

Archive Hunting

Archival research can be one of the most fun – and frustrating – parts of scholarly work. Poking around primary source texts often leads to exciting discoveries and close encounters with history, but finding that “gem” can take days, months, or even years of work. This assignment is designed not only to give you a sense of the kind of work that historians and literary scholars do, but also to help you practice some of the crucial research skills we have been developing throughout the semester: close-reading, gathering background information, documenting sources, and interacting with research librarians and other scholars. You may even notice some parallels between archival exploration and the kinds of scientific investigations described by our nineteenth-century authors.

For this assignment, you will visit **BU’s Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center**, an incredible resource on campus with several world-famous collections related to the history of science. I’ve listed some below, but feel free to browse the Gotlieb’s catalog (<http://archives.bu.edu>) on your own.

Florence Nightingale Collection
Alexander Graham Bell Collection
Magic Lantern Slide Collection
History of Nursing Archives
Phineas Quimby Collection
John James Audubon, *Birds of America* (rare book)
Richards Manuscript Collection (letters by Einstein, Agassiz, Edison, Pasteur)
Albert Einstein Collection

1. Choose your collection from the list above or from the Gotlieb’s catalog (<http://archives.bu.edu>). If you are looking at a large collection (e.g. Florence Nightingale), select 1-2 individual artifacts (letters, manuscripts, diaries, etc.) that you’d like to see.
2. Make a research appointment at the Gotlieb and schedule a time to visit. Let the archivist know what materials you will wish to consult. *Be specific.*
3. Before your visit, carefully consult the researchers’ guide on the Gotlieb’s website. (<http://archives.bu.edu/researchers>).
4. On the day of your visit, arrive at the archive *at least 15 minutes early*. Enjoy exploring, and take careful notes!
5. After your visit, complete the attached worksheet and bring it to our next class meeting, where you will share your findings with the class in an informal, ~5 minute presentation.

Worksheet – Archive Hunting

After your visit to the archive, please complete the worksheet below. Bullet points are fine. You will present your findings to the class in an informal presentation of ~5 minutes.

Name: _____

Date: _____

What collection/artifact did you consult?

What type of material was it? (Book? Photograph? Letter? Map?)

What is the record locator number (library number) for the material you consulted? Give us the citation details.

What did the archivists tell you about this source?

What did you notice about the *physical object* itself? What did the paper feel like? What did it look like? Did you notice any marginalia/stains/folds/creases?

Tell us about the *content* of the material.

What does this artifact tell us about the writer/owner, the nineteenth-century scientific world, or Victorian culture more generally?

If you were to conduct further research on this *primary* source document, what *secondary* sources might you use? List five.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Archival research often yields more questions than answers. What questions did this visit ignite? What would you still like to learn about this artifact or topic?