful, literate, or otherwise privileged, at the expense of the less so.

“The existence, preservation, and availability of archives, documents and records in our society are very much determined by the distribution of wealth and power. That is, the most powerful, the richest elements in society have the greatest capacity to find documents, preserve them, and decide what is or is not available to the public. This means that government, business, and the military are dominant.”

Zinn challenged his audience to question their own unwitting acquiescence to entrenched power, to campaign against government secrecy, and to acknowledge and confront the societal biases that ignore the marginal, the poor, the non-literate, and even the ordinary; in essence, to embrace an activist rather than passive mindset.

From: <https://blog.witness.org/2010/09/archives-for-change-activist-archives-archival-activism/>

Zinn challenged his audience to question their own unwitting acquiescence to entrenched power, to campaign against government secrecy, and to acknowledge and confront the societal biases that ignore the marginal, the poor, the non-literate, and even the ordinary; in essence, to embrace an **activist** rather than passive mindset.

This generated a considerable amount of controversy at the time, but in the 40 years since, numerous writers and participants in archival discourse have invoked the word **activist** in calling for new approaches to a range of archival concepts and practices, including ownership, diversity, non-textual cultural heritage, information rights, community archives, the definition of the record, user participation, ethical codes, and the responsibilities of the archivist. Author and former SAA President Rand Jimerson wrote:

“Archivists should use their power—in determining what records will be preserved for future generations and in interpreting this documentation for researchers—for the benefit of all members of society. By adopting a social conscience for the profession, they can commit themselves to active engagement in the public arena. Archivists can use the power of archives to promote accountability, open government, diversity, and social justice. In doing so, it is essential to distinguish objectivity from neutrality. Advocacy and activism can address social issues without abandoning professional standards of fairness, honesty, detachment, and transparency.” [emphasis mine]

From: <https://blog.witness.org/2010/09/archives-for-change-activist-archives-archival-activism/>

So what then is an activist archive? (Or its irresistibly rhyming and alliterative corollary, the activist archivist?) There are many possible answers: the documentation engendered by advocacy groups or individuals in the course of their work (Documentation Center of Cambodia); a collection deliberately assembled to reflect a history of social justice work (Columbia University's Human Rights Web Archiving project); an organization using Freedom of Information Act legislation to declassify, collect, disseminate and analyze government documents (the National Security Archive); or an approach, in which archives engage actively and directly in the documentation and record-collection process itself (the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, i-Witness Video). And, there are groups such as Archivists Without Borders and the Documentation Affinity Group which work globally and collectively to address a variety of archiving and documentation projects and challenges.

Archives and archivists are essential to preservation, continuity, and persistence of memory, but they are agents of transformation and change too. Stay tuned....

From: <https://blog.witness.org/2010/09/archives-for-change-activist-archives-archival-activism/>

SOME BASICS

- Archives usually consist of unpublished materials that accumulate organically over the course of time and that are preserved for the enduring value of the information they contain, for their value as artifacts, or as evidence of the work or activities of the creator.
- Archival collections can range in size from a single item to hundreds of boxes and contain just about anything that was created or saved by a person or organization.
- No two archival collections are the same. And no single repository or collection will contain everything on a topic.
- **The unpublished materials in archival collections are usually one-of-a-kind and exist only in the collection where you found them.** The unique nature of the materials is what makes them so valuable to researchers and distinguishes them from ordinary library items. Thousands of libraries may hold copies of particular novel, for example, but only one can hold the original first draft of that work in the author's hand.
- **The vast majority of the unpublished archival material that exists in libraries, historical societies, and institutional repositories is not available online.** You can readily find descriptions of collections on the web, or images from collections on the web and in library databases, but the materials themselves for the most part will be found only in their original format in folders and boxes in archival collections around the world. See the note on digitized archives on the Published Primary Sources page of this guide.

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

SOME BASICS

In his book, *Archival Strategies and Techniques*, Michael R. Hill writes about the nearly random ways documents end up in archival collections. In a chapter titled "Archival Sedimentation," he says:

- "Through the processes of primary ["people and organizations create, discard, save, collect, and donate materials of potential archival interest"], secondary ["people with a wide variety of motives make consequential decisions about what to do with the deceased's papers"], and tertiary sedimentation ["sorting, erosion [i.e., fires, floods, and other disasters], and arrangement of materials after arrival at an archive"], materials come to rest in boxes and file folders, on shelves and in vaults behind the locked doors of archival repositories. These materials are archival sediment [emphasis added], residual traces of human activity. They are selective traces, however, filtered by the combined imprint of personal machinations and idiosyncrasies, family sensibilities, professional envy and collegial admiration, organizational mandates, bureaucratic decisions, archival traditions, social structure, power, wealth, and institutional inertia. From such traces, we seek data from which to make sense of individuals, organizations, social movements, and sociohistorical settings.

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

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curator of the archive of the Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques, allowed me to view the registers for Paris theaters and generously offered further suggestions for research. A special thanks goes to Pierre Ickowicz and Salima Desavoye-Aubry at the Chateau-Musée de Dieppe, who opened Dieppe's immense collection of Saint-Saëns correspondence. Finally, I appreciate the assistance of the helpful staff at the Harry Ransom Center for the Humanities, the Newberry Library, the Special Collections division of Princeton University's Firestone Memorial Library, and the National Library of Australia.

NOTES

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1. See “Modern Entertainment: A Big New Idea at Orchestra Hall,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1915.

2. Heyl described his phasmatrope as “photographs of living objects shown as if in motion”; his presentation also included musical accompaniment. Heyl papers in the Franklin Institute, cited in M. J. McCosker, “Philadelphia and the Genesis of the Motion Picture,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 65, no. 4 (October 1941): 407. In 1897 the academy also served as the site for Klaw and Erlanger’s motion picture *The Horitz Passion Play*, accompanied by lantern slides, spoken commentary, and organ and choral music. As one example of a Carnegie Lyceum event, in 1912 the venue screened Albert Capellani’s *Les Misérables*.

3. The period from 1890 to World War I marked an explosion in the founding of symphony orchestras in the United States, as well as the construction of custom-built halls to house these institutions. See John Spitzer, “The Ubiquity and Diversity of Nineteenth-Century American Orchestras,” in *American Orchestras in the 19th Century*, ed. John Spitzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 22. For the motion picture industry, the 1910s were characterized by pivotal innovations including the development of the feature film and construction of the early movie palaces.

4. Mark Clague, “The Industrial Evolution of the Arts: Chicago’s Auditorium Building (1889-) as Cultural Machine,” *Opera Quarterly* 22, nos. 3–4 (2006): 480–81. For more detail on what Clague describes as “the institutional muse” and an in-depth analysis of the intersection of space, institution, and Chicago’s urban environment, see Clague, “Chicago Counterpoint: The Auditorium Theater Building and the Civic Imagination” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2002), 54–57.

SOME BASICS

- Read widely in reference and secondary sources on your topic and the time period you are studying to inform your research in archives.
- Look closely at the websites of archival repositories to learn about their collections, finding aids, and procedures.
- Always contact an archival repository before you visit.
- Keep a running list of the relevant people, organizations, events, places, dates, and themes you discover in your reading and keep a research journal of the catalogs and databases you search and the keywords you use. A research journal will help you stay organized.
- Take careful, detailed notes when using unpublished materials.
- Speak with library staff about your topic to fine-tune your research strategy and learn about related materials.
- Archival research takes time. Be sure to plan ahead.

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

SOME BASICS

The authors of *The Craft of Research* devised a three-step formula you can use to develop research question worth answering. Without a good question, you'll just be gathering data. Fill in the blanks to focus your efforts and build a research question of significance.

1. Topic: I am studying _____
2. Question: because I want to find out what / why / how _____
3. Significance: in order to better understand _____

► **N.B. Since the research process is rarely linear, you may find that once you arrive in an archival repository and start looking at collections, your research question might change.** Historian and University of Wisconsin professor William Cronon says:

"That's because you get a better sense of what sorts of arguments the documents can support, and because manuscript collections are full of weird and wonderful things that insist on being explored. Make sure you care about the question you go in with enough that you won't immediately abandon it after reading the first document. But don't be afraid to let your question transform itself in dialogue with the documents. Whatever you do, keep track of this thought process on paper. New questions or discarded ones could represent future projects."

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

FINDING AIDS

Archival materials are described at the collection level in documents called **finding aids** or collection guides.

Finding aids are written to give the repository intellectual and physical control over their holdings and to help researchers find what they are looking for within collections.

Finding aids can take many forms and range in detail from a brief summary of a collection to an itemized list of its contents, to a card catalog, but most finding aids will fall somewhere in between. The level of detail and description depend on the resources of the repository and the collection itself. Not all finding aids are online.

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

FINDING AIDS

No two archival collections are the same, so no two finding aids will be the same, but most comprehensive electronic finding aids contain the following elements:

Descriptive Summary – The basic bibliographical details you would find in a library catalog record, including the repository, creator, title, date, abstract describing the subject matter of the material, quantity of materials, and call phrase (the collection number assigned to the collection by the repository).

Biographical / Historical Note – Information on the creator of the collection, including significant historical details that provide context for the archival materials.

Scope and Content Note – A brief description of what’s contained in the collection, including the types of materials and the subject focus of the collection, with highlights sometimes mentioned.

Arrangement – A list of the series into which the collection is organized, or a brief description of the organization of the materials, i.e., “The collection is arranged by type of material, then chronologically.”

Access Points – The subject headings, including names, organizations, topics, places, document types, family names, occupations, and other terms, under which the collection is indexed.

Administrative Information – Provenance of the collection, access and use restrictions, copyright notices, preferred citation, related materials in the repository.

Container List – A list of boxes, folders, and volumes in the collection. You’ll need to know the box and folder numbers to request materials at the repository.

Finding aids may also include: Series descriptions, a list of items separated from the collection, and notes on related collections in the repository.

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

TIPS FOR USING FINDING AIDS

- Many manuscript and archival repositories have online catalogs or databases that allow searching across collection finding aids. Look for these and search them for sources on your topic.
- Collections may be described in catalog records, website descriptions, NUCMC records, published collection guides, and/or Wikipedia entries in addition to or instead of traditional finding aids.
- Not all collections will have detailed finding aids, but when they do, always spend time reading them thoroughly before diving in to a collection.
- Access may be uneven within a library, with some collections being fully processed and described in electronic finding aids complete with links to digitized images, audio, or video from the collection, while other collections next to them on the shelf may be described only in paper finding aids. Collection descriptions are continually evolving as resources permit.
- A close look at a finding aid will tell you not only what is IN a collection, but what is NOT there, saving you time.

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

TIPS FOR USING FINDING AIDS

- When viewing electronic finding aids, look for the "print view" or a link to "view as a single page" so you can do keyword searching within the document.
- Archivists research the subjects of the collections they process and frequently write detailed historical and biographical notes that contextualize the materials. You can learn a great deal by reading a comprehensive finding aid.
- A container list in a finding aid will tell you the type of material you'll find in a box or folder, but it usually won't give you the specific details of the items in that container. A typical folder title might be "Correspondence, 1911-1914." When this is the case, the only way to find out who is writing to whom and what is being said is to request the box and open the folder to read the letters yourself.
- Not all collections have finding aids and not all finding aids are online. Visit a repository's website to get an overview of the archival holdings and then contact the staff to find out if they might hold materials relevant to your topic.
- As a way of dealing with backlogs of unprocessed collections, many archival repositories have begun in recent years to follow an arrangement and description methodology called MPLP, or "More Product, Less Process," especially for large contemporary collections. This trend in processing means that archivists spend less time arranging and describing materials in order to provide access to more materials sooner. For researchers, this means they may have to spend more time looking through boxes of materials because collections may only be described in broad strokes in finding aids that mention just the most obvious contents and contain little research and scholarship.

From <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/archivalresearch/research-process>

FINDING AID EXAMPLE

<https://www.esm.rochester.edu/sibley/>