(10135) Storeroom Employees
The Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs and Wayne State University Archives has 15 full-time archivists, several of which are referred to as “collections archivists” who work directly with one of our many donor organizations. That includes me. I work with the records of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, also known as AFSCME and the Reuther Library is the official depository for the International union’s records. AFSCME is a public employee union with 1.6 million members from across the country employed in a diverse range of professions, including nurses, corrections officers, cafeteria workers, sanitation workers, librarians and archivists.

I manage collections totaling over 3,500 linear feet, about 2/3 of which are currently unprocessed. The records date from the 1930s to present day, with the bulk of the records starting in the late 1960s. Most of these are records collections, but we do have the papers of several former AFSCME leaders as well. I am solely responsible for accessioning, processing, digitization, I am the primary reference contact, and I work directly with AFSCME on whatever they need related to their records and their history. In some ways it’s like being a lone arranger because I do all the things for this one collection, but I have the immense benefit of being a part of a larger institution with things like ArchivesSpace and most importantly archivist colleagues for support and collaboration.

(12041) AFSCME Professional
Moment of appreciation for helpful colleagues!

(32664) Samuel Turner, welding
The Reuther Library has policies and procedures, based on national standards, but a lot is left up to the individual archivist to manage their collections how they see fit based on the needs of the donor.

Documenting decisions can and should happen under those institutional procedures. Since we’ve transitioned to ArchivesSpace, most of that takes place in the various fields within resource and accession records.

But I decided to I wanted to keep track of additional, more granular information. So for notes to myself, I’ve been using spreadsheets.

(12041) AFSCME Professional
My appreciation for spreadsheets in collection management began when I worked for History Associates, and a colleague, Erica Williams, shared her spreadsheets for processing. It kinda rocked my processing world and I’ve never looked back. Now I use them for accessioning. For my to-do list. For search committee work. Basically any time I think I can simplify or over complicate something by using a spreadsheet, I will.

(32664) Samuel Turner, welding
I have three main reasons to use them for collection management:

1. I can record more information at various levels of the collection and keep it all in one place. AFSCME’s departments have retention schedules and as archival material cycles out they send it to me. For the most part, those come in as accruals, so the collections are always growing and some collections have dozens of accruals, which means dozens of accession records in ASpace, and that gets a little too unwieldy for me. I have spent way too much time trying to sort through all of those records and I always miss something. Granted, that may be attributed to user error, but that’s the reality I live in. And the records usually summarize what’s in the accrual, which sometimes will be enough information, but not always. With spreadsheets, I can keep information on all the accruals for a collection in one place, with multiple levels of description, including the file level.

2. If I’m doing that while accessioning, then my hope, and this is untested, but my hope is this will easily translate to quicker processing. When I process, I start with a file-level survey in a spreadsheet, so if I already have that from the accessioning process, then I will be able to quickly move through processing.

3. They also help me with reference. AFSCME retains ownership of their records and as an active organization, they need access to them. When they need something, they usually needed it yesterday. Keeping more detailed notes helps me fulfill reference request much more quickly, particularly for the unprocessed records.
The two main types of spreadsheets I have are for accessioning and for processing.

For accessions, I have two sheets within the file, one for box-level description and one for file-level inventories.

(12058) Laboratory Worker
I list the individual boxes on my first sheet, grouped by accrual. I record the stacks location, the accrual date, who sent it, the information written on the box, approximate dates, additional content description if needed, and any other notes that might be helpful. Sometimes, as I accession I can condense the records into fewer boxes, so I try to keep track of the original box it came from and where it is now. Notes I might add include whether I condensed the boxes, removed stuff from binders, removed non-archival material, and any special formats present and any preservation concerns. This provides “at-a-glance” information for each accrual.

If you’ll note this highlighted row, after filling in the box information....
I copy each row into the inventory sheet, and list the contents below it. I have requested that AFSCME departments send inventories with their records, and a lot of the time they do, but sometimes they don’t. When they do send them, they’re sent by different people so formats and the level of detail is inconsistent. So if there’s a digital inventory, I copy it over, if there’s no inventory or its just a paper copy, I type it up. I have all my inventories together instead of a bunch of separate word docs and pdfs, along with information pertinent to me that they can’t include. This is where I can indicate if a folder was empty, if something is listed on the inventory is not in the box, write out acronyms I’m not familiar with, indicate noteworthy material for an upcoming anniversary or current events, note special formats or conditions, etc. And again, if I move a folder to a different box I can keep track of that. So if someone from AFSCME calls me up and says “I need this folder from box 8” I can look it up here and see that I moved it to box 7, which saves me the time and frustration of trying to figure out or remember why it’s not in box 8. I can easily toggle between box- and file-level views, which I find helpful.

Depending on how the material arrives to me, this can be a time-consuming process, and the level of detail I go into can vary depending on how much time I have and how useful I think the information will be to me. Sometimes it is sufficient to summarize contents. I just try to record enough information to help me find something between now and when it is processed.
For now, I’m processing collections that for the most part were accessioned long before my time. So I start by making a similar but more complicated spreadsheet.

(12058) Laboratory Worker
First, I have an Accruals tab. Each accrual to the collection is listed on a separate row. Most of this information was pulled from ArchiveSpace accession records. So I have starting in column E there, the accession number and new accession number, where applicable, accrual date, the title the collection came with, size, notes from ASpace, and additional notes from me. Then all the way in the left column, I added basically check mark columns, so I can keep track of what I’ve retrieved from the stacks, completed the initial inventory, and did I create the appropriate ASpace event. I always forget the ASpace event so I felt like a genius when I realized I could add a reminder for myself here. Then as you can see, I make use of the different font and fill colors to remind me of things that need attention. Like the accession box-level spreadsheet, this is my at-a-glance view of the collection. Now I will direct your attention to that purple lined box, because that accrual is what we’ll be looking at in the next slide.
Each file is listed with its accrual date, box number, folder number, folder title, series note, subseries if applicable, and notes. Here I make similar notes as I would for accessions. In this example we have clarification of what card count means, a note about the presence of non-archival material, an out card, and some empty folders. I don’t have screen shots of the other tabs because most of them look very similar. I’m going to list a bunch of steps real quick because they’re not directly pertinent to documenting decisions, but I’ll bring it back around: What I do is fill out this information here, and then sort it by accession date, then box number and folder number. That gives me the order the materials were in when they arrived. Then I copy it all to the arrangements sheet, where I sort by series, then by date, box and folder numbers, and then I have my intellectual arrangement for the collection. I break up each series into its own sheet so they are easier to manage, and as I physically sort them, I copy folder titles to the xml sheet, which is the Reuther Library template I copied in here, and has all the xml tags I need to copy into Oxygen and then import into ASpace for the container list. SO I like having that survey sheet so I know this is how the collection was when it came to me. If I somehow really mess something up, I could in theory put things back to how they were. Then the arrangement and series tabs are themselves kind of documenting what I’m doing to some extent: they keep track of the progression of the collection as I’ve processed it.
These spreadsheets, especially the accessioning spreadsheet, have really helped me with reference requests. The processed collections have finding aids, and they usually do their job just fine. But the unprocessed collections are a little difficult to navigate if I don’t know the exact accrual to consult. Most of these collections have a 10-year embargo period during which they are not open to the public, but are still used by AFSCME, so notes on unprocessed collections are important. And the processing spreadsheet is especially helpful when a reference request comes in while I’m processing, it helps me keep track of things as I go so I don’t have my final box list done in order to find something.

(9810) Librarian
Thank you!
Stefanie Caloia
SCaloia@wayne.edu @AFSCMEArchivist

Photos: AFSCME Communications Department Records
http://reuther.wayne.edu/image/tid/1774

(12042) AFSCME Mine Worker