



Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives, Museum of South Texas History

**South Texas College Capstone History Class Tour handout
November 14, 2014
10 am**

Definition of an Archives

An archives is an institution that collects materials of historical value. The materials are unique and cannot be replaced if they are stolen, lost, or destroyed. The archives protects the materials by using security and preservation measures. At the same time the archivist provides reference service to the materials so knowledge of culture and other topics may be passed on to future generations.

Mission of an Archivist

The mission of an archivist is to identify and collect materials of historical value, to preserve and arrange the materials, and to describe and make the materials available to researchers.

Archivist Job Description

An archivist collects and manages historical materials in all formats (paper, photographs, electronic records, audio/visual materials) that pertain to the collecting parameters of the archives. The archivist uses the latest archival methods and technologies to develop, organize and implement procedures to preserve the collection and make it readily accessible to a wide range of users.

The duties and responsibilities for the archivist cover reference, collection management and growth, and care of institutional records. Reference duties include making appointments with patrons (users) over the phone, through email or letters. The archivist also supervises the reading room while patrons are there and makes policies regarding the reading room and patron services. Another reference duty is to maintain knowledge of legal matters relating to copyright and freedom of information. Most archivists do not conduct research for patrons.

Managing the collection and contributing to its growth is a major duty of the archivist. That is accomplished first by working with people who wish to donate collections and

assessing the historical value of potential donations and purchases. Next the archivist must preserve, process, and store the materials acquired, while knowing how to take proper care of paper items, photographic film, and audio/visual and electronic media. She is required to create finding aids (documents that describe collections and tell what's in them), databases, and other tools to make the materials in the collections accessible. The archivist needs to know and be able to apply current best practices in order to accomplish all these things. She trains assistants to do some of this work and also establishes workflow and work schedules. Last the archivist makes sure all the archival materials support the historical topics collected by the archives by discarding items that fall outside those subjects.

Since most archives are part of a larger institution, another duty of the archivist is to collect and preserve the parent institution's permanent, valuable, and vital institutional records.

Other duties that an archivist performs include writing articles for professional publications and reports for the institution or other organizations. The archivist also participates in any special programs developed by the parent institution, develops community networks to market the archives and its services, and manages the budget for the archives. Last the archivist performs any other duties that are necessary to support the parent institution.

Archival Education Path

Archives are found in almost every kind of institution and organization. There are archives in governmental departments, in universities, in businesses, and in law libraries just to name a few. Therefore, a bachelor degree in almost any subject could help a person wanting to become an archivist.

The major place to earn a graduate-level archival degree is in library school. In addition to the regular library courses, a student would learn the history of archives and the archival profession, how records contribute to cultural memory, and what ethics and values an archivist must have. Other archival classes would cover the nature of records and archives, how to appraise and acquire collections, how to arrange and describe the materials in a collection, and how to preserve all types of formats. People related skills would be learned in classes that teach how to provide reference services and access to archival materials, how to perform outreach and advocacy, and how to manage workers in the archival setting. Archivists must acquire current technology skills in order to perform their work in a timely and efficient manner; therefore, an archival student needs to study records and information management as well as digital records and access systems.

Some archivists do not have library masters. Instead they have graduate degrees in history, public history, archeology, anthropology, or museum studies. Some of these programs of study provide basic courses in archives. Another way these people gain archival knowledge is to attend workshops provided by professional organizations.

How Archives and Libraries Differ

Archives

Materials are unpublished and unique

Materials are created in the normal course of business

Materials are arranged to preserve context

Materials are described as a group

Archivists prepare descriptions of the materials

Patrons may not browse the shelves

Materials must be used in the archives

Library

Materials are published and available elsewhere

Materials are created as the result of separate and independent actions (writing a book and getting it published)

Materials are arranged according to subject matter

Materials are described as individual items

Descriptions are contained in the published items (title page, table of contents, index)

Shelves are open to patrons

Many materials may be checked out by patrons

SAA Museum Archives Section Working Group Example

SAA – Society of American Archivists

<http://www2.archivists.org/>

About SAA

<http://www2.archivists.org/about>

So You Want to Be an Archivist: An Overview of the Archives Profession

<http://www2.archivists.org/profession>

Standards and Best Practices

<http://www2.archivists.org/standards>

Core Values of Archivists

<http://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>

Free Publications

<http://www2.archivists.org/publications/epubs>

SSA – Society of Southwest Archivists

<http://www.southwestarchivists.org/>

About SSA – FAQs

<http://www.southwestarchivists.org/FAQ>

Professional Development

<http://www.southwestarchivists.org/education>

NARA – National Archives and Records Administration

<http://www.archives.gov/>

About the National Archives

<http://www.archives.gov/about/>

What's an Archives?

<http://www.archives.gov/about/info/whats-an-archives.html>

What's an Archivist? (includes job titles of NARA staff members)

<http://www.archives.gov/about/info/whats-an-archivist.html>

Preservation

<http://www.archives.gov/preservation/>

NARA FAQs

<http://www.archives.gov/faqs/>

About Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives

As early as 1968, the Hidalgo County Historical Museum (now called the Museum of South Texas History) collected documents for the use of researchers. C.E. Craig of Lyford, Texas, donated the first archival collection, consisting of several land deeds.

At first the archivist was a volunteer. The job description said the archivist would be "...involved in organizing and indexing documents, books, slides and records of all kinds which are of historical significance to the South Texas area." Duties included filing, preparing index cards, organizing newspaper clippings, maintaining a card file on published materials, and keeping a list of photographic items. The job description said typing skills would be helpful but were not necessary.

In 1988 David Mycue was hired as the Senior Archivist. When he retired in 2005, Barbara Stokes filled the position. Phyllis Kinnison became the Archivist when Barbara left in 2012. All three have been professionals with graduate degrees.

In 1979 the archives was known as the Research Library and Archives. At that time it housed books, periodicals, newspapers, microfilm, documents, transparencies, tapes, records, and scrapbooks. After the death of Margaret H. McAllen, a founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Museum, the Board of Trustees changed the name of the archives to the Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives.

Today the archives is open to the public 16 hours a week. Researchers have access to books and other published materials, documents, city directories, yearbooks, abstracts of title, rare books, maps, photographs, photo albums and scrapbooks, posters, newspapers, microfilm, audio tapes, film, VHS tapes, CDs, and DVDs. Strengths of the collections include mid-twentieth century water conservation, early twentieth century ranch histories, the Mexican-American War, the Plan de San Diego, newspaper photographs and photo studio records and photographs. Types of researchers include college students, genealogists, academic researchers, authors, news networks, government officials, and others interested in the heritage of South Texas and Northeastern Mexico.

Museum of South Texas History
Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives

Reading Room Regulations

- Circulation: The archives are closed stacks and non-circulating. Researchers may not browse the storage areas, and only archives staff may remove materials.
- Security: All bags, coats, hats, or other personal items must be stored in a locker provided outside the Reading Room.
- Registration: Users must complete an annual registration form during their first visit and discuss research needs with staff. A log of subsequent visits for that year will be kept.
- Handling of Materials:
 - Use only pencils or a laptop computer for note taking. Computer carrying cases must be stored in a locker. Personal scanners and digital cameras are not permitted. **Cell phones may not be used to photograph materials.**
 - Patrons are allowed one box of manuscripts at a time and must remove only one folder at a time.
 - Materials should be laid flat on the table. Books should not be placed face down, rested on another book, or held in one's lap. Special weights are available for holding pages open.
 - Do not mark on, trace, lean on, fold or tear archival materials.
 - Please turn pages gently.
 - Use cotton gloves when handling photographs and negatives.
- Original order: Preserve the established order of items in folders and the numerical order of folders in boxes. If something appears to be out of order, alert archives staff but do not rearrange it.
- Reproduction:
 - Ask staff for copying procedure if you need photocopies. Manuscripts may only be copied by archival staff.
 - Allow a two-week-turn-around for photographs and for scans of documents depending on size of order (limited to no more than 50 pages per order) and place in reproduction queue. Please view price list for services.
 - A "Permission to Publish" form must be completed in order to publish any archival material in any format including but not limited to websites, books and other printed materials, advertisements, audio/visual products, and exhibits.
- Copyright: The patron assumes responsibility for compliance with copyright, literary rights, or other legal questions arising from patron use of archival material. A copyright statement is posted in the Reading Room.
- Citation: Cite materials used for display or in published or unpublished works. [Item, Collection Name]. Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives, Museum of South Texas History, Edinburg, TX.
- Other Regulations: Eating, drinking, and tobacco use are prohibited in the Reading Room. Children under the age of 13 are not allowed in the Reading Room.