8-1-2006

# Case Studies in Managing Collections That Grow

Sammie L. Morris
*Purdue University*, morris18@purdue.edu

Pam Hackbart-Dean

# Case Studies in Managing Collections That Grow

By Pam Hackbart-Dean and Sammie L. Morris

**ABSTRACT:** Almost all archivists have at one time or another confronted the issue of managing additions to existing archival or manuscript collections. Managing these types of collections can prove extremely challenging, even for experienced professionals. Archivists have several options for making these types of collections available to researchers, but it is not always clear which option is best. Archivists from Purdue University and Georgia State University will discuss two of the options in the following case studies on managing growing collections. These case studies are meant to serve as examples for other archivists who may be faced with managing similar collections. The case studies include justifications for each archivist's plan of work, the methodology used, the results of the work, and what was learned from the process. Pros and cons relating to each situation are also addressed, and an evaluation form has been included that will help archivists decide what steps to take when dealing with their own expanding collections in the future.

## *Introduction*

Most archival and manuscript repositories contain collections that were acquired and processed in the distant past. In many cases, additions have been made to these collections over time. Sometimes new records are discovered and added to an original collection. In other instances, collections that are created by current organizations continue to accumulate and are transferred to the repository over time. Regardless of the reason for accruals to existing collections, managing these types of collections can prove problematic and confusing for archivists. Although the topic may appear elementary, in reality many experienced archivists question the best means of

managing additions to collections. The subject is one of frequent discussion on the Archives & Archivists electronic distribution list.[1] Adding to the predicament is the fact that there is little in the professional literature that addresses the subject.

Consider the following scenario: An organization or individual made an initial donation to an archives. Over the years, this donation was processed, cataloged, and made available for research use. Decades later, more materials were donated from the same organization or individual. What is the best way to make these additions available while not making access confusing for researchers?

Archivists should keep in mind that the primary goal of processing growing collections should be the same as it is for static collections—to provide clear and accurate descriptions that enable patrons to access the collections easily. Unfortunately, finding aids and arrangement schemes that worked for the original collection will often no longer be adequate after such additions. When accruals to collections occur, archivists have several options for continuing to provide efficient access to the collections. Although no one method of action is right for every situation, it is important for archivists to be aware of their options and knowledgeable about the positive and negative outcomes of each. In this way, archivists can make informed decisions that will ultimately benefit both the repository and its users.

There are four primary options available to archivists for making growing collections available to researchers:

1. Physically and intellectually integrate additions as they are made to existing collections;
2. Intellectually integrate additions to the existing collection's finding aid, without physically integrating the additions in the same containers as the original collection;
3. Treat each addition as a separate collection with separate accession numbers, finding aids, and physical housings;
4. Add descriptions of the additions in appendices to the existing collection's finding aid without physically integrating the additions into the original collection.

In choosing the first option, some archivists may decide to reprocess the entire collection as a means of both physically and intellectually integrating the original collection with its additions. However, this is not the best option for every repository. Archivists facing diminishing budgets and staff often do not consider reprocessing collections to be feasible because of the time and expense it requires. Depending on the mission of the institution and the size and nature of the collection under consideration, one of the other options mentioned may prove more efficient.

For archivists dealing with multiple or unusually large growing collections, a practical alternative would be to integrate collection descriptions intellectually into an existing finding aid without physically rearranging the contents of boxes and folders. This method is particularly appealing to archivists who are managing collections they expect to continue to grow over time. It allows researchers to locate all similar types of materials or materials of the same subject within a collection easily, but avoids the use staff time and resources to physically integrate the accruals within the existing boxes.

When faced with growing collections, some archivists might respond by treating every new addition as its own separate collection. Each accession would be processed with a unique arrangement and description apart from the original or existing collection. Alternately, an archivist may prefer the passive approach, choosing to add new materials onto the end of the existing collection. This would include appending new box lists and descriptions to the end of the existing finding aid.

The latter two techniques, although understandable choices for understaffed repositories dealing with voluminous collections and backlogs, are the least user-friendly because of the additional time (and frustration) required on the part of the researcher to locate similar types of materials originating from the same creator. Many researchers will not take the time to read through the entire finding aid to locate relevant items that have been added at the end of the document, and may therefore conclude that the information they are seeking is not in the collection at all. In addition, if separate finding aids exist for the records of a single creator, many users will not know to check multiple finding aids to find what they are seeking, or they will be unwilling or unable to spend the additional time involved in consulting numerous finding aids.

So which of these techniques is best when dealing with additions to existing collections? Further discussion is needed on this subject so that archivists can make decisions specific to their collections and repositories. The following case studies offer insight into two viable methods for archivists to consider when managing additions to collections.

### *Case Study One: Purdue University—A Case for Reprocessing*

**Background Information**

In 1940, Purdue University acquired 15 cubic feet of aviator Amelia Earhart's papers as a gift from her husband, George Palmer Putnam. The collection primarily comprised the papers relating to Earhart's flights, but also contained some of her mementoes and personal belongings.

In the early years of stewardship, library staff treated the collection materials more as museum artifacts than as parts of an archival or manuscript research collection. Items were packed away in cabinets and occasionally brought out for special displays. During the two decades following its acquisition, the materials were rarely used and were difficult to access because they lacked an arrangement scheme. Photographs, documents, newspaper clippings, artifacts, and oversized items were intermingled, resulting in acid migration and physical damage, in particular to oversized documents.

In the 1960s, students and researchers at Purdue began using the Earhart collection for scholarly purposes, but the existence of the collection was still not widely known outside of the area. Over time, well-meaning individuals offered items to add to the Earhart collection, such as photographs and other souvenirs relating to Earhart that they had collected. Without the benefit of an archivist or manuscripts curator on campus, the collection was stored and access provided to it only when necessary. Through a lack of archival training, however, staff added materials donated from various sources to the original collection. A collection with no adequate arrangement that had received little preservation attention and only minimal description had now suffered a new blow—a loss of authenticity as a result of compromised provenance.

Despite these issues, the Earhart papers began to be used more frequently, and biographers and other researchers were relying on the materials to accurately relate details about Earhart's flying career and life. At some point, the collection was arranged, with items being separated primarily according to specific flights by Earhart. Items that did not fit these categories were lumped together as "miscellaneous," and remained difficult to access. An item-level inventory of the collection was created, which was frustrating to use because of its lack of archival arrangement.

In the 1980s, Sally Putnam Chapman, the granddaughter of George Palmer Putnam and his first wife, Dorothy Binney Putnam, began conducting research for a book she wanted to write on her grandparents' relationship with Amelia Earhart. She discovered that a collection of approximately 1.5 cubic feet of Earhart's personal papers still belonged to her grandfather's fourth wife and widow, Margaret Lewis, and Chapman used this collection to write her book. These papers were eventually handed down to Mrs. Chapman, and, after finishing her book, she donated the papers to Purdue in 2002. The 2002 donation included poems, flight logs, a passport, a prenuptial agreement, and letters between Earhart and her husband. Currently, Purdue's Earhart collection consists of approximately five thousand items (16.5 cubic feet).

Purdue hired its first archivist in 2003. One of the primary duties assigned to the position was management of the Earhart papers. Although only minimal arrangement and preservation of the collection had been attempted in the past, the item-level inventory existed and approximately one-third of the collection had been digitized. Locations for collection materials had not been noted in the item listing nor in the metadata for the scanned items, although each digital file had

been assigned a unique ID number that corresponded with the original item in the collection. The lack of location information in the item listing and metadata was one incentive to reprocess the collection, since there would be no need to alter location information in the metadata after materials in the collection were physically rearranged.

**Processing Goals**

After examining the Earhart collection, the archivist identified the following goals: consolidate the two separate gifts, improve access and use of the collection, and preserve collection materials. Based on these goals, the following 10 objectives were identified for the collection:

1. Document the work that was done to the collection in the past, along with its current state of arrangement;
2. Locate and remove items that were not part of the original collection but were added from various sources;
3. Identify and describe previously unidentified miscellaneous materials;
4. Create an arrangement for the collection that conforms to the principles of provenance and original order (where possible);
5. Physically integrate the two collections, shifting items as needed;
6. Rehouse materials and perform basic preservation;
7. Create a more user-friendly finding aid that is compatible with Encoded Archival Description (EAD);
8. Create a collection-level record in the On-line Computer Library Center (OCLC) and add it to Purdue Libraries' on-line catalog;

9. Make the finding aid available on the Internet;
10. Create a plan for continuing digitization efforts.

A significant challenge to meeting these goals and objectives was the integration of the two separate collections: the original Earhart papers and those donated by Mrs. Putnam in 2002. The initial part of the collection was already arranged and described—an organization that would not be able to incorporate the materials acquired in 2002. Identification and removal of the materials that were additions from other sources would be another challenge, albeit a necessary one to re-establish the provenance of the collection. According to Fredric M. Miller, "While the immediate processing of accessions has obvious advantages for users and administrators, it can also result in an excessive fragmentation of a repository's holdings. A more controversial issue that may be broached is the selection of important records that may have been processed incorrectly or inappropriately in the past and need either refinement or reprocessing."[2]

Because much work would be needed to physically integrate the two collections, update the arrangement, and write a finding aid, the archivist decided that reprocessing the entire collection would be the best approach. In this way, the archivist could re-examine the condition of materials and locate items in need of preservation, identify miscellaneous items to improve access, and create a finding aid that would be EAD-compatible. The small size of the collection (16.5 cubic feet), along with the broad research use and historical importance of the materials, justified the time and effort it would take for the reprocessing.

**Issues Relating to Reprocessing**

There are a number of issues to consider in regard to how much reprocessing should be done in conjunction with integrating collections. For example, if the policy of the repository dictates retaining the series arrangement of the original collection, files often need to be shifted, boxes relabeled, and additions to the collection physically integrated into the existing one. Finding aids and other collection guides must be updated to reflect additions, along with catalog records in local and national databases. Care must also be taken to document additions to collections as they occur; it is important to distinguish between items that, while produced by the same creator, may have been acquired through different means.

New methods of description and preservation of archival collections have been developed in recent years. Processing techniques have also changed over time. For many collections, arrangement may have never been done, or was done poorly. Several decades ago archives staff may have chosen to leave photographs and other media mixed with paper, and now they actively separate such materials. It is not feasible (or even recommended) to reprocess all archival collections that have received large additions. However, reprocessing may be appropriate for collections that already need some type of attention. Additions to collections can often provide the ideal opportunity for re-evaluating older collections and determining the best way to bring them up to current standards. The most common needs of older collections are improved preservation and enhanced accessibility. Improved access can occur either through a more logical physical arrangement that reflects the activities of the records creator or through improvement of existing finding aids. Collections that have become disorganized because of a disaster, frequent use, or other means, will benefit from reprocessing as well.

Documents, photographs, and other media that may have shown little signs of deterioration upon original accession will often exhibit signs of aging after decades of handling and use. Reprocessing can facilitate identification of items requiring conservation work. In some cases, archival storage supplies used in the past may need to be replaced. Finding aids have also evolved over the years. Older collections may not have finding aids, but instead are made accessible through descriptive summaries, spotty inventories, or checklists. These descriptive documents can be vague and difficult for patrons to use. They may or may not contain the biographical information, scope and content notes, series descriptions, or indices that researchers expect today. With the prevalence of new descriptive standards such as EAD, many collections are currently being re-evaluated, and finding aids are being modified in order to provide the consistency, level of detail, and formatting necessary for using EAD. As Dorothy Johnston argues, every repository must face the issue of electronic access to finding aids individually, based on "its resources and the size and nature of its legacy problem. For some, the problem is one of straightforward conversion; for others, the quality of early lists may be a significant concern."[3] Although bringing past finding aids up to current standards may prove both frustrating and time consuming, it makes sense to do so when a collection is used regularly, or is in need of conservation or improved arrangement.

Faced with accruals to collections on an ongoing basis, archivists can occasionally become overwhelmed by all there is to do to improve access and preservation to their existing collections. Growing collections can be a constant force in some repositories, and the processing of these materials must be equally persistent. This can prove challenging to archivists who want

to steward new collections responsibly and are wary of starting a reprocessing cycle that could prove endless as new additions to collections are made. Reprocessing can be very tedious, as items will need to be shifted or rehoused and will require updated finding aids or bibliographic records. Implementation of EAD markup or digitization increases the visibility of collections, but can require more detailed levels of description than many older finding aids currently provide. In these instances, reprocessing may be justified, as it is the most efficient way to accomplish improved description, preservation, and access simultaneously.

**Methodology**

Before beginning a reprocessing project, it is important to document what has been done to the collection in the past, as well as its current state. Documentation of previous work done to the collection will be invaluable for future stewards of the collection who may need to try and reestablish original order or provenance. Part of the documentation process involves keeping records on when additions to collections are acquired, information on the donors themselves, and what state materials are in when they arrive. Documenting what steps are taken in processing, in addition to noting the person responsible for the processing and its completion date, are crucial to understanding the history of the collection and what work has already been done.

Documenting the content and arrangement of the original collection can be done easily through the original finding aid, provided it is detailed enough to state what items were in the original collection as opposed to those acquired later. Additionally, researchers who have accessed the original collection in the past may be interested in returning to see only the new items in the collection. Without documentation of what was in the original collection versus later accruals,

there would be no way of knowing how to retrieve only the new material for returning patrons.

In the case of the Earhart papers, an item listing of the original collection existed, so it was easy to track which items belonged to the collection when it was acquired. What proved more difficult was determining what work had been done in the past. For example, it was clear that some items had been encapsulated, but it was unclear whether the plastic used was of archival quality. After documenting the original and current states of the collections, the second step in reprocessing the Earhart papers involved locating items in the original collection that had previously been lumped together under the heading "Miscellaneous" and determining the best way to describe them. Finally, many of the photographs in the original collection did not contain captions. Much work was required to research the dates, events, and people shown in the images.

As work proceeded on the collection, items were removed that were clearly not part of the original gift. This was not very difficult, as the original collection was donated in 1940 and as a result could contain materials dated only up to that year. It was simple to identify items dated after 1940 as artificial additions and remove them. The photographs were more problematic because almost all of them were dated prior to 1938 and it was impossible to ascertain whether they had been acquired as part of the original collection or added later. The archivist decided that all unidentified photographs dated prior to 1940 would need to remain in order to prevent possible separation of original collection materials. Some of the photographs contained donor information, and in such cases those photographs were removed.

The archivist then examined the Putnam materials to verify whether the arrangement scheme for

the original collection could be used when integrating the two collections. The archivist discovered that the existing arrangement would not work because the original collection contained no series for personal or business papers. These areas comprised the bulk of the additional material to the collection. Therefore, some components of the existing arrangement scheme were retained, such as organizing flight papers according to each of Earhart's major flights and filing items within each subseries chronologically, while additional series were created for personal and business papers. The archivist discovered through this process that many of the items from the original collection that had been identified as "miscellaneous" fit into one of these new series, and the collection materials were physically shifted to reflect the new arrangement. Photographs and artifacts that were previously filed with the flight papers were removed and separated, with care being taken to cross-reference these items with their corresponding flights in the index to the finding aid.

Once all collection materials had been physically rearranged to conform to the new arrangement scheme, rehousing of materials began. The collection had been stored in file cabinets, primarily inside plastic photograph sleeves contained in three-ring binders. This housing method was causing stress to the materials, especially oversized items and those adjacent to artifacts. The binders were also causing wear and tear to the materials, as the plastic sleeves would slump inside and curl around the rings. As a result, collection materials were transferred from the binders into lignin-free folders and boxes, with oversized materials and artifacts removed for separate storage. As materials were rehoused, items in need of conservation treatment were identified. Original newspaper clippings were photocopied onto acid-free paper, and fragile documents and photographs were placed in polyester sleeves.

Once the separate collections were combined and materials were rehoused and properly preserved, a new finding aid was created. Because an item-level list for the original collection already existed electronically, descriptions for many of the flight papers were simply copied and pasted into the new document, and edited as needed. New sections reflecting the personal and business papers were created, and descriptions for each series were written. The inventory that existed for the original collection had not contained biographical or scope and content information, so these sections were added to the new finding aid as well. Guided by the advice of Dennis Meissner, the archivist took care to engineer the new finding aid so that it could easily be marked up in EAD: "Although it is tempting for a repository to begin its work with EAD by marking up its existing finding aids as they are, more satisfying results will ensue if the repository invests some time up front in assessing, and perhaps revising, its finding aid model."[4] One method of streamlining the conversion process is to organize the separate finding aid components so they match the arrangement of their corresponding elements in the EAD Document Type Definition. In this way, archivists save time and resources during the markup of their finding aids.

In preparing a new finding aid that would transfer easily to an EAD document, the Purdue archivist studied the finding aids of other institutions that have implemented EAD. Based on those observations, the components of the Earhart finding aid were arranged to match the order of the EAD structure when possible. A template was created so that future finding aids would be constructed in the same manner, ensuring consistency and ease of use. Largely based on the model created by the Minnesota Historical Society, the Purdue finding aid template was created

not just with EAD in mind but also with the goal of creating an aesthetically pleasing descriptive tool that would be easy for patrons to use and understand. A sincere effort was made to use as little archival jargon as possible in the finding aid while still complying with the standards for archival description.

The completed finding aid for the Earhart collection is now more user-friendly, and Web access has resulted in an increase in patrons who have been able to determine what materials they would like to use in the collection before visiting the archives.[5] The finding aid is currently mounted in PDF format, which allows the hierarchical nature of the document to be preserved without major reformatting for on-line display. Once the finding aid has been encoded, Extensible Markup Language (XML) and Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) versions will also be made available on-line, thereby ensuring that the majority of researchers with Internet access will be able to view it without having to download proprietary software or use a particular Web browser.

The final step in reprocessing is to update existing catalog records. This was not an issue for the Earhart papers because they had never been cataloged. Once the completed finding aid was added to the Archives and Special Collections' Web site, a catalog record was created and submitted to OCLC and to the Purdue Libraries' on-line catalog. The catalog record includes links to the full finding aid available on-line.

In response to prior digitization performed on the collection, as well as to the opportunities for marketing and for reducing the handling of original materials, it was decided that the archives would continue digitizing select Earhart materials and place them on the Internet. As a result of

these digitization efforts, researchers from around the world are more aware of the contents of the collection, and requests for access to the Earhart papers have increased. Also, frequent photographic duplication requests for Earhart images are now filled using the digital surrogates, reducing wear and tear on the original photographs.

**Results**

The entire reprocessing project, including the cataloging phase and publication of the finding aid on-line, lasted approximately six months. On-line publication and cataloging of the collection have resulted in increased scholarly use of these materials locally and abroad, and many users have been made aware of the collection's existence for the first time. In addition to increasing access to and use of the collection, reprocessing has offered cost savings by reducing the amount of time it takes staff to locate materials requested by researchers. The new arrangement scheme has also made it easier to prioritize items for digitization. The new lignin-free housings will provide longer shelf life for the collection, and the materials will also benefit from decreased handling now that individual items within the collection are easier to locate.

Reprocessing allowed archives staff to meet the goals of the project, which were consolidation of the two collections, preservation, and increased access and use of the collection. All ten objectives identified at the start of the project were also met or are currently in process. Continued digitization of the collection and EAD markup of the finding aid are efforts that will take additional time, but will ultimately provide major benefits by making the collection more visible and accessible to users.

## *Case Study Two: Georgia State University—A Case for Intellectual, Not Physical Integration*

### Background Information

The Special Collections Department at Georgia State University (GSU) contains numerous organizational records and personal papers. Over the years, additional donations were made to some of these core collections. The decision about whether to integrate these donations into previously organized collections focuses on the question, What is the best way to supplement these accessions, especially if the original donation has already been processed?

One strategy was developed while working on the organizational records of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM). The IAM was founded in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1888 and originally focused on railway building and maintenance. Today, the IAM is active in more than two hundred industries and is one of the key unions involved in aircraft and aerospace manufacturing.

At their one hundredth–anniversary Grand Lodge Convention in 1988, the Machinists designated the Southern Labor Archives at GSU as their official repository. The Southern Labor Archives' holdings document these two segments of the southern and national transportation industry—railroad and aerospace. The extensive IAM holdings come from numerous local and district lodges, as well as from their international headquarters in Maryland.

Between 1988 and 1992, the Southern Labor Archives received 209 cubic feet of materials, including office files, official minutes, research materials, contracts, negotiation files,

audiovisual materials, photographs, and artifacts. In addition, four thousand printed volumes from the IAM library were added to the collection. Additional materials were transferred to the archives between 2001 and 2004.

The original donation consisted of materials deemed "historical," or inactive, by the organization. These records were found to be in both good physical condition and organizational order. Series were easily identified. The processing of the original donation of the collection was completed in 2000. Small additions were added as materials continue to be shipped to Atlanta.

As for current and future records from the IAM, the organization does not have an active records management program. The amount of guidance given in any organization for keeping its records varies greatly. Some organizations provide their offices or departments with detailed administrative and financial records manuals; others leave that initiative to each office or department. Others call upon archives to provide them with practical suggestions on how to maintain their records, what to save, and how to preserve historical materials.[6]

Since 2001, the IAM has held an annual local lodge history program at their education center in Hollywood, Maryland. This program involves weeklong leadership training, focusing on providing working and retired members with the skills to implement a wide variety of history projects. Skills include developing a records management plan and donating materials to an archives. Georgia State provides instruction and a records management manual for this program.

**Issues Relating to Reprocessing**

The primary issue an archivist faces when processing and managing any growing collection is how to make the existing collection accessible to researchers while, at the same time, adding new accessions to it. The records of the International Association of Machinists constitute a living collection[7] that will likely continue to expand for as long as the organization exists. Archivists should keep in mind that quality processing of additional materials does not necessarily equal extensive reprocessing of entire collections. In most cases, the preferred result is a compromise between the detailed work that would be done in an ideal situation and the minimal amount of work necessary to make the collection usable.[8]

**Processing Goals**

The primary goal when processing additional acquisitions to the IAM collection is to present to IAM staff, scholarly researchers, and students a clear descriptive inventory of the materials available for research. Ultimately, any descriptive tools developed for this or any other collection need to be sufficient to help researchers identify and choose materials relevant to their research.

After reviewing the IAM collection, GSU staff identified the following goals for processing additions to the collection: to integrate the collection intellectually without physically bringing materials together; to provide basic preservation for the records; to update existing descriptive components, including the existing EAD finding aid and MARC record; and to increase use of the collection by researchers and IAM members. From these goals, the following seven action items were established:

1. Review the collection file for the IAM records, which includes documentation regarding the initial processing work plan (the file contains background research notes, explanations of any changes to arrangement schemes, access restrictions, preservation actions taken, and level of description);
2. Create a plan of work for the collection using the original processed collection's arrangement scheme and the preliminary inventory for the additional materials;
3. Determine whether the new additions will fit into the existing series or if new series will need to be created;
4. Identify materials to be weeded, discarded, or transferred elsewhere;
5. Outline the general work flow, work schedules, and division of labor among staff;
6. Perform basic preservation, such as rehousing into lignin-free folders and boxes, preservation photocopying, removing fasteners, and segregating materials for special storage (photographs, textiles, oversized items, etc.);
7. Update the EAD finding aid and MARC catalog record to reflect additions to the collection.

**Methodology**

Intellectual arrangement of archival collections does not have to mirror physical arrangement. The series, not the box number, should be the primary organizing principle of the inventories. Terry Eastwood suggests two rules of arrangement when dealing with these types of collections: "The need to separate physical and administrative control [when dealing with accruals] is incontestable. … [T]he first rule of arrangement is to separate physical and administrative control from intellectual control. … [T]he second rule of arrangement, closely related to the first,

is to identify each component of an accession with the aggregation or aggregations to which it belongs."[9]

The GSU staff determined that the best strategy for the AIM collection was to leave its additions segregated physically from the existing collection, but to bring the content together intellectually. Wherever it was appropriate, the finding aid integrated materials from both the original donation and the subsequent additions under the same series. The following is an example of this method, as it might appear in the finding aid:

**Series I: Minutes, 1900–1985**

| | |
|---|---|
| Box 1 | 1900–1925 |
| Box 2 | 1926–1946 |
| Box 47 | 1947–1958 |
| Box 125 | 1960–1988 |

In the above example, boxes 1 and 2 were part of the original donation. The collection was processed, and the finding aid was written. In subsequent donations, the same types of materials were accessioned, with the dates for the minutes continuing from box 2 into a new container, box 47. Rather than removing the contents of box 47 and placing them with the contents of box 2, or creating a new box continuing from 2, such as 2A, the contents were left in box 47. However, the subjects were brought together in the finding aid to make it easier for researchers to locate all the minutes quickly, without having to page through a lengthy finding aid in the hopes of locating additional minutes. This same method was then applied in a subsequent donation, in which box 125 contained additional minutes.

If materials in the new accessions chronicle activities or functions that have not previously been part of the existing collection, new series can be added to the existing arrangement and description. As activities or functions change over time, a parallel series can be utilized to document such alterations. For example, if the name of the "Political Committee" changes to the "Political and Legislative Affairs Committee," a parallel series can be established to document the name change and any variation in activity or function of this committee. This modification can then be described in the series description in the finding aid. According to Adrian Cunningham, director of Intellectual Control of Records for the National Archives of Australia, "[I]t is essential to capture the change in these relationships in order to provide the contextual knowledge necessary to understand the content of the records themselves."[10]

**Results**

By processing the IAM collection in this way, the GSU staff was able to store the records as convenience dictated, while still facilitating physical retrieval. Another positive aspect of this method is its adaptability to utilizing Encoded Archival Description. The finding aid can be edited, reprinted, and reposted to the Internet as new accessions are added, with a fraction of the work needed to physically reorganize the collection every time. This reorganized encoded finding aid is posted in Extensible Markup Language (XML) and Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) to provide access to all Web users. An updated paper finding aid is also placed in the reading room.

Using EAD allows flexibility in the automated production of finding aids and related print

products essential to processing and control functions.[11] This also allows the IAM staff and members to have the most updated guide to their records, which is essential for donor relations.

One predicament with this approach is that in order to review all the parts of one series, as in the above example, a patron will need to examine multiple boxes instead of just one. Even if the plan had been to process each accrual separately, there is usually insufficient staff to physically reorganize each addition, ultimately requiring patrons to request multiple boxes anyway. With the intellectual organizational scheme, users can easily see how many years of minutes are available by viewing the finding aid, even if they must request several boxes to see the complete set of minutes.

An added inconvenience with intellectual integration is that the finding aid is no longer a true box list, with the contents of each box listed together. This may cause challenges for staff or researchers who are interested in locating the total contents for a given box. To alleviate this potential problem, the archivist can maintain a box list separately, just as library shelf-lists are retained separately from the catalog.[12]

The final step in processing these living collections is documenting the location or locations of a collection so it can be accurately paged for patrons. Every possible effort is made to store the boxes of a collection together. Additions to collections should be shelved at the same location as previous accessions of a collection. In the accession record, the movement from the collection's temporary storage to its current placement is noted. If indicated in the acquisition folder, collection folder, or stacks guide, the location is updated as well.

## *Conclusion*

In his text on archival arrangement and description, David W. Carmicheal addresses the dilemma of dealing with collections that grow:

> From time to time you will receive records that form part of a series that is already in your archives. … There are at least two ways to handle these new records (these records, by the way, are called an "accretion" to the earlier series of records). The first way to handle an accretion is to assign a series number to the records and complete a Series Description Sheet as if the new records had no relationship to the earlier series. … A second way of dealing with accretions is to assign the new records the same series number as the earlier records. This means that the earlier Series Description Sheet must be rewritten and the new records placed on the shelf in their proper place among the records of the original series.[13]

The authors argue that there is another viable method for managing growing collections—intellectually integrating descriptions without physically integrating them. Unlike library stacks, which are frequently browsed by patrons, archives stacks are closed. It makes little difference whether the accruals to a collection are shelved with the original collection as long as archives staff know where to go to retrieve the materials for patrons. Location information can exist in internal documents, such as shelf lists or collection management databases, and can easily be accessed by archives staff as items are requested.

The need to update existing catalog records should not deter archivists from using this method. After all, updating an existing catalog record is easier than creating a new catalog record for each accrual, and when a finding aid is available electronically it is much easier to copy and paste information about each accrual into an existing finding aid than it is to create a new and separate finding aid for each addition to the collection.

Reprocessing is a viable option for significant, high-use collections that are small and in need of much preservation or additional work. In the case of the Earhart papers, the original collection was poorly organized and needed to be rehoused. It required little additional effort to incorporate the newly accessioned materials into the original collection and determine an arrangement that reflected the contents of the combined collection, and then proceed to rehousing. Due to the high use this collection receives, reprocessing was warranted and the size of the collection kept staff time and resources to a minimum.

Unfortunately it is simply not practical for many institutions to reprocess collections as they are augmented, especially with collections that emanate from ongoing entities. When it is likely that a collection will continue to grow over time, it makes sense to intellectually integrate descriptive information for each accrual into the existing finding aid. This allows researchers the convenience of consulting only one document to locate materials, rather than numerous finding aids, lists, or appendices. Best of all, this method does not require physically shifting any items—as long as similar materials are brought together in the finding aid, they do not need to be physically housed together. This method saves numerous hours of staff time spent rearranging and shifting boxes, folders, and their contents.

The two case scenarios related here are not meant to be applied inflexibly. Detailed work procedures will vary from repository to repository and from collection to collection. These models are depicted only to demonstrate that additions to collections are manageable and need not intimidate archivists.

As Fredric Miller states, "By its nature, processing is the essence of orderliness."[14] It is important for archivists to make processing decisions carefully and logically, basing them on the missions of their repositories, their staff size, the available resources, and the unique natures of the growing collections themselves. The Evaluation Form in Appendix I provides a list of questions for archivists to consider when determining whether a collection that has grown since its original acquisition should be reprocessed or not. Depending on the circumstances, the decision may ultimately be made based upon existing staff and resources. Yet, even a repository with modest resources can make its growing collections accessible to researchers, if well-planned and integrated processing operations are implemented. Above all, there must be recognition on the part of everyone involved that flexibility and compromise are crucial to managing growing collections.

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS:** Pam Hackbart-Dean is the head of Special Collections at Georgia State University Library. She received her M.A. in history from the University of Connecticut and is a certified archivist.

Sammie L. Morris is assistant professor of Library Science and acting head of Archives and Special Collections at Purdue University. She is the recent author of "What Archives Reveal: The Hidden Poems of Amelia Earhart" (forthcoming in *Provenance*). Morris graduated from the University of Texas in Austin with a Master of Library and Information Science degree, specializing in archival enterprise. She is an active member of the Society of American Archivists and the Academy of Certified Archivists, and is vice president/president-elect of the Society of Indiana Archivists.

## Notes

1. L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin, <lrjm@udel.edu> "Processing Priority Criteria," 31 May 2000, <http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html> (20 May 2005). Weston Thompson, <westont@tigger.cc.uic.edu> "Practice: Accessions/Collections," 25 May 1995, <http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html> (20 May 2005). Dean DeBolt, <ddebolt@uwf.cc.uwf.edu> "Practice: Accessions/Collections," 25 May 1995, <http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html> (20 May 2005). Andrea Bean Hough, <abean@uh.edu> "Collection processing advice needed," 4 December 1995, <http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html> (20 May 2005). Sue Hamburger, <sxh@psulias.psu.edu> "accession numbering system," 6 June 1995, <http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html> (20 May 2005). Erik C. Nordberg, <enordber@mtu.edu> "Practice: Accessions/Collections," 2 May 1995, <http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html> (20 May 2005).

2. Fredric M. Miller, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990): 46.

3. Dorothy Johnston, "From Typescript Finding Aids to EAD (Encoded Archival Description): A University Case Study," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 22:1 (2001): 39.

4. David Meissner, "First Things First: Re-engineering Finding Aids for Implementation of EAD," *American Archivist* 60:4 (1997): 372.

5. The finding aid to the collection is available at <http://www.lib.purdue.edu/spcol/earhart.html>.

6. Debra Bernhardt, *How to Keep Union Records: A Guide for Local Union Officers and Staff* (Silver Spring, MD: Labor's Heritage Press, 1992): 4.

7. The author defines a living collection as a compilation emanating from either an organization whose operations are ongoing or an individual who is actively creating records.

8. Karen T. Lynch and Helen Slotkin, *Processing Manual for the Institute of Archives and Special Collections* (Boston, MA: M.I.T. Libraries, 1988): 9.

9. Terry Eastwood, "Putting the Parts of the Whole Together: Systematic Arrangement of Archives," *Archivaria* 50 (2000): 97.

10. Adrian Cunningham, "Australian Strategies for the Intellectual Control of Records and Recordkeeping Systems" (paper delivered to the Royal Society of Archivists of the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 23 October 1998): 3.

11. Daniel V. Pitti, *SGML: The Berkeley Finding Aid Project*, <http://xml.coverpages.org/berk-arl.html> (02/08/2005).

12. Pam Hackbart-Dean and Christine de Catanzaro, "The Strongest Link: The Management and Processing of Archival Collections," *Archival Issues* 27:2 (2002): 134.

13. David W. Carmicheal, *Organizing Archival Records: A Practical Method of Arrangement and Description for Small Archives*, 2d ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004): 39.

14. Miller, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts*, 48.

## *Appendix*

**Evaluation Form**

1. What is the size of the collection (with any current additions)?

a. Less than 30 ft.  b. More than 30 ft.

2. What is the processing status of the existing collection?

a. Unprocessed or processed unsatisfactorily

b. Processed satisfactorily

3. Is the existing collection appropriately housed?

a. No  b. Yes

4. How would you rate past use of the collection?

a. High  b. Moderate to Low

5. What is the estimate of future use of the collection?

a. High  b. Moderate to Low

6. What is the value of the collection (based on the artifactual, monetary, historic, symbolic, or sentimental significance of the collection to the institution and its users)?

a. High  b. Moderate to Low

7. What is the physical condition of the existing collection?

a. Materials are rare, fragile, and/or deteriorating.

b. Materials are stable.

8. Is the collection expected to grow?

a. It is unlikely the collection will continue to grow.

b. It is likely the collection will continue to grow.

9. What is the arrangement of the collection?

a. No original or existing order

b. Materials in good or adequate working order

10. Does the finding aid adequately meet user needs and can researchers utilize it efficiently and effectively?

a. No b. Yes

11. Are there enough processing staff available to reprocess the collection without creating a backlog of unprocessed incoming collections?

a. Yes b. No

A majority of "a" answers indicates that reprocessing may be the best option.

A majority of "b" answers indicates that intellectual, not physical integration may be best.