What is this and how did it get here?
a retroactive accessioning project

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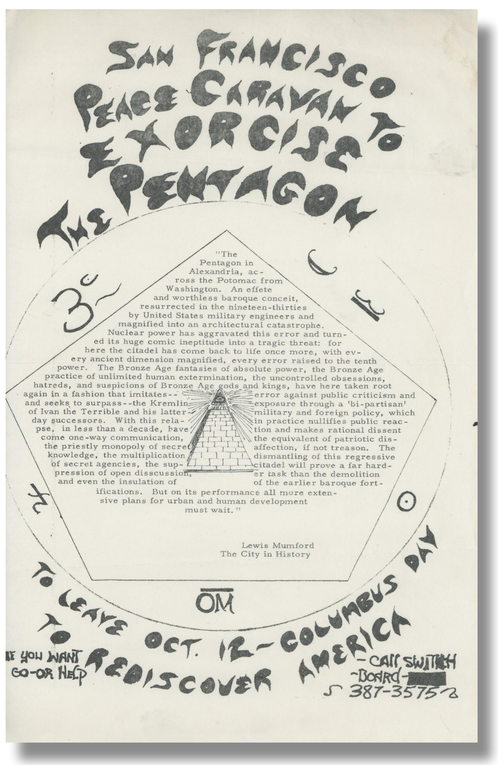
In 2018 UC Santa Cruz Special Collections & Archives began a project to appraise and accession 360 linear feet of unaccessioned holdings: a series of loosely defined collections that had little paperwork, unclear provenance, and no public access points.

Workflow

- Survey material. Create box-level inventory.
- Review and research collections and any gift documentation.
- Make retention decisions.
  - Signed deed of gift: retain
  - No deed of gift: appraise. If out of collecting scope, flag for deaccessioning.
- Retained collections: weed out of scope material, accession, and publish collection-level catalog record.
- All other collections: deaccession following local deaccessioning policy and procedure.



Outcome

COVID-19 delayed our progress, but we plan to continue our efforts. As of July 2020:

- 17 collections accessioned and made discoverable
- 28.5 LF accessioned or integrated into existing collections
- 27 LF flagged for deaccessioning
- 57 LF deaccessioned
- 250 LF still to review
- 60 hours staff time spent

A handful of letters and photographs, such as this cabinet card, were separated from the *Official report of the trial of Laura D. Fair: for the murder of Alex. P. Crittenden* (1871), but had not been accessioned until this project.

Lessons Learned

Retroactive accessioning is not revealing "hidden collections." It is a strategic implementation of modern extensible collection management practice. Accessioning is the first step toward gaining physical and intellectual control over collections. It puts them on the path of becoming accessible and used by our community.

A decision to accession does not constitute a decision to indefinitely retain the collection. Accessioning provides the administrative control that allows for deaccessioning to take place in a transparent and ethical manner.

Unaccessioned backlogs impact space management. When materials lie outside our collection management systems, shifting becomes a challenge. The pinch is felt when there is little room for incoming collections.

Unaccessioned backlogs impact collection development. We encountered several collections that were on deposit through informal agreements. By better documenting these relationships, we can more effectively respond to our community of local donors.

Understanding your predecessors is important. Through studying gift paperwork, we gained a fuller understanding of the history of the department and the personalities of early library selectors. This helps us make informed decisions.

Practical Tips

Prioritize your appraisal process. You may want to review materials that align with your collecting strengths first. Or, start with the largest collections to quickly free up storage space.

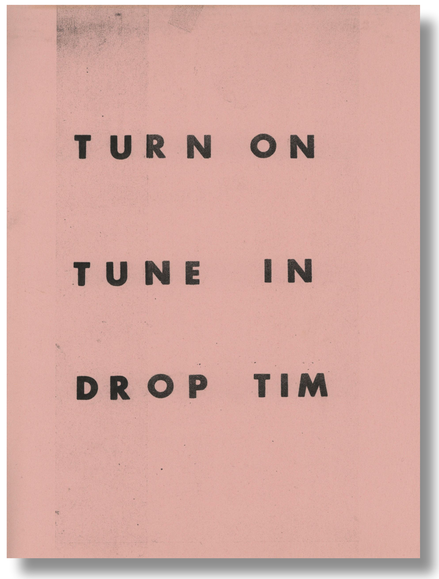
Accession as you go. Once you decide to retain the material, accession the collection and create a brief catalog record immediately.

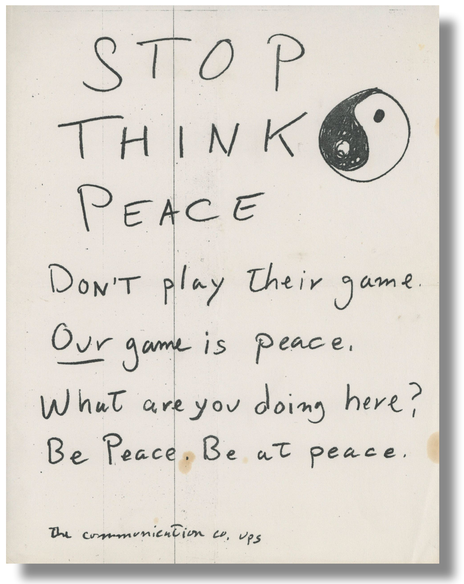
Apply the accessioning as processing approach. This is especially impactful with small collections, which are effectively processed once accessioned and cataloged.

House small collections efficiently. For collections consisting of only a few items, shelve them together in a "single items" collection box. This saves space on the shelf and uses fewer supplies.

Address deaccessioning at the end. Contacting heirs, researching repositories for transfer, and documenting your decisions is time consuming and interrupts the accessioning process. Empower archivists performing the survey work to make deaccessioning recommendations.

Develop a deaccessioning policy and procedure. This normalizes deaccessioning, which reduces risk and increases efficiency. Model them after the SAA Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning.





Above and left: flyers produced by the Communication Company, which was associated with the 1960s San Francisco activist artist group the Diggers. We were pleased to uncover material that strongly aligns with our collection strengths and exhibition program, including a collection of San Francisco Counterculture ephemera.

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