

Using Archival Finding Aids for History and Genealogy Research

Local History, Genealogy & Special Collections Department at Plainfield Public Library

localhistory@plfdpl.info

908-757-1111, ext. 136

Discovering Finding Aids

From the [Library](http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info) homepage (www.plainfieldlibrary.info):

- Departments → Local History → Collections Index
 - [Local Clubs and Organizations](#)
 - [Personal Papers and Manuscripts](#)
- Click on Finding Aid link

From the online library catalog (via [Library](#) homepage):

- Enter search terms
- Look for link to Finding Aid under title

Reading a Finding Aid

Title: named for the creator of the collection (personal papers or organization records)

Collection Overview: includes date ranges of materials (inclusive and bulk); creator; size (linear or cubic feet, number and types of containers); brief abstract summarizing the collection; other repositories may include a collection or call number in this section

Administrative Information: addresses access of materials and restrictions on use, if any; includes preferred citation format; history (provenance) of the records and their acquisition; information on who processed the collection and made it ready for research

Background: includes information on the history of the creator, whether an individual or family (Biographical Note) or organization (Historical Note); provides context for contents of collection

Scope and Content: summarizes the collection and its contents (more in-depth version of the abstract); includes record types, date ranges, significant events, collection highlights

Arrangement: outlines organization of collection into groups of similar material (series); provides description for each series

Index Terms: includes terms (People, Places, Organizations, Subjects) used to index the collection in the online library catalog

Related Items: includes additional material to consult, such as other collections, books, websites

Technical Requirements: alerts researchers to any special equipment needed to access collection material

Contents List / Container Listing / Inventory: provides location of items in the collection, by box number (or container description), folder number, folder title (or description of item), associated dates

Using a Finding Aid and Requesting Archival Material

- Pay special attention to the Scope and Content Note, Background Information, and Index Terms to determine if collection is appropriate for your research
- Consult Arrangement section and Contents List to locate material; note box and folder numbers
- Check the Technical Requirements section to see if any special equipment is needed to access material
- Contact the Local History department via phone (908-757-1111, ext. 136) or email (localhistory@plfdpl.info) to set up appointment: provide name of collection, box and folder numbers

Visiting the Archive (Plainfield Room)

- Before getting started, sign the collection access form and make sure to read all rules and regulations
- Material you requested will be brought out to you; number of items permitted for use at a single time may be limited, at staff discretion
- If you discover additional material during your visit, you may view it if accessible and time permits