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Chester County Historical Society Library Reflection

I found that my time at the Chester County Historical Society provided an enlightening learning experience of a special library setting and the Chester County community. In addition, I felt the work I performed had value in preserving the history of Chester County. From my years of experience in college, I noticed that only so much can be learned in the classroom and I knew I needed more exposure to the kinds of preservation work that professionals undertake in history-related fields. Thus, I began volunteering at the Chester County Historical Society (CCHS) in advance to experience this conservation work myself. From this volunteer experience at Chester County Historical Society, I became fascinated with the functions of record keeping and reference at the library. Thus, I pursued an internship to learn more about special libraries, archives, and the historical societies themselves.

Working in the archives gave me a great set of skills to use in the near future once I leave school. I learned about creating finding aids and formatting them according to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS). Additionally, I learned about processing manuscript collections, taking inventory, and archival theories and practice. I did not just learn about the history of Chester County, but how it was collected and what that memory means to both residents and researchers. Every day I when I was present, researchers came to the library interested in doing genealogy or property research. Thus, I realized how important historical societies are to our visitors.

From May 15th to August 5th, I worked on a few major projects. Sometimes I helped with email research inquiries, the reference desk to assist researchers in their request for information

on their topic, or shelving materials away using the Library of Congress classification system. In addition, I became acquainted with the literature surrounding archival practice and theory that include Dennis Meissner and Mark Greene 's *More Product, Less Process*, T.R. Schellenburg's *Archival Principles of Arrangement*, and Terry Cook's *What is Past is Prologue*. However, I mostly focused on cataloguing three manuscript collections: The Greeting Cards Collection, The Arthur E. James Collection, and The Henry Pleasants Jr. Collection.

Collection development consisted of processing, inventorying, and writing finding aids. Processing involved a series of steps that follow first by finding out and understanding the contents of the collection, coming up with a plan for its organization, and following that plan to its completion. The next stage of involved in inventorying the manuscript collection and writing the finding aid. The finding aid had to follow the DACS and provide a detailed record of the manuscripts that describe its history, scope of materials, arrangement, and the collection's entire content. Finally, I uploaded the finding aids onto the CCHS website and created a print version for the library. Effectively, I created metadata by providing a crucial resource and information for researchers in their pursuits and easier access to those manuscripts. By doing this, I gained a major understanding of the day-to-day work archivists and historians undertake to preserve records of the past and how they will be used in a library setting.

With these three projects, I discovered that each project had different demands and requirements. The Greeting Cards Collection had a preexisting organization structure, the Arthur E. James Collection unexpectedly grew substantially over time due to the unforeseen discovery of new records, and the Henry Pleasant Jr. Collection came from several different places in the archives that demonstrated conflicts of origin. In all of these projects, I confronted these challenges and came up with viable organizational systems, along with adapting these solutions

into their finding aids. A volunteer or librarian put some work into many of these projects and shelved them away completely uncatalogued for years before I became involved. Some items in those collections played a significantly different role in their collection development. For example, a labeled map of Chester County in the Paper Mill Series served a much bigger role in organizing the Arthur E. James Collection than a folder of greeting cards from the 1970s in the Greeting Cards Collection. However, the greetings cards themselves contained in much larger quantities told a narrative of industrialization, from the love letter format of Valentine Cards in the 1790s to the wide variety of mass produced greeting cards in the 1970s. Regardless, I found it amazing to go through each box's content and discover their connections to the collection itself, along with using this connection to successfully organize these records. In addition, I found it satisfying to know that, without my help, these important records would still be disorganized or unknown on the shelf, inaccessible for anyone to use. Through the processing of records with these projects, I learned a lot from cataloging and creating finding aids online, not to mention the research I conducted to document these manuscripts adequately.

On top of performing work in a special library setting, I unexpectedly learned a great deal about creating websites. Indeed, as part of my final project, I used Wordpress to document and showcase the work I performed at CCHS. As a result, this website served as a portfolio for my final products, containing finding aids, detailed descriptions of my work, and pictures that visualize the whole process from beginning to the end of the projects. In addition, the blog posts I made served as personal reflections and writings about what I did during the internship. With these purposes in mind, I generated a significant amount of content with this website and learned the basics of coding websites with HTML and CSS. In addition, I became involved posting

content using Drupal. As a result, this internship gave me very useful skills to use in the future in this digital age.

Looking back now, I believe the internship proved very rewarding and I learned so much about working in special libraries and managing websites. It is also satisfying to know all of the work I have done for CCHS and what they have done for me in return. I must thank Jasmine, the librarian and archivist for taking me in and showing how special libraries work, Margery and Pam, the assistant librarian and the photo archivist respectively for their assistance and guidance, and all of the volunteers for helping me out when they could. I will always greatly appreciate my time at Chester County Historical Society, as I am sure the skills I learned will be put to good use for many years to come.