

Format For Cooperation: Cooperative Collection Registers at the Peabody Museum of Salem and the Essex Institute

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F. Gerald Ham wrote in 1981 that “inter-institutional cooperation is an essential feature of a complex and interdependent technological society.”¹ Many cooperative “archival strategies” have been implemented in an attempt to reap the potential benefits of interdependence. Most cooperative archival projects, however, are concerned with collection development, often in association with archival networks.² These are laudable projects that set standards for future collection development on a massive scale, but there are other ways in which cooperation can enhance archival activities.

One such activity could be to improve access to collections currently divided between two or more institutions. How can repositories perform reference services for the universe of available material on a subject or individual when they possess only a portion of that information? The Peabody Museum of Salem (Mass.) and the Essex Institute have initiated a project that begins to address this issue through the implementation of cooperative collection registers.

This essay analyzes the nature of the libraries’ respective collections, discusses the relationship between their collecting policies and the need for this form of cooperation, and explains the development of a format for the intellectual unification of physically divided collections. It concludes with a discussion of other possible applications of this format.

The Essex Institute and the Peabody Museum of Salem, situated within a block of each other, have collected historic documentation since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The majority of the manuscript collections consists of the papers of Salem merchant families whose ships participated in trade with ports in India, China, and other Asian and European countries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The two institutions have a history of cooperation that extends back to 1867, when the Peabody Academy of Science (a parent organization of the Peabody Museum) and Essex Institute established an informal cooperative collections policy.³ The institute regularly

¹F. Gerald Ham, “Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era,” *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981): 211.

²For discussions of other cooperative archival projects, see Richard A. Cameron, et al., “Archival Cooperation: A Critical Look at Statewide Archival Networks,” *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983): 414–32; John A. Fleckner, “Cooperation as a Strategy For Archival Institutions,” *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 447–59; James E. Fogerty, “Manuscripts Collecting in Archival Networks,” *Midwestern Archivist* 6 (1982): 130–41; John J. Grabowski, “Fragments or Components: Theme Collections in a Local Setting,” *American Archivist* 48 (Summer 1985): 304–14.

³The Essex Institute was founded in 1821 as the Essex Historical Society. The institute collects and supports scholarly research in the documentary and material culture of Essex County and New England from the seventeenth century to the present. The Peabody Museum of Salem was founded in 1799 as the East India Marine Society by a group of Salem shipmasters who had sailed beyond Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope. Among

deposited marine and natural history artifacts at the Peabody Academy of Science while logbooks received by the latter were deposited in the "Marine Library" at the institute. This policy continued until 1926, when major accessions of logbooks and manuscripts first appear in museum records. These accessions roughly coincide with an end to deposits of artifacts by the institute at Peabody Academy of Science. The reason for this change in relations is unclear. Museum accession records indicate that its maritime manuscript collecting has continued since 1926, while the Essex Institute has independently expanded its own maritime collections.

Although each library was aware that the other had materials relating to its collections, the precise nature of that relationship had not been established. Existing gift agreements and other factors have made a physical unification of the collections impossible for the foreseeable future. There are currently over forty manuscript collections in which the papers of an individual or family have been divided between the two repositories.⁴

Beginning in 1980 the Essex Institute received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities to process a large portion of its maritime history manuscripts. During these projects the number of collections divided between the two institutions became evident. Soon afterward the museum librarian/archivist and the institute curator of manuscripts began to consider the potential for an intellectual unification

of the shared collections. In the fall of 1986, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and a generous Salem resident provided funding for a two-year manuscript-processing project that included the development of cooperative collection registers for the shared holdings of the Peabody Museum and the Essex Institute. The institutions employed a project archivist who began examining the museum's holdings and comparing them to the completed institute collection registers.

The arrangement of the divided papers was not a major problem. Generally, when there was a significant difference in the size of the respective repositories' holdings, the larger collection was used as a model for the formation of series and subseries. In certain cases material from the Peabody Museum provided information that necessitated some reprocessing of the Essex Institute portions of the collection. The fact that one library's collection had already been processed, however, substantially facilitated processing the related holdings at the other institution.

Reaching an agreement on the format of the collection register required more extensive negotiations between the three archivists. Even though all three had archival training and professional experience, there were discrepancies between the register styles used in the two repositories. Discussions addressed a wide range of issues in archival description and reference service. The complexity of the registers was seen as an unavoidable but not unexpected as-

their stated objectives were "to collect such facts and observations as may tend to improvement and security of navigation" and "to form a museum of natural and artificial curiosities." In 1867 George Peabody purchased the East India Marine Society's building and collections and merged them with other ethnological and natural history collections from the Essex Institute under the name Peabody Academy of Science. In 1915 the name of the organization was again changed to the Peabody Museum of Salem. See Walter M. Whitehill, *The East India Marine Society and the Peabody Museum of Salem* (Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1949).

⁴For example, the Phillips Family Papers (1636-1897) have been divided into two portions. The museum holds ten linear feet of material mainly associated with Stephen and Stephen Clarendon Phillips, the earliest merchants in the collection. The institute has eight linear feet of manuscripts, the majority of which concern Willard Peele Phillips (the son of Stephen C. Phillips) and Phillips family businesses after 1850. The extent of the division is such that even the papers of Stephen Phillips's brig *Nancy Ann* are divided between the two libraries.

pect of the project. Concurrence upon a register format required consideration of a series of factors related to the readability of a complicated archival register, such as the need for folder-level descriptions in the content list.

The resulting finding aids exhibit structural complexity but an intellectual holism that is gratifying. The introductory page (Figure 1) contains parallel holdings descriptions and provenance summaries with conservation, copyright, and processing statements amenable to both repositories. A "holdings" statement was added to emphasize that the register indexes the holdings of both libraries, and this statement is repeated at the head of the scope and content note. Material from both libraries is described in the scope and content note, and individual items of particular importance are listed with collection, box, and folder numbers in the text. A section entitled "Bibliography and Related Collections" lists secondary sources available at both institutions and cites any other known primary sources.

The format of the content list was the subject of much negotiation. A series list at the top of the first page provides the reader with a general idea of the collection structure and enhances access in quick reference situations. The holdings of the respective institutions are differentiated by "MSS" numbers interposed in the box and folder columns (see Figure 2). Readers may have some difficulty recognizing the MSS number of the collection housed in the library in which they are working, and this may result in some incorrect box and folder requests. The two repositories have recognized, however, that this type of register will initially require an additional degree

of reference service. Also, since both libraries have closed stacks, the responsibility for recognizing the respective facilities' holdings will ultimately fall upon the library staff and not the reader.

At the end of the register are separate lists of added entries for the holdings of each repository. Correspondingly, the card catalogs provide entries associated with the holdings of the host institution, while the registers describe material from both participating libraries.

At this writing six collections have been intellectually unified in this manner. This kind of register format might be used for other in-house applications as well. Two collections at the Essex Institute, for example, were intellectually combined to provide access to the papers of two associated merchant partnerships.⁵ Similarly, archivists elsewhere have contemplated the unification of different accessions of the same collection in a single register, saving extensive reprocessing of earlier accessions which had been individually processed in the past.⁶

On a broader scale, the use of this format could result in significant time and cost savings for researchers and library staff. Researchers could avoid unnecessary trips to libraries throughout the country, and reference staff would receive more precise inquiries into their collections. Undoubtedly this is a complex solution to a difficult archival problem that is not appropriate for every repository. The physical proximity of the Essex Institute and Peabody Museum of Salem was an important factor in the cost-effectiveness of this project. Also, the size of these two organizations makes a transition of this sort more viable than in larger research libraries. Nevertheless, this

⁵See "Stone, Silsbee and Pickman Records, 1816-1903," MSS# 63, James Duncan Phillips Library, Essex Institute. Benjamin W. Stone was originally a partner in the Salem shipping firm Stone, Silsbee and Pickman. He later broke away to form his own company, B. W. Stone and Brothers. His accounting records contain materials relating to both corporate entities.

⁶Telephone conversation, Gregor Trinkaus-Randall to Helen Samuels, 24 July 1987.

project represents a small measure of the potential benefits of interdependence. The report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities, *Planning for the Archival Profession*, has provided a clear mandate for cooperation between archival repositories.⁷ This project, with its sharing of expertise and resources, stands as an example

of implementation of that objective on a small scale. Other efforts at cooperation among repositories of all sizes must be promoted so that archivists can efficiently manage current and future collections and act with unity in the preservation of the cultural heritage.

⁷Society of American Archivists Task Force on Goals and Priorities, *Planning for the Archival Profession* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986), 19–20. See Goal 2, Objective E, “Promote Cooperation and Sharing of Expertise and Resources Among the Archival Community.”

Figure 1

PEELE FAMILY PAPERS, 1753-1871	
Peabody Museum Holdings	
MSS#: MH-5	Processed by: Robert P. Spindler
Volume: 29 Boxes, 2 Volumes: 15 linear ft.	April, 1987
Essex Institute Holdings	
MSS#: 66	Processed by: Sylvia Kennick
Volume: 2 Boxes, 3 Volumes: 1.5 linear ft.	July, 1982
PROVENANCE:	
Peabody Museum Holdings: The Peele Family Papers consist of personal and professional documents, correspondence and account books removed from the Phillips Family Papers, which were donated to the museum by the estate of Stephen Phillips [Accession # 19,823]. The Shipping Account Book [MSS# MH-5, Vol.3] was a gift of Mrs. Richard Seamans [Accession # 15,605].	
Essex Institute Holdings: The Willard Peele Papers are a reorganization and integration of two boxes, three folders removed from the Phillips Family Papers; five account books, a ships journal, one envelope of ships papers, one broadside and several miscellaneous letters. The bulk of the collection was purchased in 1924. Several additional items were donated: the journal of sh. Argonaut by William C. Waters in 1917; the invoice book of sh. <u>Perseverance</u> (1823) by Edward E. Cheever in 1903; and two legal papers of Willard Peele (1828) by J.M.Raymond. Removed from the collection are several folders of Phillips Family Papers [See Separation Sheets].	
CONSERVATION:	
The bulk of the collection has received no conservation. However, badly torn or soiled documents were dry cleaned and mended.	
COPYRIGHT:	
Requests for permission to publish material from either collection must be submitted in writing to the Librarian of the Phillips Library at the Peabody Museum of Salem or the Curator of Manuscripts at the Essex Institute.	
PROCESSING:	
Processing and conservation for this collection was funded in part by grants from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the National Endowment for the Humanities.	
HOLDINGS:	
This register for the Peele Family Papers represents the intellectual unification of the physically separate holdings extant at the Peabody Museum of Salem and the Essex Institute. Those materials listed under MSS# MH-5 reside at the Peabody Museum, while those listed under MSS# 66 are located at the Essex Institute.	

Figure 2

Peele Family Papers, p.6		
Series I, cont.		
<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
MSS#	MH-5	B. Personal Papers:
8	9	Lesson Book, n.d.
	10	Misc. Papers, 1753-56, 1770, 1802, 1810.
II. WILLARD PEELE (1773-1835) PAPERS, 1792-1838		
A. Shipping Papers		
Ships Papers [See Appendix II]:		
		ARGONAUT, sh.
9	1-4	Voyages 1-3; Account Book, 1819-21.
MSS#	66	
1	1	Notebook, 1818-24.
	2	Misc., 1818-19, 1821, 1827-28.
MSS#	MH-5	AURORA, sh.
9	5-7	Voyages 1-3
10	1-3	" 4-6
	4-9	BIRD, sch. - HORIZON, sch.
		JANE, br.
	10-11	Voyages 1-2
11	1-4	" 3-6
MSS#	66	
1	2	Misc., 1820.
MSS#	MH-5	
11	5-7	NEPTUNE, sch. - NEW HAZARD, br.
		PERSEVERANCE, sh.
12	1-6	Voyages 3-3
13	1-5	" 9-13
14	1	Misc., 1811-22, 1829, n.d.
MSS#	66	
1	3	" , 1819-20, 1823, 1825.
MSS#	MH-5	
14	2-4	PLATO, sh. - WILLIAM GRAY, bark
+2	1-3	Oversize, A-Z
+1	2	" , "
Correspondence:		
14	5	Letterbook, 1809-12 w/index.
	6-8	1798-1801.
15	1-4	1802-06.
16	1-5	1807-10.
17	1-5	1811- June, 1815.
18	1-3	July, 1815-1816.
19	1-3	1817- June, 1818.
20	1-4	July, 1818 - June, 1821.
21	1-5	July, 1821- 1826.
MSS#	66	
1	4	Dec., 1824 - April, 1825.
	5	May - Dec., 1825, 1827.
MSS#	MH-5	
22	1-3	1827-31, 1838, n.d.