



A Guide for Assessing and Preserving Historic VCE Materials

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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to inform individuals about the correct steps to take when they come across materials that seem to have possible historical relevance to Virginia Cooperative Extension. While this document presents an overview, the most advisable course of action is to get in touch with Special Collections and University Archives at Virginia Tech to discuss your personal situation.

Historical Importance

There are many different definitions and ways to determine the historical importance of any item, but the basic question is, does it inform or help to describe the significant activities or mission of your organization? Something that seems irrelevant and ordinary may be quite interesting to look at in a historical context. For instance, a calendar of the events your unit held in a year would offer insight into community interaction and seasonal fluctuations, financial records provide an idea of how finances changed in the organization over time, or meeting minutes may demonstrate how the program works and record a sequence of events.

The age of something does not necessarily define the item's historical significance. If you are able to justify and explain why the materials are relevant or how they could be used by others to better understand Virginia Cooperative Extension, then they most likely have historic importance. A worthwhile next step is to contact Special Collections and University Archives and start a conversation about what you have.

Special Collections and University Archives

Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) is a part of the University Libraries at Virginia Tech with a focus on collecting, preserving, and providing access to unique, historical materials. Because of Virginia Cooperative Extension's ties to the University, the archive has the responsibility of collecting and maintaining documents related to the organizations history.

By contributing your materials, members of the public are able to study a more comprehensive set of unique, historical materials, including, importantly, those that record and reflect the history and activities of the university. By contributing your materials, you will be making them available to researchers and other members of the public, while, potentially, filling gaps in the record already on hand.

Contacting Special Collections

Special Collections and University Archives is staffed by people trained in the processing and preservation of historical materials. If you are looking to retain materials in your care, or prefer to retain digital copies, they can also assist with that.

If you have materials you think may be of interest, first, go through those materials and create a broad inventory. Some of the questions Special Collections may ask you about the materials are listed below. Any preparation you can do prior to speaking with Special Collections will help make the process more efficient.

- What type of document/material do you have: correspondence, ledgers, publications, photographs, event planning documents, awards, financial documentation, etc.?
- Are there any specific details you can give to describe the content: Who produced it? What county or region does it represent? What is the general topic? Is it part of a series?
- How old are the materials? What time period do they represent?
- How would you describe their condition? Are they new, fragile, or falling apart? Do they require any special handling?
- Are they organized in any manner right now: chronological, alphabetical, etc.?
- How much material (volume) do you have: a few items, several large or small boxes? Does the material fill a closet or a filing cabinet?

Another common question is, are you interested in donating any or all of your materials to the archives? Special Collections' goal is not to take materials that are wanted, needed, or useful from your site but to move to Special Collections those materials of significance that may be useful in research or that need to be preserved, but are no longer in active use. You may also wish to consider, for example, whether there is a newer version of the item, particularly when considering educational materials, office procedures, publications.

If you have questions about how SCUA may be helpful to you or have materials you would like to transfer, feel free to contact Special Collections and University Archives at specref@vt.edu or by phone at (540)-231-6308.

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