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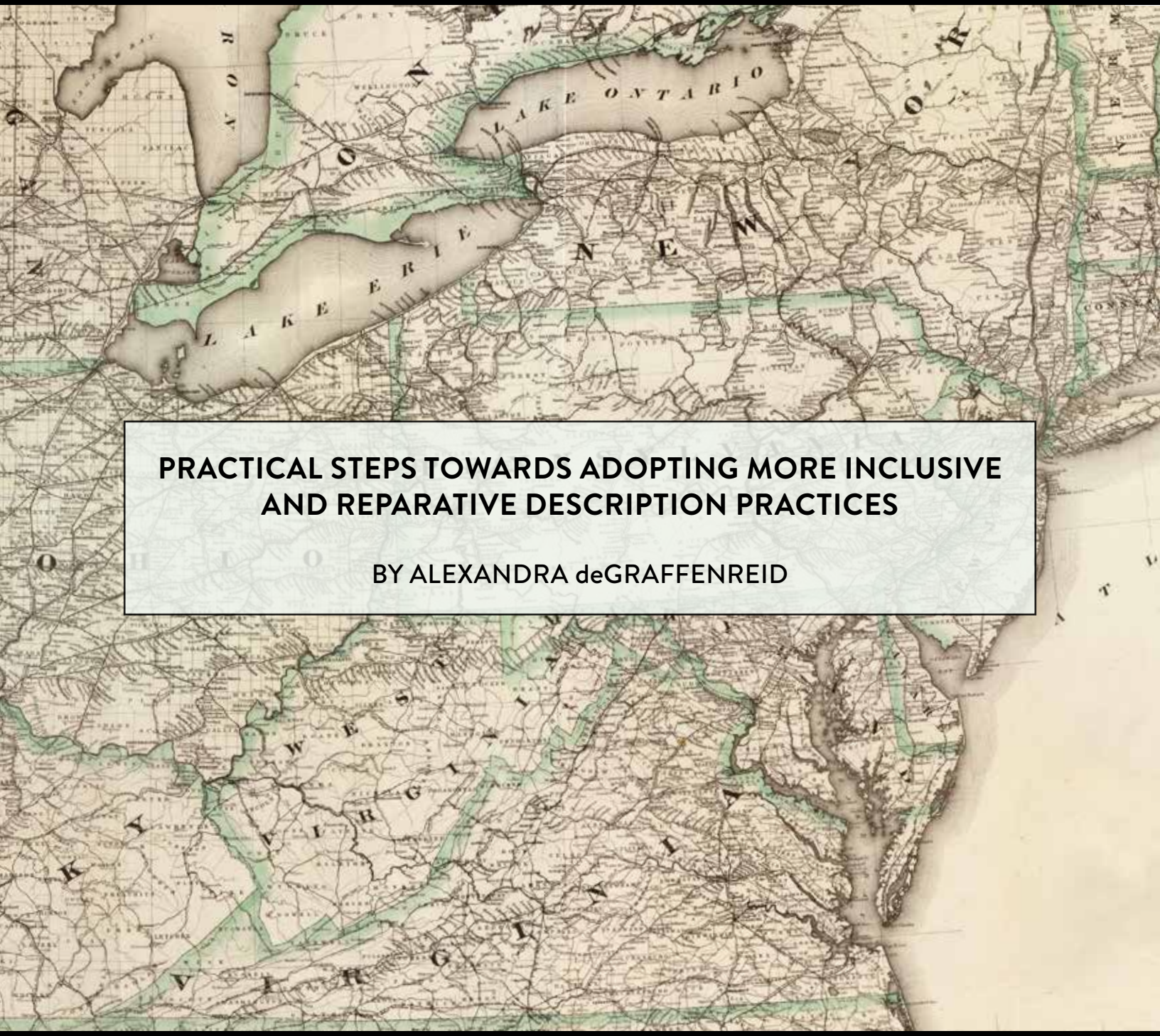

PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS ADOPTING MORE INCLUSIVE AND REPARATIVE DESCRIPTION PRACTICES

BY ALEXANDRA deGRAFFENREID

General Information

(eISSN: 2834-3867) is a double-blind, peer-reviewed publication consisting of member-authored guides, which provide practical instruction for specific archival tasks not commonly addressed in the professional literature. The entire run of the publication—from 1989 to the present—including content published with its previous title, *MARAC Technical Leaflet Series*, is online at marac.info/the-practical-archivist.

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About the Cover

Each issue of *The Practical Archivist* features a portion of the following map, courtesy of the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division: G.W. & C.B. Colton & Co, and Pennsylvania Railroad. *Railroad map of Pennsylvania Company showing the Pennsylvania Railroad, Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago Railway, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and St. Louis Railway, and their connecting eastern and western lines*. New York, 1871. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/98688764.

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Abstract

Implementing reparative or more inclusive description practices can seem intimidating for archival professionals beginning to think about potential projects. The perpetuation of obfuscating, offensive, and racist language is abundant in archival collections, leading to what Bergis Jules referred to as a "failure of care" towards the communities represented by insufficient and offensive description. Due to this failure, choosing where and how to start implementing reparative description practices is daunting. Comprehensively undertaking reparative practices may be impractical or impossible given an institution's current constraints. However, taking achievable steps to implement more inclusive description practices within current priorities and limitations is a step towards doing better and building a more robust reparative praxis. In compiling existing resources and recommendations on reparative archival description, this resource provides archival practitioners with feasible guidance on more inclusive description practices that can be implemented during accessioning and processing, and in reparative description projects.

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In Memoriam: Thomas P. Wilsted

This inaugural issue of *The Practical Archivist*, which is the revised and renamed *MARAC Technical Leaflet Series* published from 1989 through 2022, is dedicated in memory of Thomas P. Wilsted (1943–2024). The Editorial Board of *The Practical Archivist* would like to formally acknowledge the numerous, long-standing contributions Tom Wilsted made to the archives profession and especially to the archival literature.

In addition to being honored as a Society of American Archivists (SAA) Distinguished Fellow in 2008, Wilsted wrote one of MARAC's first technical leaflets entitled "Computing the Total Cost of Archival Processing," No. 2 (1989). During his career, he authored several books, including *Managing Archives and Manuscripts Repositories* (SAA, 1991), which won SAA's Waldo Leland Gifford Prize and MARAC's Arline Custer Award. In 2007, Wilsted wrote *Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities*; and in 2009, he co-edited *Archival and Special Collections Facilities: Guidelines for Archivists, Librarians, Architects and Engineers*, both of which were published by SAA. We hope Tom would be pleased to know that this publication has endured since 1989 and has evolved into a peer-reviewed publication offering a voice and a venue for new and emerging archivists in the Mid-Atlantic region.

— Written by Heidi Abbey Moyer, who worked directly with Tom Wisted from 2000–2006 when he was the Director of the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT.

Introduction

The need for reparative archival description emerged as a prominent thread in the archival discourse within the last several years. Since 2018, guides, presentations, recommendations, and reparative description projects have been released to provide processors with best practices for engaging in reparative description work (please see Appendices A-E for selected resources). Archival practitioners intending to implement reparative description practices should focus on elevating voices as much as repairing harmful legacy practices. Those creating description should not merely address painful and racist language, but should seek ways to elevate the excellence, joy, and successes of underrepresented persons and their communities. Wherever possible, this should be done in collaboration with the communities and donors whose perspectives and histories are represented within collections. In addition, archival workers must embrace the ambiguity and iterative nature of reparative description, as every community is a multitude of diverse interests, preferences, and needs.

This document is intended to serve as a compilation of existing resources that provide practitioners with practical and achievable guidance towards implementing more inclusive description practices. It is also intended to provide advice on creating and compiling more respectful, inclusive archival description for newly accessioned archival collections moving forward by offering guidance and resources for repositories of all sizes and types to begin implementing these practices within their unique contexts. However, it is not intended to be the authoritative manual on such practices. Core to the idea of reparative practices is iteration and the awareness that language and community preferences are diverse and may change. Although this document provides recommendations and resources for reparative and inclusive practices, it may not meet the needs of every collection or community. However, it attempts to help archival practitioners enact a more person- and empathy-centered praxis.

Author Positionality

At the time of writing, the author was a tenure-track Assistant Librarian at The Pennsylvania State University Libraries where she managed a collection of approximately 50,000 linear feet of material and more than 200,000 volumes as well as a small team of library faculty, staff, and students. This team is responsible for stewarding all accessioning, processing, and collection management for the Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State. At the time of revisions, she worked for Princeton University Libraries Special Collections where she manages a larger team responsible for collections stewardship and archival description. Although she is the bilingual granddaughter of a Central American immigrant, she presents as white and benefits from the privileges of this status. She therefore identifies herself as ethnically white. She wishes to acknowledge the many practitioners and theorists who have helped to shape ethical description practices and inform this guide, including Dorothy Berry, Kelly Bolding, Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, Jackie Dean, Tamar Evangelista-Dougherty, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, Bergis Jules, K.J. Rawson, Tonia Sutherland, Jessica Tai, Stacy Wood, and many others.

Definitions

- **Reparative description:** "remediation of practices or data that exclude, silence, harm, or mischaracterize marginalized people in the data created or used by archival professionals to identify or characterize archival resources" (as defined by the Society of American Archivists).[1]
- **Inclusion:** "an environment that offers affirmation, celebration, and appreciation of different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences, thus allowing all individuals to bring in their whole selves (and all of their identities) and to demonstrate their strengths and capacity" (as defined by the American Psychological Association).[2]
- **Inclusive language:** "acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to

differences, and promotes equal opportunities" (as defined by the Linguistic Society of America).[3]

- **Inclusive description:** archival description that acknowledges the diversity of linguistic uses and preferences, is respectful towards communities and peoples from all backgrounds, and promotes the accessibility and discoverability of archival resources by and about marginalized people. While reparative description seeks to remediate past practices and data, inclusive description expands on that work by looking forward to creating descriptions for newly accessioned or processed collections (as defined colloquially by the author).[4]

General Principles and Considerations

Considering the Influence and Impact of Descriptive Choices

Archival professionals must first accept the inherent subjectivity and impact of archival labor on researchers' ability to discover and interact with collections. The work of archiving is a series of active choices: to acquire, to accession, to describe (and to what extent), to digitize, etc. All of these choices shape collections and each choice is a manifestation of power by the archivist.[5] This power is not inherently negative; however, acknowledging and accepting the ways in which practitioners shape and influence collections is a necessary step towards implementing more inclusive workflows. As every action (or inaction) by archival workers is an expression of power, such actions can either perpetuate harm and exclusion or work to elevate marginalized voices within their collections at every stage of the archival lifecycle. Using imprecise or mitigative language when approaching painful topics, perpetuating harmful or marginalizing terminology, or incorporating euphemistic language that obscures identities are not passive acts of neutral decision-making: they are active, subjective descriptive choices.

FIGURE 1. *Collection of racist greeting cards* finding aid.[6]

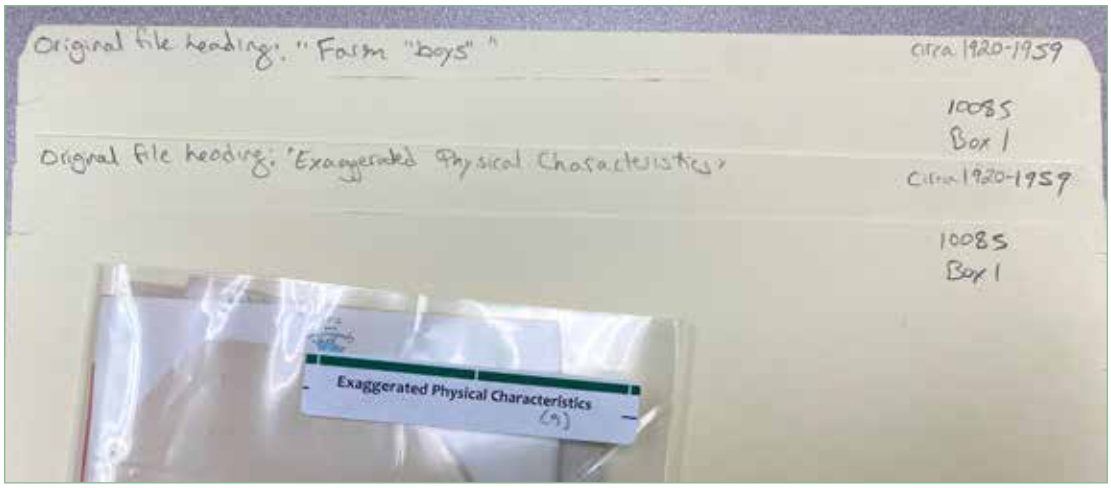


FIGURE 2. Sample *Collection of racist greeting cards* folders featuring original file heading note.

These decisions are layered and conditional. Archival work is subjective, and decisions made for one collection may not be the best decision for another. For example, in processing a collection of racist greeting cards at Penn State, the processing archivist discovered that the original collector had organized the cards into intellectual groupings. However, these intellectual groupings perpetuated racist stereotypes and used racist language. The processing archivist discussed three potential actions with the curator: 1) transcribe the original file headings "as-is" in the finding aid, 2) modernize the file headings to not perpetuate the most racist language, or 3) maintain the original file headings on the folders using "Original file heading: [original

title]" but describe the materials at a collection level (meaning the collection in its entirety without further detail of folder or item listings) so as to not perpetuate the racist language while using a content warning for the material. Ultimately, the archivists chose the third option in order to simultaneously preserve original order and provenance and minimize future harm to researchers encountering the material.

This example demonstrates the inherent subjectivity of archival decision making. All stages of a collection's lifecycle, from acquisition through processing, carry a series of potential choices. Archival practitioners must understand that part of electing to undertake more inclusive description means accepting and embracing the fact that their actions have consequences, whether for the benefit or detriment of potential users. Rather than adopting an illusion of neutrality that affirms dominant worldviews, archival practitioners should recenter archival description around respect and care for creators, communities, and potential researchers.[7] An ethic of respect and care is variable with the needs and preferences of each community. It decenters a Eurocentric, heteronormative perspective towards privileging the identities and expertise of marginalized persons. Centering care and respect also creates *better, more accessible* access points, as doing so gives preference to the current language most likely to be used by researchers from these communities and exposes collections to a broader audience.

When implementing more inclusive and/or reparative practices, archival professionals should consider the following questions:

- Whose experiences are included in archival description? Whose experiences are being excluded? Whose perspectives should be elevated?
- Who may be harmed by archival description (or the lack thereof)?
- How (and in what ways) has archival description excluded or failed marginalized experiences?
- How can archival professionals combat the historic and ongoing absence, erasure, and symbolic annihilation of diverse and under-represented communities?
- How can archival professionals interrupt or discontinue practices that perpetuate ableist, homophobic, patriarchal, racist, and/or sexist language which may be painful for researchers to interact with or difficult to successfully navigate?
- Who has given consent to be included in archival records and who has not? Would those represented within the records have been aware that these materials may be publicly available? Is there an expectation or a need for privacy?
- How were records created, maintained, and transferred to the archives? How does that context impact the understanding and interpretation of those records?

This document is not intended to dictate archival practice, but rather to assist archival practitioners with embracing where the work requires a nuanced, thoughtful approach. Instead of reverting to legacy practices or an invisible default, practitioners should think critically about their decisions and actions as well as potential impacts on researchers' abilities to discover or engage with collections.

Cultural Humility and Archivist Positionality

In 2020, Jessica Tai introduced the concept of "cultural humility" to the archival literature.[8] Tai proposes moving beyond the idea of cultural competence into acknowledging that complete competency in all cultures is impossible. This would result in the normalization of "not knowing," and therefore, encourages space for the expertise and voices of others to have authority.[9] This approach is multidimensional and iterative, outlined by Tai using the following tenets: "1) lifelong learning and critical self-reflection, 2) recognizing and challenging power imbalances, and 3) institutional accountability."[10] When archival professionals embrace a framework of cultural humility, they decenter the archivist as expert, allowing for more practices that center underrepresented voices and perspectives in archives.

As part of this framework, archivists should consider how their own positionality affects their work. Positionality is a concept "that gender, race, class, and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational *positions* rather than essential qualities."[11] An archivist's identity, beliefs, lived experiences, and training will impact how they approach a collection. This approach may be different from another colleague with a different background and experiences. Reflecting on one's own positionality helps a processor to decenter their own expertise and embrace alternative ways of thinking. Considering one's own positionality is key to embracing a framework of cultural humility. When approaching collections, practitioners should consider the following questions:

- What about my background and experiences informs or impacts how I am seeing and interpreting this collection?
- What do I not know (or know) about the people or community involved?
- Is there cultural context that is key to understanding this collection? Am I lacking the cultural knowledge necessary to best understand it?
- Is there cultural context that researchers will need to best understand the collection?
- What resources exist to help me more ethically describe these materials?
- Are there silences or gaps inherent in this collection and are those silences intentional? Should they be highlighted or acknowledged?

Researching the history of creators and their historical moments is part of the processing workflow. However, in reparative or inclusive description projects, this research may extend more deeply into community-driven vocabularies or seeking input from the creator, donor, loved ones, members of their community, or others whose stories may be present in a collection. The key towards a reparative praxis—particularly where marginalized stories were peripherally captured through the recordkeeping practices of dominant and/or oppressive groups—is seeking knowledge from external expertise via members of the communities whose histories are present in the materials. This is one way to better recognize antiquated practices and make collections more discoverable by those whose histories are represented within them.

Agency, Identity, and Naming

The names and words used by collection creators and records subjects to identify themselves must be respected. There is power in this ability to choose one's own self-identification. Respecting this power both recognizes the agency of persons in their own lives, but also provides insight to historians and researchers about those creators and subjects. Archival practitioners must remember to center the humanity of records creators, donors, and subjects throughout archival workflows.[12] Within archival description, one method to achieve this is by utilizing person-first language (language that highlights the person before their identity or disability, such as "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person") when describing a person's identities and actions where appropriate.[13] However, it is important to understand that no community is monolithic and that marginalized groups and communities have significant diversity. Chosen terms and identities may vary between creators, or even for a single creator, over the course of their entire lifetime. As language changes over time, terms may become antiquated or offensive while legacy slurs may be reclaimed and become widely used. Decisions made to balance creator agency, community preferences, mitigate potential harms, and implement reparative practices may not work for every collection or be satisfactory to every potential researcher. Each collection requires individual consideration to balance the needs of creators, custodians, and researchers. Wherever possible, consult directly with creators, donors, expert scholars, and community members to determine the most appropriate language to use when describing materials.

As one example, respecting an individual's agency and identity can be more challenging

for collections documenting LGBTQIA+ persons and their relationships. The history of stigmatization, criminalization, violence, and oppression of LGBTQIA+ persons and communities has resulted in their voices being underrepresented and excluded from archives. Archival and historical practice compounded this exclusion through descriptive practices which perpetuated silences, such as using coded or euphemistic language to discuss queer relationships or through not acknowledging the likely queer identities of collections creators, making such collections difficult or impossible for researchers to identify. When LGBTQIA+ identities and relationships are not explicitly written down or openly acknowledged, it can be necessary to read between the lines to elevate queer perspectives. However, it is also necessary to not make assumptions that impose modern notions of queerness onto historical persons; meanwhile doing nothing further reinforces historical silences and limits researcher access to queer histories. Describing collections documenting LGBTQIA+ history can be a challenge of balancing a creator's lack of clear self-identification, respecting their right to self-identify, observing changes in LGBTQIA+ creators' self-identification over time, preventing the erasure or silencing of queer histories, and creating easily discoverable and approachable access points. Practitioners must balance between creating description that respects creators' and record subjects' agency and elevating queer experiences to ensure that collections are discoverable by researchers (see example in the *Voice and Tone* section below).

The following are suggested general principles to better recognize and respect agency, identities, and cultural naming practices:

- Ask creators themselves how they would prefer to be described. If a creator is deceased or unable to identify themselves, ask trusted custodians, donors, family members, subject experts, or community members for the preferred language. Where direct consultation is not possible, refer to community-driven resources for additional research.[14]
    - For example, when acquiring a collection, ask a donor for their preferred name(s), identities, and pronouns and record these preferences at accessioning.
- Affirm and reinforce the humanity of marginalized or oppressed creators and collectors as much as creators or collectors from hegemonic groups.[15]
    - For example, always name an enslaved person when they are identified in a record to reinforce their humanity.[16]
- Use the names and terms preferred (or used by) a person or group. Where a collection documents a third party, give preference to the terms and names preferred by the records' subject(s).[17]
    - Note: If creators intentionally used antiquated terms to self-identify, acknowledge this self-identification, and contextualize how this language usage reflects linguistic and/or social changes over time.
- When describing a person's disability, use the preferred person-first or identity-first language used by the individual themselves or preferred by their community.[18]
    - Note: Although many disability communities prefer person-first language, not all do so. Always default to the preferences of a records creator or their community following additional research. For example, the Deaf community often prefers identity-first language.[19]
- Avoid honorifics such as Mr., Ms., Mrs., Mx., etc., except where preferences are known and clearly articulated by the individual.[20]
- Avoid using historical slurs or pejorative language in public-facing description where possible. Do not perpetuate pejorative language in description supplied by archivists (meaning created by the archivist and not transcribed from an original source).
    - An exception may be when the language is being used by the marginalized community itself within the context of the records. When necessary, this practice may require

contextualizing the individual who chose to use the language in the collection description (see above).

- When describing trans or non-binary persons, do not use a person's deadname.[21] Gender diverse and trans persons may use a variety of names throughout their lives and may use different names depending on context.[22] Use self-identification or consultation with individuals or those with direct knowledge to determine the appropriate name(s) to use.
- Where preferences are genuinely ambiguous, but an LGBTQIA+ relationship is probable based on known evidence, use the collection description to outline and contextualize the known evidence. Archivist-supplied notes such as the processing information note can be used to explain descriptive choices, such as why the processor chose not to impose an identity or identities onto a records creator or subject where unknown, withheld, or ambiguous.
- Recognize a person's right to privacy or intentional silence. This silence, or withholding one's identity, can be a form of asserting agency, protest, or safety. In addition, individuals who are the subjects of records may have no knowledge of being included in materials transferred to an archival repository. Communities who are (or have been) the victims of surveillance, violence, or oppression may wish to remain anonymous or may never have disclosed their identity(ies) in their lifetime. In these cases, naming may cause harm. Respect intentional silences where they exist.[23]

Language Accessibility and Audience

Description should be approachable to and understandable by a broad range of users, including novice researchers who are unfamiliar with archival practices. Consider that researchers may include genealogists, undergraduate students, high school students, professionals from non-academic fields (such as lawyers), family members, community members, or persons with purely personal interests. Avoid jargon and overly academic or technical language.[24] When extremely technical or discipline-specific terminology is necessary for describing a collection or creator's work, supplement with simplified explanatory language to aid less advanced researchers.

When collections document marginalized persons or communities, their description should be identifiable to members of the respective community. Adopting more accessible language may include:

- Prioritizing creator-generated description such as maintaining original folder titles or allowing donors or local community members to describe collections themselves.
- Consulting directly with creators or local community members or giving preference to community-driven alternative thesauri and other resources (see the section *Agency, Identity, and Naming* above).
- Utilizing bilingual or non-English description for discovery and access for collections that are predominantly in non-English languages, or that represent multilingual or non-English speakers.
- Writing clear and concise description and avoiding long sentences and paragraphs.[25]

Voice and Tone

Practitioners should use the active voice instead of the passive voice when writing archival description.[26] Doing so recognizes an individual's agency and responsibility for their own actions. Active voice further acknowledges the impact of a person's actions (whether positive or negative), whereas the passive voice provides buffering between an action and its ultimate effect. This is especially important when describing archival labor or describing a collection creator's harmful actions. When describing archival labor, this practice elevates the role and impact of workers on archival collections, explicitly challenging outdated conceptions that

collections exist without mediation.

EXAMPLES:

Instead of: "John Smith was killed by a car driven by Jeffery Thomas," **use** "Jeffery Thomas killed John Smith in a car crash."

Instead of: "This finding aid was revised by Julia Green," **use** "Julia Green revised this finding aid by [actions taken]."

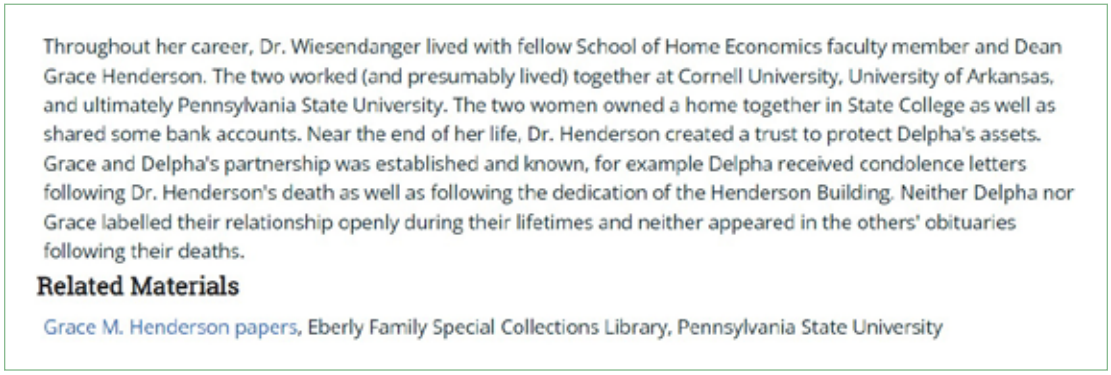
Description should be accurate, concise, and factual. Avoid language that aggrandizes or is overly reverential of collections' subjects. Avoid praising, valorizing language such as "preeminent," "esteemed," "prominent," or "great." Furthermore, avoid language that entrenches stereotypes and hegemonic perspectives, such as "aggressive," "assertive," or "eloquent."[27] It is preferable to provide biographical details that outline the actions, achievements, and experiences of an individual without inserting unnecessary, subjective language.

EXAMPLES:

Instead of: "Henry McCoy was esteemed as a judge in Centre County for over 30 years," **use** "Henry McCoy served as a judge in Centre County from 1900–1932."

Instead of: "Samuel Park was lauded for his work researching microbiology" **use** "Samuel Park was a microbiology researcher, publishing several books including…"

When processing challenging or difficult content, archival practitioners should not allow their own discomfort with the material to impact a collection's description. Violence, racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia must be clearly named and identified so that the collection can be easily discovered by researchers.[28] Although it can be instinctual when interacting with such content to mitigate one's own discomfort by using minimizing language or shying away from describing the difficult content altogether, such language can also alienate users and make search and discovery more challenging. Be precise and transparent about the materials, contents, and events documented in collections and do not use euphemistic, flowery, valorizing, or otherwise softening language. Such imprecise language lessens the discovery of material and contributes to the obfuscation and symbolic erasure of marginalized experiences. Accordingly, adopt stronger, precise terms such as *lynching*, *murder*, *racist*, *rape*, or *rio*t, etc., where appropriate and most likely to be employed by researchers when searching for materials rather than outdated or softened language that obscures experiences and impacts of violence and oppression.



Throughout her career, Dr. Wiesendanger lived with fellow School of Home Economics faculty member and Dean Grace Henderson. The two worked (and presumably lived) together at Cornell University, University of Arkansas, and ultimately Pennsylvania State University. The two women owned a home together in State College as well as shared some bank accounts. Near the end of her life, Dr. Henderson created a trust to protect Delpha's assets. Grace and Delpha's partnership was established and known, for example Delpha received condolence letters following Dr. Henderson's death as well as following the dedication of the Henderson Building. Neither Delpha nor Grace labelled their relationship openly during their lifetimes and neither appeared in the others' obituaries following their deaths.

Related Materials

Grace M. Henderson papers, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University

FIGURE 3. *Delpha Wiesendanger* papers updated biographical note outlining evidence of a relationship between Delpha Wiesendanger and Grace Henderson.[29]

EXAMPLE: Revising euphemistic language that obscures potential LGBTQIA+ history

In a previous, older version of the finding aid example (see *Figure 3)*, the notes referred only once to the lifetime partner of the collection creator as a "longtime companion and housemate." While this may be a common euphemism for queer relationships, this language also limits the discoverability

A note on archival description and creator agency: Out of a respect for creators to self-identify, Lexy chose not to label Grace and Delpha's relationship as a Lesbian or Queer relationship as neither woman explicitly labelled their relationship during their lifetimes and the nature of the relationship remains somewhat ambiguous. However, researchers should note that during their lifetimes the term "lesbian" was used derrogatively and would not likely have been used openly. Dr. Henderson and Ms. Wiesendanger's careers were during a time of significant discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons and although their partnership was known and accepted, it is unlikely that Dr. Henderson could become Penn State's first female Dean had she been open about their relationship as other than roommates. Dr. Henderson passed away shortly after the start of the modern LGBTQ+ Civil Rights Movement. Althought the archivist chose not to explicitly label Delpha and Grace's relationship as queer, Lexy deGraffenreid chose to highlight the details of their known relationship so as to help surface otherwise potentially obfuscated LGBTQ+ histories at Penn State University.

FIGURE 4. *Delpha Wiesendanger papers* updated processing information note on archival description and creator agency.

Content Description	Four gelatin silver cabinet cards, approximately 4 x 5.75 inches mounted on thick card mounts with printed captions. The four photographs include (1) a photo-collage of the Hodges family, (2) the Hodges home, (3) Paul Reed and Will Cato, and (4) Paul Reed and Will Cato surrounded by a lynch mob. The last photo has had the faces of the mob scratched out in the film negative, so as to prevent their identification. Captions read: 1. HODGES FAMILY, Murdered and burned by Paul Reed and WIll Cato, July 28, 1904. Near Statesboro, Georgia." 2. "HODGES HOME, Near Statesboro, Ga., day after the whole family of five was Murdered and Burned by Reed and Cato." 3. "PAUL REED and WILL CATO, who Murdered and Burned entire Hodges family of five, July 28, 1904, Near Statesboro, Georgia." 4. Will Cato and Paul Reed, Murderers of Hodges family Near Statesboro, Ga., at Stake just before they were Burned on Aug. 16, 1904." AQ-205813. Purchased with HASTINGS funds

FIGURE 5. *Paul Reed and Will Cato lynching photograph collection* original collection description.[30]

of materials and requires researchers to both know about and search using this antiquated euphemism. In the updated description (see *Figure 4*), the processing archivist added more precise language, outlined the evidence of the relationship, and used the processing information note to include keywords that elevated the discoverability of the collection as likely to be part of LGBTQIA+ history.

EXAMPLE: Naming and contextualizing lynching photographs

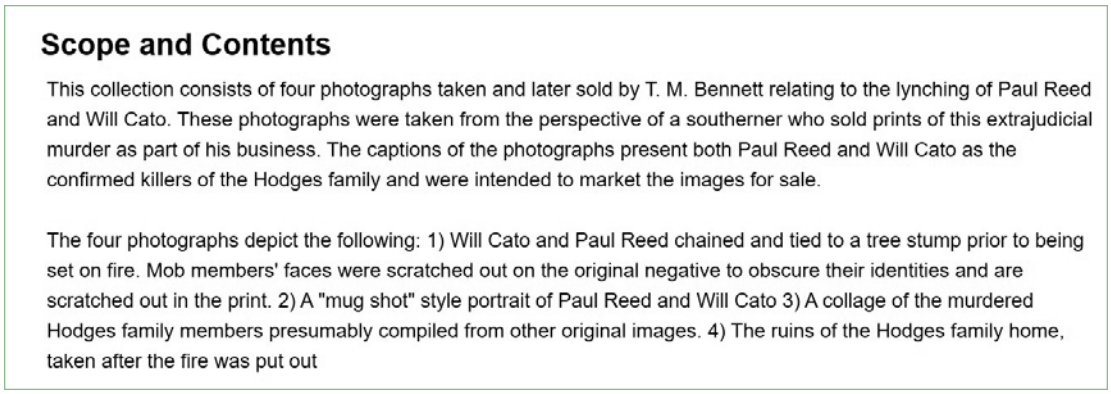
The original description for the *Paul Reed and Will Cato lynching photograph collection (see Figure 5*) uncritically adopted the language of the creator and dealer of the photographs. This description both assumes the guilt of the murdered men and minimizes the actions of the lynch mob through a passive "were burned."

The updated description in *Figure 6* explicitly identifies the murders as a lynching and contextualizes both the creation of the photographs as souvenirs as well as the lynch mob's further violent actions against the local community. Elucidating these facts provides a more accurate description of the events as known, is more transparent about the items' creation, and more concisely identifies the violent acts. Providing more inclusive description does not mitigate a harmful or offensive item's content, but it does allow a researcher to more effectively discover a collection and give them a better, more contextualized forewarning before choosing to interact with it.

While seemingly innocuous, voice and tone can profoundly impact a collection's discovery. As keyword searching is prevalent, using aggrandizing, imprecise, flowery, euphemistic, otherwise minimizing language impedes discovery as researchers are unlikely to search using those terms or phrases. Using the active voice, avoiding flowery language, and using precise, accurate language creates more understandable and searchable discovery tools, which helps all researchers and public services staff.

Extensible and Iterative Processing

Adopting more inclusive practices from a framework of cultural humility requires accepting that finding aids and other descriptive tools are not inalterable documents. As language, research, and knowledge evolve, collections may be processed and reprocessed over time. In addition, to combat inaccessible backlogs, archival professionals are implementing minimal practices that prioritize making collections stable and open for research at the point of accessioning before collections are fully processed.[31] These practices allow processing to be understood as iterative rather than as a finite, discrete procedure. Collections may be revisited and reprocessed, based on local factors such as inclusive (re)description needs, digitization, preservation needs, increased research interest, and use. An iterative processing



Scope and Contents

This collection consists of four photographs taken and later sold by T. M. Bennett relating to the lynching of Paul Reed and Will Cato. These photographs were taken from the perspective of a southerner who sold prints of this extrajudicial murder as part of his business. The captions of the photographs present both Paul Reed and Will Cato as the confirmed killers of the Hodges family and were intended to market the images for sale.

The four photographs depict the following: 1) Will Cato and Paul Reed chained and tied to a tree stump prior to being set on fire. Mob members' faces were scratched out on the original negative to obscure their identities and are scratched out in the print. 2) A "mug shot" style portrait of Paul Reed and Will Cato 3) A collage of the murdered Hodges family members presumably compiled from other original images. 4) The ruins of the Hodges family home, taken after the fire was put out

FIGURE 6. *Paul Reed and Will Cato lynching photograph collection* updated scope and contents note.

program empowers archivists to intentionally reflect on and revise archival description based on new research, community engagement, and emerging community-driven resources. Archival practitioners should embrace the "good, better, best" philosophy put forward by Alicia Chilcott and embrace the functional reality that finding aids and catalog records will be revised over time.[32]

When implementing more inclusive and reparative description practices, start with current staffing and workload capacities. Consider first integrating smaller, achievable changes as a way to embed these practices into standard technical workflows, such as:

- Ask creators for their preferred self-identification, biographical information, and other preferred language during the pre-acquisition stage (see *Agency, Identity, and Naming*) and include that identification in accession records and finding aids.
- Require inclusive description practices at accessioning to prioritize providing ethical access for minimally or unprocessed collections. This may include:
    - Adopting inclusive language into any and all description created during accessioning.
    - Creating preliminary collection-level notes such as abstracts and scope and content notes during accessioning. Even while a collection may not be fully inventoried or processed, this high level of description can be sufficient for discovery and access. Use collection-level description to call out the existence of marginalized experiences present within a collection (especially where the collection creator may be from a dominant group, or such existence may not be otherwise obvious to researchers).
    - Creating a preliminary box-level inventory of collection contents that highlights marginalized persons and themes present in the collection if time and capacity allows.
    - Making collections immediately accessible after accessioning (even where they have not been formally processed). Accessioning practices should create a stable, "good-enough" baseline that allows researchers to access collections materials. This "good-enough" baseline should incorporate inclusive description principles and practices.
- Prioritizing inclusive or reparative (re)processing needs on par with (or elevated above) other factors such as researcher use.
- Conducting an audit of legacy finding aids to identify description with biased, outdated, harmful, or racist description. Alternatively, periodically reviewing legacy finding aids, as time permits, to identify and prioritize possible collections for (re)processing.
- Soliciting feedback about descriptive tools from researchers to help determine (re) processing priorities.

Accepting that archival practice is inherently iterative can make adopting more inclusive practices seem more manageable and less overwhelming. Working towards "better" description that is good-enough to enable discovery helps archival workers enact a framework of cultural humility that embraces learning, making mistakes, and improving practices over time. This also allows practitioners to better reflect on how all their decisions inherently impact archival discovery and use because all actions taken with collections mediate between the creator and potential researchers. Ultimately, reflecting on archivist mediation and embracing these general principles of creating more inclusive archival description will lead to better

overall access points by making collections description more approachable and searchable to researchers with varying levels of experience.

Auditing Existing Archival Description

Establishing Scope and Scale

Defining the scope and scale of an archival description audit is essential towards framing an assessment. Reviewers must determine the parameters of the review including: the type of description, the extent targeted for review, the content that is being searched for by users, and the depth at which descriptions will be audited. Determining the depth and breadth of review requires answering a series of questions, including those listed below:

1. What is being reviewed?

- Catalog records
- Digital collections metadata
- Finding aids
- Online exhibits
- Physical exhibits
- Websites
- Other descriptive tools
- Some/all of the above?

2. To what extent?

- Reviewing collection-level data or MARC records only
- Reviewing hierarchies, inventories, and/or box lists only
- Reviewing digital collections metadata only
- Reviewing complete finding aids, including all collection-level and file-level data

3. What is the auditor looking for?

- Is this review intended to identify reparative description needs for all historically underrepresented communities? Or is it intended to identify reparative description needs relating to a particular group?
- Is this review looking for reparative description needs or identifying the existence of collections containing obscured and underrepresented perspectives?
- How comprehensive is this review? Is it reviewing all finding aids for potential reparative description needs? Or is this review more focused on records relating to a particular group or community?
- Is this review only looking for existing explicitly harmful language, such as outdated or racist language?
- Is this review looking for more subtle forms of harm, such as absent or obfuscating description, aggrandizing language, or the exclusion of names or identities (such as missing names of married women or deadnames)?

4. How is the auditor going to conduct the review?

- Manually (i.e., individually reading each finding aid)?
- Programmatically using scripts to identify specified terms and phrases?
- In a single, dedicated push to review all collection description?
- Sporadically, as time and resources permit?
- Using a pilot approach by targeting an initial small batch of descriptive tools?
- Using an iterative or phased approach (such as reviewing all collection-level data in Phase 1 and inventory-level data in Phase 2)?

5. How is the auditor going to record data and findings?

- Checklists
- Spreadsheets
- Database
- Online project management tool (such as Airtable)
- Other tool(s)?

6. How will results be conveyed to stakeholders?

- Who are the intended stakeholders (for example, unit team members, immediate management, administration, researchers, or the broader community)?
- Will results be shared through executive summaries, reports, or presentations?
- Will results be shared only with internal staff members and/or administrators?
- Will results be published more broadly, or are they strictly for internal use?

Asking these questions will help the auditor to plan and conduct a description audit. Particularly important is determining whether the audit will be targeted towards elevating collections relating to a specific community, or whether the audit will be more broadly scoped towards identifying reparative description needs across an institution. Both audit styles have inherent challenges and opportunities.

Generalized audits are useful for understanding the overall state of archival description within a repository and to answer questions such as:

1. How many finding aids (and/or catalog records) contain problematic language?
2. What types of harmful language exist in our collection description?
3. Are finding aids accurate and complete according to local and national standards?
4. Are finding aids (and/or catalog records) meeting a baseline of providing access and use?

A broad framework is best for determining the overall parameters of issues and is useful when archival professionals are not sure *what* types of harmful description exist, the communities that are (under)represented, or the extent to which finding aids contain harmful description. An initial assessment can help archival professionals determine reparative description needs and inform further assessment and/or project priorities moving forward. However, such assessments should be undertaken using the framework of cultural humility and an openness to adjusting parameters based on what is learned while preparing for and undertaking the assessment. For example, while searching for racist slurs, a practitioner may encounter previously unknown slurs or euphemistic language which would not have been identified in the original parameters. This process of researching, learning, and auditing may require adjusting and iterating the workflow to ensure that the assessment is achieving the intended outcomes.

It is important to accept that broad, generalized assessments can be limited by the positionality and knowledge of the assessor. No person conducting an assessment can be fully proficient in the discriminatory histories and nuanced language changes for every underrepresented group. Therefore, those conducting an initial broad assessment may miss harmful or exclusionary language simply because they do not know enough. In addition, due to the breadth of descriptive records, a generalized assessment may be limited to what is *represented* in collection-level description or cursory examinations of inventories. Such assessments may inherently exclude the unknown. A lack of description can obscure the existence of oppressed or marginalized experiences so thoroughly that researchers are unable to search for or locate such collections. In these situations, it may be necessary to conduct a comprehensive audit targeted to a specific community, similar to Yale University's project focusing on records of Japanese American incarceration during World War II.[33] An in-depth, targeted, comprehensive assessment allows archivists to engage with the histories and nuances of a single community

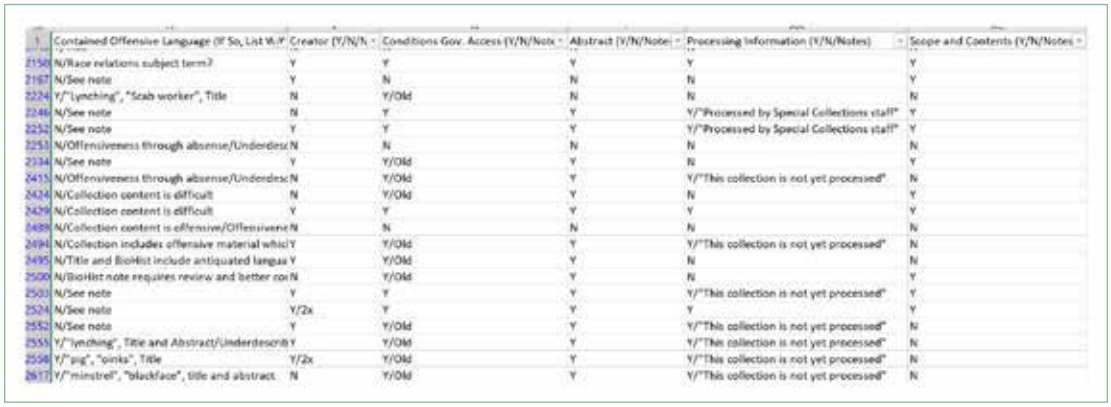
more deeply and is especially useful when there is a specific project, community partner, or limited capacities to ask specific questions, such as:

1. How many (and which) collections contain materials relating to X experience or community?
2. Is this experience or community represented within the repository's discovery tools in some way (either inclusively or problematically)? Or is it not represented in the description and the collection identified through other means (such as by researchers or through institutional knowledge).
3. Does the finding aid minimize the existence of X community's experience in favor of elevating or valorizing an individual from a dominant group (particularly where this individual may be an enslaver or oppressor)?
4. Where description exists, how is X represented? Is this depiction outdated, harmful, or obfuscatory in some way? Do the current access points facilitate easy, straight-forward searching or do they potentially impede discovery through euphemistic or imprecise terms?
5. How would researchers search for or discover this collection? Would successful searching require archivist mediation? Would it require researchers to search using offensive or outdated terms?
6. How might this community be more respectfully represented? Are there existing resources, local expertise, or community advisors who could help improve these access points?

Reviewing Collection-Level Descriptive Information

Description audits may initially focus on collection-level information (that is: only description about a collection as a whole). Although not comprehensive, such audits allow many finding aids to be reviewed quickly by focusing only on high-level information. This type of audit can review accuracy, adherence to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS), and reparative description needs. Auditing for whether finding aids comply with local and national standards is important towards the overall goal of reparative description, as incomplete, inaccurate, and insufficient description limits discoverability regardless of the presence of explicitly offensive language. In addition to DACS, auditing for complete, collection-level description may also include auditing according to local descriptive standards because local standards may have changed or been updated over time.

When auditing collection-level data, assessors should consider how best to collect data to facilitate analysis. One method is to use a spreadsheet to standardize data collection. If the repository uses a collection management system such as ArchivesSpace, the auditor can export collection data to build an audit spreadsheet more efficiently. If the repository uses only paper finding aids or finding aids available in a word processing tool such as Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or Adobe Acrobat (PDF), the auditor can create a spreadsheet and manually add the title for each collection as a row (see *Figure 7*).



	Contained Offensive Language (If So, List W	Creator (Y/N/N	Conditions Gov. Access (Y/N/Note	Abstract (Y/N/Note	Processing Information (Y/N/Notes)	Scope and Contents (Y/N/Notes
2158	N/Race relations subject term?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
2167	N/See note	Y	N	N	N	Y
2224	Y/"Lynching", "Scab worker", Title	N	Y/Old	N	N	N
2246	N/See note	N	Y	Y	Y/"Processed by Special Collections staff"	Y
2252	N/See note	Y	Y	Y	Y/"Processed by Special Collections staff"	Y
2253	N/Offensiveness through absense/Underdesc	N	N	N	N	N
2334	N/See note	Y	Y/Old	Y	N	Y
2415	N/Offensiveness through absense/Underdesc	N	Y/Old	Y	Y/"This collection is not yet processed"	N
2424	N/Collection content is difficult	N	Y/Old	Y	N	Y
2429	N/Collection content is difficult	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
2489	N/Collection content is offensive/Offensivene	N	N	N	N	N
2494	N/Collection includes offensive material whic	Y	Y/Old	Y	Y/"This collection is not yet processed"	N
2495	N/Title and BioHist include antiquated langua	Y	Y/Old	Y	N	N
2500	N/BioHist note requires review and better cor	N	Y/Old	Y	N	Y
2503	N/See note	Y	Y	Y	Y/"This collection is not yet processed"	Y
2524	N/See note	Y/2x	Y	Y	Y	Y
2552	N/See note	Y	Y/Old	Y	Y/"This collection is not yet processed"	N
2555	Y/"lynching", Title and Abstract/Underdescrib	Y	Y/Old	Y	Y/"This collection is not yet processed"	N
2598	Y/"pig", "oinks", Title	Y/2x	Y/Old	Y	Y/"This collection is not yet processed"	N
2617	Y/"minstrel", "blackface", title and abstract	N	Y/Old	Y	Y/"This collection is not yet processed"	N

FIGURE 7. Sample collection-level finding aids audit spreadsheet

After determining what they are reviewing, assessors should add each data point as a column. An additional column can be used for note-specific comments or assessors may utilize a delimiter to distinguish between standardized data and comments as needed.

Data collection methods should be standardized across the audit to facilitate data analysis (such as "Y" for Yes or "N" for No, or a "1" or "0" for a note that does or does not exist). The assessor should document the audit method and define standardized values to help future staff understand the audit process.

In this sample selection of an audit spreadsheet, "Y" or "N" is used as a delimiter to signify presence or absence of each column's note within a finding aid. A forward slash ("/") is further used to signify additional assessment notes needed beyond the simple "Y" or "N" binary. This allowed the reviewer to assess the results more easily as data while also noting the intricacies and different ways that the finding aid data was messy without needing to return to the original source material. This facilitated both easier quantitative and more subjective analyses.

If a spreadsheet is not preferred, archival professionals could use a questionnaire for each collection as a printed or digital document. Rather than overarching data analysis, individual questionnaires allow for more targeted and in-depth examination of each collection. Having a completed questionnaire on file adds transparency, which benefits future staff members when considering reprocessing. Completed questionnaires may be stored in collection files or in an overall audit project folder.

Reviewing Hierarchy-Level Descriptive Information

Auditing descriptive information at the hierarchies-level, such as inventories, series-level scope and content notes, item-level notes, or other description provided at lower hierarchical levels can be more complicated than collection-level audits due to the complexity and variability of inventories. More intensive inventory audits may be done through manual review, but they can be unwieldy and extremely time-intensive on a larger scale.

Repository-wide inventory audits may be more effective using automated methods. Active projects at several institutions have publicly shared code libraries to facilitate such audits:

- Duke University's Rubenstein Library: https://gitlab.oit.duke.edu/dul-rubenstein/description-audit
- Pittsburgh University Libraries: https://github.com/kheslin0420/kheslin0420.github.io/tree/master/Legacy_Description_Audit
- Princeton University Libraries: https://github.com/kellybolding

Creating and Revising Existing Archival Description

Revising, Retaining, or Contextualizing Harmful and/or Racist Content

When archival professionals identify harmful, outdated, or racist language, they must decide whether to revise, retain, and/or contextualize it. Several factors impact this decision, including whether the offensive language was:

- Used in a proper title or caption (such as a published book or pamphlet)
- Used as part of an organization or group's official name
- Supplied by the creator or collector in a folder or item title
- Used in a direct quote featured in the description (such as quoting from a publication, quoting the collection creator in context of referencing others, or quoting the collection creator in context of referring to themselves or a lived experience)
- Used in archivist-supplied description (such as abstracts, biographical/historical, general, or scope and content notes)

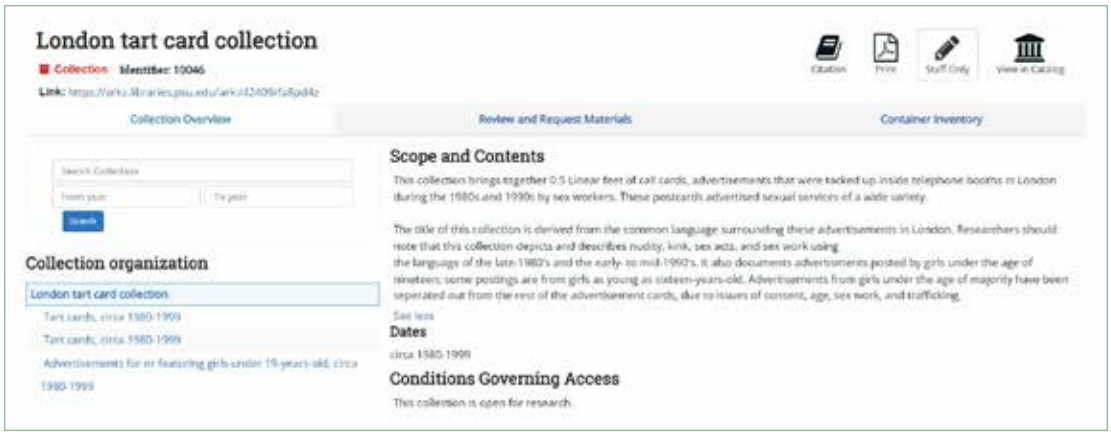


FIGURE 8. Scope and content note for the *London tart card collection* featuring a content warning.[35]

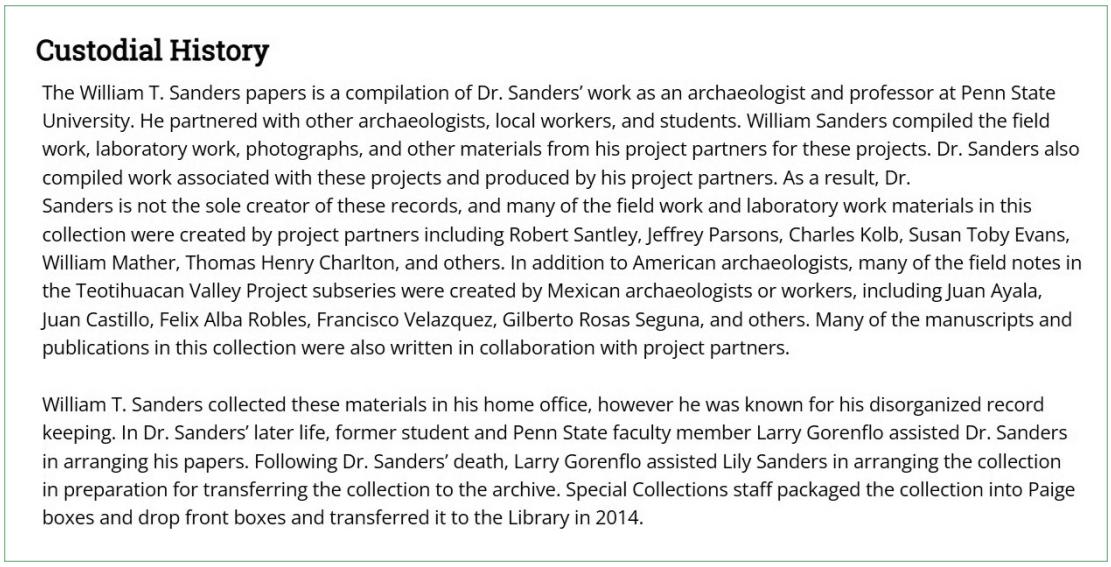
Euphemistic, imprecise, laudatory, offensive, or otherwise harmful description that previous processors added or supplied, such as in abstracts and scope and content notes, should be revised and replaced. Such language that is original to the material, supplied by creators, or supplied by collectors requires further consideration depending on context and local practices.

Archivist-supplied notes are also opportunities to highlight potentially harmful content in collections. Depending on institutional context, processors may explicitly use a label such as "Content Warning" or "Content Advisory," as their own specific note within a finding aid. Such content warnings could be specific to the content of a particular collection where applicable (such as "this collection contains photographs depicting racism and violence"). Alternatively, a general, standardized content warning such as those used by the Digital Library of Georgia and Temple University Libraries could be added to the repository website for all finding aids.[34] However, processors may not want to use a specific "Content Warning" note due to local practices or because such notes could be considered politically contentious. In this case, a processor could include a sort of content advisory within a standard abstract or scope and content note. This serves the purpose of accurately describing collection contents and advising researchers without a separate, specific note or explicitly using a phrase like "content warning" (see *Figure 8*). Institutions may also choose to include both a separate content warning note and include more specific details in collection descriptions. Archivist-supplied notes are well suited for content warnings as their purpose is to inform researchers about the themes and materials present within a collection. A content warning may advise researchers on challenging content, including but not limited to:

- Ableism
- Abuse
- Homophobia
- Human rights abuses
- Medical or human research malpractice
- Political oppression or persecution
- Racism
- Sexism or misogyny
- Sexual assault
- Suicide or self-harm
- Violent crime
- Other forms of violence

Due to the number of factors involved, reparative description *cannot* be automated. It is not enough to simply use a script or conduct a "find and replace" strategy for racist language. These decisions must consider the individual context of each instance. Reparative language solutions are highly situational and specific to the needs of each collection and what may work for one collection may not function for another. When contemplating specific revisions, the archival practitioner may consider these questions:

- Is it enough to simply replace the word or sentence with another word?
- Does part of or the entire folder title or descriptive note need revision to accommodate the altered language?
- How does altering or removing the description alter a researcher's ability to understand the collection or its content?
- How might retaining or perpetuating the offensive term's usage be interpreted as the institution legitimizing or perpetuating racism and white supremacy by bad actors or



Custodial History

The William T. Sanders papers is a compilation of Dr. Sanders' work as an archaeologist and professor at Penn State University. He partnered with other archaeologists, local workers, and students. William Sanders compiled the field work, laboratory work, photographs, and other materials from his project partners for these projects. Dr. Sanders also compiled work associated with these projects and produced by his project partners. As a result, Dr. Sanders is not the sole creator of these records, and many of the field work and laboratory work materials in this collection were created by project partners including Robert Santley, Jeffrey Parsons, Charles Kolb, Susan Toby Evans, William Mather, Thomas Henry Charlton, and others. In addition to American archaeologists, many of the field notes in the Teotihuacan Valley Project subseries were created by Mexican archaeologists or workers, including Juan Ayala, Juan Castillo, Felix Alba Robles, Francisco Velazquez, Gilberto Rosas Seguna, and others. Many of the manuscripts and publications in this collection were also written in collaboration with project partners.

William T. Sanders collected these materials in his home office, however he was known for his disorganized record keeping. In Dr. Sanders' later life, former student and Penn State faculty member Larry Gorenflo assisted Dr. Sanders in arranging his papers. Following Dr. Sanders' death, Larry Gorenflo assisted Lily Sanders in arranging the collection in preparation for transferring the collection to the archive. Special Collections staff packaged the collection into Paige boxes and drop front boxes and transferred it to the Library in 2014.

Figure 9. *William T. Sanders papers* custodial history note.[40]

impacted researchers?

- How can altering or contextualizing the original language improve access?
- Has the word been erroneously identified as harmful or offensive? Within its existing context, should it be retained?

Answering these questions will impact which action(s) is deemed best. For example, archival practitioners may feel that they have more authority to alter archivist-supplied notes than titles of publications. There are many potential actions that can be taken to change or remediate harmful, outdated, or racist language such as:

- Redacting the racist term and providing a redaction note, such as [slur] or [racist slur][36]
- Replacing only the outdated term with a current, community-preferred term
- Replacing an overly broad term with a more specific, accurate term where known (such as replacing "Indians" or "Native American" with a more specific Indigenous nations name such as Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, etc.)[37]
- Retaining the term in context, but qualifying its usage to contextualize its original use, such as:
    - Retaining the term in brackets (i.e. [original racist slur])
    - Adding a supplied phrase, such as "Original file heading:," "Original folder heading," "Original caption," or "Original title"
    - Supplying contextualizing language next to the original language, such as "X is a racist term, but is retained here as part of the item's formal title"
    - Contextualizing the rationale for a term's retention in associated collection description and/or processing information note (Note: processing information notes are not always sufficient when contextualizing racist language, as many researchers, particularly novice researchers, may not consult them)
- Including a content warning in notes or as a pop-up for online access points (see above)
- Acknowledging known silences, such as noting materials, projects, topics, or themes not in the collection where that absence is notable
- Removing direct quotes and replacing them with more general context
- Revising notes entirely to provide updated, more ethical description (rather than limiting revision to specific words or phrases)
- Where original language transcribed a caption, revising the item title to a more inclusive title and removing the offensive caption from the folder or item title. If the caption is deemed necessary to description, move the caption to a supplied note with a qualifier, such as "Original caption: [original caption]." Caution: this practice perpetuates racist and harmful content and may not be suitable in many circumstances.

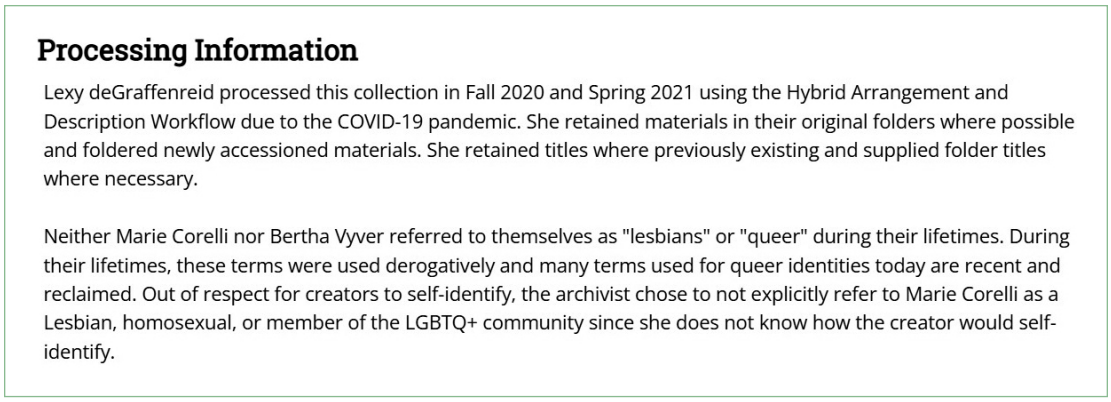


Figure 10. *Marie Corelli collection* processing information note.[42]

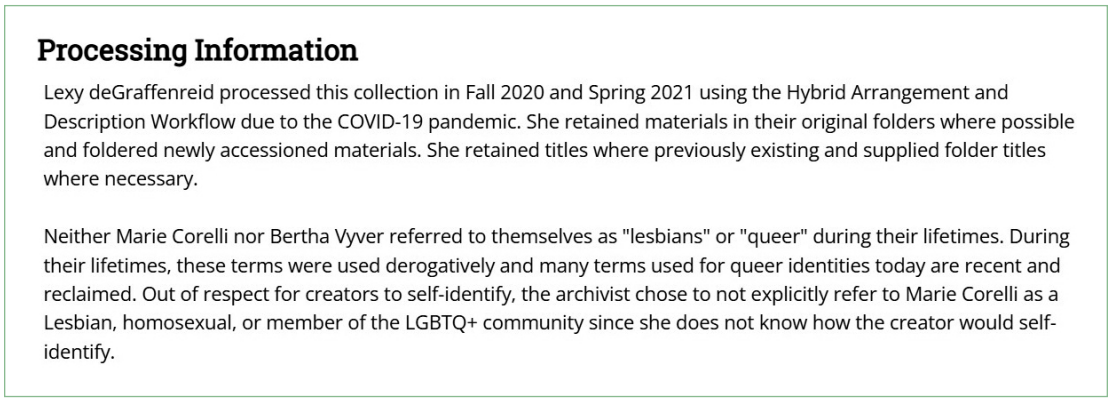


Figure 11. *Early male tightlacing, corseting, and cross-dressing collection* processing information note.

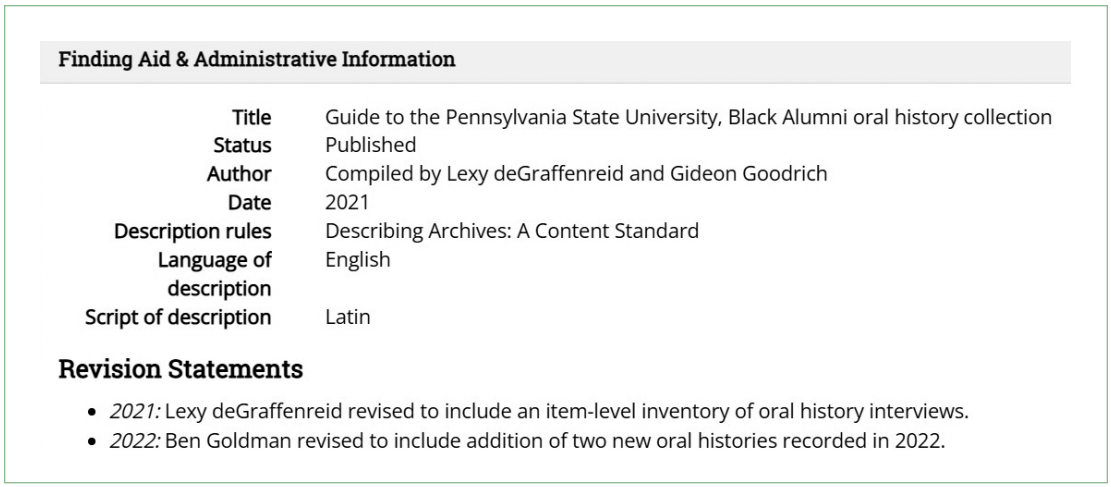
Documenting Archival Processes

Archival processes, such as collection histories and archival labor should be transparent to researchers and staff members. Notes such as custodial history and processing information are common methods for elevating this information for researchers and other practitioners. This information not only provides researchers with important context, but it also outlines important collection history for future collection managers.

Custodial history notes should detail the complete custodial history of the collection (as known). DACS defines this note as "information on changes of ownership or custody of the material being described, from the time it left the possession of the creator until it was acquired by the repository, that is significant for its authenticity, integrity, and interpretation."[38] However, archival workers should recognize that the creator is also a custodian of their own collection and consider beginning a collections' custodial history with its creator. This note should not only indicate more than the names of custodians, but also the decisions and impacts that each custodian made in shaping the resulting archival collections (see *Figure 9*). Describers may also detail additional creators or contributors in addition to the primary donor.[39] Any custodian's actions that may impact a researcher's interpretation or understanding of the collection should be detailed, including:

- Arrangement or rearrangement by creators and custodians
- Original description, such as pre-acquisition inventories
- Any alteration, destruction, loss, or intentional separation of records
- Notable records *not* transferred to the archives or otherwise excluded from the collection

Processing information notes should detail the complete processing history of the collection (as known). These notes should do more than indicate a processor's name and year the collection was processed (see *Figure 10* and *Figure 11*). Although DACS assigns the processing information note as an added value note, in order to be transparent about archival labor and archivist mediation, this note should be included starting at the point of accessioning and as part of all finding aids. Processing information notes may include "Actions and conventions include but are not limited to reconstruction of provenance, maintenance, reconstruction, or alteration of original order, devising titles for materials, weeding, and maintenance or provision of control numbers or container numbers."[41] These notes should detail all actions taken while working on collections from accessioning through processing (or reprocessing) actions. This note might also document actions *not* taken (such as not reorganizing collections or choosing not to name or identify individuals) and explain the rationale for doing so.



Finding Aid & Administrative Information

Title	Guide to the Pennsylvania State University, Black Alumni oral history collection
Status	Published
Author	Compiled by Lexy deGraffenreid and Gideon Goodrich
Date	2021
Description rules	Describing Archives: A Content Standard
Language of description	English
Script of description	Latin

Revision Statements

- *2021:* Lexy deGraffenreid revised to include an item-level inventory of oral history interviews.
- *2022:* Ben Goldman revised to include addition of two new oral histories recorded in 2022.

Figure 12. Revision statements for the *Pennsylvania State University, Black Alumni oral history collection*.[44]

For major revisions such as reparative description interventions, a copy of the original description should be saved and filed into the collection's administrative file (commonly referred to as a "collection file" or "control file") prior to updating and republishing a collection's finding aid.[43] Archival professionals should provide this legacy description to researchers upon request. Maintaining old finding aids creates a record of archival labor and provides both researchers and staff members with transparency about legacy practices, interventions, and choices made that impact the accessibility and discoverability of collections.

In addition to saving copies of previous versions of finding aids, all collection assessments, processing plans, and processing notes should be similarly saved in the collection's control folder. Processing plans and notes should document actions taken and the rationale for decisions made in stewarding archival collections. This provides transparency over archival labor and decision-making processes for both current and future archives staff. It also exposes archivist mediations in the record as well as *why* archival practitioners chose to describe (or not describe) collections in particular ways.

Changes to the finding aid (or other descriptive tool) should also be documented in a revision statement. These revision statements should be published with the remainder of the finding aid. Revision statements should be written in the active voice, include the name of the worker responsible for revising the finding aid, describe the changes made, and provide the date of the revision (see *Figure 12*).

Seeking Feedback

Archival professionals should welcome feedback from staff, researchers, and community members regarding biased, inaccurate, incomplete, offensive, and/or outdated descriptions. Inviting this expertise decenters the authority of the archivist and allows researchers the ability to report harmful content that has been overlooked or unknown to staff members for remediation. Soliciting feedback creates a more inclusive environment by demonstrating an ethic of care towards researchers themselves. Such feedback mechanisms may be formally codified through policies and guidelines or accepted through informal mechanisms such as reference desk conversations or e-mails. Potential formal feedback mechanisms include:

- A feedback survey on an institution's website and/or finding aids database.
- A statement on a website or publicly at the reference desk inviting feedback to a dedicated e-mail address.
- A comment box placed in reference services or another public location.

Due to the implicit power dynamics between researchers, institutions, and archivists, researchers from marginalized communities may not feel comfortable providing accurate feedback publicly or identifiably. Formal feedback mechanisms should offer anonymity and may provide an opportunity for researchers to self-disclose names and contact information to receive updates or submit follow-up questions.

Conclusion

Implementing reparative and inclusive description practices does not have to be daunting, nor does reparative reprocessing have to be done all at once. Archival professionals can begin with smaller, more easily achievable assessments and projects to build up towards embedding more inclusive descriptive practices directly into collection services workflows and project prioritization. This resource recommends a variety of actions that any practitioner can take to improve descriptions for collections documenting underrepresented and marginalized experiences. Inclusive archival description is *better* description, as it opens the accessibility and discoverability of collections to a broader and more diverse set of researchers. It allows people to find themselves and their communities' histories within archival collections in ways that demonstrate respect and care. Inclusive description further challenges legacies of obfuscation and erasure that have prevented research into marginalized histories. Implementing reparative and inclusive practices is fundamental to facilitating access and use for all researchers. Adopting more inclusive description practices is one step towards strengthening trusting relationships with researchers, donors, and communities to build a more inclusive archival record. In utilizing the resources and practical steps recommended in this guide, archival professionals can start to assess their reparative description needs and establish positive changes that make their collections more ethically described and discoverable.

Appendices: Resource Guide and Works Consulted

Appendix A: Archival Theory Readings

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