

Spotlight on: GFO's Manuscript Collection

WHY MANUSCRIPTS MATTER

Genealogical research is the art of tracing life's most delicate threads back to the place where personal and historical details converge. Some of the most revealing stories can be found within manuscripts, where a tapestry of ancestral evidence is brought to light through diaries, family snapshots, firsthand stories, drafted wills, biographical sketches, and original correspondence.

Over the course of the last two years, our Manuscript Committee and team of volunteers have been working on a digitization project to give researchers access to our library's previously minimally accessible manuscripts and personal papers collections. The digitization process has included extensive planning, document preparation, descriptive work, taking photographs of oversized items, running tests, securing backup storage, and researching delivery options for our vast collection. But mostly we have been scanning. Sometimes late into the night and early into the morning, the mechanical growl of the GFO manuscripts scanner can be heard emanating a forecast of researchers' access to come.

While scanning and digitizing are ongoing, we are excited finally to be able to provide digital access to a number of these valuable items. In the past, any access to our manuscript collections involved long wait periods,



Donated manuscripts and personal papers have taken up nearly every inch of shelf space in our library workroom. There is still so much to do!

often requiring our volunteer staff to struggle with heavy boxes atop high shelves or to dig through the back of disorganized file cabinets. Now with the implementation of our digital manuscripts project, researchers will be able to view and study the collection materials directly from their home computers.

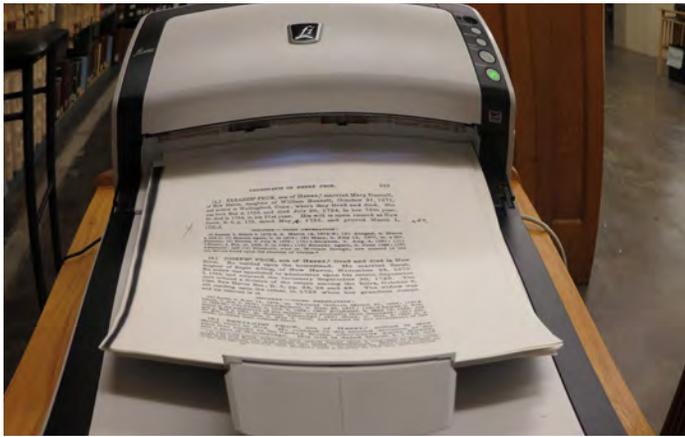


Unidentified family photograph from the Kirchal Personal Papers 2012-17, File 8 Image 2.

HISTORICAL TREASURE CHESTS

All of the items included in the GFO Manuscript Collection were acquired as donations from original researchers or from the family and friends of the collections' creators. Each collection of papers and records encapsulates a unique treasure trove of family history. A number of the collections, for example, include findings by the original creators regarding their families' European roots. Others contain copies of vital records that date back to the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783). Many of the papers also give firsthand accounts of family movements across the United States during the early nineteenth century settlement years.

As we continue our efforts to process the collections, we have found that some of the most valuable and telling items are the diaries and correspondence. For example, both the Davis Collection and the Barklow Family History Papers contain transcriptions by the original authors of ancestral journal entries and letters that trace the details of their families' contributions to the shaping of the early United States. The personal correspondence included in the Griffin Personal Papers offers researchers



The Manuscript Committee uses a Fujitsu fi-6240Z scanner in conjunction with the digital editing program called ScandAll PRO V2.0.

a number of historical anecdotes, while bringing to life the personalities of various family members. These types of records are what give the greatest distinction to our manuscript collections, since they carry family history notations that no other resource can provide.

Through such original sources, the manuscripts provide a direct connection to one's ancestral history. Additionally, the materials provide a window into the genealogical research and findings of the collections' original authors. This can help researchers avoid duplicating work previously done and can bring about discoveries in their own hunt for historical family gems.

RESEARCHERS' ACCESS

Researchers can now view a full list of the GFO manuscripts at our newly launched Digital Manuscript Collection website, www.gfo.org/dmc/index.html. The "Collections List" is organized by accession number and the title of each collection. While most of our manuscripts are still in the process of being organized and scanned, for those collections where the digitization process has been completed there are preview images and description-laden finding aids for the benefit of interested researchers. The website's "Recent Additions" page serves as a showcase for collections that have been most recently digitized, and gives additional biographical notes, when available, regarding the collections' original creators.

Access to fully digitized collections can be requested by emailing the Manuscript Committee at manuscripts@gfo.org or by clicking the "Request a Manuscript" link on our website. Details regarding fees for digital delivery and access are available on the site's "Access Details" page. Payments can be made either by check, payable to the Genealogical Forum of Oregon, Inc., or by sending

payment to payments@gfo.org via PayPal. All proceeds from manuscript requests go toward sustaining our continued digitization efforts, as we still have many collections yet to process.

WORKING BACKSTAGE

Currently, the GFO library holds over 80 individual collections which are managed by Nanci Remington, the committee chair, and me, our digital collections consultant. Nanci has worked over the last year and a half to train volunteers, design processing procedures, and ensure adequate backup resources. My role has been to help develop and launch our Digital Manuscript Collection website, and to assist with cataloging, creating archival finding aids, and researching systems for enhancing access for our researchers.

Our digital manuscripts project would not be possible without the tireless assistance of our team of dedicated GFO volunteers who have been working to carefully sort, organize, scan, and comb for metadata through each collection by turn. As we continue in our efforts, and as new collections are donated, there is much more to do. If you would like to help with this volunteer effort, please contact Nanci or LauraDenise at manuscripts@gfo.org. There are a variety of jobs available, and we welcome any and all help, but what we need most right now are scanners. We would also like to find someone to research the history of orphaned collections where the original creators are unknown. Even the smallest contribution is of immense help toward bringing long term and convenient access to these valuable collections.



One of our manuscript volunteers, Sara Chesney, spends time each week making sure all of the files are captured within the digital process. Her dedication assures we will be able to share these valuable resources with researchers from all over the country.