



Join or Die: Collaboration in Special Collections

*RBMS Pre-Conference, Philadelphia
June 23, 2010*

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Project Manager
PACSCL/CLIR “Hidden Collections” Processing Project



“Hidden Collections”

Processing Project Mission

- Process and make accessible to researchers approximately 200 currently “hidden collections” in PACSCL repositories
 - Process 114 collections (roughly 4,000 linear feet) at an average of 2 hours per linear foot
 - Create EAD finding aids for 82 additional collections (roughly 6,000 linear feet)



“Hidden Collections”

Processing Project Mission

- Provide a single access point for all of the region’s research collections, and therefore, allow researchers to gain insight into the country’s political, economic, social, religious and cultural experiences, as well as Philadelphia’s role in shaping America and its citizens
- A shared EAD repository is the first step in achieving this goal.



“Hidden Collections”

Processing Project Mission

- Experiment with large scale minimal processing for collections ranging from the 15th the 21st centuries
- Develop new workflows for repositories who need help with backlog
- Build consortial cooperation in order to reveal Philadelphia’s papery treasures to researchers across the country and the globe



Building on earlier projects ...

- This project could not be accomplished without the preceding PACSCL Survey Project
 - The Research Value Rating allows for a systematic and fair approach for prioritizing the thousands of “hidden collections” in Philadelphia for inclusion in this project
 - The survey records are critical for the creation of Processing Plans in a project with a limited time frame.



Challenges We All Face





Backlog

Everyone has it:





Lack of Standardization

Across 23 repositories, even in PACSCL, there is a distinct lack of standardization in:

- Technology
- Authority Control
- Processing Practices
- Finding Aids





Consistent Finding Aids through Cross Repository Standardization

- Require all repositories to install and use the Archivists' Toolkit throughout the project (and hopefully in future)
- Use Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)
- Develop a standardized group of authorities for all collections processed during the project (AAT for genre forms; LOC for other subjects)



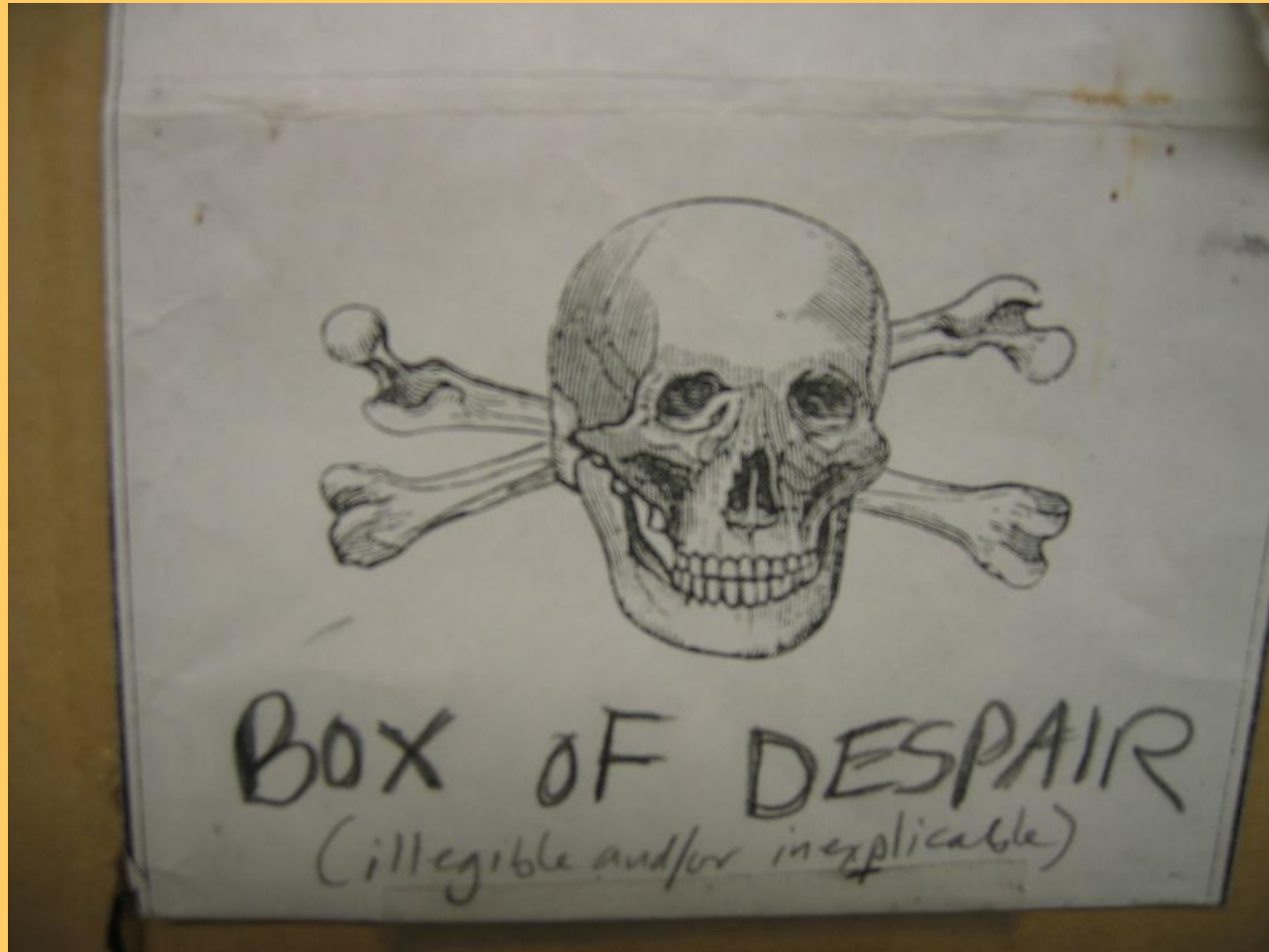
Employ Minimal Processing: Our Approach

- We knew that this was a difficult selling point ... the factor that determined participation in this project, more than any other.
- We wanted to:
 - Create the best quality product possible in the time frame allotted (2 hours per linear foot)
 - Make even the most non-MPLP folk comfortable with our work
- 1st Task: Determine what is “minimal processing” means for this project.





THE BOX OF DESPAIR



Put it into Action: Process a Collection using the Manuals



Test Collection: Anny Elston papers at Drexel University College of Medicine



Pre-Processing



Post-Processing



Solutions for 2 hours per linear foot

- Develop a structure of providing information so that students can use 2 hours per linear foot for processing, NOT discovering what a collection contains or is about
- Solution: Create processing plans which include:
 - Proposed plan for processing the collection
 - Proposed list of series
 - Preliminary list of authorities
 - Preliminary biographical/historical note
 - Existing information about the collection and creator



Solutions for 2 hours per linear foot

- This structure allows us to determine what parts of processing take the most time so that we can make realistic recommendations for funding of future processing projects.
- Create a series of worksheets
 - Track what does and does not work in a minimal processing world
 - Record preservation concerns
 - Record highlights in the collection that may be ideal for future digitization and/or exhibition
 - Re-evaluate the research value of the collection, post-processing



Maximal or Minimal Processing?

- Oh, it's minimal--but with a few maximal tendencies ...
 - We try not to skimp on description
 - We encourage further processing, description, and work on the collection as its value is more clearly seen
 - We do the most we can in our allotted time.



Centralized Training



Drexel University
College of Medicine



Academy of Natural Sciences
of Philadelphia



Independence Seaport Museum

- We train our workers in a Boot Camp:
 - Classroom instruction at the University of Pennsylvania (1 day)
 - Hands on training with a collection at an upcoming repository (2 days)
- We welcome and encourage repository staff to participate



Working together

- PACSCL
- Project Team
- Repositories





Project Team:



Courtney Smerz
Project Archivist



Project Processors: Round 1

Leslie O'Neill, Forrest
Wright, Eric Rosenzweig and

Laurie Rizzo

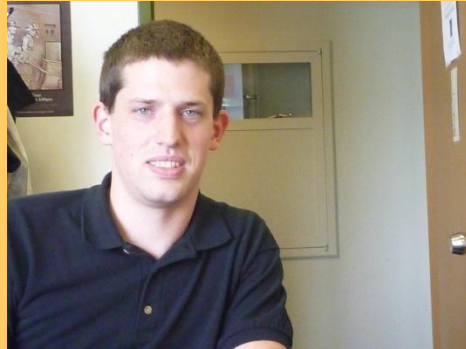
Student Processors

October 2009-May 2010





The Project Team:



Garrett Boos
Archivists' Toolkit Cataloger
April 2010



Project Processors: Round 2

Megan Good, Forrest Wright,
Becky Koch, and Megan
Atkinson:



Student Processors
June 2010



Project Team ... what we get from them:

- Hours of hard work
- Desire to learn
- Willingness to share their experiences
- Feedback on collections, the project, minimal processing, and other archival issues
- Finding aids that are almost always of excellent quality



What they get from us ...

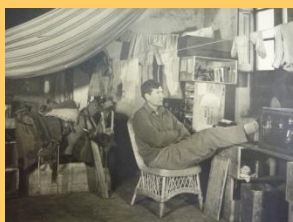
- ICE CREAM PARTIES ...



- And ... we hope, some pretty amazing experience to add to their resumes

Repositories—what we get from them ...

- Access to their amazing collections
- Content Specialists to guide our processors
- Feedback on what does and does not work, how we can improve our project, and issues that are raised during our students' work at their repositories.





Learning about minimal processing

- Up-sides to Minimal Processing
 - Collections are available to researchers MUCH more quickly than if processed traditionally (generally 8 hours per foot)
 - Awareness of the content of collection can result in further processing initiatives of entire collections or even just series
- Down-sides to Minimal Processing
 - 2 hours per linear foot is entirely too fast (we think 4 would be more realistic)
 - It is not possible to create acceptable finding aids at this speed without first developing the processing plan, biographical/historical note, and authorities



Consortial Work Gives Back:

To date (9 months into processing), 51 collections from:

- The Academy of Natural Sciences
- Bryn Mawr College
- College of Physicians of Philadelphia
- Drexel University
- Drexel University College of Medicine
- Free Library of Philadelphia
- Haverford College
- Independence Seaport Museum
- The Wagner Free Institute of Science



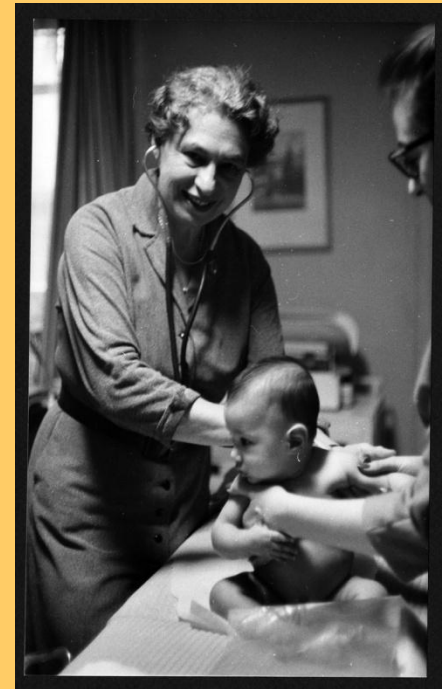
From the Alma A. Clarke papers
at Bryn Mawr College

have been “unhidden” and are now available for
researchers



Creating an EAD Repository

- In a few months, researchers and archivists will have access to PACSCL's central EAD repository allowing for cross-repository searching of finding aids



From the Anny Elston papers
at Drexel University
College of Medicine



How others can benefit:

- Minimal Processing Works!
 - It is not just for 20th century institutional records anymore
 - It can effectively be used for collections of any age and any type
 - **NOT ALL, HOWEVER, ARE GOOD CANDIDATES!**



Good



Not Good



How others can benefit:

- Centralized approach works for:
 - Training
 - Processing
 - Editing
- All plans created in Word and Excel for ease of adaptability
- Manuals
 - Minimal Processing
 - The Archivists' Toolkit



Ask not what you can do with your collection, but what your collection must do for researchers

- Do not process in a defined amount of time, but rather to a defined level of processing
- A collection-by-collection decision which must be determined by how your researchers will use the collection ...
 - Can serve as a prioritizing system for processing.



Learn from our successes ... and our mistakes

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/>. The page content includes:

- Navigation menu: Home, About the Project, Participating Institutions, Project Documentation, Project Blog
- Section: PACSCL HIDDEN COLLECTIONS PROCESSING PROJECT
- Subtitle: *Revealing the Unknown Stories of the Philadelphia Region*
- Image: A historical painting of a harbor scene with a boat and a building, captioned *From the Library Company of Philadelphia*
- Section: Project Documentation
- Section: Manuals
 - [PACSCL/CLIR Minimal Processing Manual—Spring 2010](#)
 - [PACSCL/CLIR Archivists' Toolkit Guide](#)
- Section: Processing Packet Contents
 - Due to the extreme time constraints of this project, our processors are provided with a processing packet before they start working on a collection which allows them to begin processing as quickly as possible. Each packet contains: a preliminary biographical/historical note (to be enhanced by information acquired during processing); a preliminary list of authorities (to be augmented post-processing); any relevant accession or collection information from the repository's files (when available); [survey records](#) for the collection; and the worksheets included below.
- Search bar: *To search, type and hit enter...*
- Section: CONTACT US
 - Contact Information
 - Project Team
- Section: USE THE COLLECTIONS
 - Collections by Topic
- Section: RECENT BLOG POSTS
 - Keeping the minimal processing dialog going
 - Reflections on Training and the

- Blog
- Documentation
- Transparency (what does not work is as important as what does work).

Working with Scholars and Students



Website and Project Blog

- Providing immediate access to some of the content of collections
- Promotion of collections

Central EAD repository

National History Day Philly

PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project » Collections by Topic - Mozilla Firefox

http://clir.pacscl.org/collections-by-topic/

Repositories included: [Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia](#), [Bryn Mawr College](#), [College of Physicians of Philadelphia](#), [Drexel University](#), [Drexel University College of Medicine](#), [Free Library of Philadelphia](#), [Haverford College](#), [Independence Seaport Museum](#), and the [Wagner Free Institute of Science](#).

Anthropology and Archaeology

[Machteld Mellink papers, 1938-2006](#) (Bryn Mawr College)

Business and Commerce

[Eldridge Reeves Fenimore Johnson papers, 1929-1975](#) (Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia)

[Frank Hartman papers, 1904-1977](#) (College of Physicians)

George Sproule papers, 1784-1947, Bulk: 1884-1944 (Independence Seaport Museum)

Independence Seaport collection on the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, 1919-1964 (Independence Seaport Museum)

Lubin Film Company records, 1881-1984 (Free Library of Philadelphia)*

[Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women records, 1916-1984](#) (Bryn Mawr College)

Red D Line records, 1861-1936 (Independence Seaport Museum)

Ward collection of New York Shipbuilding Corporation material, 1919-1967 (Independence Seaport Museum)*

Civil War

The Horace G. Richards papers at Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia

The name is Bond, James Bond

Academy President's Office records and Provenance

Keeping the minimal processing dialog going

FOLLOW ON TWITTER

Project Documentation page updated! Check out: <http://bit.ly/cTOVSU>

for ideas on how you might use our work methods

2 days ago

Farewell & thanks to Eric, Laurie & Leslie & welcome Becky, Megan & Megan: check updated staff page:

<http://clir.pacscl.org/project-team/>

3 days ago

Laurie writes a final project blog post on the Horace Richards papers @ ANSP:

<http://clir.pacscl.org/blog/>

Thanks Laurie for all your work!

5 days ago

follow me on Twitter



“Unhiding” Collections



From the Sarah Wistar Rhoads papers
at Haverford College

<http://clir.pacscl.org>