

Hidden Collections within Hidden Collections: Providing Access to Printed Ephemera

Rebecca Altermatt and Adrien Hilton

Abstract

In May 2009, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the Tamiment Library at New York University a grant to process its 650-linear-foot “hidden collection” of printed ephemera. As a whole, the collection is a unique and important resource. The library hoped that with improved description and enhanced access, the Printed Ephemera Collections would attract wide-ranging scholarly use. This case study explores the project staff’s approach in adapting archival methods to process this backlog of printed ephemera. The study analyzes the complexities and nuances of this project to help other repositories learn from the Tamiment experience as they process their own ephemera holdings. Tamiment’s Printed Ephemera Collections continue to grow; this case study reflects on what it means to accommodate and nurture a “living” collection.

During the past several years, the Association of Research Libraries’ (ARL) discussion about hidden collections has led to a re-examination of descriptive cataloging standards for pamphlets and ephemera. This conversation was the focus of a 2003 conference at the Library of Congress, where Carol Mandel, dean of New York University’s Division of Libraries, gave the keynote address. In her talk, entitled “Hidden Collections: The Elephant in the Closet,” Dean Mandel argued that Encoded Archival Description (EAD), emerging digital library standards and technologies, and collection-level cataloging methodology “provide options for processing special collections that we didn’t have before.”¹ The Tamiment Library developed the strategy for this project after considering the 2003 white paper published by ARL’s Special Collections Task Force, “Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers,” that

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¹ Carol Mandel, “Hidden Collections: The Elephant in the Closet,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 5 (Fall 2004): 106–13.

convincingly states it is “better to provide some level of access to all materials, than to provide comprehensive access to some materials and no access at all to others.”² This approach uses some of the tenets of the Greene-Meissner model for cost-efficient archival processing, which has become increasingly influential in the archival community, but it also includes elements from a more traditional processing approach.³

Staff at Tamiment appreciated the richness of the library’s ephemera holdings and believed the materials warranted reassessment, reappraisal, and reprocessing, as well as improved description and access. By organizing the ephemera into manageable and discrete collections and describing them using EAD, staff aimed to optimize access, reveal the depth of the resource, and contribute to the growing interest of scholars and educators in print and material culture.

The printed ephemera holdings consisted of two parts: a processed on-site “vertical file,” comprising 252 linear feet and two file cabinets, and a backlog portion consisting of 371 boxes of unsorted materials stored at an off-site facility. The vertical file had grown and contained sometimes several boxes of published materials from single organizations or trade unions. Additionally, the files were only partially accessible with a few finding aids and outdated catalog records. The backlog was broad in scope, unorganized, duplicative, and dirty. Ultimately, the Tamiment Library had a substantially voluminous and valuable resource, but one whose materials were wildly uncontrolled, largely inaccessible, and dauntingly repetitive. In short, the staff had a prototypical unprocessed hidden collection.

In 2009, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the Tamiment Library at New York University a grant to organize and make available this substantial collection. As outlined in the grant application, project staff would process the collection, adapting archival methods and treating the materials in aggregates, to create manuscript collections brought together by organization or trade union.⁴ The project team would describe the resulting Printed Ephemera Collections (PEs) using EAD and make finding aids available online.⁵

² Barbara M. Jones, comp., *Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers: Creating Access to Unprocessed Special Collections Materials in North America’s Research Libraries* (white paper, Association of Research Libraries Task Force on Special Collections, 6 June 2003).

³ Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” *The American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 208–63.

⁴ Leon Miller of Tulane skillfully asserted in his presentation at the 2011 Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting in the panel “Doing a 180: Putting Ephemera on the Front Burner” that provenance is not a concern for these types of collections. Provenance for much of the material in the project at Tamiment was unknown, thus project staff decided to build collections linked by publishing organization or trade union—“artificial creators” as it were.

⁵ The archivists created forty-six collections each described with an individual finding aid.

The Printed Ephemera Collections document the history of labor and left politics in the United States from the utopian movements and the Knights of Labor of the nineteenth century, through the socialist and industrial union movements of the early- and mid-twentieth century, to the civil rights and women's rights organizations of the more recent past. The histories of anarchism, socialism, communism, trade unionism, the African American left, and the peace movement are among those most significantly represented in the PEs. The PEs complement the more than one thousand collections at Tamiment, which total more than fifteen thousand feet of original papers, records, and manuscript collections.

Literature Review

Defining Ephemera

Librarians and archivists, as well as collectors and researchers, have found it difficult to concretely define what constitutes ephemera. Timothy G. Young states that we, as professionals, "have a hard time categorizing it, storing it, and especially (this is the heart of the problem) defining it."⁶ General dictionary definitions of ephemera focus on its temporal quality, while library and archival repositories tend to focus on ephemera's format and purpose. Richard Pearce-Moses defines *ephemera* as follows:

Ephemera: pl. n. (ephemeron, sing.)—Materials, usually printed documents, created for a specific, limited purpose, and generally designed to be discarded after use. **Notes:** Examples of ephemera include advertisements, tickets, brochures, and receipts. A repository may collect ephemera as examples or specimens. Individuals often collect ephemera as mementos or souvenirs because of their association with some person, event, or subject; personal collections of ephemera are often kept in scrapbooks.⁷

The Ephemera Society of America defines *ephemera* as including a broad range of minor (and sometimes major) everyday documents intended for one-time or short-term use. The 402-page *Encyclopedia of Ephemera* lists more than 500 categories from bookmarks to fruit wrappers to posters to theater tickets.⁸

⁶ Timothy G. Young, "Evidence: Toward a Library Definition of Ephemera," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 4 (Spring 2003): 11–26.

⁷ Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, Society of American Archivists, <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/index.asp>, accessed 8 August 2011.

⁸ The Ephemera Society of America, *What Is Ephemera?*, <http://www.ephemeriasociety.org/whatisephemera.html>, accessed 8 August 2011.

In “The Life-Cycle of Printed Ephemera: A Case Study of the Maxine Walderon and Thelma Mendsen Collections,” Mary-Elise Haug writes: “Ephemera is an unpublished, flimsy, or insubstantial printed paper artifact produced for a specific purpose and not intended to survive beyond that purpose.”⁹

Besides its transitory nature, ephemera has proven challenging for archivists and librarians to collect and describe because it often originates as out-of-scope material removed from existing collections or as individual items collected by or donated to the repository. While definitions may make it easier to identify ephemera, they are not inherently useful for collection development, appraisal, or description. Most of the ephemera at Tamiment either came out of existing collections or was accumulated because it related to those collections. While Tamiment had developed several strategies to address its growing body of printed ephemera, none were entirely successful, contributing to the size of the backlog.

Printed ephemera has traditionally been described either at the item level, as does the American Antiquarian Society, or classified as vertical file materials when not part of a collection, as Tulane and other universities do. Tamiment used both approaches in dealing with its printed ephemera. Additionally, Tamiment used MARC to catalog a large portion of its ephemera collection at the folder level.

The Value of Ephemera

In recent years, historians and students of American studies have discovered that ephemeral and pamphlet literature—leaflets, flyers, broadsides, cartoons, advertisements, drawings, caricatures, and manifestos—provide a perspective on the past that is often not accessible through more traditional sources. Produced to rally support for a cause, sell a product, or promote an organization, these transitory publications often offer rich documentation about social life, political battles, and economic and cultural developments relating to working-class people, women, African Americans, and immigrants that is rarely visible in archival collections or mainstream publications. For the most part, research libraries, with their emphases on the printed book and traditional archives, have ignored these materials. As Cathy Lynn Preston observes in *The Other Print Tradition: Essays on Chapbooks, Broadsides, and Related Ephemera*, by doing so they may have inadvertently created a class-biased canon, as publications of this kind have historically been associated with people who could not afford to buy expensive books.¹⁰ This “cheap print tradition,” standing in opposition to “elitist

⁹ Mary-Elise Haug, “The Life-Cycle of Printed Ephemera: A Case Study of the Maxine Walderon and Thelma Mendsen Collections,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 30 (Spring 1995): 59–72.

¹⁰ Cathy Lynn Preston, *The Other Print Tradition: Essays on Chapbooks, Broadsides, and Related Ephemera* (New York: Garland Publications, 1995).

Don't be a SCAB at the Ballot Box



Join Labor's Political Picket Line

your  *Emblem*

You would not scab in the factory or shop . . .

Why be a scab at the ballot box?

A vote for Landon is a vote for the union smasher and sweatshopper—for the labor spy—for those who juggle labor friendship with their mouths and carry tear gas bombs in their hands—for labor's oppressors everywhere. A VOTE FOR LANDON IS A SCAB VOTE.

Join Labor's political picket line by joining the American Labor Party and voting for Roosevelt and Lehman.

You expect the Hearsts, Morgans, DuPonts—all the organized forces of greed and privilege—to vote for Landon and the right to scab. He's their personal candidate.

BUT . . . you don't want to stab yourself in the back by voting for your enemies . . .

Vote for ROOSEVELT and LEHMAN this year.

AND . . . just as important . . . Vote for them UNDER THE AMERICAN LABOR PARTY EMBLEM and build A PARTY OF YOUR VERY OWN for the YEARS TO COME.

JOIN YOUR
AMERICAN LABOR PARTY
New York State Affiliate Labor's Non-Partisan League
Campaign Headquarters: **HOTEL CLARIDGE**
44th St. & B'way, New York, N. Y. Tel. BRyant 9-8140
ELINORE M. HERRICK, State Campaign Director

AFTER 1932



WISCONSIN PRESS, INC. 504

FIGURE 1. Flyer: "Don't Be a Scab at the Ballot Box," published by the American Labor Party, undated. PE036_5. Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, PE 036, Box 8, Folder: American Labor Party: New York State, 1936–1942, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

constructions of culture,” presents libraries with difficult challenges for collecting, preserving, and cataloging it, such as poor quality paper, varieties of shapes and sizes, and lack of bibliographical sources. As a result, much of this valuable heritage has either disappeared or is at risk.

Pamphlets and ephemera not only depict alternative popular and political cultures, they also describe aspects of ordinary life that are often not accessible to scholars using other kinds of research collections. For example, *Consider the Laundry Workers*, a pamphlet in the Tamiment collection printed by the League of Women Shoppers in 1937, depicts an African American woman at work. A careful reading reveals much about work culture, race relations, and the struggle of African American women for self-esteem in depression-era New York. Similarly, a 1909 union label advertisement of the United Garment Workers shows how the idea of masculinity and respectability helped define the craft union movement of the early twentieth century. Images of proud artisans, “Rosie the Riveter,” trade union processions, symbols, and caricatures can tell us much about working people and their social movements, beliefs, and values.

A large and growing body of scholarly work exemplified by Paul Buhle, Sean Wilentz, Robin Kelley, Kathy Peiss, and Lizabeth Cohen illustrates how these nontraditional sources can illuminate hidden corners of the American past. While they often provide what Roland Marchand describes¹¹ as a “distorted prism”—since they were designed to persuade rather than to depict social reality—scholars now recognize that these sources are among the few windows into the politics, values, and ideas of people who are otherwise largely invisible. And, increasingly, archivists and librarians are using ephemera as the basis for teaching students about primary sources. In their article, “Teaching with Ephemera,” Julia Gardner and David Pavelich discuss how students themselves discovered individual items from ephemera collections as part of a class exercise and, in doing so, alerted staff to the uniqueness and value of these holdings.¹²

History of Tamiment's Ephemera Collection

Beginning in 1912, a year in which Eugene V. Debs was running for president of the United States, Scott Nearing and Charles Beard of the Rand School of Social Science in New York City asked their students to collect flyers, pamphlets, leaflets, handbills, manifestos, broadsides, palm cards, and posters that were being distributed on the picket lines so they could be discussed in classes on political economy and trade union administration. These pamphlets and

¹¹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

¹² Julia Gardner and David Pavelich, “Teaching with Ephemera,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 9 (Spring 2008): 86–92.

pieces of ephemera were then placed in the school's library. In 1963, NYU acquired the library of the Rand School (now Tamiment Library), and this ephemeral literature was included in the acquisition.

Most of the ephemera and pamphlet literature in the Tamiment collection was created for propaganda purposes—to recruit for a cause, to advocate a political position, or to maintain the loyalty of a constituency. They, therefore, express broad assumptions about social values and ideologies that their creators hoped would persuade a receptive, often working-class audience to join a union or sign on to a political cause. While we cannot be certain that the audiences supported every element of these political programs, researchers can make the plausible assumption that the people who produced this literature believed that their audiences would respond to its messages.

Through ongoing collecting by Tamiment staff as well as donations and printed materials from manuscript collections, the collection of printed ephemera expanded in scope and temporal range to encompass and accommodate even the most recent wave of twenty-first century activism. It has also grown considerably in size and format. The materials are in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. Taken as a whole, the ephemera holdings document the changing nature of printed political ephemera over the course of a century as well as America's social and labor movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ephemera at the Tamiment

Existing On-site Collection

The on-site portion of Tamiment's ephemera holdings originally constituted roughly 252 linear feet and two file cabinets, estimated at some one million items. Over the course of the last twenty years, Tamiment staff undertook several projects to attempt to make the collection easier to access. One project streamlined what began as a complicated fourteen-series filing system into five series: Organization Files, Trade Union Files, Individual Files, Subject Files, and Abraham Lincoln Brigade Files (ALBA).¹³ Another project, alluded to earlier, cataloged in MARC at the file level roughly 90 percent of the Organization Files. Still another project removed pamphlets from portions of the ephemera holdings with the intent to catalog each pamphlet. However, because neither a collecting policy nor a systematic approach to filing was established, the on-site portion of the collection was usable but had uneven levels of access and myriad

¹³ For this project, the ALBA files were treated separately. EAD finding aids were created for two ALBA collections—ALBA Individual Files and ALBA Subject Files. Additional materials, when found throughout the project, were added to these collections and the finding aids updated.

inaccuracies. During the initial survey, the project staff often encountered monographs, serials, government documents, reprints of articles, newspaper clippings, biographical materials, and other out-of-scope materials. Files on trade unions were often found in the Organization Files, and vice versa, and dates were not kept current.

Off-site Backlog

The holdings' off-site backlog comprised 371 boxes of unorganized monographs, government documents, serials, proceedings from conventions and meetings, three-dimensional objects such as buttons and t-shirts, pamphlets, and boxes of loose paper. Most often, project staff could ascertain neither original order nor provenance for the materials kept off site. Partially a result of Tamiment's approach to processing manuscript collections, whereby in many instances printed matter (as well as serials, monographs, and photographs) is separated and dealt with distinctly, accumulation of the backlog began almost immediately after the Tamiment Library was donated to NYU. Additionally, no streamlined structure was in place for processing and integrating newly acquired printed ephemera. Most often, staff placed newly received mailings, pamphlets, or duplicates from manuscript collections into the backlog of vertical file materials and sent boxes off site as they became full. Using an existing Microsoft Access database, which had cursory box-level descriptions, project staff recalled materials from the off-site storage facility for sorting.

Goals of the Project

Printed ephemera¹⁴ is a challenging medium for most institutions. Access at Tamiment was traditionally provided through item- and/or folder-level cataloging and description or a staff-only Microsoft Access database—a method both time and cost intensive as well as unsustainable. The grant proposal hypothesized that taking an archival approach in organizing printed ephemera, including pamphlets, and grouping items around a central organization, publisher, or subject would provide aggregations that could be described at a level sufficient for meaningful access. This approach presents a viable alternative to item-level cataloging. Under the NEH grant, a project team was charged with achieving the following goals:

- Establish a working definition of *printed ephemera*;
- Devise a collecting scope for the Printed Ephemera Collections;

¹⁴ For the purposes of this paper, we, along with other authors cited, use the more familiar plural form, "ephemera," but using the singular verb.

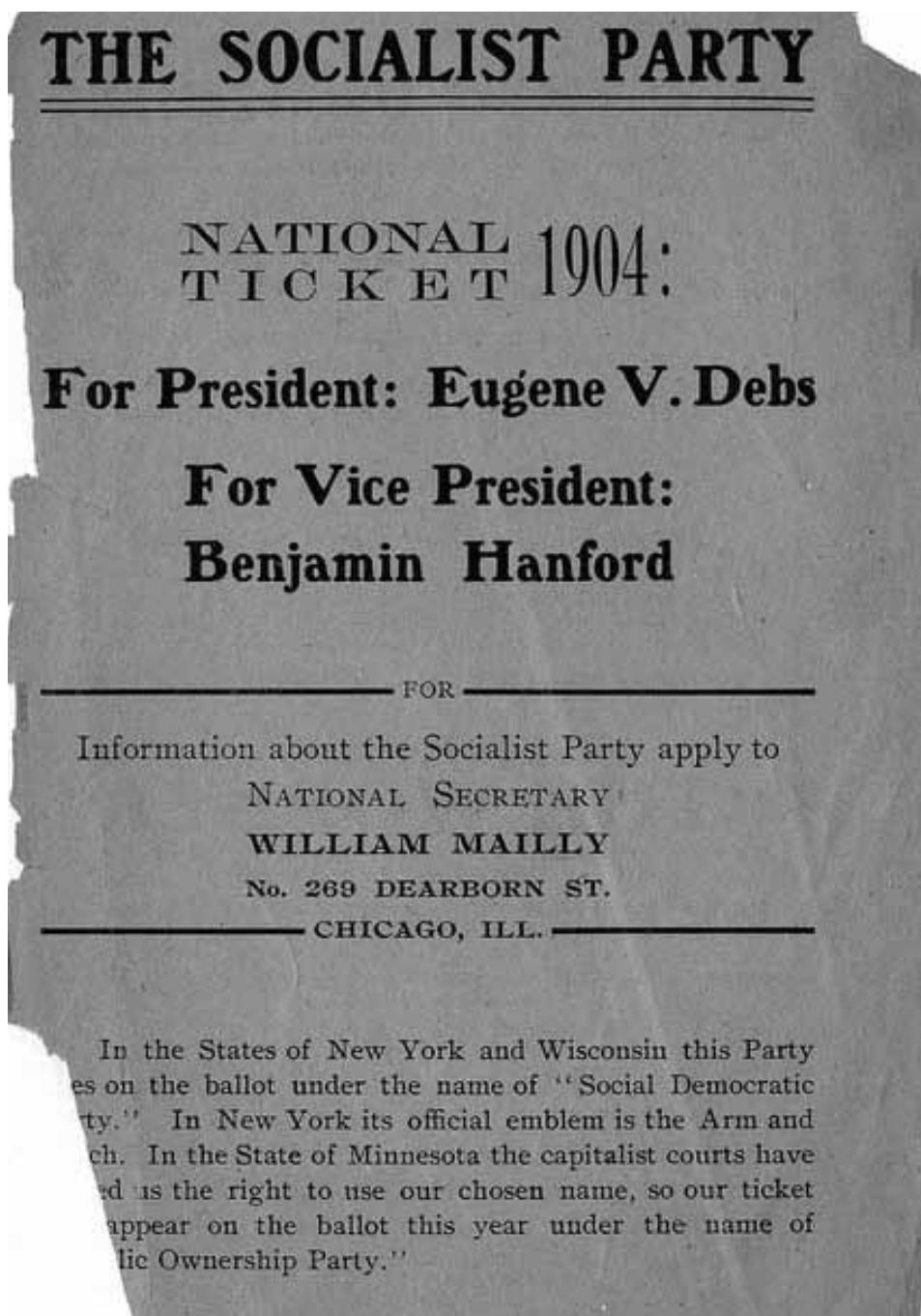


FIGURE 2. Ticket: "The Socialist Party," published by the Socialist Party, 1904. PE032_1, Socialist Party (U.S.) Printed Ephemera Collection, PE 032 Box 1, Folder: 1904, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

- Appraise both on-site and backlog portions of the PEs in terms of content, scope, and format;
- Integrate these two parts of the PEs;
- Process materials into discrete manuscript collections by “main entry,” either Trade Union, Organization, Individual, or Subject, using archival methods;
- Make collections available online via EAD finding aids using the Archivists’ Toolkit;
- Provide guidelines for adding material to the Printed Ephemera Collections; and
- Document thoughts on current practices.

Methodology

One full-time archivist and one part-time project manager/archivist as well as two part-time student assistants worked on the project with a projected goal of making the Printed Ephemera Collections accessible in two years. The intent of the project was to process materials traditionally treated bibliographically in the aggregate, whereby collection- and file-level access created through MARC records and EAD finding aids would be provided instead of item-level access. Because materials originated from hundreds of sources, mostly undocumented, the Tamiment’s ephemera holdings conformed to no original order and provenance was nonexistent. The first tasks included surveying, appraising, and sorting the off-site backlog. Archivists separated monographs, serials, pamphlets of particular value, and government documents for item-level cataloging as they would not remain part of the project. Well-known pamphlets, those already cataloged, or those by an author represented by several cataloged pamphlets were part of this group. Monographs and serials are not part of this project but had been mixed in with the backlog. Next, the off-site backlog portion was combined with the on-site materials. The archivists made separate collections for materials originating from organizations or trade unions that measured more than one linear foot. Materials that did not meet the one-linear-foot requirement remained in four large alphabetical collections that mirror the existing on-site series of vertical files: Individuals, Organizations, Subjects, and Trade Unions. Folder-level description was provided for each newly arranged collection.¹⁵ Project staff created EAD finding aids using the Archivists’ Toolkit and then made them available online. The final months of the project involved creating and refining EAD finding aids and

¹⁵ Descriptions for folder titles were determined by publishing organization or trade union. The Subjects collection remains somewhat ambiguously arranged by subject, and the Individuals collection contains material about an individual rather than by an individual.

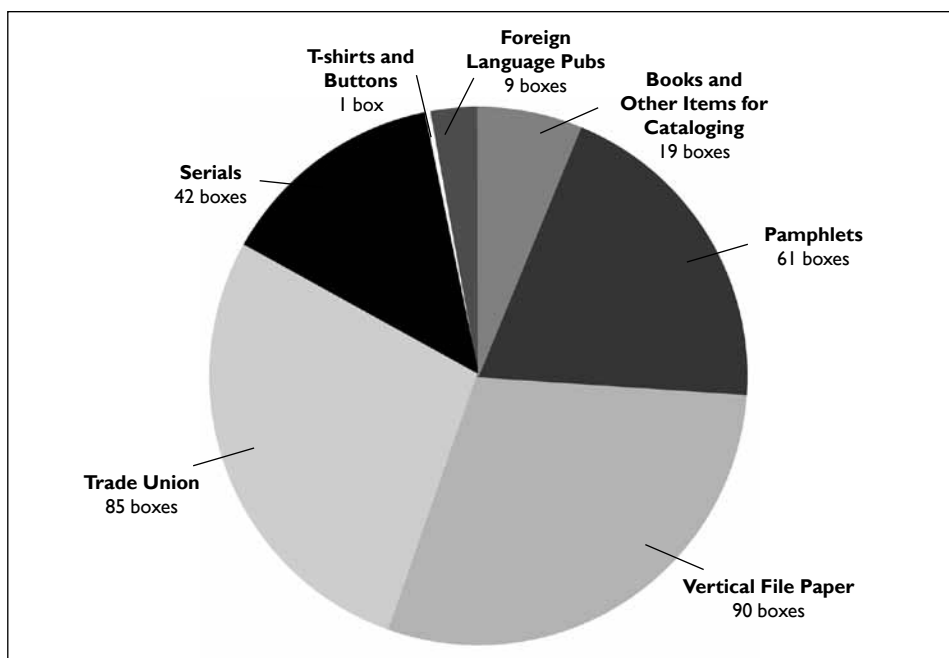


FIGURE 3. Initial sort of the off-site backlog

documentation for taking the Printed Ephemera Collections forward, including a research guide on Tamiment's website, a Flickr exhibit, and instructions for staff on adding to the PEs.¹⁶

Stage One: Initial Sort

As a first stage in the project, the archivists undertook a survey and cursory sort of the 371-box off-site backlog. The materials were delivered to Tamiment in twenty-box increments.¹⁷ Archivists separated materials by content, beginning with trade union materials and nonunion materials. Initially, archivists began filing the nonunion materials by organization, subject, or individual but quickly realized this procedure was inefficient. Space was limited and boxes of preliminarily foldered materials quickly covered the work area. The archivists shifted gears and engaged in a more expeditious sorting method by separating only materials on unions and individuals as well as pamphlets, books, and serials

¹⁶ New York University Libraries, *Printed Ephemera Collections at Tamiment Library*, <http://nyu.libguides.com/printedephemera>, accessed 8 December 2011.

¹⁷ We initially thought of going to the off-site storage facility to review all of the boxes but soon figured that would take us more than a month (our initial projection!), and as the storage facility was not on a train line, we would need a car or travel monies, which seemed too costly.

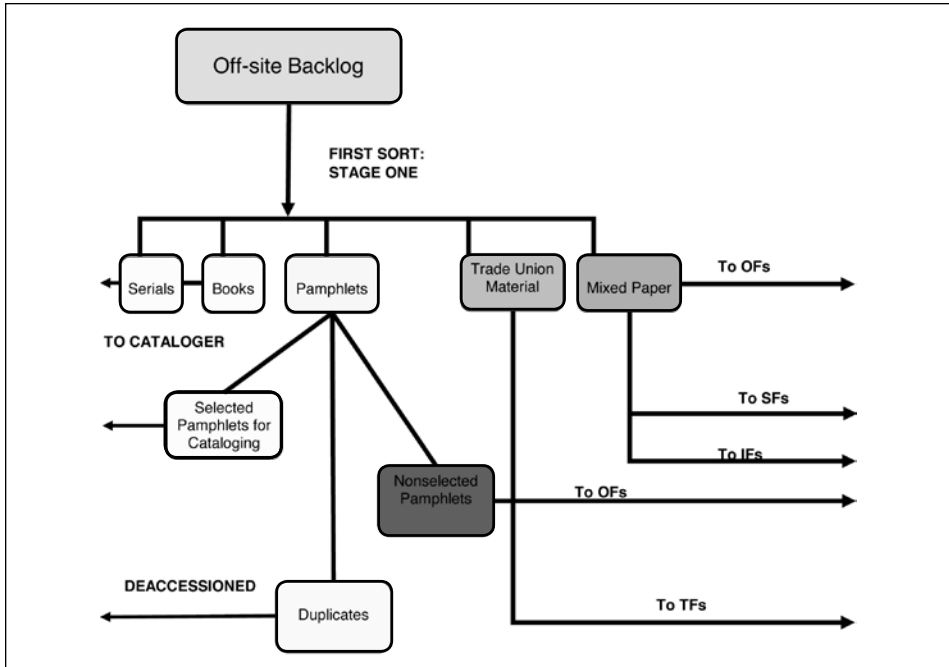


FIGURE 4. Flow chart of the project

(cont.)

formats. The archivists sent the remaining materials back off site for integration at a later stage in the project.

The initial sort took approximately three months. Groupings and extents are listed in Figure 3. A flow chart of the project is depicted in Figure 4.

Stage Two: Trade Unions

In the next phase of the project, the archivists further sorted the trade union materials by individual union. Materials of some trade unions, such as the AFL-CIO, the Communications Workers of America, and the Transport Workers Union of America, filled several boxes, but most required only a few folders. In some cases, only single items existed. The archivists then began to combine these materials with the sixty-two boxes of on-site Trade Union Files. In accordance with the stipulation that a new collection would be created if more than one linear foot of material existed for a specific union, subject, or organization, twenty-five new collections were created for individual trade unions. The materials in each of these collections are produced by a trade union, rather than being about a trade union. Within collections, the archivists arranged the materials into series by format, subject, and sometimes function, that is, department and/or division. Materials in the past had been arranged chronologically, which was not useful for researchers searching for particular types of materials. After

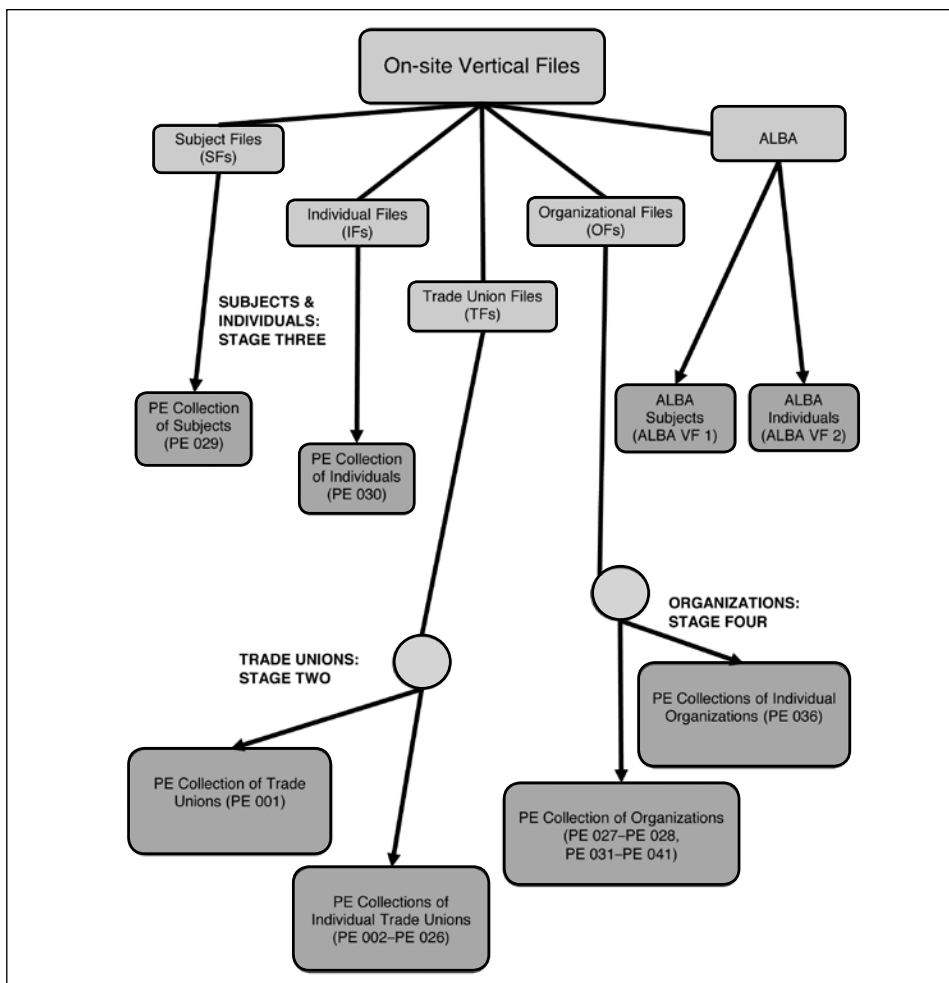


FIGURE 4 (CONT.). Flow chart of the project

these activities, fifty linear feet of trade union materials remained, documenting hundreds of unions, arranged alphabetically by name of trade union and integrated into the existing group of Trade Union Files. In the end, twenty-six new finding aids from the combined trade union materials were entered into the Archivists' Toolkit and made available on Tamiment's website.

Patrons began to use the new collections almost immediately.

A note on pamphlets

Pamphlets comprised roughly half the total ephemera holdings, but a large portion of these were duplicates.¹⁸ They were a challenging aspect of the project

¹⁸ See Appendix B showing how pamphlets fit into the general organization of the ephemera holdings.

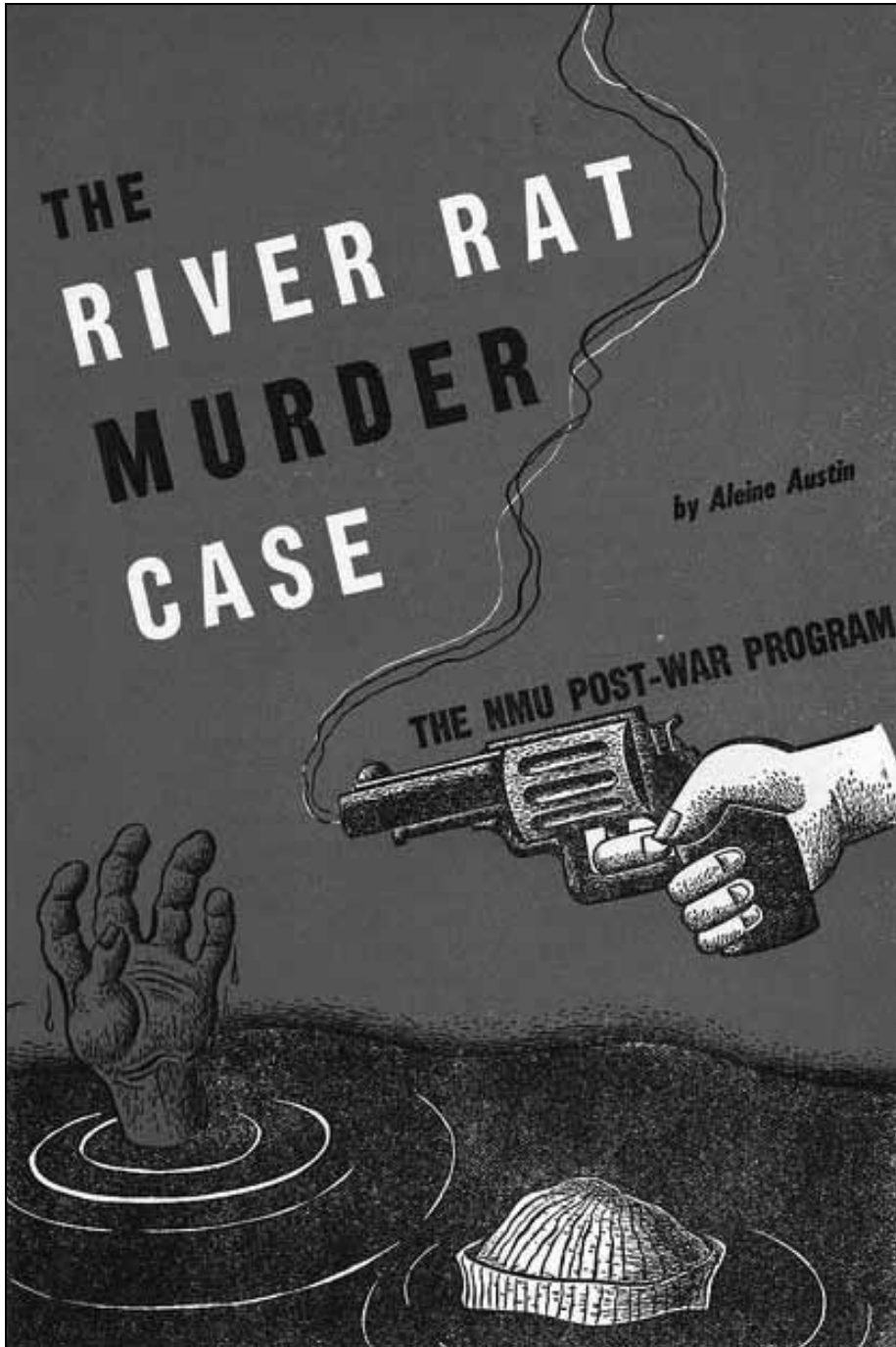


FIGURE 5. Pamphlet: "The River Rat Murder Case," by Aleine Austin, published by the Educational Department of the National Maritime Union, 1945. PE008_1. National Maritime Union Printed Ephemera Collection, PE 008, Box 4, Folder: Pamphlets and Publications, 1944–1961, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

for the archivists, posing many questions. For instance, what qualifies as a pamphlet?¹⁹ Should the publisher be taken into consideration and pamphlets made part of a discrete collection according to publishing organization, or should they be grouped by subject? Pamphlets from well-recognized publishers or organizations, such as the Communist Party USA or the League for Industrial Democracy, became their own collections; others were filed under publishing organization in the general alphabetical run on Organizations. Subject specialists on staff selected eight linear feet of pamphlets for item-level description, that is, cataloging. The selected titles were chosen because of their value to the Tamiment Library as individually described items.

While the archivists processed, a student assistant checked the separated pamphlets against the library's OPAC to weed out duplicate items. Seventy-one boxes of duplicate pamphlets were identified, logged, and sent back off site to be used later for exhibits.

Stage Three: Individuals and Subjects

Processing of the Individual and Subject categories took very little time to complete—about two months total. Individuals represented in the ephemera holdings ranged from former New York City mayor Fiorella La Guardia, to the Communist Party USA and Black Panther activist Angela Davis, to civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, and to union leader Sidney Hillman. Materials filed by individual, such as press clippings, flyers, and other literature, are generally about individuals not by them. Subjects cover the Vietnam War, various political and student activities, and union strikes, in addition to numerous other topics.

All pamphlets were pulled from the on-site Individual Files and filed with the organizations that published them. New materials were interfiled and out-of-scope files were culled. The archivists added folder dates as well as birth and death dates for the individuals if they were not already indicated. The Individual Files had a legacy finding aid that was imported into the Archivists' Toolkit. The project archivists made minor corrections and published the revised finding aid. The archivists continued to add materials discovered throughout the project to this collection.²⁰

The Subject category was more labor intensive; combining some files and removing duplicates where necessary. (For example, the archivists found ephemera related to Individuals filed in the Subject Files as well as in the

¹⁹ The SAA *Glossary* states that a pamphlet is "A short, nonserial, bound work of more than one sheet, usually with a soft cover; a booklet." However, Tamiment archivists struggled to determine the difference between a book and a pamphlet, a pamphlet and a brochure. Page count was not always a good indicator. Pearce-Moses, *The Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*.

²⁰ Tamiment staff continued to add to the "vertical file" backlog during the grant. This material was deemed outside the scope of the project, boxed up, and sent off site with a paper trail.



FIGURE 6. Membership Card: “Machinists?,” published by the International Association of Machinists, undated. PE 001_3. Printed Ephemera Collection on Trade Unions, PE 001, Box 19, Folder: International Association of Machinists: Ephemera, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

Organization Files.) The guiding principle while processing the Subject category was that if the materials didn't have a publishing organization or were deemed easier to find by topic rather than by publishing organization, they were filed by subject. Other materials were culled and filed with their corresponding organizations or trade unions.²¹ The archivists left room in boxes in anticipation of discovering more material in the eighty boxes of loose paper backlog that remained unprocessed.

Stage Four: Organizations

Thousands of organizations are represented in the collection, many defunct or formed temporarily for purposes of protests, human rights activities, or political action. Examples include the American Labor Party, the Black Panther Party, the New England Free Press, the Social Democratic Federation of America, and the Workers' Defense League. Those formed for a specific purpose, such as the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, had a short life span and therefore produced little material. For some organizations, archivists were able to supply a definitive date span; for others, dating was left open-ended.²² It seemed cumbersome to constantly update and change both the physical folder and then the database. On site, ninety-eight boxes of Organization Files existed, and, as mentioned previously, many possessed a MARC record.²³ The off-site backlog totaled another ninety boxes of paper and twenty-two boxes of pamphlets. The archivists sorted the backlog into an alphabetically arranged "mini-collection," then interfiled these materials with the other Organization Files, removing duplicates as necessary.²⁴ This method proved more efficient than stopping to interfile and shift material for each box recalled from off site.

Materials documenting contemporary organizations or those underrepresented in the collection (generally from the 1990s on) were given particular

²¹ Finding aids for Subjects and Individuals can be found at the Tamiment Library and Richard F. Wagner Labor Archives, *Guide to the Printed Ephemera Collection on Subjects PE 029*, http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/tamwag/pe_sf.html, and *Guide to the Printed Ephemera Collection on Individuals PE 030*, http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/tamwag/pe_if.html, respectively, accessed 29 November 2011.

²² We anticipated that new materials would and could be added at any time which, in the case of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, was very true. 2011 marked the hundredth anniversary of this tragic event and new materials were collected.

²³ A legacy project had provided for item-level cataloging of the original Organization Files in the library's OPAC—over 4,300 individual MARC records. While useful, the cataloging effort was not maintained; therefore, many of the files created in the past several years had no public access point. These outdated MARC records were suppressed in the library's OPAC, rendering the new finding aid the focal point for finding information and streamlining reference services.

²⁴ Additionally, during processing of Subject and Individual Files, two linear feet of material were pulled after determining the content actually related to Organizations. Finding aids were updated to reflect the addition of materials and republished.

attention; several new files were created for these organizations. The newly named Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations comprised 115 linear feet and represented over 5,400 different organizations. Additionally, twelve collections were created out of materials published by single organizations. These collections range in size from one linear foot—the National Caucus of Labor Committees, for instance—up to twelve linear feet, as is the case with the Communist Party USA Printed Ephemera Collection. Again, materials in these collections generally were published by the organization rather than being about the organization.

P r e s e r v a t i o n

A preservation component included in the grant required the conservation librarian from NYU Libraries Conservation Department to devote a percentage of time to treating project items. During the initial sort, the archivists identified and separated materials in need of immediate treatment, generally brittle pamphlets or flyers. The archivists determined that roughly 6 percent of the backlog portion of the collection needed preservation treatment, mostly pamphlets.²⁵ The archivists sleeved the majority of these materials using archival enclosures and then filed them in an appropriate folder. Serials were given to Tamiment's Technical Services Department, where staff employed their own methods of preservation. Foreign-language materials were separated out based on language, sleeved, and sent back off site until a language cataloger can be engaged to identify priority pamphlets for cataloging.

As part of the project, the archivists created a spreadsheet to track items with preservation and/or conservation needs that will ultimately have to be addressed in a future project. The spreadsheet identifies the materials and notes appropriate actions to be taken, including rehousing, preservation photocopying, treating, and repairing. A majority of the materials require some sort of preservation, as the collection had been treated mostly as a vertical file subject to high use for over twenty years.

D i s c u s s i o n a n d A n a l y s i s

This grant-funded project to process a large “hidden collection” of printed ephemera was an overall success. By the end of eighteen months of processing, the project archivists had created forty-six new collections with EAD finding aids comprising 388.5 linear feet (see Figure 7). These Printed Ephemera

²⁵ The breakdown, in boxes, is as follows: Pamphlets, 12; Foreign Language Publications, 3; Serials, 3; Mixed Paper, 1.

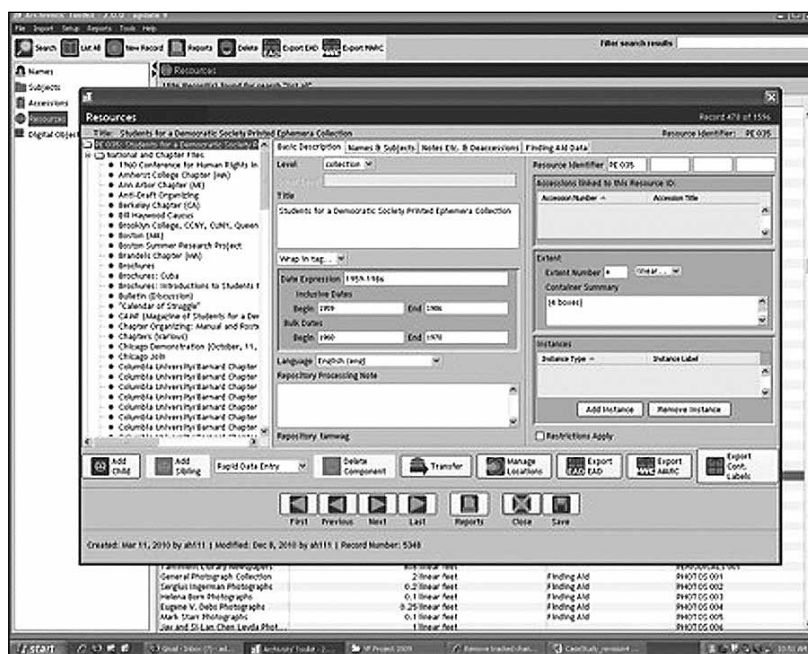


FIGURE 7. This screenshot shows a finding aid using the Archivists' Toolkit.

Collections are some of the most heavily used at Tamiment. A research guide is available on Tamiment's website, which provides an introduction as well as in-depth documentation relating to printed ephemera for instructors, scholars, and staff. The guide also gives links to all Printed Ephemera Collections finding aids. Project archivists processed over 62 percent of the original 623 linear feet. Other formats were sent to the appropriate unit within Tamiment for cataloging or, as in the case of duplicates, deaccessioning. The methodology employed by project staff to deal with the printed ephemera holdings proved to be an expeditious and expedient way to provide access to a large backlog of materials of this nature.

At the onset of dealing with the Organization and Subject categories, the instinct of project staff had been to group together all organizations with a common theme, such as communism, socialism, or anarchism. The reasoning behind this was that the names of many organizations provide no clue as to their activities; for example, many anarchist organizations do not have the word "anarchist" in their names. This was found to be true of many of the organizations overall. Though project staff could rely on subject specialists within Tamiment to assist in the grouping, they determined that this task would prove too murky and difficult. Project staff realized that organizing material by provenance or, in this case, creating organization or trade union, would actually be

more useful and allow for increased access to users and greater flexibility when adding new materials to the collections. Organizing by “artificial creator” also allowed the project team to include pamphlet collections produced by certain organizations or trade unions as part of their collections. For example, International Publishers pamphlets are included with the Communist Party USA Collection, and New York Labor News Company pamphlets are in the Socialist Labor Party Collection, streamlining the PEs and providing researchers with a more complete picture of each organization and its activities.

Unsuccessful Strategies

The archivists’ initial strategy to refolder all the backlog materials by organization, subject, union, or individual as boxes were recalled turned out to be overly ambitious. It was easier and more efficient to perform a quick and dirty sort in broad strokes and move through the materials speedily at first rather than getting bogged down in item-level appraisal and processing. Speed was privileged over thoroughness during the initial stage.

The archivists hoped to touch the items only once or twice, but this ended up being impractical. There was no way around sorting materials by specific groups and/or formats, such as trade unions, then returning to the leftover materials and sorting again. In the end, project staff touched items three or four times, often performing item-level appraisals.

Tamiment staff thought the project should start with processing the on-site collection and then move to the off-site backlog; however, the project archivists felt this was impractical. Only a cursory description of the backlog contents existed, and, at that phase in the project, the archivists knew little about the contents of the on-site portion of the ephemera holdings. Project archivists anticipated that beginning with the on-site portion would lead to unnecessary refiling, interfiling, and shifting of box contents. It would be inefficient to interfile the backlog materials into a reprocessed collection, change folders and boxes, edit finding aids, and constantly repeat these steps.

Guidelines and Thoughts on Current Practices and the Future of the Collections

Work on the printed ephemera project required project staff to appraise at the micro-level as well as to rethink the original and existing methodologies used for collecting these materials. The archivists realized that, though the original collection was transformed significantly during the course of this project, the organizational culture that produced it in the first place remains largely intact. Project staff offered critiques of the existing methodology that created

the backlog and then shared thoughts on how staff could shift to a more streamlined workflow to discourage a similar situation in the future. If, for instance, 370 boxes of materials could be backlogged within a twenty-year period, how can this be prevented from recurring after this grant ends? What guidelines, rules, collecting policies, and definitions need to be created to ensure documentation is ongoing but not overwhelming and duplicative? Who will be responsible for maintaining the Printed Ephemera Collections? This would include not only adding to them but updating the physical folders, descriptions, and resource records in the Archivists' Toolkit, and republishing the finding aids. How often should interfiling occur?

To go forward, project staff supplied Tamiment staff with the following:

- A definition for *printed ephemera* (from the *SAA Glossary*);
- Collecting scope for printed ephemera materials;
- Written instructions for adding materials to the existing Printed Ephemera Collections;
- Thoughts on current practices;
- Vertical Files versus Printed Ephemera Collections

Defining Printed Ephemera

In reviewing the existing “ephemera” collections during processing, the archivists often came across memoranda, minutes of meetings, personal correspondence, posters, buttons and other three-dimensional objects, books, government documents, and proceedings of meetings. Project staff determined that these types of materials are not printed ephemera and should *not* be included in the PEs in the future. These material types seem to have shown up in the backlog after being removed from manuscript collections during processing or accessioning because they were duplicative or because of their “problematic” formats. In this case, appraisal should be used to determine the value, if any, of the materials, especially if they are duplicative, and the appropriate steps to take, such as discard, give to the Special Collections librarian for the printed collection, or make into a discrete series within the archival collection.

Project staff created an online research guide to the Printed Ephemera Collections, which defines printed ephemera to assist in appraisal decisions.²⁶ By clearly defining the types of materials that are printed ephemera, the project archivists sought to provide clarity and promote new policy regarding archival arrangement and description as well as collection development.

²⁶ New York University Libraries, *Printed Ephemera Collections at Tamiment Library*.

Collecting Scope

In taking the Printed Ephemera Collections forward, it is important to develop a scope and collecting policy. The PEs should *not* become a catchall. They are now manuscript collections, which require several steps of maintenance when additions are made (see Procedures section below).

Numerous formats that were not printed ephemera were found in both the on-site Vertical Files and the off-site backlog. Mailings, cards to renew journal subscriptions, postcards for newly published books, and inserts in mailers for example should *not* be part of the PEs. These items can be discarded. Serials, pamphlets, and monographs should be given to the Special Collections librarian.

Additionally, project archivists encouraged Tamiment staff to determine the range of subjects that should be collected. As the collecting scope of Tamiment evolves, the PEs may as well, but a definition of what to keep is needed along with a rationale.

Procedures for Adding Materials to the Existing PE Collections

The project archivists provided written guidelines to Tamiment staff for interfiling into the newly created Printed Ephemera Collections. They also hoped to convey, perhaps above all, that searchable databases and Web-based finding aids make separating ephemera from collections no longer necessary; rather, series devoted to printed ephemera within collections will suffice to provide access. These guidelines were enthusiastically received, and the Special Collections librarian used them to create a new work flow for adding materials using student staff.

The Printed Ephemera Collections should and will continue to grow, especially with the addition of twenty-first-century materials. Many steps are involved to add materials to the PEs in regular intervals such as by semester or year. A student or staff member should be designated as the PE person.

Step 1. Determine where the item should be filed; check the finding aid(s) to see if a folder exists for this item. If so, and there is room in the folder and box, and the item does not duplicate existing holdings, the item can be added.

Step 1A. If there is no room, a new folder can be made and put at the end of the collection (the last box).

Step 2. Add the item(s) and update the folder if needed (dates);

Step 3. Update the resource record in the Archivists' Toolkit, if needed;

Step 4. Republish the finding aid.

The fourth step needs to be followed for each item added to the collection. As of November 2011, eight linear feet of material has been added to the new PEs in the form of pamphlets, flyers, brochures, and other printed matter.

Thoughts on Current Practices

Project staff discerned during the project that materials had been pulled from manuscript collections and put into the vertical file backlog because it had been determined that the items would be more accessible there. However, such items were not accessible in the backlog. Other materials were in the backlog because they were:

- duplicative,
- not germane to the main topic of the collection,
- not manuscript items, but rather books, flyers, government documents, pamphlets, or serials.

Project staff advocated that going forward:

1. Duplicates should be discarded.
2. Serials, monographs, government documents, and pamphlets should be given to the Tamiment librarian for the printed collection.
3. Ephemera should stay with the archival collection it came with as this tells us about the donor's interests and activities and gives context to the item. A series for printed ephemera can be included in the collection.
4. Proceedings of conferences and conventions can either remain with the archival collection, or be given to the Special Collection librarian for cataloging. Consistent use of one method is preferred.
5. When ephemeral items come in piecemeal, they can be added to the PEs.
6. Reprints of articles should either stay with the original archival collection or be discarded.
7. Scope and collection policy should be taken into consideration at all times. The PEs are not a catchall for materials that would otherwise have been discarded. The goal is to make materials more accessible, not less. If something goes into a backlog, no one has access to it.
8. If possible, the four main runs of PEs—Organizations, Individuals, Subjects, and Trade Unions—should be reviewed and culled on an ongoing basis.

If past practices continue, another sizable backlog will develop. Rethinking removal of printed ephemera from archival collections and implementing a plan to stay on top of the new PE materials queue will assure researchers access to a unique collection.

Vertical Files versus Printed Ephemera Collections

Project archivists also provided an alternative solution to adding to the Printed Ephemera Collections by suggesting that staff consider creating a new set of vertical files for the specific purpose of retaining nonarchival materials for

reference purposes. This might help eradicate confusion over what qualifies as printed ephemera and what does not. Individual archivists at Tamiment should still maintain their own vertical files or ready research files for researchers. The contents would include actual vertical file materials—reprints, newspaper clippings, items printed from online resources, papers written by students: anything that is *not* archival. Such files are often created during processing to assist archivists in writing finding aids, and there is no reason to discard these materials, but it would be useful to centralize these files and provide researchers with access.

Conclusion

As discussed in this case study, the project team processed Tamiment's "hidden collection" of printed ephemera using archival methods, treating the materials in the aggregate rather than at the item level. This method proved efficient, as project staff were able to make the Printed Ephemera Collections available through forty-four EAD finding aids in less than twenty-four months. Patrons began requesting and using the collections almost immediately after the finding aids were posted online. By following more minimal processing up front, time and money could be saved, though access is made less granular. However, it can be argued that material left in collections will be described and made accessible more efficiently than if it is allowed to sit in a backlog for years.

As project staff read more about the nature, history, and uses of ephemera and spoke with other institutions about their experiences, it became evident that ephemera need not be a burden. Rather, it can be treated as any other manuscript material by providing access in the best manner available. By creating collections with the title "Printed Ephemera," Tamiment validates the unique research value and historical importance of preserving material that was *made* to be ephemeral, literally disposable, in the first place. Printed ephemera opens a vast and inviting window on social customs, communication methods among unions, activists, and political parties, and, perhaps most invaluable, the materials provide insight into certain historical movements and causes that are now defunct or undocumented.

Perhaps the initial impetus behind separating out the printed ephemera from collections was the idea of providing better access using item-level cataloging and description; however, this proved unwieldy with the volume of materials collected ad hoc and found in existing collections. The authors hope that institutions may benefit from this experience at Tamiment. By demonstrating that printed ephemera can be included in finding aids while being maintained as part of manuscript collections, staff believe this method will provide more access and also streamline processing practices at Tamiment.