

Winter 2017

Preservation Perspectives: New Year & New Goals

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Repository Citation

Stolz, B. (2017). Preservation Perspectives: New Year & New Goals. *Kentucky Libraries*, 81 (1), 21-22.
https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/ul_pub/204

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PRESERVATION PERSPECTIVES:

New & New YEAR GOALS

BY BILL STOLZ • ARCHIVIST, WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

Have you been passing the file cabinet full of paper or stacks of photograph albums piled on a shelf for the past year or more? Maybe you have a great collection of diaries, but they have rarely been used by researchers, due to an old finding aid and lack of access points. The new year offers us a chance to make new, realistic goals for 2017. This “fresh start” is a chance to reappraise our collections with the goal of prioritizing collections for processing (or reprocessing of older collections), addressing preservation concerns, and/or creating new or updated finding aids that will make collections more accessible.

While appraisal often refers to potential or incoming collections, it can also be done with your existing collections, especially if your facility has a backlog of unprocessed archival material, some of which may predate everyone on staff. A goal for the upcoming year could certainly be to identify all the unprocessed collections and/or those processed collections that may have older or inadequate finding aids. Additionally, the process provides an opportunity to appraise collections for preservation concerns, such as mold, deteriorating paper, poor storage conditions, fragile format, and so on.

Remember that the goals of the appraisal are to know what you have and then prioritize collections for processing and/or preservation work. As you work through the collections, make notes on preservation needs (think fading photographs, fragile glass plate negatives, reel-to-reel recordings), intrinsic value, space/storage issues, and/or researchers' needs. This appraisal can be as simple as just examining older finding aids for collections that have not had much use in recent years and writing new detailed ones, or it can be as complex as surveying all of your unprocessed collections by opening each box and making a rough inventory of the contents and preservation needs.

This is also a good time to review your mission and collection policy. Strong mission statements and collection policies make appraisal and deaccessioning decisions much easier. When reviewing your collections, here are basic questions to ask:



- Does this match our collection policy and scope?
- What types of formats are in the collection (paper, photographs, audio)?
- Does this collection have preservation concerns?
- Is the storage location adequate?
- Does this collection need new enclosures (folders, boxes)?
- Do we have the resources to invest in the collection?
- Does the current finding aid provide enough information on the contents of the collection?
- Is this a collection that will be of great interest to researchers

and/or the community that we serve?

- Have the deeds of gift been completed and signed?

This might be a good time to consider applying for local, state, and federal grants to assist with processing and/or preservation needs. The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives Local Records Branch offers local records grant annually to help cover costs associated with archival preservation, microfilming, and records management equipment. The Kentucky Council on Archives also provides small monetary grants each year for archival projects. A variety of national organizations, including the National Historical Publications & Records Commission and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, provide grant funding. A comprehensive list is available on the Society of American Archivists web site.

So what do terms like appraisal, reappraisal, processing, or finding aid mean in archival talk? A great research tool for everyone with archival collections is Richard Pearce-Moses' *A Glossary of Archives and Records Terminology*. The entire glossary can be viewed on and downloaded from the Society of American Archivists web site. SAA also offers a variety of other educational links, guides, and publications to assist archivists. A must for every archives or special library are titles from the SAA Fundamental Series. The books, written by archives professionals, cover a variety of topics from processing to reference to preservation.

We are all busy with reference, exhibits, programming, donors, committee meetings, and other daily

obligations, but taking the time to create a clear picture of what you have and what you need to do to keep it safe and make it available can go a long way for both your collections and your facility. Just think, the box of glass plate negatives sitting on the bottom shelf might turn out to be a wonderful collection of street scenes of a town or city that can be utilized for research, exhibits, and fundraising.

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