

The YMCA, one of the oldest and largest social institutions in the United States, has touched the lives of virtually all Americans.

It gave the country basketball and volleyball, its best-known popular contributions. But it also pioneered camping, public libraries, night schools and teaching English as a second language. The Y has provided war relief since the Civil War and served immigrants and refugees from countries around the world. It has fostered understanding and cooperation within Christianity and among the world's major faiths. It has summoned the strengths of association to make communities stronger.

Yet we know this information only because people have preserved the documents and artifacts of their YMCA's history over the years. **Make sure your YMCA's history is preserved, too.**

### Why preserve your YMCA's history?

#### Be part of a YMCA tradition

With more than 150 years of history in the United States, the YMCA is one of the oldest and largest social institutions. As a national organization, the YMCA has recognized the importance of preserving and documenting its history from early on, establishing a historical library and archives in 1877. Each YMCA is an important part of its local community. Its records provide valuable documentation, both of the history of the Y and of the local community that built and supports it.

#### Understand your YMCA and community

History links us with our past and helps us understand who we are. Your YMCA—whether it is 150 years old or 1 month old—tells a story of your community. And understanding your Y's past helps us remember how we came to be and where we ought to go now.

#### Historical records are a valuable resource

Historical records are useful resources to reference when recognizing important anniversaries and milestones in history. YMCAs have used their historical records to publish commemorative histories, produce exhibits and develop eye-catching and unique marketing or fundraising materials and products.

#### Preserving records makes good sense

Information is an institutional resource for decision-making. New staff members need to know about your YMCA's previous activities, commitments and decisions. As the Spanish-born philosopher George Santayana so famously said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Knowing your history helps in developing a more complete understanding of your mission and provides perspectives on today's problems.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Kautz Family YMCA Archives for assistance or advice on preserving your YMCA's history.

Address: 318 Andersen Library  
222 21st Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Phone: 612-625-3445

Fax: 612-624-4848

E-mail: [ymcaarch@umn.edu](mailto:ymcaarch@umn.edu)

Web site: <http://special.lib.umn.edu/ymca/>

## PRESERVING YOUR YMCA'S HISTORY

*If your YMCA doesn't preserve its history, who will?*



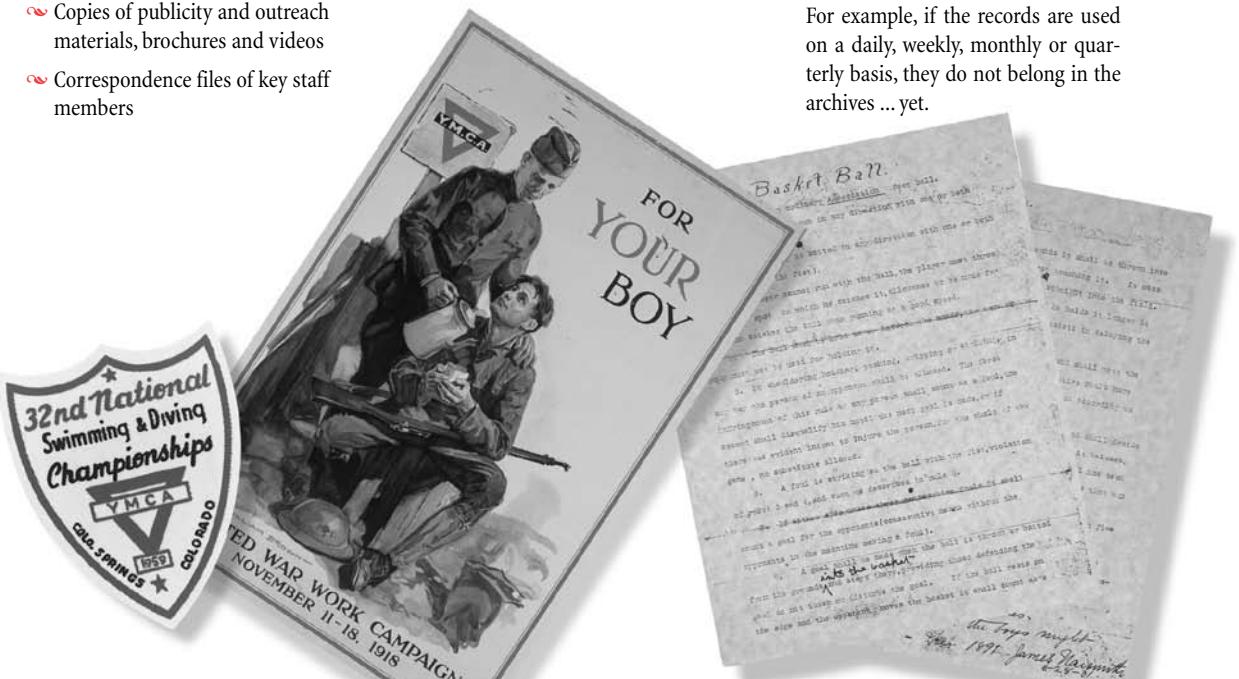
# FIRST STEPS

for preserving your YMCA's historical records

## 1 | IDENTIFY WHAT SHOULD BE SAVED

Records that document your YMCA's programs, activities and relationship with the local community are all of historical value. In addition, genealogists are always interested in biographical material about relatives who served as YMCA staff members or volunteers.

- ❖ Founding documents  
*(charters, articles of incorporation, bylaws)*
- ❖ Newsletters, both external and internal
- ❖ Board and committee meeting minutes
- ❖ Annual reports
- ❖ Project or activity reports and summaries
- ❖ Local procedure or policy manuals
- ❖ Summary financial data
- ❖ Grant applications
- ❖ Staff directories
- ❖ Scrapbooks and photographs  
*(preferably with names, places and dates identified)*
- ❖ Copies of publicity and outreach materials, brochures and videos
- ❖ Correspondence files of key staff members



## 2 | ORGANIZE THE RECORDS

### Some basic do's and don'ts:

- ❖ **Do** keep materials in their original, labeled file folders or place the materials in folders and label them.
- ❖ **Do** keep materials created or generated by the same program, committee or office together.
- ❖ **Don't** use stick-on labels, because the adhesive dries up and the labels will fall off. Instead write information directly on file folders.
- ❖ **Don't** attempt to rearrange materials by subject matter.
- ❖ **Don't** pull individual documents from files. Do not try to find single, interesting documents in your files. It is better (and less time-consuming) to handle records as sets or groups rather than to try to identify individual documents and pull them from the files.
- ❖ **Don't** archive records that you use regularly. For example, if the records are used on a daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly basis, they do not belong in the archives ... yet.

## 3 | COMPILE BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR RECORDS

Regardless of where you plan to maintain your Y's archives, you should compile some basic information that will be helpful to anyone who works with your records.

- ❖ Date span of materials
- ❖ Total number of boxes
- ❖ A very basic list of what is in each box  
*(could be a list of file-folder titles or simply a summary of the contents, such as "minutes 1960-1985 and newsletters 1978-1990")*

## 4 | DECIDE WHERE TO KEEP THE RECORDS

Will your YMCA manage its own archives in-house or donate records to a suitable repository?

Once you identify and collect records of historical value, you'll need to decide how they should be maintained. The two basic options are to establish your own archives in-house or to donate the records to a local repository, such as a historical society or special collection based at a local college or university.

### In-house archives

The biggest advantage to starting an archives program in-house is that records will be close at hand if you need access to them. On the other hand, starting an archives will require knowledgeable staff or volunteers, a suitable storage space, and the development of procedures for accessing the material when needed.

### ❖ *Donating to a local repository*

Donating your historical records to a local repository can ensure that the material is preserved long-term by people who are experienced in the care and maintenance of archival records. Staff will typically catalog the material and create inventories, finding aids or indexes that allow your YMCA to more easily identify and locate material later. Choosing a repository that holds the records of other local organizations and individuals can also be a great way to connect the history of your YMCA with the history of the community in general.

Most repositories will require that materials be donated outright. Although the archivists may be willing to make arrangements for you to borrow materials for special exhibits or other events, material once donated generally stays in the custody of the repository. People requiring access to the material are usually not allowed to borrow it and would need to use it on site in the repository's reading room. Keep in mind that the terms of such donations are often negotiable. The staff of the Kautz Family YMCA Archives, the repository for national YMCA records, is available to advise on appropriate repositories and assist with donation negotiations.

## 5 | HOW VOLUNTEERS CAN HELP

Whether your YMCA decides to keep its historical records in-house or donate them, identifying and collecting these materials can be a great opportunity to involve your volunteer base—and even expand it. Many people are excited about the idea of working with historical material. Volunteers can pitch in to box and label files and type up box or folder lists. Volunteers who have been associated with the organization for a long time may be able to help identify people or events in unlabeled photographs.