With an Eye on the Prize – the Struggles of a Lone Arranger with Acquisition & Appraisal – Shari Christy, AFRL/HO Research Division, WPAFB, OH.

ABCs front slide

Good morning. This is the session: "ABCs of Acquisition and Appraisal." We're your hosts, Shari Christy, Lonna McKinley and Adriana Cuervo. Since we don't have a chair, the format will be that we'll each introduce ourselves then proceed right into each of our presentations.

I. <u>Brief background of Shari and AFRL/HO Research Division</u>

Slide 1: I'm Shari Christy, a Lone Arranger slash Institutional Archivist in a science & technology oriented institution. I'm the Contract Archivist with the Air Force Research Laboratory History Office Research Division located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, in Dayton Ohio.

Slide 2: The Air Force Research Laboratory's heritage dates back to 1917 when the first beginnings of research into aviation were starting at McCook Field in Dayton and has gone through many iterations

Slide 3, This is our timeline showing the evolution of AFRL beginning in 1917 and ending in 1997 with AFRL's creation. As you can see (or can't see given the tininess of this slide) AFRL has been multiple divisions, branches, and superlabs, until finally culminating in its current iteration – the Air Force Research Laboratory.

II. <u>First things first in Acquisition - LET'S TALK ABOUT A COLLECTION POLICY:</u>

Slide 4 AFRL "stood-up" or came into being in October of 1997 but they didn't have an archivist until I came along in January of 1999.

They also didn't have an archives or Research Division space/area/room – they just knew they wanted to collect materials to document the history of AFRL. So, the first thing I did was to sit down and develop our collection policy and this is always the guiding / "Golden" principle in your acquisition and appraisal program. Here's mine. **Slide 5**

- The AFRL research division accepts unclassified and non-proprietary materials that document important decisions relating to AFRL and its predecessor organizations – all the way back to 1917. These include the Science & Technology activity itself, planning, finances, personnel, and so on. Materials can be on almost any type of media – electronic, paper, photo, video, etc. The research division maintains the provenance of the donated materials and preserves their original order. (Materials not accepted include technical reports, which are housed at DTIC, and 3-D artifacts, which should be given to the National Museum of the United States Air Force.)

  Now, admittedly, it's vague but there's a reason for that. Due to the very nature of Research & Development and the diversity of AFRL, we can't say definitely that we'll accept this and only this and not that or never that. But this broad collection policy doesn't mean that we accept anything and everything. Let's take a look at the Qualities or Characteristics we look for in a collection. **Slide 6**

- Informational value – the collection tells about persons, activities, and projects with which AFRL or predecessors have been involved in over the years. – These include specific projects worked on such as the National Aerospace Plane project or the Aerobee project – to name a few.

- Evidential significance – the collection contains evidence about functions and activities of AFRL and predecessor labs over time. – these include organizational charts, phone books – which are a great resource when someone is trying to confirm that "dad or mom" worked there; and Research & Development Project Case files – which document a particular project from beginning to end – again to name a few.

- Thirdly - the Intrinsic value/Uniqueness – the collection has one or more unique factors that make it important to retain – an example of this are materials we recently acquired relating to the Manned Orbiting Laboratory – which laid the groundwork for the space program and with which the

USAF School of Aerospace Medicine (now under AFRL) was a predominant player.

- **Slide 7** – final word on Collection policy – Develop one - yesterday!

III. Next step in Acquisition - LET'S TALK ABOUT SPACE ISSUES – **Slide 8**

A. When I came on board – there was no defined "archival space" – however we still acquired collections based on our collection policy. Space wasn't really an issue for us initially as we were trying to build our collection. Now that we've been around for a while and we have a defined space/location, it's becoming more of an issue. **Slide 9**

B. To determine your space issues: Know how much you currently have and what's in each collection – at least in an overall way – This will cut down on duplication and or facilitate adding to current collections. What you acquire should be influenced in part by what you already have. To possibly supplement current collections and/or round out missing pieces of existing collections or to take your archives in a new direction – always within the guidelines of your collection policy.

C. Know how MUCH you can take in – how much open space and how fast are you processing – are you currently using More Product Less Process Versus Standard processing? Will you be doing that in the future?

D. Is the new collection a better representation? Deaccessioning can be part of this process. If the answer's yes – you can save space.

E. Currently – We have approximately 1800 linear feet of processed materials which range from 16 mm film of assorted S&T tests to lantern slides to materials from 2009. And we have approximately 700 linear feet of unprocessed materials. We have evolved into 4 rooms – 1 for unprocessed collections and 3 others for processed collections. **Slides 10-13 –** These slides show the basic layout of the

Research Division – which ranges are open and which collections are in which room. We have compact shelving which maximizes the space but we still need to be judicial in our acquisition of collections. I also use this layout for disaster preparedness – indicating by color, the priority of collections to be salvaged/saved. Red being top priority, followed by Yellow, then green.

F. **SLIDE 14:** When I receive in anything – regardless of whether or not I ultimately keep the collection – I log the collection into my Accessions Log. This helps me maintain intellectual control in a broad sense for the Research Division. I use a simple excel spreadsheet showing basic information of the incoming collection. Date Received, Item/File Description, Record Group Collection, Encompassing Dates, Volume, Donor/Org, and the Linear Feet. I can tell at a glance how much I've received in up to that day and what type of collections they were and who they came from. The log is maintained by year – I start a new one the first day of the calendar year and retain/archive the prior years logs.

SLIDE 15: Hand in hand with the Acquisitions Log, I develop a "Records Transmittal Form." This form gives me even more intellectual control over the collection. It tells me at a quick glance: Which collection the box is part of, the date I received the collection, a brief description of the collection overall, and the quantity of the collection received in. I send an electronic copy of this form to the donor for their records. Once I've completed the form, I tape a copy of it to each box that is part of the collection. I also have a preliminary inventory section on the form – so that I can note when I appraised the contents of the box and make the necessary notes. Here's what a typical range looks like in the unprocessed section of the research division. **Slide 16**

IV. <u>OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN ACQUISITION</u>: **Slide 17**

a. Security (valuable collection; or Classified versus unclassified) – when possible, we do not accept Classified – as it has many storage issues –

such as you need a secure vault and special handling is required. As an example of security issues, a while back we were contacted by the AFRL library about their donating to us a collection of rare books relating to early research in aviation and aeronautics. The library was in an open stacks location and the rare books were disappearing! We now have the books behind a cipher lock and most of them are in phase boxes due to their fragile state and they don't circulate any more!

b. Restrictions – We do have documents with restrictions – it's part of the nature of our documents as they relate to R&D and S&T but they are handled on a case-by-case basis. In other words – the whole collection might not be restricted, merely a few documents. When those are requested, their classification is reviewed by the current responsible organization prior to the release of those documents. But other institutions I know do get collections from donors with specific restrictions – such as don't open to public for 25 years, etc. So that's something to consider when acquiring a collection like that – is it more trouble than it's worth?

c. Labor – we're fortunate in the respect that we are an "institutional" research division – materials we collect are used by AFRL historians to write the history of AFRL and other projects. So we're not under any "strict deadlines" to get collections processed. But it is something to consider – are the expectations of the donor that the collection will be processed immediately? Within 6 months? I'm very careful about never promising a "processed by" date. You never know what might come up to get in the way! I'm also fortunate in that although I'm a lone arranger – I do have student help through the Student Temporary Employment Program – these are typically graduate students from the local public history program. They assist in a big way in getting collections processed and keeping my backlog down to a workable level.

V. Next step in Acquisition - LET'S TALK ABOUT DONORS

Slide 18: Donors – I deal primarily with internal/institutional donors, very few are external. We are also not dependent upon monetary donations from donors to keep working and stay open.

Considerations for acquisition include:

a. How dependent is your organization on donors of collections for financial donations? Would not taking the collection impact future financial dealings?

b. If you acquire a collection, can the donor also make a monetary donation for processing it? Can you take the collection if the answer is no?

VI. **slide 19**:SAYING YES with a Big But! First – that's not me! Just want to make that clear. Here's some reasons for saying Yes to a donor who wants to donate a collection.

Yes because you never know what else they might have and could possibly donate later.

Yes because they may not know exactly what they have and might mistakenly call it something that it really isn't. For example – I was called by an individual regarding some "Tech Reports" that they had – was I interested? Technically, we can't take Tech Reports because they are handled by another organization but I don't like saying yes or no until I've seen the materials. Be upfront with donors that once you've reviewed the materials, there's a chance that you might not take them after all, citing collection policy, space issues, etc. Most potential donors understand this and it saves heartache on both ends. If someone insists that you take materials sight unseen – that should raise a red flag!

Yes because it really doesn't hurt to take a look at the materials and Yes doesn't mean you HAVE to take it: We're all strapped for time. And I've made a few trips out to a donor's location only to discover that the materials weren't really within our collection policy no matter what the donor believed. Sometimes the reverse can happen. The materials not only fit our policy but actually turn out to be something completely different than what was described to you over the phone. Case in point – getting back to my tech reports donor. I paid a visit to the donor's location and it turns out that what they had were Memo Reports that our Aero Medical Lab researchers generated in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Anytime the researchers did anything – they wrote up a report about that activity, this includes wartime research that was conducted. According to one our historians, the only other organization to have these materials is the Smithsonian in Washington DC – and they only have it on microfilm. So these were original documents. So you know I wanted these materials! And I was this close (pinch fingers) to saying No thanks!

Yes is always better than No – you just don't know what they might have later or who they'll talk to. Word of mouth is a big advantage in our business but it can also hinder, depending on how you handled the previous situation.

Be up front about possibility of Deaccessioning – for some donors, this might cause them to rethink their donation. That's understandable. In my experience, the offices I've dealt with did not want the documents back and preferred that I take care of their disposal.

Perhaps "caveat" might be a better word!

VII. NOW, LET'S TALK ABOUT APPRAISAL - **Slide 20**

Appraising – A big question to decide: On-site = at donor's location or Off-site=your institution's location

A. **On-site –Pros** – If at all possible, I advise appraising on-site.

- This prevents you from taking in a collection that doesn't fit your policy

- You can assess and address preservation issues right there and then (Mold, bugs, active or inactive, etc.)

a. Assess potential biological hazards - I heard of a student who'd been given a collection to process – straight from the donor to the student – without any review by the archivist. The student discovered actual hypodermic needles within the boxes – and there was still fluid in them! No documentation as to what the fluids were, etc. But these boxes were already at the institution – so now what?

- There are no Deaccessioning issues if you don't take the collection

However there are some cons to appraising on-site.

B. **On-site – CONS.**

- Appraisal time can be rushed – you can only stay so long and the donor is peering over your shoulder the whole time.

- The environment is less than ideal – sometimes it's a donor's unheated garage in February or a top floor warehouse non-air-conditioned attic in July (I've done both). Neither were a lot of fun.

- Pressure to take the collection – The donor can't understand how you don't see the important value of this particular collection!

- Donor Disappointment - you don't want to hurt the donor's feelings; If you don't – then what are your subsequent responsibilities in dealing with the collection?

C. **Slide 21: Off-site(at your institution) – PROS –**

   a. You can take your time to appraise

   b. It develops good donor relations

   c. Weeding/Deaccessioning – You can perform as needed (depending on the donor agreement); This is also less painful to the donor if they don't see it!

D. **Off-site – CONS**

   a. You could take in a collection with possible preservation issues

      Here's why you want to appraise on-site. **Slides 22**

      This item came from a collection that I had to box up in Rome, New York. I had approximately 4 days to box up 160+ records storage boxes. **Slide 23:** It was in manila envelope which didn't show any damage. It wasn't until I was in the midst of actual processing back in my institution that I discovered this gem. **Slide 24**

   b. Collections take up space – and sometimes that's at a premium

   c. The collection might not fit your collection policy – after all – no matter what you tell a donor – they've already decided that their collection will fit your policy and/or they just want to get rid of it and/or find a home for it.

E. **Inventory: Slide 25:** Even if you don't have time to perform a detailed/thorough appraisal of the materials initially – just going through the boxes to see if there are any housing or preservation issues is important.

   I brought samples of the types of materials we've received in the Research Division just in the past few months that I thought might be of interest.

Don't worry – nothing as bad as what I've just shown you. But to give you an idea of why it's important to do at least a preliminary inventory as soon as you can – if you can't do a full on appraisal of the materials. Materials stuck to each other; assorted fragile copies that might disappear before you can process it. You need to discover if there are immediate, pressing preservation needs in the collection before it's too late. I'll pass these around. Here's some examples of why you want to inventory / appraise ASAP.

Slide 26 Case in point of a collection received in- note the plastic bag on the right!

Slide 27. These lovely green boxes (archival supplier not to be named, but it WAS an archival supplier) circa 1950s/1960s– had a piece of wood in the bottom of each box! They came in the large brown boxes on the right – so going through them cut down on the shelf footprint.

Slide 28: Here's where I'm trying to appraise a collection that was "organized" but when they shipped it up to us – they "unorganized" it (ie: it was boxed up without maintaining any of the original order). Box 1 was now box 15, and so on. So I had to recreate their original order by going through each box before I could begin processing the collection.

Slide 29-30 - I'm also talking about –**-**slumping of hanging files; slumping of folders, bent folders, photos; half filled boxes that you might be able to combine with others to reduce the footprint of the collection. **Slides 31-32.** This collection came in nicely boxed, lots of padding to keep the materials safe, open it up and what did I see? **Slide 33.**

VIII. In CONCLUSION **–** Acquisition and Appraisal can be relatively painless if you keep the basics in mind. Know your collection policy, know your space issues, and **slide 34** – Always says yes But with a Caveat!

We also have a CD of the forms each of us discussed in our presentations, available up front after the session. But if you don't get one – pls. email me and I’d be happy to send you the documents. My email is shari.christy.ctr@wpafb.af.mil and I have business cards up front as well.

Slide 35. Thank you for your attention today. And I’ll turn it over now to our next speaker - Adriana Cuervo.