

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH IN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

July 24, 2015 Grace Krause Archives, Explore Posts, Historical Archaeology archival research, historical archaeology

Fieldwork in historical archaeology doesn't always involve digging in the dirt. I've spent many of my days this field season digging in the archives instead, which is what I'm doing today. An archive houses collections of preserved documents from any time period and subject that can be used for historical research. Archives I frequent are kept at universities, public libraries, or museums.



Some tools of archival research: a notebook, writing implement, stack of documents, and my iPod for quick photos (and background noise since archives can be too quiet!). Taken at the [Southern Food and Beverage Museum Culinary Library and Archives](#).

Historical documents provide us with a different kind of data than we might discover with physical remains from an archaeological site. These types of data—such as federal census records, photographs, and newspapers—connect what's in the ground with the diverse people that lived and worked at these sites in the past. Reading about local happenings and what people thought about them helps archaeologists gain social insights for interpreting artifacts. Documents can also help us figure out where to start digging, particularly historical maps from the time period of interest.



Blue Books list the names and addresses of New Orleans brothel employees in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Taken at the [Louisiana Research Collection](#).

Archivists are invaluable resources when working on any historical archaeology project. They have a vast knowledge of the collections and can direct you to resources you were unaware of before, as well as help you navigate complicated collection catalogues. My list of important things to look at has expanded considerably after discussing my project with archivists—the more data the better!