

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARCHIVIST

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Spring Issue



Interior, Denver Public Library. Photo courtesy Denver Public Library. For more information see page 5.

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SOCIETY OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARCHIVISTS

Notes from the President



The season is upon us again. Fire season, that is.

Last summer I received a call from the director of a small history museum in Walsenburg. She was rather frantic as the Spanish Peaks were blazing and the flames were rapidly approaching Walsenburg. She didn't know what to do, or who to call, so she called me because we work together occasionally and she knows we're located nearby.

I posted a message to the SRMA listserv asking if anybody might be able to help her. Within a half-hour she was receiving highly professional advice on disaster avoidance and recovery, and was calmed considerably. The fire approached the edge of town but never made it into Walsenburg. If it had she would have been prepared to deal with it.

Many of us have disaster preparedness plans in place, but when the catastrophe strikes it's very easy to panic and forget everything we know. Most of you are probably aware of this, but our SRMA website has great resources to guide you through a disastrous situation. If you haven't looked at them, I highly recommend that you go to <http://www.srmarchivists.org/> and become familiar with the Emergency Resources listed under the Resources menu item. Should disaster strike here at my place that's one of the first places I'll look for help. The SRMA resource is one reason that I offered to chair the Subcommittee on Disaster Preparedness and Recovery for the Regional Archives Association Consortium (RAAC). Every regional should have emergency resources like ours.

On a second note, I'm looking forward to seeing many of you again at our Spring Meeting on June 6 at the Denver Public Library Western History/Genealogy Department. It promises to be a great conference focusing on *digital preservation*.

And here's wishing you all a safe and disaster-free season!

Tim Hawkins, Executive Director
Bessemer Historical Society [Steelworks Museum and CF&I Archives]
tim.hawkins@steelworks.us

DMNS Archives Moving to Rocky Mountain Science Collections Center/ ~Aly Jabrocki, Denver Museum of Nature and Science

On February 14th, 2014, the new wing of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science opened to the public. The new wing includes both the Morgridge Family Exploration Center and Rocky Mountain Science Collections Center. The Archives and Image Archives will be the first department to move into the new Collections Center, which boasts 63,000 square feet, spread out over two underground levels.

Currently, the Archives and Image Archives have around 4,300 linear feet of documents and 700,000 images. The materials document the history of the museum and its people, including field journals, images from scientific expeditions, research notes, and publications.

Archives and Image Archives will have a 1,800 square foot workroom for staff and volunteers, including five scanning stations and an audio-visual digitization tower. Next door is a state-of-the-art storage room spanning 3,300 square feet, with compact shelving and controls for temperature and humidity. Documents and objects will occupy the main storage area, with prints and film being stored in either of our cold storage rooms. Negatives, slides and motion picture film will be bagged and stored in the freezer at -4 degrees (35% RH), while prints will be kept in the cool room at 45 degrees. Attached to the Archives Workshop, the museum's photographer, a member of the Archives Staff, will have a new studio and office.

Over the past five years, DMNS Collections Staff and Volunteers have been preparing for the move, which has included inventorying, assessing and rehousing collections. Almost all documents are now in acid free folders and boxes, while negatives and prints are in Mylar stored in acid free boxes and binders. Currently, the museum's collections are spread out all over the museum – mostly behind dioramas in cramped, dusty spaces. For the first time in the museum's history, collections will be consolidated into one easy-to-access area. Stay tuned for a SRMA tour in the months to follow!

Archival Certification: Validate your achievements, knowledge and skills

The 2014 Certified Archivist examination will be held August 13 in Phoenix (AZ), Albany (NY), Madison (WI), Tuscaloosa (AL) and Washington (DC) -- and wherever 5 or more candidates wish to take it.

The 2014 application and more information will be available January 1 at www.certifiedarchivists.org or contact the Academy of Certified Archivists (aca@caphill.com or 518-694-8471).

The application deadline is May 15, so don't wait!



Have You Renewed?

Please consider renewing your membership in the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists for 2014!

Memberships remain \$10 for students, \$15 for individuals and \$30 for organizations.

Renew now so you don't miss out on anything!

Renew your membership by visiting <http://www.srmarchivists.org>

Colorado Railroad Museum Maps Available Digitally

~Kathy McCardwell, Colorado Railroad Museum

The Richardson Library at the Colorado Railroad Museum (Golden, CO) is in a period of great change. We are instituting formal cataloging and the creation of finding aids, assessing the collection with reference to our newly-approved scope statement, and focusing on selected small collections for digitization. While these changes will clearly take years to accomplish, we have recently completed a first step, in the form of a small scanning and rehousing project, with the help of Colorado Historical Records Advisory Board (CHRAB) and Denver Public Library's (DPL) Western History & Genealogy Division. The collection in question is a group of 23 large maps, predominantly from 1880s-1890s, when the railroads were extensively expanding their reach within Colorado and neighboring states. The majority of these are hand-drawn, many in color and with decorative embellishments, such as calligraphy and sketches of landscape features. The majority of them are drawn on paper backed with linen which, while comparatively stable as a medium, has become embrittled with time. Given the large size of the items--some up to approximately 30 feet long--they are of necessity stored rolled. The size of the maps combined with the embrittled medium and delicate hand-applied pigments present a combination of preservation concerns that make public access to the physical maps inadvisable.

Given these concerns regarding preservation and access, we applied for financial support from the CHRAB re-grant program, which redistributes funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), National Archives and Records Administration, to small institutions. Initially, our plan was simply to catalog and rehouse the maps on cores, as we believed that digitization would be beyond our financial and technological means: some of these maps approach six feet in width, and our normal large-format scan provider can only accommodate originals up to three feet wide. Thanks to a suggestion from a CHRAB reviewer, we approached the staff at DPL's Western History & Genealogy Division, to inquire about their willingness to digitize for us the maps in question. The DPL staff was immensely helpful: they were willing to do this scanning for us, to host the scans on their digital maps page, and to create OCLC WorldCat records for them, in anticipation of us joining OCLC.

As of April 30, 2014, the maps are securely rehoused; their catalog information is at the point of being uploaded from its spreadsheet form to our museum catalog software, PastPerfect; and the majority of the images are already available on DPL's digital maps page (<http://digital.denverlibrary.org/cdm/maps/>; call number "Colorado Railroad Museum map"). The Richardson Library at the Colorado Railroad Museum would like to thank both CHRAB and DPL for their assistance to our small but ambitious organization! We are also very pleased to begin increasing the accessibility of these items, which we hope will be of great interest to the scholarly community, surveyors, local historians, and railroad enthusiasts.

Letter of Thanks

30 April 2014

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you, one and all, for your words of congratulation and best wishes on my retirement in August 2014. Twenty years of association with the archival community through the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists provided me with sound advice, encouragement, instruction and support that was translated into establishing the local history repository known today as the Douglas County History Research Center – Douglas County Libraries. The task could not have been accomplished without SRMA's presence in my professional life. Thank you!

As you go about your daily work, continue to advocate for saving and providing access to intellectual content of "the old stuff". The value of the past is how it informs the present and future decisions for life around us. Continue to find creative ways to allow the past to speak and tell its story.

May your professional life be full challenging inquiries that only an archive can answer,

Johanna Jaeggli Harden, Archivist, retired

Former SRMA Member-at-Large, Program Chair, Membership Chair

Spring SRMA Meeting & Scholarships

The Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists' spring meeting, to be held in Denver, Colorado, on June 6th, is approaching. With a theme of digital archives, the conference will be taking a look at born digital collections and digital preservation.

Visit <http://www.srmarchivists.org/meeting/2014-spring-meeting/> for more information. Please register before the deadline of May 23.

Also, three scholarships for members to attend are being offered. Full criteria and application form can be found on the Scholarships page of the SRMA website [<http://www.srmarchivists.org/about-us/scholarship/>]. To apply, please save, rename, and fill out the form and send it to Patty Rettig at patricia.rettig@colostate.edu with the subject line "SRMA Scholarship Application" by 5 pm on Friday, May 9th.

Please contact Patty Rettig with any questions.



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Volunteer Opportunities

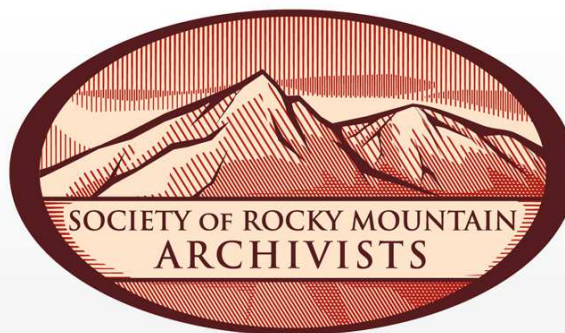
Are you looking for volunteers? Are you looking to volunteer your services?

If you have any archives related volunteer experiences coming up please submit them to Caroline Blackburn, SRMA electronic Resources Manager (<http://www.srmarchivists.org/ask-a-question-5/>) to be placed on the website.

Thinking About Advertising with *The Rocky Mountain Archivist*?

Here are our rates:

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- ◆ 1/8 page (1 1/2" wide x 4 1/2" tall) = \$50
- ◆ Business card (3 1/2" wide x 2" tall) = \$50



Social Justice and Diversity

Editor's Note: Do you wonder what are the newest trends and theories archival students study? University of Denver students have submitted their recent studies to the newsletter, their instructor Jamie Seemiller provides further information:

During the fall quarter (2013-2014 academic year), Library and Information Science students in my Archives Appraisal (LIS4801) class at the University of Denver were asked to write a final paper about appraisal theory and practice. The papers were a way for students to further explore a topic discussed in class and also offered a unique opportunity for the students to partner with SRMA and share their research. The papers review appraisal theory and practice as well as ask some fundamental questions about how, why and what we collect in archives. The four themes presented in these papers are: why and what do we collect; social justice and diversity; format and subject appraisal and digital preservation and deaccessioning. Each newsletter during 2014 will feature a theme with two student articles.

Bertram Foster

The Seeds of Hatred: It Is What It Is

I am a collector to my heart. I collect music. Doesn't matter the type of media or, at times, the condition of the media it's in, if it involves what I consider good music, I will collect it. Reel to reel, cassettes, and eight-tracks are just as coveted and beloved as vinyl. My problem is storage. I am running out of space to store my stuff, my music. Now I will be honest here and declare that I resent my wife's monopoly of available storage space within our dwelling. Between her military documents, awards, and correspondence and our eldest daughter's "I'll die if I can't keep everything I have made, drawn, and sculpted over the past 15 years", there's barely enough floor space in the corner of the utility room in our basement for me to properly care for and store my profound eclectic collection of recorded sound. Those house-dwelling heartless harpies are making me consider the unthinkable; getting rid of some of my music! Oh, they subtly suggest from time to time how my outlook on life would improve and bring peace and harmony to mankind if only I would unburden my lot by ridding my world of "that vinyl albatross". Yea, right...about as subtle as a brick through a window. Well of course I thought the same thing any archivist worth their salt would think; they must be out of their blankty-blank minds! Do they really expect me to part with the first pressing of Miles Davis Bitches' Brew and out of print jams like George Clinton's instrumental 'Hey, Good Looking'? Well, after much prayer and fasting, I still speak to them. Music is in my blood and a day without it is like a sunny day without someone you love to share it with. It satiates a need within me that my wife and daughters cannot understand. A collection, be it private, public, personal, or indifferent, must *do something* for the collector as well as its targeted audience (In my case, one and the same). What I mean is every resource within a collection must hold some value esteemed by its collector. By fulfilling a mission, satisfying a desire, or meeting a want or a need, a collection must deliver some intangible remuneration in order of maintaining its usefulness. Now in the case of music, and me here are the causes and effects: Rock does exactly that, Rocks, and with rock, I rock out. Blues, Country and Folk music are intended to tell a story by identifying with a circumstance or emotion. Cool, I can get with that too. What Brother can't identify with the Blues? Jazz is about demonstrating artistry of the voice (like Opera) or an instrument. Discovering new musical frontiers by improvisation while composing musical masterpieces is the mission and focus of Jazz. Please see Al Jarreau, Winton Marsalis, and the aforementioned Miles Davis. I rap rhapsodic. Let me continue. R&B is the Groove of Life (both positive and negative), the up-swings, setbacks, hopes, disappointments, and joys of all people. R&B's global appeal denotes the universal messages found within the genre. Funk, oh my. How do I describe what Funk, and I mean **P Funk**, means to me. Here goes. P Funk is great Soul singing expertly combined with instrumental masters (Bernie Worrell, William "Bootsy" Collins, Maceo Parker, etc.) up-tempo by ten. P Funk is a badass groove, a "go-on with your bad-self" attitude, nice clothes that fit, and a beat that just won't quit. Succinctly put, P Funk is music that makes you want to shake your booty, hard and long. It is what it is, **Pure Funk**. Well, that is what my collection does for me. I jam, dream, romance, mobilize, decompress, cry, and identify with the words and the rhythm. It does that for me. Well, these intrinsic values got me to thinking about the peculiar collections of others and the need(s) they meet. It's one such collection I would like to talk about.

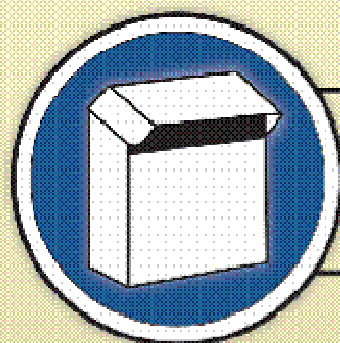
Foster and student papers continued from page 6...

A few weeks past, I happen upon Ferris State University's Jim Crow Museum. Its mission is to use objects of intolerance to teach tolerance and promote social justice. As I perused the pages of the Jim Crow website, I came across the museum founder's, Dr. David Pilgrim, article *The Garbage Man: Why I Collect Racist Objects*. Dr. Pilgrim opens his heart, indeed his soul to readers and shares the personal experiences that inspired the museum. His awareness of racist relics began at the age of 12 or 13 in Mobile, Alabama where he purchased a ceramic Mammy saltshaker from a five and dime. Upon purchase, young David walked out the store and immediately threw the shaker to the ground shattering it. He states his response wasn't a political or protest move, simply he thought it was ugly and hated it. To have the race you are identified with publicly defamed, devalued, and dehumanized daily is hurtful to the adults. But to scar the heart of child in this way is cruelty beyond evil. The act did not go unnoticed by the white store clerk and he gave young Pilgrim an earful about destroying "good" merchandise. Later on in 1988, an adult David came across another racist remnant. It was a 1916 magazine advertisement depicting a little black baby boy suckling on a hose from an inkbottle with the caption that read "Nigger Milk". He bought the print from the antique store and had another verbal issue with the sales clerk. The clerk wrote "Black Print" on the sales invoice to which David took exception. "If you're going to sell it, call it by its name" he told the clerk. She refused. They argued. He brought the print anyway and decided it would be his last diatribe with store clerks and dealers. He will just make his purchases and leave. As offensive as these items mentioned were to David then and would be to many now, they are by no means the most odious of racial caricatures crafted to exist. This is where the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia fulfills its mission; to use objects of intolerance to teach tolerance and promote social justice. There are over 9,000 objects ranging from fishing lures, dolls, board games, to prints, postcards, and T-shirts all depicting African Americans in stereotypes or encouraging violence toward them. The collection includes items that were made over a hundred years ago and items made as recent as this year. One T-shirt takes its impetus from the '08 presidential election. The shirt reads "Obama 08" along with cartoon monkey holding a banana. Another resource is a mouse pad that depicts a Klu Klux Klansman in full regalia chasing an Obama caricature with the caption "Run Obama Run". Yes that's the here and the now. And it is now what was then, seeds of hatred sown to inflict as much hurt as possible.

It "is all about teaching, not a shrine to racism," Dr. Pilgrim states on the website. And the lessons taught at Jim Crow Museum are hard instructions for many visitors to swallow. Some leave angry, offended, frustrated, or just deeply troubled and sad. How can one be of the human race and not be affected? Every item, every image inundates one demeaning and disgraceful image that affirms their creators as evil-personified. Dr. Pilgrim understands the troubling emotion his collection elicits but believes the value these artifacts add in the teaching of this country's racial history between Whites and African Americans and their potential to promote healing dialogue far exceeds the dismay and anger they stimulate. As Dr. Pilgrim put it, his collection consists of items that "should either be in a garbage can or a museum." His collection helps him to heal from the wounds inflicted by the very items. Each display and the subsequent discussion represent an emotional cathartic lancing of a racist boil embedded in our collective consciousness. This is what his collection does for him. Painful? Yes. Harmful? Coming from the intent to impart awareness, knowledge and wisdom, no. Needful? Most definitely!

This review and report of the Jim Crow Museum website has been very difficult for me to finish. Many times I have sat to read Dr. Pilgrim's "The Garbage Man: Why I Collect Racist Objects" only to find myself rising from my desk's chair sadden. You see, I was raise less than sixty miles from that 5 and dime store in Mobile, Alabama and had an experience not unlike young David Pilgrim experience a while ago. A year before my wife's tour of duty, we drove from our hometown of Pensacola, Florida to my grandparents' house in Furman, AL. We decided to take state Highway 21 from Atmore to Oakhill and then into Furman. In Oak Hill, we stopped at a little roadside convenience store for food and gas. My wife noticed a brass bed and considered buying it (Thank God she changed her mind!). Anyway, I noticed a rotating display of tin signs for sale displaying all manner of catch phrases of the time. On one of these signs were a family, a black man, woman, and I think a little girl. The smiling man was adoringly holding a little bundled baby. The caption over the happy family read "A new coon in town". I don't remember what my initial reaction was but I remember telling myself that not to raise hell, it's Alabama, it's the country. Just rednecks and crackers in a little piss-bucket place. But it took all I had in me to take a trembling step away from that display and not pick it up throw it at the sales clerk who, amazingly enough was an African American young lady. . The moment I turned my head away from the display, the sale clerk raised her eyes from the customer and saw what I guess a wounded expression on my face. Then I noticed the store was crammed full of demeaning displays of African Americans. As I headed for the doorway, I noticed the sales clerk's focus was still on me. Maybe she wanted me to bring attention to the visceral offal she had to endure daily by saying something to the owner who was currently engaged in a price-bargaining duel with my wife.

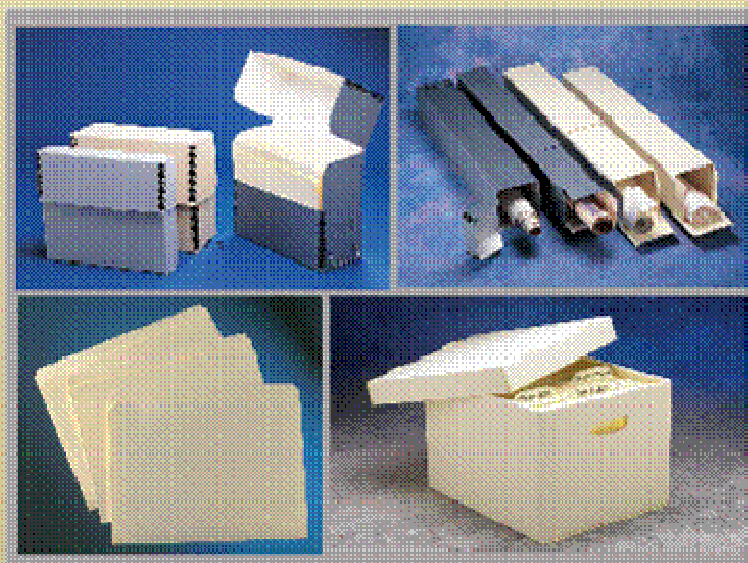
Foster and student papers continued on page 9...



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Foster and student papers continued from page 7...

Well, that was good enough for the storeowner. I knew for sure that was a battle in my wife's favor. But as I approached the counter and gave the clerk a look that said, Really? How in the world can you, My Sister, put up with this! Then I noticed the look on her face. "Please", it said to me, "I know. I know but it is all the job I have." Then it dawned on me; outside of this store, there weren't any other place of business and the nearest of any kind was probably about thirteen miles away. And in rural Alabama, that is a heck of a long way. Those are country miles. For my Sister, Oak Hill may have been all she had. I just turned back to her and said "God bless you Sister." She smiled a thank you to me in relief.

Reference

Pilgrim, D. (2005, February). The Garbage Man: Why I Collect Racist Objects. *Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia*. Retrieved November 4, 2013, from <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/jimcrow/collect/>

Jen LaBarbera

Social Justice In The Archives: A Reflexive Approach To Appraisal and Collection Development

Introduction

Theoretically, archives are meant to be unquestionably objective sites of historic fact, and archivists are meant to be the neutral keepers of the evidence of these historical facts. Realistically, though, archives are construction sites of the story of history, and archivists are actively shaping that cultural story through their selection and appraisal decisions. Halberstam (2003) writes that "the archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory." Mbembe (2002) gives a more expansive explanation of the archive, stating that archives are "primarily the product of judgment, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded. The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged "unarchivable." The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status." (p. 20)

Given this reality of the archive as a constructive site of history, memory, and discrimination/privilege, archivists need to adopt a more reflexive / self-aware approach to appraisal and collection development - that is, to adopt a social justice framework in their approach to selection, appraisal, and acquisition of archival materials.

In this paper, I will provide a brief history of social justice in archival discourses and a definition for an archival social justice framework, which could be applicable to most archival institutions, followed by potential challenges and strategies for traditional and/or mainstream archival institutions.

History of social justice in archival discourse

Most archivists trace the roots of the impetus to build more inclusive collections to Howard Zinn's address at the 1970 Society of American Archivists (SAA) annual meeting. (Keough, 2002) Zinn (1977) later went on to publish an article, noting the power that archives have over the stories of history, the farce of the "neutrality" of the archivist, and urging archivists to "compile a whole new world of documentary material, about the lives, desires, needs, of ordinary people." (p. 25)

Howard Zinn's entreaty to archivists to change their approach to documenting history came at the same time as the rise of the "new social history" of the 1960s and 1970s, which went hand in hand with the political and social upheaval of that era. "The ascent of the new social history cannot be understood outside the social and political context of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The civil rights, students and women's liberation movements, and Vietnam war protests challenged traditional social and political power structures in the US. These struggles for social justice asserted the value of people at all levels of society, a belief reflected in social historians' desire to produce histories from the bottom up." (Van Wingen and Bass, 2008, p. 578) This new social history movement extended to all corners of the history professions, as well; Mason and Zanish-Belcher (2007) explain how the influence of social history changed the field of women's history in the 1970s and 1980s: "No longer were historians interested solely in 'great' women - those active and prominent in the public sphere. Writing history 'from the bottom up,' social historians brought to the foreground groups that had previously been ignored or forgotten by historians." (p. 285)

LaBarbera and Student papers continued from page 9 . . .

In 1974, Gerald Ham, then president of SAA, addressed the group at an annual meeting, urging archivists to expand their collecting scopes beyond the elite and powerful (read: primarily white, male, wealthy) to document the “broad spectrum” of society. (Ham, 1975) He warned that by continuing to document only the kinds of materials and subjects that had traditionally made up archival collections, archivists risked becoming “weathervanes moved by the changing winds of historiography.” - that is, that archivists should “transcend” their biases or risk documenting only the material that followed historic and political trends. This, however, assumes archival neutrality, which is a questionable assumption. All archivists and historians unavoidably bring their own biases to their work, and while objectivity may be an achievable professional standard, objectivity is distinct from neutrality. (Jimerson, 2007)

About ten years after Ham’s address, Helen Samuels (1986) proposed a documentation strategy approach to archival appraisal and selection. Among other things, this approach would theoretically help archives to collect materials that represented the “broad spectrum” of society that Gerald Ham encouraged in 1974. Since then, archivists have continued to work toward the best approach to creating more diverse collections. More recently, the conversation has shifted from “diversity” in the archives to a more explicit dedication to social justice in the archives.

Integral to understanding how social justice ideals play into archival institutions is an acknowledgment of both the power of the archivists’ position in selecting history and their institutions’ role in writing history. A number of articles have provided a foundation for this understanding of archives as sites of power; for example, in Schwartz and Cook’s (2002) article about archives and power, they explain that archives, as repositories/institutions, have power over the writing of history (the “shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity”) and that archivists, as record-keepers, have power over the records that shape these histories, memories, and identities. The choices that archivists make during selection and appraisal automatically confer privilege on the material selected. This privileged material then becomes the primary source material that reflects our history.

Defining social justice in the archival context

In the articles that have been written about diversifying the archival record in the past few decades (Duff, et al, 2012; Dunbar, 2006; Gilliland, 2011), authors have given a variety of definitions for social justice in the archives. SAA’s statement on diversity (2010) gives some direction toward a definition of social justice when it states that “the relevance of archives to society and the completeness of the documentary record hinge on the profession’s success in ensuring that its members, *the holdings that they collect and manage*, and the users that they serve reflect the diversity of society as a whole.” (emphasis added) A more comprehensive definition of social justice in the archives would be complex and extensive; for the purposes of this article, I’ll propose a brief working definition gleaned from a variety of articles on the topic: applying social justice principles to archives means working toward a more representative, diversified record of the past while questioning the construction of history based on existing/historic power structures. In other words, social justice in the archives means “filling in the gaps” of archival collections while acknowledging and questioning the power inherent in the selection of archival materials.

According to Duff, et al (2012), archives that operate in an archival social justice framework:

- Proactively enable participation in and access to the archive;
- Are mindful of the exclusions, absences, and silences in the archives and consider how these gaps can be remedied, including consideration of additional cultural mnemonics;
- Understand how archives can facilitate restorative-reparative-transitional justice through protection, supplementation to and promotion of the record; and
- Resist exclusions and marginalizations from archival institutions. (p. 330)

These four key aspects of an archival framework for social justice cover the full spectrum of an archive’s functions, from selection of materials to arrangement and description of the collections to access to the archive itself. These four aspects provide a foundation for applying social justice principles to archival practice.

LaBarbera and student papers continued from page 10 . . .

Contributing to the work of defining and discussing social justice in the archives, Dunbar (2006) has offered an archival discourse that incorporates critical race theory. Critical race theory requires a new perspective; rather than focusing on the “otherness” of people of color and other marginalized or disempowered groups, it flips the focus, “position[ing] whiteness as the subject of investigation, with the normative position and privileged values belonging to or being shared with people and cultures of color.” (p. 113) Applying critical race theory to archival discourse and practice “create[s] frameworks to clearly identify, define, and analyze oppression and how it operates at various individual, cultural, and institutional levels.” (Duff, et al, 2012, p. 329) A critical race theory lens could identify biases in the archival discourse, and could make space for voices and materials of marginalized and underrepresented groups in archives. Critical race theory’s place in archival practice and discourse could play out in both internal and external ways, affecting both the reflexivity of the individual archivist and the full spectrum of archival functions.

Challenges for traditional / mainstream archives

Applying these principles to all archives, however, is not necessarily an easy task. There are a number of challenges that traditional or mainstream archival institutions may face in attempting to apply a social justice framework to their appraisal and selection practices.

First, implementing a documentation strategy that reflects the principles of critical race theory and social justice requires reflexivity on the part of the archivist. That is, it requires reflection on the privileges and biases of the individual archivist. Adopting critical race theory principles into an individual’s archival practice requires one to reconsider the very foundations of historiography and the frameworks of standard social structures. (Dunbar, 2006)

Second, adding an explicit commitment to inclusivity or social justice to a collection scope or collection development policy may be difficult. For some institutions, the process for amending or changing these policies may be complicated, overly bureaucratic, and/or time-consuming. Garnering support and commitment from all staff members, including - especially - the archives staff who oversee collection policies, may also be a challenge for some archives.

Third, building inclusive collections that have a social justice framework relies on building trust, connections, and relationships with underrepresented communities. Mason and Zanish-Belcher (2007) explain that “It is easier to acquire the papers of educated women of color, than poor, less formally educated women of any race or ethnicity. Educated people not only create more written records but are more comfortable with libraries and with institutions of higher learning and thus more open to donating their papers to an archival repository.” (p. 288) These groups are generally underrepresented in our social history/histories; because these groups have been disempowered, they have been excluded from the histories that are largely written by those in power. Depositing materials in an institution such as an archival repository that has historically been party to that exclusion would require a conscious and intentional trust- and relationship-building effort between an archive and potential donors. It is also important to note that in the absence of a traditional structure of archival-based record-keeping, many of these communities have created their own structures for retaining cultural memory. (Gibbs, 2012) An archival approach to collecting materials from these communities may need to take these existing archival and documentation structures into account.

A last and related challenge that may arise when collecting materials from these communities is structural in nature. Archives are, for the most part, document-based repositories; the materials most often selected are papers and manuscripts. Many of these underrepresented communities may not prioritize document-based materials, and may have other ways of documenting community memory. Spencer (2007) explained that “A strong oral tradition in the black community, combined with the reluctance of black women to donate their papers to mainstream manuscript repositories due to concerns over perceptions and a somewhat adversarial relationship, resulted in a scarcity of documentation.” (p. 317) Archivists will have to answer the question of how to best record and reflect a donor’s or community’s story when traditionally collected materials (letters, manuscripts, papers, etc) are less available.

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Strategies for traditional / mainstream archives

One approach that many archivists have taken in the past few decades has been an increased willingness to incorporate oral history projects into archival collections. Mason and Zanish-Belcher (2007) stated that “oral history is one method of enhancing the historical record for underdocumented groups. It is especially critical for groups that do not create written records.” (p. 290) One example of an archive that has employed an alternative method to recording histories of an underrepresented group is the Schlesinger Library, part of the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University. Between 1976 and 1981, the Black Women’s Oral History Project interviewed seventy-two African American women who had made “significant contributions to American society in the first half of the twentieth century.” These oral histories are fully transcribed, and most of the transcripts and audio files have been digitized and are available for researchers online. (Schlesinger Library, 2013)

Other approaches that archivists may take are methods of outreach to specific communities, with the goal of building trust and relationships, rather than acquisition of materials. Gibbs (2012), cautioned: “Incorporating diversity into the historical record does not mean blindly accessioning records related to a specific race or ethnicity. Just as we recognize and encourage divergence in mainstream archives that document a broad range of professional fields and perspectives, we must see ethnic communities as independent, complex social groups instead of presuming that our diversity agenda is in alignment with minority documentary needs and histories simply because it addresses the issue of diversity.” (p. 203)

Archivists from traditional archival institutions (e.g. government, public, academic) may also consider working with existing community archives and community archivists. Wakimoto et. al. (2013) makes an important distinction in makes an important distinction in their recommendations for working with community archives; rather than considering the curators of community archives as amateurs or unprofessional archivists, professional archivists should consider these community archives and community archivists as subject specialists and experts in these subject areas.

A number of archives have explicitly added statements into their collection scopes or mission statements that underscore their commitment to archival social justice. For example, the mission statement of the Iowa Women’s Archives at the University of Iowa (2013) reads: “The Archives fulfills its mission by collecting and making available primary sources about the history of Iowa women from all walks of life. It undertakes a robust outreach program to gather and preserve the history of groups underrepresented in archives. Through its programs and online resources, the Iowa Women’s Archives serves a broad audience ranging from students and scholars to the general public.” (emphasis added) The Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Library (MARBL) at Emory University has made public statements about launching a “concerted effort to expand its collection of historically significant lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) materials, particularly as they relate to Atlanta, its history, and its response to the AIDS crisis.” (2013) Making explicit statements about an institutional commitment to collecting materials that fill in the gaps of history and represent underrepresented groups is an important element of social justice in the archives.

On a more theoretical level, Sturgeon (1996) suggests that archivists shift their theoretical approach to filling in the gaps in their collections from a “documentation strategy” approach to a “documentation advocacy” approach. This kind of approach to collection development would require archivists to intentionally and actively attempt to document the lives of individuals and groups who may not be well represented in a given archival collection. This theoretical approach would also require archivists to abandon ideas of strict neutrality and adopt a documentation strategy and collection policy that centers social justice and inclusivity. Sturgeon gives as an example the immense archival potential of environmental justice groups working in the Bay Area who are fighting against environmental racism; adopting a policy of “documentation advocacy” and actively engaging with these groups as archivists, he argues, would enable archival institutions to fill in the gaps in their collections regarding both racial and issue diversity.

A recurring theme of much literature profiling archives that have successfully begun to incorporate more diverse collections is that of the activist archivist. Taking on the role of an activist archivist requires an active approach to creating connections with communities and community groups and requires the archivist to be reflective in their archival practice, considering their own privileges and contexts in their processes of selection, acquisition, description, and arrangement. Reflective archivists acting as activists, much of this literature claims, will result in more inclusive collections that reflect a wider variety of communities (Wakimoto et al, 2013; Campbell and Stevens, 2010).

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Conclusion

Many archivists have been working for the past four decades to enhance collections to better reflect the diversity of our history, slowly shifting the focus from “apolitical neutrality” to a more proactive social justice approach (Gibbs, 2012). Archives have always been sites of power, constructing and reconstructing the stories of history. As Mark Greene (2003) explains it, archives are about “providing the building blocks and tools for assembling and interpreting the past -- history and/or memory.” (p. 100) Without a social justice approach that recognizes social power structures and the inherent power in archival selection, those building blocks will only tell the story of the powerful and the elite. As archivists, it is our duty to provide accurate primary evidence of history; as archivists, it is our duty to take steps toward ensuring that our representations of history are not just telling the stories of those in power. The building blocks of history that we collect, then, need to also include the voices of the marginalized and the underrepresented.

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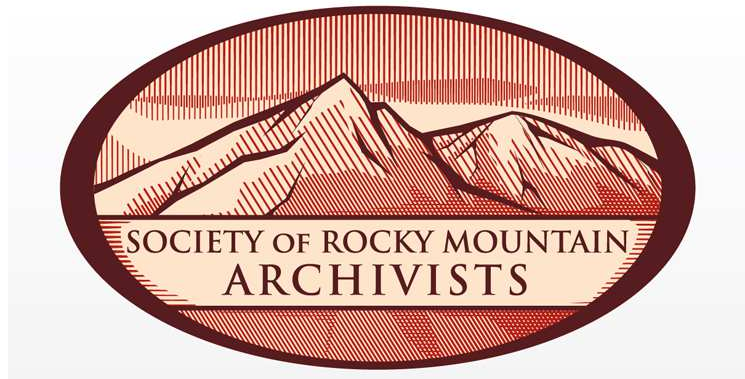
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