

Introduction to Manuscript Collections

Video Transcript

The Special Collections Research Center is home to the University of Chicago Library's archival, manuscript, and rare book collections. We welcome people from around the world to our reading room. You do not need to be affiliated with the University to visit us, nor do you need special credentials or reasons for using our collections. [Images of Joseph Regenstein Library exterior, as well as the front door, gallery, reading room, and front desk of the Special Collections Research Center.]

This video is an introduction to our manuscript collections. [Image of archival boxes on shelves.]

Manuscript collections contain a wide range of primary sources such as letters, photographs, audio recordings, artwork and more.

[Images of each type of primary source mentioned including an illuminated page from Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*; correspondence from the Saul Bellow Papers; a letter written by Frederick Douglass to Mr. Mills in 1868 from the Historical Manuscripts Collection; photographs of the March on Washington from the Robert Spike Papers; a dictabelt recording from the Saul Bellow Papers; and a detail of an etching titled "Angela Davis" by Jan Krejci from the Baruch Foundation Records.]

The collections reflect the research interests and strengths of UChicago over time. [Images of a watercolor sketch of ice floes in Greenland from George William Manby's sketchbook made in 1821; a 19th-century paper doll from the Paper Doll Collection; and a photograph of Dr. Julian Herman Lewis in his laboratory from the Eva Overton Lewis and Julian Herman Lewis, MD PhD Collection.]

Some collections are very old, such as papyri from the 2nd century CE, and some are very new such as the records of active community organizations on the South Side of Chicago. [Images of a fragment of the Iliad (MS 1062); and a circa 1960s photograph of two people holding a sign that reads "CommUNITY: Join the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference" from the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference Records.]

Our manuscript collections are split into two categories based on their age: early manuscripts and modern manuscripts. The early manuscript collections include items from the ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and early modern periods up to the year 1700. Among them you will find religious and secular texts, European legal documents, commonplace books, musical scores, and more. [Images of a Book of Hours (Ms 347); the Canterbury Tales (Ms 564); a scroll from the Sir Nicholas Bacon Collection of English Court and Manorial Documents; and a 15th-century music score.]

The modern manuscript collections date from 1700 to the present and are especially strong in the following subjects:

- American civil rights in the 19th and 20th centuries [Image of a photograph of Ida B. Wells from the Ida B. Wells Papers; and film clip of the first Chicago Pride Parade in 1970 from the Alan Amberg Gay History Collection.]
- Poetry [Image of an edited typescript of Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "We Real Cool" from the Poetry: A Magazine of Verse Records.]
- Atomic science and the Cold War [Photograph of Enrico Fermi from the Enrico Fermi Papers]
- Medicine [Film clip of Dr. Mindy Schwartz teaching in the Special Collections Research Center classroom with a 19th-century surgical kit owned by Thomas Burrows.]
- Native American community organization [Image of finding aid for the Native American Educational Services, American Indian Chicago Conference Records.]
- Chicago labor and social reform [Image of the "Big Four" of settlement work in the United States pictured at a National Federation of Settlements Conference held at Hull House in Chicago. Pictured are Mary K. Simkhovitch, Mary McDowell, Graham Taylor, and Jane Addams.]
- Chicago jazz [Image of album cover for Sun Ra's "Fate in a Pleasant Mood" from the Abraham Alton Collection of Sun Ra.]
- The history of Chicago's Hyde Park, Kenwood, and Woodlawn neighborhoods. [19th and mid-20th century images of the corner of 55th Street and Lake Park in Hyde Park, Chicago from the University of Chicago Photographic Archive.]

Manuscript collections are discoverable through the Library's online catalog and through collection guides called finding aids. [Image of the homepage for the online Finding Aids database.]

You can locate manuscripts in the catalog by conducting a keyword search, then narrowing the results down to Archives/Manuscripts in Special Collections using the facets on the right side of the screen. [Shows demonstrated keyword search for "Book of Hours" in the Library catalog. Search is narrowed by "Format" and "Library" facets resulting in 11 items.]

Our finding aids are the most detailed guides to modern manuscript collections. They include a general description of the collection and a box, folder, or item-level list of everything in the collection. [Shows online finding aid for the ACT UP Chicago Records. Scrolls down from descriptive summary at top of finding aid to inventory section.]

You can conduct a keyword search across all finding aids, or you can browse our finding aids by topic. [Shows "Topic" tab at top of finding aids homepage. Clicks on "Topic" and scrolls through list of topics. Clicks on "Chicago and Illinois" topic.]

Because our collections are rare or unique, you cannot check them out from the Library. Instead, you use them in our reading room. [Images of researchers using collections in the Special Collections Research Center's group study room and main reading room.]

But what if the Center is closed, or you do not live in the Chicago area? We are always working to digitize collections. You can browse digitized collections in our finding aids database. Not all collections are digitized yet. If you need something specific, please contact us. [Demonstrated browse of finding aids with digital content. Clicks on "With Digital Content" tab at top of finding aids homepage. Clicks on Century of Progress International Exposition Publications finding aid. Scrolls down to inventory section of finding aid and clicks on "View digitized document" link under the item "Sky-ride. See the air from the air, 1933." Link takes viewer to color PDF of a pamphlet from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair about the Sky-ride.]

To learn about more digital resources, watch the video “Introduction to Digital Resources.”

[Final image is a list of image and music credits.]