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Request or Protest: Serving Historic Rolled Petitions to the Public

ABSTRACT

Historically, most petitions arrive at the National Archives and Records Administration in a rolled format. This paper explored the origins of the rolled petitions and how best to preserve the rolls while safely serving them to researchers and making them available for exhibition. Sometimes the decision is made to change the original format in order to preserve the information. How do we make the philosophical decision to change the original format of a rolled petition, and how are other aspects of use balanced with conservation? In what situations does changing the original format preclude the use of a reproduction? When the use of a reproduction is preferred, how is it duplicated, and if digital scanning is chosen, how are the files named? This paper will describe how these questions were answered in the context of handling choices made regarding an early nineteenth-century Cherokee petition and various rolled petitions in the holdings at the National Archives.

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