The New York State Library in Albany holds many collections of written, visual, audible, and electronic records, each one a thread in the rich fabric of New York’s history. But history is more than just the record of famous names and great events. History is the story of your life.

Using the diaries, letters, scrapbooks, photos, newspapers, postcards, maps, and all the “stuff in a box” that people collect, researchers piece together the story of communities, families, organizations, and events from the colonial era down to our own times. You can add your story to this record.

What to keep?
Just about anything can be part of a collection. You may think it’s not interesting to an outsider, but even the smallest scrap can reveal an important historical truth. A few suggestions:

- Letters (don’t forget the envelopes which may have dates or other information), postcards, e-mails, greeting cards
- Photos (dated and people and places identified if possible), slides and photo albums
- Audio tapes, home movies and videos
- Diaries, journals and scrapbooks
- Certificates (birth, confirmation, bar/bat mitzvah, marriage, death)
- School records: report cards, diplomas
- Membership records: unions, clubs and fraternal organizations
- Military papers
- Real estate records, wills and estate papers
- Paintings, drawings, needlework, sheet music
- Family newsletters (often sent around holidays)
- Newspaper clippings of your family or people you know (especially if they are dated and the publication is noted)

But I’m saving it for my family…

It’s never too soon to think about donating your papers to a library. Your collections will be protected, organized and cataloged so that family members as well as researchers can access them for generations to come. A phone call, a letter or email message can start the ball rolling. Let us know what you have. We can discuss the collection and its contents, and if the State Library isn’t the best fit, we’ll even help you find another repository.

In most cases, donations start with a site visit. If possible, we’d like to come and see the papers and get sense of how much material there is, its general condition, and where it’s stored. It also helps us to talk with you and get a feel for what the papers mean to you and your family. Finally, we’ll schedule a convenient time to pick up your papers.

The deed of gift

A “deed of gift” is a simple, one-page document that legally transfers ownership of your papers to the library. In some cases—usually to protect privacy—you or your family might want to seal certain records restricting access for a specified time—say 25 or 50 years. All of this is part of the deed of gift.
Tax-deductible gifts?
Some gifts made to non-profit agencies, including libraries, may be tax deductible. The first step in finding out if your donation qualifies you for a deduction, is to contact an accountant or tax professional. Then, you will need to obtain a professional appraisal of your donated papers to establish their “fair market value.” The State Library can provide a list of fee-based, independent appraisers in the Capital Region.

Appraisers examining a collection

Preserving your collection
When your collection arrives in the Library one of the first steps in “processing” is re-housing the contents in protective boxes, folders and enclosures. These are made of special chemically inert materials, which will help keep unstable media from deterioration.

Photo negatives as originally received in plain paper envelopes and old metal file drawers

Negatives re-housed in “safe” archival folders and boxes
Storing the collection

Once the collection is re-housed it is stored in specially-constructed shelving in our climate-controlled storage area.

Making the collection user-friendly

One of the first steps in making the collection available to researchers is to inventory the contents of each box.
The inventory will eventually lead to the creation of a “finding aid”—a descriptive guide to the contents of the collection.

Typical finding a
Larger collection guides can run to several hundred pages.

Completed guides can be consulted in the library and on the State Library’s website:

http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/

An online catalog entry contains a brief description of the collection and a link to its finding aid.
Researchers can access the library catalog onsite or via the internet.

INTERESTED IN DONATING YOUR COLLECTION?

Be a part of New York’s History!

Write: The New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections 11th Floor, Cultural Education Center Albany, NY 12230

Call: (518) 474-4461

Or email to: mscref@nysed.gov

The State Education Department does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, religion, creed, disability, marital status, veteran status, national origin, race, gender, genetic predisposition or carrier status, or sexual orientation in its educational programs, services and activities. Portions of any publication designed for distribution can be made available in a variety of formats, including Braille, large print or audiotape, upon request. Inquiries regarding this policy of nondiscrimination should be directed to the Department’s Office for Diversity, Ethics, and Access, Room 530, Education Building, Albany, NY 12234. Requests for publications should be made to the Department’s Publications Sales Desk, Room 309, Education Building, and Albany NY 12234.