

Micro-Cosmogonic Acts:

Organizing a Local History Collection, in Theory & Practice

Some Meditations

A mess is a mess, until you can find things because it's been made orderly

Neat & clean, spotless & pristine does not, in itself, constitute order or access, but it fools most

There are degrees of order, as there are degrees of chaos, in office cubicles & local history rooms

Ecclesiastes (To Everything, a Season)

Is there a mission statement, charge, or stated purpose for the repository or special collection(s)?

Have any prioritized goals been identified or stated, any wishful thinking?

Has any stated sequence or timing of these priorities been established?

Snapshots

Is there a written overview of your library's local history holdings? (Repository description)

Are there any written overviews of individual special collections? (Collection descriptions)

Are there any descriptions of the individual items within a collection? (Item-level descriptions)

Differentiations in Common

See what you have

Consider how you'd like to organize & unite it logically

Consider ways it might be physically located or divided, and best means to make it accessible

Identifying & Gnashing Teeth Over, or Rejoicing in, Unusual Finds

Which items are brittle, moldy, water saturated, faded, exposed, critter-ridden, partly eaten?

What is or appears to be unique or rare (the library & county catalogs, & First Search may help)?

What is or appears to be more commonly available?

What forms and formats do the items in the collection take?

Setting Torch to Shadow: Identifying Pre-existing Related Reference Tools & Finding Aids

Are there collection guides (general or specialized) or archival finding aids, in any form or format?

What annuals (yearbooks), atlases, bibliographies, dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, gazetteers, handbooks, manuals, indexes, local history periodicals & reviewing sources, do you own, that relate to local history (in any form or format)

What reference tools that don't appear to exist, would help you most (potential priority projects)?

-- Mark Rothenberg, *Long Island Local History 101*