

Integrated Organization: Processing 500 feet of Special Collection Materials in Under 18 Months



Donica Martin, Archives Librarian and Angela Solis, Archives Apprentice
Champaign County Historical Archives, The Urbana Free Library, 210 West Green Street, Urbana, Illinois 61801



The Project

The Champaign County Historical Archives (CCHA) of The Urbana Free Library holds approximately 1,000 linear feet of special collections material related to county history. In November 2017, over 650 linear feet remained unprocessed and inaccessible to the public. Within 18 months, approximately 550 boxes consisting of 800+ collections were consolidated into 350 finding aids, that are accessible via the library's *Local History Online* catalog.

This poster highlights how archives staff and graduate students established a workflow and physically organized, inventoried, and cataloged over 500 feet of materials in under 18 months using Society of American Archivists (SAA) guidelines for reappraising and deaccessioning materials.

Planning Phase

Activities

- ✓ Attended SAA Workshop on Reappraisal and Deaccessioning in Chicago, Illinois, May 2017
- ✓ Studied SAA's Best Practices for Volunteers and developed a volunteer program
- ✓ Created an initial report and project proposal with a checklist of work to be completed before beginning the project
- ✓ Drafted a practicum description for Spring 2018

Work completed before beginning the project:

- ✓ Obtained administrative approval
- ✓ Reviewed the Illinois Abandoned Property Law (Museum Disposition of Property Act: Illinois Compiled Statutes Chapter 765, ILCS 1033)
- ✓ Defined objectives and purposes for the project
- ✓ Studied the Urbana Free Library's collection management policies
- ✓ Identified the scope of collections to reappraise
- ✓ Collected additional data for target collections
- ✓ Identified and quantified necessary resources such as staff time, budget, UIUC collaboration, number of volunteers, physical space
- ✓ Defined clear guidelines for reappraising collections (checklists, etc.)

Goals

- Reduce backlog
- Evaluate condition of unprocessed collections
- Address immediate preservation concerns
- Improve overall access to materials for both staff and patrons
- Correct faulty appraisal methods that occurred upon accessioning
- Comply with current institutional collection management policies
- Assess collecting strengths and refine collecting focus
- Balance resource allocation (space, staff time, conservation resources)
- Develop a better understanding of the collection held by our institution

Objectives

Discovery – We want our collections to be discovered and used by patrons!

Tasks

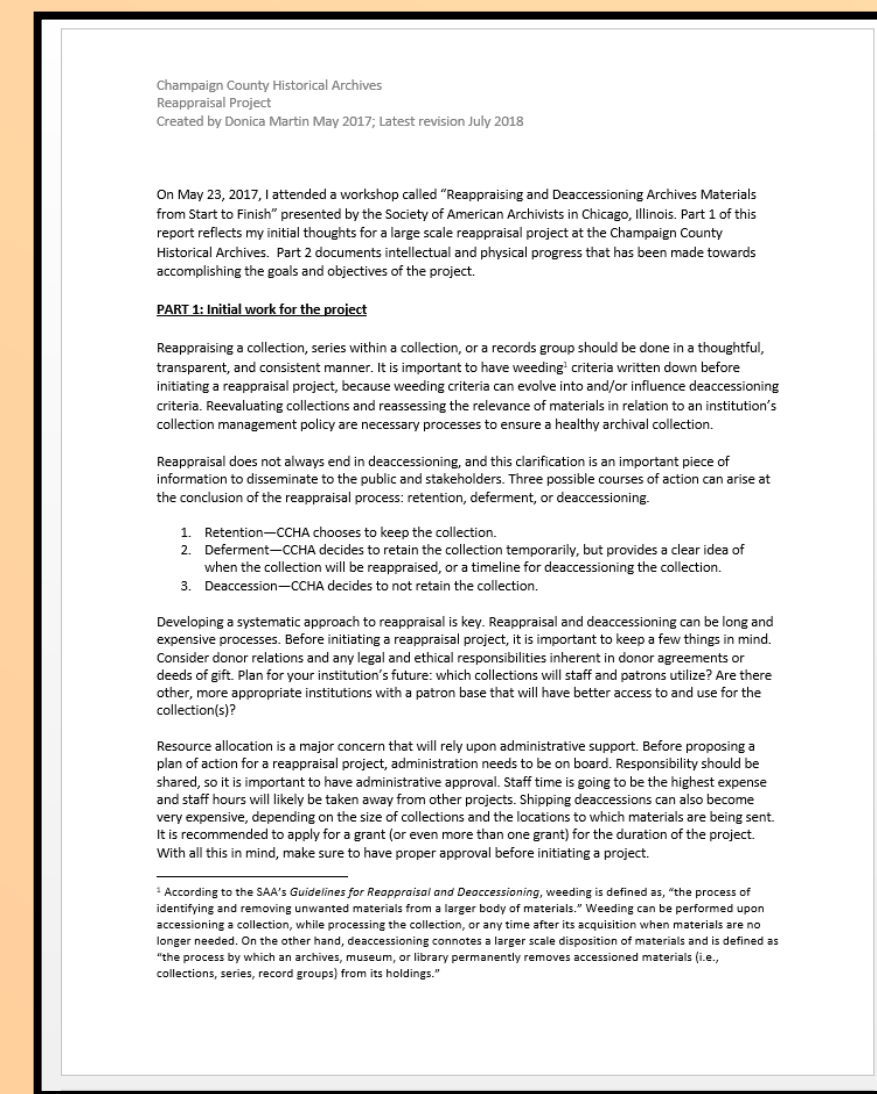
- Create finding aids for collections that are processed, or for which sufficient metadata exists
- Complete OCLC records for all collections with finding aids
- Create or update existing *Local History Online* catalog records for boxes that are not ready for OCLC records, and provide a link to clean versions of box logs

Organization – Logical intellectual and physical organization of collections

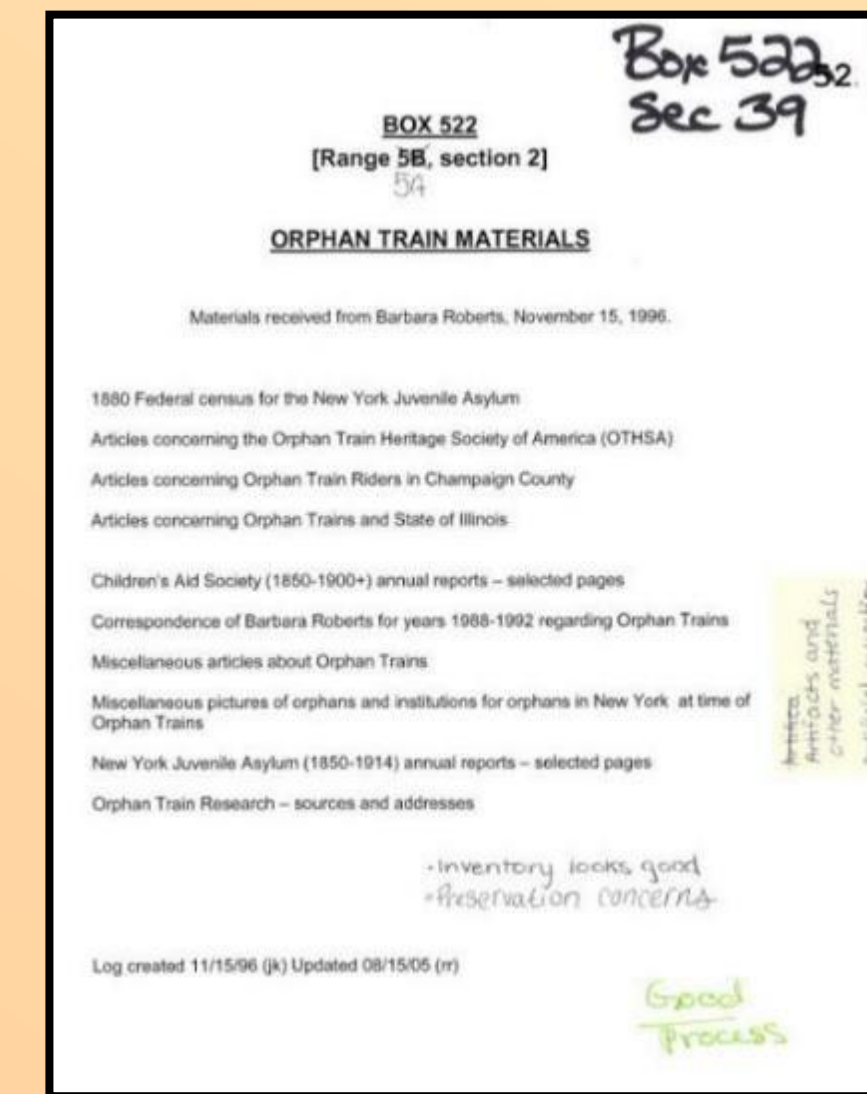
Tasks

- Organize the Library Annex shelf list, reappraisal Excel sheet, and box log files for easier intellectual access
- Physically organize collections at the Library Annex
- Combine collections of related materials and physically move them closer to one another to prepare for processing
- Flag collections that are ready for processing and assign to graduate volunteers

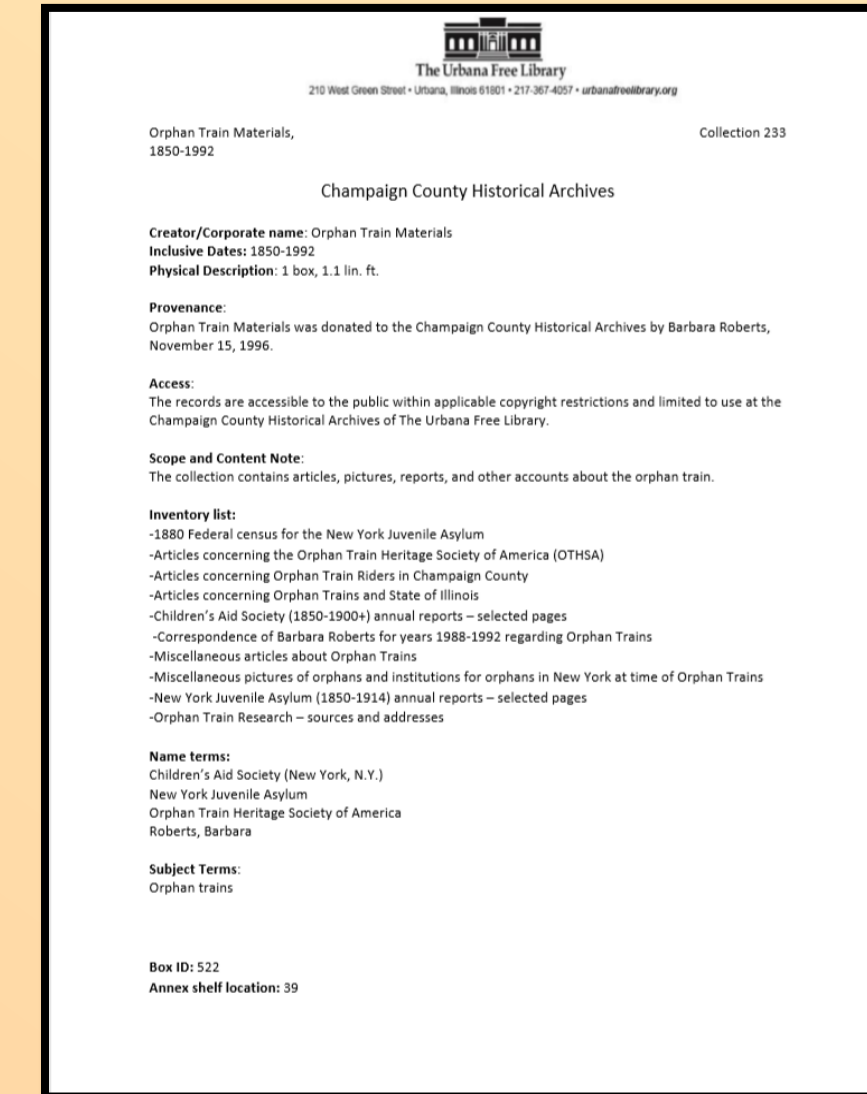
Planning



First page of the initial report and proposal of project in 2017

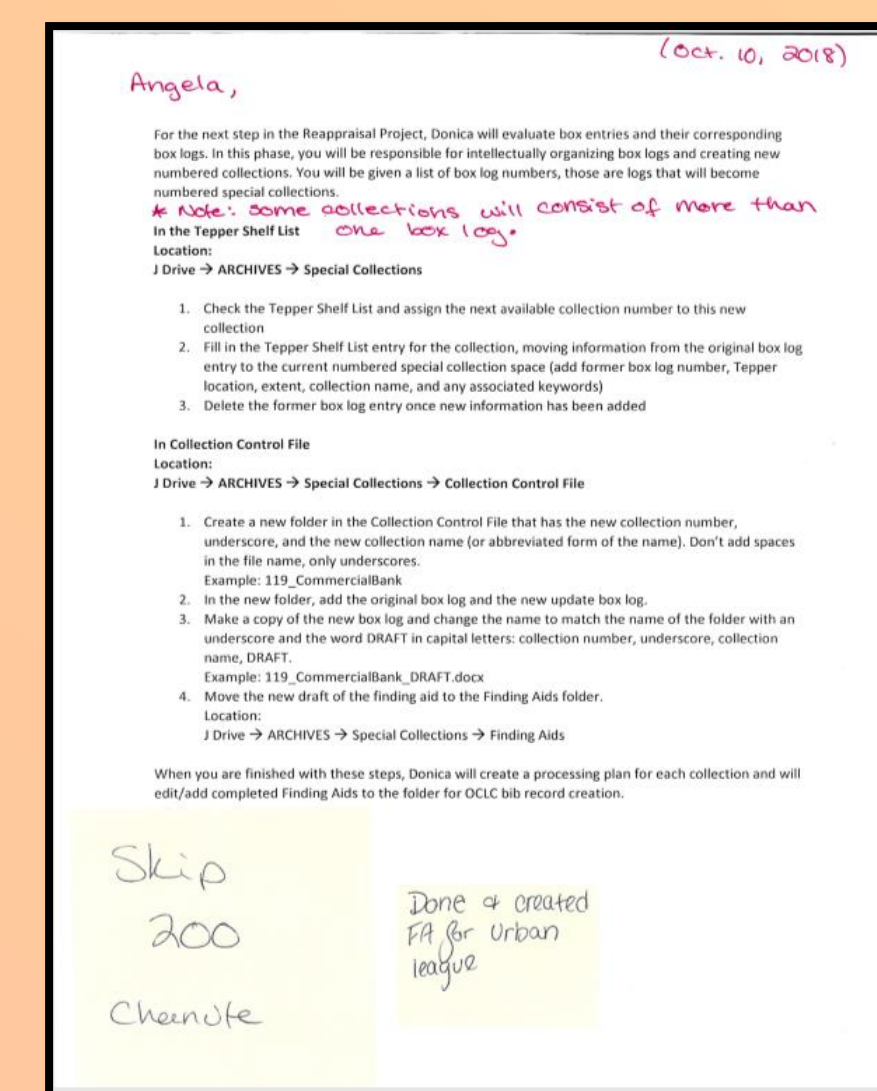


Box log with notes made during physical inventory

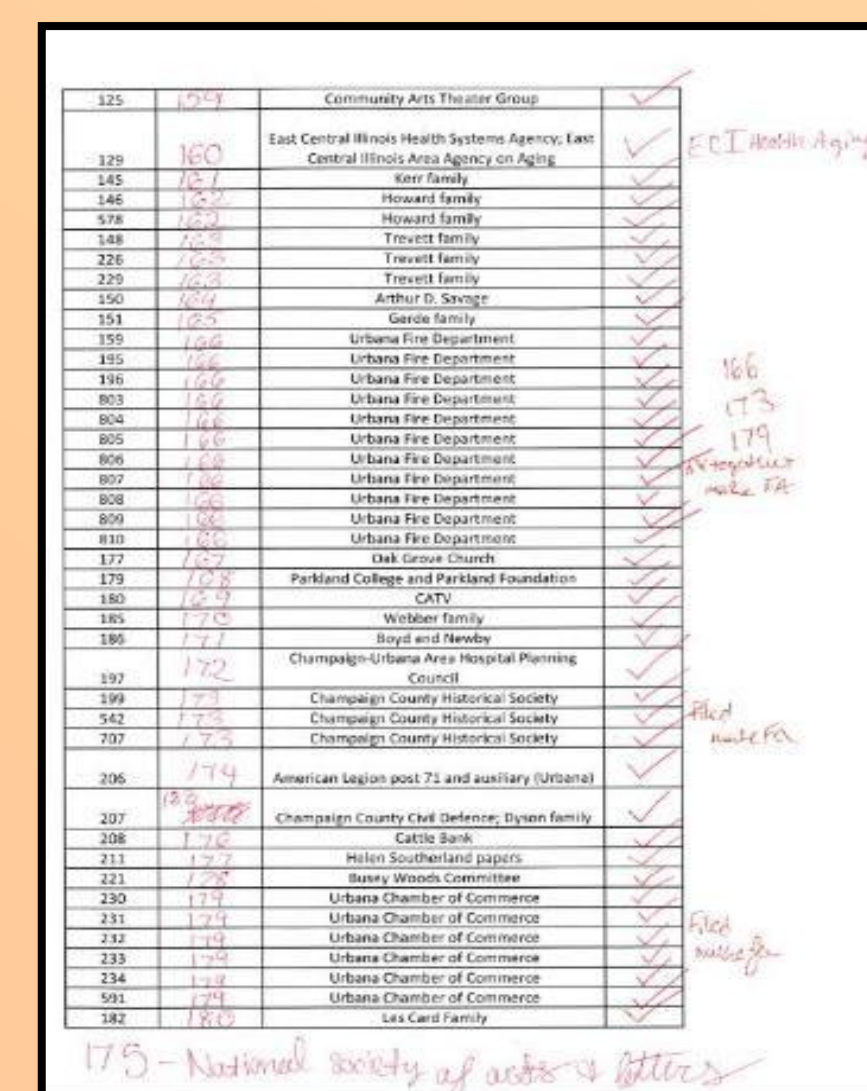


Completed finding aid

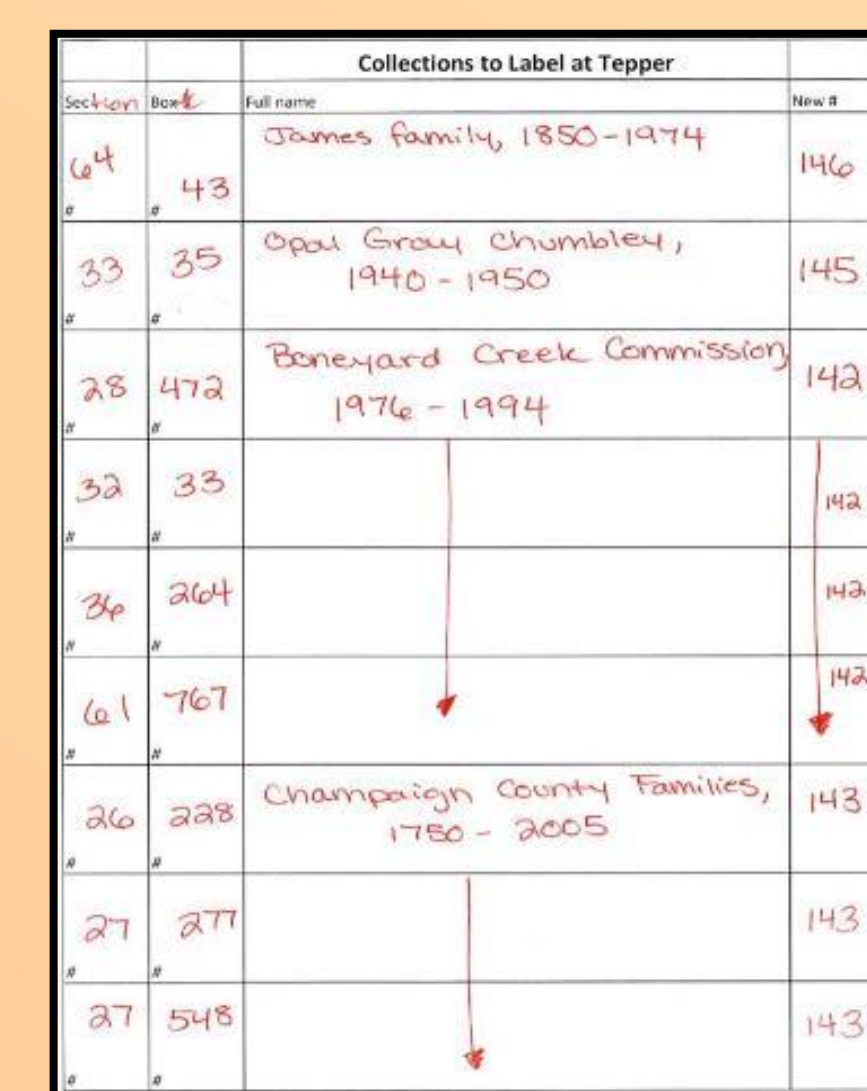
Implementation



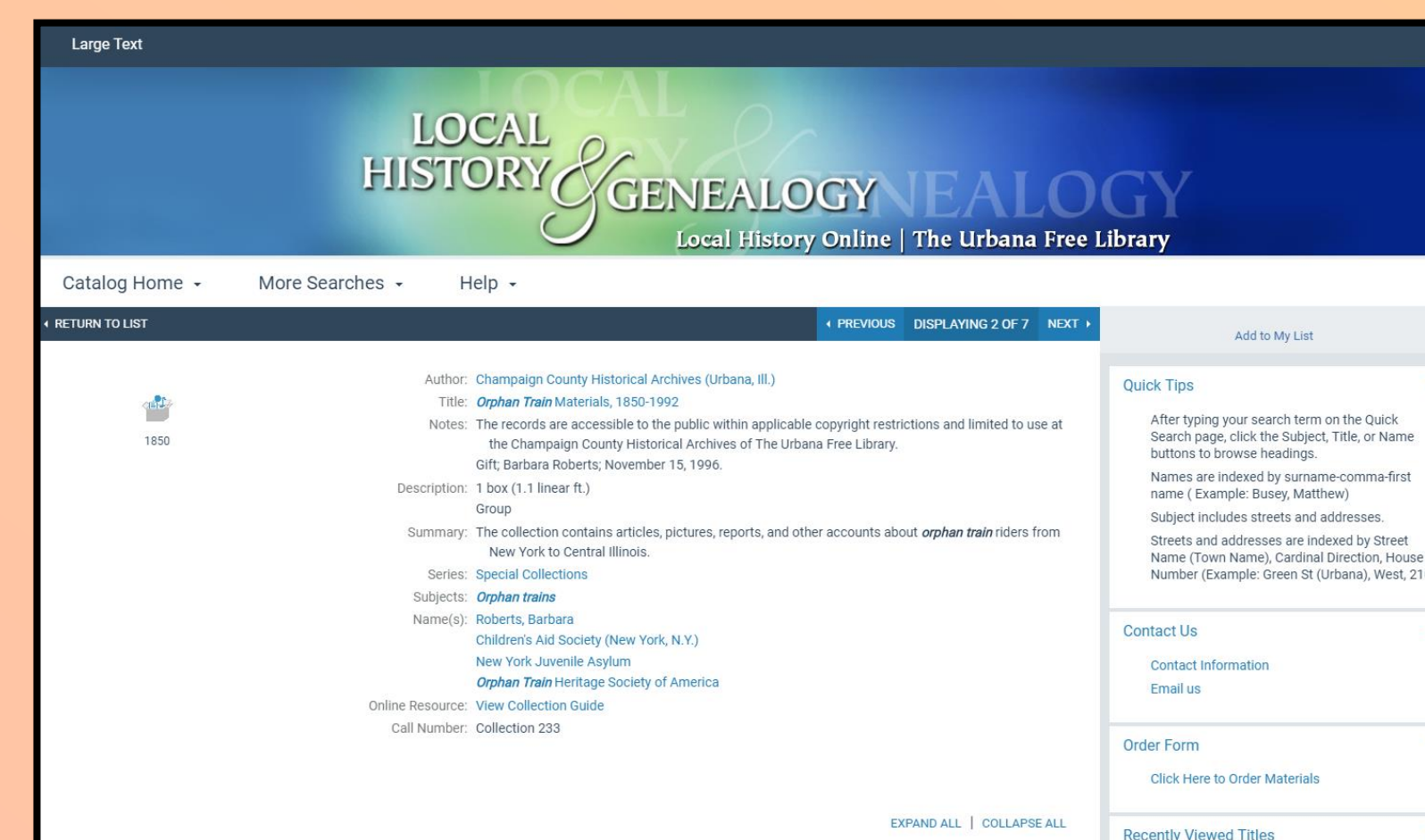
Instructions for combining large artificial collections of related materials



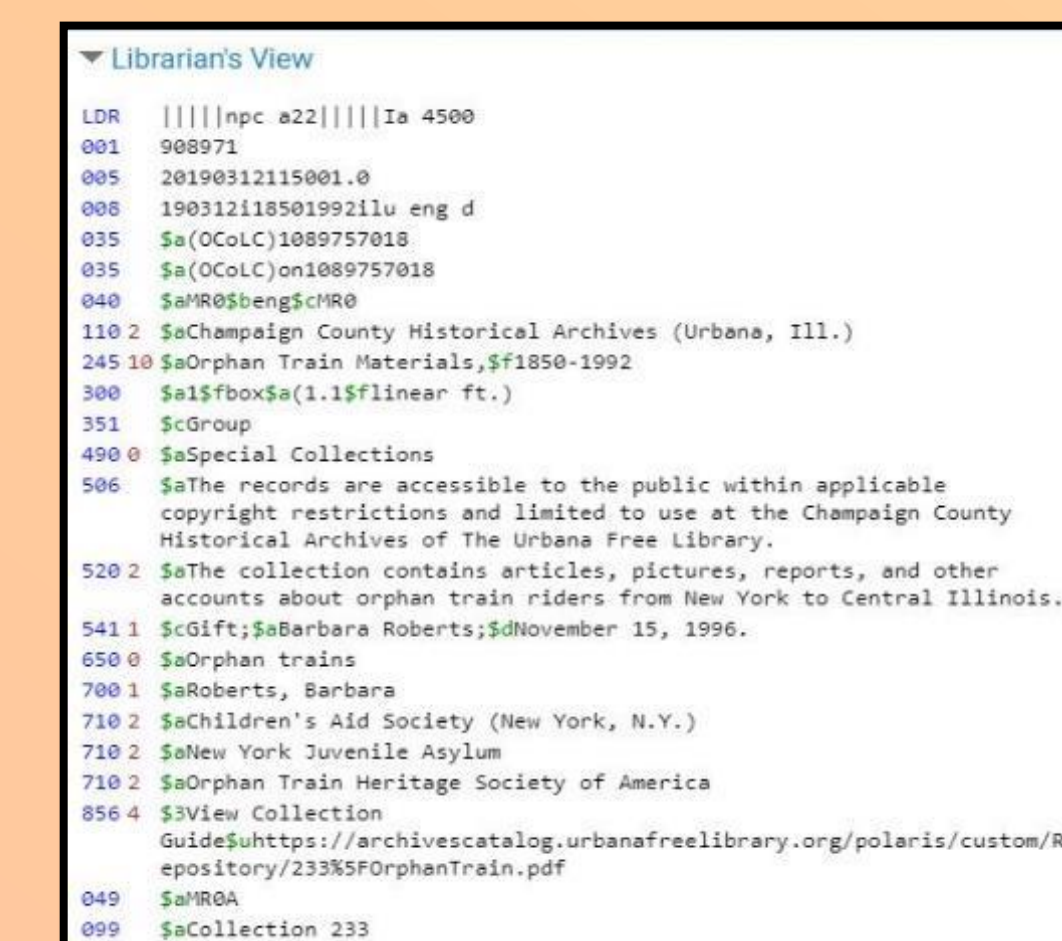
Worksheet listing locations and box numbers of collections to combine, including notes regarding completion



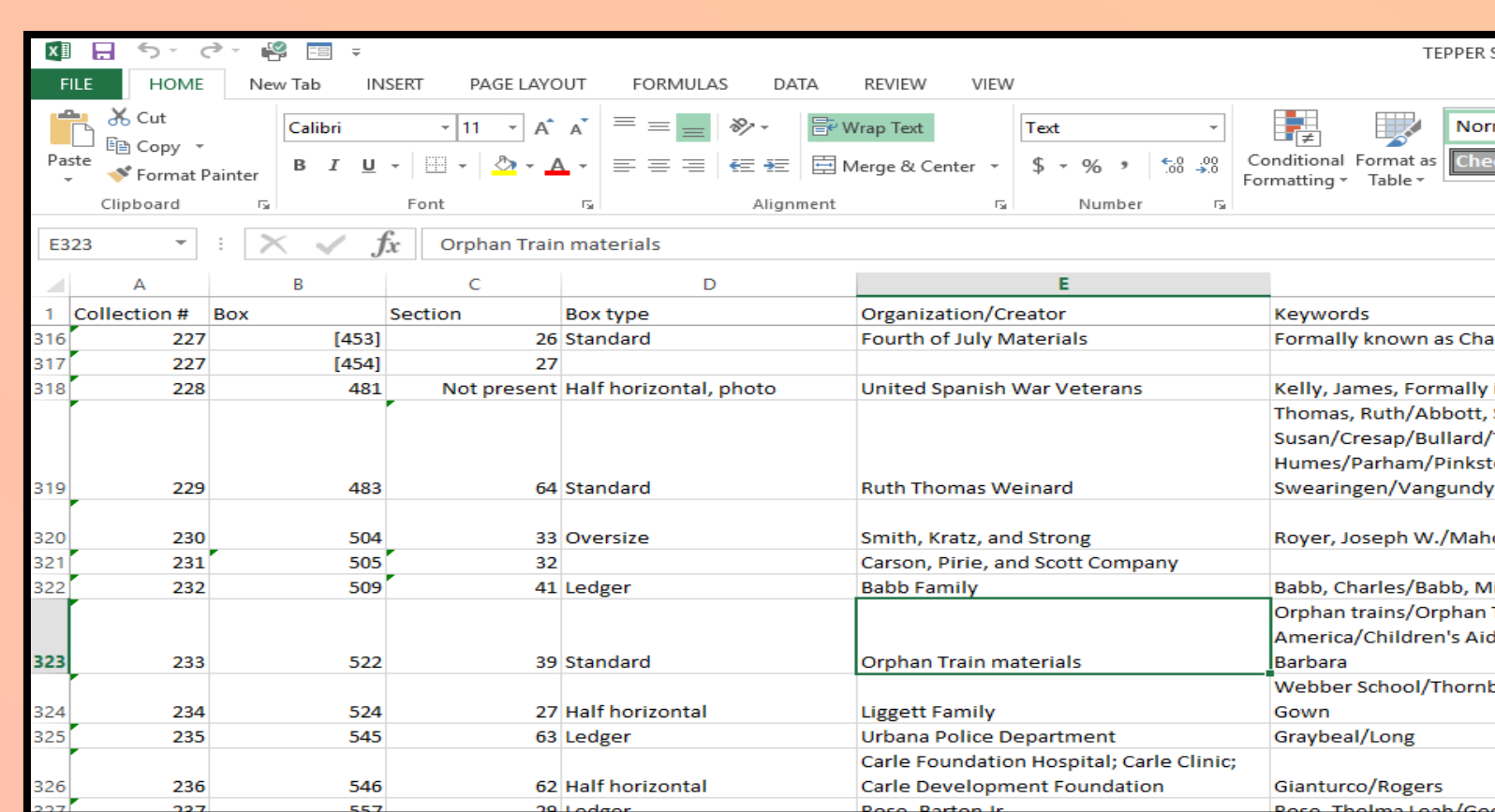
Worksheet for physical reorganization of collections



Local History Online catalog record



MARC record



Library Annex Shelf List: staff guide to collection contents and location



Processed collections

Reappraisal Guidelines

The Library Annex is located adjacent to the main library. The Annex houses all of the Archives' processed collections, the Chanute Air Force Museum's collection, and many Champaign County Circuit Court records. In addition, the Library Annex is a storage facility for **approximately 650 linear feet of special collections that were in-process or unprocessed**. These collections represent a large subset of all special collections held by CCHA, and were the target of this reappraisal project. **Storage boxes were targeted for reappraisal based on the following shared characteristics:**

- Listed by box number in the Library Annex shelf list meaning that no/minimal discovery is available to library users
- No assigned collection number, meaning the collection had not been evaluated or processed
- Not listed in accession database, meaning no/minimal/varying donor information exists
- Various stages of processing and inventorying
- Boxes may contain more than one collection and/or accession and may or may not be related to the other collection(s) and/or accession(s) within the same box
- Some of these collections no longer fit CCHA's collection management policy

Intellectual and Physical Organization

Spring Semester -2018 – Practicum student and Archives Librarian

- 550 special collections boxes; 650 linear feet
- 350 box logs and inventories updated

Fall Semester 2018 – Archives Apprentice and iSchool volunteers

- 150 inventories reformatted
- 370+ finding aids generated
- 50+ finding aids added to OCLC database, Archives Grid search engine, and *Local History Online* catalog
- 7 iSchool volunteers processed 26 linear feet of materials

Spring Semester 2019 – Archives Apprentice, Archives staff, and iSchool volunteers

- 550 boxes labeled and relocated according to processing priority in the Library Annex
- 90+ finding aids added to OCLC database, Archives Grid search engine, and *Local History Online* catalog
- 8 iSchool volunteers processed 28 linear feet of materials

Next step: Deaccessioning

Additional collection research needed to make an informed decision:

- Donor/creator information (will there be negative consequences if certain collections are transferred or destroyed?)
- Donor correspondence and/or donor file materials
- Agreements, deeds of gifts, donor forms
- Any inventories or lists of contents
- Any other available administrative and/or intellectual information
- Institutional memory from staff members

Results

The issue of large backlogs does not have to be overwhelming for institutions, even those with limited staff and funding. Formatting this action plan to other institutions is possible and can help control and manage special collections backlogs in an approachable and efficient manner.

The initial planning phase, physical collection organization, and intellectual access took about 18 months to accomplish. Physical arrangement and description, along with deaccessioning materials will take an additional 12-18 months. The project was accomplished with 1-3 people working in tandem for approximately 20-25 total hours per week over a period of 18 months.