

Amanda Demeter, Journeyman Archivist
Carrie M. McLain Memorial Museum
Final Report for Weeks 1-6, March 28-May 7, 2016

Introduction

This report is intended to apprise the ASHRAB and the McLain Museum of my activities during the past six weeks of work at the museum. Per the Memorandum of Agreement I signed upon accepting the position, I have processed the Carrie M. McLain papers and the Clara Mielke Richards papers (now the Mielke family papers) and created finding aids for both collections. An additional collection, the Joe Harnish papers, was also processed in the extra time. Because the McLain Museum does not have a dedicated space in their current web presence for EAD-encoded finding aids, we have chosen to generate PDF versions of the finding aids for online use. The below details these processing activities as well as other accomplishments in the role of Journeyman Archivist.

Carrie M. McLain Papers

The Carrie M. McLain papers (Accession No. 2006.2) have been arranged, described, and appropriately housed. Starting as two document boxes, one banker's box, and two postcard boxes, the processed collection is now approximately 3 linear feet, with papers and photographs in 5 document boxes, two postcard boxes, one 16x20 flat oversize box, and an oversize map folder. The collection had already been encapsulated almost completely with polyester film sleeves when I began working with it. For many of the paper materials this was unnecessary once items were placed in folders. In addition, many of the items did not fit well in the enclosures, so a number of sleeves were removed to be repurposed. Similarly, some of the larger photographs were enclosed in inappropriately sized sleeves (which can do more harm in some cases than leaving them unsleeved) and I assigned a volunteer to resleeve any problem photos.

The majority of the collection is photographs, which had already been sleeved, individually assigned unique identifiers, and described at the item level in the museum's PastPerfect database. It is unclear if this sequence was derived from original order or artificial, but I chose not to disrupt it by further physical sorting of the images. At the same time, I wanted to take advantage of the incredible amount of work already completed on the photos and utilize the item level information in the guide without making it unmanageably long. I added broad subjects in the Search Terms field and box location information in the Home Location / Container field to intellectually arrange the images as I would have if I were to physically sort them into groupings. Using these subjects to

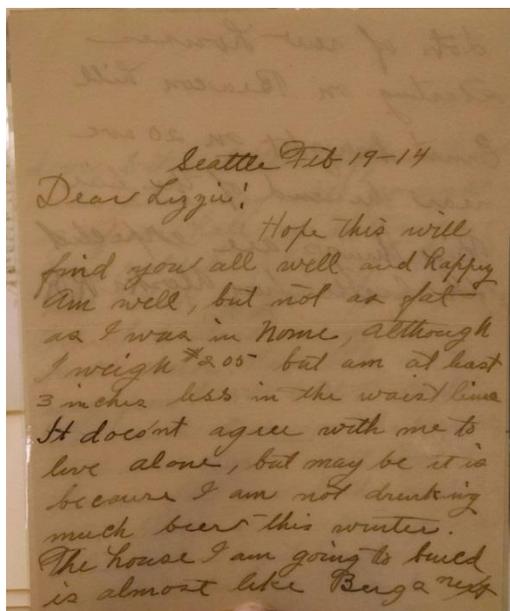


Carrie McLain on high school graduation day, 1913. Carrie M. McLain papers, Accession No. 2006.2

generate reports exported from the database, I constructed a subject index to the photos as an appendix to the collection finding aid.

The papers portion of the collection was undescribed. As a majority of the items appeared to be an assembled, artificial collection on Alaska history rather than papers generated by McLain, these materials were sorted by subject. The portion of personal papers was arranged in a few small groupings. Because of the highly detailed description on the photos, I chose to describe the collection at a much more granular level than I would in a strictly archival institution that implements MPLP (“more product, less process”) strategies. Striking a balance between minimal archival description and object-level museum description has been one of the major challenges and learning opportunities in this project, and a good reminder that processing models can and should shift to serve the institution and its collections.

We have determined that a flat specimen drawer in the new storage at the Richard Foster building can be set aside for archives use in order to properly house oversized materials such as maps. The museum will be ordering oversized folders for larger materials to be properly arranged, labeled, and housed. All oversized items have been encapsulated in archival polyester film to stabilize and protect them.



“Dear Lizzie: Hope this will find you all well and happy. Am well, but not as fat as I was in Nome, although I weigh #205 but am at least 3 inches less in the waist line. It doesn't agree with me to live alone, but may be it is because I am not drinking much beer this winter. The house I am going to build is almost like Berga next”

Letter from Frank J. Mielke to Lizzie Mielke, 1914 February 19. Mielke family papers, Accession No. 1979.1

Mielke Family Papers

The Clara Mielke Richards papers started as three document boxes of photos and papers, and upon processing became the Mielke family papers (Accession No. 1979.1) housed in two document boxes, one postcard box, and an oversized map folder. The papers were a mix of materials from Clara's parents, Frank and Lizzie, as well as items from Clara's childhood. Because the origin of some of the materials was unclear, the papers were arranged by material type (e.g. correspondence, financial records, ephemera, etc.) rather than by the creator. The collection includes a large accrual of both personal photos and souvenir views of Nome and greater Alaska, along with a number of letters.

This correspondence in particular includes some great content on life in Nome from its early days to the mid-century. A majority is from 1912-1914 when Frank traveled to Seattle, Washington for the winter to work on the family home and other houses they leased. The letters demonstrate the common pattern of many Nome residents leaving for the winter to conduct various business activities in port cities such as Seattle and San Francisco, with Frank

mentioning other Nome men who would be returning home with the first ship of spring. Other highlights include discussing the coming and going of vessels such as the *Corwin* and *Victoria*, the arrival of mail by the first ship, and the later advantages and limitations of air mail.

Unfortunately, a number of materials were laminated at some point in their lifespan, which may cause issues with future digitization (in addition to preservation concerns). Again, because of the museum's model of item-level description as well as the small size of the collection, I described the materials at a greater detail than I would at a larger repository. All oversized materials, photographs, and fragile materials have been encapsulated in polyester enclosures.

Because the photographs had not been individually entered into PastPerfect like the McLain photos, I was able to arrange them before numbering. Placeholder item records and unique identifiers were generated for the photos, and the prints were marked with these numbers. This way, if and when the museum elects to describe the photos individually as museum objects, the order of the archival collection will go undisrupted in that process. The photos were in binders in worn sheet sleeves of unknown material so they were removed, sleeved individually, and boxed. One third of the photos were retained in the binder order because they appeared to be a coherent grouping documenting a trip around Alaska, possibly removed from a contemporary album at one time. The remainder were arranged into two groupings of family photos and historic/souvenir photos.



Processing photos in the Mielke family papers.

Joe Harnish Papers

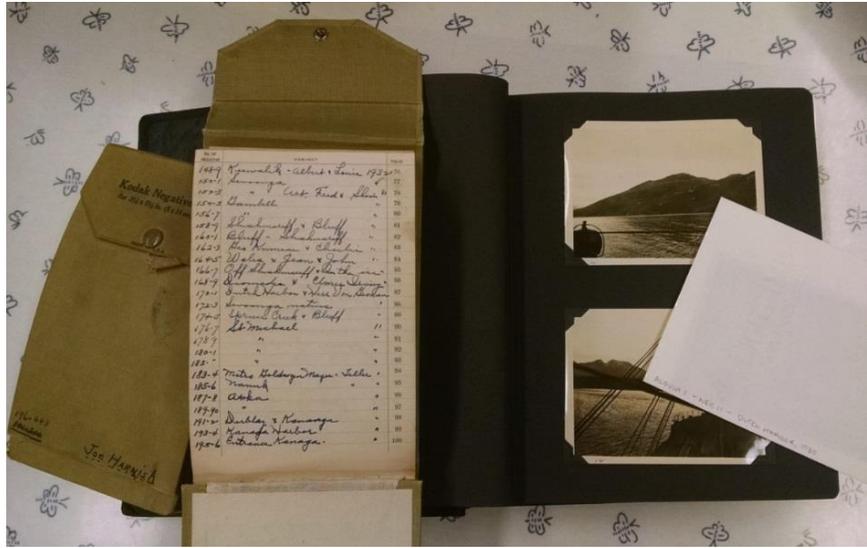
I was able to fit in an additional collection for processing and we selected the papers of Joe



Investigating the Joe Harnish papers in a museum storage room.

Harnish, a purser and agent for the Alaska Steamship Company who was based in Nome in the 1930s. The collection includes various log books from Harnish's work, a number of U.S. Geological Survey publications, as well as a meticulously numbered set of photograph and negative albums, with images of Nome and other parts of the Seward Peninsula. Some of the encapsulation work will need to be completed by museum staff after I leave, since we decided to prioritize other training activities for my last few days.

The photographs have remained in the albums because of their artifactual value as a whole, and they were described as such with each album receiving a scope note in the finding aid. The six framed photographs were retained in their frames again for artifactual value per the Museum Director, and were described at the item level in PastPerfect and the finding aid. The individual photos in the albums may at some point be described at the



Photograph and negative albums, 1931-1938. Joe Harnish papers, Accession No. 2013.8

item level should museum staff choose to do so, but placeholder records were not generated for them at this time. The negative album sleeve pages were discolored and the film base determined to likely be nitrate, so the negatives are in the process of being removed from the albums, sleeved in paper envelopes, and stored in a freezer already reserved for nitrate film. The negative albums have been retained for the highly useful identifying information in the album inventories.

The collection's USGS publications contain many folded maps. These will need to be encapsulated and marked and/or described to retain the intellectual information connecting the publications with the removed maps, then relocated to oversize storage.

The Harnish papers illustrate a later period of Nome history than the previous collections and are significant for their representation of the city's role as a shipping and transportation hub for northwestern Alaska. The photos include views of Nome pre- and post-1934 fire, candid portraits of native peoples from the surrounding villages, aviation history, and strong examples of how supplies arrived in remote parts of the territory.

Emergency Preservation

On Monday morning, April 4, we arrived at the museum to discover a significant leak from snowmelt between the buildings. Due to collections expanding as they are packed for the upcoming move, some items had been temporarily stored on the floor and were exposed to water. In inspecting these items, which had not yet been accessioned, it was determined that the presence of mold on some of the materials was a pre-existing condition and only exacerbated by the reintroduction of moisture. These items were immediately quarantined from the rest of the collection. Other damp paper materials were interleaved with paper towels and/or fanned out to dry, and several fans were brought into the room to circulate the air. Several moldy items were taken to the new museum building to be frozen in the quarantine refrigeration unit. These items will need to be reassessed for cleaning by a conservator or reformatting and disposal.

Archives Training & Documentation

I have written a processing guide specific to the museum's collections, which is intended to be used in conjunction with the ASHRAB Processing Manual (<http://archives.alaska.gov/pdfs/ashrab/ArrangementDescriptionManual.pdf>). This guide details a workflow using the PastPerfect database to document papers at the collection level and photographs at the item level as permitted by museum needs, provides a style guide for finding aids and collection labeling, and other information. Also included are further reading materials such as the online version of DACS (2nd ed.), and various research resources. This guide is still in draft form and has been passed along to the museum for further editing.

In the last week we used several small collections to test the workflow and train Collections Assistant Cheryl Thompson on basic processing. She processed and rehoused the Haycock (Alaska) collection and the Alaska State Constitution Convention minutes, and has begun finding aids for the collections. We discussed appropriate housing, arrangement, and description, using the above resources and her prior training at a state archives-sponsored workshop.

On a more ad-hoc level, I have used the collections' individual needs to introduce training and various useful resources. The McLain papers provided an opportunity to teach the museum assistant how to encapsulate oversize materials such as maps and large newspaper clippings. These items also opened discussion and allotment of oversize storage space for archives materials (as noted above). Numerous real photo postcards in the Mielke family papers led to sharing guides on dating the postcards based on the printed postage box; our emergency's silver lining was the introduction of the NEDCC Preservation Leaflets as an invaluable resource.



Encapsulating maps and oversize clippings from the Carrie M. McLain papers

Community Engagement & Education

I presented at the Nome Rotary Club meeting on Wednesday, April 20 about my work on the collections. In addition to describing the Journeyman Archivist program and my work on the McLain and Mielke papers, I gave an overview of what processing entails, considerations of original order versus imposing order, the value of finding aids, and the historical significance of the collections. The audience was given an opportunity to ask questions. I brought a selection of materials from the McLain and



Rotary Club of Nome, April 20, 2016. Photo by Julia Farris.

Mielke papers for people to see the range of items present in the collection, including personal correspondence, financial records such as bank registers and check books, photographs, and ephemera from the Alaska Steamship Company.

On the same day, I attended the City of Nome Library & Museum Commission meeting, where I gave a brief progress report on the completion of the McLain papers, the processing of the Mielke papers, identification of oversize storage, and participation in the emergency management of the building leak.

My last day with the museum, I participated in presenting to a group of approximately 75 junior high students touring the new Richard Foster building. The students were split into three groups, which rotated around the library, cultural center, and museum spaces within the building. I spoke about archives and primary

sources, the role and activities of an archivist, as well as my specific work as the Journeyman Archivist.

Suggestions for Future Projects

The Carrie M. McLain Memorial Museum has a number of relatively small archival collections still in various undocumented and/or unprocessed states. Because the framework of the Journeyman Archivist program mandated that I process two agreed-upon collections, I gave an extra level of attention and detail to their arrangement and description. However, I believe that the McLain Museum would benefit from an archives inventory, in which all collections are accessioned and very minimally described at the collection level in the PastPerfect database. Ideally this undertaking would occur prior to moving the collections to the new building, but it would be extraordinarily beneficial to gaining control over these materials at any point in the museum's future.

Final Thoughts

The Journeyman Archivist program has been an incredible professional opportunity and a wonderful life experience. I hope that the work I have done in these six short weeks will help support the continued management of archival materials within the McLain Museum. I am grateful to the ASHRAB for selecting me for this position, to Amy and Cheryl at the museum for graciously hosting me in their space, and to the community of Nome for welcoming me.