

Introduction to the Archival Environment in the United States

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COLLEGE OF
INFORMATION
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First Archives in the US

- 1791: First Historical Society in the US: Massachusetts Historical Society (<https://www.masshist.org>)
- 1901: First state archive – Alabama Dept of Archives and History (<http://www.archives.state.al.us/>)
- 1934: Establishment of National Archives and Records Administration (<https://www.archives.gov/>)



National Archives Building



Historic animated GIF of National Archives building, Washington, DC <http://gph.is/2bxKw6c>



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The Society of American Archivists

- Established in 1936
- Professional society with members from all types of archival institutions



Federal Government Archives

- The National Archives manages all records created by the federal government across their lifecycle
- Activities governed by laws including:
 - Federal Records Act of 1950
 - Presidential Records Act of 1978



National Archives and Records Administration

- *Our Mission is to provide public access to Federal Government records in our custody and control. Public access to government records strengthens democracy by allowing Americans to claim their rights of citizenship, hold their government accountable, and understand their history so they can participate more effectively in their government.*



State Government Archives

- Every state and territory of the United States has their own archives
- Function as repositories for state and territorial governments
- These institutions are subject to each state's laws and have different organizational structures.
 - Reflect the decentralized network of state governments



Example: Maryland State Archives



- “The State Archives serves as the central depository for government records of permanent value. Its holdings date from Maryland's founding in 1634, and include colonial and state executive, legislative, and judicial records; county probate, land, and court records; church records; business records; state publications and reports; and special collections of private papers, maps, photographs, and newspapers.”
- <https://msa.maryland.gov/>



University Archives

- Many college and universities maintain their own archival repositories
- These repositories house university records as well as special collections of famous alums and local history



Example: John Hay Library at Brown University



- Houses Special Collections and University Archives
- Holdings include H.P. Lovecraft Collection (early 20th century science fiction writer)
- <https://library.brown.edu/hay/index.php>



Historical Societies and Community Archives

- These organizations are non-governmental institutions that collect and maintain archival materials of local interest for a specialized audience



Example: Maine Historical Society

- The Maine Historical Society is an independent organization which seeks to “preserve the heritage and history of Maine.”
- Not affiliated with a university or state governmental agency
- <http://mainehistory.org>



Corporate Archives

- Some private sector companies use archival and records management techniques to control information in their organizations
- For companies in banking, healthcare



Example: Coca-Cola Archives

- Coca-Cola uses historical materials like advertising to maintain its brand. These materials are managed like an archival collection and used to generate historical exhibits and other projects.
- https://www.instagram.com/coke_archives/



Archival Principles

- **Principle 1: Records in archives possess unique characteristics.**
- **Principle 2: The principle of *respect des fonds* is the basis of archival arrangement and description.**
- **Principle 3: Arrangement involves the identification of groupings within the material.**
- **Principle 4: Description reflects arrangement.**
- **Principle 5: The rules of description apply to all archival materials, regardless of form or medium.**
- **Principle 6: The principles of archival description apply equally to records created by corporate bodies, individuals, or families.**
- **Principle 7: Archival descriptions may be presented at varying levels of detail to produce a variety of outputs.**
- **Principle 8: The creators of archival materials, as well as the materials themselves, must be described.**

Derived from: https://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS/statement_of_principles



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