Documenting Wonderland: Conducting a Collection Survey to Inform Collecting Policies

Sara Pettinger
Purdue University, scpettin@gmail.com

Anne L. Foster
Yellowstone National Park, anne_foster@nps.gov

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives

Part of the Archival Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Utah State University
MERRILL-CAZIER LIBRARY

Documenting Wonderland: Conducting a Collection Survey to Inform Collecting Policies

Sara Pettinger
Anne L. Foster

ABSTRACT

Collection surveys and collecting policies have become standard for effective archival collection management. But in recent years, surveys have most often been used to establish processing and preservation priorities and collecting policies are often considered static documents that, once established, change little as the collections grow. The Yellowstone National Park Archives, with a mandate to update its collecting policy and limited space and resources, developed a project to survey its collections in order to inform an updated policy. With a more granular focus on analyzing collections than previous surveys have undertaken, this case study focused on defining success and fulfillment of some collecting areas, while also identifying areas in need of more attention. The successfully completed project has provided critical data to inform Yellowstone's collecting considerations and offers a model for other repositories in examining their collections and policies in light of a more resource-limited future.

Introduction

The Yellowstone National Park Archives documents the history and work of the world's first national park. The archives is part of the Park's museum program and is housed in the Heritage and Research Center located in Gardiner, Montana. In 1920, National Park Service (NPS) Director Stephen Mather partnered with the American Association of Museums to establish model museums at Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone National Parks.[1] Although the focus of these museums was natural history, archival materials—particularly photographs and ephemera—were also collected. By the mid-20th century, Yellowstone's curators began to intentionally collect the papers of significant figures in the Park's history. At about the same time, park historian Aubrey Haines started to reclaim the historically significant administrative records. As he later described, the records were dispersed and stored in "washrooms, storage sheds, specimen rooms, and the hands of private

---

1. Tami Blackford, "Heritage and Research Center," *Yellowstone Science* 12, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 5-23, https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/upload/YS_12_4_sm.pdf.

individuals."[2] Of the discovery, Haines recalled, "It is my understanding that former Superintendent Edmund B. Rogers had the boxes placed there after he had snatched them back from the Mammoth dump where they were to be burned."[3] In 1978, Yellowstone became an Affiliated Archives of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).[4] Under the memorandum of agreement, permanent government records are accessioned to NARA, but housed and made available in the Park. The Archives also collects donated materials. Essentially, the Yellowstone National Park Archives is similar to many academic archives, collecting both institutional records and donated manuscript materials.

Institutional Context and Collecting Background

Acquisition of materials in the Yellowstone Park Archives is guided by a collection management policy, known within the NPS as a Scope of Collections Statement (SOCS). Service-wide, the SOCS are written according to a standard framework, and reviewed and updated about every five years. For institutional records, acquisitions are defined by the NPS records schedule. Collecting of private papers is determined "on a case-by-case basis where items will be weighed by historical significance, rarity, associational, aesthetic and other values important to preserving and documenting Yellowstone's existence."[5]

In 2008, the Park Service commissioned a review of the NPS Cultural Resources Program, including the museum program, by the National Academy of Public Administrators. The results of this broad survey revealed significant backlogs of uncatalogued materials, particularly of park archives.[6] This led to a 2010 initiative to address the issue, with targeted funding for archives processing. Although the initiative indeed increased the total of archives and manuscript materials processed and cataloged Service-wide, it had the unfortunate result of actually increasing the backlog due to the identification of additional materials not yet transferred to park archives and the increase of online finding aids that helped donors find potential repositories for their materials. A 2020 follow-up review specifically focused on

---

2.   Paul Schullery, *The Yellowstone Archives Past, Present, and Future* (Athens, OH: Ohio University, 1975), 8.

3.   Ibid.

4.   Blackford, "Heritage and Research Center," 10.

5.   Yellowstone National Park, *Scope of Collections Statement* (Mammoth, WY: Yellowstone National Park, 2015), 30.

6.   Frank Hodsoll, James Kunde, and Denis P. Galvin, *Saving Our History: A Review of National Park Cultural Resource Programs* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration, 2008), 38-39, 41, https://s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/napa-2021/studies/saving-our-history-a-review-of-national-park-cultural-resource-programs/08-03.pdf; Marcus Peacock, Donald Bathhurst, Linda Bilmes, Sheila Burke, and Margaret (Peggy) Sherry, *Assessment of the National Park Service Museum Collection Storage* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration, 2020), 28, https://s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/napa-2021/FINAL-REPORT-NAPA-NPS-MSM-12.14.2020.pdf.

museum collections and collection storage revealed that little had changed.[7] The continuing growth of collections combined with the ever-increasing costs for expanding storage has led the Department of Interior to emphasize the need to tighten collecting policies throughout the agency.

Yellowstone's backlog was identified as one of the largest throughout the NPS in the 2008 review.[8] This led to the hiring of the Park's first professional archivist and significant backlog reductions were made under the Archives Initiative and since. It also led the Park to tighten collecting in the current SOCS. Several broad themes were identified within the manuscript collections and active, passive, and not collected categories were assigned:

> *Documenting the typical tourist visit to the park is well represented in the collection and will not be actively sought. Any new additions of this nature should have a unique perspective or story that is not already represented. Active collecting will focus on building collections relating to research in the park, doing business (concessions/guiding) in the park, and living in the park (the personal side of being a park employee)... The following will generally not be collected:*
>
> - *copies of records held by other institutions.*
>
> - *digital scans of historic photographs or documents without the accompanying originals; and collections consisting primarily of collected materials such as news clippings and ephemera.*
>
> - *materials also will not be accepted that relate to a collection for which another institution serves as the primary repository and where acceptance of the offered materials would result in a split collection (staff will refer the potential donor to said repository).[9]*

While this refinement helped to narrow acquisitions, it was largely based on the archivist's general sense of collection strengths and weaknesses. Further, it became clear over the subsequent years that there were sub-categories and themes that were offered by donors more frequently than others—though again, this was an anecdotal rather than data driven assumption. As the time neared for a review of the Scope of Collections Statement, it became clear that more concrete information about the manuscript collections was needed to inform any updates to the document.

---

7.   Peacock et al, *Assessment of the National Park Service Museum Collection Storage,* 21.

8.   Hodson et al., *Saving Our History,* 44.

9.   Yellowstone National Park, *Scope of Collections Statement*, 30.

Objectives

The goal of the project, then, was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the manuscript collections. Yellowstone is similar to many academic archives, which house not only official records, but also collect personal and organizational records of those who are part of the institution: staff, constituents (in our case, visitors), scientists, and groups formed by those who live here. Unlike academic repositories whose constituents usually document a variety of personal experiences, our constituents tend to focus quite narrowly on documenting the Park's landscapes and features. Everyone takes a photograph of Old Faithful Geyser. There is a reason it is called Old Faithful—it has not visibly changed all that much over time. This results in a lot of remarkably similar potential donations. While it is easy to determine if a postcard is a duplicate, it is much more difficult to define "effectively duplicate" for photographs and albums. What is the point at which there are enough similarities that the value of more of the same declines in research value? The hope was that a survey that compiled not only subject, but also type of creator, format, era, geographical coverage, and even subsets thereof might help us develop a usable definition. The overall objective, then, was to find out what exactly we had on the shelves, determine where there was considerable overlap in materials, and reveal any missed areas to focus collecting in the future. The Park was fortunate to receive funding for a remote project archivist in the summer of 2022 through the Northwest Archivists' Archivist-in-Residence program. Together a plan was designed to survey and analyze the existing manuscript collection to provide baseline data of the collection's strengths and weaknesses, which would inform the pending update to Yellowstone's Scope of Collections Statement and maximize the value of collections accepted within the framework of limited space, staff, and time.

Literature Review

While what is variously termed collecting policy, collection development policy, or acquisition policy now seems a standard part of archival practice, it was not until the last part of the 20th century that it became so. Calls to create guidance on what an archive collects came at a time when several related issues caused archivists to reflect on their previously established practices. The New Left or New Social History of the 1960s and 1970s critiqued prevailing historical narratives and demanded a different documentary record than many repositories had previously collected. Calls to collect materials related to underrepresented groups prevailed to meet the needs of the New historians.[10] The result, however, as Peter A. Russell explains, was that

---

10. See, for example: Kenneth W. Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts: A Practical Manual for their Management, Care, and Use* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1975) 60; Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *The American Archivist* 38, no. 1 (1975): 5–13, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.38.1.7400r86481128424; Dale C. Mayer, "The New Social History: Implications for Archivists," *The American Archivist* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 388-399, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.48.4.l107660916858k13; Peter A. Russell, "The Manx Peril: Archival Theory in Light of Recent

"archivists have tended to treat [new research agendas] as additive;" expanding collecting areas, rather than replacing. Burgeoning institutional bureaucracy also contributed to an age of overabundance.[11] At the same time, economic recessions in the 1970s, and tax cuts in the 1980s, tightened archival resources to manage and house the growing backlog.[12] One solution to the problem, though not without debate in the early years, was to develop "guidelines outlining the scope and selection of materials that support a repository's mission."[13]

Brief descriptions of the use of collecting policies appear in the literature as early as the 1950s.[14] Yet, the literature in the 1970s suggests that the practice was neither widespread nor widely discussed. Writing in 1972, Gould P. Colman laments that in a bibliography of archival writings, "No space was needed to list writings dealing with guidelines for the acquisition of archival and manuscript materials."[15] Momentum begins in the 1980s, with an increase in conference papers and articles describing particular institutional policies and others exploring such policies in light of the New Left History movement and the collection of previously under documented groups.[16,17] The movement culminated in the winter 1984 edition of *The American Archivist*,

American Historiography," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 124-137, accessed January 2024, https://www.archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11764.

11.   Russell, "The Manx Peril," 134.

12.   See, for example: Russell, "The Manx Peril," 135; Leonard Rapport, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *The American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (1981): 143–150, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.44.2.b274w3126t430h52.

13.   "Collecting Policy," Society of American Archivists Dictionary of Archival Terminology, accessed January 2024, https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/collecting-policy.html.

14.   See, for example: Henry Cox, "The Impact of the Proposed Copyright Law Upon Scholars and Custodians," *The American Archivist* 29, no. 2 (1966): 225, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.29.2.e147rwn802071l56; Leone Eckert, "The Anatomy of Industrial Records," *The American Archivist* 26, no. 2 (1963): 186, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.26.2.94p76553r47x19h3; Lucile Kane, "Collecting Policies of the Minnesota Historical Society: 1849-1952," *The American Archivist* 16, no. 2 (1953): 130, 134, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.16.2.0601475kux5767u8. Both Eckert and Kane describe their repository's broad subject areas for acquisitions, while Cox, as part of a larger discussion of copyright, appears to assume a broader use of such policies.

15.   Gould P. Colman, "The Forum: Contributions from Members," *The American Archivist* 36, no. 3 (1973): 483-486, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.36.3.mt802p87l2878684.

16.   See, for example: *The American Archivist* Summer 1985 edition, which published papers delivered at the 1981 annual conference by R. Joseph Anderson, John J. Grabowski, and Susan Grigg describing the collecting of ethnic groups; Charles Schultz, "The Forum: From the Editor," *The American Archivist* 48, no. 3 (1985): 259-260, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.48.3.066074546k860616.

17.   See for example: Linda Henry, "Collecting Policies of Special-Subject Repositories," *The American Archivist* 43, no. 1 (1980): 57-63, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.43.1.375115311118078; Fredric Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," *The American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (1981): 113-124, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.44.2.r5x54qq0r71275w4; Jane Wolff, "Faculty Papers and Special-Subject Repositories," *The American Archivist* 44, no. 4 (1981): 346-351, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.44.4.k78g2n70338262r2.

which focused on collection management writ large and contained seminal collecting policy articles by Faye Phillips and Jutta Reed-Scott. While previous articles described existing policies and argued the need for a policy in response to a specific archival challenge, Phillips contends that consensus has been reached: "Modern collection policies are needed that take into consideration competition, research needs, ethics, institutional resources, and deaccessioning."[18] Further, they detail the process of creating a collecting policy, drawing from guidelines for libraries developed by the American Library Association.[19] Reed-Scott sets collecting policies within the larger practice of collection management, advocating planning as an essential collection management function and that "a written development policy is a crucial step in this planning."[20] While published guides in "how to do archives" prior to 1984 often failed to include a discussion of collecting policies, guides thereafter treated it as a key component.[21, 22]

Collecting policies failed to stem the deluge of records or growth of backlogs, however. The literature of the 1990s and early 2000s decries this fact, with Timothy L. Erickson chastising, "[W]e can wax eloquent on the need for well-defined policies; we can articulate beautifully crafted statements of lofty purpose, mission and goals…. But these observations do not attack the root of the problem… [W]e are accessioning too many fonds that, while they may fall within our geographical, chronological and linguistic parameters, simply do not contain important information."[23] Cynthia K. Sauer, who surveyed the effectiveness of collecting policies of manuscript repositories, found that there was a "seeming resignation of some archivists that there is nothing to be done to change less-than-ideal collection practices, and the tools championed as ways to address these issues are not worth the effort."[24] Despite

18. Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," *The American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (1984): 38, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.47.1.x07k74g7331762q2.

19. Ibid, 37.

20. Jutta Reed-Scott, "Collection Management Strategies for Archivists," *The American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (1984): 23, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.47.1.wt6721l537810j13.

21. Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts*, 56-85

22. See, for example: Bruce W Dearstyne, *Managing Historical Records Programs: A Guide for Historical Agencies* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altimira Press, 2000), 71-73; F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1993), 2-25; Mary Lynn McCree, "Good Sense and Good Judgment: Defining Collections and Collecting," in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Service, 1984), 104-110.

23. Timothy L. Ericson, "At the "Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction": Archivists and Acquisition Development." *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991/1992): 68, accessed January 2024, https://www.archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11799.

24. Cynthia Sauer, "Doing the Best We Can? The Use of Collection Development Policies and Cooperative Collecting Activities at Manuscript Repositories," *The American Archivist* 64, no. 2 (2001): 331, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.64.2.gj6771215231xm37.

finding such attitudes prevalent in her survey sample, Sauer concludes on a more positive note and suggests that those "who are convinced that such tools are more a hindrance than a help reevaluate the priority they have given to their collecting practices and begin to believe the claims found in the archival literature that such practices, even with their imperfections, really can make a positive difference, and are worth the effort."[25]

Once collecting policies began to be an integral part of managing a repository, archivists found it necessary to determine what they actually held and what they wanted to, or should, continue to collect. A wave of innovative processes to aid in making such decisions followed.[26] The last analysis method—collection analysis—is arguably the simplest and the technique that has continued with the most regularity. Collection analysis, as explained by Judith E. Eidelman, is: "The evaluation of the characteristics of a repository's holdings [and] attempts to systematize and bring more planning to the collecting process."[27] Both Eidelman, who describes the use of the project by three Midwestern institutions, and Christine Weideman, writing about the experience of the Bentley Historical Library, deem the technique a success.[28] While collection analysis has been more often applied to setting processing priorities in recent years, it remains a straightforward and manageable method for setting, monitoring, or modifying a collecting policy.

Lacking from the literature on collecting policy is any discussion of successful fulfillment of the plan. How is success in collecting a place, subject, event, group, etc. achieved? Collecting policies help determine areas of emphasis, but they fail to indicate how one measures success beyond simply adding more. Is it possible to

---

25. Ibid, 332.

26. See for example: Frank Boles and Julia Young, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *The American Archivist* 48, no. 2 (1985): 121-140, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.48.2.1414g624328868vw; Helen Willa Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (January 1991), accessed January 2024, https://www.archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11804; *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992); Philip Alexander and Helen Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *The American Archivist* 50, no. 4 (1987): 518–531, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.50.4.v889q1182r11p36u; and Richard J. Cox, "The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective," *Archivaria* 38 (February 1994), 11-36, accessed January 2024, https://www.archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12021; Mark A. Greene and Todd J. Daniels-Howell, "Documentation with an Attitude: A Pragmatist's Guide to the Selection and Acquisition of Modern Business Records," in *The Records of American Business*, ed. James M. O'Toole (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1997), 161-229.

27. Judith Endelman, "Looking Backward to Plan for the Future: Collection Analysis for Manuscript Repositories," *The American Archivist* 50, no. 3 (1987): 344, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.50.3.m24760mh124r6u3w.

28. Endelman, "Looking Backward to Plan for the Future," 344, 353; Christine Weideman, "A New Map for Field Work: Impact of Collections Analysis on the Bentley Historical Library," *The American Archivist* 54, no. 1 (1991): 60, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.54.1.d657136x82qlh286.

---

determine that one has collected enough? The insightful book *Active Collections* offers collecting institutions a position of "tough love" and advocates for "quality over quantity" with a focus on impact and use as guiding parameters.[29] Archivist Mark A. Greene, in his contribution to the book, writes, "Use should be the end of all our efforts, if not, what are we collecting all this stuff for?"[30] If use is to be a guiding principle, can a metric be articulated that defines an end goal for a collection? How much and of what quality is enough to meet the needs of an institution's users, broadly defined? With this question in mind, we hoped to develop a survey of the park archives that would answer the question "Do we have enough?" Enough to tell this aspect of Yellowstone's story accurately? Enough that we can focus our limited resources to tell another story, perhaps, or to share the story more broadly or to new audiences?

Collection Survey Methodology

Yellowstone National Park's manuscript collections include varying types of materials from many different individuals, historical time periods of its history, subject areas, and areas of the park. To conduct a collection survey of these collections, a thorough examination of their holdings was necessary. Examining the entirety of the manuscript collections would determine collection strengths and weaknesses and allow for any changes to the scope of collections for future accessions. Understanding what collections already existed within Yellowstone's holdings would assist in making recommendations for what the institution should continue to collect based on priority areas or those that should be decreased or discontinued.

Without onsite access to Yellowstone's collections, use of the 176 manuscript collections was done remotely over 12 weeks. The project archivist accessed finding aids for processed collections on Yellowstone's website. Unprocessed collections were sent in three separate groups by email from the archivist in the form of PDFs that supplied the information necessary to complete the survey. These thorough and preliminary finding aids provided the bulk of the information needed to conduct the survey. In addition to supplementary readings, the archivist provided institutional and geographical knowledge if any of this information was unclear.

Using the information found in finding aids and the archivist's extensive knowledge of the manuscript collections, the survey was formed by separating the collections into four major categories based on the creator of each collection: Visitors, Employees, Researchers, and Businesses/Organizations. Further criteria was added to

29. Elizabeth Wood, et al., "Introduction," in *Active Collections*, ed. Elizabeth Wood, et al (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 4; and Trevor Jones and Rainey Tisdale, "A Manifesto for Active History Museum Collections," in *Active Collections*, 9.

30. Mark A. Greene, "Four Forceful Phrases: An Archival Change Agent Muses on Museology," in *Active Collections*, ed. Elizabeth Wood, et al (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 80.

Name of Collection	Dates	Decade	Size (Linear Feet)	Type	Creator category	subcategory	Subject	Sub-subject	Location	Subcategory (location)
Caustin Family Photographs	1941-1949	1940-1949	0.25	Photographs	Visitors		Visitor activities, Plants			
Dale H. Nuss Papers	1963-1999 (bulk: 1963-1975)	1960-1969, 1970-1979	0.5	Personal papers	Employees	National Park Service employees, Park rangers	Social life, Management activities			
Daniel Trotter Potts Letters	1824-1827, 1948	1820-1829	0.1	Personal papers	Visitors	Explorers, Fur trappers	Native Americans		West Thumb	West Thumb Geyser Basin
David R. Toeppen Slides	1948	1940-1949	0.5	Photographs	Employees	Concession employees	Visitor activities		Tower-Roosevelt, Mammoth, Norris, Old Faithful, Lake, Canyon	Camp Roosevelt Lodge, Yellowstone Lake
Dorothy and Harry B. Goodspeed Scrapbook	1937	1930-1939	0.2	Ephemera; Photographs	Visitors		Transportation, Visitor activities	Railroads		
Edward E. Midgley Papers	1931-1936	1930-1939	0.25	Ephemera; Photographs	Employees	Concession employees	Social life		Canyon, Old Faithful	Canyon Lodge, Old Faithful Lodge
Electric Peak Arts Council (Gardiner, Montana) Records	1999-2014	1990-1999, 2000-2009, 2010-2019	0.5	Records	Businesses/Organizations	Nonprofits	Gateway communities, Social life, Arts	Performing arts	Gardiner, MT	
Entre Nous (Gardiner, Montana) Records	1940-2010	1940-1949, 1950-1959, 1960-1969, 1970-1979, 1980-1989, 1990-1999, 2000-2009	1.5	Records	Businesses/Organizations	Youth organizations	Gateway communities, Youth activities	Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts	Gardiner, MT	

Figure 1. Collection survey spreadsheet

the survey to assist in determining strengths and weaknesses of the collections, consisting of the type of creator, time period, subjects found within the collection, and the location most depicted in the collection materials.

The survey was designed in Google Sheets for ease of access to users using the four major categories as headings, creating a table depicting each of the four criteria (type, time period, subject, location) along with eleven fields and subfields varying in nature to further parse out the basis of each collection, seen in Figure 1. Some subfields were added after the initial survey began when it was determined a more descriptive analysis of subjects and locations was needed. While some fields such as size of collection and type of materials were not used in the final collection analysis, they were included to understand each collection as a whole and could be referenced in any future updates to Yellowstone's collection policy.

Theme Development and Application

Once we created the collection survey's structure, the project archivist read each finding aid carefully. Dates, historical/biographical information for the individual or organization, size of collection, and description of its contents were included on the finding aids. This information was crucial to surveying each collection, placing it in the correct category, and further determining the type of creator, time period, subject, and location found in each. If a collection fell under multiple categories, such as the Milton P. Skinner papers fitting under both the Employee and Researcher category, the more dominant subject matter determined the category.

Initially, the Date, Subject, and Location fields did not have a subcategory option, and all data was placed under each of these categories. Subcategories were created shortly after analysis began because initial data was too broad or distinct. Date became accompanied by Decade, Subject by Sub-subject, and Location by Sublocation. For example, the Subject field became plentiful with a wide range of subjects such as transportation, wildlife, railroads, automobiles, hiking, and so forth.

With the addition of the Sub-subject field, transportation was listed under Subject, and any specific type of transportation was added under Sub-subject, i.e., railroads, automobiles, stagecoaches.

Additionally, the broad collection subject "Visitor Activities" was created to encompass any activity equivalent to subject terms such as hiking or fishing, or if the collection consisted of photographs from popular sites within Yellowstone. This term was used for all four main categories, making it possible for an Employee collection to include the subject term of visitor activities. These decisions were made after discussions with the Collections Committee of Yellowstone, consisting of various staff at the Heritage and Research Center.

A portion of the collections categorized as "Employee" collections in the survey can be seen in Figure 2 below. Most of the data fields collected as part of the survey required data to be entered, including the four criteria columns—Creator, Decade, Subject, and Location. Nearly all collections were dated or had inferred dates and could be given a value for the Decade column. The Creator Subcategory was useful in determining the type of creator beyond the four main categories of Visitors, Employees, Researchers, and Businesses/Organizations. However, not all included specific types; those were mostly found in the Visitor category. Unique and distinct types were noted in this field, such as visitors that were women or photographers. Women were specifically noted only if the collections were from solely women visitors. This was to better show representation of women visitors to Yellowstone, especially during the park's early years. Other underrepresented groups would have been included such as BIPOC, Indigenous peoples, or non-English speaking groups, but no other distinct groups appeared in the manuscript collections.

Name of Collection	Dates	Decade	Size (Linear Feet)	Type	Creator category	subcategory	Subject	Sub-subject	Location	Subcategory (location)
Dale H. Nuss Papers	1963-1999 (bulk: 1963-1975)	1960-1969, 1970-1979	0.5	Personal papers	Employees	National Park Service employees, Park rangers	Social life, Management activities			
David R. Toeppen Slides	1948	1940-1949	0.5	Photographs	Employees	Concession employees	Visitor activities		Tower-Roosevelt, Mammoth, Norris, Old Faithful, Lake, Canyon	Camp Roosevelt Lodge, Yellowstone Lake
Edward E. Midgley Papers	1931-1936	1930-1939	0.25	Ephemera; Photographs	Employees	Concession employees	Social life		Canyon, Old Faithful	Canyon Lodge, Old Faithful Lodge
Frank Sincock Photographs	1924-1926	1920-1929	0.25	Photographs	Employees		Winter, Visitor activities		Inside park: Canyon, Mammoth. Outside park: The Tetons, Gardiner, MT	Canyon Camp, Canyon Hotel, Mammoth Hot Springs
Fuhrman-Baumgartner Photograph Albums	1919-1924	1910-1919, 1920-1929	0.25	Ephemera; Photographs	Employees	Concession employees, Yellowstone Park Camps Co. (YPCC)	Transportation, Social life, Visitor activities, Winter	Automobiles	Canyon, Lake, Tower-Roosevelt, Mammoth	Canyon Hotel, Lake Hotel, Fort Yellowstone, Mammoth Camp
Gerald E. Mernin Papers	1924-2010 (bulk dates: 1965-2001)	1920-1929, 1930-1939, 1940-1949, 1950-1959, 1960-1969, 1970-1979, 1980-1989, 1990-1999, 2000-2009, 2010-2019	6.5	Ephemera; Personal papers	Employees	National Park Service employees, Park rangers	Wildlife management, Trails, Social life	Bear management, Bison management, Nez Perce Trail		

Figure 2. Portion of "Employee" collections surveyed

The Subject field had data entered for every collection as at least one subject term was able to be input from each collection. The Location field, while important to determine areas in and outside of the park that are well-represented or lacking, was not entered for every collection. Some collections encompassed the entirety of Yellowstone with no distinct locations highlighted. If the location was prominent in the collection or had historical significance, it was noted in this field and furthermore in the Sublocation. For example, if the Backcountry area of Yellowstone was found in the collection, more specifically Boundary Creek, "Backcountry" was placed in the Location category and Boundary Creek in the Sublocation category.

Findings

Graphic representations of the data were created and analyzed after assessment to better show the areas of the manuscript collections that were well-represented or where gaps existed. Of the four main categories, Employees and Visitors were the bulk of the manuscript collections, as seen in Figure 3. Employees made up just over half of the manuscript collections, followed by Visitors and then Businesses/Organizations, and the least of the collections from Researchers.
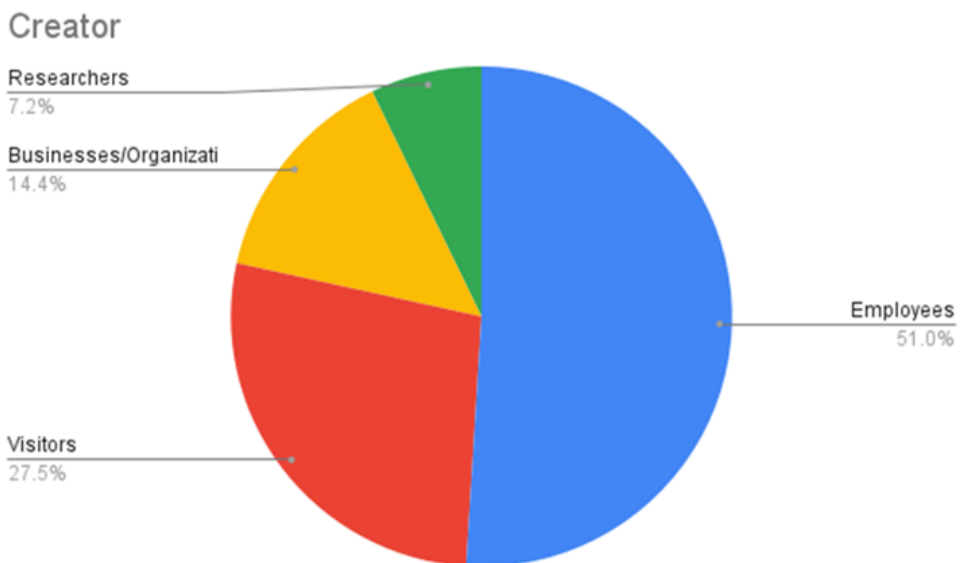

Figure 3. Type of Creator

Employee-created Collections

Employee collections made up 51% of the manuscript collections at Yellowstone National Park, making it the category with the highest presence.

Type

Concessioner and National Park employees make up the bulk of the Employee collections, as seen in Figure 4. Army (civilian and soldier), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), contract, and surveyors were also found. The "Other" category depicted types that appeared in single collections and was used only in creating graph representations of the data.

Time Period

The decades with the highest number of Employee collections were from the 1910s to the 1930s, as seen in Figure 5.

Subject

Social life (21.4%), management activities (18.1%), and visitor activities (11%) were the top three subjects that related to the employees' work activities or their lives within Yellowstone. Social life referred to anything the employee took part in outside of work that appeared in the collection, such as personal correspondence with family
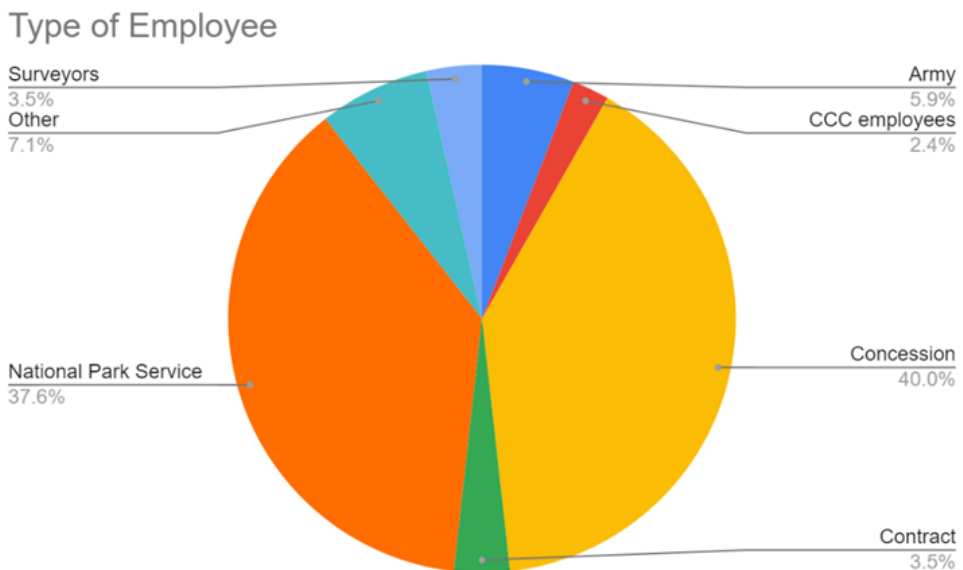

Figure 4. Employee Type (Creator Subcategories)
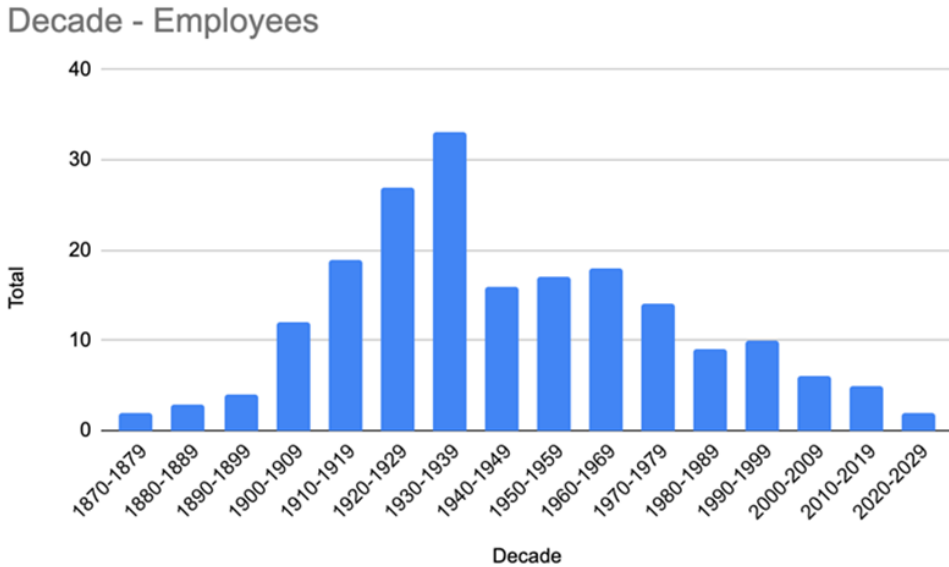
Decade - Employees

Figure 5. Employee collections coverage by decade

and friends. Management activities referred to any activity performed while on the job, such as work-related reports. Visitor activities categorized any activity related to recreation or sightseeing within Yellowstone, such as photographs of wildlife or well-known landscapes and geographic features.

Location

Mammoth, Old Faithful, Canyon Lake, and Tower-Roosevelt were the five most collected areas of the park among employees. These hold some of the most visited features of the park, in addition to being more developed. The location noted was the work location of the employee or the location most prominently seen within the collection. The location noted was the work location of the employee or the location most prominently seen within the collection.

Visitor-created Collections

Visitors consisted of 27.5% of the manuscript collections at Yellowstone National Park.

Type

Families and individuals traveling to the park for recreational purposes were the majority of the Visitor collections. It was also noted when women were individual

visitors to Yellowstone to account for the presence of women in the history of the park. These specific collections created by women visitors depict the early history of the park and have been included for this reason. Photographers, explorers, soldiers, presidents, and Japanese Americans were other prominent types of visitors found.

Time period

The 1820-1829 decade saw the earliest instance of a visitor coming to the park. As seen in Figure 6, the decades from 1890 through 1959 make up the bulk of the Visitor collections.

Subject

The topics highlighted most in the collection materials determined subjects for Visitor collections. For activities such as hiking, camping, sightseeing, or other recreational activities, the subject heading "visitor activities" was used. This subject appeared in nearly half of the Visitor collections as it is inferred that most visitors tend to visit Yellowstone to see the most popular sights and areas of the park. Transportation appeared in 25%, with subcategories of the type of transportation, usually stagecoaches, railroads, or automobiles. The time period of each collection could also be depicted from the type of transportation shown. Military, concessions, infrastructure, plants, and other diverse topics were present in single collections.
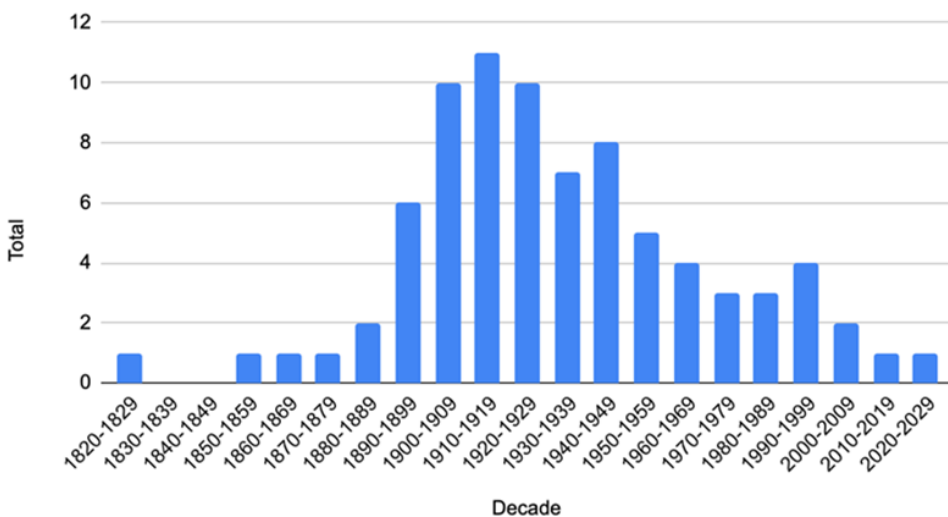

Figure 6. Visitor collections coverage by decade

Location

Locations for the Visitor collections were only noted if the location was solely represented throughout the materials, which very few Visitor collections met this standard. The location for visitors was not representative in relation to the collection survey or used to determine results.

Business/Organization-created Collections

Businesses and organizations in and around Yellowstone, referred to as gateway communities, were well-represented in the manuscript collections of Yellowstone, encompassing 14.4% of the holdings.

Type

Nonprofit organizations make up 20% of the businesses and organizations that relate to the social lives and cultural aspects of Yellowstone and its gateway communities. Churches, women's organizations, concessions, youth organizations, and cattle ranches are other businesses and organizations found in the manuscript collections.

Time period

From the 1880s to the 2000s, the amount of collections based on businesses and organizations steadily increased. This trend shows the increase in the number of businesses or organizations existing in and around Yellowstone and the increase in visitation and popularity of the Park. There were fewer collections after the first decade of the 2000s.

Subject

Subjects among the businesses and organizations related to the type of organization, such as cattle ranches, in most collections. For example, cattle ranches included subjects such as hunting and ranching while women's organizations included subjects of social life and women. Gateway communities appeared at just over 20%. Social life was the second highest subject found at 13.6%; other subjects with a high percentages of appearance were arts, women, ranching, and National Park Service employees.

Location

The location was broken down by specific areas within or outside the park. Gardiner, Montana, located just outside the northwest entrance to Yellowstone appeared in 62.5% of these collections, as seen in Figure 7. Cooke City, Jardine, and Paradise Valley, communities located in Montana just outside of Yellowstone, were also found in the collection. Inside the park, Mammoth appeared in most collections.
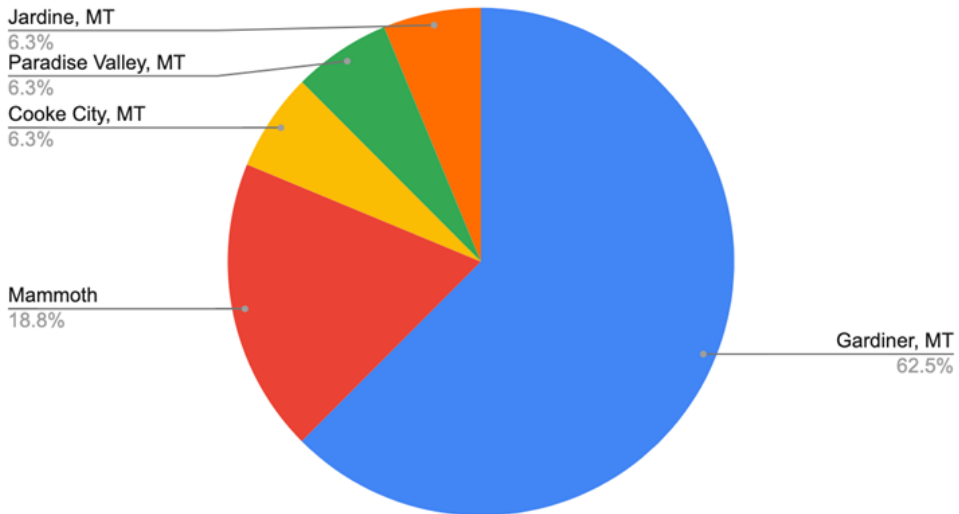
Figure 7. Location representation in Businesses/Organizations collections

Researcher-created Collections

The Researcher category includes any collection consisting solely of research-related materials conducted in and around Yellowstone. Researchers made up the least of the collections at just over 7% (13 collections).

Type

Biologists, entomologists, geologists, and other science-related researchers made up half of the Researcher collections. Students, photojournalists, surveyors, and women were other types of researchers found in the manuscript collections, as seen in Figure 8.

Time period

From the 1870s to the present day, there were collections for each decade, but no decade had a notably larger amount than any other.

Subject

The number of subjects was vast among the researcher collections, the majority relating to the diverse number of geographical features of Yellowstone. Geothermal features appeared most at 11.5%, which related to any collection covering the unique
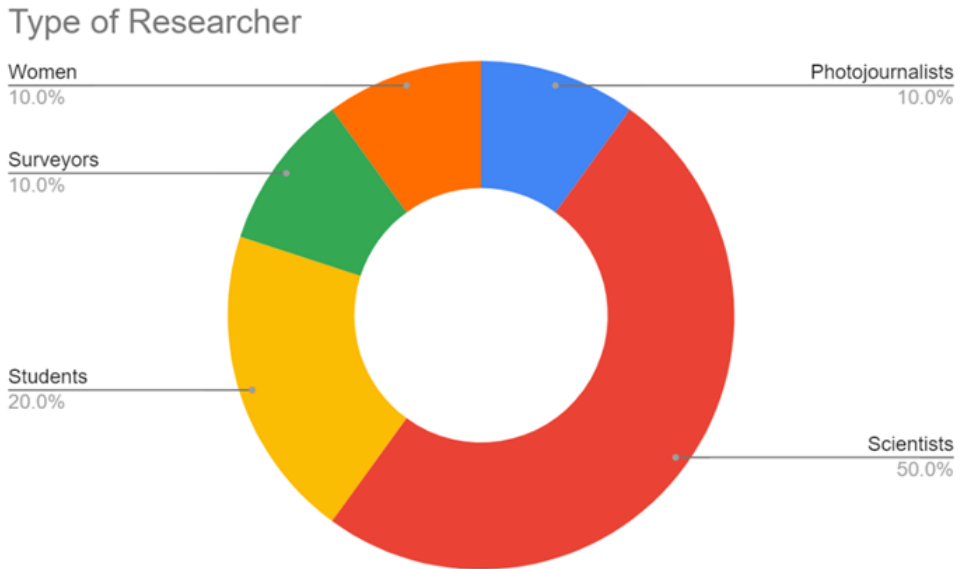
Figure 8. Types of researchers represented within Researcher collections

geothermal activities that occur in Yellowstone (i.e., geysers and hot springs). Fire management, geology, plants, and wildlife management were also found.

Location

The Canyon area of Yellowstone was found most, with fewer of the researcher collections including specific locations. Lamar, Mammoth, and Old Faithful were also present.

Collection-Building Recommendations

Employees

Clear strengths in the Employee category are among concession and National Park Service employees, but the collections lack more recent materials from these groups, likely because more recent employees produce more born-digital materials than paper-based. NPS employee collections alone tend to consist of career-appointed employees rather than seasonal employees. Permanent employees for the NPS are more likely to produce more materials throughout their career than seasonal employees, who may only work a few months of their lifetime for the NPS. Collecting areas that are recommended to seek increased representation are more recent employees, unique employee types, and early employees, if the records exist.

Subject terms within the employee collections are vast. Those related to living and working in the Park appear the most, as many of these employees not only participated in work-related activities, but also explored Yellowstone outside of work. Specific work activities such as construction or wildlife management are present, but there are few terms that appear frequently enough to determine which areas are indeed lacking. Continued collection of employee collections with the themes of management or visitor activities is recommended as these depict the work and personal life of employees, especially for the types of employees that are lacking.

Canyon, Mammoth, and Old Faithful are found most frequently in the manuscript collections and are recommended to continue to be collected. However, it is strongly recommended to actively seek collections from less developed areas of the park to have a fully representative idea of what employees experienced working and living in Yellowstone, from the most developed areas of Mammoth to the least developed areas of the backcountry.

Visitors

Collections from early explorers, distinguished visitors in history, underrepresented groups, and visitors during historical events are recommended to continue collecting. Visitor collections are important, as they depict an average visit to Yellowstone, highlighting popular features and areas of the park. Collecting too many similar collections can cause duplication of many materials and is discouraged for lack of storage space and need for more unique collecting areas.

Early exploration, noteworthy or historical events in Yellowstone are recommended to continue collecting in relation to subjects of Visitor collections, especially if they offer a unique view of the park.

Businesses and Organizations

We recommended continuing to collect materials from businesses and organizations, especially those found in gateway communities, for all subject areas to better understand and preserve this history. They are representative of life outside the park and its influence on the types of businesses or organizations that have existed through time.

With the strengths of the Businesses/Organizations category lying in gateway communities, we recommended collecting materials from all areas in and around the park, especially those that are less prominent in the current collections.

Researchers

Researchers are the smallest category of the manuscript collections at Yellowstone. We recommend collecting all materials from researchers if they are not duplicates and have some significance to Yellowstone. Additionally, collections from noteworthy events or time periods are recommended, such as changes in wildlife management in the mid-20th century. An additional survey of institutions with

collections related to Yellowstone is recommended to better understand what is being collected elsewhere and draw conclusions as to why researcher collections are lacking at Yellowstone.

Next Steps and Further Questions

Now that we have a better understanding of the existing collections, we must determine how it will influence the next Scope of Collections Statement (SOCS). Currently, we have been able to cite the findings of the survey to bolster recommendations to the Collections Committee to decline specific offers, particularly visitor albums that offer the same visitor experiences we can now show are well documented. Next, we must update and implement changes in the new SOCS, such as moving areas from "actively collecting" to "no collecting" because of abundance. While the abundant collections hold a vast number of materials and research value, areas such as visitor collections will be proposed to move to "no collecting" status unless deemed by archivists to offer something new or different from the typical story. Gaps in our collections will also be analyzed in reference to the current SOCS and new, more specific areas for growth will be suggested.

Potential areas of interest for growth include more recent employee collections and the papers of employees from newer partnerships such as the Student Conservation Association and independent service providers known as commercial users. The survey has provided invaluable data to inform the discussion and help guide the next stage of collecting—and some intentional not collecting—for the park archives. What comes across especially strongly in the survey is how relatively homogenous many collecting categories are. For example, visitor collections are remarkably similar in terms of the areas of the park represented, the types of experiences documented, and the subjects depicted. One of the keys for the new SOCS will be to define this type of collection trend and detail the factors that indicate when a particular collecting area has been adequately documented and can, therefore, be closed to new acquisitions.

The survey also offers the opportunity to open a broader discussion among the institutions that collect Yellowstone. It offers the potential to refine collecting policies to ensure comprehensive documentation, reduce competition, and encourage collaboration. In 2018 and 2022, nearby academic institutions organized conferences that also considered Yellowstone as one of their collecting areas of emphasis. Montana State University's Conversations on Collecting Yellowstone conference was a unique opportunity combining academic and other public institutions as well as historians and collectors of Yellowstone memorabilia. As the archivists of the various institutions shared sessions and talked with the other stakeholders, the idea for a more collaborative approach to Yellowstone collecting emerged. While exploring the collections of other Yellowstone repositories was beyond the scope of this survey, it is hoped that the categories and themes chosen to analyze the Park's collections may prove useful to the others and eventually provide the framework for more comprehensive data collections and inter-institutional analysis, and perhaps further

collaboration in acquisitions in the future. Also revealed through the conferences was the revelation that there were collections related to Yellowstone scattered across the world, often in somewhat unusual places. And yet, these collections were not out of place in their repositories as they were often contained within larger personal collections tied to the geographic place where they were found. As survey participant Jodi Allison-Bunnell, Head of Archives and Special Collections at Montana State University observes, "Where should collections of Yellowstone reside? Isn't there meaning in the fact that they are found everywhere?" Viewing the documentation of Yellowstone's story as part of something larger, a responsibility that can be shared across collecting institutions, is profoundly reassuring in this "new normal" of limited resources.