



STARTING AN ARCHIVE

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE?

An archive or archives is the non-current records of an organization or institution preserved because of their continuing value. Records can be on paper, film, compact discs, videocassettes, digital files, plastic, cloth...any format!

WHY DO YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR RECORDS FOREVER?

What are your goals? Who are you saving your records for -- your organization's members now; your organization's members in the future; your community; or historical researchers?

WHICH RECORDS ARE WORTH KEEPING FOR POSTERITY?

Appraise your records. Consider what types of materials to save and the importance of their content to the organization. The lists of records at the end of this guide can help you decide which materials to retain.¹ Keep in mind that these are just suggested levels of importance and your organization may have different needs.

HOW SHOULD YOU ORGANIZE WHAT YOU KEEP?

Whenever possible, arrange and file the records in the order in which they were originally created, maintained, and used, not according to any artificial or arbitrary arrangement.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR ARCHIVE?

Archival description is the process of establishing intellectual control over the records through the preparation of finding aids, such as inventories, catalog cards, or indexes. To have intellectual control means that you know what records you have and that you can retrieve records in a consistent manner.

HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT WHAT YOU KEEP LASTS FOR POSTERITY?

Preservation is any type of activity that prolongs the useable life of records. Preservation activities are designed to minimize the physical and chemical deterioration of records and to prevent the loss of informational content. Conservation is one component of a preservation program and includes the examination, documentation, and treatment of records. Some factors effecting the preservation of materials are chemicals, temperature, humidity, light, and vermin. Housing materials in appropriate containers, such as acid-free folders and boxes and metal shelves and cabinets, can aide in the long-term care of your records.

¹ Adapted from Brichford, Maynard J. *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977.

HOW DO YOU MAKE YOUR ARCHIVES AVAILABLE?

Consider the issues of reference and access. Who will be able to use the records? Where will they be housed? Who will be responsible for maintaining the archives? What policies will you have for use, duplication, loans, etc?

WHAT MATERIALS ARE USUALLY CONSIDERED PERMANENTLY

VALUABLE?

Usually Valuable

Abstracts of title	Interviews	Proclamations
Albums	Legal records	Recollections
Autobiographies	Letters	Regulations
Brochures	Locally published materials	Reports, annual
Budgets	Logs	Reports, audit
Bulletins	Manuals, policy	Research journals
By-laws	Manuals, procedure	Research reports
Catalogs	Memoirs	Resolution
Constitutions	Memorials	Rolls
Diaries and journals	Militia lists	Rosters
Directives	Minutes	Rules
Directories	Muster rolls	Speeches
Dockets	Newsletters	Studies
Election documents	Organizational charts	Surveys
Guides	Poll lists	Testimonials
Handbooks	Press kits	Wills
Histories	Proceedings	

Often Valuable

Agendas	Contracts	Kinescopes
Agreements	Deed abstracts	Ledgers
Announcements	Diagrams	Maps
Audio recordings	Drawings and sketches	Memoranda
Books	Field notes	Motion picture films
Brochures	Film strips	Negatives, photograph
Certificates	Financial records	Order books
Charts	Flyers and handouts	Petitions
Photographs	Registers	Specifications, buildings
Plans	Reports, progress	Subject files
Poems	Research files	Telegrams
Posters	School annuals	Transcriptions of tapes
Press releases	Scrapbooks	Video recordings
Promotional materials	Sheet music	

Occasionally Valuable

Assessment records	Date books and calendars	Notices
Case files	Examination questions	Payrolls
Catalogs	Inventories	Postcards
Clippings	Lectures	Program documentation
Committee files	Newspaper clippings	Recommendations
Course materials	Nominations	Statistical tables
Course outlines	Notebooks	Transcripts

Often Without Value

Applications	Licenses	Requisitions
Ballots	Mortgages	Sales literature
Bank statements	Orders, financial	Shorthand notes
Bills, financial	Outlines	Tickets
Budget work papers	Payroll deductions, authorizations	Tickler files
Business cards	Payroll deductions, notices	Time books and records
Cash books	Plaques	Trial balances
Checks, cancelled	Purchase orders	Vouchers
Claims	Reading files	Work orders
Invoices	Receipts	Worksheets
Leases	Releases	
Lecture notes		

Usually Without Value

Blank forms (multiple copies)	Greeting cards	Supplies
Duplicate copies	National magazines	
	Stencils	

WHAT BOOKS ARE APPROPRIATE FOR THE BEGINNING ARCHIVIST?

Bellardo, Lewis and Lynn Lady Bellardo. *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992.

Ham, F. Gerald. *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992.

Hunter, Gregory S. *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives: A How-To-Do-It Manual*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1996.

Miller, Fredric M. *Arranging and Describing Archives*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990.

O'Toole, James M. *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990.

Pugh, Mary Jo. *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992.

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn. *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993.

Wilsted, Thomas and William Nolte. *Managing Archival and Manuscript Repositories*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1991.

WHERE CAN YOU GET FURTHER ASSISTANCE?

- Austin History Center
<http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc>
- Society of American Archivists
<http://www.archivists.org>
- The Archivists Toolkit from Archives Association of British Columbia
<http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/toolkit.html>
- National Archives and Records Administration
<http://www.nara.gov>

IF YOU WANT TO DONATE YOUR RECORDS TO AN ARCHIVES, WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

If you are interested in donating your collection to an archival repository be sure to contact that institution before discarding any records. Archivists are experts in identifying materials that should be transferred to an archival repository or manuscript library. Because the research value of records may be diminished if items are removed or if the records are rearranged, donors are encouraged to contact the repository staff before weeding, discarding, or reorganizing their papers and other records. **For further assistance contact the Manuscripts and Archives Curator at the Austin History Center at (512) 974-7382.**

Austin History Center ★ Austin Public Library
<http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc>
(512) 974-7480
Monday, closed
Tuesday-Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
Sunday, 12 noon-6:00 p.m.