

Preparing personal archival records prior to donation

At some time of life, most of us find ourselves sorting and packing up the papers and memorabilia we have kept or created ourselves, or that someone else in our family or circle of friends has created or kept over the years.

Where do we start? What can we discard? What is worth keeping? Is it likely to be of continuing value to South Australians now or in the future? Where might we donate them? Who do we contact? This fact sheet attempts to provide some practical answers to these questions.

What are archival records?

Archives are records that were made or accumulated in the course of everyday living by individuals, families, societies or businesses and are considered worthy of preservation for the future because of their continuing value. Archives are unique records that provide evidence of their creator's thoughts, beliefs and actions at the time and throw light on how and why they acted as they did. They are mainly paper records such as letters, diaries, journals, documents, but include photographs, films, video recordings, sound recordings, oral histories, maps, architectural plans, posters, artworks and computer discs.

Information about the [archival collections](#) of the State Library of South Australia, can be obtained online from the Library's web page: www.slsa.sa.gov.au Select 'Quick Links', then 'State Library A-Z', and 'Archival Collections'.

Where do we start?

It helps to look at the personal papers and memorabilia as a whole. Have the records been kept in an organized way? Organized records may be housed in filing cabinets, labeled boxes and shelves, in a special room or study. Correspondence may be filed or bundled in alphabetical or date order and photographs may be organized into albums.

With organized records, the golden rule is to MAINTAIN THE ORIGINAL ORDER. If you have to pack the records up, keep to the original sequence and label each box for example: 'Correspondence 1945-1950: Box 1/10', 'Correspondence 1951-1960: Box 2/10', 'Photographs Box 3/10', 'Photographs Box 4/10', etc.' (assuming you pack 10 boxes).

Sometimes personal records are scattered throughout a home in no obvious order. Others have been shifted, repacked and rearranged several times and any original order has long been lost. How can you create order out of chaos? You could start by bringing like things together to create series. Series consist of records sharing the same provenance (founder, creator or collector), which have been kept together, have resulted from the same activity or interest, or have a similar format. For example you could bring together:

- **Correspondence**

Keep bundles of letters, telegrams, etc intact. Keep inserts in letters (like cuttings, small photos, memorabilia) in their place. Keep letters in their original stamped envelopes if possible. These may provide dates and locations. (We can return the stamped envelopes later if you wish).

Box the correspondence together. Label the box 'Correspondence' and provide a date range if known, e.g. 'Correspondence 1945-1950'. If you know what the correspondence is about,

make a note on A4 size paper to insert at the front of the box. Transcriptions of handwritten correspondence, typescripts or disks, are useful.

- **Diaries, journals**

Box these together in date order. Label the box 'Diaries' or 'Journals' and provide the date range. It is useful to provide a brief description of the contents (e.g. diary of a trip to Yorke Peninsula 1935, school diaries 1910-1920, war diaries 1939-1945, personal diaries).

Transcriptions of original handwritten diaries are also useful for researchers, particularly as typescripts or on disk.

- **Other documents**

Documents such as awards and certificates, valedictories and personal references.

Family papers, such as original birth, death, marriage certificates, naturalization papers, original family history research.

Papers relating to a person's career, occupation, involvement in clubs and organizations, war service and associated realia (e.g. war medals)

Label these boxes 'PERSONAL PAPERS' and number the boxes as with the correspondence.

- **Large paper records (maps, plans, awards, large documents)**

Preferably keep them flat. If this is not possible, then provided they have not been stiffened or mounted, you could roll them loosely and tie with a ribbon.

Cylinders provide support if maps are rolled around them.

If outsize items are already folded, refold them the same way, for the time being.

Make a label by listing the contents on a separate sheet of paper and keep this with the item, so it can be easily identified.

- **Framed works**

In most cases, once framed or mounted items have been accepted for adding to the Library's collections, the frames & glass will be removed by Library staff and the items will receive conservation treatment and storage. You can request that the frames be returned to you.

- **Artworks, prints, paintings, posters**

Make a list of any artworks by South Australian artists. Regardless of artistic merit, those of most interest for historical research, depict South Australian people, activities or events, and contain identifiable landmarks such as buildings and townscapes. Keep artworks away from direct sunlight.

- **Photographs**

Bring photographs, negatives and albums together. Original photographs are preferred.

The Library may prefer to copy from negatives, where the originals are not donated.

All formats of photography including glass plate negatives, daguerreotypes, opalotypes, etc. can be handled by the Library. Keep photographs in place in original albums.

Try to provide captions and dates for any loose photographs, lacking captions. Captions make the images more useful for research and usually provide the location, names of people and places, descriptions of any activity occurring, the photographer's name and the date (or approximate date) the photograph was taken (the rule of thumb for captions is 'WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE')

Keep photographs and negatives out of direct sunlight. Remove any duplicate photoprints. Box and label 'PHOTOGRAPHS'.

- **Digital photographs**
With the popularity of digital cameras, more images are 'born digital'. Information about [digital images](#) is available from the Library's web page under 'Copying Services and Charges' and 'Copying from digitized Pictorial Collections'. The Library's preferred image standards are: 300 dpi; actual size or 3000x2000pixels; 6mb greyscale or 18mb colour. Images can be provided as TIFF or JPG files.
- **Films, video recordings, sound recordings**
Original formats are always preferred and the Library may provide reformatted copies to donors as appropriate. The Library can handle all formats including 8mm, 9.5mm, 16mm, and 35mm film and video recordings including obsolete formats such as Umatic tape.
Further advice can be obtained from the Audiovisual Librarian on Telephone 8207 7261 Fax 8207 7307 Email: mcdade.rob@slsa.sa.gov.au
- **Oral histories**
The Fact Sheet 'Oral History' provides information. This can be obtained online from the Library's web page: www.slsa.sa.gov.au Select 'Quick Links' then 'State Library A-Z', then 'Collections' and then 'Oral History'.
For further advice regarding oral histories, such as tape or digital recordings of interviews, please contact the Archival Field Officer (Oral History)
Telephone (08) 8207 7260 Fax (08) 8207 7307 Email: edwards.june@slsa.sa.gov.au
- **Realia (including medals, badges, stickpins, trophies)**
Realia and other artefacts may be accepted for the archival collections where they support documentary records. Keep realia with the personal papers they relate to, e.g. keep war service medals with related war service documents. If you know the significance of a particular item, please make a note on a sheet of paper and keep this with the item. Otherwise, box the realia together and label as 'REALIA'.
- **Box lists**
Once you have completed sorting the personal records into categories (or series) as suggested above, you might like to create box lists for them. This is simply a list of the contents of a particular box in order from front to back. Create a list on a sheet of paper and insert it in the front of each box. A copy of all your box lists may prove useful if you discuss the personal records with an archivist. It also provides a record of what has been given to the Library.

What can we discard?

The following can generally be discarded, however if you are in any doubt, keep the item and seek advice.

Duplicates in any format, as the original is preferred.

Photos of very poor quality (e.g. dark, out of focus, faded, torn), unless they are the only image of a person or unique event.

Photos which lack captions, and for which you and your family cannot identify the people, places or dates (unless the images are exceptional in quality and are definitely South Australian)

Photocopies of original documents (except where the original document is not held), as the originals have an historical integrity lacking in copies

Incomplete or scrappy notes, such as shopping lists, and copies of other people's poems, recipes, etc.

Christmas cards, greeting cards, birthday cards, etc, where they are mass produced, only have a basic greeting inside, and were not published in South Australia. (There are exceptions: some cards bear interesting newsy letters, particularly those sent at war time, others are fine examples and may have been handmade with silk or handpainted.)
Unused items, such as notebooks, exercise books, letterhead, ledgers.
Badly damaged materials, which are mouldy, insect damaged, or where pages are stuck together (unless you believe they may be of significance. In this case, seek advice before discarding).

What is worth keeping?

The person who accumulated the records thought they were worth keeping and so does the family. Has there been any interest from the local community? Have historians or researchers asked for permission to use the records? This would be a strong indication that the records are of value for research. Perhaps nobody outside the family knows about the records. The Library always welcomes the opportunity to appraise your records (see below for how to contact the Archival Field Officers).

What is likely to be of value to SA?

This is a question addressed by the State Library's Collection Development Policy, as all archival donations, including additions to existing holdings, are subject to appraisal in accordance with the Library's Collection Development Policy.

Collection Development Policy

The State Library of South Australia collects archival material relating to South Australia and South Australians. The aim is to create a comprehensive and representative collection of unpublished records about South Australia, which are worthy of preservation for the future because of their continuing value.

At present, papers of individuals and families do not represent a true cross-section of society, so attention will be given to records reflecting Aboriginal and migrant experience and ethnically-based communities. Papers of workers, especially women and contemporary youth, and twentieth-century diaries, are priority areas for collection.

Appraisal

The appraisal process is at the heart of collection development for all categories of archival material. It establishes the archival values of records, for example evidential, legal, informational and historical, and determines whether these meet criteria for permanent preservation. Archival records may require significant specialist assessment, arrangement and description to make them accessible. Archival records may also require conservation, re-housing and considerable storage space. These factors are considered in assessing records offered to the library.

Where might we donate them?

Personal (private) records of South Australians are appraised for the archival collections of the State Library of South Australia. The State Library does not collect official government or municipal records. For these you should contact [State Records of South Australia](#) on (08) 8226 7750 or visit their website at <http://www.archives.sa.gov.au>

For Commonwealth records, please contact the Adelaide branch of [National Archives of Australia](#) on (08) 8409 8400 or visit their website at <http://www.naa.gov.au>

Records of largely local significance may be more appropriately deposited with a Local History Collection, Historical Society, National Trust or regional archives.

Who do we contact?

Please contact the Archival Field Officers on Telephone (08) 8207 7260 Fax (08) 8207 7307 Email: honey.diana@slsa.sa.gov.au or edwards.june@slsa.sa.gov.au The Archival Field Officers can also discuss donations under the Cultural Gifts or Philanthropy Programs.

Further information can be obtained from the Library Fact Sheet '[Donating material to the Library](#)'. This is available in hard copy (ask staff at Reference Desk) or from the Library's web page at www.slsa.sa.gov.au Select 'Quick Links', 'Library Fact Sheets', 'General Information', 'Donating material to the Library'.

Published materials

For books and other published items (e.g. pamphlets, newsletters), contact the Collection Development Team on Telephone (08) 8207 7362 or by Fax (08) 8207 7307 or Email: markham.di@slsa.sa.gov.au

For ephemera (such as greeting cards, invitations, programs, menus, calendars, art catalogues, wine labels), contact a Heritage Collection Development Librarian. Telephone (08) 8207 7281 or Fax (08) 8207 7307 or Email hocking.joanne@slsa.sa.gov.au

For further information

Library visitors Request assistance from Customer Service staff at the Information Desk

Telephone enquiry service (08) 8207 7250 **TTY** (08) 8297 7251 **Toll Free** 1800 182 013

Facsimile Fax an enquiry to Research Services (08) 8207 7247

Letter Write to Research Services, State Library of SA, GPO Box 419, Adelaide SA 5001

Online Submit an online enquiry form to Research Services via www.slsa.sa.gov.au/ask_us

Email Send an email to info@slsa.sa.gov.au

Internet Visit the State Library website at www.slsa.sa.gov.au