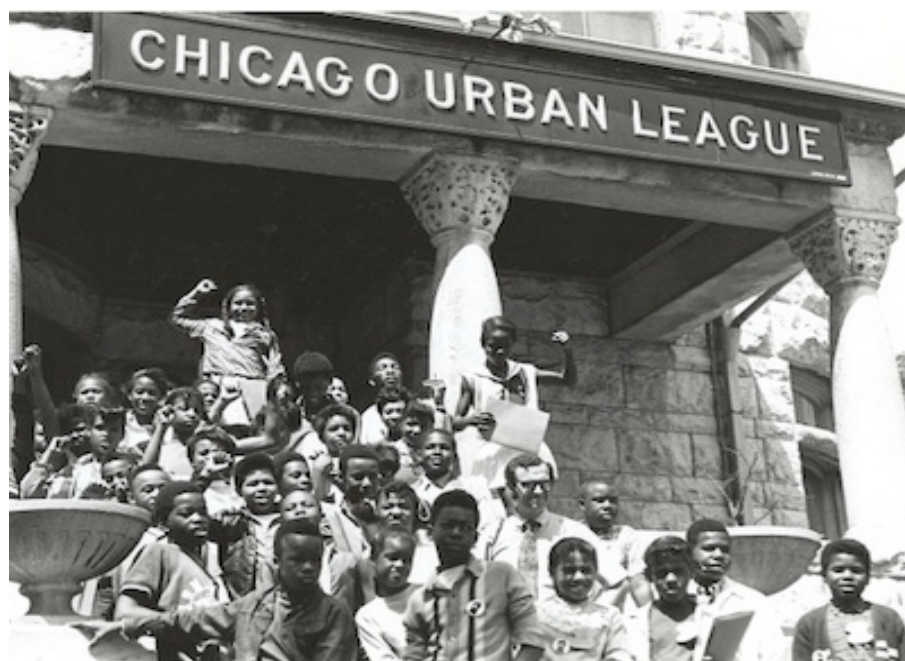


The Color Curtain Processing Project:



Unveiling the Archives of Chicago's Black Metropolis

Training

December 5-9, 2011

BMRC/CLIR

Color Curtain Processing Project

- A project of the Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC) funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR)
- 28 Month Project
- Processing 100 Collections at 13 Institutions
- More Product Less Process (MPLP)
- Archivists' Toolkit



Institutions

- Bronzeville Historical Society
- Chicago State University
- Chicago History Museum
- CPL Harold Washington Library Center
- CPL Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection
- Columbia College Center for Black Music Research
- Dusable Museum of African American History
- Illinois Labor History Society
- Roosevelt University
- Shorefront Legacy Center
- Spertus Institute
- UIC Library of the Health Sciences
- UIC Archives and Special Collections

BMRC

The Black Metropolis Research Consortium

- A Chicago based association of libraries, universities, and archival institutions that house materials documenting African American history and culture
- Offers several workshops and lectures yearly on archival issues and advocacy
- The University of Chicago serves as host institution for the BMRC
- Conducted large scale survey of archival collections housed at various institutions in Chicago from 2009-2011

Project Goals

- Process approximately 100 collections across 13 Chicago area repositories.
- Experiment with large scale minimal processing for records ranging from the 19th to 21st centuries.
- Create DACS compliant finding aids for approximately 100 collections across 13 area repositories.
- Utilize DACS, EAD, MARC Records and the Archivists' Toolkit to create highly standardized and consistent discovery tools (finding aids).
- Increase access to Chicago's collections that document African American history and culture through consortial collaboration.

“Archivists are intermediaries between the creator of a collection of manuscripts and the present and future users of the papers. Archivists... are among those charged by society to decide which portions of the enormous quantity of records become part of the permanent historical record of our culture. Our task is to preserve these materials and to make them accessible to researchers who study and tell the stories of our past ... The papers we process will soon become the “stuff” of history. Each one of us is a link in the long chain of knowledge that stretches from the lives of the men and women who created the papers to the eventual users of the manuscripts.”

--University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

http://www.lib.unc.edu/wikis/archproc/index.php/How_to_Proceed:_Introduction

The Job

- It won't be easy at 2 hours per linear foot ...
- The time constraints are frightening, the expectations are significant... but the rewards are amazing
- You will be working with great unprocessed collections
- You will be working at Chicago's best repositories and with some of the brightest people in the archival field.
- You will be gaining hands on experience with minimal processing, the Archivists' Toolkit, EAD and DACS.

The Job, continued...

- This job is a once in a lifetime opportunity— listen to the experts at repositories, learn from the collections, and get to know future archivists
- You also have the opportunity to help evaluate this project
 - What works and what doesn' t?
 - Is the training sufficient?
 - Do the manuals for processing and the Archivists' Toolkit work?
 - What do you think of minimal processing?
 - What have you learned from working with experts at participating BMRC repositories?

Processing

The arrangement, description and housing of archival materials for storage and use by patrons.

Processing Basics

Provenance

Original Order

Arrangement

Description

Housing

PROVENANCE

“1. The origin or source of something; 2. Information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection. (Provenance is a fundamental principle of archives, referring to the individual, family, or organization that created or received the items in a collection. The principle of provenance or the *respect des fonds* indicates that records of different origins (provenance) be kept separate to preserve the context).”

Provenance Summary

- Tells us who created or donated the collection, where it came from and why.
- Also tells us that each collection is distinct and should NEVER be interfiled or combined with other distinct collections.

ORIGINAL ORDER

“The organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records. Maintaining records in original order serves two purposes. First, it preserves existing relationships and evidential significance that can be inferred from the context of the records. Second, it exploits the record creator’s mechanisms to access the records, saving the archives the work of creating new access tools.”

Original Order Summary

- The organization and sequence of records established by the creator.
 - Original order is not the same as the order in which materials were received. Items that were clearly misfiled may be refiled in their proper location.
 - For original order to apply, there needs to be an identifiable and useful order in existence. If there is not an identifiable or useful order (if you cannot explain what the order is), then you will have to impose an order.

“The principle of respect for original order does not extend to respect for original chaos.”

ARRANGEMENT

“1. The process of organizing materials with respect to their provenance and original order, to protect their context and to achieve **physical** or **intellectual** control over the materials. 2. The organization and sequence of items within a collection.”

Arrangement Summary

- The process of organizing material to achieve **physical** and **intellectual** control over the materials, while respecting original order whenever possible.
- In traditional processing, records are arranged to the “folder level,” often with care taken to arrange and describe the contents within folders to the “item level.”

Intellectual & Physical Arrangement

Intellectual Arrangement

Refers to the hierarchical arrangement of series, subseries, folders and items within a collection, and how they relate to each other.

Physical Arrangement

Refers to the actual order of materials within the collection. Physical arrangement or location is typically denoted with box and folder numbers, or volume numbers.

Intellectual & Physical Arrangement

- Intellectual and physical arrangement are directly related but may not look the same.
- Items that intellectually belong together may not be housed together because of differences in format or size.
- A series is not defined by its physical location, nor does the intellectually created series determine the physical arrangement of the collection.
 - Series may span multiple boxes, and a new series may begin in the middle of a box
- Physical location is necessary to help researchers obtain access to material

SERIES/SUBSERIES

Series: “A group of similar records that are arranged according to a filing system and that are related as the result of being created, received, or used in the same activity; a file group; a record series.”

Subseries: “A body of documents within a series readily distinguished from the whole by filing arrangement, type, form, or content.”

DESCRIPTION

Definition: “1. The process of creating a finding aid or other Access tool that allow individuals to browse a surrogate of the collection to facilitate access and that improve security by creating a record of the collection and by minimizing the amount of handling of the original materials. – 2. A written account of the physical characteristics, informational content, and functional purpose of a records series or system.”

The description is the bridge between intellectual and physical arrangement.

HOUSING

- Typically completed during the process of arrangement
- **Traditional Processing:**
 - Archivists transfer records to archival enclosures, despite the quality of the original housing.
 - Archivists unfold and smooth ALL papers; remove rubber ALL bands, staples and paperclips regardless of condition.
 - Archivists often interleave photographs and acidic papers (like newspapers), make “preservation photocopies,” and sleeve material in Mylar to prevent discoloration of surrounding documents.

Minimal Processing

- Designed for late 20th Century institutional records
- Arranging and describing archival collections at a less intensive level than is considered standard in order to make the collections available for use.
- Generally, no preservation work is completed and arrangement and description within series and folders is limited.
- Introduced by Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner in an article entitled “More Product, Less Process” in 2005 and is still considered extremely controversial.

"More Product, Less Process"

- Why Minimal Processing?
 - Backlog (It is everywhere!)
 - Increased size of late 20th century record collections
 - Reduced resources, especially in a recession.
- Arguments Against Minimal Processing
 - The finished product is not finished.
 - The finished product does not conform to standards.
 - Processors may never have time to return and finish.
 - Collections that are not fully processed may create additional work for reference staff when researchers ask questions.
- Arguments For Minimal Processing
 - What is the point in keeping materials that researchers do not know exist or cannot use?
 - It is not our job to do all the work for researchers, but to make it possible for them to do their work.

Minimal Processing, cont....

- Minimal processing is not just for late 20th century papers
 - Ability to minimally process a collection results more from its order than from its age
- Collections may not be flawlessly arranged; however, better intellectual and physical control of collections is absolutely achieved, and materials are made more accessible.

Minimal Processing, cont....

- Minimal processing is NOT sloppy processing
 - By creating and demanding adherence to standards, minimal processing effectively provides physical and intellectual access to collections
- Minimal processing makes collections available for research much faster than traditional processing.
 - This is our ultimate goal!

MPLP Preservation

- All collections will be housed in archival boxes (not necessarily new!)
- All loose items will be placed in archival folders or boxes.
- Non-archival folders will be replaced ONLY if existing folders are damaged or do not fit in archival boxes.
- Volumes with damaged bindings will be tied up and/or foldered and placed in boxes.
- Metal fasteners will be removed ONLY if they are causing damage to the collection and rubber bands will be removed ONLY if obvious.
- Preservation photocopies will NOT be made.
- Folded items will NOT be unfolded.

Preservation, cont....

- This does not mean that we do not care about preservation.
- BMRC relies heavily on the *Preservation Worksheet*, which is completed for each collection.
 - Some institution-specific handling will be required.
 - Flag materials that are damaged or extremely fragile.
 - Notify someone immediately if you see signs of:
 - **Bugs and/or pests**
 - **Mold**
 - **Nitrate film**

Handle with Care

- Even though the collections are receiving minimal processing, it is important to remember that they are irreplaceable.
 - Depending upon their storage and the care they received prior to arriving at the repository, these collections may not be good condition.
 - We are not paper doctors, but like doctors, our mantra should be: “First do no harm.”
 - If something does get damaged, please tell the repository staff and make a note on your preservation worksheet. This may be an indication that the material is too fragile to be handled by researchers.

Handling Archival Materials

- When carrying large or oversized materials, hold onto top-right corner and bottom-left corner.
- If you have to unfold materials, be very careful of brittleness (items folded and unfolded many times are weakest at the fold line)
- If items are sticking together, call for help, do not risk ripping materials.
- Bound volumes should be placed in the boxes, SPINE DOWN.
- Do not eat or drink near archival collections.
- Never use pens, ONLY pencils (everything we do should be reversible).
- NEVER throw anything away without consulting with repository staff and receiving permission.

Tools of the Archival Trade

The Finding Aid

DACS

EAD

MARC

Archivists Toolkit

The Finding Aid

Definition: “1. A tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records. -2. A description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and that assists users to gain access to and understand the materials.”

- Contains
 - provenance
 - admin./bio note
 - scope and content note
 - Size/extent
 - subjects
 - organization and arrangement
 - inventory

Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)

- A standard for creating access tools for all forms of archival materials, including their archival creators and the forms of creator names.
- This is a fairly recent attempt by the archival field to standardize finding aids and other tools across repositories.
 - Almost every repository has their own way of creating finding aids and making their information accessible to researchers.
 - Without standardization, each time a researcher visits a new repository (in person or online), they need to learn how to use that repository's system.

Encoded Archival Description (EAD)

- A standard used to mark up (encode) finding aids that reflect the hierarchical nature of archival collections and that provides a structure for describing the whole collection, as well as its components.
- This is another attempt for standardization within the archival field.
- EAD is extremely time intensive! If one character of the code is not correct, the finding aid will not validate.

Machine Readable Cataloging Records (MARC)

- A data communications format that specifies a data structure for bibliographic description authority, classification, community information and holdings data.
- This cataloging information describes what is contained within a collection and is usually what is searched within a library catalog. Therefore, it is a powerful discovery tool.

The Archivists Toolkit

A collections management tool that creates
DACS compliant finding aids, encoded archival
description, and MARC records

AT THE CLICK OF A BUTTON!

YOU CAN DO IT!!!!!!!

18 Months

100 Collections

100 Finding
Aids



Your Mission

- Arrange the collections into series and subseries
- Transfer documents into acid free boxes and, at times, folders
- Describe the collections in the Archivists' Toolkit
- Create DACS compliant EAD finding aids

Processing the BMRC Way



The BMRC Method

Processing is divided into FIVE basic steps

- Step I. Know your Collection
- Step II. Collection Arrangement
- Step III. Collection Description
- Step IV. Collection Review
- Step V. Completing the Process

Processing Levels

- Level 1 – Collection Level
- Level 2 – Box Level
- Level 3 – Folder Level

Step 1

Know your Collection!

1. Review the Information

- Take ½ an hour and read all collection documentation in your packet.
- This will give you a good idea of
 - What or who the collection is about
 - What subject matter is/should be covered in the collection
 - What types/genres of records you will encounter
 - What to look for in your initial review of the collection
 - How to understand and contextualize the records.

What you should have to start

- **BMRC Survey Record:**
 - Identifies basic information about a collection
 - Date span
 - Estimated linear feet/containers
 - Identifies preservation concerns
 - Provides a brief abstract or synopsis of collection contents & subject matter
 - Provides brief historical note
- **Processing Packet:**
 - Building on survey, it preps collections for actual processing
 - Gathers ALL known info in one place
 - Proposes series and subseries
 - Identifies potential processing issues & offers solutions
 - Expanded biographical/historical note
 - Proposes authorized terms
 - Lists supplies needed for processing
 - TIME FRAME for processing
 - Includes all processing worksheets

2. Conduct an Inventory

- Compare what you see with what you know from the existing descriptive documents and processing plan
 - COUNT THE BOXES! Make sure you have all the boxes and accessions included in the collection.
 - Identify unfoldered/unboxed material.
 - If shelved separately, bring together in one location.

3. Confirm Arrangement

- Identify proposed series/subseries
 - Reevaluate the proposed arrangement in the processing plan.
 - Discuss possible revisions with Lisa
 - As you identify material place a marker at the beginning and ends of each group to make it easier to find when you return to the material.

STEP 2

Collection Arrangement

A. Intellectual Arrangement

- Original Order
 - Only rearrange if there is no original order or the existing order is not conducive to research.
- Series/Subseries
 - Begin processing the most important or revealing series
 - Resist refining organization at subseries level
 - Don't identify individual items.
 - Flag problem items for review AT THE END OF PROCESSING.
 - Take notes on
 - subject content,
 - significant/key people,
 - subjects of historical interest,
 - Obvious gaps and strengths in documentation

Hierarchical Nature of Archives

- Collections are arranged into Series and Subseries: A series is “a group of similar records that are arranged according to a filing system and that are related as the result of being created, received, or used in the same activity.”
- Archival collections are arranged hierarchically; if you can make an outline to organize ideas for a paper or presentation, you can organize archives

-
- Collection
 - Series
 - Subseries
 - Folder
 - » Item

Series Categories

- Do not overcomplicate things - Let the collection do the talking!
 - Look for established record groups
 - Look for materials that are obviously the same type of record or are regarding the same topic
 - Look for files that were obviously created or maintained by the same person
- Common Series Groupings
 - Personal/Biographical
 - Correspondence
 - Creations
 - Research
 - Photograph
 - Subgroups related to other people or organizations
 - Audiovisual
 - Digital Files

Establishing Series

- In establishing your series and/or subseries, remember:
 - If you create one series, then every file or record within the collection MUST fit within that or another series
 - If you create a subseries within a series, all the files within that series must fit into that or another subseries.
 - In other words, you may NOT have some files in series or subseries and not others.

Establishing Series

- If you are processing business or organizational records, you may find one or more of the following series
 - Board of Directors records
 - President's records
 - General correspondence
 - General subject files
 - Financial records
 - Personnel (or Human Resources) records
 - Etc.

Exercise

Multi-Level Description

B. Physical Arrangement

- Place series in logical order based on int'l arrangement
 - 90% of the time physical order will follow intellectual order
- Arrange folders within series
 - There should ALWAYS be an obvious arrangement.
 - Alphabetical, chronological or numerical, etc.
- Conduct cursory preservation during physical arrangement.

D. Foldering and Boxing

- Foldering Basics
 - Don't overstuff folders (1" or less)
 - Square the bottom so it stands flat in box
- Boxing Basics
 - Containers should be full but not tight.
 - Never overstuff a box
 - Label box in pencil with series and any identifying notes.

C. Sensitive Material

- You will not have time to diligently identify sensitive material.
- Make sure to record documents you do find in your notes, in Archivist Toolkit, and the Finding Aid.
- Talk to Lisa and the repository liaison about restricting material.

Intellectual and Physical Arrangement

- Once the collection is arranged, discuss final series and collection arrangement with Lisa PRIOR to data entry or assigning box and folder numbers

E. Folder Titles

- A good title helps the researcher decide if a collection contains useful information.
- If possible, transcribe existing folder titles.
 - Only improve titles if inaccurate or confusing.
- **DO NOT**
 - Abbreviate
 - Use acronyms
 - Use “miscellaneous”

E. Numbering

DO NOT NUMBER UNTIL YOU HAVE PERMISSION

- Folders:
 - Every folder within any given box should be numbered from 1 to however many folders there are in the box.
 - If reusing folders select clean and obvious location.
 - ALWAYS start each new box with a new folder 1
 - If you make a mistake, you will only need to renumber folders within ONE box, not the entire collection.

Step 3

Collection Description

A. Biographical/Historical Note

- Biographical Note (About the Creator)
 - This is 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 (what was the world in which they lived and worked like?), death dates, etc.
- Historical Note (About the Creator)
 - This is written when the creator of the collection is an institution, a business/corporation, or an organization. It should include items such as dates of incorporation/organization, location, type of work conducted, reasons for importance, context, etc.

Scope and Content Note

- Refers to the contents of the collection.
- Level of detail will depend on level of processing. All collections will be described at the collection level (Level 1).
 - Types of records (genres)
 - Topics and subjects
 - Inclusive or bulk dates
 - 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.
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What's in the majority of the collection and/or series?
 - Does the collection fully tell any story? Or does it only partially tell the story? Or , does it merely fill in gaps of a bigger story?
 - Does it inform any unexpected or not immediately apparent topics?
 - Could you write an article or a book on any topics covered by using this collection alone?
 - Is it a first stop for researchers or a last stop, etc.?

Basics for a Scope and Content Note

- Must be concise and informative, not an exercise in creative writing!
- The collection should be described in the same order that is arranged, with the most important and relevant information first.
 1. Describe the collection overall
 2. Discuss the arrangement of the collection
 3. Describe each series individually within the scope note
 4. Explain who may find the collection to be useful and why

Container List

- List of material found in the collection.
- Will reflect the processing level.
- Each section will contain a description of material.

Abstract Note

- The abstract is a brief and tidy statement that sums up the collection in a **few sentences**.
- It provides researchers with the most essential facts about the collection; and what institutions will use to describe material in a catalog.
- Make sure your abstract includes:
 - Who/what the collection is about
 - Significant contributions of the creator/subject
 - Date span of the collection
 - What is in the collection (types or genres of records)

A Note about Notes

- Notes should be honest and unbiased: you may love or hate the subject of your collection, but the researcher should not know that.
 - This does **NOT** mean that your notes have to be boring. Feel free to let the personality of the creator shine. If you find a quote in the papers that is relevant, incorporate it. Don't forget to cite it.
- Your notes should be based upon what is in the collection. This is technical writing, not creative writing.

STEP 4

Collection Review

The World's Window to the Collection

- Quality is extremely important.
- Your description is how a researcher determines whether or not a collection will be useful to them.
- Spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors are embarrassing and can prevent researchers from finding pertinent information.

Review Your Work!

- Description Review
 - Make sure the Finding Aid reflect the content
 - Look for inconsistencies
 - Address any lingering questions
 - Look for folder title/numbering mistakes
- Collection Review
 - Double Check date range
 - Did the collection size change
 - Are there any names to be added/removed from Authority list.

Step 5

Completing the Process

Are we there yet?

A. Finalize the Finding Aid

- Multiple levels of editing

B. Archivist Toolkit

- AT entry after final edits are complete

C. Box Labeling & Numbering

- Completed after info entered into AT, will be printed with template
- Boxes in any given collection should be numbered consecutively from 1 to however many boxes there are in the collection.
- NEVER start renumbering boxes at the beginning of a new series. A collection should only have one “box 1”.

D. Worksheets

- You absolutely **MUST** completely fill out worksheets for every collection
- Please put some time and thought into this
- It is how we track the success and failure of minimal processing and how we will be able to communicate what we learn to the larger archival community

E. The Blog Post

- **Write your blog post!**
- **OUR GOAL: EACH STUDENT SHOULD WRITE ONE POST FOR EACH INSTITUTION**
- This is mandatory and is a chance for the collection (or even a small part of the collection) to stand out.
- You may be as blunt as you want to be about the project and minimal processing.
- Get creative or even critical, but remember that you are writing this as an agent of the BMRC. Keep it professional and mostly positive or at least diplomatic when discussing collections and repositories.
- Blog posts may be written during work hours: when you submit your finding aid to Lisa for the first proof, take TWO HOURS and write a post. You and your partner can alternate: one tidies up, the other writes a blog post!
- Blog posts get turned into Bergis.

Why should you write blog posts?

- Immediate “unhiding” of the collection!
- Transparency in project methodology, successes, failures, and lessons learned.
- A chance to talk about what you are doing and about your collections (your finding aids need to be unbiased, but this does not!!!)
- Increased visibility for you!

F. (is for) FINALLY!!

- Clean up your workspace, make certain that any materials or tools used have been returned, etc.
- Return all documentation to Lisa (folder with descriptive information and processing plans, the completed processing worksheet, a copy of the preservation worksheet, and your evaluation).
- Meet with Project Staff to discuss the processing and ways in which to improve the efficiency and quality of our work.

**WORKFLOW
AND OTHER HELPFUL
HINTS**

Hints at the start of processing:

- Make sure you have Processing Packets for all collections
- Make sure collections are prioritized
- Refer to your manuals with questions

As you work at each repository, keep in mind:

- You have a lot of supervisors—Lisa, Bergis, **AND** the repository staff
- **ALWAYS** be respectful of repository staff
 - We are guests in their repository
 - They are the experts on their collections
 - You **MUST** respect their way of doing things
 - What is the format for labeling folders?
 - What are the formats for capitalization of series titles and folder titles in finding aids?
 - What is the format for folder dates?
 - What items should be flagged? (see preservation worksheet)
- **ALWAYS** be respectful of the collections
 - The papers may or may not be old, but they are all unique and have documented research value
- **ALWAYS** ask questions
 - There is **NO** time to go back and re-do work
 - It is our responsibility to produce good work with which (?) repositories are happy.

Please pay attention to deadlines:

- We have roughly 2 hours per linear foot ... the papers will almost always be interesting, but we cannot afford the time to get caught up in them.
- If we fall behind, it is possible that collections elsewhere will not be processed—which is unfair to both repositories and researchers.

Please take photographs!!!

(Must get permission from liaison)

- We want LOTS of photographs of the collections, your work and progress!
- Photos should be uploaded to folder on server (place TBD)
- Be sure to keep the photos you add organized and properly named:
 - “Repository Name_ Collection Name”
 - i.e. Roosevelt University_Christopher Reed papers

WHY WE DO THIS

- Remember that the only reason to do all this work is to make certain that these collections are USED by researchers.
- The best way to provide access is to create really good tools that will point researcher to the materials relevant to their study.