BASICS OF FINDING AIDS

Cate Putirskis
Ohio State University Libraries
Overview

■ What a finding aid is & is used for
■ Best practices for writing finding aids
■ Anatomy of a finding aid
  - Part 1: Summary
  - Part 2: Notes
  - Part 3: Collection Inventory
■ Suggestions for getting started

Food and Nutrition Class, 1950s
What is a finding aid?

- **Society of American Archivists’ definition:**
  
  A description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and that assists users to gain access to and understand the materials.

- **Physical control** = materials listed have a numbering or identification system applied that allows for locating and retrieving them

- **Intellectual control** = documents the context within which the materials were created, including identifying and maintaining relationships between materials

*The Lantern, 1955*
What does a finding aid look like?
When are finding aids useful?

- When researchers want to know more about what is in a collection
- When a repository wants to share information about their collections broadly online
- When having a (detailed) inventory of the contents of a collection is helpful for the daily work of the repository
  - Inventory control or collection maintenance
  - Determining uniqueness or overlap of collection contents
- May be beneficial for insurance or valuation purposes
Finding aid best practices

- Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)
  - https://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS

- An overview that gives guidelines (with examples of common occurrences)
  - DACS users need to interpret and apply the guidelines for situations without an example to model

- Not a template; purposefully flexible

- Designed to interact with other description standards (MARC, Dublin Core, etc.)
  - Also designed to interact with international standards of archival description

- Reviewed and updated regularly: last major revision in 2013; minor revisions annually
Is DACS required for a finding aid?

- Depends on your repository’s goals and intended uses

- If local use only, DACS is optional
  - *i.e. if your documents will be created locally with local formatting (Word, Excel, PDF, HTML, etc.)*

- If using finding aid creation tools, DACS is required
  - *These tools are built on Encoded Archival Description (EAD), which is the XML language for DACS*

- If goal is to participate in a consortium, DACS is required
  - *All finding aid consortia require finding aids in EAD*
Anatomy of a finding aid

■ Part 1: Summary
  - *vital stats of the collection*

■ Part 2: Notes
  - *Contextual description of the collection contents*

■ Part 3: Collection Inventory
  - *(detailed) list of the collection contents*
Part 1: Summary

SPEC.TRI.0008

Table of Contents
- Summary Information
- Biographical Note
- Scope and Contents
- Arrangement of Materials
- Administrative Information
- Controlled Access Headings
- Collection Inventory

Summary Information
- Repository
  - Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute
- Creator
  - Hong, Shen, 1894-1955
- Title
  - Hong Shen Papers
- ID
  - SPEC.TRI.0008
- Date
  - 1946-1954, 2013
- Extent
  - 0.66 Cubic feet
- Physical Description
  - (1) oversize flat box; (1) rolled item box
- Abstract
  - The Hong Shen Papers contain photographs, a sketch of Hong, correspondence, scrolls, and promotional materials for a Hong Shen symposium held at Ohio State University, called “Hong Shen and the Modern Mediasphere in Republican Era China.” Hong Shen was a Chinese playwright, director, screenwriter, film and drama theorist.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Hong Shen Papers, SPEC.TRI.0008, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, Ohio State University
### Part 1: Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Summary Information</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Repository</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creator</strong></td>
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<td>Hong, Shen, 1894-1955</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-1954, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **If following DACS, all fields required**
  - Repository: [DACS 2.2](#)
  - Creator (if known): [DACS 2.6](#)
  - Title: [DACS 2.3](#)
  - ID: [DACS 2.1](#)
  - Date: [DACS 2.4](#)

- **If not following DACS, most important are Title and/or ID**
  - *Date is also useful & recommended*

- **Language(s) of collection materials also required by DACS** ([DACS 4.5](#))
Part 1: Summary

- If following DACS:
  - Extent and Physical Description are required [DACS 2.5]
  - Abstract ([DACS 2.7]) and Preferred Citation ([DACS 7.1.5]) are recommended, but not required

- If not following DACS:
  - Extent and/or Physical Description are the most important
**Biographical Note**

Hong Shen (1894-1955) was a Chinese playwright, film director, screenwriter, film and drama theorist, and educator. He was considered to be a key figure in the development of modern Chinese theatrical arts. Hong attended Ohio State University, where he wrote and produced two English plays, "The Wedded Husband" and "Rainbow." In 1922, he returned to China where he taught, directed, and wrote scripts for plays and films. In 1949, Hong was appointed the Vice President of the Chinese Dramatists Association.

In 2013, to commemorate Hong's experience at Ohio State University and his daughter's donation of his materials, the university held a Hong Shen symposium, titled Hong Shen and the Modern Mediasphere in Republican Era China, as well as performances of Hong's play, "The Wedded Husband."

**Scope and Contents**

The Hong Shen Papers contain photographs, a sketch of Hong, correspondence, and a calligraphy scroll and a painting scroll. The collection also contains posters, a flyer, and a schedule from the Hong Shen symposium held at Ohio State University, titled "Hong Shen and the Modern Mediasphere in Republican Era China." The materials date from 1946 to 1954 and 2013.

**Arrangement of Materials**

Materials are arranged in chronological order.

**Administrative Information**

**Publication Information**

2017 June

The Ohio State University Libraries Special Collections
Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute
Thompson Library, 1858 Neil Avenue Mall, Columbus, OH 43210

**Access to Materials**

Materials in this collection are available for use, but may be used in the Thompson Library Special Collections reading room only. Audio/visual materials and computer media may need a use copy produced before access is allowed.

**Use of Materials**

Materials in this collection may be protected by copyright, and are made available for research and educational purposes. In general, the OSU Libraries do not own the copyright for materials from our collections and cannot grant copyright permissions for these materials. The user is responsible for making a final determination of copyright status. If copyright protection applies, permission must be obtained from the copyright holder to reuse, publish, or reproduce the work beyond the bounds of fair use or other exceptions to the law. Works in the public domain are not protected by copyright and do not require permission to use.

**Acquisitions Information**

Donation from Hong Quan, 2013

**Processing Information**

Processed and finding aid written by Zoe MacLeod, 2017 June
Part 2: Notes

Biographical (or, Historical) Note

Hong Shen (1894-1955) was a Chinese playwright, film director, screenwriter, film and drama theorist, and educator. He was considered to be a key figure in the development of modern Chinese theatrical arts. Hong attended Ohio State University, where he wrote and produced two English plays, "The Wedded Husband" and "Rainbow." In 1922, he returned to China where he taught, directed, and wrote scripts for plays and films. In 1949, Hong was appointed the Vice President of the Chinese Dramatists Association.

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- Biographical (or, Historical) Note
  - If following DACS, recommended but not required (DACS 2.7)

- Scope and Contents
  - Required if following DACS (DACS 3.1); recommended even if not following DACS
Part 2: Notes

- **Arrangement**: optional if following DACS ([DACS 3.2](#))
- **Arrangement** is the most critical component of **intellectual** control
  - Foundational concepts of archival theory (provenance & original order)
  - Collections should not be physically arranged differently from the order received unless/until original order can be determined
- If you are just using finding aids for **physical** control of collections, arrangement is unnecessary

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**Arrangement of Materials**

Materials are arranged in chronological order.

*University Librarian’s office, Orton Hall, 1912*
Part 2: Notes

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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2017 June
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Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute
Thompson Library, 1858 Neil Avenue Mall, Columbus, OH 43210

Access to Materials
Materials in this collection are available for use, but may be used in the Thompson Library Special Collections reading room only. Audio/visual materials and computer media may need a use copy produced before access is allowed.

- Publication Information
  - Name and location of repository are required if following DACS (DACS 2.2)
  - Date of publication is optional if following DACS (DACS 8.1)

- Access to Materials
  - Required if following DACS (DACS 4.1)
Part 2: Notes

Use of Materials
Materials in this collection may be protected by copyright, and are made available for research and educational purposes. In general, the OSU Libraries do not own the copyright for materials from our collections and cannot grant copyright permissions for these materials. The user is responsible for making a final determination of copyright status. If copyright protection applies, permission must be obtained from the copyright holder to reuse, publish, or reproduce the work beyond the bounds of fair use or other exceptions to the law. Works in the public domain are not protected by copyright and do not require permission to use.

Acquisitions Information
Donation from Hong Quian, 2013

Processing Information
Processed and finding aid written by Zoe MacLeod, 2017 June

■ Use of Materials
  – Optional if following DACS (DACS 4.4)

■ Acquisitions Information
  – Optional if following DACS (DACS 5.2)

■ Processing Information
  – Optional if following DACS (DACS 8.1)
# Part 3: Collection Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection Inventory</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New Chinese Drama Society correspondence, 1946</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong speaking in the First World Congress of the Defenders of Peace, Prague photograph, 1949</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong signing the &quot;PRC-Cultural Cooperation Agreement: The Implementation Plan in 1955' in Berlin, photograph, 1954 December 27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sketch of Hong Shen by BeiHong Xu, circa 1940s-1950s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calligraphy scroll by Xuan Du, circa 1940s-1950s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting scroll by Qingge Zhao, circa 1940s-1950s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Wedded Husband&quot; revival flyer, 2013 November 16-17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Wedded Husband&quot; revival posters, 2013 November 16-17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Shen Symposium schedule, 2013 November 18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3: Collection Inventory

Components:
- Title of folder, item, etc.
- Date(s) of folder, item, etc.
- Unique numbering of physical materials

Strategies:
- If following DACS, the title and dates use the same DACS rules as other sections of the finding aid
- Inventories can be as detailed or simple as you want
- Often the most used and useful section of the finding aid, so best place to invest your time
Other Optional finding aid contents

Access headings/indexing terms

- Custodial history & provenance
- Existence of originals
- Existence of copies
- Related collections (in your repository or elsewhere)
- Information on conservation activities conducted on materials in the collection
- Complex arrangements (series, subseries, etc.)
- Notes at the folder- or item-level within the container list
Suggestions for getting started

1. Start with and focus on the Collection Inventory (Part 3)

2. At minimum, assign either a collection title or collection ID # to the collection (and record this in your finding aid)

3. Whenever possible, record and include when your repository received the collection (& from whom, if known)

4. Keep your writing simple, clear, and brief
   - *Description should be as neutral as possible*
   - *If you are using a local template, keep this simple also*

5. If using a finding aid tool, familiarize yourself with DACS (and EAD, if inclined)

*Track meet at Ohio Field, c1914*
Sharing your finding aids online

- On your repository’s website:
  - Attach/imbed as documents (PDF, Excel, Word, etc.)
    - Can also use a back-end finding aid writing tool (like Archivists’ Toolkit) to create these formats
  - Code as webpages (in HTML)

- Utilize a finding aid tool
  - OhioLINK EAD Finding Aid Creation Tool / Finding Aid Repository
  - ArchivesSpace
  - Archon
Questions?

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https://library.osu.edu/people/putirskis.1

All images from the Ohio State University Archives’ Photograph Collection and available via Flickr

Spanish class, 1951