

1-1-2014

The Wright Plan for the Horace Sheffield Jr. Collection

David J. Moore
Wayne State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moore, David J. (2014) "The Wright Plan for the Horace Sheffield Jr. Collection," *MAC Newsletter*: Vol. 41 : No. 3 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter/vol41/iss3/9>

This Up-and-Comers is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in MAC Newsletter by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

Please submit Up-and-Comers items to Justin Seidler at justinseidler@gmail.com.

The Wright Plan for the Horace Sheffield Jr. Collection

By David J. Moore, Graduate Archival Certification Program, Wayne State University

Organized labor and the fight for civil rights were pivotal issues that shaped the city of Detroit in the twentieth century. Battles were fought in the streets, on the overpasses, and throughout the institutions of government. Horace Sheffield Jr. stood firmly at the intersection of these two movements. Although best known as a civil rights activist and labor leader, Sheffield was involved in a number of organizations and unions. His affiliations included everything from the UAW to the United Way. The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History (CHWMAAH) is currently processing the records left behind by this crusader for equality. The initial collection was donated by the Sheffield family, with smaller donations added subsequently by Horace Sheffield III.

The Sheffield Collection has a complicated history. Significant processing work and inventory were carried out in previous years; however, the archivist who spearheaded the effort passed away suddenly. She completed a significant amount of reorganization within the collection, but the inventory she left behind had not yet been updated to reflect the changes. Materials were listed in detail on the inventory, but the corresponding box/folder indications did not match up. Although the inventory was excellent and very detailed, it would have been much more time-consuming to update it to match the collection's current state than to carry out a new inventory. Additionally, a significant amount of material donated by Sheffield III since this work was done needed to be folded into the collection. The refolding undertaken by the previous archivist was extremely diligent; however, this diligence meant that creating a new inventory entailed, more or less, engaging in item-level description, as many of the folders contain only one or two items. This is one of the largest collections the CHWMAAH has taken in to date, although in certain boxes, the folders occupied more space than the materials themselves.

Ultimately, time constraints and the collection's potential for significant use by a variety of research interests meant skipping initial plans to drastically weed the materials during this processing phase. Civil rights, labor, community outreach, and Detroit history all intersect in this collection. Sheffield Jr. interacted with luminaries of all sorts. The collection contains materials related to

several presidents (including John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Jimmy Carter), Michigan governors and Detroit mayors, Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, and popular icons such as Jackie Robinson and Frank Sinatra.

During initial processing, the decision was made to leave the materials in their existing folders. The level of detail was deemed an advantage for researchers, who often search for materials related to a specific topic or institution. The level of detail was also a huge advantage when highlighting items that would be meaningful in the collection's online exhibition. This identification work was a major focus during initial processing. In addition to general historical significance and research potential, it was of paramount importance to select items that meshed with the themes and overall mission of the CHWMAAH. The collection itself will ultimately be open for users, but the online exhibition will represent the CHWMAAH as much as it will Sheffield Jr. himself.

A major boon to the processing of this collection is the significant and ongoing interest of the donor, Horace Sheffield III. LaNesha DeBardelaben, head archivist at the CHWMAAH, and Lisa Schell, corporate archivist and outreach coordinator for Allied Vaughn, have been and will continue to be excellent resources for donor relations. They keep Sheffield III apprised of the collection's progress and are instrumental in providing direction for the project's interns, especially with regard to special donor requests during processing.

2013 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the civil rights marches in Detroit and Washington, DC. Sheffield Jr. was heavily involved in these events, and Sheffield III required related materials from the collection to use in the documentary video series *His Dream, Our Stories*. It was disheartening to find that the photographic materials were in no discernible order. Many of the folders were overstuffed and contained photographs varying widely in date and content. Of course, this is all too common in raw archival collections. However, several hours of intense scouring revealed an entire folder of prints from the March on Washington. They cover a broad range of

(Continued on page 28)

(Continued from page 27)

vantage points: wide shots of crowds on the Mall, close shots of specific groups and individuals, and shots of civil rights and labor leaders, including Walter Reuther, marching arm-in-arm. There is also a fantastic photograph of Sheffield Jr. with Martin Luther King Jr. on stage at Cobo Hall during the events surrounding the Detroit Walk to Freedom. The photos were rapidly digitized to be readily available for potential use. This process to search, identify, and digitize took just two weeks.

On a separate occasion, Sheffield III indicated that he planned to give a talk related to several topics that appear in the collection. Once again, materials needed to be quickly pulled from the semiprocessed collection. Sheffield Jr. was the pioneer of an effort called the Detroit Plan, an education initiative designed to prepare low-income Detroiters for jobs in the construction industry. Sheffield was also a key official in the Trade Union Leadership Coalition (TULC), which provided support for this initiative. Several folders contain materials directly related to the Detroit Plan, and these were relatively simple to find using the existing inventory. However, records related to TULC were voluminous. It was then necessary to cross reference the year of the Detroit Plan's inception with the TULC records to find additional materials that shed light on this project.

When the public is eventually able to access the Sheffield Collection, both in person and online, it will be thanks to the tireless efforts undertaken and hundreds of hours spent by a devoted group of archivists, university interns, and volunteers—even high school students volunteering at the CHWMAAH were afforded the chance to participate in data entry during the inventory process. The history of the collection is complicated, and the road to access has been long and winding; however, the dedication of those who recognize the inherent potential in this collection is without question. Additionally, the issues of the collection's past have been integral to the current work. A detailed report on the state of the collection and information pertinent to future work accompanied the end of the first stage. Although those involved in this stage will continue to serve as resources for the CHWMAAH, work could proceed without them, if necessary. University interns will continue to carry out the bulk of the hands-on work with this collection, which highlights the importance of effectively “passing the torch.”

In the archival world, anything can happen, and the history of the Sheffield Collection is stark evidence of that fact. Those involved in processing the collection have labored diligently to establish a system that will allow work on the collection to continue no matter what. To the credit of all those at the CHWMAAH, this valuable collection is no longer sitting on the shelf. Researchers and historians will no doubt find ample material to break new ground in the analysis of the organized labor and civil rights movements, both in Detroit and nationwide. Educators of all types will be able to incorporate the efforts of a prominent figure in the push for labor equality simply by using their computers. Through this instruction, students will be better able to contextualize this battle within the broader civil rights movement. There is still work to be done, and the CHWMAAH has committed wholeheartedly to follow through to the end. The unwavering dedication of all those involved in this project will ultimately realize the potential of this unique collection.

SAA's Best Practices for Internships as a Component of Graduate Archival Education

Shortly after Amy Cooper Cary's response to the November 2013 Up-and-Comers article was written (see page 31), the Society of American Archivists put out a call for member comment on a draft document entitled “Best Practices for Internships as a Component of Graduate Archival Education.” The draft was written by four SAA Council member-volunteers—Tanya Zanish-Belcher, Geoffrey Huth, Elisabeth Kaplan, and Lisa Mangiafico—following a Council discussion in September 2013 about the potential benefits of providing members with a set of guidelines or best practices for internships as a component of graduate archival education. Following the comment period (which ended on November 22, 2013), a draft incorporating appropriate revisions will be reviewed by the SAA Standards Committee and presented to the SAA Council for adoption at its January 22–24, 2014, meeting. For more information, see www2.archivists.org/news/2013/call-for-member-comment-best-practices-for-internships-as-a-component-of-archival-educatio.