

# That Elusive 'Golden Minimum'

When Closure Is Far, Far Away

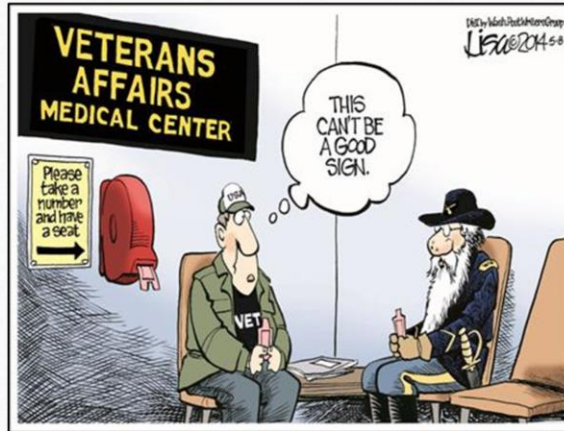
Daria Labinsky  
National Archives at St. Louis  
April 29, 2016

Greene, Mark A.; Dennis Meissner (2005). [\*"More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing"\*](#). *American Archivist* **68**: 240.

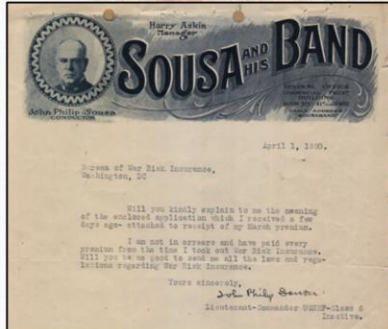


Courts-martial records as they came to the National Archives at left. They may not be in archival housing but they are otherwise fine. VA XC files at right.

Oh,  
if you  
only  
knew.



In 2010 NARA and the VA officially agreed to a records schedule that made Deceased Veterans Claims, also known as XC Files, the property of the National Archives 60 years after their date of transfer. This first transfer was 12,864 cubic feet. Cartoon found at <http://ponderingprinciples.com/tag/veterans/> dated 5/9/14

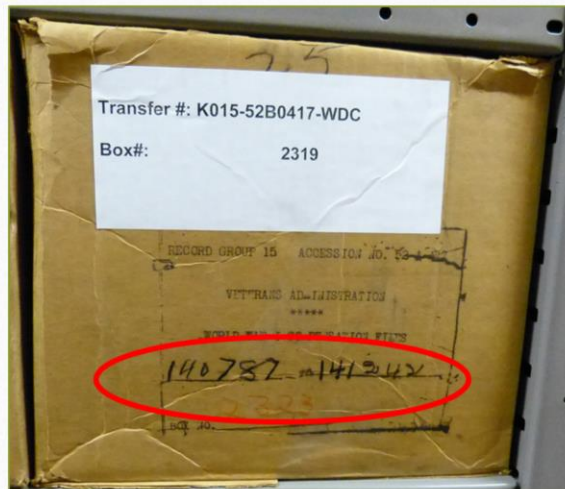


Orientation poor - thinks he is in jail for killing a man.  
 No hallucinations at this time  
 Expansive delusions (Personal friend Pres. Harding)  
 Delusions of Grandeur. \$1000 a month pension (\$500 from Pres. Harding) \$1000 mo Business

**They're not cool—or useful—if you can't find them.**

We can use these records reconstruct the service of a veteran whose record had been destroyed in the devastating 1973 National Personnel Records Center fire. They are also very cool! Clockwise from left, letter from John Philip Sousa's record, photo sent in by a veteran (the bartender) who was looking for work, excerpt from a finding of insanity where the veteran was said to have delusions of grandeur and thought he was a close friend of President Harding.

**There are  
not 455  
folders  
inside  
this box!**



Arranged numerically but not consecutively.

Some claim files from World War I are still open! And a few from the Spanish-American War, and 1 from the Civil War! See Phillips, Michael M. "Still Fighting the Civil War: Veterans' Benefits Live on Long After Bullets Stop, *Wall Street Journal* online, May 9, 2014,

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303603904579493830954152394>

**A three-city,  
three-state  
project!**

• **Lenexa, KS** •

• **Spanish Lake, MO**

• **Valmeyer, IL**

Records examined at/shipped from Lenexa; database entry and survey at Valmeyer; database QC and survey at Spanish Lake (St. Louis suburb). Staff at the NPRC's Valmeyer annex charged with surveying and creating database.



	A	B	C	D
1	BoxNum	RegClaimNum	LastName	FirstName
2	553	XC-22323	HARRELSON	RUBEN
3	553	XC-22318	BARREN	WALTER
4	553	XC-22340	MONTIN	SULO
5	553	XC-22331	YORK	ANDERSON
6	553	XC-22343	ST. GERMAIN	EDWARD
7	553	XC-22332	WELLINGTON	LAWRENCE
8				
9	559	XC-22582	SHOEMAKER	JAMES
10	559	XC-22579	RUSSELL	MORRIS
11	559	XC-22573	GATES	CARROLL
12	559	XC-22569	ROSS	EARNEST
13	559	XC-22558	ANDERSON	ANTONE
14				
15	567	XC-22910	LEONHARDT	FREDERICK
16	567	XC-22900	SUTTLES	MAURICE
17	567	XC-22901	TARTIKOFF	DAVID
18	567	XC-22902	WEISBAKER	ALFRED
19	567	XC-22903	HESS	ROBERT
20	567	XC-22917	TAYLOR	WILLIAM
21	567	XC-22912	FERGUSON	JAMES
22	567	XC-22913	GRAHAM	JAMES
23	567	XC-22922	NAUOKKITS	JOHN
24	567	XC-22928	PHILIPS	RAY
25	567	XC-22908	HINDS	ELLIOT
26	567	XC-22906	DONNOHUE	JOHN
27				
28	571	XC-23054	JOHANSEN	JOHN
29	571	XC-23037	KLEIN	HYMAN

The database had more than a few errors.

QC'g the spreadsheet against the boxes of records revealed many discrepancies. This was due in part to inaccuracies inherent in the records. Also, these weren't records the staff at Valmeyer were familiar with.

**What's  
behind  
the label?**

**The claim  
number  
range!**



Not being able to see the claim number range makes searching extra difficult. And sometimes the labels stick so well that they tear off the numbers.



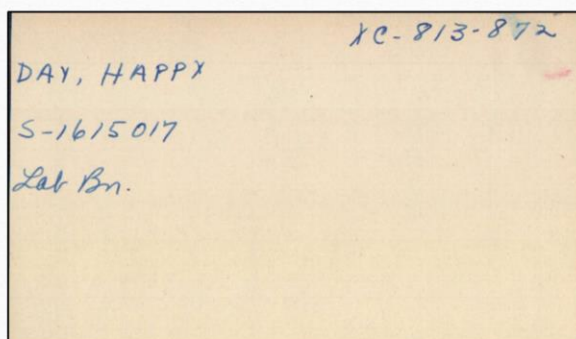
**Want to really  
irritate your  
co-workers in  
Preservation?**



*This box has been  
Surveyed, cleaned  
& OK'd by  
Preservation 11-1-13*

Preservation staff surveyed more than 100 boxes that had been flagged and bagged for mold. *None* of them were moldy. I later surveyed another 100 boxes and found five of them had mold; these were bagged and sent to Preservation for cleaning.

**Oh,  
Happy Day!  
We found  
a finding  
aid!**



The Lenexa staff discovered 117 boxes filled with these index cards—the index to our transfer. We later learned we had microfilmed index cards for VA records in our building.



**But that  
didn't make  
this go away.**

Box 8374 has cases 820118-820180. Box 8376 has cases 169759-169790.



If they could  
only talk ...

About 100 boxes had been damaged by water and soot, so they all had to be surveyed. Fortunately, they weren't moldy.

**‘Simplicity  
is a key to  
avoiding  
complication.’**

**— Joyce Meyer**

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	World War I Compensation Files, VA Claim Files, XC Files Inventory					
2	13	7	8376	169	739	169739
3	13	7	8376	169	760	169760
4	13	7	8376	169	762	169762
5	13	7	8376	169	763	169763
6	13	7	8376	169	764	169764
7	13	7	8376	169	766	169766
8	13	7	8376	169	767	169767
9	13	7	8376	169	769	169769
10	13	7	8376	169	771	169771
11	13	7	8376	169	774	169774
12	13	7	8376	169	775	169775
13	13	7	8376	169	777	169777
14	13	7	8376	169	780	169780
15	13	7	8376	169	781	169781
16	13	7	8376	169	782	169782
17	13	7	8376	169	783	169783
18	13	7	8376	169	785	169785
19	13	7	8376	169	787	169787

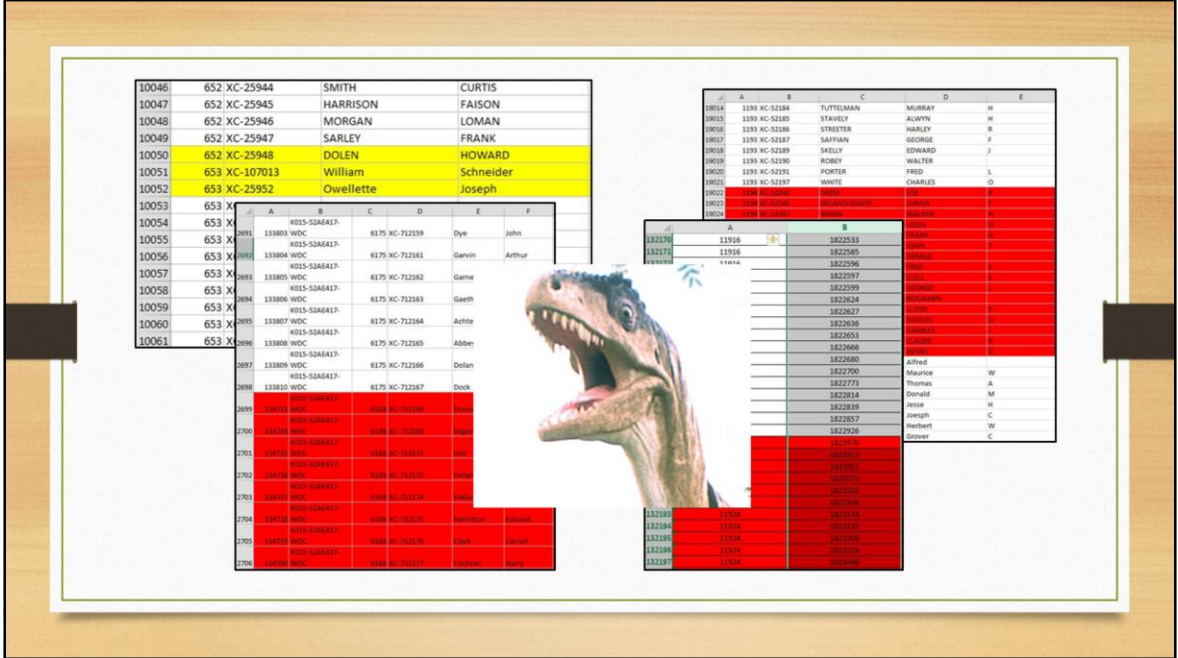
Let's just finish what we started, but with only the most basic information we need to search.



**Sometimes, a box is more tape than cardboard.**

I wish I could say this was an outlier.





We found many boxes that were really far from where they should be. When you're dealing with thousands of boxes, it's hard to just rearrange them. The database, as my supervisor said, showed that the problem was "like a monster that just keeps growing."



Archives technician Diane Doerner at work

**“OK, so  
we’re  
doin’  
this.”**

Diane Doerner, one of our archives technicians, checks her box list against what she’s finding in the box as she rehouses. (“Ten Duel Commandments” from *Hamilton*.)



**What we learned:**

- **Know what you have**
- **Communicate with staff**

Do a thorough survey before starting on a processing project. We thought we had done that but as with the mold issues/non-issues, it could have been better. Had we let people know what we were doing, we'd have known about the XC microfilm earlier and would have saved ourselves some time.

*keep it  
simple*



**What we learned:**

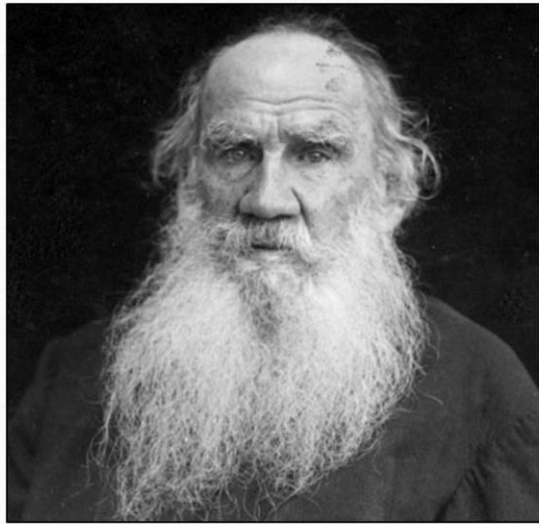
- **Minimal description**
- **QC from the get-go**

We were asking the Valmeyer workers to get too much information--greater chance for error.

If we had QC'd the database as soon as it was being created, we would have realized the problems much sooner.

**Each unhappy  
collection is  
unhappy in its  
own way.**

**--Leo Tolstoy  
(not)**



All collections processing is different, which is why a processing guideline-per-box metric is frequently unhelpful. But here are some good guidelines:  
[http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/hosc/docs/\\_Efficient\\_Archival\\_Processing\\_Guidelines\\_v3-1.pdf](http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/hosc/docs/_Efficient_Archival_Processing_Guidelines_v3-1.pdf)



**Sometimes  
the hardest way  
is the best way.**

daria.labinsky@gmail.com

Isamu Noguchi. <http://www.designcollectors.com/EN/blog/108/happy-birthday-isamu-noguchi/>