

PRESERVING SOUTH CAROLINA'S PAST

The importance of family papers

Your family's history is important to you. Just as a person without memory is functionally impaired, so too is a family without a link to its past. To a large degree, your family's memory lies in its papers and records — the original letters, diaries, photographs, certificates, and other documents that you and your relatives have produced and collected over the years. These materials give vital and unique testimony to the life and achievements of your family.

Your family's history may be important to your community, too. Whether or not members of your family attained a degree of fame, they have shared in the heritage of a certain place and time. Your family's papers, then, can also be part of your community's collective memory.

Most of us lack the resources or expertise to properly preserve our family papers. Fortunately, there are over one-hundred archival repositories in South Carolina that are in the business of preserving historical records: your local, county, and state historical societies, libraries, museums, and universities. These professional institutions are stewards of South Carolina's past.

archival repository can provide the records with environmentally controlled storage, freeing up your home space. It can safeguard the records by overseeing their handling and use. More importantly, it can give both you and the scholarly public research access to the valuable information the records contain. By placing your family's papers in an archival repository, you take an important step toward their preservation, and you ensure that the memories they contain will be kept alive.



PLACING YOUR Family Papers IN AN Archival Repository

SC State Historical Records Advisory Board



What can an archival repository do for you?

An archival repository is a place where historically-significant documents are housed and cared for. If your family's papers are deemed appropriate for an archival collection, you stand to benefit. An

What documents are suited to an archival repository?

Many of the materials produced or collected by a family are significant — but some are more sentimental than historical and will have value only to the family itself. An archival repository is interested in the documents of enduring historical significance, those that best speak of the heritage of the family and community. Of interest here are not only the public and private triumphs and successes but also evidence of all aspects of daily life and of endurance in adversity. Some of these documents may include:

- Announcements ♦ Architectural records
- Audio recordings ♦ Autobiographies and memoirs
- Awards ♦ Certificates ♦ Clippings
- Correspondence ♦ Diaries ♦ Drawings
- Financial records ♦ Interviews ♦ Legal documents
- Letters ♦ Maps ♦ Memorandums

Motion picture film and videotape ♦ Notebooks
Organization/institution records (such as
business, social/professional, religious)
Pamphlets, brochures, flyers, etc. ♦ Photographs
Scrapbooks ♦ Subject files ♦ Telegrams
Writings (stories, poems, etc.)

How does an archival repository operate?

An archival repository is run by people whose first priority is the preservation of historical materials. In every way they can, they want to help you preserve your family's papers, no matter where they are housed. They can discuss with you the historical significance of your papers, further explain the benefits of donating them to an archival repository, and advise you on which repository would be best for your papers. In addition, the staff will be responsible for the care of the records and will continue to work with you as you use the papers or discover more material to donate.



Feel free to contact an archival repository — your local or state historical society, library, museum, or university — for details on its operations. To locate an archival repository in your vicinity or elsewhere in the state, consult the online South Carolina directory of archival repositories at www.state.sc.us/scdah/repository/repositories.htm. You will see that some of the repositories in the directory, notably the SC Department of Archives

and History, collect only government, not family and other non-government, records. Keep in mind that services for donors and researchers alike, including hours of operation, staffing, and budgets for preserving and processing papers, vary from institution to institution. Here are a few other general points:

- ◆ An archival repository operates a great deal like other businesses in that it cannot invest materials and labor in the preservation of items it does not own. Lack of ownership can severely restrict its control over a collection of records and thus its ability to care for it. It is in the best interests of both donor and repository that the repository is given ownership of the papers through a deed of gift. Deeding the papers to the repository also avoids the possibility of any legal questions regarding the ownership of material left on deposit indefinitely.
- ◆ Most South Carolina archival repositories have significant backlogs of papers to process for research use. As a result, while an archival repository is able to preserve your family papers when it receives them, it may be months or even years before it can fully process those papers to make them available for research.
- ◆ The primary goal of an archival repository is to preserve your family's records as an historical resource and make the information in them accessible to researchers. A repository may not be able to promise that donated materials will be placed on exhibit or used in some other public venue. Such decisions often depend on the institution's schedule of programs, which are usually planned in advance.
- ◆ While donations to a non-profit archival repository are tax deductible, the repository itself can neither give monetary appraisals of donated materials for tax purposes nor recommend an appraiser. Such practices could be viewed as a conflict of interest. You may expect the repository to fully cooperate with an appraiser of your choice, however, by providing access to the donation.



- ◆ Archival repository staff can best assist you if you make an appointment. This will enable them to plan their schedules to give you their undivided attention. Some repositories may not have regular visiting hours, and some may require appointments to use the collections.
- ◆ It is best to consult with the archival repository's staff before you make a donation. The list in this publication can help you identify what materials are most worthy for donation, but you should let archival repository staff members review all your material rather than selecting items for donation or for discarding yourself.
- ◆ An archival repository maintains and enforces policies on access and use of its collection. These policies exist for the protection of all materials in its care, including your family papers.

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To contact the SC SHRAB for further information:

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www.state.sc.us/scdah/shrab/shrab1.htm