

## Locating Materials in Our Special Collections

### Consulting & Searching Finding Aids

Our finding aids are listed under [Special Collections](#).

At our Library, each special or rare book collection is associated with:

- an individual or a family ([Raymond Knister](#))
- an institution or a society ([Toronto Centre for the Book](#))
- less commonly, with a historical theme ([Canadiana](#)).

Every special collection has a *finding aid* which will help you identify materials that are relevant to the topic of your research.

A **finding aid** is:

- a written, descriptive tool containing information about materials (also known as *records* or *holdings*) in a special or an archival collection
- created by librarians and archivists to establish administrative, physical, or intellectual control over the holdings of a collection, and to make it possible for researchers to retrieve particular records or information from these archives.

A typical finding aid for a special collection lists or describes all of the records, created by an *entity* (an individual or an institution), in a hierarchical arrangement. A *fonds* is the archival term for all of the records in a collection—the sum of all the records created or accumulated by the entity.

Most of our finding aids consist of an **introduction**, a list of **series**, and sometimes a comprehensive **box/file list** for all the records.

### How to Read Our Finding Aids

#### Introduction

An introduction to our finding aids usually contains the following:

**Biographical sketch** (for collections associated with an individual or a family):

- a brief history concerning the life and activities of an individual or family responsible for the creation, receipt, or accumulation of the materials in the collection
- basic information usually includes full names, dates of birth and death, geographic locations, education, occupations or activities.

**Administrative history** (for collections associated with organizations and institutions):

- a brief history concerning the life and activities of a corporate body responsible for the creation,

## Locating Materials in Our Special Collections

Published on E.J. Pratt Library (<https://library.vicu.utoronto.ca>)

---

receipt, or accumulation of archival material being described

- basic information usually includes the names by which a body was known, dates of existence, geographic locations, and major sphere of activities.

### Scope and content:

- a summary of the nature and the content of the materials in the collection
- may include information on the types of records (books, photographs, manuscripts).

**Notes** (additional information that may be helpful to researchers):

- **Restrictions:** any conditions which affect when and how records may be consulted for research purposes. Any restrictions on access are indicated in the finding aids.
- **Related material:** other collections (at our library and other institutions) with a similar subject matter that may be of interest to researchers.
- **Related resources:** interviews, criticism, and other publications that pertain to the collection.

[Victoria University Chief Librarian](#) should be contacted regarding access to **restricted records**.

## Series

A **series** is a group of records within a fonds or collection that share common characteristics and were created or accumulated from the same function or activity. A description, located at the beginning of each series, summarizes the content, dates of creation, types of records (photographs, text, etc.), and scope and content.

For instance, the records in the [Kathleen Coburn collection](#) are organized into the following series:

- General correspondence
- Subject correspondence
- Research and editorial records
- Lecture and publication files
- Scrapbooks and journals
- Personal files
- Graphic files

Each series is comprised of files which are housed in boxes. The box and file number for each file in a series is provided in the series-level *box/file list*. For example, [letters from Harold Bloom](#) (under “Bloom, Harold”) are located in Box 1, File 6. They are dated 1963 and 1964.

Some series are also subdivided into a *subseries*, especially in the case of larger collections. For instance, in the Northrop Frye collection, [Series 1: Correspondence](#) consists of the following subseries:

- General correspondence
- Family correspondence
- Correspondence with publishers
- and others.

## Accession Numbers

## Locating Materials in Our Special Collections

Published on E.J. Pratt Library (<https://library.vicu.utoronto.ca>)

---

Sometimes, a group of records has an **accession number**, which indicates the year in which the Library acquired the files. The accession numbers are indicated at the top of the box/file list. For example, the record named [“University of Aberdeen”](#) is located in *1988 Box 7, File A1*.

## Fonds Level Box/File List

For convenience, our library has created a comprehensive, fonds-level box/file list for some collections, which include all records in a particular collection (such as the [Northrop Frye fonds Box/File List](#)). This is not part of standard archival descriptions.

## Requesting Specific Files

To request a record for consultation, please note:

- name of the collection
- accession number (if present)
- series number/title
- box number
- file number
- name of the file.

For instance, if you would like to see the [1937 photograph from Series 1 in the John Norman Harris collection](#), please note the following details when submitting your request:

John Norman Harris. Accession 2011.01. Series 1: Personal correspondence. Box 1, File 2: Photograph : b&w.

Please consult [How to Read a Box/File List to Request Specific Files](#) (PDF) for further instructions.

Requests must be itemized in priority order, according to the order in which you would like to view them.

*Students enrolled in **VIC184H** should submit their requests to Roma Kail (r [dot] kail [at] utoronto [dot] ca) or complete the request form available at the Reference Desk.*

## Consulting the Collections in Person

We require advanced notice in order to retrieve special collections materials. The collections are available for use from 9:30 am until 4:30 pm Monday to Friday, in the Special Collections Reading Room on the first floor of the Library.

Once you have identified the materials you plan to consult, the next step is to register for an account and request an appointment through [Special Collections Access](#), a library account designated for this purpose.

For other policies governing special collections materials, including reproduction, please refer to the [Policy on Access & Use of Special & Rare-Book Collections](#).

*Text by Lisa Sherlock, Agatha Barc, Roma Kail, Marina Bokovay, and Gabbi Zaldin, based on a library research seminar for the course VIC184H.*

## Locating Materials in Our Special Collections

Published on E.J. Pratt Library (<https://library.vicu.utoronto.ca>)

---

Last updated: November 28, 2024

**Source URL:** [https://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/collections/special\\_collections/locate](https://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/collections/special_collections/locate)