

# Ephemera: The “Poor Step - Child” of the Archive

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# Issues with ephemera for Archives & Special Collections

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- ▶ Ephemera are not supposed to withstand the test of time
- ▶ Ephemera are important for understanding the past, but they may not necessarily have a place within archives or special collections
  - ▶ Not unique
  - ▶ Not rare (sometimes)
  - ▶ Printed, but not a book
  - ▶ Preservation issues



## Main Question

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What are the current descriptive practices employed by archivists and special collections librarians to provide access to ephemera in their collections?



# Working Definition of Ephemera

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**Paper materials, usually printed, that are not bound in books. These materials were not intended for long-term use, but rather to be used as a method of conveying information to many people quickly.**

Ephemera, include, but are certainly not limited to, posters, bookmarks, bumper stickers, matchbooks, pamphlets, menus, flyers, cigar wrappers, and much, much more.

Ephemera generally do not include three-dimensional objects, like ash trays, tee-shirts, or other cultural artifacts, but in many institutions, ephemera includes non-paper materials.

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# Methodology

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ARL Libraries

Broken down into Small, Medium, Large collections

Small: Contacted 9, 5 responses

Medium: Contacted 11, 6 responses

Largest: Contacted 11, 7 responses

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# Questions:

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1. How do you arrange and describe ephemera materials in your collection?
  2. Do you keep ephemera materials with the rest of the collection?
  3. How do you promote ephemera within the collections (if at all) for patrons to use?
  4. Do you ever deaccession ephemera?
  5. Out of curiosity, just to get a feel for the collections, what are your favorite pieces of ephemera in your collection? Is there a most-requested piece? A quirkiest piece? A best example?
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# Research Analysis: Arrangement, Pull Out, Description

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- ▶ **Arrangement: Depended on the type of collection**
  - ▶ Usually, original order
- ▶ **Seldom pull out**
  - ▶ Exceptions: size
- ▶ **Description: Item level vs. Collection Level**



# Research Analysis: Promotion

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- ▶ Finding Aids, Google, Blogs
- ▶ Exhibits
  - ▶ Great for tours, undergraduates
- ▶ Social Media





# Research Analysis: Deaccessioning

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- ▶ **Almost never deaccession**
  - ▶ Issues of definition



# Research Analysis: Collections

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- ▶ **Themes:**
  - ▶ Underrepresented groups
    - ▶ GLBT Collections
  - ▶ Student groups
  - ▶ Personal papers



# Next Steps

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- ▶ Professional Help
- ▶ More conference presence
- ▶ Institutions need to have more “rules”
- ▶ More resources needed

