

Archivist Toolkit for first time visitors

About Us

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Introduction

Welcome to the Montgomery County Archives (MCA), a place where you can access records that reveal the past and inform the present. We at the MCA know visiting an archive for the first time can be a little overwhelming, so we're here to help. This is a toolkit for those new to archives as well as those who have visited us before. Through this toolkit you will learn the ends and outs of how to effectively use archives.

What's an Archives?

An archives is a place to find information usually not found anywhere else. Unlike a library, where you can gather information from secondary sources like books, in an archive people gather information from letters, reports, notes, photographs, digital records, and other primary sources. There are many different types of archives including: university archives, national archives, state archives, county archives, city archives, corporate archives, and more. Accordingly, archives contain a wide variety of records, from government-produced records, to the papers of people and organizations. The main goal of archives, and the archivists that work in them, is to ensure that important records are available for current and future generations to research.¹

How to use Archives

Before visiting the archives one should first determine what their topic of research will be. One way to accomplish this is by checking out information available on the MCA's website to find resources related to your topic. If this does not work the archivist will work with you to narrow your topic and find resources related to that topic. When visiting the archives one should expect to spend at least 30 minutes to an hour conducting research. Depending on the topic, one should also expect to use a finding aid or microfilm, both of which are discussed below.

¹ Potter, Lee Ann. "What Is an Archives." Cobblestone Magazine, September 2003.

Microfilm

Microfilm is a storage system using film, kind of like an old film reel. It continues to be a tool used within archives even in an era of digitization, mainly because it is a low-cost, reliable, long-term, standardized image storage medium. The equipment needed to view microfilm images is simple, consisting of light and magnification. Plus, the medium has a life-expectancy of hundreds of years.² Microfilm is readily available for use at the MCA. Available records include: property records, adoption records, marriage licenses, and birth and death records. Records within the Montgomery County Archives are microfilmed in order to reduce wear and tear on the original records. Microfilm also allows for copies of these records to be made.

Finding Aids

Finding aids are documents that provide information about a specific collection within the archives. Finding aids usually explain what materials a collection contains, how big the collection is—how many boxes, microfilm reels, gigabytes, etc., it consists of—, how the collection is organized, as well as provide contextual information about the creators of the collection. You can view the list of finding aids available at MCA [here](#).

Primary Sources vs. Secondary Sources

Primary sources provide direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object, person, or work of art. Secondary sources describe, interpret, comment upon, analyze, evaluate, and summarize primary sources. For example, a televised interview with President Kennedy would be a primary source. A biography written about President Kennedy would be a secondary source.

Research Room Etiquette

Sharing a research space with others, and handling important documents, requires researchers to follow certain guidelines to make sure everyone has a successful experience.

The following are NOT allowed within the research room:

- Food and drinks
- Books and newspapers
- Scanners

The following ARE allowed within the research room:

- Laptops
- Cell Phones (silenced)
- Cameras (no flash photography please)
- Notebooks
- Pencils (No pens please)
- Briefcases, handbags, backpacks, computer cases, and Purses (Please place on the floor or in a chair)

² "Microfilm." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed July 07, 2017.
<https://www.archives.gov/preservation/formats/microfilming.html>.

Tips for handling Documents

When handling archival records it is imperative that you be careful. Many of these records are delicate and old and must be handled with special care. Please help us to preserve these records by following these instructions.

- When examining any of our records, please be sure to keep documents in their original order, make sure to examine only one box and one folder at a time.
- Documents are not under any circumstance to be removed from the archives.
- Keep documents flat on table.
- Make sure your hands are clean before handling documents
- To avoid damage to original documents always use pencils when taking notes. Also be sure to avoid placing notepaper on top of the documents or using a pencil as a pointer.
- Copies are permitted. Uncertified copies are \$1.00, certified copies are \$2.00. Photographs taken on a personal phone or digital camera are free. We do not allow the use of camera tri-pods, special lighting, rearranging furniture, or any other such activity undertaken to secure a better quality picture. High-quality photographs are \$10.00 per image and CDs of Requested Documents are \$10.00 per CD in addition to normal charges for copies of \$1.00 per page. We require that you sign a licensing agreement to publish photographs and other images held by the MCA.

How to cite Archival Research

Once you have found archival records relevant to your research the question then becomes. “How do I cite these sources?” No worries, we have figured it out for you. When citing sources found at MCA we suggest using the following [Turabian](#) format:

(For Footnotes) First Name, Last Name [to] First Name, Last Name, [Date], [Folder], [Box], [Collection], [Archives], [Location of Archives]

Ex: George Bush, letter to Emory Folmar, October 10, 1992, Folder 1, Box 1, Emory Folmar Papers, Montgomery County Archives (Montgomery, Alabama.)

(For Bibliography) Last name, First name Middle initial. Title of Work. Format. City: Publishing Company, copyright date. Source, Collection. Medium,

Ex: Bush, George H.W. *George H.W Bush to Emory Folmar*, October 10, 1992. Letter. From Montgomery County Archives, *The Emory Folmar Papers*, 1977-1999.