



Historical Society of Pennsylvania

PHILADELPHIA'S LIBRARY OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Statement on Harmful Language in Collection Descriptions

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania strives to use and maintain respectful, inclusive, and accurate language in archival finding aids, library catalog records, and associated metadata. We acknowledge that there are descriptions for our collections that are offensive or harmful. The standards for language, respect, and tolerance of these descriptions are no longer appropriate and do not reflect the values of HSP and the stewards of its collections. To ameliorate harmful language in collection descriptions, HSP will review and update such content as it is discovered.

HSP is also committed to upholding archival standards of preserving historical accuracy and the original context in which collections were created and organized. For example, it is standard archival practice to maintain certain descriptive elements within a collection as it is received, such as the names of organizations; nicknames of individuals; folder names; and the titles of published material. The historic value and context of descriptive metadata will therefore be reviewed and weighed against the language itself.

User input will be vital to the ongoing discovery of harmful language in HSP's collection descriptions. This is a working policy, and since description revisions will be an ongoing process, we welcome any suggestions that readers might have. Please contact Cary Hutto, Director of Archives, at chutto@hsp.org or Anthony DiGiovanni, Director of Cataloging and Reference Services, adigiovanni@hsp.org, if you have any questions or comments.

Adapted from the following policies:

[Drexel University Statement on Harmful Content in Archival Collection](#)

[Princeton University Statement on Language in Archival Descriptions](#)

[Temple University SCRC Statement on Potentially Harmful Language in Archival Description and Cataloging](#)

Related resources and discussions on archival descriptions:

[Language Matters: Writing Inclusive Finding Aids and Description \(Armando Suarez\)](#)

[Society of American Archivists and Inclusive Description](#)