

## Appraisal Report: Immigration History Research Center Archives

The Immigration History Research Center Archives (IHRCA) at the University of Minnesota (UMN) Libraries is an archive and library devoted to documenting immigrant and refugee experiences in the United States. It is one of 15 units in the UMN Libraries' Archives & Special Collections department. Since 1963, IHRCA has collected resources supporting the study of immigration, ethnicity, and race. Its collections represent European immigrants who came to the U.S. from the 1880s through the early 20th century, as well as late 20th and early 21st century immigrants and refugees. According to Assistant Archivist Maura Coonan, IHRCA has 11,000 linear feet of manuscript collections, 45,000 books, 3,500 serials, 900 newspapers, and 210 GB of 1,075 born-digital files (personal communication, February 14, 2019). These include personal papers, organizational records, and oral histories. Three full-time archivists manage the collections, with assistance from three student workers.

IHRCA's collecting practices are guided by its collection development policy and mission, which are both internal documents (see appendices). The archive's website has an About Us section, but it only addresses IHRCA's history and general collecting areas. The collection development policy was last updated on September 10, 2013 and is reviewed every five to ten years (Coonan, 2019). The policy begins with a statement of purpose, which is to collect, preserve, and provide access to materials on immigration and ethnicity. The policy then focuses on describing IHRCA's strengths: immigrants from eastern, central, and southern Europe and the Near East from the 1880s through the early 20th century. It specifies the types of printed, manuscript, and audio-visual materials they collect, such as products of ethnic presses, archives of ethnic fraternal associations, and phonograph records. The policy also mentions collecting areas IHRCA is growing—"sources documenting the migration and acculturation of immigrants and refugees in the post-1965 era." Then examples of recently accepted collections from this category are provided, such as a project documenting immigrant youth social media. At the end, one statement indicates what they do not collect: "three-dimensional objects, material culture items or paintings, sculpture."

The mission document also includes information relevant to appraisal decisions. It discusses the types of users and programs supported by IHRCA's collections. Their audience includes UMN researchers, faculty, and students, as well as researchers from out-of-state and outside the country. IHRCA provides educational materials for the university, offers graduate assistantships and internships to students, and disseminates research findings through conferences and publications. They also serve members of the public in Minnesota and beyond by hosting exhibits and lectures.

## Evaluation

IHRCA's collection policy and mission focus on what the archive collects and who they serve, which mirrors the majority of college and university archives' online policies in a study by Marshall (2002). Marshall's research showed that policies did not describe collecting procedures. Similarly, although IHRCA's policy is internal, it does not acknowledge how decisions are made. While they only have three archivists, this is surprising given the age of IHRCA and the size of their parent library. Coonan (2019) described that in practice, IHRCA has an Acquisitions Committee at the UMN Libraries level. The committee makes decisions for items exceeding

three linear feet, the process takes about a week, and any archivist can call a committee meeting. Otherwise, archivists can make decisions on a case by case basis, and this can take anywhere from months to years depending on both the donor and the items being donated. Coonan (2019) also noted that unlike other Archives & Special Collections units, IHRCA does not purchase items. Like IHRCA, Marshall (2002) also found that policies did not refer to deaccessions, which Phillips calls for in her proposed model (1984). Coonan explained that IHRCA does not have an official deaccession policy (2019). This is due to their being a part of a public institution, where there is politics behind writing policies and dispositions. Similar to acquisitions, deaccession decisions are made at the library level.

Phillips (1984) also recommended that policies include a procedure for revisions. While IHRCA's policy is dated, it does not indicate that it is a living document. Coonan mentioned that IHRCA is now collecting materials from Somali and Hmong communities, large immigrant groups in Minnesota, and that they no longer accept newspapers published beyond 2010 (2019). The absence of this information demonstrates that the IHRCA collecting policy document is due for another revision.

Other elements that Phillips included in her model and are lacking in IHRCA's policy are cooperative agreements and a statement of resource sharing policy (1984). According to Coonan, local historical societies may collect similar items and other institutions may have large collections of manuscripts with related content (2019). For example, an individual may donate items to multiple institutions where they worked. While cooperative agreements seem useful for donors and users, Coonan expressed that IHRCA is unique and did not seem concerned with collection overlap. She said that social media helps them stay apprised of what other institutions are collecting. Regarding a resource sharing policy, a growing number of digital collections, such as immigrant letters and oral histories, may render this unnecessary.

Based on their mission, IHRCA is most concerned with supporting academic researchers. This was confirmed by Coonan (2019) when she talked about receiving an increasing number of reference inquiries from genealogists. Because IHRCA cannot support genealogical research, the archivists refer this user group to historical societies or ethnic museums. This implies that the archivists and UMN Libraries Acquisitions Committee are selecting materials in the interest of scholarly researchers. Multilingual website options and the online project Immigrant Stories, where individuals create and upload videos telling their immigration stories, almost suggest otherwise. These encourage community involvement and the latter resembles the participatory model for multicultural archives advocated by Shilton and Srinivasan (2007). However, it is not clear if all videos are accepted, and according to the Immigrant Stories website, the professional preservation of their videos "ensur[es] that students, researchers, and the public will be able to watch these videos decades from now" (About Immigrant Stories, 2019). Future researchers are emphasized, and collecting decisions remain within the purview of archivists and librarians.

Ultimately, IHRCA's collecting practices are based on archival principles which state that value is determined based on perceived use. This originates with T.R. Schellenberg who believed that archives exist primarily for their evidential and informational values and not for the creator's interests (Tschan, 2002). It is unsurprising how archives housed within universities make appraisal decisions in the hope of meeting scholarly needs. These units may be balancing their own mission and collecting policy with that of their parent library and institution. Nevertheless, Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young have critiqued academia's dependence on informational value in appraisal (Trace, 2010).

Despite being an academic unit that centers scholarly research, IHRCA's long-standing role in collecting underrepresented narratives cannot be discounted. It was not until the 1970s when Hans Booms and F. Gerald Ham advocated for appraisal methods that reflected all of society (Tschan, 2002). While Coonan (2019) did not discuss collaborations with immigrant groups, IHRCA curator Ellen Engseth (2018) wrote about the organization collaborating with and hosting a one-year residency for a Somali American documentary photographer and community archivist. Perhaps IHRCA is moving towards a participatory model for specific projects, which involves creators and their communities in appraisal or description.

### Improvements

IHRCA has limited staff resources. In February 2019, Coonan reported that one of their archivists was working off-site at the United Nations refugee archives, and that in January, she pulled a high volume of boxes—133 in total—for visitors. Nonetheless, devoting time to revising the collection development policy could improve staff efficiency in the long run. IHRCA could put their policy and mission online to increase transparency and set expectations for donors and researchers. By noting that the publicly-available policy is subject to revision, the archivists may be compelled to regularly review it. It would also be informative for other archives when making referrals or collecting similar sources.

Phillips' (1984) recommended model for collection policies is a useful starting point for archives like IHRCA. Their policy could be updated to reflect collecting weaknesses or specific areas they seek to grow. For IHRCA, these include the more recent immigrant groups in Minnesota, such as the Hmong and Somalis. Coonan (2019) said that the latter are the largest Somali population outside Somalia. Thus, IHRCA should communicate its prominent role in documenting that group. The policy could also describe what IHRCA no longer collects, such as post-2010 newspapers.

While the mission already states the users they support, it could be clarified so that genealogists understand that their needs are beyond the scope of IHRCA archivists. Coonan (2019) suspected that their archive is listed in directories published by genealogy organizations. Combined with the growing public interest in ancestry and DNA kits, IHRCA will continue receiving genealogy inquiries if they do not specify their limitations.

Phillips also suggested that archives include information about collecting or deaccession procedures. However, this may be irrelevant to website visitors, and supplying details about acquisition turnaround time or deaccessions at a state institution could lead to public relations issues.

### Measuring Success

Upon updating and making the policy and mission accessible online, IHRCA could assess its impact by tracking different kinds of inquiries. An increase in reference and donor inquiries relating to new collecting areas may correlate with the latest policy revision. Archivists would be advised to ask individuals how they heard about IHRCA to see if they read the policy or mission. Likewise, archivists could track the volume of inquiries from genealogists to see if they decrease. Finally, they can see if the number of inquiries relating to post-2010 newspaper donations also decreases.

Website traffic to the collection development policy and mission pages would also be insightful. Marshall (2002) found that accessing college and university archive policies required the navigation of multiple layers of information. A negligible amount of traffic may reveal that the documents should be placed in a more prominent area of the website and possibly linked to from the About section of their Facebook page.

Archivists can also interview the Acquisitions Committee to see if the updated policy provides clarity and leads to more efficient decision making. If IHRCA has established relationships with donors who have repeatedly provided materials, archivists could also consider asking them for feedback.

### Conclusion

In addition to the recommendations mentioned above, IHRCA's collecting policy and mission will need regular updates as they acquire more born-digital materials and complete work on a new digital preservation system. As new immigrant groups arrive in the U.S. and awareness grows for diversifying the historical record, IHRCA is poised to be a leader of capturing immigrant stories and providing innovative access to them. Proactively assessing their collections and policy will enable them to effectively serve not only UMN researchers but broader communities.

## References

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## Appendix 1: Collection development policy

*(last updated September 10, 2013)*

The IHRC Archives, a unit of the Archives and Special Collections department within the University of Minnesota Libraries, has since the early 1960s gathered vast holdings of archival and published sources (personal papers, along with the organizational records of immigrants and refugees and the agencies created to serve them, oral histories, newspapers, serials and books). The collections are particularly rich on the labor migrants who came to the U.S. between 1880 and the 1930s, on the displaced persons who arrived in the U.S. after World War II, and on the refugees resettled in the United States after 1975. The IHRC Archives works closely with the IHRC to document a broad range of immigrant and refugee experiences, and to make the preserved documentation accessible to researchers.

One of the nation's leading archival/library repositories of source material on immigration and ethnicity, the IHRC Archives collects, preserves, and makes available these resources on a national scope. These materials are particularly rich for immigrant groups that originated in eastern, central, and southern Europe and the Near East—referred to historically as the “new immigrants”—who came to this country during the migration wave that gained momentum in the 1880s and peaked in the first decades of the 20th century. The Center also documents the work of institutions and individuals concerned with service to and programs for immigrants, including the most recent newcomers from throughout the world.

The IHRC's collections include printed, manuscript, and audio-visual materials of national and local origin. The print collection consists of 45,000 books and pamphlets, more than 3,500 serial titles and over 900 newspaper titles. Most of these publications are the products of ethnic presses in the United States and Canada from the late nineteenth century to the present; but there are also many academic and popular works from university and commercial publishers. The manuscript holdings consist of ca. 1,400 collections occupying over 11,000 linear feet. Audio-visual materials consist of small, but rapidly growing, files of phonograph records, photographs, and oral history tape recordings.

Over the years, efforts have been made to collect materials reflecting as fully as possible the social, political, religious, and cultural characteristics of immigrant groups. Manuscripts collections, for example, include archives of ethnic fraternal associations, churches, publishing houses, musical and theatrical societies, political and labor associations, and consumer cooperatives, as well as papers of ethnic community leaders and ordinary individuals/families. These primary sources are complemented by a library composed predominantly of publications of ethnic presses, including novels and poetry, histories and biographies, religious and political works. The Center's extensive collection of newspapers and serials, covering a wide diversity of perspectives, constitutes a fundamental and often used source for researchers.

Through the records of service agencies, publishers, and research institutions, the IHRC has in recent years been acquiring significant sources documenting the migration and acculturation of immigrants and refugees in the post-1965 era. Among these materials are the records of

Immigration & Refugee Services of America (and its affiliate U.S. Committee for Refugees), records of International Institutes in several U.S. cities, the research library and program files of the University of Minnesota's pioneering Center for Refugee Studies, and the primary resource documentation accumulated by the publishers of Interpreter Releases, the nation's leading digest of immigration policy and law.

The Center has also obtained significant collections of reformatted material made available commercially or from other institutions. These include INS subject files on Asian exclusion, Mexican immigration, and prostitution and "white slavery." Increasingly, such sources are being commercially distributed in electronic form, and the IHRC (in cooperation with the UM Libraries) obtained a temporary subscription to the Alexander Street Press digital collection "North American Immigrant Diaries, Letters, and Oral Histories." Collections such as this now provide the opportunity for the IHRC to dramatically extend the reach of its collections to UM students, faculty, and outside visitors exploring a wide array of topics, cultures, and time periods.

Recently, the IHRC Archives has been accepting also materials in digital format ("born-digital"). A comprehensive digital preservation system is currently being developed by the University Libraries. Examples would include the Minnesota 2.0 Project documenting Facebook pages of immigrant youth, Somali immigrant video interviews from the Sheeko Project. Development of digital content includes acquiring digital copies of physical originals held by private individuals or private institutions (as provided by the appropriate gift agreements).

The IHRC Archives does not collect three-dimensional objects, material culture items or paintings, sculpture.

## Appendix 2: Mission

The IHRC enriches society by preserving and promoting understanding of the history of the American immigrant experience. In doing so, it acts in partnership with various ethnic communities, historical agencies, research specialists, educators, and many others. It develops and maintains a library and archival collection, provides research assistance, produces publications, and sponsors academic and public programs. Its work supports the tripartite mission-teaching, research, and service-of its parent institution, the University of Minnesota.

The Immigration History Research Center is an integral part of the University of Minnesota and thus partakes of its tripartite mission: research, teaching, and service. The Center contributes to those objectives in its sphere of specialization, the history of immigration and ethnicity in shaping the culture and society of the United States. It seeks in every manner possible to promote the multidisciplinary study of that history.

The Center stimulates research about the history of American immigration and ethnicity by: Building research collections of documentary materials; developing research tools to aid in the use of such materials; articulating the rationale for research in this field and alerting the scholarly community to research opportunities; providing grants in aid of research; and disseminating IHRC-based research findings through conferences and publications.

The IHRC collects, preserves, and makes available archival and published resources documenting immigration and ethnicity on a national scope. These materials are particularly rich for ethnic groups that originated in eastern, central, and southern Europe and the Near East—those who came to this country during the Great Migration that gained momentum in the 1880s and peaked in the first decades of the 20th century.

The Center also documents the work of institutions and individuals concerned with service to and programs for immigrants, including the most recent newcomers from throughout the world. Through collaborative projects and reciprocal exchanges with other repositories, the IHRC facilitates preservation of materials and promotes new acquisition initiatives.

By attracting scholars and graduate students from various parts of the United States and Canada and from abroad, the IHRC enriches the intellectual resources of the University and the wider community. Lectures and seminars by such visitors are sponsored by the Center and open to all.

The IHRC serves as a unique teaching laboratory, providing educational resources for both faculty and students at the University and other area institutions. It attracts graduate students by offering financial aid in the form of research assistantships and provides opportunities in archival training to students through internships and directed studies.

Service to its various constituencies is an important part of the IHRC mission. The Center serves scholars and the public in the state of Minnesota, in the nation, and internationally. It educates and enriches the lives of many through: newsletters, press releases, and media appearances;



exchanges of students, scholars, and research materials;  
visits and correspondence with individuals and representatives of institutions and organizations  
in the ethnic communities;  
and public lectures, conferences, and exhibits.

The Friends of the IHRC, an independent support group, assists in these outreach efforts by  
providing a bridge to the ethnic communities.