Welcome remarks by Anne Cuyler Salsich, Chair
Get Their Hands On It: Teaching with Objects in Archives and Special Collections
Session 603, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, August 22, 2015

Hello everyone, welcome to the discussion session Get Their Hands on It: Teaching with Objects in Archives and Special Collections. My name is Anne Salsich and I’m the associate archivist at Oberlin College, where my department and that of our colleague in Special Collections are involved in a lot of class sessions with students and their professors. In this session we will consider objects as rich primary sources for teaching and learning, particularly in this digital age, and of archivists and special collections librarians as educators and interpreters, and who apply a laboratory model of learning to their class sessions.

First, we’d like to get a sense of those of you here with us today. How many of you are teaching for classes or working in collaboration with professors for classes at your institutions? And of those, how many are primarily special collections librarians? How many are archivists? How many have responsibilities for both areas? And finally, how many of you are using objects in your teaching? We know we are not alone in this area, and we hope that we will have some discussion from the floor at the end of the panel’s speaking time.

The most recent issue of the American Archivist has an article on archival literacy competencies for undergraduate history majors by Sharon Weiner, Sammie Morris, and Lawrence Mykytiuk. That article reports on a study to identify archival literacy competencies for undergraduates and post-graduates as defined by history professors. The list of 51 competencies that emerged from the study includes this one:

Interpret a variety of types of primary sources to glean information from them. Critically analyze and write in a critically informed way about a variety of types of sources used in historical research, such as institutional records, rare books, photographs, charts and maps, manuscripts and personal papers, ephemera, born-digital materials, 3-D artifacts, audio-visual materials, and oral history interviews.

If history professors define archival literacy competency in higher education in this way, then our work as archivists and special collections librarians must include the appraisal, selection, arrangement and description of objects as well as documents. Archivists and special collections librarians are best positioned to collaborate with faculty in the teaching of archival literacy competencies, and in the case of certain objects, they are essential.

This is a 75-minute session, and each of the 5 panelists will speak for about 10 minutes about our approaches to using objects to support pedagogy at our institutions. The panelists will introduce themselves as we go around the table. Our moderator, Mott Linn, will pose some questions to the panel after the presentations, and then he will take questions from the floor. We have put together a slideshow to run on its own during this session.