DONATING YOUR COLLECTIONS

Personal Histories Preserved for Community Memory

For millennia, written records have provided essential clues to the past. Through letters, diaries, and unpublished writings of many types, and also through the audible, visual, and electronic records of recent times, researchers have been able to study and understand much about the history of particular communities, businesses, and organizations; the history of specific events and broader societal trends; and the history of the United States in general. The letters, emails, diaries, photos, and other materials that accumulate over the years give vital and unique information regarding your life or the history of your family. These materials are personal to you, but their contribution to the heritage of a certain place and time is valuable, too. When you donate your personal records to Georgia State University’s Special Collections and Archives, your unique history becomes a part of the community’s collective memory.
What Is Special Collections and Archives?

We carefully preserve collections of written, visual, audible, and electronic material created by private citizens both past and present. We ensure that these personal and family collections will be available for research by generations to come. Students, professors, genealogists, journalists, and many others may find your records both interesting and of value to their research work.

What Can GSU’s Professional Archivists Do?

If you are considering donating personal or family records, our archivists can

- Discuss the historical significance of your collections.
- Advise if GSU would be the best home for your collections.
- Continually work with you to locate or identify other materials to donate.

If your records are appropriate for our collections, and you agree to donate them, our archivists can

- Provide the digital or physical materials with secure, environmentally controlled storage.
- Oversee their proper handling and use.
- Provide research access to the contents of the records, both to you and the public.
How Can You Preserve and Prepare to Donate Your Records?

• To ensure the preservation of materials for potential transfer to GSU’s Special Collection and Archives, keep physical items in a cool, dry, temperature-stable environment.

• Back up your digital materials regularly.

• Locate and make a list of all of the records you are considering donating. We can accept donations as small as a single item and as large as dozens of boxes or terabytes of digital files.

• To be historically significant, materials need not be organized, they need not be “old,” and they need not relate to a famous individual, event, or organization. However, they should provide a rich and complete look into some aspect of your life or work (or that of your family member). Think about what aspects of your work or life are documented in your records.

• Special Collections and Archives prefers to receive related groups of materials rather than single items. Try to keep materials grouped together in their original context rather than separating out individual items to show us.

• Understand that we accept original items only, not copies or digital recreations.

• Make sure that photographs, tapes, and films are properly identified.

• Give your digital directories and files names that indicate content or subject matter.

• Do not mail or drop off materials without first consulting with our archivists. Before accepting a donation, we must evaluate all materials offered and ask the donor to sign a deed of gift.

• Be prepared to explain the current location of all the digital material that you wish to donate. This could include content stored on backup drives or thumb drives, on CDs and floppy disks, on other computing devices, in networked or cloud storage, and in online accounts. We might ask to capture digital material directly from your computer.
Do You Need to “Cull” the Materials or Reorganize Them?
The research value of records may be diminished if items are removed or if the records are rearranged. You should contact our archivists before weeding, discarding, or reorganizing papers and records, regardless of their location or format—we have expertise in identifying materials that should be transferred to a repository or manuscript library and will talk with you about whether your records should be weeded or rearranged.

While we prefer that you not reorganize materials before an archivist reviews them, it is helpful if you can provide contextual information, such as names of people who appear in photographs or the stories behind significant items. The archivist might be able to visit your home or office to review your materials.

Will Special Collections Take Everything You Offer?
We may be unable to accept everything that you offer due to space constraints or niche collecting scopes, but we always welcome the chance to review materials. If they are not appropriate for our collections, there may be another repository to which we can refer you. When deciding what to donate, please consider the following:

- We discourage donors from donating partial collections or splitting materials among several institutions.
- We generally do not take publications that are widely available elsewhere, such as popular magazines and newspapers, or commercially available audio and video recordings.
- Some material may be of more sentimental than historical value and should be kept by the individual or family.

How Can You Learn More about Donating?
Our archivists can best assist you if you make an appointment in advance. You can reach us by emailing archives@gsu.edu or calling (404) 413-2880.
Your Personal Records Could Have Historic Value

The list below, which is suggestive and not definitive, illustrates the wide range of documentation that can be useful for historical research. Special Collections and Archives collects many types of personal and family records, in both traditional and digital formats:

- ARTICLES/ESSAYS
- AUDIO TAPES
- BLOGS
- BROCHURES
- CORRESPONDENCE (LETTERS/EMAIL)
- DIARIES
- FLYERS
- FILMS/VIDEOS
- LEGAL DOCUMENTS
- MEMOIRS
- MINUTES
- PHOTOGRAPHS
- PROFESSIONAL PAPERS
- SCRAPBOOKS/PHOTO ALBUMS
- SPEECHES/LECTURES
- SUBJECT FILES
- REPORTS
- WEBSITES

Churches, political organizations, businesses, economic interest groups, community groups, voluntary associations, professional associations, and other collective enterprises all create materials that document their purpose, policies, and activities. An individual or family may hold the records of such a business or organization, and this material, too, may be significant.
DONATIONS
We can only invest materials and labor in the preservation of items that we own. Therefore, we will not accept material on deposit or on loan. Donors are asked to sign a deed of gift, which formally signifies that the materials become the property of GSU Special Collections and Archives.

PURCHASES
GSU Special Collections and Archives is a non-profit entity and is unable to purchase collections directly from individuals. Purchases can only be made from a reputable auction house or dealer who specializes in archival materials and sells them at fair market prices. Funds for such purchases are drawn from dedicated endowment monies and are limited.

ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS
Access to donated materials is governed by our policies regarding availability, duplication, and publication. As a prospective donor, you should become familiar with our policies and discuss any special needs or concerns with an archivist before completing the deed of gift.
RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS
If you are concerned about confidential materials, be prepared to identify items of concern and then discuss the possibility of restricting part of the collection to protect your privacy or the privacy of others. While we desire to make all materials freely accessible to researchers, we will agree to reasonable and equitable restrictions for limited periods of time.

COPYRIGHT
Assignment of copyright is often complex, and you should work with the archivist to clarify issues of copyright ownership. Generally, copyright belongs to the creator of writings, digital files, or other original material, but it can be legally transferred to heirs or others. In addition, ownership of copyright is separate from ownership of the physical item. We ask donors to donate not only the physical papers but also any copyright in them that the donor might own.

CONDITIONAL GIFTS
GSU Special Collections and Archives is unable to promise that donated materials will be exhibited or used in some other specific fashion as a condition of accepting the gift.
MONETARY APPRAISALS FOR TAX DEDUCTIONS
Talk with your tax accountant or attorney about the possibility of a tax deduction for the donation of material to GSU. Archivists cannot give tax advice, nor are they permitted to appraise the monetary value of a collection being considered for Special Collections and Archives. We can, however, provide you with a list of local manuscript appraisers who will (for a fee) make monetary appraisals. You must arrange and pay for any such appraisal, preferably before your collection is transferred to us.

MONETARY DONATIONS
We are a not-for-profit organization. Monetary donations are not a prerequisite for the acceptance of a collection, but if you are able to assist us by providing funds toward the arrangement, cataloging, and preservation of your records, we encourage you to discuss the possibility with an archivist.

This pamphlet was adapted from content prepared by the Manuscript Repositories Section of the Society of American Archivists (CC-BY 4.0).

Contact Us!
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archives@gsu.edu

@GSU_ARCHIVES
@GSU_LIBRARY