Should I use library resources or an archives?

Which is a better resource to help you find the information you need, a library or an archives? This is an important question, because libraries and archives are different from one another in many ways. Here are some of the differences you can expect:

At a Library
A library contains published books and periodicals that usually can be checked out and replaced if lost or stolen. When using a library, you would:

- Use a card- or online-catalog that lists every item in the library's collections.
- Identify each item that you would like to use by its call number, which is a code used to categorize and organize items in libraries by subject.
- Walk directly to a shelf in the library and retrieve an item (self-service).

Questions relating to general historical or factual information, biographical information, and compiled, statistical information are usually better answered in a library.

At an Archives
An archives provides access to original records that were created and/or accumulated by a person, family, organization, or government institution in the course of its "life" or daily business. Because these records usually cannot be replaced, security and preservation of the records play an important role in making them available to the public. When using archives, you would:

- Refer to an online catalog or paper-based guides, or a combination of both, to begin your research; you would need to identify the name of the organization that created the records, and identify the unit of records that might contain the information that you seek.
- Request records and await their retrieval from secure areas called "stacks."
- Examine records grouped together, not handed to you as separate pieces of paper. When you request records from the stacks, they will come to you in boxes and folders that are ordered in a sequence that preserves the filing system implemented by the organization that created and used the records. In archives, it is as important to preserve and maintain the filing system of the records as it is to preserve and maintain the records themselves. If records are removed from their filing arrangement, it may be impossible to return the document to its proper place.
- Spend time, online or at the archives, learning about the records to locate the specific information that you seek. While some documents might be available through an archives’ web site, only a small fraction of the records are available online. The costs to prepare, produce, and maintain electronic versions of billions of paper documents are exceptionally high. Information about Collier Library Archives & Special Collections (including digitized materials) may be found at http://www.una.edu/library/about/collections/.

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