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CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS

Priority collections becoming more accessible to the public

CHICAGO (November 18, 2010) –The Chicago History Museum’s Archives and Manuscripts collection has recently been getting a lot of attention internally with some groundbreaking initiatives that will allow for the collection to be more accessible to the public.

In 2008, President Gary T. Johnson launched the **Collection Processing Initiative (CPI)** to identify hidden collections needing cataloging and processing attention in order to make them visible to the public and accessible for use by researchers. As part of the overall initiative, the Museum applied for, and received a grant from the **National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC)** to review the Museum’s archival holdings and begin processing priority collections. Priority collections include those that have historic significance, but are inaccessible due to inadequate processing or cataloging.

The NHPRC project team began reviewing the museum’s holdings in October 2009 in order to prioritize collections and recently completed the assessment of 1,115 collections totaling 17,909 linear feet (the linear foot equivalent of 49 football fields or 12 Willis Towers). Since April, the project team has verified and enhanced over 700 catalog records describing these holdings and will complete the cataloging by early spring of 2011. As catalog records are completed, they will be added to the Museum's online public access catalog, allowing greater public access to the museum’s archival holdings.

The Museum’s archival holdings document Chicago’s beginnings to the present day and American history through the Civil War. In the 1960s, under the leadership of the visionary archivist, Archie Motley, the Museum revised its collection policy to build a more representative collection rooted in social and urban history. This included soliciting materials documenting Chicago-area social conditions, race relations, neighborhood life, religious and community organizations, politics, labor history, education, and ethnic history. Between 1961 and 1997, the archival holdings expanded by 4,000% to roughly

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16,000 linear feet. This period of rapid growth resulted in the creation of a world-class history resource thanks to the tireless efforts of Motley, who served as Archivist Emeritus until his death in 2002. The NHPRC grant now allows the Museum staff to focus on making the holdings acquired by Motley and subsequent Museum staff more readily available to researchers and the public.

Last year, 10,784 students, educators, academics, journalists, genealogists, film and video producers, and members of the general public accessed CHM's collection through the Research Center either in-person, over the phone, or via the internet. The Museum's archival collection has been cited in countless books, dissertations, college papers, history fair projects, media presentations, and unpublished personal research projects.

Due to the increased emphasis on this collection, the Museum is proud to announce that Peter Alter has assumed the role of Archivist. Alter has been with the Museum for the past 11 years as a curator and has extensive experience with the collection. This includes exhibition research, serving as a public historian, and working with the collection prior to joining the Museum's staff when conducting research for his PhD in 1989. "The archives are central to the function of the Chicago History Museum," stated Alter.

In his new role, Alter will be processing the collection, continuing to build the collection, gaining a better understanding of the important archives that we currently possess, and promoting the holdings to researchers and to the Museum. He will also be contributing to a blog informing the public of new additions to the collection as well as treasures that he uncovers in his research. "I hope to continue the great work Archie Motley started. He was key to the collection process we have today; he documented urban history through archival collections before it was cool."

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The Chicago History Museum, a major museum and research center for Chicago and American history, is located at 1601 N. Clark Street. The Museum can be reached by CTA buses 11, 22, 36, 72, 73, 151, and 156. Parking is conveniently located one block north of the Museum at Clark and LaSalle Streets (enter on Stockton Drive). Admission to the Museum is \$14 adults with audio tour, \$12 seniors/students with audio tour, free for children 12 years and younger. Please call 312.642.4600 or visit us at www.chicagohistory.org. The Chicago History Museum is affiliated with the Chicago Historical Society and acknowledges the Chicago Park District's generous support of all the Museum's activities.