Donating Archival Material to HMRC

Thank you for considering the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) as the home for your archival materials. HMRC is part of the Houston Public Library System's Special Collections Division along with the Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research and the African American Library at the Gregory School.

The mission of HMRC is to locate, preserve, and make available to researchers the documentary evidence of Houston's history. Since its creation in 1976, HMRC has been located in the historic Julia Ideson Building where we further our mission by providing access to our Texas and local history book collection, archives, photographs, architectural drawings, oral histories, and maps.

The letters, diaries, photos, and other material (digital or paper) you donate record and communicate vital and unique information about Houston's history. While these items obviously matter to you, they are also important to historians, researchers, and the general public, now and in the future. When you donate archival material to HMRC, it becomes a part of your city's collective memory.

Why Should You Donate Your Papers to Us?

As an archive dedicated to the history of Houston and its surroundings, we accept and maintain collections created by private citizens and corporate entities past and present with a demonstrable connection to the region. Because our mission is to ensure that these materials will be available for research by generations to come, HMRC staff places the preservation of these historical materials as chief among their duties. They can assist you in identifying the historical context and optimal disposition for your archival materials.

Once your papers are accepted as part of HMRC's collections, we provide the material with environmentally-controlled, secure storage and oversee their proper handling and use. Equally important, we facilitate research access to the contents of the papers, to you, your heirs, and to the public. In future years, researchers including students, professors, genealogists, journalists and many others may find your papers interesting and of value to their work.

What Should You Donate?

While HMRC focuses its collections on the history of Houston, we collect a diversity of material types and formats. We accept donations ranging in size from a single item and to hundreds of boxes. Your material need not be organized or housed in archival enclosures. It need not be "old" or related to a famous individual, event, or organization in order for it to be historically significant. While it is desirable for collections to represent a coherent body of material, it is not necessary for your donation to represent a unified theme.

Examples of historically significant material

While it is useful for HMRC staff survey your papers or records in order to determine which materials have enduring historical value, listed below are types of materials that are often valuable to a researcher. These lists, which are suggestive and not definitive, illustrate the wide range of documentation often of interest in historical and administrative research. Please note that HMRC is interested in digital materials as well as physical collections.

Among the types of materials of interest to researchers are:

- letters
- memoirs/reminiscences
- diaries
- scrapbooks/photo albums
- professional papers
- genealogical information
- speeches/lectures
- business records
- subject files
- legal documents
- minutes/reports
- brochures and flyers
- photographs (labeled)
- films/videos/audio tapes
- digital files

Also, of interest are files relating to the individual's civic, business, religious, political, and social activities. Churches, political organizations, businesses, economic interest groups, community groups, voluntary associations, professional associations, and other collective enterprises all produce records which document their purpose, policies, and activities. An individual or family may hold the records of such a business or organization, and this material, too, may be significant.
Will HMRC take everything you offer?
While HMRC may not accept everything we are offered, we welcome the chance to review material; if it is not appropriate for us, there may be another archival repository to which you could be referred. Some material, however, may be of more sentimental than historical value and should be kept by the individual or family itself. The research value of records may be diminished if items are removed or if the records are rearranged, so donors are encouraged to contact HMRC before weeding, discarding, or reorganizing their papers and records.

Making the Donation
The first step in making a donation is to make an appointment to speak with a staff member. If it seems that your donation would be more appropriately placed at another repository, we will be happy to discuss this possibility and whatever options would best serve the long-term care of your cultural heritage materials.

Donations
HMRC can only invest materials and labor in the preservation of items which we own. Therefore, we accept donations of individual or family papers, but will not accept such material on deposit or on loan. Donors are asked to sign a donation agreement, which formally signifies that the papers become the actual property of the archives. We ask that collections not be mailed or dropped off without first consulting with staff as it is necessary that we evaluate all material offered and that the donor sign a Donor Agreement.

Access to Collections
Once material is donated to a repository, it does not leave the building. This is to ensure that it is preserved as long as possible. Access to donated papers is governed by HMRC’s written policies regarding availability, photo duplication, and publication. A prospective donor should become familiar with such policies and discuss any special needs or concerns with staff before completing the donation agreement.

Copyright
Copyright is an often complex issue, and you should work with HMRC staff to clarify issues of copyright ownership. HMRC asks donors to confer any relevant copyright permissions whenever applicable. This request is made to make it easier for researchers to use quotations from the papers in their work. Generally, copyright belongs to the creator of writings and other original material (such as photos and music), but can be legally transferred to heirs or others. Moreover, ownership of copyright is separable from ownership of the physical item (the letter or photo).

Monetary Appraisals & Tax Deductions
HMRC staff cannot give tax advice, nor are they permitted to appraise the monetary value of a collection. In certain circumstances, it may be possible for a donor to take a tax deduction for the donation of a collection to an archive. Donors are encouraged to speak with their tax accountants or attorneys about this possibility. Staff may be able to assist donors in finding manuscript appraisers who can (for a fee) make monetary appraisals for the donor. It is up to the donor to arrange for and bear the cost of any such appraisal.

Supporting Your Donation
Preparing archival collections for use by researchers is an expensive operation in our organization. Donors who are able to assist us by making monetary donations and/or contributing labor toward the arrangement, cataloging, digitization, and conservation of their donations of papers are encouraged to do so.

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