

Museum Archivist

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Letter from the MAS Chair, Jenna Stout

During 2022-2023, the Museum Archives Section has increased programming through monthly pop-up presentations. These virtual 20-minute talks, followed by 10 minutes of Q&A, showcase colleagues' exciting work in the Museum Archives field.



We kicked off our fall series in November with “Started From The Middle, Now We’re Here: Making A Game Plan For Metadata Justice At The Dickinson Research Center.” Lulu Zilinskas, Kera Newby, and Samantha Schafer, staff members at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, presented on their implementation of ArchivesSpace and Islandora for photograph and manuscript collections. In addition to improving discoverability, staff incorporated metadata justice into their processes.

For the December pop-up, Digital Assets Librarian Danielle Nowak of the Morton Arboretum introduced ACORN (Arboretum Collections & Resources Nexus). This digital asset platform facilitates electronic access to plant-related materials from the Sterling Morton Library and Morton Arboretum’s special collections. After the holiday season, Librarian and Archivist kYmberly Keeton of the ART | library deco presented “Collective Relevance: Curating Black Art & History Throughout Independent Praxis” for our January pop-up. ART | library deco is a virtual art library and digital gallery documenting through the lens of BGLAM: Black Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums.

The winter series of pop-up presentations continues in February with speaker Tara Laver, Senior Archivist at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and Vice-Chair / Chair-Elect of the Museum Archives Section. In “Art and Archives: Bringing It All Together,” Laver will discuss her co-curated exhibition Origins: Collecting to Create the Nelson-Atkins and share lessons learned for crafting collaborative, compelling exhibits.

In the coming months, we will continue highlighting the work of Museum Archives Section members and colleagues in our pop-up presentations. If you would like to speak and share about a project or issue you’ve been working on, we would love to hear from you! Members can submit proposals on a rolling basis using this form.

~Jenna Stout, CA, CRM, Museum Archivist, Saint Louis Art Museum, Chair, Museum Archives Section

MUSEUM ARCHIVES SECTION NEWS!



MUSEUM ARCHIVES: PRACTICE, ISSUES, AND ADVOCACY

By Rachel Chatalbash, Susan Hernandez, and Megan Schwenke

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS EXCITING, NEW PUBLICATION AND TO SEE A SNEEK PEAK, PLEASE VISIT THIS [LINK!](#)

Museum Archives: Practice, Issues, Advocacy, edited by Rachel Chatalbash, Susan Hernandez, and Megan Schwenke, articulates what museum archivists do, the impact of their work, and how they can position the archives as an indispensable hub of knowledge and activity within the museum. Twenty-seven museum archivists provide practical guidance on the day-to-day management of archives and explore strategies for effectively carrying out the museum archives’ work.

MUSEUM ARCHIVES SECTION BUSINESS MEETING HELD ON AUGUST 3, 2022

We welcomed the MAS section at the 86th annual meeting for a virtual business meeting on August 3, 2022. Read the 2022 meeting minutes and past minutes on the MAS micro site: [https://www2.archivists.org/groups/museum-archives-section/meeting-minutes.](https://www2.archivists.org/groups/museum-archives-section/meeting-minutes)

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INTERNSHIP PROFILE: GILLIAN FERGUSON

INGALLS LIBRARY AND MUSEUM ARCHIVES, CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART



This summer, I had the privilege to work in an archive and art library for the first time during my phenomenal internship at the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA), one of my favorite museums. I completed various projects to support the library's mission of making resources easier to access. My main project centered around the curatorial files, a collection of over 54,000 files organized into accession number order. Previously, each of

the 20 different curatorial departments had its own organizational system. I was to sample 1,000 files to determine the next steps for organizing and labeling the collection. Before I began, I completed a literature review of archival sampling methods (soon to be published in Oberlin's history magazine *On Second Thought*). Then I met with librarians, archivists, and curatorial assistants to better understand past filing systems. I created a spreadsheet to keep track of which files to sample and what I found inside the folders. Some contained old correspondence and photographs, and others were empty. After I finally reached the thousandth file, I wrote up my sample results and provided recommendations for how the curatorial files could be better organized to make the most of the space.

Halfway through the summer, the museum archives received a donation of artist papers, and I had the opportunity to process the new collection. I read everything I could about the artist Edris Eckhardt, who worked with ceramics, sculpture, and glass during the mid-1900s in Cleveland. I sorted the pieces into stacks of publications, sketches, and photographs and discarded any duplicates. After carefully sliding dozens of fragile papers into protective sleeves and creating a detailed finding aid, I boxed up the material and brought it to a new home in the corner of the archives.

Throughout the summer, I also assisted the conservation department by preparing photos of objects at different stages of treatment to be uploaded onto the museum database. I cleaned up digital files by deleting duplicates, updating titles, and fixing typos. I also helped the digitization staff by entering metadata for Cleveland artist August Biehle's collection of papers at the CMA.

My internship was enriched by numerous opportunities to learn about museum history, meet with staff across departments, and attend special events and exhibitions. Examples include shadowing a tour of preschoolers led by the education department, assisting a member of conservation with the treatment of an archival object using argon gas, and designing a tour with a creative theme. All of the summer interns were able to spend time in the galleries, tour the conservation lab, and give presentations to the staff about our work. There were also a few field trip opportunities to visit neighboring cultural institutions.

Overall, I had an incredible summer, and I am excited to carry the experiences from my internship into my fourth year at Oberlin. I am confident about working in an art museum again someday, especially in the library or archives, because I am passionate about arts education and access. After I graduate, I plan to travel before returning to school for library and information sciences. Until then, you will find me mesmerized by the artwork in the galleries.

NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SANTUIT AND COTUIT, CAPE COD, MASSACHUETTES

By Amy M. Johnson, Administrator & Archivist, Historical Society of Santuit & Cotuit

The Historical Society of Santuit & Cotuit (HSSC) received a 2022 Cape Cod Antique Dealers Association (CCADA) Cultural Enrichment Grant to restore and conserve a collection of six diplomas and certificates awarded to Dr. Donald E. Higgins. Dr. Higgins was a prominent physician, practicing in Cotuit for 45 years from the mid-1930s to around 1980. His diplomas and certificates are part of a permanent exhibit in the Cotuit Museum. Three of the diplomas and certificates have suffered buckling and rippling, and all are backed with non-archival cardboard causing some discoloration. After a site visit from Tom Doyle, a Massachusetts State Archivist with the SHRAB-funded Roving Archivist program, it was advised that the diplomas were of high priority for conservation treatment. HSSC Curator, Cindy Nickerson, transported the documents to Cape Cod Picture Framing and Restoration in Dennis, Massachusetts, last fall to be assessed. The assessment recommended the replacement of the cardboard backings with Foam Core and dry mount of three paper certificates. The estimated cost for the project is \$600. Amy Johnson, Administrator & Archivist for HSSC, came across the CCADA grant in an online search for restoration grants.

“Through its Cultural Enrichment Grant Fund, the CCADA seeks to promote a better understanding of Cape Cod’s history and heritage by providing support to nonprofit organizations for special projects which help advance and preserve this goal.” (<https://ccada.com/cultural-enrichment/>) Pleased to see a local organization that provides funds for historical conservation and restoration projects, Johnson brought the grant to Nickerson’s attention. Nickerson completed the grant



application in November and was notified in January that CCADA would provide \$400 towards the restoration project. CCADA has five grant categories: “conservation of a previously owned or newly acquired object.” The Cape Cod, Antique Dealers Association, grants HSSC the necessary funds to bring the irreplaceable diplomas and certificates up to archival standards. The expected completion of this project will be in late Spring 2023.

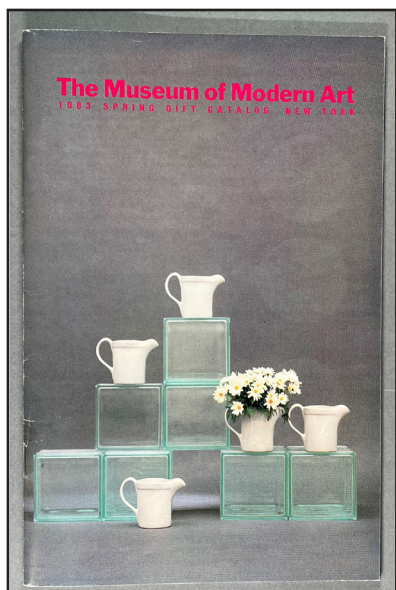
[Image: The Doctor’s Office in the Cotuit Museum

Everything in the “office” belonged to Dr. Donald Ellwood Higgins—Cotuit’s family doctor for some 45 years—or to his father, Dr. J. Haydn Higgins, a founder of Cape Cod Hospital. Dr. Don’s diplomas and certificates are featured prominently on the back wall.]

THE MoMA ARCHIVES BACKLOG PROJECT AND THE PROCESSING OF MoMA RETAIL CATALOGUES

By Rachel Garbade, Assistant Archivist, Museum of Modern Art

In October 2022 I joined the Archives, Library, and Research Collections team at MoMA as an Assistant Archivist. My primary project was to process the backlog that had accumulated in the Archives over the years, a varied body of materials including both museum records and external donations. At the beginning, my work typically involved sorting through individual items—such as a postcard or annotated book—to determine which preexisting collection it should be added to, and updating the finding aid as needed to indicate the presence of newly processed material. However, as I went along, larger groups of items required more involved processing. Sometimes the material was so substantial—as in the case of a large stack of [photocopied letters](#) between photographer Edward Weston and MoMA curators Beaumont and Nancy Newhall—that a new series had to be added to a collection. Meanwhile, other material was so anomalous that it could only be its own collection with a new finding aid written from scratch.



This was the case with three boxes of MoMA sales catalogs, dating from 1976 to 2020, that were transferred to the Archives from the Department of Publications and the MoMA Library between 2020 and 2021. The catalogs from the Department of Publications featured books for sale, whereas the catalogs from the Library represented a broader range of merchandise for sale at the Museum's stores, such as design objects and furniture.

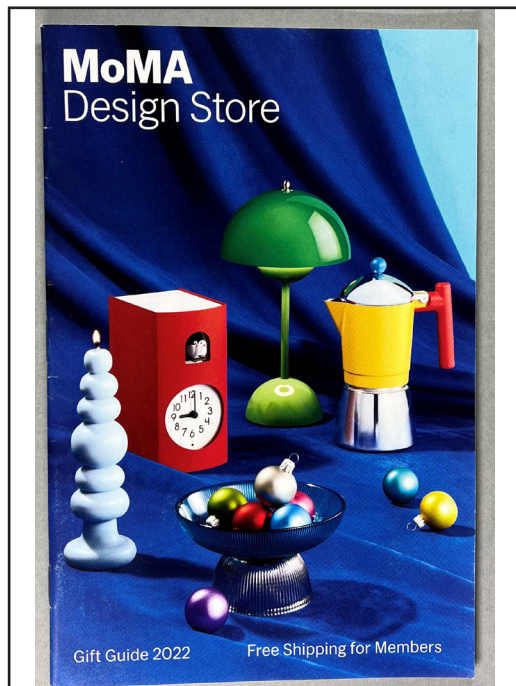
During my initial survey of preexisting collections, I came across one titled "Mail Order Catalogs," consisting of about ten or so sales catalogs like those found in the three backlog boxes. This one-box collection was the product of a transfer from the Mail Order Department in 1990, but had been left unprocessed and lacked a finding aid. As I dove deeper, I discovered additional sales pamphlets and catalogs, dating

as far back as 1934, in two other collections, Archives Pamphlet Files and Reports and Pamphlets, both of which are essentially informal subject files for miscellaneous museum materials. Those additional catalogs advertised the sale of books, postcards, color reproductions, color slides, print portfolios, Christmas and holiday cards, sculpture reproductions, posters, gifts, calendars, games, furniture, design objects, toys, housewares, and hardware. Thus, it became clear that in processing these three boxes from the backlog, I was faced with the unique opportunity to bring together a significant quantity of retail catalogs together in one place, through somewhat



unconventional means. Respect des fonds did not really apply to this material, given the artificial nature of the existing collections.

Because some catalogs focused on just one type of item, while others featured a variety of merchandise, it was most straightforward to arrange this new collection chronologically, with one folder per year, rather than by product type. As I gathered the material together, though, I did not have one catalog for every year. Thus, I skipped the standard process of numbering the folders and instead chose to label them by year, to allow future accruals to painlessly retain the collection's chronological sequencing without a complete renumbering.



As I removed items from folders in the Archives Pamphlet Files and Reports and Pamphlets, I left printed memos in their place and notes in the finding aids to alert seasoned researchers that they had been moved to the collection that would now newly be named [MoMA Retail, Publications, and Other Sales Catalogs](#). (“Mail Order Catalogs” did not sufficiently articulate that only MoMA published the catalogs and felt like an outdated term that lacked specificity.) Similarly, to ease with the reference of this collection, in the newly authored finding aid, I added an abstract note to each folder with a brief inventory; e.g. 1981: 1 color slides catalog, 1 publications catalog, 1 retail catalog.

To celebrate the processing of this collection and publication of its online finding aid, I was invited to curate a vitrine exhibition of holiday and gift related catalogs, to coincide with the holiday season. Little did I know, after chatting with colleagues in the department, this would lead to the discovery of yet another folder in Archives Pamphlet Files with additional Christmas card catalogs. So, after the final accrual, the collection now boasts 170 catalogs, fourteen of which are on display in the MoMA Library vitrine exhibition, titled Holiday Retail Catalogs.



The highlight of this project was a visit from eight members of the Retail department. As I pulled catalogs from the collection, I was met with a chorus of oohs and aahs and eager photographing of vintage catalog pages. Some staff members focused on the romantic wording of sales pitches from the 1930s, while others delighted in seeing products sold in the 1980s that are still available today. (MoMA knows good, timeless design!) I also learned that the first design object sold by the Museum was a kaleidoscope, present on the pages of at least one catalog from the 1970s. There was even brainstorming talk of bringing back some vintage products for the Museum's 100th anniversary in 2029, guided by these very pages.

I believe the visit proved the importance of my overall backlog processing project. Not only are existing collections being enriched by one or several item accruals, but also entire collections are being rethought or created anew to facilitate the research of this museum's multifaceted history. MoMA not only paved the way for the exhibiting and collecting of modern art, but also for museum store merchandising, for example. In this particular case, I was reminded how archives have the power to elucidate unique facets of the Museum's history, while also fostering collaboration across departments. I can't wait to see what I uncover in the backlog next!

THE WILLIAM P. AND MOYA OLSEN LEAR PAPERS

By Jenn Parent, Project Archivist, The Museum of Flight

The Museum of Flight's Collections Team is pleased to announce the completion of a 2-year grant-funded project to process and make available the William P. and Moya Olsen Lear Papers. This project was made possible from a major grant from the Humanities Collections and Reference Resources program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Photographic slide of William P. Lear with a car and Lockheed Lodestar aircraft, December 12, 1954.

William P. "Bill" Lear is most well-known for the Learjet and his work in the aviation field. Yet with over 130 patents, Lear is considered a pioneer beyond the field of aviation. In 2000, Bill's widow and a trustee of the Museum, Moya Olsen Lear deeded the William P. and Moya Olsen Lear Papers to the Museum of Flight. Consisting of the more than 285 cubic feet of Lears' office files and having come directly from Moya, this collection is the most complete and authentic archive of the Lears.

The William P. and Moya Olsen Lear Papers documents the extensive and varied career of inventor and businessman Bill Lear, with a smaller focus on the philanthropic and business activities of Moya Olsen Lear. The collection, which dates from 1838 through 2001, consists of administrative records, correspondence, financial reports, research files, legal records and patent applications, technical reports and drawings, photographs, negatives, scrapbooks, and ephemera illustrating Lear's interests and inventions, particularly in the realms of navigation and aircraft design, that often were perceived as ground-breaking, innovative, and ahead of their time.

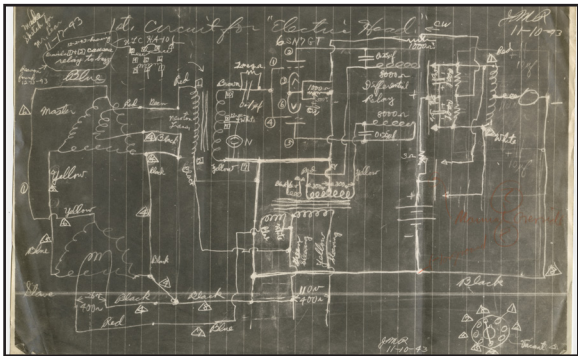
The collection had arrived with little original order. After surveying the materials and determining that there was documentation from several different companies as well as personal items, we decided on a company-by-company arrangement following chronological order with personal materials at the end. We ultimately ended with sixteen series, beginning with Lear Developments in the 1930s, which manufactured direction finders and aircraft receivers, to Lear Fan, Ltd. in the 1970s which developed the Lear Fan business jet. It continues chronologically through his career and past his death as Moya Lear worked to



Photograph of Moya Lear at first flight of the Lear Fan 2100, January 1, 1981.

drive his legacy. Additional content focuses on Bill and Moya's professional lives. The personal materials support their philanthropic and social endeavors, as well as focus largely on recognition they each earned.

Processing such a large and technical collection was no easy feat and there were definitely challenges. As noted, the collection is highly technical and often lacked contextual information. For example, the LearAvia Corporation (Series XII) produced numerous aircraft products, including autopilot systems, a battery temperature indicator, a cabin temperature controller, a nose wheel steering system, and a synchroscope. Each product had several



Sketch related to Learton control system. Created by J.M.R., November 10, 1943

component parts, also produced by LearAvia Corp. or its partners. Documents for those components as well as the products are present in the Technical Files subseries and consist of photographs and transparencies; charts and technical data; diagrams and sketches, including numerous oversize versions; reports and manuals; and related FAA certificates and correspondence. Although the parts were assigned identification numbers, it was not always evident from the files which final product the individual numbered parts actually

related to. Because of this confusion and the limited time we could spend trying to identify individual parts, I was unable to group the materials by product and instead listed each piece independently by number. Additionally there were many photographs of component parts that were unidentified, and without technical knowledge and deep familiarity of the company's many products it was hard to organize these. The lack of context in such a specialized collection presented difficulty in describing content accurately enough so it would be findable by researchers. For that reason, many of the folder titles are quite granular, providing information on both subjects and formats, so as to provide enough access points as possible.

Relatedly, many of the companies existed contemporaneously and had complex, overlapping relationships as subsidiaries or affiliates that supported or made products for each other. Some were absorbed into main companies, some branches broke out on their own as an organization. Tracking the path and intersectionality of the companies was like a solving complex maze. Another similar challenge was finding materials within the collection from multiple companies that initially we did not know existed and thus requiring multiple restructures of our initial processing plan.

One of the biggest challenges was the enormous number of oversize documents, many of which arrived folded or rolled. The bulk of the oversize materials are technical diagrams that illustrate Lear's inventions. They were produced in varying formats, including diazo prints, sepia diazo prints, hand-drawn pencil and ink sketches on paper, and reproductions on plastic film.

Many of these were too large to fit into our oversize boxes or flat files and needed to remain rolled. Due to the sheer quantity (more than 2500), it was not cost-effective to order archival tubes. We needed 100 tubes to complete the project. To mitigate the cost, archivist Charise Dinges wrapped non-archival tubes in hand-cut polyester which she then adhered to the tube with double-sided tape. As the tubes come in one size, she had to hand-cut approximately 70 tubes to size. She then rolled the documents onto the prepared tubes, wrapped them in archival tissue and tied them securely with acid-free linen thread. The tubes were then placed in long boxes or bags for storage.



Custom cut tubes and Mylar protect oversized technical drawings too large to unroll.



Photographs of William P. Lear with a Lear-o-scope and loop antenna, New York City, NY, circa 1935.

Since the collection covers so many of Lear’s companies, I thought I’d share a few series highlights. First is Lear Developments. Founded in 1931, Lear Developments’ main focus was aircraft radio and navigation development and production. The company’s first major success was the 1935 Model L Radio Compass, also called the “Lear-O-Scope.” Supported in the collection with the patent application, specifications, and photographs, it was marketed for commercial pilots and was one of the early radio-based direction finders for aircraft.

Jumping ahead a few years brings researchers to the Lear Jet Corporation, established in 1962 and the home of Bill Lear’s most well-known endeavor, the Lear Jet, a small, fast executive transport plane. Technical documents, including oversize diagrams, and photographs for are present. Also present are materials around the 8-track player and cartridges which were developed and produced by Lear and his team at Lear Jet Stereo 8. It’s often a surprise to folks to learn that!



Photograph of a Learjet 23 aircraft (tail number N801L) in flight, circa 1963.

The Lear Motors Corporation series is a personal favorite. I had no idea that Bill Lear had worked on anything outside of aviation, much less developing steam engines from 1968-1975. In an attempt to address pollution,

Lear developed steam-powered vehicles, including a passenger transit bus, passenger cars and a racecar. Dozens of photographs, promotional films, and numerous technical drawings document the three projects.

Finally, the Lear Fan Limited series focuses on Lear's final project prior to his 1978 death: the quest to develop, produce, and market the Lear Fan 2100, an all-composite aircraft. The series holds administrative, financial, and legal records and 2800 photographic items that document its development. This section is also unique in that it's the only business-related series to feature Moya Olsen Lear prominently. After Bill died, Moya took the lead and fought for FAA certification, although she was ultimately unsuccessful. history.



Photograph of the two Lear Fan aircraft (tall number N327LF and N626LF) in flight likely during a test, circa 1980-1984.



Photograph of William P. Lear and Moya Lear in a Lear steam-powered bus, Reno, NV, circa 1970s.



Photograph of the Lear Vapordyne Indy race car, circa 1968-1971.

These few highlights are just a mere glimpse into the depth and breadth of the William P. and Moya Olsen Lear Papers. The collection is a treasure trove of materials for not only aviation enthusiasts but other interests, such as history of sound technology and business history. It is a rich resource for all types of uses, from casual interest and edification to academic research to telling stories through books and documentaries, and more. Last but far from least, I'd like to acknowledge my peers on the project team : Karen Bean, Nicole Davis, Charise Dinges, Sarah Frederick, Kelci Hopp, Ali Lane, and Arabella

Matthews for their incredible work and assistance during this project. The William P. and Moya Olsen Lear Papers finding aid is available at <https://archives.museumofflight.org/repositories/2/resources/63> . Digitized content will be online by the summer of 2023 on our Digital Collections at <https://digitalcollections.museumofflight.org/> .

Museum Archives Section Steering Committee 2022-2023

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Tara Laver	Co-Chair	Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
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