

Using Special Collections – TIFF Film Reference Library

The Special Collections are treated as primary source materials. Typically, they are used for conducting scholarly research, curatorial and programming research, in-depth biographical research and media analysis, and other specialized purposes.

We sometimes use the Special Collections to answer detailed reference questions or respond to requests by the media or producers for stills and clips. However, as these are specialized inquiries requiring time for research, most often, people consult with a reference librarian or find their questions answered by using the reference collection of the Film Reference Library.

As unique archival materials, each collection has different restrictions and considerations for reuse. These are determined by the information content of the material, the wishes of the donor or creator, and the condition of the items and requirements for preservation. Some materials may be closed because they contain confidential or personal information. Some materials may be too fragile or too deteriorated for handling. Some of the audio-visual material may be in an obsolete or professional format and requires a transfer of the material be made in order to be viewed. The transfer costs involved in this process are passed on to the researcher.

The steps and guidelines for obtaining access to the Special Collections are as follows:

- First, contact the archivist of the Film Reference Library specifying the materials you wish to consult, the nature of your research project and your credentials. In some cases, this may be the only step required, and an appointment for viewing will be set up.
- For materials, where permission from the donor is also required to access the material, researchers will be provided with the appropriate contact information to obtain the donor's permission (usually a representative of the donor in a production office or an agent).
- Viewing Special Collections holdings is by appointment only. Materials must be retrieved and prepared, which can take time, since some materials may be stored offsite or need special playback equipment, and some fees may apply in order to access the materials.
- All consultation of original Special Collections holdings takes place onsite at the FRL; materials are not loaned for offsite access. Due to the fragility and rarity of some original material, the archivist may determine that only copies, scans or dubs be made available for consultation. This is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Special handling instructions are provided to researchers who are consulting original records:

- No pens or markers are permitted on the research tables; pencils should be used for taking notes.
- Photographs must be handled with white cotton gloves, which the FRL provides.
- All paper records must be kept in their original order in the files.
- Some of the particularly fragile, oversized and three-dimensional material is handled by staff only.

Finding aids and inventories

There are finding aids and inventories available onsite for most of the Special Collections. The collection level descriptions usually provide an overview of the contents, including date ranges, media and extent, and provide a listing of the major series or groupings. Some collections have been processed to the file or item level. These will have inventories or shelf lists available onsite. For others, only general descriptions are available. The Finding Aids are the property of TIFF and cannot be reproduced without permission of the library.

Fee-based services

Fees are charged for obtaining copies, advanced research services in response to inquiries, large-volume retrievals and, in exceptional cases, custodial services when staff is required to handle original materials.

There is no self-serve photocopying of Special Collections materials. Special Collections photocopying is done by staff, and fees may include a handling charge in addition to the per page charges. Some fragile materials cannot be copied. Copies of visual materials can be obtained as digital images or photographic reproductions. Moving image and sound materials are subject to lab costs. In all cases, you must deal with rights and access questions before copies will be provided.

Rights and clearances

The Film Reference Library does not license the reuse of materials; in most cases, it neither owns copyright nor represents the copyright holder. This means that the permission to copy must be obtained from the rights holder.

We can provide you with available rights information. However, we do not offer services to locate the copyright holder or representative, which may require extensive research. The responsibility for obtaining permissions and clearances rests with you, the Library user.

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