INFORMATION FOR DONORS
History and Scope of Manuscript Collecting at the Western History and Genealogy Department

Taken from *The Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Journal of the West, Winter 2008 (Vol. 47, no. 1), by Cox, Hagen, Hanson, et al. updated 2013.*

Since the Western History Department’s creation more than 70 years ago, our librarians and archivists have acquired over 5,000 manuscript collections, making our archival materials a resource of national significance. The Department’s collections span the period from 1718 to the present, with the bulk addressing the last one-and-a-half centuries. And the Department continues to actively acquire significant material within the scope of its collecting mission, including an impressive array of personal papers, diaries, journals, ledgers, scrapbooks, organization and business files, club and association papers, natural resource documents and family genealogical records. Collectively, these items bear witness to the history, growth, and development of the city of Denver, the state of Colorado, the Rocky Mountain region, and the Trans-Mississippi West. Our collection includes papers on mining, agriculture and ranching, railroads, architecture, writers, artists, theaters, and organizations and businesses. It also documents the region’s ethnic and racial diversity, especially its Native American, Hispanic, and African American communities.

Especially notable personal and family collections include the William S. Jackson Family papers, a chronicle of generations of a prominent Colorado family, including a Colorado Supreme Court judge; the papers of Denver mayors James Quigg Newton and Benjamin Stapleton; the papers of Polly Baca, a Colorado state senator and Hispanic political leader active on the national political stage; and the papers of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, founder of the Crusade for Justice and advocate for the rights of Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest. Regional business is documented with such collections as the records of the Banning-Lewis Ranch, the San Miguel Cattle Company, and the Colorado Ostrich Farm. The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad collection is substantial, including plans and drawings for railcars, terminal buildings, and rail lines. Our architecture collections contain plans and project documents dating from the 1880s to present, and represent the works of prominent regional architects such as Temple Buell (Paramount Theater), Fisher and Fisher (Phipps Mansion), Burnham Hoyt (Red Rocks Amphitheater), and Victor Hornbein and Edward White, Jr. (Denver Botanic Gardens Conservatory). Denver’s major landscape architect and city planner, S.R. DeBoer, is represented by his planting designs and park plans.
William E. Barrett (*The Lilies of the Field*), Leonora Mattingly Weber (young adult fiction writer), and Thomas Hornsby Ferril (Colorado Poet Laureate) are three significant authors whose manuscripts are held by the Department. Manuscripts of regional artists include the papers of Muriel Sibell Wolle, George Elbert Burr and Angelo Di Benedetto. Su Teatro, an important Denver theatrical troupe entertaining and educating around Chicano-Latino themes since the 1970s, is represented. And numerous organizations have arranged for the Library’s stewardship of their papers, including the Denver Chamber of Commerce (from the 1860s), the City Club of Denver and the Colorado AIDS Project. Notable businesses such as the Moffat Estate Company, the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, the Swedish Medical Center, and the Denver Tramway Corporation have also donated their extensive records for preservation and access.
What are Archival Collections?

The mission of the Western History/Genealogy Department is to collect materials – published and unpublished – that relate to the history of Colorado and the West. Materials support research west of the Mississippi River, including Alaska and Hawaii. When we refer to “archival” collections, we are referring to original unpublished papers and records. While published materials may include books, maps, and serial publications, unpublished materials vary widely. Some examples of unpublished manuscript materials are:

For Individuals and Families:
- Correspondence, personal and/or professional
- Articles written or edited
- Journals/Diaries
- Scrapbooks
- Photographs (identified, preferably)
- Drafts of creative work/manuscript drafts
- Research files
- Subject files
- Clippings and/or publicity files
- Legislative files
- Campaign files
- Papers related to community involvement
- Speeches
- Awards (certificates)
- Architectural blueprints, drawings, sketches

For Businesses and Organizations:
- Correspondence
- Photographs (identified, preferably)
- Subject files
- Meeting minutes
- Memos
- Reports
- Long-term budget/financial information
- Program and research files information
- Brochures
- Publicity clippings and announcements
- Awards (certificates)
- Architectural blueprints, drawings, sketches

These types of materials shed important historical light on the history and contributions of families, individuals, businesses, and organizations.
Exclusions

So that we can devote our time to the preservation of and access to materials with the highest level of research value, we try to exclude certain types of materials from our collections. If you know that these materials are in your files, it is helpful if you remove them ahead of time.

If you’re not sure whether certain items in your collection fall into the below categories, please identify the items in question and we will take a look at them for you. If we deem them inappropriate for the collection, we can return the unwanted material to you or discard it at your request.

The types of materials to look out for are:

- Duplicates copies of items already in the collection
- Blank forms
- Personnel files (resumes, etc.)
- Records that include in them sensitive information, such as tax/financial records, account numbers, drivers license numbers
- Financial records (EXCEPT historical ledgers and financial planning documents/long-term budget plans)
- Tax files
- Material culture and/or miscellaneous objects, such as clothing, fabric, pens, pencils. (EXCEPT items that are unique to the collection, such as an organization’s promotional t-shirt)
- Moldy or damaged items
- Direct mail or mass mailings
- Voluminous clippings or old newspapers
- National or widely available publications
- Unidentified photographs, film, or music
- Awards, plaques, trophies
- Photos in frames (we will remove)
Some Information on Logistics

**Review Committee**
All new collections and additions to existing collections must first be approved by the Department’s Acquisitions Review Committee prior to being donated to the library. The Review Committee meets monthly. After the committee has approved your donation, we will be in touch with you to arrange the transfer process.

**Packing**
We ask our donors to keep their materials in their “original order” because this sheds light on the creation and use of the records. Most individuals, businesses, or organizations that are packing up their homes or offices simply transfer their file drawers into cartons or boxes and label the boxes with a marker so that they correspond to the order of the materials. For instance, your first two boxes may look something like:

Last name/Organization name  
Box 1

Last name/Organization name  
Box 2

Any additional information you can provide us with about the contents of the boxes is very much appreciated. This could be as simple as writing the general contents of the box on the lid or providing basic box inventory sheets.

*A special note about business/organization records:* It is very helpful when businesses and organizations clearly identify the office/cluster/staff member represented by the records in a particular box or series of boxes. Also, if you have current and historical organizational charts, please send them along because it is helpful for us to be able to refer to them.

**Transfer to the library**
Once all of the material is in boxes, please contact me ([Jamie Seemiller](mailto:jseemill@denverlibrary.org), 720-865-1817) to arrange a transfer.

Businesses and organizations should consider setting up an internal records retention program and schedule for donating inactive records to
the library. We can provide you with a Records Retention Guide to assist you in doing this.

**Deed of Gift**
Collections are donated to the Denver Public Library via a Deed of Gift, which transfers legal ownership of the collection to the library. You will sign the Deed of Gift when the materials are transferred to the library. A copy of the signed Deed of Gift will be sent to you after the collection has been inventoried.

In addition to the Deed of Gift, businesses and organizations often have their Boards pass a resolution designating the Denver Public Library as the official repository for the organization’s records. This can be helpful for the organization because as Board members change, new members do not realize that records have been donated to the library in the past.

**Appraisals**
We cannot perform monetary appraisals at the library, but we can provide you with contact information for individuals who can, for a fee, appraise your donation for tax purposes. You can have your collection appraised either before or after it comes to the library. Please let me know if you would like to contact and appraiser.

**Storage versus Donation**
The Western History and Genealogy Department does not accept collections for the purposes of temporary or long-term storage. All collections must be formally donated to the library via a signed Acquisitions Agreement.
Access and Cataloging

Every archival collection donated to the Denver Public Library receives a catalog record in the Denver Public Library catalog and a box-level inventory, which will provide a general description of the contents of every box. We will send a draft of the inventory to you to see if you would like to make any changes to it.

Donors also have the option of having a collection fully processed and having an electronic finding aid created. However, this is a costly and time-consuming endeavor, and we rely on grants and monetary donations to undertake these projects. If you are interested in having your collection processed, please contact Jamie Seemiller.

The process for allowing researchers to use your collection is very secure. All researchers must show identification and fill out an application form before using archival collections. They then must place their belongings in a locker (no bags, notebooks, pens, or food/drink is allowed) and use the notepaper and pencils we provide for taking notes. Laptops are permitted, but laptop bags must be locked up. The researcher will then use the collection in a secure reading room that is monitored by a proctor (a member of the archives staff) at all times. The proctor is available to answer questions, but also keeps a close eye on the materials being used. Photocopies of items in the collection can be requested via an order form, but an archivist on our staff will review the requests before processing them to make sure there are no copyright or privacy issues. A researcher is only permitted to request copies of up to 25% of a collection.

Please contact Jamie Seemiller, Special Collections Librarian for Acquisitions, with any questions:

jseemill@denverlibrary.org
720-865-1817 OR 720-865-1821