

## Identifying Risks and Prioritizing Needs

As the reference librarian for Swingate Public Library, you have recently been given sole responsibility for the Local History Room (LHR) collection. The LHR was established in 1940 by a donor with a deep interest in local history. Prior to your appointment to this role, the LHR had never been officially staffed.

Though started primarily as non-circulating published genealogical resources, the collection has grown in an ad hoc manner and now includes an assortment of materials gifted or loaned by current and former Swingate residents, taking up almost 100 linear feet of storage space. New materials often show up out of the blue. Right now, the collection includes:

- 150 bound volumes of published genealogical reference resources. These are in the online public access catalog.
- 40 boxes full of newspapers, of which 35 are state papers, 3 are regional, and 2 are local. Each box holds about 20 newspapers. About half of the newspapers have been transferred out of the cardboard grocery boxes they were originally stored in and rehoused in archival boxes. Mouse droppings were discovered in an around several boxes.
- Approximately 20 linear feet of unprocessed additional material donated by local residents including photographs, negatives (nitrate, acetate, and polyester), news clippings, scrapbooks, open reel audio tapes, letters, textiles, a small collection of stuffed water fowl, etc. During a recent research request, fuzzy mold was found in a shoebox full of photographs from the 1920s. The requestor was the grandson of the original donor. Distressed by the state of the photographs, he has asked for all family materials to be returned to him.
- 15 records cartons representing a collection related to the life of a figure of national political significance. Although she has lost prominence, scholars are currently reevaluating the importance of her contribution to the Suffragist movement. The collection includes the only extant copy of her most famous speech, as well as correspondence with prominent politicians of her day. These boxes are unorganized but include photographs, manuscripts, and ephemera. When opened, an unpleasant smell comes from a box of large negatives in the collection.
- 4 boxes of WWII materials – includes uniforms (one uniform has large, powdery white spots in creases and under lapels), two firearms, a first aid kit, and a loose box of letters folded with their original envelopes.
- 2 highly used photograph albums documenting early homes in Swingate. The pages of the album are falling out, and many photographs have come loose.

The published genealogical materials are highly used and are kept in the reference section of the Library. Newspapers and historic collections are less often used and have been stacked on shelves and on the floor in the LHR.

The library itself was built in 1920 within the floodplain of a large river, and has experienced repeated leaks and minor flooding. The LHR, located in a basement storage room, has been particularly affected by these floods as water seeps in from two spider-webbed ground-level windows.

## **Overcoming Hurdles: Ethics**

We will be considering the ethical questions each of the following four scenarios may bring up for an institution, as well as strategies for addressing those questions.

### *Scenario 1: Dealing with the Past*

Your non-tribal collecting institution has a historic collection of indigenous music recordings. The analog tapes are degrading and there is an opportunity to undertake a mass digitization project for preservation and to provide online access.

Legally, the recordings belong to your institution. However, you know that they were created in the context of colonial extraction and appropriation, and that laws do not provide the means to recognize the indigenous group's rights in relation to the recordings. The recordings may also have cultural, religious, and political meanings that your institution are not aware of.

### *Scenario 2: Collecting in the Now*

Your public collecting institution is interested in collecting social media (e.g. Tweets, YouTube videos) arising from a contemporary social movement, as many important events are being documented by individuals on social media rather than by traditional news outlets.

The movement is decentralized and involves many grassroots organizations, activists, journalists and concerned citizens. Lately, as the movement gains momentum, government and police have been cracking down on protests and those they see as "leaders." There are concerns about surveillance and harassment.

### *Scenario 3: Access to Offensive Materials*

Your library has received a Request for Reconsideration of Library Material from a patron regarding a well-known children's book published decades ago. The book portrays a class of people in way that most contemporary audiences, including your library's review panel, would agree is clearly offensive.

The panel must decide what to do with the book -- keep it on the shelf, restrict access to it somehow, remove it from circulation entirely, or something else.

### *Scenario 4: Community Archives Project*

Your institution is taking part in a community archiving project in collaboration with a community that has been historically under- and mis-represented in archives. Your institution hopes to build a lasting relationship with the community and engage it in preservation and use of the archives.

While the community understands the long-term value of their materials and wants to them to be preserved and accessible, they are also suspicious and wary of the institution. For example, some members of the community may want to scan and digitize their materials but do not necessarily want to deposit them with the institution, allow access, or provide detailed identifying metadata.