

# THE HISTORYMAKERS®

## WHAT ARE PAPERS?

### DO I HAVE PAPERS?

In short, you do! The term “papers” can refer to a wide array of materials in various formats:

- Letters/email
- Memoirs/reminiscences
- Diaries/blogs
- Scrapbooks/photo albums
- Professional papers
- Genealogical information
- Speeches/lectures
- Articles/essays
- Subject files
- Legal documents
- Minutes/reports
- Brochures and fliers
- Awards/certificates
- Photographs
- Films/videos/audio tapes
- Websites

Letters, emails, diaries, photos, and other material accumulated over the years give vital and unique information regarding your life or the history of your family. When you donate your personal or family records to a manuscript repository, your family history becomes a part of your community’s collective memory. Although interesting as artifacts, the real worth of your papers lies in their evidentiary value. They are the primary sources upon which the writing of history is based. They permit scholars to reconstruct and understand the past, and set the record straight about events and personalities.

In future years, researchers—including students, professors, genealogists, journalists, and many others—may find your records both interesting and of value to their work.

### WHO WOULD WANT MY PAPERS?

There are numerous institutions that want to collect and preserve your personal materials for research purposes.

### HOW SHOULD I PREPARE?

Make an appointment! Repositories are happy to meet with you to discuss your papers, and any provisions you would like made for them. It is also important that you determine whether or not you will be donating your papers outright, restricting access to the materials, or receiving payment for your collection.

To ensure the preservation of your materials for transfer to a repository, you should keep them in a cool, dry, temperature-stable environment, and any digital materials should be backed up. While your papers need not be organized, “old,” or related to a famous individual, you should identify any photographs, films, or tapes, and any digital files should have names that indicate content or subject matter.

Be sure to contact a repository before you weeding, discarding, or reorganizing papers and records, regardless of their location or format. The research value of records may be diminished if items are removed, or if the records are rearranged. Generally, repositories are more interested in a coherent body of material rather than individual items, and they prefer to receive the original items rather than copies. Once you donate your records, the staff will continue to work with you as you locate or identify other materials to donate, and will work to process your papers by unpacking, sorting, arranging, and describing the materials. Most repositories have a collecting policy that informs their decisions about what to accept.