145 Drawings of Richard Nixon's Nose

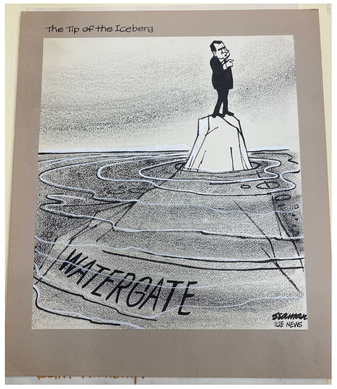
--- Processing the Bernard Seaman Cartoon Collection ---

BACKGROUND

The Bernard Seaman Cartoon Collection consists of over 4600 original drawings, prints and sketches created by Bernard Seaman, a cartoonist and illustrator whose work was published in labor union newspapers like the *AFL-CIO News* and *ILGWU Justice*, among others from the 1930s to the 1980s. Because the collection covers such a broad timespan, the materials within it address many of the major sociopolitical and economic events of the 20th century, reflecting how American unions responded to what was happening in the country and the world at large and encouraged union members to engage with the political happenings of their time.

The Seaman collection came to UMD as part of the transfer of the George Meany Memorial Archives in 2013. Initial processing was conducted in 2019 by student assistant Alison Riehl, who created an itemized preliminary inventory for the collection and performed initial rehousing. Because of the collection's unique nature and high research value, it was deemed a candidate for further processing, and I (Rosemarie Fettig) took on the project in spring 2022.

UMD holds a similar collection of labor cartoons - the AFL-CIO News cartoons - which provided a rough blueprint for the processed collection and finding aid. However, I knew the process was going to be different the AFL-CIO News collection had a more substantial original order than the Seaman collection, so I had more flexibility with this project, but there were also more decisions that needed to be made.



"The Tip of the Iceberg," Box 22 Folder 7

PROJECT GOALS

- Make collection easier for researchers to navigate by conveying as much information via finding aid as possible
  - more "browseable" without forcing researchers to pull every box
- Use storage space more efficiently while providing safe and stable housing for a heterogeneous group of objects
  - Wide spectrum of individual item sizes = unsuitable for solely chronological physical arrangement
- Accomplish the above in a way that used staff time and resources efficiently and took advantage of existing systems and knowledge

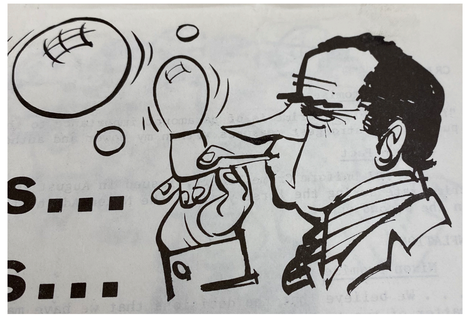
ARRANGEMENT

I elected to tackle the challenge of scale presented by this collection by approaching the intellectual and physical arrangements separately. In a nutshell, this was a solution to balancing researcher needs and staff capacities.

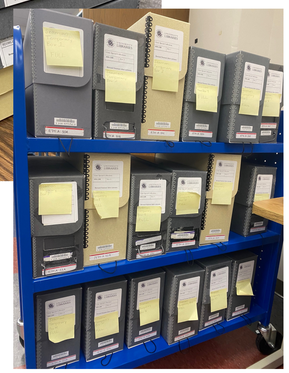
Intellectual Arrangement:

Because no useful original order existed, I had more freedom to think creatively about the arrangement and prioritize user needs. Roughly one-third of the items had dates associated with them (either publication dates of newspapers or dates written on the items by the artist), so a chronological arrangement seemed like a good starting point because there were no apparent pre-existing series in the collection. Also, the AFL-CIO News cartoons are arranged in chronological order, and we wanted to maintain some consistency in how we handled this collection.

Dates were collected as part of the item-level inventory begun by Alison and completed by me and stored in an Excel spreadsheet, which made the information easier to manipulate using the sorting functions. In order to incorporate as much of the collection into this chronological order as possible, I undertook a two-part research process to assign circa dates to the undated materials. First, I identified potentially related materials based on their titles and textual content - through this method, sketches were assigned a circa date of the same year their final counterpart was published. Next, I performed historical research to establish further circa dates, using major historical figures, events, and pieces of legislation to narrow down ranges for possible creation dates. For example, if a given item contained the name of a president, a range covering that president's time in office was assigned to the item. In some cases, it was possible to get more specific - for example, a mention of a presidential campaign allowed the range to be further narrowed to one year. At the completion of this process, we were able to assign dates (exact or circa) to almost 60% of the collection. The remaining undated materials were ordered alphabetically by title and placed at the end of the list of dated materials to provide some structure for this portion of the collection.



"Promises, Promises," Box 11 Folder 1



Above: oversized boxes emptied after physical rearrangement
Right: a portion of the Hollinger boxes used to store smaller items

Physical Arrangement:

Again, because there was no useful original order, we had more flexibility than usual. Arrangement decisions were motivated by preservation priorities and a desire to use storage space efficiently. The initial processing had resulted in 24 Hollinger boxes of 3 different sizes and 13 oversized flat boxes of 2 different sizes. Rearrangement was conducted in phases, beginning with the reassociation of related items.. During this phase, I also identified candidates for refoldering - items that had been placed in inappropriately-sized folders due to a supplies shortage. I also discovered that most of the oversized boxes contained a substantial amount of non-oversized material, which required rehousing. In refoldering and rehousing these items, I was able to shift all additional non-oversized material into the existing Hollinger boxes without adding any more boxes and reduced the number of oversized boxes from 13 to 5, greatly decreasing the amount of shelf space required for the collection.

FINDING AID

The item-level inventory, which contains title, date, and a transcription of all textual content for each item. formed the basis of the finding aid, but manual data entry was not an option due to the sheer volume of material. The size of the dataset made this collection a good candidate for experimenting with the "Load Via Spreadsheet" tool in ArchivesSpace, which had not been used widely in SCUA. The inventory was transformed into the import template, and multiple test uploads were required to better understand how ArchivesSpace interpreted various Excel formatting decisions. Because the inventory includes the full text present on each cartoon, including captions and speech bubbles, researchers can search this text to identify individual items of interest (e.g. finding all 145 images of President Nixon).

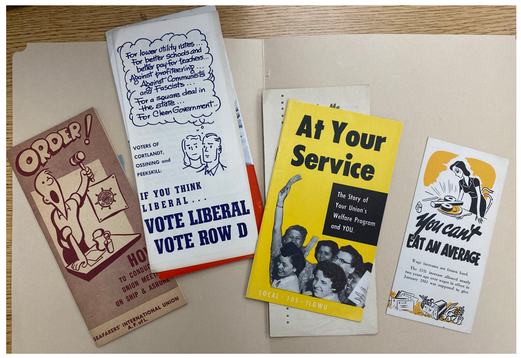
CHALLENGES

- "Now or Never" situation: Further processing on this collection is unlikely , so I wanted to take the time to do as much as I could.
- Re-evaluation of physical arrangement: The discovery of non-oversized material in the oversized boxes was unexpected, but ended up being a boon because I was able to significantly reduce the number of boxes, and by extension, reduce the shelf space required.
- Excel difficulties: usually aren't doing the amount of data manipulation that this project required and had to troubleshoot a lot of issues with Excel number formatting both in the original inventory and in the ingest template for ArchivesSpace.
  - To resolve these, I developed a suite of custom formulas that could be applied in bulk to render data in plain text.

LESSONS LEARNED

With the Excel kinks worked out, the use of ArchivesSpace spreadsheet ingest has the potential to be incredibly helpful for the creation of finding aids for large collections in the future. My struggles with Excel formatting taught us a lot about how to best format our inventories from the beginning, so this should make future ingests easier since they will require fewer transformations.

Sketches, Box 5 Folder 8



Pamphlets, Box 16 Folder 1

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