

Special & Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries
Panama Canal Museum Collection
Collection Development Policy
Approved 2016. Revised March 2021.

Collection History and Mission

The Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC) in the Department of Special & Area Studies Collections (SASC) is the leading research collection for the study of the American era of the Panama Canal. The collection documents the U.S. experience in the Panama Canal Zone and in the country of Panama. To a lesser degree, the collection also preserves historical information about the Canal prior and subsequent to U.S. construction and operation. SASC preserves and provides access to the historically significant and distinctive materials in the collection in order to facilitate knowledge creation and dissemination. The PCMC supports and advances the commitment of the George A. Smathers Libraries to excellence in education and research and contributes to the University of Florida's standing as a preeminent public research university.

The Panama Canal Museum, formerly located in Seminole, Florida, closed in 2012 and transferred its collection to the Smathers Libraries, greatly enhancing UF's holdings on the Canal and Panama. The Museum's mission was to document, interpret, preserve, and articulate the leadership role played by the United States in the history of the Panama Canal, with emphasis on the construction, operation, maintenance, and defense of the Canal and the contributions to its success by people of all nationalities.

The PCMC is comprised of two groups of materials: Accession 1 and Accession 2. To preserve the integrity of the museum's original collection, all materials transferred from the Panama Canal Museum are preserved as Accession 1 of the PCMC, and no additional materials will be added to Accession 1 in the future. Materials acquired by gift or purchase from sources other than the Museum are preserved and curated as Accession 2 of the PCMC. Accession 2 is a dynamic, evolving collection that grows as the Smathers Libraries acquire new resources in support of the mission of the PCMC.

The PCMC has developed as a central component within the larger framework of the Panama and the Canal collections, which are managed by multiple curators and units within the Libraries. Within SASC, the Latin American & Caribbean Collection provides access to monographs and serials, and the Map & Imagery Library preserves maps, aerial photographs and related materials. As a designated Center of Excellence in government documents for the U.S. Panama Canal Commission and its predecessor agencies, the Libraries acquire and preserve any government documents produced by the Commission and related agencies, as well as documents related to the creation and maintenance of the Canal. Additional holdings relating to Panama and the Canal are preserved and made available in libraries such as the Marston Science Library and the Humanities & Social Sciences Library (Library West).

For the purposes of this policy, "Canal Zone" refers to the unincorporated U.S. territory that existed from 1904 to 1979, as well as the territory after the Zone was disestablished and the U.S. continued to operate the Canal during the transition period from 1979 through 1999. Wherever the term "Canal Zone" appears, it covers the entire period of the American Era from 1904 through 1999.

Collecting Scope

The Special and Area Studies Collections Department seeks to collect materials that reflect the breadth of human experience in support of the educational mission of the University of Florida. We are committed to acquisition practices that reflect sound stewardship of institutional and community resources. We practice ongoing review of existing collections to ensure diversity and inclusion in description, access, and outreach. Curators collaborate across collections to better represent distinct and overlapping identities and experiences, and to redress gaps in individual collections or across collections.

To continue developing the PCMC as a preeminent research collection, UF will acquire research materials in diverse formats and preserve these resources as part of PCMC Accession 2. SASC is interested primarily in collecting materials that are:

- Unique (e.g., unpublished personal papers, photos, diaries, business records, etc.).
- Rare (e.g., published or printed materials typically unavailable in many cultural heritage repositories, such as newspapers, news clippings, yearbooks, maps, etc.).
- Historically significant (e.g., materials that document events, activities, perspectives or conditions).
- Of enduring and permanent value (e.g., materials that have an ongoing usefulness to historians, scholars and other researchers).

Collecting efforts are focused primarily on the topical and temporal areas in which the PCMC is particularly strong. SASC collects materials that augment or complement existing collecting areas or strengthen under-represented areas that have been identified in this policy as important. SASC avoids duplication of materials preserved and made available in other repositories or collections (e.g., Canal records held by the National Archives or government documents such as those in Smathers Libraries' Center of Excellence for the U.S. Panama Canal Commission and its predecessor agencies).

Subject Areas

The following ratings are used to describe collecting levels in each subject area:

- **Minimal:** no or very few collections
- **Good:** some collections, but scattered chronologically, geographically, or thematically
- **Selective:** substantial collections, providing relatively comprehensive coverage of one or more sub-sections
- **Representative:** substantial collections, providing a representative cross-section from multiple sub-sections of this topic
- **Comprehensive:** thorough coverage of most aspects of this topic

Construction

- **Current Collection:** Canal construction is extremely well documented by the PCMC. This comprehensive collection is extensive enough to support both teaching and substantial scholarly research. Particularly strong is the collection of Ernest Hallen construction photographs, which document all aspects of the American construction of the Panama Canal.
- **Desired Collecting Level:** Continue to be comprehensive in documentation of the American construction effort.

Life in the Canal Zone

- Current Collection: Our collections are representative to comprehensive for most aspects of daily life in the Canal Zone, with special strengths in leisure activities and social organizations.
- Desired Collecting Level: Continue to be representative, making a special effort to collect materials before 1979.

Railroads

- Current Collection: The PCMC has a representative collection of materials relating to the construction and operation of the Panama Rail Road which includes many 3D items, such as railroad ties and light fixtures.
- Desired Collecting Level: Continue to be representative in photographic and ephemeral materials.

Health / Sanitation

- Current Collection: The PCMC has a selective collection of materials relating to Canal Zone hospital buildings (particularly photographs) and a good collection of items about mosquito eradication.
- Desired Collecting Level: Continue to be selective in hospitals, and increase to selective in mosquito eradication, yellow fever, and malaria in response to student research requests.

Education in the Canal Zone

- Current Collection: The collection is comprehensive in materials relating to all aspects of Canal Zone high schools, with a special strength in high school yearbooks. The collection is representative in elementary/middle schools, and Canal Zone colleges.
- Desired Collecting Level: Continue to be comprehensive in high schools, with a focus on collecting any missing high school yearbooks, and representative in elementary/middle schools and college.

Canal Operation, Maintenance and Defense

- Current Collection: The collection is comprehensive in materials relating to the operation, maintenance and defense of the Canal.
- Desired Collecting Level: Continue to be comprehensive.

Canal and Canal Zone Administration

- Current Collection: The collection is comprehensive in materials relating to the organization and activities of the Canal and Canal Zone administration.
- Desired Collecting Level: Continue to be comprehensive in materials relating to administration of the Canal and Canal Zone. SASC does not collect official government documents printed by agencies of the U.S. Government; these materials are collected by the Center of Excellence.

The Country of Panama

- Current Collection: The collection includes selected materials related to Panamanian culture and history, particularly focusing on the experiences of Americans in Panama.
- Desired Collecting Level: Continue to be selective.

Chronological Scope

The primary collecting focus is to document the American experience from 1904 through 1999. Materials outside of this time period are assessed for their research value and historical significance. For example, Pre-Columbian materials may not be collected but materials from the French period of construction might be collected because they provide historical context for the American era. Similarly, materials dating after the December 31, 1999, transfer of the Canal are collected less comprehensively than materials dating from the American era.

Geographic Scope

The PCMC focuses on materials documenting life, work and people in the Panama Canal Zone. Although these materials include some documentation of the country of Panama, Panamanian geography and culture is not a primary collecting focus. SASC collects materials documenting the country and culture of Panama very selectively.

Formats of PCMC Materials

Formats of materials collected include:

- Manuscripts and archival materials (e.g., correspondence, diaries, reports, writings)
- Photographs
- Oral histories
- Postcards
- Scrapbooks
- Audiovisual recordings (e.g., home movies)
- Ephemera (e.g., pamphlets, bulletins, posters)

Formats typically not collected include:

- Materials that SASC is unable to properly preserve, provide access to, and/or store.
- Published, printed or commercially produced materials such as books, periodicals, newspapers, maps, and sound or video recordings typically are not retained as part of the PCMC but are managed by appropriate units within SASC and the Libraries. For example, published maps are managed by the Map & Imagery Library. Print materials originally acquired from the Panama Canal Museum (e.g., school yearbooks) are preserved as part of the PCMC Accession 1 but managed separately in the Latin American & Caribbean Collection (LACC). Librarians in the LACC will make decisions regarding future print acquisitions relating to the Canal, Canal Zone, and Panama.
- Mass-produced souvenirs, gift shop curios, and other tourism-oriented merchandise.
- Three-dimensional objects (e.g., ceramics such as cups or dinnerware), textiles (e.g., molas), furniture, or works of art. Exceptions may be made if materials have extremely strong connections to other PCMC research materials, if materials have extraordinary informational content, and/or if formats lend themselves to enriching or enhancing exhibits of PCMC materials.

If materials are not acquired because of their format, SASC typically provides donors with recommendations of other possible repositories or recipients that may be able to properly preserve the materials (including the Friends of the Panama Canal Museum Collection).

Audience and Purpose for Collecting

SASC collects for education and research purposes. In addition to providing access to PCMC materials on-campus and/or online, these materials are used in exhibits, teaching, and outreach. The primary audience for PCMC materials consists of scholars, students, and other researchers. The collection also serves the needs of professionals at other cultural heritage repositories, genealogists, and the general public.

Acquisition & Accession Procedures

Gifts

- A gift is executed by a gift agreement, or deed of gift, which must be signed by the donor(s), the Dean of University Libraries, and the University of Florida Foundation, which is the designated receiving unit for gifts to the University.
- Generally, gifts must be unencumbered by any restrictions as to use, exhibition, or disposition. Gifts may be rejected if the materials are not within collecting areas (as designated by this policy), if the materials duplicate items already in the PCMC, if the materials cannot be cared for properly, or if the materials lack research value or historic interest.
- Gifts may be tax deductible (as allowed by law), and donors must obtain their own appraisals by qualified appraisers. SASC personnel cannot participate in gift appraisals.

Stewardship and Ownership

- The University of Florida must take physical custody of gift materials at the time that the gift agreement is executed. The process of establishing physical and intellectual control over new acquisitions is called accessioning.
- As steward of PCMC materials, SASC has the authority to make decisions relating to the use or disposition of PCMC accessions, as specified in gift agreements. SASC is responsible for determining retention, storage location, cataloging, preservation, digitization, exhibition and promotional activities.
- SASC will not promise that gift materials will be exhibited, reproduced or promoted, except when specified by the gift agreement.

Collections Committee and the Review Process

- Proposed gifts of materials are reviewed by the Collection Committee every two months. The Committee adheres to this policy in making acquisition decisions. All acquisition decisions are reviewed and approved by SASC and library administrators.
- Committee members are faculty and staff of SASC and the Libraries representing diverse expertise in subjects and formats. The Chair of the Committee shall be appointed by the SASC Department Chair. The members should include a representative of the Latin American & Caribbean Collection, a representative of the Map & Imagery Library, an archivist from SASC, the Regional Government Documents Librarian, and two other librarians or staff of the Libraries.

- The Committee consults with University of Florida faculty, scholars, subject specialists, or members of the Zonian community in making acquisition decisions.
- In those cases where gifts are not accepted, the committee may request the prospective donor to submit digital photos and/or descriptive information to be retained as part of the Canal Zone Narratives Collection, which is comprised of digital images and/or digital narratives accompanied by contextual information such as names, personal reminiscences, and historical information.
- In addition to assessing the research value and historical significance of potential gifts, the Committee also considers factors such as available storage space, ability to store the materials safely and securely, the relationship to or duplication of other materials in the collection, ability to process materials within a reasonable amount of time, ability to preserve materials, and ability to provide access to the materials.
- Gifts may be declined if the resources necessary to preserve, process, store, and/or make the materials accessible to researchers exceed capacity. The Committee may recommend other repositories, individuals or groups that may be interested in acquiring the materials (e.g., the Friends of the Panama Canal Museum Collection).

Digital Considerations

- SASC strategically selects physical materials for digitization. Not all PCMC materials will be digitized. Digitization decisions are based on considerations such as uniqueness or rareness, historical significance, research or educational value, digitization costs and funds available, and other priorities within SASC and the Libraries.
- SASC collects electronic materials that are “born digital” such as digital photographs, digital audio files, or word processor files. However, born digital materials are reformatted and/or migrated to new storage media when necessary for preservation and/or access purposes. SASC cannot commit to preserving born digital materials in their original formats and technical environments indefinitely.
- Digital materials in the Canal Zone Narratives Collection (photos and information contributed by donors in digital format) are retained in the formats and on the media that are most appropriate for preservation and access.

Deaccessioning Process

Deaccessioning is the official removal of items from the PCMC. Deaccessioning may be the result of loss of items due to theft, deterioration or other means of loss, but typically deaccessioning occurs as the culmination of a deliberative process. Disposition of deaccessioned items usually is by transfer to other cultural heritage repositories. Items may be offered to the original donors if so specified in the gift agreement, and some donors may wish to specify individuals or families who may be interested in receiving the items. If no repositories or donors are interested, deaccessioned items also may be offered to the Friends of the Panama Canal Museum Collection. Items discarded during the regular archival appraisal and processing of materials (e.g., removing duplicates) are not considered deaccessioned items.

PCMC Candidates for Deaccessioning

- Duplicates of extant items in the PCMC
- Materials that are outside of the scope of the collection policy and have little research value or significance
- Materials that would be housed more appropriately in another collection or another repository
- Materials in such poor condition that they are unusable or jeopardize other materials or people (e.g., deteriorated film)

Procedures for Deaccessioning

- The Collection Committee reviews deaccession proposals made by SASC staff.
- The Committee reviews gift agreements to ensure that no restrictions or conditions need to be resolved.
- The Committee may contact donors or the Friends of the Panama Canal Museum Collection to discuss intent to deaccession.
- Deaccession decisions must be approved by the Dean of Libraries.
- No materials are deaccessioned within five years of execution of the gift agreement.

Policy Revision

This policy is reviewed at least once every five years by the Collection Committee.