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Starting from Scratch Creating the Synagogue Archives

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

A Jewish community has existed in America for more than three centuries. In the year 1654 a handful of Jews—twenty-three in all—disembarked at New Amsterdam, the tiny Dutch settlement at the mouth of the Hudson River, and established the first Jewish community in what is now the United States. By the year 1990, the American Jewish community has grown to number nearly six million.

How this growth was accomplished, what it meant to those who were involved in it and to the land which fostered it, the enormous importance it came to possess for the Jewish communities of the world—this is surely one of the most remarkable and significant stories both in American and in Jewish history. It is a story that scholars of today and tomorrow will explore in great depth. It is also a story of family life; a search for "roots," identity and family history. It is a story of a group of people and their lives: their work, their beliefs, their failures, their successes. Most of all, it is part of the American story. Those who lack an understanding of the American Jewish experience will, ultimately, lack an understanding of the American dream and the Jewish heritage.

To discover and tell this story requires more than dedication and discipline. It requires documentary sources—the raw material of history. When such resources are scarce—and this is often the case—researchers find themselves greatly handicapped.

Where is this raw material to be found, and how is it to be made available to historians, genealogists, sociologists—anyone who is interested in the study of American Jewry? In many ways it is safe to say that no agency within the American Jewish community is a better source for these materials than the American synagogue. So much of American Jewish religious life has been, and still is, reflected in the synagogue, the basic institution of American Jewry. Congregational records constitute one of the most important sources of American Jewish life and thought that can be found. The American Jewish Archives hopes the information presented here will encourage American synagogues to organize their own congregational archives, if they have not already done so, and guide them as they embark on this important enterprise.[1]

Proper planning and organization are essential to the creation of a congregational archives. Required is a commitment to the task, an attention to detail, and knowledge of basic archival principles. Many decisions must be made. The mission and goals of the archives must be decided. A collection policy must be established. Sources of funding identified. Staffing must be arranged. Supplies and a storage area obtained. This manual includes six broad areas of emphasis that should provide the fundamentals of starting a congregational archives. These areas can be adapted to meet individual congregational needs. Taken together, they will provide a solid basis on which to start and build a usable and efficient archives.

The six areas of emphasis are: I. Authorization and Support; II. Collection Policy and Appraisal; III. Physical Facility and Supplies; IV. Organization and Procedures; V. Preservation and Conservation; and VI. Access, Reference, and Security.

Note: Included throughout this manual, in the footnotes and the appendix, are suggestions for further reading. These should be consulted for clarification and support as the manual is read and used. They can also be used as a beginning for further study. This manual covers only the basics of archival work. As your experience grows and needs change, the reading and examples listed here can direct you to new sources of material concerning advanced theories, methods and procedures. Examples of all forms and regulations mentioned in this brochure can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Archivist of the American Jewish Archives:

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[1] Portions of the introduction and conclusion of this brochure were taken, courtesy of the author, from, Jacob R. Marcus, "Your Congregational Archives," American Jewish Archives Publications Series (Cincinnati: 1961), 3-4 and 12-13.

I. AUTHORIZATION & SUPPORT

An archives is responsible for selecting, preserving, and making available records determined to have permanent or continuing value.

Mission Statement

The first step in establishing an archives is obtaining formal authorization and support from the parent organization's governing body. For most congregations this is the synagogue board. Such authorization is vital. It validates the archives' existence as an official part of the congregation and, usually, guarantees some level of financial support. It places the official support and weight of the congregation behind the archives, providing the foundation upon which all work can begin.

This authorization should be a formal, one page, document—called a mission statement—that establishes the archives by name and designates the position of archivist as a member (paid or volunteer) of the synagogue staff. The mission statement should contain a brief passage clearly laying out the scope, purpose, function and goals of the archives. It should establish the archives' governance, creating clear lines of authority and placing the archives within the synagogue's governing hierarchy. It should also contain a brief history of the archives' origin and development.

This document should be presented to the synagogue board, voted upon, and approved. With the board's approval, the mission statement will become the archives' charter and operating policy.

Governance

In establishing governance the synagogue board should consider the creation of an archives committee. This committee might consist of only three or four members, with the archivist serving either as a full or ex-officio member. The archives committee would be responsible for setting broad policies overseeing the operation of the archives.

The archivist would oversee the day to day operation of the archives, implementing policies established by the archives committee. The archives committee would govern administration: finances, budgets, guidelines for donor relations, collection guidelines, etc.

The archives committee should also focus on furthering public relations: promoting the work and goals of the archives both in the congregational and surrounding communities.

The exact responsibilities of the archives committee—as with all rules and procedures—should be laid out in writing to avoid confusion or problems. These responsibilities will be determined by the goals and resources of the congregation and cannot be mandated in this manual. It is important, however, that all involved—particularly the board and the archivist—are comfortable with the arrangements and that they promote and further the work of the archives.

II. COLLECTION POLICY & APPRAISAL

Collection Policy

Every archives must have a collection policy. That is, every archives must decide what it is they plan to collect. An archives defines its identity by its collection policy. A collection policy determines the records an archives will seek to preserve and make available for research use. For example, congregational archives usually collect only the records of their congregation. Some congregational archives, however (especially those in areas where there are no other repositories of Jewish records), might collect records of the surrounding Jewish community. These decisions are dependent on individual circumstances and resources.

Whatever the collection policy, it should be clearly and specifically laid out and formally adopted as part of the archives' operating policy. Usually, the collection policy is briefly mentioned in the mission statement then explained in detail in a separate document.

To not have a collection policy is to invite chaos. A collection policy benefits the archives by focusing energy and resources towards specific goals, preventing distractions and diversions.[2]

Archives cannot collect everything. They must set strict parameters in collecting and stick to them. It is useless to establish a collection policy and then ignore it. The collection policy can change with changing circumstances and needs, but only after careful deliberation and then with approval of the archivist, archives committee and/or synagogue board.

Appraisal

Using a collection policy to select materials for retention and preservation is called appraisal. Archival appraisal is the application of the guidelines and criteria of a collection policy in determining what records an archives will collect. Appraisal is the process archivists use in determining which records should be accessioned (or accepted) into their repository.[3]

Appraisal has been called "the archivist's first responsibility" and defined as "the selection of records of enduring value."[4] Appraisal has also been called "the process of determining the value and thus the disposition of records."[5] Appraisal is the bedrock of archival work. One

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[2] See, for example, F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," *American Archivist* 47 (Winter 1984), 11-22. For a good overview of the development of collection policy and collection management plans see Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," ibid 47 (Winter 1984), 30-42.

[3] See, for example, Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 133-160. Schellenberg was among the first to write in theoretical terms about appraisal and his theories still stand as the leading statements on appraisal. Schellenberg emphasized appraisal as it related to public (i.e., government) records but his observations can be applied to private as well as public records.

[4] "Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities," Society of American Archivists (Chicago: 1986), 8.

[5] Maynard J. Brichford, "Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning," Society of American Archivists *Basic Manual Series*

commentator has written that “the surest proof of sound records appraisal lies in the quality of use of the archives and the growth of its reputation among the [public] it serves.”[6]

For the purposes of this manual appraisal should be recognized as the process whereby the goals of a collection policy are put into action, resulting in the development of a strong and useful collection of records. In using the guidelines of a collection policy a congregational archives will decide if a collection of records—be they minutes of the board, administrative office files, or the papers of a synagogue member—meet the criteria established in the collection policy and are worthy of permanent retention in the archives. Conversely, through appraisal the archives will also decide which materials will not be kept and therefore be targeted for disposal.

Appraisal should always be based on the established criteria contained in the archives’ collection policy. These criteria should be applied consistently every time.

Much has been written on appraisal. It is a leading field of study and debate among archivists. It is beyond the scope of this brochure to examine appraisal in depth but the reader is encouraged to do so. The appendix contains suggested readings on archival appraisal.

III. PHYSICAL FACILITIES & SUPPLIES

Most congregational archives will not have a specially built storage facility. Most will have to make do with a spare room, or a portion of a spare room. In this case the archivist must be adaptive, making the best of what is available.

Any archival facility should have three components:

- a storage area
- a work area
- a research area where patrons can examine the archives’ holdings.

(Chicago: 1977), 1.

[6] Ibid.

In addition, office and other archival supplies must be obtained. This section will give a broad overview of the physical needs and furnishings required for storage, work and research areas as well as a brief description of some necessary supplies and names of suppliers. A detailed discussion of access rules and security policy is included in the section on Access, Reference and Security.

Storage Area

The storage area should have room to house all of the archives' holdings, in their differing formats, with room for future growth. If possible, the storage area should be close to the research area for ease of transfer of boxes and cartons, but, for security reasons, kept separate and locked at all times. The storage area should be clean and dry, preferably with no outside walls or windows, or overhanging pipes. If the storage area has windows they should be covered with heavy blinds to keep out sunlight and its damaging ultraviolet rays.

Sturdy, professional quality, steel shelving should be installed. Wood or painted shelves should be avoided; the resins and toxins of wood and paint can be harmful to the documents. Shelving should be kept at least eighteen inches from walls. There should be sufficient aisle space for easy access, preferably a minimum of thirty inches in width. Locked and fireproof steel filing cabinets can also be used for storage. Cabinets require less floor space than shelving and, if sturdy, are durable and secure. Drawbacks include increased difficulty in access to the documents and higher risk of damage from pulling and replacing files. Cabinets are also much more expensive means of storage, per cubic foot, than shelving. This can be significant if you have large holdings or anticipate future growth.

Light fixtures should be of all-metal construction, not more than nine inches wide, with thermally protected ballasts. All records should be kept a minimum of twelve inches from light fixtures.[7]

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[7] Kenneth W. Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts* (Nashville: American

The storage area should have fire detection and extinguishing equipment. Detection systems should respond to smoke and heat. Preferred detection systems should include an audible alarm that sounds within the building and automatically connects to the local fire department when activated.

A portable fire extinguisher should be on site. Dry chemical extinguishers are not recommended; they leave a powdery residue that may be harmful to the documents. Prefered is the Halon 1301 multipurpose A:B:C extinguisher. It can be used on any type of fire, does not leave behind any residue, and does not require cleanup.[8]

The storage area should be well ventilated with controlled heat and cooling systems. Temperature and humidity should be kept constant at 70°F and 55% relative humidity. Fluctuations in heat or humidity are very damaging to all forms of records and documents.

Access to the storage area should be limited to staff and authorized personnel. Researchers, visitors and unauthorized personnel should never be allowed into the storage area.

Work Area

The work area is where the archives' staff processes collections, answers inquiries, and performs daily administrative functions. At a minimum it should include a desk and telephone, with easy access to the storage and research areas. If necessary, the work area can be combined with the storage or research areas. Ideally, the work area should have room for sorting and processing large collections, miscellaneous equipment, and a staging area for boxes and cartons. Unfortunately, however, most congregational archives will have to make do with small spaces and tight quarters.

Association for State and Local History, 1975), 47-54.

[8] Judith Fortson, *Disaster Planning and Recovery* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1992), 19.

Some archival manuals suggest a 60/40 space ratio of stacks to administrative facilities.[9] The work area, no matter its size or location, should be off limits to researchers and visitors and tightly secured when the archives is closed

Research Area

The research area is the only area where visitors may view the holdings of the archives. There should be a table and chairs with sufficient lighting. A staff member should be posted in the research area as a monitor at all times. Visitor access to other parts of the archives as well as the rest of the building should be carefully controlled. Researchers should never be allowed to enter the stack area to retrieve, or refile, materials. A staff member should bring all materials to the research area.

Food, drinks and smoking should be prohibited at all times in the research area. Noise and visitor access should be kept to a minimum. Researcher entry and egress should be constantly monitored and supervised. Rules should be made concerning the number of documents or boxes a researcher may view at one time.

Supplies

Any archives will require standard office supplies, plus archival supplies such as boxes, folders, and labels. A durable library cart is a necessity. Researcher demands may require duplicating services such as a Xerox machine. If your holdings include microfilm a microfilm reader or reader-printer may be needed.

There are many companies that specialize in archival supplies. Most companies provide free catalogs of their products. Two of the best known vendors of archival supplies are the Hollinger Corporation and University Products, Inc. The appendix at the end lists addresses and telephone numbers of these vendors.

Archival supplies can be expensive. For the proper care and life of the documents, however, it is important

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[9] Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts,* 49.

that archival-quality products be used. Using and storing documents in non-archival containers and folders will quicken the deterioration of the documents.

More information on archival supplies, especially as they relate to the storage of documents, can be found in the section on Preservation and Conservation.

IV. ORGANIZATION & PROCEDURES

This section discusses the nuts and bolts of archival work: accessioning, arrangement and description of archival collections. These are tasks the archivist must perform after the collections have arrived and before they are made available to researchers. Collections should be made available for research use only after they have been fully processed: i.e., after they have been accessioned, arranged and described. Allowing access to unprocessed collections poses security risks and may disturb the original order and structure of the collection.

This section will discuss the broad basics of accessioning, arrangement and description. As with appraisal, much has been written on these topics and the reader is encouraged to study and learn more. The appendix contains a select bibliography of additional readings.

Accessioning

Accessioning is the process of transferring records to the physical custody and legal control of an archival institution. When documents arrive at an archives they must first be accessioned. Accessioning begins by entering important information about the donation into an accession register. The register should note the date of receipt, the donor, the size of the donation, and a brief description of the donation's contents.

The accession register should be kept as a yearly log, listing each accession as it arrives. Accessions should be listed consecutively, each having its own number: i.e., 94/1 would be the first accession of 1994, 94/2 the second, etc.

In addition to the log entry, a separate accession form should be filled out noting in detail specific information about the accession. The accession form provides a brief narrative description of the collection that the archivist can keep on file and consult for future reference. The accession form should contain the following: the collection's title; a brief description of contents; present arrangement, if any; physical condition; size; donor; restrictions; and, most importantly, its location in the archives.

After the accession form has been completed the archivist should file this form for future reference. Attached to the accession form should be any relevant correspondence, notes, or donor agreements compiled during the donation process.

Donor agreements are very important. They transfer legal title of the collection to the archives and explain, formally and in detail, the exact terms of the donation, including restrictions. Every accession, particularly donations from persons or organizations outside the synagogue, should have a completed and signed donor agreement. All donor agreements should be filled out and signed by the donor and by an appointed representative of the archives. A copy of the agreement should be given to the donor with the original kept on file in the archives. Donor agreements prevent confusion between the archives and the donor concerning details of the donation and can provide legal protection for the archives in the event of a disagreement or misunderstanding.

After accessioning, the collection should be prepared for storage. It is advisable to have separate storage areas for processed and unprocessed collections.

When preparing unprocessed collections for storage little needs to be done other than clearly labeling all the boxes. No arrangement or description of the collection is necessary at this time, other than compiling a brief summary of contents for the accession form. If new boxes are needed, the collection should be transferred without disturbing its existing arrangement. When the collection is shelved the location should be noted and written on the accession form. It is also advisable to maintain a separate locator file which lists the name and location of all collections accessioned into the archives.

This completes the process of accessioning. It is simple yet necessary. It provides organization and record keeping for necessary control over all materials entering the archives.

Arrangement

Arrangement is the archival process of organizing documentary materials in accordance with archival principles.

There are two main types of collections found in archives: organizational records (records of an organization or group, be they the records of a synagogue, lodge, community organization, etc); and personal papers (papers and records of an individual), also called manuscript collections.

Most collections found in congregational archives are organizational records. Most congregations collect only the records of their congregation, although some congregational archives might also have collections of personal papers, particularly of the rabbi. The arrangement of the two types of collections differ slightly. Both will be discussed here.

Organizational Records

The arrangement of organizational records is based on two archival principles: provenance and original order. Provenance is the archival principle that records created by one records keeping unit should not be intermixed with those of any other. Provenance is based on the idea of maintaining the link between the records and the records creator. This is done by preserving the original structure and organization of the records as established by the records creator. This maintains the structural and historical integrity of the collection and allows the researcher to view the records in the context in which they were created and used.[10]

[10] Many articles and books have been written on provenance. For example see, Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A*

In other words, separate and distinct groups of records within a larger collection of organizational records should be kept separate and distinct. This distinction is based on separating the records according to the department or unit within the organization that created them. For example, the archival records of a congregation should be subdivided based on the different departments that make up that congregation: i.e., the minutes of the board of trustees should be kept and filed as a distinct unit; the records of the Sisterhood should be kept and filed as a distinct unit; the records of the religious school should be kept and filed as a distinct unit, and so on.

These separate groups of records within a collection (i.e., for the synagogue board, Sisterhood and religious school) are called series. Series of records are a body of records arranged in accordance with a unified filing system or maintained by the records creator as a unit because of some relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use.

In establishing series, it might be helpful to develop a flow chart or organizational tree of the congregation's operating structure. This will help identify different departments within the congregation and distinguish the record creating agencies. The records of each of department will constitute a separate series of records in the congregation's archives.

Original order is the second component (after provenance) in arranging organizational records. Original order is the archival principle that, whenever possible, all records

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Historical Analysis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); Sharon Gibbs Thibodeau, "Archival Arrangement and Description," in James Gregory Bradsher, ed., *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions* (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1988), 67-77; Theodore R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) and "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," *National Archives Bulletin* 8 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1956), partially reprinted in Maygene F. Daniels, ed., *A Modern Archives Reader* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Sevice, 1984); and Barbara Reed, "Appraisal and Disposal," in Judith Ellis, ed., *Keeping Archives,* Second Edition (Port Melbourne, Australia: Australian Society of Archivists, 1993), 157-206.

within a series should be maintained in the order in which they were placed by the organization, individual, or family that created them. This order can take many forms. In many instances it might be chronological. For example, the minutes of the board of trustees most likely will be arranged chronologically, from the earliest date to the latest.

Other arrangements are possible. For example, the original order of correspondence files might be alphabetical. Some series might be arranged by subject headings. Whatever the original order of the records, unless it is indecipherable or unusable, it should always be maintained when arranging and filing the records in the archives.

As with provenance, maintaining original order of a collection preserves the integrity of the records as established by the records creator and allows the user to view the records in their original context.

If, and only if, the original order is unusable should a new order be imposed on the collection by the archivist. If a new order is installed it should be created using the simplest and most convenient method(s) possible. Imposing a new order should be done only as a last resort and only when necessary.[11] If a new order other than the original order is imposed on a collection the reasons for this should be noted and explained in detail in any finding aids created for the collection.

Organizational records are usually very large. As a result, it is not feasible to attempt to arrange or account for every piece of paper in the collection. To do so would take an inordinate amount of time and be cost prohibitive. For large collections of organizational records arrangement is performed only to the folder level. This means that the archivist makes no attempt to arrange or identify individual items inside a folder. The arrangement is kept and checked only to the folder level.

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[11] This section on arrangement is based on Megan Floyd Desnoyers, "Personal Papers," in Bradsher, ed., *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions,* 87-89. See also, Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives,* 100-105.

For smaller collections arrangement may be done to the item level. In most cases, however, for organizational records folder level arrangement is all that is required.

Manuscript Collections

The arrangement of manuscript collections, sometimes called personal papers, differs from the arrangement of organizational records in that the principles of provenance and original order do not always apply. This is due to the nature of personal papers; they reflect the order, or disorder, of the person collecting them. Personal papers are personal; they may come to an archives in many levels of arrangement, or, with no arrangement at all. As a result, the processor of personal papers must be more adaptive than the processor of organizational records, which are usually in a specific order or have an order that can be readily identified and recreated.

One commentator has written, "there is no one way to arrange [personal papers]. Archivists try to achieve what they perceive is the arrangement that will best show respect for the origin and integrity of the papers while considering the needs of the users. Usually the simpler the arrangement, the greater its usefulness."[12]

As a result, the arrangement of personal papers is often more time consuming than for organizational records. Without an obvious provenance the archivist may have to create series or groupings of records where none previously existed. Also, because personal papers are more disorganized than organizational records, they often require meticulous attention.

Personal papers are frequently arranged to the item level. This means that individual letters or documents within a folder are arranged by the archivist in some way, usually alphabetically or chronologically. Of course, as with organizational records, if a collection of personal papers is very large this may be impossible. Arranging any collection to the item level is very labor intensive work.

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[12] Desnoyers, "Personal Papers," 88.

If at all possible, the processor of personal papers should rely on provenance and original order in arranging personal papers. When the existing arrangement is unusable finding a level of processing that will provide the best access to the materials is one of the archivist's greatest challenges. This ability comes from experience, familiarity with arrangement techniques, knowledge of the records and, perhaps most importantly, self-confidence.

The purpose of all arrangement is research use: making the records available for research use by placing them in a simple and precise order where the records can be easily identified and accessed upon demand.

Lacking an identifiable provenance and original order there are four accepted methods of arranging manuscript collections. First is separating and grouping series by type of material: i.e., correspondence, minutes, sermons, etc. Second is establishing chronological series: by time periods or eras. Third is alphabetical arrangement of the records within a series, used most often in a correspondence series. Fourth is a mixture of any or all of these methods.

One archival manual states that "selection of the appropriate method [of arrangement] will suggest itself on the basis of the apparent order as received, the most useful order for search and retrieval of information, or the simplest means of acquiring control over the papers. Archivists are responsible for deciding which arrangement is most appropriate at each level and making sure that arrangement makes sense in relation to the other levels and parts and to the whole."[13]

If arranging manuscript collections sounds vague and confusing, it sometimes is. Try first to apply the theories of provenance and original order. If this is impossible then rely on common sense and good judgment. Experience can be the best teacher in arranging manuscript collections. Read and study archival texts; see how other archives and archivists arrange their manuscript collections; ask the researchers who use the collections for their opinions. Learn what does,

[13] Ibid, 89.

and does not, work. Seek out the most clear and simple arrangement possible. Remember, no arrangement is final; any arrangement can be redone if a new or better way is discovered.

Description

Description is the process of establishing intellectual control over holdings of an archival institution through preparation of finding aids. A finding aid is a description from any source that provides information about the contents and nature of documentary materials.

After a collection has been arranged the archivist must make a record or listing of that collection's contents. This process is called description, i.e., gaining intellectual control over the collection: "know[ing] what [you] have, what it contains, and where it is."[14] Without effective description all archival work is irrelevant. No matter how well a collection is arranged, if the material in that collection cannot be located and made available for use it is worthless.

Description is where the archivist has the opportunity to make his or her most important contribution. It is where the archivist can use his or her creativity and communication skills to bring out the full research potential of a collection. The archivist knows more about the collections than anyone else. The archivist arranges the collections and writes the finding aids. Through this knowledge the archivist becomes a conduit for the transfer of the information within a collection to the user of that collection. It is vital that the archivist write out this knowledge in a finding aid. The archivist should strive to write finding aids that will be clear and helpful long after he or she is no longer at the archives to oversee the use of its collections.

Writing finding aids is for the archivist what writing books and articles is for the historian. It is the presentation of an organized series of facts, information and analysis based on intensive research in a specific area. Without clear and effective finding aids any collection of records is worthless.

[14] Ibid, 90.

For both organizational records and personal papers the standard form of description is the inventory. The inventory is a detailed description of a collection, providing narrative description as well as a box and folder listing of its contents.

The standard inventory has four sections:

1. Introduction
2. Biographical Sketch or Institutional History
3. Scope and Content note
4. Box and Folder list

A well written inventory will provide the user of the collection with quick and easy access to its contents, provide background information on its history and origins, and analyze its research potential. Many examples of inventories can be found on this website. The Introduction contains statistics and information on the size and background of the collection. It lists the donor(s), any restrictions on use, the existence of property or literary rights, and instructions on proper citations to be used when material from the collection is used in writings or publications.

The Biographical Sketch/Institutional History is a brief narrative of the life or history of the person or organization represented in the collection. This sketch should be one or two pages in length and list the highlights of the life or history of the subject. The sketch should be factual and unbiased; it should not contain analysis or conjecture. It should be a simple, fact based statement that can be used for ready reference of key dates or information.

The Scope and Content note is a narrative description of the collection's contents that, combined with the box and folder list, should enable users of the collection to quickly learn the collection's scope, contents, strengths and weaknesses. In the scope and content note the archivist should write a narrative series by series analysis of the collection, noting strong and weak points, quantities of materials, gaps in holdings and areas of emphasis. The scope and content note is where the archivist has the opportunity to interpret and analyze the collection and reveal to its users the collection's importance, significance and weaknesses. The archivist should use the scope and content note to make a concise, interpretive statement on the research potential and possibilities of the collection.

The Box and Folder list is a box by box, folder by folder listing of the contents of the collection. The box and folder list should show the contents of each box, file by file, listing the headings for each box and folder along with its appropriate span dates. The box and folder list allows the researcher to quickly scan the contents of the collection and select boxes and files for use.

All information presented in an inventory must be accurate. The researcher will rely on the accuracy of the inventory in making decisions about which files to see or even to view the collection at all. The inventory should be written with great care and doubled checked before presenting it to the public.

Small Collections

Many smaller collections, numbering only a few pages, or non-textual items such as photographs, artifacts, tapes, etc., do not require an inventory. For these collections, a catalog card is sufficient or an entry in a computerized data base. Each catalog card or data base entry should list the collection's main entry or title, a brief scope and content note (usually one or two lines), the size of the collection (number of pages, items, etc.), its form (manuscript, tape, photograph, etc.), the donor, the item's location in the archives, and, if desired, cross references to relevant subject or name headings.

The form and style should be the same for every catalog card or data base entry. Development of consistent rules and procedures will facilitate the creation of your finding aids and avoid confusion when using them.[15]

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[15] The American Jewish Archives has developed an extensive system of rules and procedures for cataloguing manuscript material. For a copy of these regulations or further information please contact the Office of the Archivist at the American Jewish Archives. Librarians in the United States and Canada have adopted precise cataloguing rules for books that can be adapted for use

PRESERVATION & CONSERVATION

Preservation of historical records for research use is the goal and purpose of every archives. Yet, preservation and use are often contradictory goals. Use of documents is the greatest threat to their preservation. To manage and control these conflicting goals is a great challenge to the archivist.

Preservation

Preservation should be the goal of every archival activity. The purpose of archives is the preservation of historical records for research use. Preservation does not have to be elaborate or costly; basic archival procedures are sufficient for most preservation needs. Preservation is done best through daily practice of sound archival techniques and simple common sense.

Some of the basics of preservation were discussed earlier in the section on storage. Archives must maintain a climate and atmosphere conducive to the storage and preservation of archival records. Storage areas should be clean and free of pollutants. Temperature and humidity should be maintained at constant levels: 70°F and 55% RH. Sunlight and its damaging ultraviolet rays should be blocked by heavy blinds. Steel shelving should be used rather than wood or other materials. Storage areas should have smoke and fire detection systems with portable fire extinguishers. The storage area should be locked and secure whenever the archives is closed. Access to storage areas should be limited to staff members. Visitors or researchers should not be allowed into storage or work areas.

Proper filing and storage techniques are vital to preservation. All papers and documents should be filed

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in archives. These rules are very detailed and are beyond the needs of most readers of this manual. They should be consulted only as an example of what has been done in this field. See, *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules,* Second Edition (American Library Association: Chicago and Canadian Library Association: Ottawa), 1978.

in acid free (ph level 7.0) boxes and folders. Documents should fit comfortably into the boxes, never crammed, bent or folded. Boxes should be full to prevent curling, but not overfull. All boxes and folders should be fully labeled, preferably typed on self-adhesive labels. Labels should list the collection's title or main entry, its contents, span dates, and location in the archives. Oversize or non-textual items should be filed separately, in cabinets or specially made boxes where they are safe from the elements. All collections must be placed on shelving safely away from the elements and overhead pipes. Boxes or individual items should never be left on tables or the floor. Most of all, original archival documents must never leave the archives. They should not be loaned or borrowed for any reason.

The archivist should maintain a locator file that lists the location of all material, both processed and unprocessed, held in the archives. A system of numbering or labeling the stack area should be developed to aid in locating the collections.

Conservation

Conservation differs from preservation in emphasis. Conservation denotes an active effort to reduce or reverse the effects of use and aging on selected documents. There are many expensive and extensive conservation techniques available to archivists but most conservation techniques can be done at a minimum of cost. A few of these will be discussed here.

Rare or valuable documents, especially those that are fragile, should be removed from their collections and filed separately as a security precaution. Items having intrinsic value (i.e., those that are valuable as a document in and of itself)—such as an original constitution or charter, or a handwritten letter by a well-known person—should be taken out of their collections and filed in a secure place. This will prevent deterioration of the document through handling and use, deter theft, and prevent accidental loss or damage.

When an original document is removed from a collection a Xerox copy of the original should be inserted in its place. Mention of this exchange and of the new location of the original should be noted

Fragile or aging documents that do not have intrinsic value and are important only for the information they contain can be copied onto acid free paper and the original discarded. Newspapers are an excellent example of this.

Note: Please use caution when discarding any original documents. Be certain that the loss of the original will in no way harm or embarrass the archives or violate donor agreements. When considering disposal of any items it is a good idea to have, in writing, the permission of the donor to do so or to offer back to the donor the items targeted for disposal.

Documents can also be preserved through microfilming. There are many organizations, including the American Jewish Archives, that provide microfilming services. Microfilm is clean, compact, and long lasting. It is the most efficient and cost effective means of preserving large collections of materials. Its drawbacks are cost, difficulty in use, and purchase and maintenance of necessary equipment. Microfilming should be considered only when a large amount of material is involved. When considering microfilming for conservation please contact the American Jewish Archives for consultation and advice.

Basic conservation techniques such as straightening or cleaning can easily be performed by the archives staff. Rusty paper clips and staples should be removed from all documents. Rubber bands, strings, or metal clasps should be taken off. Dirt and dust should be wiped away. Cleaning supplies are available that will not harm the documents. Before attempting any procedure please make sure that cleaning or straightening will not harm the document in any way.

There are other specialized and sophisticated conservation techniques, such as encapsulation (sealing the document in an air tight enclosure) and deacidification (an elaborate—and costly—chemical process of removing all acidity from the document), that are available. When considering one of these options please consult first with a conservation professional or the American Jewish Archives.

VI. ACCESS, REFERENCE & SECURITY

Access, reference, and security are necessary in any archives that permits research use. Every archives should establish written guidelines for each of these functions. Access policy will determine who uses the archives and why; reference policy will determine how the collections are used; security will ensure the records are used with safety and care.

Access

Access is the archival term for authority to obtain information from or to perform research in archival materials.

Archives keep records in anticipation of future use. A statement on the goals and priorities of the archival profession says that "the use of archival records is the ultimate purpose" of archival work. This report goes on to say that archivists must "undertake steps to promote use" of their holdings.[16] Another archivist wrote that "the end of all archival effort is to preserve valuable records and make them available for use. Everything an archivist does is concentrated on this dual objective."[17]

Archives should have a clear and defined access policy. Controlling access requires planning and diligence as well as significant outlays of money and staff time. A fair and equitable access policy must be established based on the

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[16] "Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities," 22.

[17] Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques,* 224. For a listing of standards governing access see the Society of American Archivists "Standards for Access and Appraisal of Gifts," *American Archivist* 37 (January 1974), 154.

goals of the archives and its available resources. Many questions must be answered.

- Who will be the users of the archives?
- Will the archives be open only to congregational members, or will persons outside the congregation be permitted access?
- How will access be granted? Will researchers be required to make appointments? Will researchers be required to provide references and credentials?
- Will the archives have regular hours of operation?
- Will access to certain collections, or parts of collections, be restricted? If so, how will petitions for access to restricted collections be handled?
- Will the archives charge fees for its services?
- Will duplication of documents be permitted? If so, what will be the cost and procedures of making copies?
- Will the archives advertise, through published catalogs or any other means, the existence of its collections?
- Will archives staff research and answer telephone and mail inquiries and will there be a fee for these services?

The answers to these and many more questions will determine access policy. A congregational archives must--first and foremost--serve the needs of the congregation. It must provide on demand requests for information from officers and members of the congregation. Ideally, and ultimately, it should be the goal of every archives to allow access to its holdings to all interested users. There are many persons interested in the use of congregational records: genealogists, historians, the media, religious scholars, to name but a few. An archives can be an effective public relations arm for the congregation. Through the supply of information it can promote awareness of the congregation in the surrounding community, encourage Jewish identity, raise awareness for important causes, assist in fund raising, and contribute to the pleasure and work of many people. It can assist in the study of history and perform many public services.

It is advisable to start slowly with access, limiting services until it is clear what the archives is capable of handling and is willing to do. All services have costs. The archives should measure the cost of each of its services to determine their feasibility, especially as they relate to stated goals and priorities.

Whatever the access policy, it should be clearly stated and evenly applied. All rules concerning access should be included in any forms, applications, or brochures issued to the public. The rules of the archives should be applied fairly and equitably to all persons. A statement on access policy published by the Society of American Archivists, the leading professional archival organization in the United States says, "it is the responsibility of an archival and manuscript repository to make available research materials in its possession to researchers on equal terms of access." The statement continues by saying that an archives "should not grant privileged or exclusive use of materials to any person or persons."[18] This does not mean restrictions on use cannot be applied; they must be applied fairly and equally.

Archivists should be reluctant in accepting or imposing restrictions on its collections. Restrictions impede use; and use is the purpose of archives. Some restrictions are necessary and prudent for legal or personal reasons; many others are unnecessary and burdensome. The archivist should attempt to limit restrictions placed on their collections and insist that all restrictions be "clear and unambiguous,"[19] to the donor, archivist and user.

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[18] Found in Sue E.Holbert, "Archives and Manuscripts: Reference and Access," Society of American Archivists *Basic Manual Series* (Chicago: 1977), 28.

[19] Trudy Huskamp Peterson, "The Gift and the Deed," *American Archivist* 42 (January 1979), 61-66; reprinted in *A Modern Archives Reader,* 139-145. This is an excellent article covering donor negotiations, donor agreements, and issues of restricted collections.

Restrictions can be imposed by the donor, a representative of the donor, or the archivist. No matter who imposes the restrictions, it is the archivist's responsibility to enforce them. And enforcement of some restrictions can cause many headaches. There can be many levels and types of restrictions placed on a collection. There can be many questions and issues to resolve. To avoid confusion, all restrictions and terms of the donation should be fully laid out and explained in the donor agreement (see the discussion of donor agreements in Section IV. Organization and Procedures).

Any restrictions should be listed in all accession forms and finding aids for that collection. Users of the archives should be notified of restrictions on collections they might wish to see and be advised as to proper procedures for obtaining permission to use restricted materials.

Archives should try, within legal and ethical restraints, to set limits on all restrictions. Archivists should be reluctant to agree to any restrictions that have an unlimited duration. Restricting materials for an indefinite time is unacceptable. In all cases, the archives "should establish a policy on the length of time that donors, heirs, and designees can control access" to a collection and "that after such time the archives has the authority to make the access determinations."[20]

Reference

Reference service is the archival function of providing information about or from holdings of an archival institution, making holdings available to researchers, and providing copies, reproductions, or loans of holdings.

Reference is the application of access policy. Reference is where the archivist uses his or her knowledge of their collections to become a conduit between the information in those collections and the researcher. No one will know more about the collections in an archive than the archivist. The archivist, with his or her knowledge, experience, and use of well-constructed finding aids can provide invaluable assistance to users of archives.

[20] Ibid., *A Modern Archives Reader,* 142-143.

One article on reference says that "providing information about holdings [is] accepted as a primary obligation of a repository."[21] Another commentator states that "archivists must know their holdings and their relationship to the interests of researchers as well as the laws and regulations governing access. They must be diplomatic when dealing with the public, exercising good judgment, common sense, and tact."[22]

The archivist should talk with the researcher about his or her research needs to learn how he or she might better help the researcher and to avoid misunderstandings or confusion. Each should ask questions of the other to find needed answers. The archivist should instruct the researcher in the use of finding aids, explain the rules of the archives and, when appropriate, suggest possible sources. Most of all, the archivist should treat each researcher and each reference request equally. The professionalism and integrity of the archivist should never be questioned or compromised.

Archivists must always be aware of proper ethics in reference work. A code of ethics for archivists is available from the American Jewish Archives.

Security

Security of the archives' holdings is the responsibility of the archivist. Some suggestions for maintaining the security of your collections follow:[23]

- *Require and make a record of identification from each researcher upon their arrival.*
- *Do not permit researcher or visitor access into work or storage areas.*
- *Control entry and exit to the research area. Check researchers in and out of the archives on every visit.*
- *Prohibit packages, briefcases, purses, etc., in the research area. Do not allow food or beverages in the research*

[21] Holbert, "Archives and Manuscripts: Reference and Access," 9.
[22] James Gregory Bradsher, "An Introduction to Archives," in Bradsher, ed., *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions,* 13.
[23] Holbert, "Archives and Manuscripts: Reference and Access," 13-14.

area. Prohibit use of ink or ball point pens. Only pencils may be used.

- *Monitor the research area at all times. Maintain a visible presence.*
- *Require researchers to read and sign forms listing the rules and regulations of the archives.*
- *Allow only staff members to perform photocopying or other duplication services.*
- *Replace valuable or fragile originals with photocopies or microfilm. File the originals in a locked and secure cabinet or vault.*
- *Check all boxes and folders before and after use.*
- *Make sure all doors, windows, and exits are securely locked when the archives is closed.*
- *Install smoke and fire detectors. Have portable fire extinguishers close at hand.*
- *Be prepared. Think of security before a theft or disaster occurs. Keep emergency telephone numbers handy. Have a plan of action ready in the event of an emergency.*

CONCLUSION

Establishing and maintaining an archives requires a significant commitment of time, money, and effort. All costs and responsibilities should be considered before deciding to organize a congregational archive. Archives are service organizations; they do not generate revenue and are not self-supporting. The benefits of an archive are often subjective and intangible: promoting culture, preserving history, providing service, and increasing learning. Yet, as the founder of the American Jewish Archives has written, "indifference to the past and indifference to the future go hand in hand. Congregations which undertake to establish and maintain their own archives will serve both the past and the future."[24] They will help preserve their own history and assist in maintaining and promoting Jewish identity.

The American Jewish Archives stands ready to assist congregations wishing to develop or reorganize their archives.

[24] Marcus, "Your Congregational Archives," 12.

This document lists only the basics of archival work. For further information please contact the

Office of the Archivist
American Jewish Archives
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio, 45220.
(513)221-1875 phone, (513)221-7812 fax
E-Mail Kevin Proffitt

APPENDIX

Archives and Archival Organizations

American Jewish Archives
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220
(513) 221-1875 (phone)
(513) 221-7812 (fax)
e-mail: AJA@cn.huc.edu
www.americanjewisharchives.org

Society of American Archivists
17 North State Street, Suite 1425
Chicago, Illinois 60602-3315
(312) 606-0722 (phone)
(312) 606-0728 (fax)
e-mail: info@archivists.org
www.archivists.org

Archival Supply Vendors

Hollinger Metal Edge
(800) 634-0491 (phone)
(703) 898-8073 (fax)
e-mail: hollingercorp@earthlink.net
http://www.hollingercorp.com/

University Products, Inc.
(800) 628-1912 (phone)
(800) 532-9281 (fax)
e-mail: custserv@universityproducts.com
http://www.universityproducts.com

SELECTED READINGS:

- Bradsher, James G., ed. *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

  This is a compilation of essays that explain, clearly and simply, the basics of archival work. There is emphasis on the practical aspects of archival work with inclusion of introductory archival theory. An excellent source for the beginning archivist.

- Daniels, Maygene F., ed. *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1984.

  This is another compilation of essays similar to Bradsher's Managing Archives. There is good practical advice but this volume includes more introductory material on archival theory and history than does Bradsher. Still, a solid and useful source.

- Duckett, Kenneth W. Modern Manuscripts: *A Practical Manual for Their Management, Care, and Use*. Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1975.

  This volume, though dated, is an excellent introduction to arrangement and description of *manuscripts and archives. Duckett discusses, in very clear terms, all the steps in arrangement and description. This book also has chapters on the uses of archives and development of public programs.*

- Ellis, Judith, ed. *Keeping Archives* Second Edition, Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: The Australian Society of Archivists, 1993.

  This is a more advanced collection of essays dealing with theoretical issues of archival principles and functions. It is also useful as a non-American look at archives and archival practice.

- Fortson, Judith. *Disaster Planning and Recovery*, New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1992.

  This handbook, as its title says, discusses disaster planning and recovery. It show how to prepare a disaster preparation manual and presents techniques for salvaging damaged documents. There is also a useful bibliography of related readings.

- Society of American Archivists. *Archival Fundamental Series*, Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990-1993.

  This is a series of seven manuals that discuss, in detail, the major areas of archival work: Appraisal, Arrangement and Description, Preservation, Reference, and Management. This is must reading for every archivist. It is also valuable as a reference tool.

For additional publications, check the latest
Society of American Archivists publications catalog at:
www.saa.archivists.org