

Courtney Smerz's remarks to the McNeil Center

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Thank you, Laura, for inviting us to speak to you all today about our project -- the PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project. Let me start off by saying that our project is little difficult to explain. It is has a lot of different components - most of which would be more significant to a room full of archivists. We have tried to break it down here, and to focus more on aspects of the project that we felt a roomful of historians would be most interested in.

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We are conducting our project under the auspices of PACSCL, which is the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries.

Since starting work on this project, we have come to realize that few people know what PACSCL is, so I think it's important to start off by telling you a little bit about that organization.

To put it in the most basic terms, PACSCL, is a cooperative group of special collections libraries with shared goals for their special collections. (And by special collections, I mean manuscripts, archives, rare books, photographs, that sort of thing). PACSCL was founded in 1985, with 16 member libraries. Today, there are 35 member libraries, large and small, including University of Pennsylvania, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Wagner Free Institute, and Independence Seaport Museum. Collectively, the 35 repositories house approximately four million rare books, two hundred sixty thousand linear feet of manuscripts and archival materials, and nine million photographs, maps and works of art on paper. So, this is all to say that there is A LOT of archival stuff here in Philadelphia!

PACSCL is not a repository in and of itself, and it does not own any collections.

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The Hidden Collections Processing Project is the most recent PACSCL developed initiative. PACSCL received \$500,000 from the Council on Library and Information Resources Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives Initiative or as we refer to it – CLIR. PACSCL received the money to process and make accessible for research approximately 200 HIDDEN COLLECTIONS of manuscripts and archives in 23 PACSCL repositories.

We have 27 months to finish the work, and if you know anything about archives, you know this is no small task, and we plan to wrap up next August.

As an aside, you may be interested to know that the CLIR Hidden Collections initiative is a nationwide program and we are just one of dozens of projects being conducted all over the United States to expose hidden special collections.

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Since I assume you are not archivists, you may be asking yourself: “what are hidden collections?”

Hidden collections are unprocessed or under-processed collections, in our case, of archival materials -- basically, they are NOT considered to be research ready.

Because they are considered not research ready, archivists usually do not advertise these collections to the researching public, which is why they are considered hidden.

Hidden collections are not unique to Philadelphia; there are 1000s of hidden collections across the United States, and probably around the world.

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Collections are considered NOT research ready for a lot of really good reasons.

One of the main reasons is because frequently hidden collections are not in good intellectual or physical shape to be used by researchers. What I mean by intellectual is that there is no way for a researcher to learn what is in a collection. By physical, I mean that the actual papers are too messy and difficult to navigate or are too fragile to be handled.

Another reason is that often the archivists themselves do not know what exactly is in the collection. It’s important to note here that some of these collections have been accessioned for decades and often, there isn’t a lot of information regarding what, how or why materials were collected.

The bottom line is if the current archivists do not know what is in the collection, they do not know how to promote the collection.

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Now you may be asking yourself, “why can’t the archivist just go and find out what is in the collection?”

Traditionally, making a collection research ready, or processing a collection, is a very time consuming, labor intensive process.

As a result of this process, as well as many archivists' tendency to acquire, rather than see papers thrown away in the garbage, repositories collect faster than they can process, and end up with what we call a processing back log. And this is where the hidden collections are. Back logs in most repositories are massive and overwhelming, and archivists do their best to chip away at them, frequently with limited staff and financial resources.

BUT, despite all this - the question we as a profession have started to ask ourselves is, if no one knows these collections exist, they do not get used, and if they are not able to be used by anyone, **what's the point in keeping them?**

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So, I think the answer to that question is that we keep the materials because we know they are valuable - informationally speaking.

And over the past 5 years or so, PACSCL has worked to help repositories deal with their backlogs of hidden collections, with the ultimate goal being to un-hide hidden collections and make them accessible to the researching public.

From 2006 to 2008, PACSCL conducted a survey of some 2000 hidden collections in 22 PACSCL repositories, which provided a brief description of the contents of each of the hidden collections and ranked them for their research value. The survey records are available publicly, and I will share that website with you at the end of the presentation.

In the Hidden Collections Processing project, as I said earlier, we are processing and making fully accessible 200 of the highest ranking collections from the survey project.

To clarify, processing is the act of arranging an archival collection, providing archival quality housing for the collection and describing the collection, or writing a finding aid. A finding aid is a catalog of the collection that communicates to users what is in the collection and how to locate specific materials in the collection quickly and easily.

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Like I said earlier, 200 collections in 27 months is no small task – it's near impossible, in fact.

In order to complete the project we are experimenting in a few ways.

For the first experiment, we are testing the limits and effectiveness of a less intensive type of archival

processing introduced by Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner in 2005. “More Product, Less Process,” or MPLP, as their method has been named, argues that providing access to collections is most important and that many of the time intensive tasks thought to be essential in archival processing are, in fact, not necessary at all, at least not initially. Greene and Meissner recommended their method for business records created during the 20th century, but we are testing its effectiveness on collections of all types, dating from the 17th to the 20th centuries. In doing so, we are able to process collections in a fraction of the time ordinarily thought necessary.

The second experiment is that we are training graduate students to conduct a majority of the processing work.

And, lastly, we are using the Archivist’s Toolkit, which is a newly developed, open source database software that has been designed especially for archival collections.

Hopefully, all of this work will result in a methodology or approach that archivists can use directly, or adapt to suit their unique needs, to help eliminate archival backlog in their repositories.

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So, the gist of it all is that we are making archival collections research ready...

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...And easier to find.

The final component of our project is a central finding aid web site, in which finding aids from all 23 repositories will be made available.

Our finding aid site was developed and is hosted by the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

Currently, finding aids from 8 repositories are available on the site, but we are adding to it all the time!

I want to clarify that we are not digitizing collections, and that there are NO digital surrogates of records available here... at least for the time being. Digitization is a possibility for the future, but probably not for many years.

We are very excited about the site for a couple of reasons. The obvious reason being that it enables searching in multiple repositories at the same time -- and after processing archives across Philadelphia over the past year, the value of this capability has only become more apparent.

The main reason is that we have found related collections all over the city. The Wister family, which is an old Philadelphia Quaker family, is the most obvious and best example. Members of the Wistar family have been prominent and involved members of Philadelphia society and culture over the past 250 years. Papers created by and about members of this extensive family have been found in practically every repository in the city, dating from the 1700s to 1900s.

Another big reason is that we have found hidden collections in unexpected locations, such as a collection of World War II photographs at the Academy of Natural Sciences.

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This is what the home page of the site looks like!

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As I said a minute ago, the best part of the site is that it enables cross-repository searching, but you can limit your search to a single repository, if you like.

There is a keyword searching capabilities and faceted searching capabilities.

Is everyone here familiar with faceted searching? Well, basically, you can select as many or as few facets as you need in order to expand or limit your search results. On our site, you can use the facets to search for specific time periods, subjects, names, within specific repositories, etc.

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To date, we have processed 90 collections in 18 repositories. As you can see from the list here, the repositories really run the gamut in terms of the subject matter you would expect them to collect.

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We have roughly 60 collections to go in 7 additional repositories. And now, Holly is going to tell you a bit about some of the collections we have or plan to process.

Holly Mengel's remarks to the McNeil Center.

I am going to talk to you today about some of the collections we have recently processed which we think might be of interest to you in your research. Some of these collections are about famous enough people that the collections will have been used by researchers, but many of them have been virtually untouched ... as a result you should see our project, to some degree, as a thesis factory.

In preparing for this talk, I notice that our pre-1850 collections fall into several strengths (however, these are not the only categories into which they fall). These strengths include the American Revolution, colonial history, medicine, Quaker family history, and women's history. The collections which I am going to talk about would be of interest to researchers working in many of these categories. I am not going to talk about several amazing more well known collections because although their records should be much more accessible now, they were never quite as "hidden" as the ones I will be discussing. If you want to know more about the John Dickinson papers, the Read family papers, the Rush family papers and the William Penn papers, to mention just a few, please check out our website. By the way, you may all know of the Penn papers at HSP, but there is an amazing collection created by Albert Cook Myers at the Chester County Historical Society ... Myers was planning to write the definitive biography on Penn ... but he researched so much that he died before writing it down. As a result, if you are researching Penn, a lot of your work may be done.

The first collection I would like to talk about is the **Dillwyn and Emlen family correspondence**, housed at the Library Company of Philadelphia. For those of you who are not familiar with the Dillwyn and Emlen families, William Dillwyn was a Quaker abolitionist who married Sarah Logan Smith in 1768. Their daughter Susanna was born in 1769 and about a month later, Susanna's mother died. By 1777, William Dillwyn moved to England and remarried, resulting in much of William and Susanna's relationship occurring via correspondence, which someone had the foresight to keep and donate to the Library Company for our edification.

There are hundreds of letters dating from 1770 to 1818. In the first letter, dated 1770, William Dillwyn describes Sarah Logan Smith to his infant daughter. The letters that follow are largely family-centered ... but as Susanna grows up and marries Samuel Emlen, another prominent Quaker, the nature of the correspondence reflects **current events, views on religion, abolition, Philadelphia and British society, issues with Native American treaties, the American Revolution, the Yellow fever epidemics, the war of 1812 and Napoleon Bonaparte**, to name only a few. In 1814, Susanna discovers a tumor in her breast which is removed (without anesthesia) by a team of doctors including Philip Syng Physick. The letters from this time period reflect Susanna's faith, her fears, her surgery and her recovery, as well as her husband and father's concern and relief when the danger is passed. The letters continue until 1818—Susanna died on November 24, 1819.

I cannot actually say enough about how amazing these letters are ... they provide unique views on Philadelphia, New Jersey and Britain from pre-Revolutionary War to post War of 1812. The collection is in need of a lot of work ... the letters, despite beautiful handwriting, are difficult to read, and in the time frame allotted, there was not time to read for content. What this means, however, is that there are potential treasures to be unearthed by researchers.

Next, is **Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere**. He is another pretty amazing person and his papers were purchased by the Library Company of Philadelphia in 1785. He was an immigrant from Switzerland, an artist, and a tireless collector of American ephemera. He traveled throughout the colonies and the West Indies pre-Revolution and collected information, documents, broadsides, etc. After 1770, his collecting focused on Native Americans, the Leisler Rebellion, the Zenger freedom of the press trial, the Paxton Rebellion, the Stamp Act crisis, and the American Revolution. Much of the material in the collection is copies ... copies that DuSimitiere made of documents he thought important and the collection is interesting in that regard as well. Some of my favorite documents include all the natural history drawings, similar to what you see here in the slide and the many lists that DuSimitiere made—including, in this case, the number of distilleries of rum in the city and suburbs of Philadelphia in 1772. DuSimitiere opened the first public museum in America (The American Museum in 1782), but was unsuccessful ... he died in 1784 without much credit for his work and pretty close to penniless.

The **Sarah Wistar Rhoads family papers** is representative of some pretty amazing Quaker family papers housed at Haverford College. Also worthy of mention are the Sarah Cooper Tatum Hilles papers, the Reinhardt, Hawley and Hewes family papers, the Taylor and Nicholson family papers and Vaux family papers. These, to me, are the truly hidden papers revealed by this project. Probably very few people have heard of them or their achievements, however, they made significant contributions to their homes, communities, and particularly their meetings. As with family records, generally, these papers cross multiple generations and therefore some papers fall after 1850. Interestingly, these papers are very strong in representing women in the community ... many of the letters are written by the women of the families and provide unique and fascinating viewpoint of the world. Information about land, business, and family are prevalent in these collections. Religion is heavily discussed in correspondence. These are only a few of the collections from this time frame held at Haverford College.

The last collection I would like to talk about is the **Thomas Leiper and family business records** at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Thomas Leiper was another immigrant. He came from Scotland to America in the 1760s and began working in the tobacco industry. He was also a patriot ... he was one of the founders of the first troop of Light Horse of the City of Philadelphia, and served in the Revolutionary War, seeing action at Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, and York. After the Revolutionary War, he started a quarrying business. Some form of Thomas Leiper and Sons continued in existence until 1947. The papers are extraordinary. Most are volumes of financial material describing his business, but tucked in and amongst these figures are fascinating glimpses of what it meant to own and operate businesses in the late 1700s and early 1800s as well as a very small glimpse into what it meant to be a worker during that same time frame. There are also six letterbooks, most of which discuss business, but also include letters written by Leiper regarding current events and day-to-day life. Some of the more fascinating have to do with his opinions of the British presence in America. The document on the right of this slide is dated December 3, 1774 and reads: "The people of Britain are very much mistaken if they think they can cram what Acts they please down our throats." Unlike the Dillwyn and Emlen's handwriting, Mr. Leiper's handwriting was not beautiful, as you can see ... so, no doubt there are endless treasures waiting to be discovered in these volumes.

You have probably noticed that these collections all come from Haverford College, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Library Company of Philadelphia. This is extremely misleading as to the existence of amazing collections in your targeted time frame at other PACSCL repositories. It is important to remember that Minimal Processing was designed for late 20<sup>th</sup> century records, and therefore, many repositories selected collections for processing that fall closer to that time frame. If you are interested in looking to other PACSCL repositories for pre-1850 collections, the repositories listed here have a significant number of collections dating from before 1850.

There is so much that I did not get to tell you about, so I am going to finish up with a few things that I think might be useful. If any of you are researching the **history of medical education**, this project has uncovered an endless number of resources. At the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, the Samuel X Radbill papers includes notebooks and textbooks, dating from roughly 1750. At the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Logan family papers includes almost all of the texts used by William Logan and William Logan, Jr. in their education at Edinburgh. In the Rush family papers, also at Library Company of Philadelphia, there are a few of Rush's texts used during his education, but also the lectures that he gave to students at the College of Philadelphia. His son, James Rush, also was educated in medicine at the University of Edinburgh and, after the death of his father, he read his father's lectures. At the Drexel University College of Medicine, there is information about the North American Academy of Healing Arts, an early institution educating homeopathic physicians as well as the first women's medical college IN THE WORLD.

As far as **women**—there is some pretty amazing documentation! A few of the amazing collections that have not yet been mentioned are the Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson papers which document one of the brightest and most respected women in colonial America. She was a writer and her unpublished works are housed at Library Company ... there is also a lot of information about her in both the Rush family papers and the John Dickinson papers. In the Logan family papers at the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Logan family papers and collection of Dickinson and Norris family papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, there are amazing observations by Deborah Norris Logan.

Every one of these collections has been minimally processed. That means we have spent significantly less time than is normally spent on preparing collections for use. While that might seem like a bad thing, for you and other researchers, it only means that there are treasures in the collections that are undiscovered ... and therefore prime resources for your theses and dissertations. Hopefully, we have provided you with the tools to discover these gems.