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Chapter 08 - Heritage Resources

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Chapter Eight / Heritage Resources



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Heritage Resources

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Western Washington University Libraries

Archives and *special collections* are dedicated to gathering and preserving unique and primary source materials to help advance understandings about where we have been, who we are, and where we are going. Through the thoughtful selection and acquisition of distinctive collections, students and scholars of all levels are able to access raw, un-interpreted and authentic evidence of their cultural heritage, allowing them to engage in original and innovative research, and enhance their critical thinking and analysis skills. There is an inherent curiosity that arises when touching and learning about an artifact – the authentic object – that goes beyond the information it contains. Consider reading a letter written from husband to wife during the Fraser River Gold Rush in 1858. The letter may provide evidence of time and place, such as what life and working conditions were like in mining camps, and perhaps even information about marriage and gender roles in the 19th century. Furthermore, when the letter is considered within in a larger collection of family papers, the reader discovers that the correspondence was received after the husband died in a mining accident, and understanding that contextual relationship engenders new thinking about the nature and timing of communication, the art of letter writing, and even perspectives on death and dying in the 19th century. Engaging in research that draws together these broader contextual relationships can move the researcher beyond a predilection for immediacy, and contribute to more holistic and nuanced understandings of cultural and historical change over time.

There are many different kinds of archives and special collections with a variety of collecting priorities. Some preserve the records of parent organizations such as a government body (e.g. the National Archives) or corporate entity (e.g. Microsoft). Others seek materials from private sources because they relate to a specific subject area (e.g. PennDesign Architectural Archives), individual or group of individuals (e.g. African American Slavery Archives), or geographic region (e.g. Huntington Library California Collections). Nearly every academic library has their own archives and special collections program (or programs), and at Western Libraries these are located within the units comprising *Heritage Resources*.

Heritage Resources Units and Collections

Heritage Resources was created in 2010 by bringing together three distinct units – Special Collections (SC), the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies (CPNWS), and University Archives & Records Management (UARM) – to more effectively manage and promote use of Western Libraries' unique holdings in support teaching, learning and research. The three units collect rare books, manuscripts and archival records documenting the culture of Western,

Definitions

- ◆ **Primary sources** are firsthand accounts generated during an event by a direct participant or an eyewitness which are often used to support original research. Primary sources are different from secondary sources (see definition below) which contain information created after an event to explain it to someone else or provide an analysis/interpretation of the event.
- ◆ **Secondary sources** contain information generated after an event to explain, analyze and/or interpret the event and the context in which it happened. Secondary sources are often based on research conducted with primary sources.
- ◆ **Archival materials** are primary sources that are preserved because of their enduring value (often due to the historical or legal significance of the information they contain).

the local community, and the Pacific Northwest region. Special Collections is located on the sixth floor of Wilson Library, and the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies and University Archives and Records Management are located in the Goltz-Murray Archives Building across from Buchanan Towers on south campus.

Center for Pacific Northwest Studies

In 1971, a dedicated group of faculty at Western Washington University established the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies (CPNWS) as an archives and research institute to foster interdisciplinary study and enhance understandings of the region's past and present. CPNWS collects a wide array of material including correspondence, photographs, maps and architectural drawings, and electronic records which describe the region (with a particular focus on Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska) from pre-European contact to the present. CPNWS collections include the papers of prominent families and individuals (e.g. the Larrabees, Gates, Hovanders, and Donovans); business records (e.g. the Pacific American Fisheries and Alaska Packers Association records); materials from local and regional organizations and non-profits (e.g. League of Women Voters, YMCA and YWCA of Whatcom County, and the Bellingham Music Club), historic photographs (e.g. Wallie V. Funk, Galen Biery, and Howard E. Buswell), tribal materials (e.g. oral histories/personal interviews and maps), audio-visual recordings (e.g. film footage from local Bellingham television station KVOS), and much more.

University Archives & Records Management

University Archives & Records Management (UARM) began in the late-1960s with origins in the History Department, and became part of Western Libraries in 1977. As the official repository for the institution, University Archives compiles a record of the significant activities carried out in the fulfillment of Western's mission, dating from 1895 to the present. The Archives seeks records that provide a continuity of evidence of official acts and decisions; ensure Western's accountability to itself and its stakeholders; document the events and people that impact the university's history; and document the scholarly, academic, and cultural life of the university community. Examples of UARM materials include Board of Trustees minutes, records of student activities and clubs (e.g. Ethnic Student Center), athletics (e.g. historic football films and photographs of teams and games), and documentation of Western's built environment (e.g. building and construction plans).

Records Management oversees all university record-keeping to ensure the preservation and accessibility of records for as long as they are needed; guarantee the authenticity, reliability, integrity, and usability of records; and

and establish effective record-keeping practices in compliance with legal requirements, institutional policy, business needs, and community expectations.

Special Collections

Special Collections was created in the late 1990s to acquire and preserve unique intellectual and cultural heritage materials. The Rare Book Collection features books dating back to 1517, illustrated manuscript fragments, and contemporary artists' books. Other strengths of the collection are American and Pacific Northwest history, literature, small press/letterpress, and Asian books. A cuneiform tablet and a Mezuzah scroll were also recently acquired. Numbering over 2200 books, The Fly Fishing Collection concentrates on Americana, and includes work that is literary, technical and artistic. It is one of the largest cataloged fly fishing collections in the country. The Children's Collection includes over 300 pop-up books, rare and historic children's books, the Campus School Collection, and a set of readers and primers that date back to the 1840s. The Western Collection is a collection of publications written by faculty, staff and alumni of Western. The Campus History Collection documents the history of Western's campus through publications and photographs.

Using the Collections

Access: Archives and special collections staff are tasked with preserving records, but we are equally responsible for making those resources accessible for public use. Heritage Resources welcomes all members of the Western community (including faculty, staff, and students), researchers from other institutions, and members of the public to access our collections. We will make our resources available to researchers on equal terms, subject to the appropriate care and handling of materials.

Outreach and Instruction: Our collections provide the foundation for outreach activities by which Heritage Resources furthers the awareness, development and use of its materials. Our outreach efforts include exhibits and displays of resources from the collections; presentations, literary readings, and scholarly talks; and a regular instruction program that involves independent study and internship opportunities, onsite class visits, and specialized, one-on-one research assistance.

Preservation and Security: The physical protection and preservation of Heritage Resources' collections is crucial to the care and maintenance of our unique collections. Due to their format, rarity, value and/or the evidence they contain, our materials are always stored in environmentally-controlled areas and they do not circulate, meaning they cannot be checked out and you will need to access physical materials onsite at our facilities. We also have security measures that we ask all researchers to follow when using our collections. Typically, you will be asked to sign in at reception and lock up/store any coats, backpacks, purses, etc. that you have brought with you. Before visiting, we encourage you to review individual unit websites for information about hours of operation, parking information, and research room rules.

Strategies for Using Resources

Conducting research in archives and special collections takes time and can be more complex than typical research due to the location and arrangement of collections, preservation considerations, and access policies. We want researchers to have a productive and meaningful experience when they visit our facilities, and are happy to help researchers narrow down their topic and find resources relevant to their research. To ensure an optimal research experience, we encourage you to contact our staff well in advance of your visit, communicate as much as you can about your research needs, and don't hesitate to ask us for suggestions and/or referrals.

How to Find Materials

Because of the diversity of archives and special collections, there are myriad ways of finding and accessing information about specific holdings. Although there is no one catalog or database that allows you to search every collection in existence, there are several specific tools that can assist you in finding materials through Heritage Resources.

Finding Aids

In order to access the most detailed information about Heritage Resources' archival materials, researchers will want to explore *finding aids* (detailed guides) to the collections. Finding aids generally include information about the creator of a particular collection (e.g. individual, family, business, organization, government entity, etc.), and an overview of the collection contents and their arrangement (e.g. administrative and/or financial records, correspondence, photographs, etc.). Oftentimes a guide will also contain a detailed inventory or listing of materials (e.g. box, folder and/or other container-specific information). Finding aids are intended to help researchers determine whether certain collections are likely to suit their needs. All three Heritage Resources units have finding aids for *select* archival collections, which you can access through Western Libraries' catalog (OneSearch), individual unit websites and/or Archives West (see below for more information about each discovery platform).

Discovery In-Depth: Heritage Resources Units

Each Heritage Resources unit maintains its own individual website to provide additional, unit-specific information about holdings. The Heritage Resources website provides general information about the mission, history and collecting scope of each unit, independent study and fellowship opportunities, and other resources for teaching & learning with Heritage Resources holdings. The site also links to various search and discovery platforms including OneSearch, Archives West, CPNWS databases, and Western Libraries Digital Collections.

Center for Pacific Northwest
Studies (CPNWS)

Western Libraries
Special Collections

University Archives &
Records Management

The [CPNWS](#) website allows researchers to do a keyword search across all collections as well as within the photograph and/or map catalogs, specifically, and there is also an option to browse an alphabetical listing of collections. All of CPNWS' collections have a corresponding finding aid.

The [Special Collections](#) website provides links to descriptive information about holdings including catalog records in OneSearch, finding aids for archival collections, and transcripts for oral history interviews.

The [UARM](#) website offers general information about University Archives' collection scope, description about the kinds of records in the collections, and links to selected online collections.

OneSearch

OneSearch is the main catalog for Western Libraries, where you can search for item-level description of published materials housed by Heritage Resources (including rare books at Special Collections), and also brief summaries of archival collections. The OneSearch catalog also includes information about holdings at other regional academic libraries. You can use the filters options to search for materials in specific collections and/or at specific Heritage Resources locations.

Archives West

[Archives West](#) is a database containing thousands of finding aids for primary source collections housed at over forty institutions located throughout the Pacific Northwest (including Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, and Washington). This allows researchers interested in local and regional history to search the text of finding aids to discover what individual member repositories have, and what their options are for accessing materials. All three Heritage Resources units have finding aids in this database.

Research Guides

Heritage Resources' staff have compiled several subject-based [research guides](#) to help researchers find and access primary source material relevant to their studies. These guides not only point to material located within Heritage Resources' holdings, but also frequently suggest additional resources that are available elsewhere. These research guides are accessible through Western Libraries' website, the Heritage Resources homepage, and individual unit sites. Topics covered include Aerial Photographs; Civil Rights; Cold War, World War I and World War II; Environmental Activism; Great Depression; LGBTQA+ H(i/er)story; Northwest Native American and Tribal History; Oral Histories; and Women's History.

Western Libraries Digital Collections

Heritage Resources' staff have digitized select archival and special collections material, and made it available online as a [digital collection](#). This digitized content includes selections from the Children's Literature Collection, Galen Biery Collected Photo Albums, Fishtown Collection, Wallie Funk Photographs, Vancouver Expedition Charts and Lithographs, the Western Front (student newspaper) Historic Collection, and more. The digital collections can be accessed through the Western Libraries and Heritage Resources homepages, as well as the individual unit websites.

Other Useful Resources

There are several other databases and websites that may be useful to researchers who are interested in archival, primary source and/or special collections materials.

American History and Life

[America: History and Life](#) is the definitive index of literature covering the history and culture of the United States and Canada, from prehistory to the present. With indexing for 1,700 journals from as far back as 1910, this database is one of the most important bibliographic reference tools for students and scholars of U.S. and Canadian history.

Newspaper Resources

[America's Historical Newspapers](#) contains digital, fully text-searchable facsimiles of 1,000 historic newspapers from every state in the U.S., dating from 1690-1876. [Chronicling America](#) is an excellent digital collection of

select American newspapers hosted by the Library of Congress and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This site features digitized newspapers from 1836 – 1922, including a number of ethnic minority papers. [Historical Newspapers in Washington](#) is a site sponsored by the Washington State Library that gives users electronic access to around 20 Washington newspapers from the turn of the century. Finally, the [New York Times Index Online](#) allows you to search issues of that publication from 1851 to the present.

Making of America

Initially a collaborative effort between [Cornell University](#) and the [University of Michigan](#), this resource provides a thematically-related digital library documenting American social history from the antebellum period through reconstruction. The collection is particularly strong in areas of education, psychology, American history, sociology, religion, and science and technology.

HistoryLink.org

[HistoryLink.org](#) is an evolving online encyclopedia of Washington state and local history. It provides a free, authoritative, and easily accessible history reference for the benefit of students, teachers, journalists, scholars, researchers, and the general public. With a few noted exceptions, all essays and features on this site are original works prepared exclusively for HistoryLink.org by staff historians, contract writers, volunteers, and consulting experts. All essays and features are vetted by professional staff.

Chapter Conclusion: Why is this important to you?

Primary sources allow for original research and conclusions – when you make a connection with primary source material it is your own unique connection – and this can lead to truly innovative research and writing projects. Primary sources can also help cultivate critical thinking skills, such as the ability to find and analyze multiple information sources, consider various viewpoints and biases, and form original conclusions. Working with primary sources requires one to navigate and synthesize large quantities of information from disparate sources, and employ sound reasoning skills in order to solve complex problems. The process of critical analysis involves approaching all information sources with a healthy skepticism, questioning and challenging them, and considering where else one might turn for supplemental, supporting and/or contradictory information. These are essential life-long learning skills which support an informed and just society.

Primary sources are the authentic and original remnants of the past, demonstrating how things used to be, how they have changed, and how different generations have approached life and/or generated their world views. The collections of Heritage Resources contain stories – stories of the university, its students, and its character; stories of those who migrated to and settled in Bellingham and the surrounding counties; stories of the earliest inhabitants of the region we now call the Pacific Northwest; stories of our ancestors, and stories far older. These unique stories come to life through handling, reading, and thinking about our collections, and experiences like these enrich our lives and allow us to connect more deeply to both our past and the present. History and the human experience comes alive through the collections of Heritage Resources.