Citing Archival Resources & Primary Sources

When conducting research within an archive it's important to cite the archival resources and/or primary sources that you use. This is especially vital as many items preserved within an archive are unique and cannot be found elsewhere. Additionally, depending on why you're researching within an archive, citing your sources might be a requirement of your assignment or project.

Citation Methods

When you cite an archival resource there are many ways that you can do so. Some of the methods used include:

- APA Style
- Chicago
- MLA
- Turabian

Also, if you're a student, there might be times in which your professor requires that you use their own personal method of citing primary sources.

As a note, it's always good to know what citation method is preferred within your field of study. This is especially so if you're looking to write an article to be published within an academic or scientific journal. Different journals tend to have specific citation guidelines that their contributors must follow to have their content published.

While there is no perfect way to cite an archival resource, there is always a preferred way.

Necessary Information

Each citation method requires that you provide specific information. But if you're unsure about which method is required of you, it's always good to err on the side of caution; record as much administrative information as possible and keep comprehensive notes about the archival resources you use. A lot of this type of information can be found in a collection's finding aid. You may not need all of this information but you'll have it in the event that you do.

Additionally, it's good to know of some of the essential details that most citation methods require.

- Author or creator's name
- Date
- Title of the work
- Publication information (if available)
- Collection name
- Box and folder numbers
- Repository
- URL and date accessed (if found within a digital archives)
- Information about the item (such as page number, section, description, format, etc)
- Sub-collection, series, or subseries (if available)