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Notes from the President

Happy New Year! I hope you had an enjoyable holiday season. The Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists (SRMA) is ready for a productive and exciting New Year. SRMA is looking forward to hosting the 2015 Western Roundup- “Archives in the West” in Denver May 27-30, 2015. I hope that many of our SRMA members will be able to join colleagues from the Western region in Denver for the conference. The 2015 Western Roundup Program and Local Arrangements committees have been working diligently to develop an outstanding conference program for Western Round-up 2015 that you will not want to miss. Western Roundup is a joint conference of the Conference of Inter-Mountain Archivists (CIMA), Northwest Archivists (NWA), Society of California Archivists (SCA), and Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists (SRMA). Register now at http://www.srmarchivists.org/meeting/2015-western-roundup/

To book your hotel room at the conference rate visit: http://www.srmarchivists.org/meeting/2015-western-roundup/how-to-book-a-room-for-embassy-suites/

Western Roundup is pretty much the focus these days amongst SRMA board members, but the board is actively planning other projects. Lindsay Schettler, Preservation Member-at-Large, is working with the SRMA board to plan Archives month and preservation events. If you have ideas for events, please contact me and I will pass them on to board members working on programs and activities.

Also, save the date for this year’s Colleague Connection at the University of Denver on Thursday April 16 at 5:00 p.m. Colleague Connection is proud to present an emerging hot topic issue with many varied implications for information professionals. But What If They Print THAT? The Ethical Implications of User-Created Content presented by Martin Garnar, Reference Services Librarian and Professor of Library Science, Dayton Memorial Library at Regis University. It is sure to be an interesting program and a great event to network with colleagues from the library profession.

Finally it is that time of year when The Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists is in search of excellence and offers a variety of opportunities for professional recognition and financial assistance through the naming of Fellows, an awards competition, and scholarships. Nominate a deserving colleague – or yourself – by Feb. 28! For details, http://www2.archivists.org/recognition.

Thanks for your support of SRMA and see you in Denver in May!

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Collaborative appraisal methods and underrepresented populations in collections

By Calli Force
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“Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.”
George Orwell, 1984

Introduction

The appraisal theory presented to you here is one of active participation and cultural immersion in which archivists must get closely acquainted with activist groups and marginalized members of society and represent their movement in archival collections from the beginning rather than retroactively. It is about establishing provenance alongside the creator rather than by speculation informed by content and context. This kind of archival appraisal makes some professionals uncomfortable, and I argue that discomfort is a good thing. We do not often see close relationships between archivists and members from NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), for example, gathering material that will undoubtedly prove useful to posterity and researchers interested in the formation and inception of much of the legislation that will preside in the future. History books are ever more often white washing or censoring material, and archival institutions will most likely be the last bastions of truth, or at least we hope they will.

Appraisal methods should reflect institutional missions indeed, but not before those missions themselves have been updated to ensure accurate portrayals of the facility’s goals; if those goals are aligned with the continued suppression of historical facts, then I claim the trained archival professionals should
use their authority to override discriminatory efforts that marginalize activist bodies – discriminatory in the way of shaping, or perhaps more appropriately miss-shaping, the collective memory. There is a noticeable power in archival work, and “this power gives those who determine what records will be preserved for future generations a significant degree of influence.

Archivists must embrace this power, rather than continuing to deny its existence” (Jimerson, R. 2007, p. 254). Use this power to both our and our constituents’ advantage rather than hogging it all for ourselves. Preserving the cultural heritage of a civilization is an awesome responsibility that often intimidates and sometimes scares those not included in the process of archival work. It is up to us, the professionals, to quell these fears not just in our policies but in our everyday practices, beginning with appraisal.

Archival Identity & Cultural Perspective

Implementing more intense community outreach programs to get activist groups and other community organizations to play an active part in creating their culture’s collective memory is a crucial step in the right direction for archival appraisal. In order for repositories to house collections that speak to and about the people who create, use, and influence the archives is one thing; to accomplish this goal accurately and honestly is the real challenge. Actively participating with underrepresented populations to ensure their presence in archival histories is key to forming successful appraisal practices. John Ridener in his work From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory (2009) posited that “the archive has deemed groups of records important enough to preserve in order to keep and organize the action taken by the organization” (p. 1); this act of deeming what is and is not acceptable to add to a collection is what lends to the stigma that follows those working in the archival profession. We make conscious decisions in our selection processes, which in turn creates “the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in archival theory” and in our institutions (Ridner, 2009, p. 4). The danger in what some may argue is an inability to separate ourselves from our personal biases has far-reaching cultural implications, but the good news is that with well-developed inclusive appraisal methods, we can easily conquer this longstanding issue.

Terry Baxter wrote about these cultural issues from an activist perspective regarding the stereotypes that face librarians and other information professionals, a perspective that I believe is integral to this particular appraisal theory: “Archivists coming into the profession today are overwhelmingly millennial women with master’s degrees in library information science. While there is no definitive correlation between these demographics and views of archivists, it seems reasonable to infer the higher levels of education and professionalization at a younger age could relate to the archivists’ increasing desire to define themselves and not just accept the outside stereotypes” (2014, p.133).

One could also infer that this newly defined archival self reflects the recent pushes for archivists to pursue collections that reflect a truer representation of the human record than ever before. Many marginalized populations – women, members of the LGBTQ community, immigrants, disabled people, and racially discriminated people – in collections has ignited a trend of radical or activist archives.
My argument is that the terminology “activist” or “radical” archives is problematic because they are, simply, archives. Attaching these kinds of labels while defining their cause may, unfortunately, hinder their efforts to achieve legitimacy. There is too much effort wasted on legitimizing collections that should not have to be defended in the first place and not enough effort on embracing what simply is: a true reflection of our histories. In defining ourselves as individuals in the archival world, against stereotypical representations and perceptions of whom or what we should be, we are, in turn, shaping the collective memory of our culture, and I think that is a good thing – the right thing. Furthermore, the “widening diversity on university campuses and in the archival profession has been reflected in the diversity of records, types of archival institutions and archivists themselves” (Ridener, 2009, p. 102). Defining not only ourselves as professionals but also our collections in opposition to hypocrisy and outdated imperialistic values is crucial to our work if memory institutions are to remain relevant.

**Social Justice in Archival Appraisal**

Our policies need to reflect these societal ebb and flows in order to accurately and justifiably represent a depiction of the human record. How can an institution actively participate with its community if its policies and procedures are decades old? Active re-evaluation of institutional missions are key to implementing up-to-date appraisal operations, especially if an archives claims to represent its community. People evolve, society changes, and so must our professional goals reflect these changes. Perpetuating a myth – archivists are the great keepers of secrets – is not a good thing; archivists must work against the status-quo in order to survive in their profession, to generate interest in what we do: preserve truths, not secrets. While maintaining neutrality in our efforts to form usable, relevant, well-rounded collections is ultimately important, embracing our humanity is arguably even more so. Denying the existence of certain people by not representing them in our collections is not in any way upholding impartiality. Apathy is not the answer to avoiding biases, as Baxter illustrated by sharing the struggle of early generation queer activists: “in the absence of recognizable efforts from mainstream historians and archives, communities took on this responsibility themselves. [...] Early queer activists recognized that their community heritage and community perspectives on its interpretation needed to be preserved” (2014, p. 137). How can we fail ourselves so completely as to leave such important work to those who are not professionals, to those untrained in archival practices simply because we refuse to recognize their personal but also very public and political struggle as not one relating to the human experience? If we make claims that we and only we are the ones meant to carry out this kind of work, then we need to be able to back up that stance with our institutional missions. We need to bolster our efforts to become all-inclusive, not just semi-representational because otherwise what is the point? What kind of service are we providing as trained information professionals by neglecting entire communities in our collections while openly accepting others? The message our institutional practices send to posterity is one of conscious discrimination is we refuse to actively collaborate with those who feel underrepresented.

**Have you Renewed?**

Please consider renewing your membership in the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists for 2015! 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 www.srmarchivists.org.
When it comes to public and private institutions that uphold the values of and support a democratized and informed society, we must also consider that “technological innovation, especially widespread use of computers, has created an expectation of democratic recordkeeping and expanded horizons for cultural memory” (Ridener, 2009, p. 1). It is true that social media especially has played a major role in the democratization of multiple organizations - archives and museums included. The masses now have endless platforms from which to express their ideas and opinions and have the potential to garner support for real causes and political movements. Social media has made it nearly impossible for organizations and political figureheads alike to not hold themselves publicly accountable for their actions. This form of expression has most definitely helped shape our cultural landscape. How archivists choose to select material for their collections is indeed influenced by technological innovations like social media in numerous ways. Libraries, museums, archives, and other information institutions have Pinterest, Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr accounts, among other sites, in addition to extensive online digital collections, in order to stay relevant and operate within the public sphere. How fitting it would be, then, for our appraisal methodologies to be just as transparent and collaborative as our digital presence?

As Ridener pointed out, we are seeing a shift in the archival paradigm from the predominantly flat how-to manuals to the changing demographic of professionals and now a conflation of archival theory and practice. It would seem professionals are recognizing the seemingly widening gap between discourse and application. As time progresses, archival appraisal theorists have graduated from the archaic, nonsensical claims of Jenkinsonian keeper mentality to more practical selection methods that focus on user-centric appraisal theory and proactive development of new collections, like collaborating with activist groups from the LGBTQ community or women’s rights legislative groups as creators of valuable material. It could be inferred that Richard J. Cox argued for this kind of collaborative effort when he discussed how “appraising records, if done correctly (or it done at all) ought to get archives as close as they can come to the pulse of society (and the organizations archivists were for)” (2011, p. 247). In order for archives to achieve accountability in both policy and practice is to ensure broader narratives. Getting closer to this societal pulse, as it were, requires what I have been arguing for all along: close relationships and collaborative efforts with community members and organizations during the selection process. Getting people involved with community archives is an honest way to connect people to our collective histories and relinquish some of the power we seem to hold in shaping these histories. We still have an obligation to uphold our professional reputation, but we can include the public in our decision-making processes in a way that dissolves the boundary between us and them. The stigma that often follows archival professionals as unreasonably powerful controllers of past, present, and, in turn, future can be eliminated with more efforts focused on user needs.

**Re-evaluating Administrative Influence**

Throughout much of the literature on the topic and in my very brief experience in the
archival world, it is suggested time and time again that “records comprise mere ‘archival slivers’ of the events and processes that they are supposed to embody and reveal” (R. Punzalan, 2009, p. 198). Let us stop with the administrative bodies higher in the institutional food chain handing down collections with no real relevance or connection to the other records simply because these donations carry with them some kind of ulterior motive. Archives are not personal safe houses for administrative leaders to use as collateral for establishing relationships with institutional bureaucracies. This trend of nonarchival professionals giving orders to their archivists creates an ugly ethical dilemma, one that sends a negative message to our users and our communities. We are basically portraying to the general public how we define the importance of our records based on their exploitive value, not their historical value. Of course archives have an obligation to their institutional missions, especially those within larger establishments like universities, for example; however, even this accepted practice of simply shoving records in the faces of archivists with no active involvement in the selection process on the part of the archivist(s) seems to be incongruous with the overarching mission of all archives as impartial repositories. The collaborative selection process of which I write should most definitely include a more clearly established line between how much control over appraisal nonarchival administrative bodies have. The ultimate goal would be to have these administrative members be a part of the selection process in a more highly regulated way. They must be more familiarly acquainted with both the information professionals and the archives’ mission and collection in order to make executive decisions about record acquisitions. It could be beneficial for administrators to sit in on donor meetings and even to take an active part of the accession process with the archivist in charge of acquiring material, at least within a documentation strategy basis. There needs to be a clear separation of archival privilege, as it were, and still be an open communicative collaboration among professionals working within the same institution. We are not simply record keepers involuntarily oblivious to content and context when it comes to abiding by administrative requests, or at least we should not be. This relationship needs to be solidly aligned with archival missions and just as in touch with community representation as the archives itself. Put the collective memory before petty file-keeping needs.

Conclusion

Selection is a societal requirement, one that should actively involve representatives from both inside and outside the archives. The shift from evidentiary repositories to archives as narrative suggests a conscious, co-creative effort, not just a curatorial one. The integration of both memory and evidence as parts of a collective whole in archival collections is a trend worthy of honest pursuit. As Cox claimed, and I agree, archives are not meant to make people feel good but to tell the accurate
story of a society (2011). In order to transcend the myth of the secret-keepers, to dispel the anxieties about power-hungry archivists, to strengthen our reputations as impartial shapers of the collective memory, we must focus our selection process on the new, unfolding pages of history as they are written. We must avoid retrospectively seeking the leftover bits and pieces later down the line when we suddenly recognize – or worse, when we are told – that there are gaps on our shelves that should be filled in with records about crucial historical movements once ignited by community members who no longer exist to tell their stories.

References


Membership Information & Benefits

SRMA membership is drawn from regular and volunteer staff of archives, historical societies, museums, businesses, government agencies, libraries, colleges and universities, religious institutions and other persons who are concerned with the identification and care of information that documents the history of our region. Individual membership is open to any interested person. Institutional memberships are welcome and encouraged.

SRMA membership facilitates the exchange of archival knowledge and assistance. It advances the interests of individual archivists and of the archival profession. Members automatically receive the SRMA newsletter, membership directory, regional archives directory, and informational materials. The Society also has and editorial board for the publication of occasional papers. We invite you to complete the membership application form located on the SRMA website to enhance your personal career development and to further the cause of the archival profession in the Rocky Mountain region.
Digitizing archival collections: A case study

By Justin Easterday
Archival Fellow at CU-Boulder

In May 2013, I was accepted into an archival internship in the Archives at the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries. During my internship time at Norlin Library, I followed their training program in manuscript processing developed for archival student assistants, interns, and MLS graduate students. While I was completing the internship, I continued to take archival courses, which taught me the current archival ideas and practices. Taking courses while working in an archives was very beneficial because I was able to use my academic knowledge while working on collections. Through the training program I learned how to: edit, re-format, and create finding aids; re-house and re-organize collections; and fully process untreated collections.

For my practicum, I was able to fully process the Nancy Lewis Collection, a .25 linear feet holding of World War II (WWII) correspondence. This collection is small and only consists of letters from two soldiers without introductory or outside explanation. The only information known had to be found within the incoming correspondence. All the letters were from Louis Carlson and Willis Newbold and addressed to Ms. Nancy Lewis and Ms. Juell McCann. After researching information on Carlson and Newbold on the computer and with the letters, I completed the historical sketch and finished processing the physical collection.

The collection was submitted by the archives to the University of Colorado Digital Library for placement in their digital queue. Having recently established an internship in digital librarianship, the Digital Library accepted me as their first full digital intern.
The digital internship consisted of two parts: the scanning of the Nancy Lewis Collection materials and the creation and application of metadata of the collection.

The digitization process is comprised of several phases, the first being a determination of the scanned order. The digital archivist needs to decide the order in which researchers will want to view the material. I chose to show the letter before the envelope. After all the material was scanned, I used Adobe Photoshop to crop and visually edit the material. With the scanned images edited and ready to be placed online, I then used the ABBY program, which allows a user to word-search through the scanned letters. After I completed using ABBY, I moved to the second part of my digital internship, the creation and application of metadata.

When writing the metadata, I first learned the collections needed the following basic information: an identifier, title, creator, subject, date, publisher, format of the material, and a description. Since The Nancy Lewis Collection consisted of correspondence, the basic metadata was simple to write. One of the important aspects of writing metadata is that metadata follows a set vocabulary that is used when describing material. When writing the metadata descriptions I learned, unlike finding aids, the description is only a short summary and gives the researchers a general idea of what the letter is about and “hooks” them into reading the document.

To keep the collection’s metadata organized:
- The majority of the metadata is completed in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet before being uploaded to LUNA, the metadata software.
- The metadata information on the Excel spreadsheet is: the identifier, title of the file, who created the material, subject, a short description, the publisher, the date, the type of material, the format the material is in, and the source of the collection.
- After completing the different sections in the Excel spreadsheet, the information was uploaded into LUNA, the metadata program.

Once all the material was uploaded into LUNA, the collection was then approved to be placed in the University of Colorado’s digital library.

Once the Nancy Lewis Collection was uploaded, I continued my archival internship and was able to process the Matthew H. Dale Collection. The Matthew H. Dale Collection contained cursive handwritten letters from 1859-1861. These letters were written by Matthew to his family describing his mining experience in the Rockies. Since Matthew wrote in cursive, several letters were difficult to read, until I found a magazine article that contained Matthew’s transcribed letters. With both the handwritten and transcribed letters, out of curiosity I asked the Digital Lab Manager if it would be possible to digitize the collection. The Digital Lab Manager said it would be possible to digitize it, but the problem would be using ABBY to OCR the letters.

After I finished processing the collection I asked the Digital Librarian if I could digitize the collection. When I received the approval to digitize the Matthew H. Dale Collection, I followed the same digitization and metadata proces wth no supervision. During the OCR stage, I was able to use the ABBY program on the transcribed letters, but I was not able to successfully OCR the handwritten letters. After talking with the Metadata Librarian, it was determined the best method was to use the transcribed letters as another term in the
metadata. Once all the metadata was compiled, I submitted digital images and metadata to be uploaded into the digital library.

As a result of digitizing two collections, I have realized that digitizing collections is a necessary step to preserve material for future generations. However, the discussions on digitizing collections are true; it is a time-consuming process to scan and write metadata. Hopefully in the near future the archival community will find new methods that will help us preserve our history in a less time-consuming way.

**News & Announcements**

**Preservation kits available**

SRMA preservation kits are available for your institution's use! The kits are as follows:

**SRMA Environmental Monitoring Study Kit**

This kit was first assembled by the Colorado Preservation Alliance and paid for with funds from the Colorado Historical Fund. The kit includes extensive instructions for the use of all monitor equipment, placement of the monitors, collection of data, and long-term actions. References, resources, and a bibliography are included to help your institution or organization understand and move forward with long-term environmental monitoring.

The Environmental Monitoring Study Kit includes:
- Data Logger and Remote Sensors
- Digital Humidity/Temperature Meter
- Humidity Indicator Paper
• Humidity Indicator Cards
• Digital Illuminometer
• Blue Wool Cards
• Light Damage Slide Rule
• Insect Traps

SRMA Photograph Care & Identification Kit

This kit is designed to help establish a relationship with your institution’s photograph collection. It includes detailed information regarding photographic processes, common deterioration issues, and housing recommendations.

• Introductory information on photograph care
• 30X Light Scope included with instructions
• Photo identification with physical examples from kallitypes to daguerreotypes to digital photographs.
• Reference material, extensive bibliography, and flowcharts
• Storage guides
All in one case and ready to be shipped to your institution!

Hear what your fellow colleagues have to say about using the SRMA Photograph Care & Identification Kit:

We love it! Needing to identify the process used to create a small cased photograph in our Special Collections, and not finding an answer in our first resort, James Reilly’s Flowchart for identification guide published by Kodak, we checked the samples behind the Photo ID tab in the SRMA kit’s binder. Angled viewing of the surface eliminated a daguerreotype (which would have shifted between positive and negative images). This left the possibility of an ambrotype or tintype (ferrotype). Following the suggestion in the kit, we used a magnet. It stuck to the back of the case, distinguishing the iron support of a tintype from the glass support of an ambrotype.
-Doug Rippey, Metadata Technician, University of Denver

Please contact the Preservation member-at-large, Lindsay Schettler, if you are interested in using either of these kits or are interested in more information at leschettler@gmail.com.

Nominations sought for SAA’s CFW Coker Award

Hello archivists and finding aid/descriptive system fans and creators!

As you may know, the deadline for Society of American Archivists’ awards is just around the corner! Each year, the C. F. W. Coker Award is given out to recognize an outstanding and innovative finding aid, finding aid or descriptive system, or finding aid/descriptive project.

Established in 1984, this award recognizes finding aids, finding aid systems, projects that involve innovative development in archival description, or descriptive tools that enable archivists to produce effective finding aids. To merit serious consideration for the award, nominees must, in some significant way, set national standards, represent a model for archival description, or otherwise have a substantial impact on descriptive practices.

The following types of works or activities may be considered:

1. Finding aids, including, among others, multi-institutional guides, record surveys, repository guides, special subject lists, finding aids to individual collections or records groups, and narrative descriptions of holdings.
2. Finding aid systems, including, among others, manual or automatic indexing systems, computer databases, or current awareness systems for notifying users of holdings.
3. Descriptive tools that enable archivists to produce more effective finding aids, including, among others, subject thesauri, authority files, data element dictionaries, manuals establishing descriptive standards, and such reference works as atlases and administrative histories.
4. Projects that involve innovative developments in archival description, including, among others, cooperative ventures that result in the exchange of finding aid information among repositories, efforts at building national information systems, and
survey projects.

Last year's submissions were great and we had to make a tough decision. This year, we'd like to have to make a difficult choice again, but we need your help!

Do you know of an outstanding and innovative finding aid or description system published in 2014? Have you created a finding aid or designed a descriptive system or tool that you feel breaks new ground in the field of archival descriptive practice? Would you like to see the author(s) or editor(s) recognized for contributing to descriptive practice and the archives profession? Please consider submitting a nomination prior to the deadline of February 28, 2015. Self-nominations are welcome!

The nomination form, additional information, and a list of previous winners can be found at www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-coker.

Many thanks in advance from the 2014-2015 C. F. W. Coker Awards Committee!

**2015 Western Archives Institute**

The 29th annual Western Archives Institute will be held at the University of Santa Clara from July 5 – 17, 2015. The Western Archives Institute is an intensive, two-week program that provides integrated instruction in basic archival practices to individuals with a variety of backgrounds, including those whose jobs require a fundamental understanding of archival skills, but who have little or no previous archives education; those who have expanding responsibility for archival materials; those who are practicing archivists but have not received formal instruction; and those who demonstrate a commitment to an archival career.

The Institute also features site visits to historical records repositories and a diverse curriculum that includes history and development of the profession, theory and terminology, records management, appraisal, arrangement, description, manuscripts acquisition, archives and the law, photographs, preservation administration, reference and access, outreach programs, and managing archival programs and institutions.

Denis Meissner will serve as Principal Faculty Member for the 2015 Institute. Meissner is the Interim Deputy Director for Programs at the Minnesota Historical Society, and a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists. He has participated in a number of SAA and international efforts focused on the arrangement, description, and management of archival materials, and presently serves on SAA's Encoded Archival Context Working Group, which is developing a global standard for encoding archival authority records.

Meissner has worked closely with the design, delivery, and management of electronic finding aids to archival collections, and has participated in numerous U.S. and international working groups in the development and delivery of collection descriptions and the standards that underlie them, including chairing RLG’s EAD Best Practices Working Group. He has consulted and presented workshops on archival processing and description and has published largely in those areas, but also in the area of business records management.

In 2003, he and Mark Greene of the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming were awarded a yearlong NHPRC Archival Research Fellowship to study archival processing expectations and backlogs in U.S. repositories and to recommend changes to existing practices. That research led to an article in the American Archivist, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," which has since enjoyed a strong uptake within the archival community.

Tuition for the Institute is $700 and includes a selection of archival publications. Other non-negotiable fees including program transportation, facility fees, opening dinner, and luncheon at the closing program will be available in early February. Housing and meal plans are available at additional cost.

The application deadline for the 2015 Western Archives Institute is March 1, 2015. For additional program information, see http://www.calarchivists.org/WAI, or contact:
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The Western Archives Institute is co-sponsored by the Society of California Archivists and the California State Archives.