# Archival Issues

Journal of the

Midwest Archives Conference

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CONTENTS



MAC
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*PUBLICATION REVIEWS*

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*Archival Issues*, a semiannual journal published by the Midwest Archives Conference since 1975, is concerned with the issues and problems confronting the contemporary archivist. The Editorial Board welcomes submissions related to current archival practice and theory, to archival history, and to aspects of related professions of interest to archivists (such as records management and conservation management). We encourage diversity among topics and points of view. We will consider for publication submissions of a wide range of materials, including research articles, case studies, review essays, proceedings of seminars, and opinion pieces.

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**Margaret Cross Norton Award**

A panel of three archivists independent of the journal's Editorial Board presents the Margaret Cross Norton Award in odd-numbered years (alternating with the New Author Award). The Norton Award recognizes the author of what is judged to be the best article in the previous two years of *Archival Issues*. The award was established in 1985 to honor Margaret Cross Norton, a legendary pioneer in the American archival profession and the first state archivist of Illinois. The award consists of a certificate and $250.

Cowinners were selected for volumes 23 and 24. Francis Blouin was recognized for his article, "Archivists, Mediation, and Constructs of Social Memory," 24:2, 101–112. Blouin's thoughtful and intellectually engaging article states that the role of archives in the formation of social memory is an area of study with wider practical reaches than that of a purely academic exercise. Blouin's article suggests that the study of archives and the representations of history within them bring the question of the integrity of archives to the forefront. The idea that archivists may play more than a completely objective role in the formation of the historical record strikes directly at the core of our theories and practices of archival appraisal and accountability. Through opening this discussion, Blouin opens the possibility for archivists in collections of every size and specialization to carefully consider the larger issues implicit in each collection-related decision that we make.

The other winner of the Margaret Cross Norton Award is Philip C. Bantin for his article, "Strategies for Managing Electronic Records: A New Archival Paradigm? An Affirmation of Our Archival Traditions?" 23:1, 17–34. Our colleagues who develop theoretical solutions for profound problems that face us in fulfilling our professional mandates often challenge us to rethink previously held convictions or develop practical solutions. In recent years, nowhere has this been more apparent than the complex issues facing electronic records. For many in our profession, the very subject "electronic records" seems to be a Promethean task introduced by cruel gods to haunt our dreams and impede our progress. Rarely are archivists presented with such a clear synopsis of the theoretical framework, an analysis of the crucial issues, and a series of practical suggestions as in Phil Bantin's article.

**New Author Award**

A panel of three archivists independent of the journal's Editorial Board presents the New Author Award in even-numbered years (alternating with the Margaret Cross Norton Award) for articles appearing in a two-year (four-issue) cycle of the journal. The award was instituted in 1993 to recognize superior writing by previously unpublished archivists, and may be awarded to practicing archivists who have not had article-length writings published in professional journals or to students in an archival education program. Up to two awards may be presented in a single cycle. The award consists of a certificate and $250.

For volumes 23 and 24, the New Author Award winner was Mark Shelstad for his article, "Switching the Vacuum into Reverse: A Case Study of Retrospective Conversion as Collection Management," 23:2, 135–153. The article discusses in detail the situation at the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming as it undertook the retrospective conversion of the collections' finding aids to electronic format. The project, as is typical of such endeavors, became more than retrospective conversion: it became a massive reappraisal, documentation, and deaccessioning project. The article includes extensive tables on the time required to revise a collection as well as a detailed discussion of the methodology used. It is a well-written and well-documented article on potential problems almost any repository might face when doing retrospective conversion and how one institution responded to these challenges.

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# A CASE STUDY OF THE WEB-SITE APPRAISAL PROCESS AS APPLIED TO STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCY WEB SITES IN WISCONSIN

BY JEREMY BRETT

*ABSTRACT:* Web sites are increasingly being used by state governments not only as platforms for the public dissemination of agency documents, but as repositories for agency records. As a result, the ephemeral nature of Web sites and electronic information presents major appraisal and preservation problems for government archivists. This article describes the Web-site appraisal process in action, undertaken at the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) in response to the receipt of the records of a particular state agency commission. The commission's records were preserved entirely on the commission's Web site, and required WHS staff to develop questions and strategies for the appraisal and preservation of state agency Web sites that contained agency records.

In the famous preface to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain wrote of his greatest work that, "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." This case study is written in much the same spirit. It does not attempt to present the final answer to the problem of preserving Web sites, because archivists know perfectly well that there is not one as yet, given current technological limits.

Instead, what follows here is a narrative description of one institution's fairly informal and nonstrategic attempts to study the problems associated with the appraisal and preservation of a particular format of record, a fluid, highly flexible documentary form with amazing information potential, that more and more is being utilized by corporations, institutions of higher learning, government agencies, and private citizens alike as a key method of storing and disseminating crucial information: the Web site.[1] Archivists know that some of these sites merit permanent preservation, especially as Web sites continue to become the sole or primary repositories for important records. They also know that preserving electronic information in formats that will ensure its readability for future generations is one of the profession's greatest challenges. This problematic dichotomy was the major problem with which staff members from the WHS had to

grapple as they thought about ways to effectively appraise the permanent archival value of Web sites and the information they contain.

## *Setting the Stage for What Follows*

In early 2001, archives staff from the WHS were approached by Professor Don Kettl of the University of Wisconsin–Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs. Dr. Kettl, a noted authority on Wisconsin state government who had served on several previous task forces and commissions dealing with government issues, wanted us to know that the work of yet another body chaired by him had been completed and that the records of its proceedings were available for possible preservation by the WHS.

This body, The Governor's Blue-Ribbon Commission on State-Local Partnerships for the 21st Century, was formed in April 2000 by Governor Tommy G. Thompson to study the relationship of state-to-local government throughout Wisconsin and ways in which this relationship could be improved and streamlined in order to provide the best possible and most efficient range of services to the citizens of the state. The concept of this new commission was originally born out of the Wisconsin tradition of providing large state grants to local governments for a multitude of services, as well as Governor Thompson's perception of good government being smaller and more cost-efficient whenever possible. In announcing the formation of the commission, Thompson called upon the 31 members, drawn from a range of occupations and walks of life (including state and local government workers, education officials, state lawmakers, and members of the public), to "rethink the roles of different levels of government in the changing economy of the new century" and evolve new and bold ideas about how state and local governments might cooperate in all their important relationships. The commission held a number of public meetings across the state through the rest of 2000, in which it took testimony from responsible officials and solicited public input; it submitted a final report and list of recommendations in January 2001.

To WHS staff members, the work and findings of the Kettl Commission clearly represented a historically significant milestone in the history of Wisconsin state governance. Were the commission proposals to be accepted and finally implemented, they could represent a large-scale restructuring in the ways in which the state interacted with localities, as well as reflect the national trend of resurgent federalist thought so prominent among Republican politicians (including Governor Thompson) at the end of the twentieth century and start of the twenty-first. The records of the commission would naturally be an important acquisition for the State Archives. Therefore, imagine the consternation of WHS staff when Dr. Kettl handed over a CD-ROM that day containing the *entirety* of the commission's historical record—the only version there was. No hard-copy backup. No paper of any kind. To add another twist, the commission's proceedings were recorded, maintained, and retained only on a public Web site.

Dr. Kettl, as chair of the commission, had been responsible for recording the body's proceedings and activities. He had chosen to jump headlong into the future and place everything—schedules, minutes of commission meetings, presentations by speakers, public feedback, media reports, and so forth—on a Web site that he had created. Kettl would enter the proceedings of the commission into the Web site as the meetings hap-

pened, and public comment would be registered or recorded in a "Feedback" section of the site. The site provided links to media reports, to library reference material, and to outside organizations concerned with or relating to commission work. Except for handwritten notes, which may or may not have been kept by other commission members, and the final published report, there were no paper records of the commission to be had. There was only a CD-ROM copy of a Web site.[2] (At that time, the site itself was still up, but had not been active since February 2001.)

After the panic subsided, it became apparent that here was, in actuality, a potentially profitable opportunity. Like all archival institutions, especially those involved in managing public records, the WHS had to quickly come to grips with the ever-looming problem of electronic records. There's probably not an archivist or records manager anywhere who doesn't feel trepidation when considering what needs to be done (and more immediately, what *can* be done) with records produced in intangible electronic formats. The Kettl Commission records presented a fait accompli, an electronic record (or records?) with no paper originals or backups. The WHS would be obliged to deal with the records of the Kettl Commission as an e-records issue and, more importantly, as a *Web records* issue—something with which the WHS had yet to really concern itself—rather than as a set of records containing a portion of electronic content, or a paper record with a duplicate available on CD, or a CD-ROM of records, the paper originals or copies of which existed somewhere. These last would have been comforting scenarios, but it quickly became apparent that there was no safety net and that, in the end, the issue would have to be resolved within the WHS.

## *Searching for Information*

An informal working group was established and began meeting in March 2001. The group did not set out with a specific research agenda. Being faced with an immediate problem, they found it most realistic to blend a healthy dose of practicalities with more theoretical inquiries. At the same time that the group discussed such abstractions as the nature of Web sites as records, it also looked towards achieving several definitive end products. First, naturally enough, they hoped to produce a viable solution to the immediate problem of the Kettl Web site. Second, this solution and the methods used to reach it could then be used as a source for future Web record appraisal and accessioning techniques. Lastly, the group saw this situation as a genuine opportunity to broaden the WHS's knowledge base concerning Web sites in general and the documentary nature of Web records.

To begin, group members looked for sources of information on previous or ongoing endeavors involving Web records. At the time the study was conducted, very few public entities could be identified that were taking steps to deal with the problem. The National Archives, for example (as discovered only after the fact, in spring 2002), had begun to produce guiding documents for federal agency Web records, but this project was unknown to the group at the time. Projects underway at that time for which some general contextual information was drawn included the Library of Congress-Cornell University joint Minerva Project and Brewster Kahle's Internet Archive. Kahle especially helped to guide the group's thinking about potential legal and social issues in

Web archiving. The group did make much use of documentation from two particular public agencies. The Nebraska Secretary of State's Office's draft "Web Page Regulations"[3] demonstrated the utility of establishing close to the outset a solid set of definitions to use as benchmarks for taking the next conceptual steps. For example, Nebraska was making use of World Wide Web Consortium definitions of "Web site," "Web page," "Web resource," "link," and several other terms. Having a determined concept of what constitutes, for example, a "Web site"—a core term for anyone hoping to appraise and accession such things—is an aid to producing a checklist of pivotal points for analysis. In short, once there's a solid definition of the problem, it makes it easier to describe the problem's characteristics, nature, and features that make it what it is. Consequently, it becomes clear what and what is not crucial when determinations are made about how to preserve the item.[4]

The group also looked to the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and its very useful "Policy and Guidelines for Keeping Records of Web-Based Activity in the Commonwealth Government," produced in January and March 2001.[5] Australia at the time was light years ahead of any American governmental entity in researching the problem of Web-based records and putting into effect practical measures to capture and retain such records. Summarizing the work is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that the NAA's work was extremely useful as a source of inspiration and a wonderful example of straightforward procedures. NAA presents responsibilities, a series of policy points accompanied by best practices, the fundamentals of good Web-based record keeping, requirements, and, finally, appraisal considerations. The guidelines have the virtue of simplicity and being fairly open-ended; the WHS group found it important when writing its own appraisal guidelines to strive for a similar approach. Web records and Web sites are of such unprecedented variety, with so many different types of graphics, file formats, accompanying media and images, and so on, that trying to pin them down under one overarching policy document is a Sisyphean task. NAA's efforts encouraged the group to think at a broader level and not to get bogged down in too many technical details or theoretical concepts at the expense of solving the practical problem in front of it.

At the same time, the group started to look at other existing Web sites that resembled the Kettl site in purpose, form, and/or content. Of course, it was clear that the value of this sort of search might be limited, due to the inherent nature of the Kettl site. The Kettl Commission Web site was not a typical government site: it was very discrete, with very few external links. Professor Kettl took steps when creating the site to embed media articles and other reference sources within the site, eliminating the need to link to outside Web pages.[6] Nonetheless, examining sites of similar content and purpose proved to be of use for comparative purposes. Several sites examined by the group provided some context for the Kettl situation. These included the California Assembly Speaker's Commission on State and Local Government Finance[7], the Nebraska Commission on Government Innovation and Restructuring[8], and the New York Temporary State Commission on Lobbying.[9] Each of these shared some of the same characteristics of the Kettl site: meeting agendas and minutes, links to press coverage, links to related interest groups, etc. The group considered it worthwhile to see how other states and public agencies responded to increasing public clamor for Web access by making materials

available on the Web, and whether it appeared that those institutions had given thought to future preservation and access to those materials. Little evidence was found that site creators were taking these issues into consideration. Sites tended to give an impression not that they were or at least contained public records, but were instead really forums for presenting records.

## *Evolution of Issues*

In hunting for information, questions naturally started to rise and important issues began to coalesce. Of these, the one with the most potential was the question, "When is a Web site a *publication* and when is it a *collection of records*?" Group members had been struck at first by the idea that a Web site, or at least the Kettl site, is created, established, formulated, and packaged inherently for public consumption. It thereby had more of a "published nature" about it than would have a typical paper public record. The group determined that the nature of a particular site could be determined using the traditional range of archival appraisal methods, with a few twists. As one member put it, the use of Web technology inherently provides broader access to information than paper filing systems and, thus, there is likely to always be a "publication" component involved in Web access decision making. In the old paper-based world, some records are internal, others external and designed for public access. If an agency has the capacity to create and maintain all of its internal documents in a Web environment that allowed public access, do these records become publications? Or are they rather merely open records? This question of the nature of Web records led the group to consider some key questions to ask as it consulted Web sites:

- What does the creator intend the Web site to accomplish? Is it a forum for presenting selected information to the public, or a method for conducting all of the creator's business?
- Does the site accomplish what the creator set out to do?
- What is the overall scope of the site?

These are, the group believes, valid questions to ask at the outset and to continue asking all the way through the appraisal process. The *intent* of the site creator as to function and scope is vital to conducting an effective appraisal. The Kettl Commission site was created as a repository for the entirety of that entity's records. Are other appraised sites created for the same purpose? Is the site created merely as a delivery system for public information? Is the site more nebulous than this? For example, does the site contain links to an outside database that may itself be considered a record, even though the site may not be?

## *Developing Guidelines*

It became the group's contention during the discussion process that the methods by which Web sites were appraised could be generally analogous to those used for appraising records in more traditional media, with the key exception of considering the complicated nature of technological issues. In a broad sense, though, Web sites and Web-based records must be appraised independently of media: a record is a record is a record. With

these considerations in mind, the group developed a set of in-house appraisal guidelines that could theoretically be applied to any Web site created by a Wisconsin state government agency.

These guidelines followed a four-pronged analysis structure, overlaid with the central point that, to quote the guidelines, "these sites must have asked of them the same types of questions asked of paper or other traditional formats of records. The intellectual decisions are the same; the difference is that, once these questions have been answered to the archivist's satisfaction, she must extend her study into the technical aspects of the site. *However*, these latter examinations *must* be predicated on decisions made about the site's informational content."

The four prongs of the analysis were: motive, information, technical, and a concluding questions segment.

The "Motive Analysis" asks the question, "What was the purpose of the site?" Web sites, as has been noted, exist in a number of different formats and are created for a number of different reasons. They can be simple electronic bulletin boards, user interfaces for accessing databases, "publications" (defined here as digital versions of material "that the creator would under other circumstances produce as a published paper document"—broad, but a viable working definition), electronic commerce sites, intranets for internal use, actual repositories for record material (whether born digitally or not), and so on. Some sites will be one of these things, and others will be several of these, and still others will be something else entirely. But, it is crucial to have a fundamental understanding of the purpose(s) of the appraised site: for what reasons did the site's creators bring the site into existence and how can it be placed in the overall context of, in the case of public agencies, that agency's formal mission and its administrative/programmatic operations?

A motive analysis of the Kettl site was fairly straightforward: Dr. Kettl created the site as a platform for the entirety of the commission's activities. The site was also designed as the sole repository of the commission's documented history. From this, the clear conclusion was that, without the site, there would be no way of fully understanding the evolution and development of the Kettl Commission's recommendations, its discussion priorities, and the direct ways in which public opinion affected the commission's work.[10]

The second analysis is "Informational." What is the quality of the information being presented on the site? As the guidelines phrase it, "the key question to consider during appraisal is, 'Does the site contain information relevant to understanding the functions, activities, mission, or avowed purposes of the agency, office, board, commission, etc?'" A corollary question is, "Does the site contain records (official records) of the agency, office, board, commission, etc?" Appraising the information on a site requires that archivists ask whether the functions, etc., of an agency can be understood without recourse to the site, and whether the site places some new or different emphasis on the agency or its activities. In short, the guidelines ask whether information on the site is new, is different, and/or is specific to the site only and not available in other records. The group's guidelines also ask whether any record material deposited on the site is considered to be an "official record" and, therefore, whether losing such material would create significant gaps in the agency's documentary record.

Just as with other record media, it is important to gauge the informational value of site records in the context of other available informational sources. Are there government publications, paper originals of records, etc., that document the information contained on the site to the same or greater degree than does the site? If this is the case, the guidelines hold that, at least until technical capabilities allow the expert capture, maintenance, and migration of Web records, the WHS retain the paper and discard the electronic version. Also, any appraisal decision made concerning Web records ought to be made in the context of existing institutional collection policies or strategies, exactly as if Web records were normal paper-based records. Just because it is electronic, or just because the records exist on the Internet, does not mean the records necessarily have any more legitimacy than paper records. Would any repository retain these records if they were not electronic?[11]

Appraising the Kettl site in this light, the group concluded that the information on the site was definitely worth retaining. As previously noted, the records on the site represented the *only* documentary record of the commission and to lose them would mean the permanent loss of a full understanding of the commission's work. Since the group agreed that the Kettl Commission represents a significant milestone in the continuing relationship between Wisconsin state and local governments—which have a long tradition of mutual support—and that its proposals had the potential to reimagine that relationship, certainly the records had vital information that needed to be retained.[12]

A third analysis is the "Technical Analysis," which (at least for the group) can be the most daunting and perplexing to accomplish. The technical aspects of Web records and Web sites are vast. The working group's appraisal guidelines made no effort to be exhaustive, but the group felt it important to present at least some of the key questions that need to be asked involving the technology of the site or site records. Some of these questions include:

- Who created the site? Which office or bureau? Are records creators responsible for what goes on the site, or does the in-house Information Technology shop handle this? (This question is asked not only in order to have a source for technical information should it be required, but to provide a better understanding of the institutional situation that gave rise to the site or site records.)
- What specific software tools were used to develop and maintain the site? Are any of them proprietary in nature?
- How much file storage space will be required to maintain the site? Will it be maintained on a CD or other storage medium, on the archival institution's intranet, or on its public Web site?
- Does the technical documentation, such as software documentation and search indexes, need to be retained? How about the files generated in developing the site or site records (i.e., project management and reports from Webmasters)?
- Does an indexing system for the site exist? Can the archiving institution use it?
- Besides text files, what other types of content make up the site or site records? Sound files? Streaming video?

- If the site or site records are being appraised while they are currently on-line (as opposed to having been stored on a CD-ROM, like the Kettl site), is that site active? Can it or the materials on it be altered? If so, will the informational integrity of the site or site records be changed? And if so, should all iterations of the site be retained?

And there are many more questions to ask.[13] The technical analysis can be frustrating as new roadblocks and seemingly insurmountable technological hurdles arise, but it is crucial to a full and effective appraisal that these issues be faced head-on, and be applied on a case-by-case basis. Each site is different and each site presents its own particular technical (as well as informational) challenges. The Kettl site was a relatively simple site from a technical standpoint. There were very few external links that would be broken once the site was deactivated or the linked sites went down. Press releases and public comments were embedded as files within the site, thus eliminating the need for many links. PowerPoint presentations were generally also available in HTML format, thus obviating the need for Microsoft PowerPoint.

On the other hand, the important public feedback forums of the site, "Gotta Beef," "Idea Box," and "Best Practices," in which members of the public could submit ideas, complaints, or examples of good state-local practices already in operation, had been shut down and were no longer available. (Nor could they be accessed any longer from the site on-line.[14]) There is a small portion of streaming video and streaming audio for some of the meeting material, requiring the use of media player software. As technical issues, however, these proved to be minor, although the former signifies a loss of considerable informational value.

The working group felt that a few follow-up questions should be asked before making a full and final appraisal. This "Supplemental Analysis" consists of two important questions that need to be considered throughout the appraisal process.

The first was whether the purpose for the site's existence is best served by maintaining the site as it is. That is, is it crucial to a proper understanding of the site or site records and the activities of the agency that created them to preserve the site exactly as it appears and operates on-line? Will users of the information contained in the records be handicapped if the visual display and associated features are replaced with, say, a collection of text file folders? For some sites, the appearance and presentation are critical to the underlying information contained on them. For others, the bells and whistles are attractive conveniences, but the record material isn't changed or rendered unusable by their absence. This is an important point, because archivists often encounter sites full of graphics and sound or video files and frames and whatnot, and shouldn't immediately jump to the conclusion that resources must be committed to maintaining all of it, or that it's necessary to give up on hoping to capture the site or site records because there's this great jumble of phenomena to sift. Look to the *motive*: why did the creator add those features? Look to the *information*: are these things record material, or do they make a real contribution to the actual record content of the site? Look to the *technical aspects* as well: will it be feasible to capture the site in its current visual form? What will be involved?

A second question, while more prosaic, is still an important one, especially in these days of increasingly straitened institutional resources. Does the importance of the infor-

mation on the site outweigh the costs of staff time and resources involved in accessioning the site, making it available for public use, and monitoring it over time? Of course, as the appraisal guidelines note, this cost analysis ought to be made during every archival accession, but such analyses are of additional importance when applied to digital records. The preservation of these types of records often requires significant resources (such as new storage devices, increased file storage space, and new devices for accessing information), and often in a short amount of time to ensure the records' preservation and continued access. Any archivist who is appraising sites or site records needs to consider the relative costs of accessioning these items and whether there might be a less expensive or resource-intensive method of doing so without sacrificing informational integrity.

These last questions played a significant role in drawing conclusions about the Kettl site. The appraisal report phrased it thus: "I don't believe that anyone can realistically submit that the dynamic structure of the site is crucial to understanding the functions or activities of the Commission .... Intellectual order ... is not tied to any particular aspect of the site as a Web product. Given all this, I'm not convinced that we should spend the time and resources required to accession this site electronically." Nothing that the group could identify in the structure of the site was required to clarify the information within, when other options were available. In the end, the group decided to choose from a set of four options:

1. Retain the Kettl Commission site, in its entirety, on a CD-ROM. This would preserve the physical appearance of the site, to a certain degree (i.e., the site would exist as a series of file folders, which, when clicked on, would bring up the appropriate section of the site as it looked when live on the Web).
   **Problem:** The appropriate software for reading all documents would have to be available. The data would have to be periodically migrated.
   **Decision:** Reject this option as too time- and resource-intensive given current WHS capabilities. (See the quotation from the appraisal report in the introduction to this list of options.)
2. Print in hard-copy form every document on the site and create what amounts to a paper version of the Web site.
   **Problem:** The dynamism of the site would be lost. A vast amount of paper would be created. Kettl's entire point of creating a commission site (to avoid drowning in paper) would be rendered null and void. Archivists would be obliged to make determinations about how much of a linked site or of internal documents to print. Should absolutely everything be printed, no matter how small or insignificant?
   **Decision:** Reject this option as producing too much paper and preserving site records of lesser importance.
3. Retain nothing. Allow the commission's published final report to stand as the only necessary record of the commission's activities.
   **Problem:** This would mean the loss of all supporting documentation. The WHS and its user communities would lose a true understanding of the commission's proceedings and activities.
   **Decision:** Reject this option as leading to the loss of crucial documentation. Without it, there would be no record of the commission's decision-making

process, no evidence of public comment, and no reference sources that were used to establish the context in which the commission reached its conclusions.

4. Print in hard-copy form selectively chosen documents from the site, choosing those that are determined to be of permanent historical interest.
   **Problem:** The dynamism of the site would be lost. Archivists must make a complex series of determinations about the relevance of every document.
   **Decision:** Accept this option as the best one for serving the interests of researchers. Space and paper will be saved. A properly selected set of site records will clearly reveal the commission's workings without cluttering with unneeded documentation. Preserving site dynamism is not crucial.

So, in the end, after multiple meetings of the working group, which debated technical implications of archiving Web sites, brainstormed about the development and future of Web archives, and studied a number of articles and other reference sources concerning Web sites and electronic records, what was the result? In the end, almost shamefacedly, the group took the somewhat less than momentous technical step of printing records and maintaining them in paper form. This decision demonstrates that, just because archivists deal with an electronic form of a record, it's not necessary to preserve it in an electronic format. Decisions will vary from case to case, depending both on institutional resources and on the site or site records themselves: is it important to future users that the site be maintained in its current format? If not, and if paper will work just as well, then there is no reason an archivist can't print hard copies. (Many public agencies and other organizations are currently doing this with their electronic mail, for example.) This may not be the most farsighted strategy available, but it does reflect the undeniable fact that sometimes archival institutions must work with what they have when they have it. It also reinforces the WHS group's contention that every site is its own particular animal, and that different decisions will be applied to each one.

## *Conclusion*

The WHS group's experiences with the Kettl Commission Web site were immensely valuable. Kettl was only a first encounter with the problem of how to preserve Web sites and Web records for the future, a problem that will only loom larger as more and more government agencies and other organizations not only cement their presence on the Web but actually use their Web sites as record repositories. The group was led to consider a whole range of questions, from the small (What if a site we want to accession has external links, or proprietary software?) to the grand (What is the value of Web sites for documenting government activity? Are sites themselves records?). These questions (and the frequent lack of good answers) will aid the WHS in future Web-site appraisal and accession endeavors, having served to broaden its knowledge base concerning sites and site records. The entire appraisal process exposed both the similarities between appraising Web records and more standard formats, and the differences. Understanding that there *are* both similarities and differences is important: the group found that acquired appraisal experiences and understanding of the nature of records did not need to

be abandoned. On the contrary, those experiences are perfectly applicable to the Web record world. Archivists may be intimidated by the new frontiers of electronic records, but they should be comforted in the realization that their collective experience with appraising paper, audiovisual, and other forms of records is the most important tool they have in crossing into the strange new world.[15]

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## NOTES

1. For the purposes of this case study, consider the *Web site itself* to be a form of record, as opposed to a platform for housing and displaying Web-based records. It is outside the purview of this paper to get involved in the whys and wherefores of whether sites can be records. The group contends that there are situations where this is the case; in the documented example, the site is a single discrete entity that, itself, is a documentary record of activities and events, but it is also a repository for Web-based records.
2. A fuller description of the features of the Kettl Commission Web site is found in my own June 2001 appraisal, which can be obtained from the Wisconsin Historical Society.
3. <www.state.ne.us/home/SOS/RecordsMgmt/Webstan1.htm>. At the state site one can also find a cogent statement of scope, content, and issues that briefly lays out issues of concern when appraising Web sites: <http://www.sos.state.ne.us/RecordsMgmt/Webstan.htm>.
4. A future corollary to the appraisal guidelines will be an attached set of definitions for terms used in the guidelines.
5. <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/er/Web_records/intro.html>
6. This is not to say that the Kettl site did not share certain problems of other public Web sites. For example, there were some external links, which, of course, affects the dynamism of the site were those linked sites to shut down. Links to other state pages raised issues of control and authority, to give another example.
7. <http://speaker.metroforum.org>
8. <http://www.nol.org/home/clgir/intro.htm>
9. <http://www.nylobby.state.ny.us>
10. The Final Report, of course, would provide the actual decisions rendered, but only the site could demonstrate how the commission arrived at those decisions. Likewise, copies of media reports could supply a window into commission proceedings, but only as witnesses to particular days or subjects under discussion. Full documentation requires the site or records on the site.
11. This question is designed to preempt the mind-set in some quarters that an e-record is inherently valuable because so many records today are produced in electronic format, as well as the opposite idea that those records are somehow less valuable because of their inherently ephemeral nature. Web sites must always be considered in the same informational terms as records of more durability.
12. Of course, the Kettl Commission is probably atypical in that the entire site constitutes a permanently valuable record. In many cases, archivists will discover that only one portion or several portions of a site merit permanent retention.
13. The full guidelines can be seen at <http://enterprise.state.wi.us/home/wirc/SHS_Web_guides.htm>.
14. Apparently they do (or did two years ago) exist in a backup format as part of a spreadsheet—odd, certainly, for what was a series of text-based responses, but the working group determined that these were such an unwieldy and generally hard-to-read format that we would not undertake to preserve these spreadsheet files.

15. This article would not have been possible without the efforts of the author's former colleagues at the Wisconsin Historical Society who joined him in 2001 as members of an unofficial working group that spent many a thoughtful hour wrestling with the problems of Web-site appraisal and preservation when they could have been ice fishing or performing a host of other wholesome Wisconsin activities: the head of the society's Collections Bureau, Donna Sereda; Local Government Records Archivist Virginia Fritzsch; then Preservation Officer Sharlane Grant; Webmaster Paul Hedges; Government Publications Librarian Lloyd Velicer; and from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Records Officer Nancy Kunde. In the author's opinion, not enough can ever be said about the dedication and skill of these wonderful people to archives, to records management, and to history in general. Thanks are also due to Margery Sly for her helpful assistance in the editing of this article.

# DOCUMENTING STUDENT LIFE: THE USE OF ORAL HISTORIES IN UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

BY MICHELE CHRISTIAN

***ABSTRACT:*** This article discusses a recent oral history project conducted by the University Archives, Iowa State University Library, which documents students' campus experience and concentrates on the university's annual celebration, VEISHEA. By focusing on current students, the University Archives has been able to actively document student life and become better aware of the numerous student activities on campus. The project has enabled the archives to build bridges to previously undocumented student groups. The contact through these interviews has led to the donation of records from these groups, and has made these students more conscious of their role in the university's history and their responsibility to document it.

Documenting student life is one of the greatest challenges faced by college and university archives in developing their collections. The history of any institution of higher education is incomplete without the history of the student body. Surprisingly, despite the fact that students constitute the largest group of any college or university community, very few records and papers of students generally exist outside of the registrar's office. As keepers of college and university histories, archivists must make greater efforts in procuring these materials. As John Straw states in his 1994 article on documenting student life, "there is a wide range of important research in this area yet to be undertaken. Hopefully, we can find the documentation to meet these needs."[1] However, many factors contribute to the difficulty in documenting student life, including the fact that most student activities are seldom recorded or saved.[2] Even if records are created and preserved, the chances of these materials coming to the archives are low.

One reason for this problem is the continuous turnover of students in membership and leadership positions, particularly in campus organizations. The frequent turnover makes conventional methods of transferring records from university offices ineffective. Each year, students are faced with choosing leaders for their organizations; this lack of continuity creates instability in the way the organization's records are created and stored, and forces archivists to reestablish relationships with these groups each year.[3] Another difficulty with documenting student life is recording the lives of those students who avoid traditional or mainstream student groups and activities.

Of the documentation that does exist, the materials that find their way to the archives often come irregularly and unexpectedly.[4] Since most students have no idea that the archives exists at all, let alone what the archives does, it should not be surprising that this is the case. Without a concerted effort on the part of the college or university archives to include and inform students, many aspects of campus life will remain undocumented.

Oral history interviews are one method of documenting the student experience. Speaking with the students directly captures their personal perspectives on varied aspects of student life, such as courses, campus activities, student organizations, and interpersonal relationships. Oral histories complement many of the traditional records that may already be available in the archives, since they often provide greater context to events described in other records. The interviews offer a deeper and, arguably, more subjective layer of understanding to a college or university's history. Sometimes an oral history will capture an event that would not be found in traditional sources.

For example, in a recent oral history interview conducted at Iowa State University, Dr. Barbara Forker described the events surrounding the formation of a Physical Education and Leisure Studies Department, which combined the Men's and Women's Physical Education Departments at the university. Amid some protest from the members of the Men's Physical Education Department and the Athletic Department, the university named her head of the new department. In the interview, Dr. Forker related an incident that occurred after the first staff meeting: she asked the male staff members to remain and told them that she knew they did not want her as the head of the department. Dr. Forker proposed that the staff give her a year to prove that they could work together and reminded them that it would require effort on their part as well as her own. During the rest of the impromptu meeting the staff explained to her what they liked and disliked and she told them what could be changed and what could not. Dr. Forker was proud of all of her staff for making the department a success and demonstrating that they could cooperate.[5] The University Archives has no other documentation on this event. Nothing in Dr. Forker's papers or the papers of the staff members even hint that this meeting occurred.

The University Archives, a division of the Special Collections Department of the Iowa State University Library, has been conducting oral history interviews since the early 1970s. Most of the interviews are with prominent members of the Iowa State faculty, administration, and alumni. In fact, very few of the interviews have focused on current students or their activities. In an attempt to fill in these gaps, the Iowa State University Oral History Project has made the capturing of student life a high priority. This ongoing effort attempts to record the personal perspectives of current students on a variety of activities from course work to life in the residence halls or in the Greek system. Since 2001, a major focus of the interviews has been on the students' perception of the university's somewhat controversial annual celebration, VEISHEA.

VEISHEA is an acronym for the five original divisions of Iowa State: Veterinary Medicine, Engineering, Industrial Science, Home Economics, and Agriculture. Each spring, Iowa State University hosts VEISHEA, the largest student-run celebration in the United States. Every year VEISHEA, Inc., an association consisting of over 350 students, organizes this extraordinary three-day event. The students design and implement

every aspect of the celebration; VEISHEA is one of the few activities on campus that is truly student organized. Due to the size and complexity of initiating an oral history project centered on students, the University Archives felt it was important to capture the evolution of one of Iowa State University's most revered and contentious traditions. The archives staff determined that it should focus on this particular event because of VEISHEA's unique position on campus, recent history, and the fact that in one way or another it affects the lives of every student.

First celebrated in 1922, Frank "Shorty" Paine, Professor of Engineering and an alumnus, gave the event its name as a symbol of harmony. According to the VEISHEA program for 1922, the purpose of the celebration is "To develop a spirit of unity, unity between Iowa State College and Iowa people, unity between Ames and High School Students, unity between alumni and students, unity between the students of the five divisions."[6] In order to gather support from the administration, VEISHEA had to showcase the school for the citizens of Iowa, particularly high school students.[7]

Prior to VEISHEA, several of Iowa State University's divisions hosted celebrations each spring that were held only weeks apart. The interruption of schoolwork generated by the multiple celebrations was a cause of great concern for the faculty and the administration. The main incentive behind the creation of VEISHEA was to combine all of the divisional celebrations into one all-school celebration that would prove to be less disruptive to the students' studies. It would also be a larger and, therefore, more effective advertisement for the school and provide students with an opportunity to learn how to coordinate a major event. In order to gather support from the administration, VEISHEA had to be seen as an exposition that would invite citizens of Iowa, particularly high school students, to visit the campus. The founders made exhibits and open houses essential to the celebration. This sense of duty to bring the university and the people of Iowa together is deeply ingrained in Iowa State's culture. It reflects the school's strong commitment to the ideals of its land-grant heritage, particularly the principle of extension. Since the inception of Iowa State University in 1858, there has been a drive to spread the knowledge gained at the school throughout the entire state. From the farmers' institutes first taught in 1869 to the establishment of the first county extension offices in 1904 to the development of VEISHEA in 1922, Iowa State University has made outreach essential to its mission.[8] It is the university's dedication to extension that underlines the foundation of VEISHEA.

As the popularity of this event grew, the original purposes of VEISHEA began to be overshadowed by the unofficial parties that started to dominate the weekend. Young people from all over flocked to Iowa State University in an effort to participate in what became known as the "largest party in the Midwest." VEISHEA carried on as usual, but each year it became less about the celebration of excellence it was originally intended to be and more about drunken revelry. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, minor disturbances and altercations between partygoers and the police escalated into riots. Community members, both residents and business owners, were upset with the celebration because they no longer felt it was a safe event.

The defining moment for VEISHEA came in 1997, when a man was fatally stabbed on the lawn of one of the fraternity houses. Neither the two men convicted of the crime nor the victim were local to Ames, Iowa, or connected to Iowa State University in any

way: they were all part of the crowd drawn to VEISHEA's "after hours" activities. In response, the university immediately created a task force to examine the event. The task force concluded that the problems were related to the binge drinking associated with VEISHEA and decided the celebration would go alcohol free or permanently end. The students were asked to choose which option they preferred. Reluctantly, the student body voted to support an alcohol-free event and the celebration continued. Many students were unhappy with the change, some because they associated VEISHEA with alcohol-related activities; others felt that the new policies were overly restrictive to student liberties.[9]

Although other events have divided the Iowa State campus in its nearly 150-year history, it is often difficult to find evidence of student reactions within traditional records of the University Archives. The archives maintains the records of VEISHEA, Inc., including programs, photographs, correspondence, histories, reports, and news clippings. These materials cover its founding in 1922 to the present and reflect the activities and sentiments of those involved in the planning of VEISHEA. The records allude to the amount of work and preparation that is needed to produce a successful event and the issues that concern the committees each year. For example, the records of VEISHEA, 1970, reflect the campus's reaction to the Vietnam War and the tragedy at Kent State University, which occurred only days before the celebration was held. The VEISHEA Central Committee determined that the celebration must go on, but changes needed to be made in order to reflect the gravity of the situation. They decided that no weapons would be carried by anyone during the parade, including the military. They also decided to create a platform for public discussion of current events that would be accessible at all hours, and to add a "March of Concern" to the parade.[10]

VEISHEA has become part of the fabric of Iowa State University and the controversy that has recently clouded the 80-year-old event calls for a concerted effort to investigate the celebration from the student perspective. While we can be reasonably sure that VEISHEA, Inc.'s and the administration's point of view will be presented through correspondence and reports, these records tell only half of the story; only by seeking out students and recording their versions of events can the archives begin to hope for an accurate portrayal.

When starting the oral history project in 2001, the staff decided that the project must achieve two goals. First, it should focus on current students, including those that were active in the planning of VEISHEA, active members of other student organizations, unaffiliated students, nontraditional students, and international students. It was decided that all students, regardless of prominence and level of participation on campus, have a story to tell. Sometimes, students with lower campus profiles have more to say about how the university has influenced their lives. The University Archives staff sought to learn and record the various perceptions of life at Iowa State and VEISHEA. Although the primary focus is on current students, this does not imply that the University Archives has abandoned plans to interview the faculty, university administration, and alumni. The project focuses on students for two reasons: the staff wished to capture the memories of students prior to graduation, allowing the students very little time to forget or alter their memories. Whereas the effects of time may still occur, chances are that the memories may not be altered to the same degree as they would if more time had passed.

The second reason is the students' proximity. The staff would have, potentially, thousands of prospective students in the interview pool, relying on a continuous stream of students.

The second goal of the oral history project was to create an undertaking that could be ongoing. The project had to be manageable enough to not interfere with the regular work flow of the University Archives. The staff decided that approximately 10 to 15 students per academic year could be interviewed without interrupting the routine workload. In addition, the limited number of interviews will not overly tax the department's resources when it is time to duplicate the tapes and transcribe interviews. The Special Collections Department employs three professional staff members, three support staff members, and four to five part-time student assistants. Normally, the department's policy has been to outsource the transcription of oral history interviews, however, student assistants have been assigned to this task in the past.

In light of the fact that the project is being conducted through the university and is focusing on students, the University Archives needed permission from the university's Human Subjects Review Committee, which reviews any research done involving human subjects and assures that the research is within the guidelines of the Code of Federal Regulations Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. Over the past few years, this practice has increasingly come to the attention of historians and other social scientists.[11] Each institution is charged with the duty of creating policies to govern research on human subjects and to create an internal review board (IRB) to regulate these policies. Given that each institution develops its own research policies, there is no one way in which IRBs review oral history. Generally, IRBs rate research projects in three review categories. Certain projects can be considered exempt from review, such as those that include taste testing of United States Department of Agriculture approved foods and research involving records and specimens already in existence. Research projects that pose a minimal risk to its subjects may be eligible for expedited review and promptly accepted by the head of the IRB or a committee of the IRB formed for this purpose. The last review category is the full review, which includes all other types of research and may require extensive adjustments to the project, or denial.[12] The American Association of University Professors, recognizing the limitations this occasionally places upon academic freedom, has recommended that IRBs look into creating general exemptions for certain research projects, including oral history interviews.[13]

Fortunately for the Special Collections Department, the Human Subjects Review Committee readily approved the project. The department was simply required to complete the necessary forms and create an informed consent form, which is a form that lets the interviewee know the purpose of the project and the benefits and risks involved in participation (Appendix A). The form also notifies the interviewees that the interview will be made available to the public. It explains that by signing the deed of gift the interviewee transfers ownership of the interview to the university. The only obstacle the department faced in the approval process was the deed of gift. The review committee required that the form be approved by the University Legal Services. After a brief discussion with the university's lawyers, a document was created that would transfer the ownership of the interviews from the interviewees to the Special Collections Depart-

ment to the satisfaction of the department, the university's lawyers, and the review committee (Appendix B).

After the project was approved by the university, the next step was to find candidates for interviewing. Since the University Archives wanted to talk to a variety of students, the staff chose not to solicit the assistance of faculty advisers to the various student organizations. The archives wanted to capture the perspectives of more than the very active and very pro-ISU students. Therefore, the project director relied upon the recommendations provided by students employed by the University Archives. Two student employees were interviewed for the project. Both students, feeling that the project had merit and that several of their friends would enjoy participating, gave the archives a list of names. This referral approach worked out well: of the people contacted, approximately 70 percent agreed to be interviewed. These students were from a variety of backgrounds, majors, and activity levels, including members of fraternities and sororities, leaders of the resident hall organizations, student government, and students with no involvement in any of these groups.

Before the interview, the students were asked to fill out a form that would provide basic biographical details (Appendix C), allowing the interviewer to tailor the questions to fit each person. During the interview, each student was asked several standard questions regarding their background, family, course work, activities, and their views on VEISHEA and Iowa State University (Appendix D). Most of the additional questions the interviewer asks flow from answers the students have given. By letting the students talk freely, without interrupting or inserting the interviewer's opinions, they quickly forget about the tape recorder and focus their attention on telling their stories. The relaxed atmosphere encourages the students to speak their minds and not worry about the interviewer's reaction, resulting in a more truthful interview.

Each interview is recorded on a normal bias 60-minute TDK audiotape and will be copied on another TDK audiotape, making an archival master tape and an access reference copy of the interview. A transcription of the interview will also be created to allow for both an audio and paper copy. As is the practice with other oral history projects initiated by the Special Collections Department, the transcripts will be sent to the interviewee for review and minor editing, if necessary. After the interviewees have seen the transcripts and the editorial remarks are added, the interviewer will add footnotes to provide further context. The interviews will then be cataloged as one collection of interviews. To offer better access to the information within the transcripts, the archives will create an index to each transcription and a master index to all of the interviews. Whole interviews or sections may be made available through the Special Collections Department's Web site.

It is interesting to note that all of the students interviewed thus far have had different opinions about VEISHEA and the university. Some were very involved in the celebration and some were not. One student was so irritated by the treatment of students in the residence halls during VEISHEA that he and another student worked to have the event canceled unless the university began to treat VEISHEA like any other weekend. According to him, the students in the residence halls were treated like prisoners and they were tired of it. One of the General Co-Chairs for VEISHEA, Inc. had nothing but positive things to say about the event and felt that the administration's restrictions were

welcome and made VEISHEA a friendlier and less unruly event. It is through the oral history project that we are able to capture all sides of the story, including those from individuals that would otherwise not be heard.

Since the oral history project began, most of the students who remember the recent tragedy and changes made to the event have graduated. The more recent students have not experienced a "wet" VEISHEA, nor have they pledged to keep the campus free of alcohol during the celebration; therefore, they cannot comment on the alterations made to the celebration. Due to this change, questions regarding the "Pledge" or changes in residence hall policies during VEISHEA have been dropped from the interview question list for more recent students. Students are still asked to talk about VEISHEA, their experiences with the celebration, and their views regarding the event.

Although this project is still in its infancy, it has great potential for outreach to the student population by exposing them to the Special Collections Department and showing the students what we can do for them, both as researchers and as record keepers. An unexpected benefit of this project has been the opportunity to approach student organizations about transferring their records to the University Archives. Through talking to the students, the archives has been able to encourage campus groups to discuss the advantages of having their records in a repository rather than with the members of their groups. In little over a year, the Iowa State University Archives has accessioned 10 times the number of linear feet of student organizations' records that the archives had accessioned in the previous three years combined. The archives has added the records of two social fraternities, one social sorority, and one professional fraternity. The most interesting of the new accessions are the records of the residence hall associations.

The residence halls at Iowa State University are divided into three associations based upon their locations: Richardson Court Residence Hall Association, Union Drive Residence Hall Association, and Towers Residence Hall Association. These associations are governed by the Inter-Residence Hall Association (IRHA), which consists of representatives from the three associations. The three residence hall associations and the IRHA have discussed adding a line in their by-laws directing the transfer of association records to the University Archives, thereby circumventing the traditional turnover problem. The archives has recently received the records of the Union Drive Residence Hall Association and the Inter-Residence Hall Association, and the department is expecting the records of the other associations when the students return from summer break. Prior to the project, the archives contained few records for these organizations. These materials consisted mostly of newspaper articles that the Special Collections Department had clipped over the years. The University Archives has now received over 30 years worth of meeting minutes, reports, enactments, correspondence, and photographs. Part of this accession also included the records of the Men's Residence Hall Association, the predecessor of the Union Drive Residence Hall Association, and the Committee on Alternative Living, which was created to assist with the residence halls in the creation of coeducational housing.

By simply contacting students and asking them to tell their life stories, we have educated them about archives and encouraged them to find a permanent home for their organizations' records. They have added another important part of the university's history to the archives. Several of these students expressed their gratitude in the fact that

they do not have to throw away their organization's records in order to make room for new records.

While this project has had many benefits such as outreach to the public and raising the profile of the archives on campus, the most important aspect of doing these oral histories is being able to capture and record history as it happens from an under-documented community. Active documentation in a university and college setting is essential to ensure that we record what it means to be a student, otherwise, the history of the university will remain the story of the administration without regard to the student population the university was created to serve.

College and university archivists must employ more creative methods to document the lives of students. Oral history interviews are one of the best approaches for this, especially with students, who are often willing to share their experiences orally and less likely to write them down. The Iowa State University Oral History Project reflects a commitment on the part of not only the University Archives, but also of the university as a whole to preserve the rich history of the campus from a multitude of perspectives. The University Archives hopes to improve the previous effort in how the archives had documented student life in the past and, thereby, provide a more comprehensive understanding of campus life at Iowa State University.

Appendix A

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Iowa State University Library
Special Collections Department
Oral History Projects

**PURPOSE**

The oral history project will document the careers, lives, and/or certain events of those affiliated with Iowa State University, those engaged in agriculture or science and technology, and American women involved in science and engineering. The oral histories will be used to provide prospectives and details of history that are often not apparent in other records, and when used with other research material, they will help to provide a more accurate picture of history. The oral histories gathered by the Special Collections Department will complement other records in the department and will help to further aid the Iowa State University research community.

**PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a deed of gift; you will receive copies of each form. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions regarding general biographical information, educational background, career, professional affiliation(s), and/or level of involvement in certain activities (such as clubs, athletics, and events). You will have the right to not answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering and you may terminate the interview at any time. The interview will be recorded on audiotape or videotape and it will be transcribed. The transcript and the recording(s) of your interview will be available to the public at the Special Collections Department of the Iowa State University Library.

**RISKS**

Participation is voluntary and there are no foreseeable risks involved in taking part in this project.

**BENEFITS**

Aside from having the satisfaction that you have contributed to history and that your ideas and accomplishments will be preserved indefinitely, there is no personal benefit for participating in this project.

**QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions about the Iowa State University Library, Special Collections Department Oral History Project, please contact Tanya Zanish-Belcher at 515-294-6648.

**PARTICIPATION**

Participation in the project is voluntary and you may end the interview at anytime without discrimination or retribution towards you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your interview **will** contain your name and other personal identifiable information. In addition, your interview will be available to the public at the Special Collections Department of the Iowa State University Library.

**TIME**

The average length of an interview is approximately an hour. However, the interview may be longer or shorter, and may require more than one session.

**DEED OF GIFT**

As a participant in the project you will be asked to sign a deed of gift. This form gives authority over your interview to the Iowa State University Library, Special Collections Department. This means that you relinquish any claim to legal title, literary property, and copyright for your interview to the department. You will have the right to review the transcript. You will also have the right to copy, use, or publish all or part of your interview; this right is good only until the time of your death; your heirs will have to obtain permission from the department to use, copy, or publish your interview. If you wish, you may place resonable restrictions upon the deed of gift.

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Your signature signifies that your questions have been answered, that you understand the purpose and procedures used for the interview, and that you agree to take part in this project.

Interviewee Name (print): _____

_____ _____

(Signature of Interviewee) (Date)

**INITERVIEWER STATEMENT**

I have explained the above points with the interviewee and I believe he/she understands the purpose and procedures involved in participating in the Iowa State University Library, Special Collections Department Oral History Projects.

_____ _____

(Signature of Interviewer) (Date)

Appendix B

**Deed of Gift Agreement**
**Special Collections Dept./University Archives**
**Iowa State University Library**

I, , hereby give, convey, donate and assign to Iowa State University (ISU), my oral history memoir, to have and to hold the same absolutely and forever. I understand that Iowa State University will use my oral history memoir for such historical, research and scholarly purposes as they see fit and that by this conveyance I relinquish:

1. All legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in my oral history memoir.

2. All my rights, title and interest in the copyrights which I have or may be deemed to have in my oral history memoir and more particularly the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performance, and display of my oral history memoir.

I also state that I have not assigned, or in any manner encumbered or impaired, any of the aforementioned rights in my oral history memoir to another person or organization. The only conditions which I place on this unrestricted gift are:

1. The right to review the transcript of the oral history memoir and suggest minor editing changes if necessary .

2. The right to copy, use or publish my oral memoir in part or full until my death.

Dated this _____ day of _____ , 20__.

_____
(Signature of Donor)

As agent for or as the duly appointed representative of Iowa State University, I accept the oral history memoir of for inclusion in the ISU Archives.

Appendix C

**Oral History Information Sheet**

Name_____

Birthdate_____

Home Town_____

Major/Minor_____

_____

Date/Expected Date of Graduation_____

Associations, Clubs and Activities_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

# Appendix D

General Topics of Discussion:

Hometown and family life:

- Describe your hometown.
- What do your parents do?
- Why did you decide to come to Iowa State University?
- Did your family influence your decision?

Iowa State University:

Coursework:

- What is your major and what are your thoughts on the classes you attended?
- Which courses/professors did you find most helpful?

Student activities:

- In what activities or organizations are/were you involved?

For each group:

- How did you become involved?
- What is the purpose of the group?
- In which duties/activities does the group participate?
- What was your role in the group?

Do you have a job during the school year? If so, please describe where and what you do at this job.

Housing:

- Did you live in the residence halls, in a fraternity/sorority, or off campus?
- Why did you choose to live in [residence halls, a fraternity/sorority, or off campus]?
- Describe what you enjoyed the most/least about living there.

VEISHEA:

- When did you first learn about VEISHEA?
- What were your perceptions of the activities? How has this perception changed?

Did you have any personal involvement in VEISHEA? If so, what did you do for the celebration?

- If so, describe your involvement in VEISHEA.
- What do you like/dislike about your involvement in the celebration?

How did you feel about the changes made to VEISHEA?*

- Do you feel the administration made the right decision? Why/why not?*
- What do you think should have changed that did not?*
- What do you think should have remained unchanged?*
- How did you feel about having to make the "Pledge"?*
- What was your reaction to the ending of the "Pledge"?*

How did you feel about VEISHEA and will you go back as an alumnus?

General reflections about Iowa State University:

- Describe one of the best/worst experiences of attending Iowa State University.

*Questions asked students who started Iowa State University prior to 1998.

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# THE STRONGEST LINK: THE MANAGEMENT AND PROCESSING OF ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

BY PAM HACKBART-DEAN AND
CHRISTINE DE CATANZARO

***ABSTRACT:*** The work of every archives includes selecting, preserving, and making available materials of enduring research value for current and future research use. This effort is done in conjunction with creating processing priorities, identifying space for collections, and locating resources and staffing. Processing plays a crucial role in making collections available to researchers. However, the action of processing cannot take place in isolation. Acquiring collections of quality, planning priorities for processing, determining levels of arrangement and description, establishing standards and procedures for processing, and working with "living" (or continuously growing) collections are fundamentally important for any successful archival program. Ultimately, the planning and management of processing becomes the essential building block for any archives.

One of the greatest challenges confronting archivists today is the significant size of modern archival collections. Despite these challenges, archivists must continue the work of selecting, preserving, and making available materials of enduring research value for current and future research use without preempting processing priorities, space, resources, and staffing. Processing plays a crucial role in making collections available to researchers. But the activity of processing cannot take place in a vacuum. The issues associated with obtaining collections of quality, planning priorities for processing, determining levels of arrangement and description, establishing standards and procedures for processing, and working with "living" (or continuously growing) collections all assume fundamental importance for successful archival management. Thus, the planning and management of processing becomes an essential building block, a strong link in the chain of a successful archival program.

According to the *Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators and Records Managers*, processing includes the "activities of accessioning, arranging, describing and properly storing archival materials."[1] The management of processing is the big picture of making a collection available for research beyond these nuts and bolts of processing. It

is the actual planning of all intellectual and physical arrangement for the entire archives. The questions that arise in the managing of processing are numerous: What are the best appraisal strategies for obtaining collections of quality? What is the best means of establishing priorities for processing? To what level should collections be processed? How can backlog be minimized, if not altogether eliminated? What are the best standards for processing, and how can these standards be achieved? How can archival teamwork be encouraged? How should "living" collections be handled? Ultimately, how do we provide the best access to these collections?

The existing archival literature rarely addresses issues specifically relating to the management of processing. The manuals and commonly used textbooks[2] and the more recent on-line manuals[3] offer valuable guidelines to archivists on the basic tasks of processing. They focus largely on practical aspects of arrangement and description rather than on issues related to processing within the context of overall archival management. The familiar principles of processing espoused by the theorists[4], provenance, original order, and Oliver Wendell Holmes' five levels of processing[5] form the basis for the fundamentals outlined in this literature. Writings on appraisal and selection do offer some observations on the planning of processing[6] and a few articles on archival management address some issues related to establishing processing goals.[7] Canadian archivists Terry Eastwood and Bob Krawczyk provide brief observations on the problems of working with "living" collections in the context of abandoning the concept of provenance *(fonds)* in Canadian governmental records.[8] Other valuable journal articles, including those by Megan Floyd Desnoyers, John Dojka, Helen W. Slotkin, and Karen T. Lynch, have focused more specifically on planning issues, but they are now more than 20 years old.[9]

This article focuses on processing management questions, drawing upon the knowledge of the authors' experiences with processing collections housed at the Georgia State University Library, Georgia State University. Although the solutions described here work well in a university's special collections department, they are adaptable to any situation where there are materials that remain unprocessed.

## *Appraisal as a Prologue to Processing*

Before archivists can decide on processing priorities, they need to review how their institution has chosen to select and accept collections. "While careful arrangement and expansive description are laudable goals," according to Gregory Hunter, "they are a wasted effort on a collection of no enduring value."[10] Moreover, with the profusion of modern records in a myriad of formats, archivists must regularly review and update their institution's acquisition policy and appraisal procedures.

When accepting or rejecting a collection, archivists are accustomed to considering appraisal factors such as historical significance, legal and evidential value, informational content, and limited documentation. Yet there are many other factors that enter into "the black box," as Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young have shown.[11] In considering whether to accept a collection, the practical factors—the costs-of-retention factors, as Boles and Young refer to them—are equally important to consider. Collections need to be evaluated in light of the amount of staff time in processing and preservation work

that will be required, as well as the amount of space required to house the materials. It should go without saying that the records must be complementary to other collections and research resources maintained at the repository.

The review process begins with an evaluation of the acquisition policy, as well as an analysis of the collections currently held by the institution. A review of records in a collection includes information "of a record's functional characteristics: who made the record and for what purpose; of the information in the record to determine its significance and quality; of the record in the context of parallel or related documentary resources; of the potential uses that are likely to be made of the record and the physical, legal and intellectual limitations on access; and of the cost of preserving the record weighed against the benefit of retaining the information."[12]

Repositories accepting records are ethically committed to ensuring the processing, rehousing, and basic holdings maintenance of the records. A formal assessment should be made of the institution's ability to provide secured space and an ongoing environmental monitoring program. The repository should be committed to ensuring that these collections will be cataloged in local catalog systems, as well as in a national database such as the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) or the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) provides RLIN bibliographic records for collections in the custody of repositories unable to contribute national-level cataloging to a national computer database. If time and money permit, placing the finding aids on the Web should be a part of the cataloging process.

If some pieces of the storage and cataloging puzzle are not in place, this presents a great opportunity to seek funding and/or institutional support to acquire the missing elements. Funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Historic Publications and Records Commission, some state granting agencies, and some private foundations are available to support such initiatives.

## *Survey of Unprocessed Collections*

Most repositories have a backlog of records waiting to be processed, due in large part to the size and complexity of modern records, combined with inadequate institutional resources. The establishment of arrangement and descriptive priorities will ensure a balanced and coordinated processing program. Fleckner, Hunter, and others have discussed the techniques of completing archival surveys[13] in the contexts of a records management program, starting an archives, or surveying materials in a given subject area. Similar survey techniques may be applied to the planning of priorities for processing. With a review of the acquisition policy, archivists can produce a systematic survey of unprocessed collections to determine the processing priorities for the backlog.

Planning the survey is essential. Five basic questions must be answered prior to undertaking such a project, including: Who will coordinate the survey? Who will conduct the survey? How long will the information be gathered? What information will be collected? What will be done with this information?[14] When these basic questions are answered, analysis will help archivists determine the processing priorities for their repositories.

A survey form (figure 1) provides the archivist with specific information for each unprocessed collection. Most database software packages allow the configuration of electronic forms. Whether or not a database program is used, a survey form can include certain essential information presented in succinct and logical order. Such information includes the title of each collection; the accession number and/or date received; the location of the collection; a brief history or biography; the volume of the collection (according to some standard of measurement); a brief description of materials; an arrangement scheme (alphabetical, chronological, numerical, or none); inclusive dates of the collection; any restrictions (noting what they are and how they are applied); and the presence or absence of a signed deed of gift.

**Figure 1: Survey Form**

| Local Call Number (Accession Number--035 field) | | |
|---|---|---|
| L2001-10 | | |
| Title Statement (245 field) | | |
| Textile Workers Union of America Collection | | |
| Physical Description (300 field) | Location of collection | |
| 10 linear feet | Alumni Hall | |
| History Note (545 field) | | |
| The United Textile Workers of America was chartered in 1901 and became a founding union of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1937. As part of the CIO, the UTWA was renamed the Textile Workers Organizing Committee, then the Textile Workers Union of America. | | |
| Organization/Arrangement (351 field) | Dates | Restrictions on Access (506 field) |
| Chronological | 1941-1975 | No |
| Deed of Gift | Relevant to collecting policy | Relevant to institution policy |
| Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Research value | Preservation priority | Special formats |
| High | Low | Photographs |
| Summary Note (520 field) | | |
| The collection consists of correspondence, membership rosters, contract proposals, legal and financial documents and industry data. The correspondence is the largest segment of the collection and includes letters between New England and Mid Atlantic local officers and Southern Director Joseph Jacobs. Materials include dues payments; per-capita taxes; defense fun contributions; news for the union newspaper the *Textile Challenger*; contract negotiation, interpretation, and recognition; grievance settlements; arbitration hearings. | | |

Information gathered could parallel a MARC21 record. This initial information gathered about each collection would then create a basic catalog record to be entered in a national bibliographic database. The collection may not be processed, but at least researchers can be made aware of its location.

To refine the assessment process, further questions may be added, including: Do the records relate to the institution in terms of topics that are being documented? What is the stated purpose of the collection as it relates to the institution's mission policy? Who are the institution's users?[15]

The assessment process includes ranking each collection as a high, moderate, or low preservation priority. Information on the condition and stability of each collection and the preservation options required for each collection, including improvement of housing, reformatting, or conservation treatment, would assist in determining these priorities. Finally, a consideration of any special formats that will need special attention (such as photographs, audiovisual, scrapbooks, electronic records, or artifacts) needs to be noted.

Reviewing the acquisition policy, reference use statistics, and reference questions assists in determining high-priority collections. The value of the material for research purposes and/or its intrinsic value to the institution, to a specific group, or to society in general will help to determine appropriate actions and to set priorities.[16] Those records having high research value and pressing preservation needs assume the highest priority.[17]

When all the preceding information has been gathered for every unprocessed collection, those collections with a high priority can be identified. Action plans for processing can be developed in five-year increments, with a review and update of the survey at the conclusion of this period.

## *Preliminary Processing Steps*

In Mary Boccaccio and David W. Carmicheal's technical manual, *Processing Congressional Collections*, the authors suggest important preliminary steps before beginning to process a collection of any size.[18] Every project should begin with checking the boxes sent against the packing list or against a preliminary inventory prepared by the receiving institution. Since boxes from the collection may be stored in various locations, it is important to make sure all boxes and inventory lists are concurrent. Although this action seems so simple and straightforward, it is important to verify that all materials are available at the beginning to bypass problems later in the processing of the collection.

As repositories receive the papers of an individual or organization, they frequently include formats with special access and preservation challenges such as photographs, audiovisual materials, graphic materials, maps, memorabilia, and electronic records in addition to traditional paper materials. The preliminary inventory can be as simple as a box list with a brief description of the contents of each box. If possible, the inventory will provide information to the box level and include the type of material (format), the organization of records, the broad subject area covered, and the inclusive date span.

Using the preliminary inventory as a basis, the processing archivist creates a written work plan for the collection s/he plans to process. This plan describes the individual series in the collection and recommends the appropriate level of arrangement and description for each series. At the same time, the processor will identify materials to be weeded, discarded, or transferred. Next, any processing problems present in the collection will be noted, and it should be noted whether the current organization or housing scheme is adversely affecting materials.[19] Finally, the archivist concludes by estimating the time frame for completing intermediary as well as total processing activities and the amount of financial and staff resources the project will likely expend.[20]

## *Levels of Processing*

The most important of these steps is deciding on the level of processing a collection. It may seem easier to determine the overarching processing priorities than it is to plan how to process individual collections. However, it is essential that the processing archivist focus on establishing the level of processing for each collection, particularly those of great size, that pose major staffing and time commitments.

According to Fredric Miller, "It is important to understand that there is no requirement that all sets of records be processed to the same level of detail."[21] Megan Floyd Desnoyers recommends that "the archivist should evaluate each collection and decide how far that particular collection needs to be taken along the arrangement, preservation, description and screening continua."[22] Established guidelines indicate which collections might receive more careful processing than other collections. In assessing these needs, the processing archivist must consider the physical condition of the collection, the obligations to donors and researchers, and any legislation germane to the collection itself.[23] The processing program extends beyond the selection of records and ensures that activities are carried out in a logical order.[24]

Assignment of levels of processing must be made during the accessioning process.[25] Decisions are based on available resources, possible uses of the material, and the nature of the records themselves.[26] Levels of processing include:

- **Level 1:** Appropriate for a collection that needs minimal processing, usually established at the time a collection is acquired. No arrangement is performed, and description will consist entirely of title, approximate size, rough span of dates, and list or summary of types of materials found in the collection. This could be accompanied by names of prominent correspondents, principal writings, or a list of significant subjects addressed. Other options include a preliminary inventory as well as a catalog record in lieu of a finding aid.[27]
- **Level 2:** This level is appropriate for very large collections such as organizational records. Collections may include large series of the same document types that need little detail or elaboration, such as minutes or newspaper clippings. At this level, materials are sorted into series or by form of material (correspondence, writings, personal papers, photographs, etc.) and listed at box level. Included is a summary type finding aid with a container list to the box level, bound volume, or microfilm reel. The scope and contents section of the finding aid briefly summarizes the subject content of the materials in lieu of elaboration in the container list.
- **Level 3:** This level is reserved for collections that are of particularly high historical value, will have heavy research use, and/or will have a great deal of research interest. Collections are sorted and arranged by series and subseries. At this stage processing includes completely reboxing and refoldering materials according to archival holdings maintenance standards. Papers within folders are properly arranged, and the collection is described at the box and folder level in a completed finding aid.

- **Level 4:** This level is reserved for collections of rare documents and collections of very few items.[28] This is a calendar- or item-level control. An exceptional item or near-item level of foldering and description is used occasionally in cases where the need for extreme security or other considerations of access and retrieval necessitates such control.[29]

For most large collections, processing to level 2 or level 3 is the most practical choice. Level 4 is rarely a viable option for sizeable collections.

## *Preservation Considerations*

The processing archivist must not conduct arrangement and description without addressing the preservation or conservation needs of the collection. Archivists managing the preservation needs of their collections always come face-to-face with some basic obstacles, often caused by the poor conditions in which the materials were stored prior to donation. The chief preservation obstacles encountered by archivists are exposure to dust and mold. Boxes arrive at repositories having been stored in attics, basements, or warehouses, which lack proper environmental controls, regular maintenance, and housekeeping. Most collections also typically include newspaper clippings and deteriorating photocopies that will require reformatting.

"All collections should be evaluated to determine their need for protection from their containers, from self harm or destruction (such as from deteriorating chemicals or metal in, on, or near the documents), and from damage, danger, or theft from users."[30] Preservation activity should take place during the actual processing of any collection. The processing archivist will determine how far to take the preservation activity, either basic holdings maintenance (refoldering, reboxing, preservation photocopying) to more extensive work on the materials (reformatting to microfilm or reformatting from VHS to beta tapes).

Once an archivist has cleared the standard preservation obstacles associated with processing, s/he is free to concentrate on defining and describing records in ways that make their effective use possible and that actively encourages their use. These goals can be accomplished by considering the appropriate level of control and description given available time and resources.

## *Physical Arrangement and Description*

After completing the preliminaries of selection and appraisal, accessioning, preliminary inventory, and processing proposal, and determining the level of processing, the archivist can proceed with the physical arrangement of the collection.

Seven critical stages of processing allow archivists to gain intellectual and physical control over a large collection: background research, preliminary inventory of records with preliminary groupings, identification of series and arrangement, review for weeding and sampling, physical arrangement and basic level of preservation, the preparation of the finding aid, and the creation of a catalog record. When conducting background research, it is very useful to create a chronology or history of the individual or organiza-

tion, including a list of staff and the positions they held, or officers and the offices they held.

Preliminary inventories help provide an overview of the collection. This inventory can go down to the box level and include the type of material (format), the organization of records, the broad subject area covered, an inclusive date span, and an estimate of work to be achieved.

In the course of completing the preliminary inventory, the materials are examined closely to determine if there is an existing pattern of arrangement and series. Separating groups of records into series and subseries will establish greater control of a collection.

Records are next reviewed for possible weeding and sampling. By removing irrelevant and low-value records from the collection, the archivist refines the collection into one that is concentrated with rich information and value and conserves valuable storage space. This winnowing of records can be done using qualitative (selective) or quantitative (statistical) sampling techniques.[31] The amount of work required is largely dependent upon the order of the records, as well as on the level of processing decided for each collection.

If the original order is discernible and the records have been kept according to that order, then the task of refoldering and reboxing is quite straightforward. If the original order is discernible and there are minor corrections that need to be accomplished (such as correcting alphabetical errors and replacing misplaced folders), this, too, is a reasonably simple task. However, if the original order is not discernible, a much larger commitment of time is needed in order to make the collection usable by researchers. The work plan developed earlier takes the state of the records into account when estimating the time needed to complete a project.

**Figure 2: Processing Checklist**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ACCESSIONING:**<br>_____Assign an accession number<br>_____Create entry in accession database<br>_____Prepare Donor/Collection folder<br>**PRELIMINARY INVENTORY:**<br>_____Develop preliminary inventory<br>_____Label containers with accession number and name of collection | _____Item removed from frame<br>_____Oversized materials rehoused<br>_____Books listed and cataloged<br>_____Boxes labeled<br>_____Boxes shelved<br>_____Location guide updated |
| **PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT ACTIONS:**<br>_____Basic preservation (surface cleaning, etc.)<br>_____Boxes replaced with lignin-free boxes<br>_____Folders replaced with lignin-free folders<br>_____Folders stamped and labeled in pencil<br>_____Materials mended or repaired<br>_____Fragile materials resleeved/encapsulated<br>_____Fasteners removed and replaced<br>_____Duplicates removed (note if they were transferred or destroyed)<br>_____Photocopied all clippings, thermo-fax, etc. onto cotton fiber paper | **DESCRIPTIVE ACTIONS:**<br>_____Described to what level (collection, box, older, item)<br>_____Draft finding aid in EAD<br>_____Revisions completed for finding aid<br>_____EAD document converted to HTML and linked to web page<br>_____Hard copy of finding aid placed in reference room binder<br>_____Draft MARC record created<br>_____MARC record input into Voyager and reviewed<br>_____MARC record entered into OCLC<br>_____Catalog Department uploaded MARC record into OCLC |

A processing checklist (figure 2) outlines basic procedures performed on an individual collection, including basic holdings maintenance actions. This inventory is very useful, especially when working with the sheer volume of large collections, with keeping up with what has been completed on any given project. A checklist must be completed for every processed collection. The number of items checked off would depend on the level of processing chosen for that collection.

Although this work can sometimes seem solitary, there are opportunities for collaboration. Paraprofessionals and student assistants can accomplish many basic tasks, such as reboxing, refoldering, labeling folders, and minor preservation work. Training student assistants in routine tasks offers the processing archivist the opportunity to develop his or her supervisory skills.

Once the archivist finishes the physical arrangement of the materials, s/he will begin to describe the collection. Description typically includes creating a finding aid and a catalog record. Many repositories now have the capability of encoding finding aids using Encoded Archival Description (EAD) and mounting them on the Web. These searchable, readily accessible aids offer maximum accessibility to potential researchers. A copy of the finding aid will also be placed in the reference room for on-site users and for those who do not have Web access.

## *Processing Living Collections*

A significant challenge in processing large collections is managing collections that grow in size as donors continue adding materials to their original deposits. Known as "living collections," these collections often emanate from organizations whose operation is ongoing (for example, university and organizational records). When processing such collections, the goal will be to present a clear inventory to users.

Intellectual arrangement does not have to mirror the physical arrangement. The series title, not the box number, can be the primary organizing principle of the inventories. Terry Eastwood suggests two rules of arrangement when dealing with these types of collections. "The need to separate physical and administrative control [when dealing with accruals] is incontestable ... the first rule of arrangement is separate physical and administrative control from intellectual control. ... the second rule of arrangement, closely related to the first, is to identify each component of an accession with the aggregation or aggregations to which it belongs."[32]

Thus, the goal is to leave living collections unintegrated physically, but to bring them together intellectually. So a finding aid may well look something like:

**Minutes, 1900–1985**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1900–1944 | Box 1 |
| 1945–1952 | Box 56 |
| 1953–1985 | Box 101 |

**Minutes, 1900–1945**

| Box |
|---|
| 1 |
| 56 |
| 101 |

This format is adaptable to EAD and it accommodates series descriptions. It also means that the finding aids can be edited, reprinted, and reposted to the Web when new accessions come in, at a fraction of the work of physically reorganizing the collection every time.

One predicament with this approach is that, in order to review all the parts of one series, as in the above example, a patron will need to examine multiple boxes instead of just one. Nevertheless, if each accrual is processed separately, there is usually insufficient staff to physically reorganize each addition, ultimately resulting in the request of multiple boxes. By applying the intellectual organizational scheme, users can easily see how many years of minutes are available.

The more serious difficulty with intellectual, not physical, integration is that the finding aid is no longer a true box list. This may cause challenges in locating the total contents of each box. To alleviate this potential problem, the archivist can maintain a box list separately, just as library shelf lists were separate from the card catalog.[33]

## *Conclusion*

Managing the processing of large collections can be daunting, but sizeable collections need not intimidate a repository if it develops and adheres to well-planned and integrated processing operations. The planning process offers a cumulative benefit. Each part of the continuum, from selection and appraisal to arranging and describing, is strengthened with sound planning. With a little imagination, compromise, and collaboration, processing can become another strong link in the chain of archival activity. Using sound principles and procedures, the management of processing becomes the strongest link of all.

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20. Processing rates vary a great deal from collection to collection. "Yale University Processing Manual," table I.5, provides guidelines for processing estimates, <http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/manuscript/process/appA.html#I.5>.
21. Miller, 46.
22. Desnoyers, 8.
23. Desnoyers, 8.
24. Miller, 45.
25. These levels are based on those first established by Holmes (see note 5).
26. Miller, 46.
27. "Archives and Manuscripts: Processing Manual"
28. "Yale University Processing Manual," Chapter II. General Information/Getting Started.
29. "Yale University Processing Manual," Chapter II. General Information/Getting Started.
30. Desnoyers, 13.
31. Hunter, 64–68.
32. Eastwood, 97.
33. Mark Greene, "Living Collections," 11 July 2000, personal E-mail to author.

# ARCHIVING NEWSPAPER COMIC STRIPS: THE SAN FRANCISCO ACADEMY OF COMIC ART COLLECTION

BY AMY MCCRORY

***ABSTRACT:*** This article describes a two-year project at The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library (CGA)[1] devoted to processing and describing newspaper comic strips from the collection of the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art (SFACA), a nonprofit corporation founded by Bill Blackbeard in 1968. The SFACA collection is the largest known collection of cartoon art from American newspapers, so preserving its contents and making them accessible to researchers was essential to the study of this art form. Writing the finding aid to the collection required accommodation of Blackbeard's collecting philosophy, observance of the rules of archival description, creation of a descriptive scheme that would meet researchers' needs, and an approach that would fit within the framework of Encoded Archival Description (EAD). Although the challenges of processing the SFACA collection may seem unique to the comic strip format, archivists accustomed to working with more traditional documents will recognize shared concerns with original order, points of access, and other archival principles.

## *Introduction*

In 1997, The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library purchased the collection of the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art, an institution founded in 1968 and devoted to collecting a variety of popular culture materials, including printed cartoon art. Over a two-year period, the staff of CGA organized materials from the SFACA and assembled a finding aid to the collection. We intended for the finding aid to reflect and expand upon the SFACA's 30-year effort by pulling together the diverse parts of the collection while at the same time giving each part its adequate measure of description. The usual tasks of organizing the materials and writing a finding aid for them were complicated by the fact that printed cartoons appear in a variety of formats in publications owned, operated, and supervised by various publishing companies. Within this collection, some of the cartoons remained in the newspapers in which they were originally published. In other cases, the SFACA's creator had removed them from the news-

papers, casting them into new formats—the clipping and the tear sheet—that lacked contextual information. One of the primary challenges of the project was to design a finding aid that would encompass this variety of formats. EAD emerged as a useful tool, both in encoding text and in unifying diverse electronic files into a descriptive whole.

## *The Blackbeard Collection from San Francisco to The Ohio State University*

Bill Blackbeard began the SFACA collection in the late 1960s at his home in San Francisco. His stated goal was to collect "popular narrative art" in all its forms. The entire collection is too complex to describe in detail here, but merits a brief overview. Its materials included, in addition to comic strips, bound newspapers (more than 1,600 volumes dating from the 1880s); popular fiction (more than 25,000 volumes dating from the mid-eighteenth century); periodicals (more than 11,000 issues dating from 1890); dime novels and story papers (more than 700 titles dating from the Civil War); Victorian cartoon-illustrated fiction (more than 250 volumes, including illustrated novels by Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and others); British boys' papers and "penny dreadfuls" (more than 100 titles dating from 1860); comic books and graphic novels (more than 7,500 dating from 1929); popular films; reference works on narrative art; newspaper comic strip reprint books; and science fiction fanzines, among other things. The collection filled 14 rooms of a two-story, 4,000-square-foot house.

Blackbeard's choice of the expression "popular narrative art" is as good as any to describe the holdings of the SFACA. The phrase encompasses both written and pictorial art and points to the interrelatedness of words and pictures in many of the books, magazines, and story papers he chose to collect. This relationship reached a highly developed and refined form in the modern comic strip, for which cartoonist Will Eisner coined the term "sequential art"[2]. Blackbeard's sizeable collection, which turned his home into a floor-to-ceiling maze of vertically stacked materials, represents an attempt to trace and preserve the evolution of storytelling that combines words and pictures to produce this third, entirely different kind of narrative. Because the mass-published art and literature of the nineteenth century informed the comic strips that emerged in the twentieth, Blackbeard actively collected both.

The impulse to collect comic strips arrived in the late 1960s when he decided to write a history of the newspaper comic strip in America. He quickly found that no comprehensive collection of such materials, suitable for research, existed. During the same period, he learned that many libraries were disposing of bound newspapers after microfilming them. To acquire these materials, he founded the nonprofit SFACA. He began collecting newspapers from California libraries, later expanding his collecting activity to institutions nationwide, including the Library of Congress. Some of the newspapers he acquired were still intact in their binders, but many had been cut apart for microfilming, the separated pages stacked in the order of their original pagination. Blackbeard kept some of these disjointed newspapers as they were and cut others apart in order to create chronological runs of comic strips. This meant either cutting several years' worth

of single comic strips out of the pages or removing comic sections whole. He kept the bound newspapers intact.

Cartoonists and comics historians have long understood the importance of the collection, but its research applications may not be immediately apparent to others. Most people see cartoon art on an almost daily basis, perhaps so often that they fail to grasp one of its most valuable features: that cartoonists are quite precise (often merciless) in their jests at dress, mannerisms, posture, speech, assumptions and prejudices, modes of political dishonesty, styles in the decoration of domiciles and public spaces, and the pointed discomforts of domestic and social discord—in short, all of the elements that show, in the most immediate manner, what individuals and their larger environment are like in a given time and place. Paul Bourget noted this fact in an illustrated piece on American humor, written for the *New York Herald* in 1894. On the subject of "comic newspapers," he wrote: "Without exaggerating the importance of these pamphlets, we must recognize in them, in every country, a certain documentary value. They characterize the humor of the race and its delight in mockery. Besides, you will find in them a thousand details of habits, noted on the spur of the moment, and which their exaggeration renders still more perceptible to the traveller."[3]

In 1996, Blackbeard learned that he would lose the lease on his home and be forced to sell his collection. Selling items piecemeal to individual collectors would have netted a substantial monetary return over time, but it would also have destroyed the most comprehensive collection of American newspaper cartoon art extant. Recognizing the importance of keeping the collection intact and making its contents widely known, The Ohio State University Libraries negotiated with Blackbeard over the course of a year regarding its disposition. They reached an agreement, and the materials, 75 tons in all, were transported to Ohio in six moving vans.

CGA was well equipped to process and house this valuable collection. One of five special collections in The Ohio State University Libraries (OSUL), it was established in 1977 with the gifts in kind of the Milton Caniff and Jon Whitcomb collections. Its mission is to collect printed cartoon art of all kinds, including comic strips, editorial cartoons, sports cartoons, magazine cartoons, comic books, and graphic novels, and to provide access to these materials. Its collections include both published and original art, as well as materials documenting the careers of cartoonists and the activities of cartoonists' professional associations. Altogether, it holds more than 370,000 graphic materials, making it the largest academic research facility documenting printed cartoon art in the United States.[4]

The curator applied for a two-year grant to support work on the collection and received funding from the Getty Foundation, the Scripps Howard Foundation, and the Charles D. Farber Memorial Foundation. In July 2000, I was hired as the project archivist and began deciding, in consultation with the curator, how to process the materials. I hired several university students to assist with the project; all descriptions of activities in this article that begin with the pronoun "we" signal that these were collective activities in which my assistants' ideas and observations shaped my decisions about processing the collection.

CGA's organization and description of the SFACA collection were influenced from the start by the fact that this collection was already well known and had, long before its

arrival at Ohio State, an active user community. Often referred to as "the Blackbeard collection," it had for many years provided researchers with source material for cartoon histories and reprint volumes. Numerous articles and over 75 books had been produced using SFACA materials, most notably the Fantagraphics reprint library of *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, Winsor McCay's opulently surreal classic. Comics historians were accustomed to making the trip to Blackbeard's house in San Francisco to view cartoons and other illustrated materials dating back to the nineteenth century.

CGA had already been in operation for more than 20 years when it purchased the SFACA collection, so the curator could anticipate the nature of researchers' requests. When historians were, for instance, interested in researching a particular comic feature, their interest was often focused on a limited span of years because the creative personnel had changed several times during the life of the feature. Often, a request centered on a single date or small group of dates, particularly if these examples were missing from privately held comic strip collections. When material was needed for reprint books, it was important to know how complete the holdings of a particular title were. There was tremendous interest in the creative giants of cartoon art, such as McCay, George Herriman, and E. C. Segar, so that individual works—particularly early or obscure works—by these highly prolific artists were of great importance.

## *The Challenges of Preserving and Arranging Clippings, Sections, and Tear Sheets*

The goal of the two-year project was to organize and make available the newspaper comic strips from the SFACA collection. (Monographs, serials, and bound newspapers were excluded from this work flow; existing library staff in the OSUL Special Collections Cataloging Department cataloged them.) The newspaper comic strips consisted of some 2.5 million comic clippings, comic sections, and tear sheets, dated from 1894 to 1996. Some explanation of the three different formats is helpful in illuminating the unique problems of organization, storage, and description that presented themselves with this collection.

The *clippings* were single comic strips Blackbeard cut from newspapers in an attempt to establish a complete, or near-complete, run of each comic feature. The *comic sections* were primarily Sunday color sections, which Blackbeard kept intact. These dated from 1894, the first year in which American newspapers published four-color comic sections. The *tear sheets* were single pages Blackbeard cut from Sunday comic sections. They featured either half-page or full-page comic strips; devoting an entire Sunday page to a popular comic feature was common in American newspapers until the 1950s. The tear sheets made it possible to establish a long Sunday run of a single feature in its best presentation, that is, in the largest format possible. The versos of the pages included additional comic strips.

The two major tasks to be accomplished were organizing the comic clippings and tear sheets and providing access to the contents of the comic sections. The comic sections carried contextual information—newspaper titles and dates of publication—about the comic strips on their pages. The clippings and tear sheets usually retained the date

information (though not always); the names of the newspapers had, in most cases, been lost when the comics were cut out. Each format had to be considered separately in decisions about processing, storage, and description.

As with most collections, the SFACA materials ranged in condition from excellent to very poor. The usual issues in deciding about storage and use of fragile materials were shaded by the fact that these cartoons existed on newsprint. CGA's longstanding practice was to retain newspaper cartoons in their original printed format, a commitment supported by the university libraries' administration. A literature survey undertaken to further explore newspaper preservation practices turned up very little. Most of the articles assumed a short life span for newsprint and recommended preservation photocopying or microfilming. Advice about preservation of the paper itself was available at the Web sites of the Library of Congress (LOC)[5] and the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC)[6]. We incorporated the LOC and NEDCC guidelines into existing CGA practices, keeping the paper stored away from light, heat, and humidity; providing adequate support for materials so that they could be handled without causing damage; and repairing tears when necessary.

Comic clippings varied in size from 3 x 10 cm (1 1/4" x 3") to 20 x 50 cm (8" x 20"). We arranged these chronologically in stacks, usually of one year each, wrapped them in acid-free paper, and stacked them in appropriately sized archival boxes. We placed tear sheets, usually 41 x 52 cm (16" x 21") in heavy folders and stored them in larger archival boxes. We interleaved fragile tear sheets with acid-free bond paper so that they could be lifted by the edges of the interleaving paper instead of by their own edges. We enclosed extremely fragile tear sheets in clear polyester folders.

Sunday comic sections required more elaborate storage. We processed the oldest sections first, since these were often rare and contained little-known material. So that researchers would be able to page through them, seeing the Sunday supplements as a casual reader would have a century ago, we placed these in clear polyester folders, sealed along one edge, and interleaved them with bond sheets. This method of storage ensured that even fragile pages could be carefully turned, using heavy acid-free strips of paper to lift their edges without damage occurring.

After consulting the LOC and NEDCC Web sites and working with OSUL's conservator, I decided to repair damaged items with heat-sensitive tissue. The conservator tinted the repair tissue with aniline dyes to match the various tones of older newsprint. A small percentage of the pages were so brittle that the application of heat-sensitive tissue could have increased the damage. Therefore, we simply placed them in polyester enclosures with written instructions that only CGA staff were allowed to handle them.

Our efforts to arrange the SFACA collection were complicated by the fact that Blackbeard had never created a written index or catalog for his collection. Having lived with the collection as it grew over 30 years' time, he knew the locations of the groups of materials in his house and could retrieve items without reference to any printed guide. The original order of the collection as a whole was lost during the packing and transport of the materials from California to Ohio. However, within some of the boxes, Blackbeard's arrangement of the materials was plain: he grouped some items in order to emphasize a particular comic feature, others to show the work of a single artist, and

others to establish the output of a newspaper or syndicate during a certain period. Our task was to reassemble the items in a way that would reflect their collector's intentions.

We sorted comic clippings by title and date. The entire run of a single comic feature could range anywhere from two days to seven decades. Each feature was generally dispersed among many boxes: a year of clippings in one box, several years in another, a few months in another, perhaps a stray week or two in each of several other boxes. Some groups of clippings arrived at CGA neatly stacked and in date order; others needed substantial reordering. Given that there were hundreds of boxes and several file cabinets full of clippings, it was necessary to create a system of temporary numbers to track the strips as we sorted them and recorded their dates.

Previously accessioned collections of comic strips at CGA had been accounted for on a photocopied month-and-date grid. Each grid represented a one-year run of the comic; location numbers had been written in by hand. I decided to replicate this system electronically in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. This not only provided a compact presentation of holdings information for the public, it served as a simple environment for library staff to track dates, and could be edited as necessary. In particular, it was very easy to replace temporary location numbers with permanent numbers when processing was completed. We converted the spreadsheets to Portable Document Format (PDF) for on-line presentation (figure 1).

Sorting continuing runs of comic strips by date was not as straightforward a task as one might expect. To begin with, date information was not always available. Usually, the cartoonist had written the month and date on the original art used for reproduction; the year, as a part of the syndicate's copyright notice, was printed on the item at the time of its initial publication. However, some comic strips—particularly those published in the first quarter of the twentieth century—lacked date information. As clippings, they had, by definition, lost the contextual publication information provided by the newspapers, unless they had appeared near the top of the page and Blackbeard had clipped them to preserve the banner date.

Sometimes, text on the verso of a clipping provided clues. Movie advertisements, war and other news coverage, new car sales, baseball scores, and boxing match decisions were helpful in identifying years. Dated wire stories could help to establish the correct sequence for a group of clippings. Most welcome of all were legal notices, since these had to include the month, date, and year. Some groups of clippings included both dated and undated material so that it was necessary to read the comic strips, relying on a continuing story line to infer chronological order (this was not always an unwelcome task).

In some cases, it was impossible to assign dates to a group of clippings, for example, when Blackbeard had clipped them from various newspapers that had run them on different days. We used the cartoonist's handwritten date in these cases, since it transcended the differences in the publication schedules of the outlets in which the work appeared. Lacking such information from the artist, we concluded that such comic strips had no single identifiable date; it was often impossible to determine whether SFACA holdings for the feature were truly complete.

At times, gaps in the date run were the result of factors other than missing items. Although historians agree that the first continuing daily strip appeared in 1903[7], not all

**Figure 1: PDF inventory of San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection holdings, *Mutt and Jeff*, 1919.**

| **Mutt & Jeff** | **Bud Fisher** | 1919 |
|---|---|---|
| Title of feature | Creator(s) | Year |

**Size** Most dailies: 19 x 42 cm; some dailies 27.3 x 39.3 cm

* Indicates date is uncertain. % Indicates strip is on verso of another feature.

Sundays appear in red and bold.

| | January | February | March | April | May | June | July | August | September | October | November | December |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-4 | SFC20 | | | | | |
| *2* | SFC20 | SFS18-1-5 | SFS18-1-9 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFS18-3-6 | |
| *3* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-3-1 | SFC20 | | | |
| *4* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | | |
| *5* | SFS18-1-1 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | SFS18-3-4 | | |
| *6* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-9 | | | | | |
| *7* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | | |
| *8* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFS18-2-5 | SFC20 | | | | SFC20 | |
| *9* | SFC20 | SFS18-1-6 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | SFS18-3-7 | |
| *10* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | | |
| *11* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | SFC20 | |
| *12* | SFS18-1-2 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | SFC20 | |
| *13* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-1 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-10 | SFC20 | | | | |
| *14* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | | |
| *15* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-6 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | |
| *16* | SFC20 | SFS18-1-7 | SFS18-1-10 SFS20-2-1 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-3-8 | |
| *17* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-3-2 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | |
| *18* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | |
| *19* | SFS18-1-3 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | | | |
| *20* | | SFC20 | | SFS18-2-2 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | |
| *21* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | SFC20 | SFC20 | |
| *22* | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFS18-2-7 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | |
| *23* | SFC20 | SFS18-1-8 | SFS18-1-11 | | SFC20 | | SFC20 | | | SFC20 | SFS18-3-9 | |
| *24* | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-3-3 | | SFC20 | | |
| *25* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | SFC20 | | |
| *26* | SFS18-1-4 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | SFS18-3-5 | | |
| *27* | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-3 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-11 | | | SFC20 | | |
| *28* | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | SFC20 | |
| *29* | SFC20 | | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFS18-2-8 | SFC20 | | | | | |
| *30* | SFC20 | | SFS18-1-12 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | SFC20 | | | | SFS18-3-10 | |
| *31* | SFC20 | | | | | | SFC20 | | | | | |

Dailies published in the New York **World;** duplicates and date conflicts may exist when checked against other holdings for 1919.

**SFS18** Sundays published in the **Nashville Banner**; **SFS20-2-1** Sunday published in the **Washington Star**.

Includes four panel strip entitled "Bolshevicki" in the month of March

"daily" features ran every day; the reasons for this varied. The early years of Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff*, which began publication in 1907, provide one example. Gaps in the SFACA run of *Mutt and Jeff* might be attributed to missing copies in the collection or, just as likely, to Fisher's sudden, self-elected vacations, during which he would abruptly leave work for a month to travel in Mexico (and was always welcomed back, as his work was hugely popular[8]).

To finally establish the completeness of this collection, one could research every issue of the relevant American newspapers back to 1894, but there would still be uncertainties.[9] Newspaper strikes and mail strikes could interfere with the regular appearance of a comic feature in a particular publication, as could a publisher's decision to stop running a feature that continued to run in other newspapers. The existence of a comic strip both as an artist's creation and as a commercial entity, reprinted in hundreds of different outlets, complicates its reassembly in a single collection.

Comic sections and tear sheets required slightly different working methods from that of the clippings. By definition, each item always contained more than one comic feature. Early comic sections, in addition to containing comic strips, could be the subject of research themselves as examples of turn-of-the-century graphic design, each publication incorporating comic strips, illustrations, stories, advertisements, and other features presented in a distinctive style. Accordingly, we treated comic sections in two ways. First, we tracked their comic strips in the same spreadsheets we used for the comic clippings. Second, in the finding aid to the collection, we recorded each comic section as a physical item, noting the title and date of the newspaper from which Blackbeard had removed it.

Tear sheets possessed some of the qualities of the comic sections. They contained multiple comic features and, in some cases, had banners presenting the newspapers' titles and dates. Blackbeard's treatment of them, however, established that their role in the collection was closer to that of the clippings. He had assembled each group of tear sheets with an eye toward creating a run of one particular comic feature; identifying information about the newspaper from which they had been taken might or might not be present. The contextual information was clearly secondary to the goal of assembling one comic title in one place. Accordingly, we processed them in much the same way as the clippings. The tear sheets were not described as items in themselves, but were treated solely as carriers for comic features.

Illustrated advertisements, often presented in the form of comic strips, were a common element in both the comic sections and the tear sheets. We created spreadsheets for these as well, the file names corresponding to the name of the product advertised. Advertisement comics were usually unsigned or signed with a pseudonym. In most cases, the artists were unknown, but in the few cases where the creator's name was a matter of record, we added it to the description.

## *Digital Imaging*

The other major activity of the SFACA project was the creation of digital images of selected items in the collection. We chose a single representative panel for each comic feature, either scanning or photographing the material, depending on its size. A digital

imaging specialist established standards and procedures for the project and trained the rest of the staff in creating images.

We scanned color and black-and-white materials alike in 24-bit color, creating a thumbnail and reference image for each. General guidelines for the project stated that the size of reference images should not exceed 100K, but allowances were made for cartoons whose details could not be appreciated unless the entire digital image were larger. Sometimes, the colors produced by the digital camera were markedly different from those of the original item. In these cases, we adjusted color levels in Photoshop, aiming to make the digital surrogates as close to the originals as possible. However, we made no attempt to digitally "clean up" images or correct flaws such as tattered or torn edges, yellowed newsprint, or faded inks; such characteristics were all considered inherent parts of the objects, telling much about their creation and subsequent history.

We considered batch processing of images for presentation on the Web, but decided against it. The size and proportions of newspaper comic strips one hundred years ago were quite different from what they are today. In general, they were much larger overall and the relative size of the lettering in relation to the images was smaller. In the interest of transmitting to viewers a sense of these differences, we resized each image individually, choosing the most suitable dimensions for each.

## *Describing a Popular Culture Format*

Once the work flow for sorting materials, creating spreadsheets, and scanning images was established, work on the central part of the finding aid to the collection began. This was conceived as an on-line document that would present simple records for the materials, those records linking to the more detailed holdings information in the PDFs. The finding aid was divided into two series, the first for comic features, the second for comic sections. (Two additional series, one for the illustrated advertisements and one for early noncontinuing cartoons by important artists, are in development at the time of this writing.) The entire finding aid can be viewed on the Web at <http://dlib.lib.ohio-state.edu/cga>.

## *Series I: Comic Features*

I organized the first series alphabetically by the titles of the comic features. This arrangement was best suited to the needs of researchers who, as noted earlier, would be interested in particular creative works and would want to locate titles easily. Each record included creator names, when possible, and beginning and ending dates of SFACA collection holdings for the feature. Container numbers were not a part of the records in the first series, since they already appeared in the spreadsheets. A sequential listing of container numbers would have been impossible for many of the records, since the comic features were stored in multiple, often nonadjacent boxes as a result of their varying sizes and formats.

We followed CGA's established practice of using the general term "creator" to credit all creative personnel: writers, artists, and those who assumed both roles. We assigned credit according to names appearing on the comic strips; no attempt was made to list all

of the artists and writers who might have assisted, without credit, on a given strip. Primary information about "ghosts" is available only through personal accounts or through syndicate records, which may be incomplete or nonexistent, and that require careful research to weed out inconsistencies and false claims. *The Stripper's Guide*, a database of information about comic strips and their creators, already contains abundant and detailed artist and writer information. Rather than repeat it, the SFACA finding aid referred researchers to *The Stripper's Guide* for the more in-depth history.

Assignment of titles to the comic features could be complicated. Contemporary readers of comic strips are used to stability in feature titles and may assume that a 50-year *Peanuts* or 72-year *Gasoline Alley* is typical. But the medium in its youth was often unpredictable and subject to sudden changes of all kinds, and titles were no exception. Title changes might occur as a comic strip evolved over time, with the strip's most prominent character giving way to another or the theme of the strip changing significantly. The feature *Joe Jinks,* for example, which began as *Joe's Car* in 1917, went through the succeeding titles *Joe Jinks*, *Curley Kayoe*, *Buttons*, and finally *Davy Jones*, ending in 1971.

Many early comic strips carried a new title each day; some appeared with no title at all. Occasionally, newspapers printed their own versions of titles above the strips. Some apparent title changes were simply alternate titles the artist used, never settling on one choice. Rube Goldberg, a prolific artist who was apparently never troubled by the primary demand of newspaper comic work, namely, coming up with a new idea every day, frequently produced more than one comic a day, nesting an additional one-or-two-panel gag inside of the already complicated main feature. He was not overly concerned with consistency in naming his creations, so that his daily strip and the secondary strip might each carry one of several different titles, which were recycled on no particular schedule. Bud Fisher was even freer in his early work, changing the format and theme of *Mutt and Jeff* as it suited him, often leaving gag-a-day conventions behind and veering off into political satire or odd essays on contemporary slang, and titling the creations at will.

Even more difficult were features whose artists jumped from newspaper to newspaper and syndicate to syndicate, taking their creations with them, sometimes able to retain their original titles, at other times forced to change them due to a copyright suit brought by the original syndicate.[10] In some cases, it was impossible to determine whether two differently titled features drawn by the same artist and looking very much alike should be described as two separate creations or a single feature with a title change. *The Stripper's Guide* was often helpful in this regard, although on some occasions we had to make an arbitrary call based solely on the materials in hand.

We chose a uniform title for each comic feature, basing the choice either on the uniform titles used in *The Stripper's Guide,* information from a reference book or Web site on comics history, or a local decision made by looking at the complete run of materials and choosing the most likely candidate for an overarching title. With an eye toward simplicity in the finding aid, all title changes—earlier and later titles, alternate titles, and unstable titles—were identified in the finding aid as "alternate titles." They were listed in the order of their successive appearance (if there was any order), usually with little or no annotation. More detailed explanations, if they were necessary, were provided in the PDFs with the detailed listings of holdings. In addition to a title or titles,

creator names, and dates, each record in the first series included a link to the representative image of the comic feature and links to the PDFs.

## *Series II: Comic Sections*

I organized the second series alphabetically by the titles of the newspapers in which the comic sections appeared. Individual records for each comic section were filed chronologically below the appropriate newspaper titles. No attempt was made to record the history of newspaper title changes. I simply created a record for each separate title, filing the records alphabetically along with the appropriate span of dates.

It became apparent that, for the oldest comic sections, an additional level of description would be needed to account for some of the items in their pages. Had their content been entirely stable with the regular appearance of the same continuing comic features, these features could have been tracked in spreadsheets. But in the comic sections of the late 1890s and early 1900s, there was a proliferation of material that occurred only once, much of it in some format other than the comic strip. Librarians and archivists accustomed to describing avant garde collections will recognize many of the problems that arise when one tries to apply standardized description to materials created by artists enjoying the freedom of a new, experimental format.

This creative freedom is what makes reading comic sections from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth so rewarding. The pages are crowded with artistic inspiration, ranging from simple, middlebrow genre pieces to freewheeling experiments in storytelling, employing virtuoso illustration and antic wordplay. The generous page space allotted to comics at the time fostered all types of expression. Some works depict high-speed physical comedy, their punch lines a wild scramble of objects pulled into a chaotic and inevitable clash of forces; others are stately in their narrative pacing and pictorial elaboration, slowing the reader down so that every detail may be absorbed (figures 2 and 3). Though this was the period when the standard six-panel, half-page allotment for the newspaper comic strip emerged, it was also the period when the best artists regularly deviated from the format. In their work, the action crosses panels or bursts out of them altogether; perspective and layout are bent and twisted in order to reflect altered states of perception or heightened emotion. Some artists decorated the margins of the pages with additional illustrations, embellishing, commenting, or expanding upon the theme or action of the central cartoon.

These experiments were possible because comic sections were a new invention and no one knew exactly what they should look like. In many newspaper comic sections, comic strips and panel cartoons shared space with editorial cartoons; paper dolls, puzzles, models, and decorations meant to be cut out; illustrated poems, stories, sheet music, and vaudeville-style, two-line exchanges; feature articles with spot illustrations; and full-page cover art. Staff artists might work in several of these genres, in addition to the comic strip. A single artist often created several new comic strips in one year, some of them running for decades afterwards, others appearing only a few times before they were abandoned. There were strips that appeared one time only ("one-shots," to use today's term), with vividly imagined characters—either human or animal, or talking, thinking, havoc-wreaking inanimate objects—never to be used again.

Tracking of these additional materials began during the two-year, grant-funded project, but time did not permit describing the artistic content of all of the comic sections included in the finding aid. Furthermore, it was not called for in the terms of the grant, where the emphasis was upon recording continuing comic strips. However, recording the one-shots and other obscure items was important because, in many cases, they were the work of major newspaper cartoonists, either those who were already well established in nineteenth-century American and British humor magazines or those who began their careers at turn-of-the-century newspapers and went on to become famous. Recording of most of these items had to be postponed until after the end of the initial two-year project. After the project deadline, we undertook the creation of records of artists' early works and are still adding these records to the on-line finding aid. We employ format and genre terms for printed cartoons created by the Consortium of Popular Culture Collections in the Midwest[11], expanding upon them as needed.

**Figure 2: *Hungry Hal*, "The Glorious Fourth of July in Funnyville" (detail), by DeVoss Woodward Driscoll. From the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 3, 1904.**

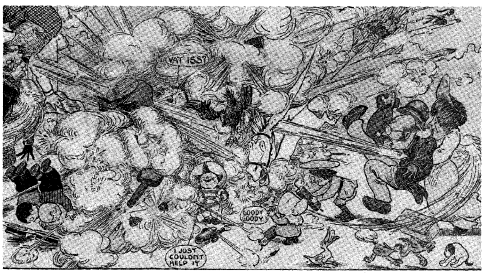
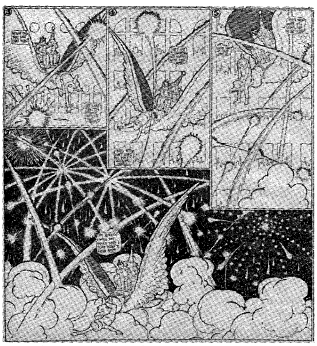



**Figure 3: *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (detail), by Winsor McCay. From the *Oakland Herald,* May 12, 1906.**



## *Incorporation of EAD*

The Getty Foundation grant required that the finding aid be written in Extensible Markup Language (XML) using the Document Type Definition (DTD) for EAD. I used an authoring environment created and distributed by Christopher Prom at the University of Illinois, which incorporated EAD Cookbook templates into NoteTab Pro software. The image files and the PDFs listing the extent of holdings for each comic feature resided on the same server as the main body of the finding aid. Two types of EAD linking elements, one for descriptive elements external to the main finding aid and the other for digital images of collection items, joined them in a complete collection description.

OSUL's Web librarian designed a style sheet for the finding aid in Extensible Stylesheet Language (XSL). Transformation from the XML file to a single HTML file would have presented researchers with a lengthy Web page containing more than 1,000 individual records so, instead, the output was broken into multiple files. The main page of the finding aid included the overview of the collection and the two series titles with their accompanying scope and content notes. These notes were followed by links to the HTML files containing the records of comic features and comic sections. The style sheet, while outputting the alphabetical list of comic titles in the first series, generated a separate HTML file for each initial alphabetical letter. Second series records were output according to newspaper titles with a separate HTML file for each title.

As more finding aids are developed for on-line presentation, it is likely that archivists will stop thinking of linked objects as "external" to the on-line document. The finding aid may then be seen as a group of files of varying types rather than as a single XML or HTML instance. The fact that some large on-line finding aids already exist as a group of separate HTML files, with or without other file formats involved, may lead practitioners to adopt this view.

## *Conclusion*

Every archival collection, in addition to reflecting the ideas of its creator, is made up of materials that have their own history. Archivists are expected to describe these materials in a way that informs researchers of their potential usefulness, but often the features to be described are elusive in nature. In the SFACA collection, information about the elements that constituted our records—creator, title and date—was at times difficult to identify. Additionally, the comic strips' existence as printed items, appearing in a variety of formats in numerous publications, meant that grouping them and describing them collectively could be complicated. This fact runs counter to assumptions about mass-produced materials: that they will be highly standardized, with little deviation from the recognized standard. In fact, these items demonstrate that the products of industrialized culture can possess as many idiosyncrasies as the more personal objects—manuscripts, correspondence, and photographs, for instance—that make up traditional archival collections. Both types of materials can require archivists to expand existing subject vocabularies and to rethink the intellectual organization of collection descriptions.

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## NOTES

1. The acronym "CGA" was assigned to the Cartoon Research Library when its former appellation, Cartoon and Graphic Arts Library, was still in use. "CGA" remains the abbreviated form used within the university libraries, both in automated records and in everyday communications.
2. Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, Florida: Poorhouse Press, 1985) 7–8.
3. Paul Bourget, "The New World as Seen Through French Eyes," *New York Herald Fifth Section*, 9 December 1894, p. 2.
4. More information about CGA is available at the library's Web site: <http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/cgaweb/>.
5. "Preserving Newspapers," *Library of Congress*, November 2002, <http://www.loc.gov/preserv/care/newspap.html>.
6. "Preservation of Library and Archival Materials" series, *Northeast Document Conservation Center*, various leaflets, <http://www.nedcc.org/leaflets/leaf.htm>.
7. Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1994): 36.
8. Robert C. Harvey, "Bud Fisher and the Daily Comic Strip," *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies* 1:2 (February 1994): 18.
9. A large and growing database of information about comic strips in American newspapers does, in fact, exist. *The Stripper's Guide*, a subscription database distributed on CD, is based on research of newspapers, materials from comic strip collections, and reference works such as the *Chronology of American Comic Strips*. Though it contains thousands of records, its creator states in the introduction to the database that it is "nowhere near comprehensive" and the beginning and ending dates of many comic features are uncertain.
10. The best-known example is that of the lawsuit publisher William Randolph Hearst filed against cartoonist Rudolph Dirks in 1913, when Dirks attempted to move his popular feature *The Katzenjammer Kids* from Hearst's *New York Journal* to Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*. See Stephen Becker, *Comic Art in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959): 48.
11. The list of terms is available at "Form/Genre Terms for Printed Cartoon Materials," *Consortium of Popular Culture Collections in the Midwest*, <http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/pcl/ctsaurus.html>.

# APPRAISAL, REAPPRAISAL, AND DEACCESSIONING

BY CARYN WOJCIK

***ABSTRACT:*** The State Archives of Michigan conducted an extensive backlog reappraisal project to identify government records in its custody that did not possess archival value. During the course of the project, over 13,000 boxes were reappraised. The State Archives determined that 58 percent of those boxes did not contain archival records. The State Archives also determined that over 3,600 boxes were not authorized for transfer to the repository and never should have been accessioned. As a result of this project, appraisal and accessioning practices were streamlined to ensure that better decisions are made before records reach archival custody.

Over the years, archival appraisal literature has debated the appropriateness of reappraisal and deaccessioning as collection management techniques. Leonard Rapport's article in *American Archivist*, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," published in 1981, raised so many eyebrows that the journal devoted an entire issue in 1984 to publishing responses from other archivists.[1] One of the most passionate opponents of reappraisal in the 1984 issue was Karen Benedict, who feared that archival repositories that engaged in broadscale reappraisal initiatives may "seriously undermine" their program.[2] Since then, the debate has continued. Timothy Ericson's 1991 article, "'At the Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," focuses less on the justification for reappraisal and deaccessioning projects and more on encouraging archival repositories to define their "collecting focus" so their appraisers have "specific instructions" for determining which records will be preserved.[3] A variety of factors, described later in this article, compelled the State Archives of Michigan[4] to address these exact issues. The archives staff identified a need to define why the records we preserve have value and found that reappraisal and deaccessioning were useful techniques to prepare for the future.

It is not uncommon for an archival repository to have a backlog of unprocessed records, but the State Archives had a huge backlog of over 19,000 cubic feet of government records. The State Archives generally does not make unprocessed records available to the public, though they are made available to the creating agency. The staff is reluctant to make unprocessed records available to the public because they are not fully described according to the State Archives' quality standards. In addition, it is possible that the records will be reappraised during processing. If the processor determines that the

records do not possess archival value, they will be deaccessioned and, therefore, the records would become unavailable to future researchers. This could cause a conflict if the records were made available to the public prior to processing.

The State Archives hired professional archivists for the job of processing archival records. However, because the processing staff of three full-time employees was also required to perform other duties, it did not seem possible that the State Archives would ever reduce the backlog to a manageable size. Since it was unlikely that the State Archives would be able to hire additional processors, the staff agreed that something needed to be done in addition to the ongoing processing activities to reduce the size of the backlog. For a variety of reasons, the staff was concerned that the backlog contained a lot of records with marginal value, so the State Records Archivist agreed to reappraise the unprocessed records.

The professional staff of the State Archives philosophically agreed that reappraisal and deaccessioning are useful collection management techniques, but the decision to initiate a reappraisal/deaccessioning project did generate some controversy. The staff debated issues similar to those raised in Leonard Rapport's article, such as whether past appraisal decisions should be reevaluated and what procedures should be used to deaccession government records. The staff debated which records should be eligible for such a reevaluation: processed records, unprocessed records, or both. The staff also debated whether it was worth the effort to reevaluate past decisions, considering the amount of work that needed to be done to reduce the size of the backlog of unprocessed records.

At first, the project was conducted on a pilot basis to determine what the benefits were of reappraising the unprocessed records from just two departments. The staff did not want to commit to a full reappraisal if only a small number of boxes would be deaccessioned. However, after these two departments were completed, the staff agreed that the project would produce many short-term and long-term benefits, so the project was expanded to a full reappraisal of the backlog of all executive branch records.

## *How did the backlog get so large?*

There are several factors that contributed to the size of the processing backlog. In 1989, the State Archives moved into the newly built Michigan Library and Historical Center building. This new facility contained storage space specifically designed for the maintenance and preservation of archival records. The space was designed to accommodate 15 years of growth to the archival collection. At the time of the move, the entire archival collection consisted of over 21,000 cubic feet of records and was stored in the State Records Center, which does not possess a temperature-and-humidity-controlled environment.[5] The new space accommodates approximately 70,000 cubic feet of records. Therefore, the availability of storage space allowed the staff to increase its collecting efforts.

Also at the time of the move, the State Archives increased the size of its professional staff. At this time, a new State Records Archivist was hired to coordinate the appraisal and acquisition of records from the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, and part of the Judicial Branch. The person who was hired for this position remained with the

State Archives for about two years. The position remained unfilled for five and a half years after his departure, during which time the remaining members of the State Archives' staff assumed many of the duties of the State Records Archivist. However, due to a lack of dedicated resources, the front-end appraisal of records suffered. Staff tended to make conservative appraisal decisions at the front end; they accessioned anything with potential archival value and planned to weed the records on the processing table.

The Retention and Disposal Schedules developed by the Records Management Services also contributed to the size of the backlog. These schedules varied in their age and their quality; many of them did not provide sufficient information to make an archival appraisal decision. Thus, the archivists often selected and accessioned records that were not scheduled for preservation. However, changes to the schedule development process are helping to ensure that newer schedules are much more useful tools for facilitating archival appraisal decisions.

## *Deaccessioning*

Government agencies that knew about the existence of the State Archives tended to know two things about the repository: first, the State Archives does not return records to agencies; second, the State Archives does not keep everything that is accessioned. Both of these issues created a negative impression about the repository among a significant customer base. As for the first issue, it is true that, unlike the State Records Center, the State Archives does not return archival records after they are accessioned. This protects the records from destruction, loss, and reorganization and there are no plans to change this policy. However, the State Archives is encouraging agencies to extend the active retention period for some of their records so this does not cause them a problem. The State Archives is also promoting the easy access of records at the repository.

The second issue required the State Archives to implement change. The processing archivists' traditional practice was to simply destroy records they decided not to preserve. Occasionally, they contacted the creating agency and offered to return the records and, occasionally, the archivist made a notation on the agency's Retention and Disposal Schedule to remind people not to authorize the transfer of additional records. Unfortunately, boxes waited for months or years until an authorized person from the agency could decide if he wanted the boxes returned or destroyed; schedules were rarely updated to prevent the transfer of additional records. The result was that agencies feared that the records they sent to the State Archives were not safe. They did not trust the State Archives to preserve their records.

The State Archives needed to make the deaccessioning process more consistent and to build trust among state agencies about its practices. The staff debated and tested several options and finally agreed to implement an internal policy that requires the State Archives to follow the same disposition procedures that the creating agencies follow. First, the State Archives worked with the Records Management Services to develop a general schedule for "non-records." To summarize, this general schedule defines "non-records" to be duplicates, publications, insignificant drafts, "FYI" notes, materials that do not document significant activities of the agency, etc.[6] A benefit of this general schedule

is that it authorizes the processing archivists to weed a lot of material (such as duplicates) that may clutter valuable records series.

Second, the staff decided that if the State Archives accessioned a records series that a Retention and Disposal Schedule already authorized for destruction, the processing archivists could deaccession it without notifying the creating agency. However, if the State Archives accessioned a records series that was scheduled for permanent preservation and the processing archivists decide that the entire records series does not possess archival value, the Retention and Disposal Schedule must be revised to authorize the disposition of the records before they are deaccessioned.

The State Archives can now tell agencies with confidence that, if their Retention and Disposal Schedule says they should transfer their records to the State Archives, they can be assured that the records will be preserved. The State Archives can also tell agencies that, if an appraisal decision changes, they will be notified before the records are destroyed because the agency must approve all revisions to their own Retention and Disposal Schedule. The State Records Archivist is responsible for notifying the Records Management Services when a schedule needs to be revised to reflect a new appraisal decision and the processing archivists when the new schedule is approved so they can deaccession the records (deaccessioning includes both destruction of records and their return to the creating agency to fulfill the remainder of the active retention period).

The State Archives decided not to publish the new deaccessioning policy because the changes were internal and did not affect how other agencies operated. Instead, the State Archives is using less formal methods for reassuring agencies that their records will be preserved, such as the records management manual and training.

## *Appraising Records*

In 1996, the State Archives of Michigan hired a new State Records Archivist who had very little practical experience appraising government records. The State Archives did not have a formal appraisal policy at the time, so there were no tools available to teach new archivists what types of records the staff had traditionally acquired. The new archivist also lacked a strong familiarity with Michigan government organization and history and did not know which agencies routinely transferred archival records and which agencies required active solicitation.

The new archivist responded to the situation by initiating two projects (involving multiple archivists on staff) that would develop tools to assist current and future staff with the responsibility of appraising and acquiring Michigan government records. The goal of these projects was not to influence a radical shift in the State Archives' collecting practices (the scope and purpose of the collection), but to document why certain records were preserved and others were not. This would serve not only to generate a common understanding among staff about the State Archives' definition of archival records, but also to educate others.

The first project produced a priority list of government agencies, ranking the agencies according to their potential to produce archival records. This potential was identified by the veteran archivists based upon their knowledge about the functions of and records produced by each agency. The analysis was totally subjective; no criteria were

used to rank the agencies. If the veteran staff was unfamiliar with a particular agency, the State Records Archivist was responsible for contacting the agency, reviewing retention schedules or inspecting records, and then making a recommendation for ranking. Agencies that received a priority 1–3 ranking create records with significant archival value and, therefore, it is worth the effort to seek out any of their records that might be absent from the holdings of the State Archives. Examples of these agencies include cabinet members, boards and commissions, the Legislature, the Office of the State Registrar, the Corporations Division, and the Bureau of Elections. Agencies that received a priority 4–5 ranking produce archival records, but of low reference value and, therefore, the State Archives will not actively seek the transfer of their records. Examples of these agencies include Civil Service employment records, Office of Services to the Aging, and professional licensing boards. Agencies that received a 0 priority ranking do not produce records with archival value.

The second project produced a formal appraisal policy. This project team was smaller and consisted of the two archivists responsible for appraising state and local government records. However, the entire professional staff reviewed the draft policy before it was approved. The team wanted to develop a policy that would define the State Archives' acquisition practices beyond the broad mission of "documenting Michigan government" to more specifically identify the government functions and information content that possess historical significance so the policy could actually guide decision-making activities.[7] The team that developed the policy conducted a review of archival appraisal literature and attended an appraisal workshop taught by Mark Greene for the Midwest Archives Conference in October 1998. The most influential of these articles was one provided by Mark Greene at the workshop about the "Minnesota Method."[8] This article contained appraisal criteria that focused on the content of a record (the reasons it is created and the information it contains) versus the physical characteristics of the record (completeness, preservability, etc.). This example of appraisal criteria provided a model for the team to follow.

The policy adopted by the State Archives of Michigan consists of several components: a mission statement for establishing the scope of the holdings, appraisal criteria for determining the value of the records based upon their information content, appraisal mechanics for determining the quality of the records, and, finally, a methodology for making appraisal decisions. When developing the appraisal criteria, the team used the priority list to identify nine broad categories of government services that produce archival records (Law and Legislation, Citizenship, Civil Protection, Economic Development, Natural Resources and the Environment, Health and Human Services, Labor, Transportation, and Education). Then, the team analyzed the types of archival records produced by agencies associated with each category to define why their content possessed historical significance. This allowed the team to develop appraisal criteria for each category "describing the type of information we want from what we collect,"[9] such as "records that map transportation routes/means over time." Armed with these tools, the State Archives' staff was prepared to make consistent front-end appraisal decisions and to reevaluate prior appraisal decisions.

## *Reappraisal Project*

The State Archives decided to test these new appraisal tools by reappraising the processing backlog. The predominant staff viewpoint was that the project should not reappraise processed records because, as Karen Benedict states, "The average institution struggles to process those records that have not yet been made available to users. That step should take precedence over removing records which already have been made available."[10] In 1999, the State Records Archivist, with the help of several student assistants, started analyzing every accession in the backlog, working with each department from the Executive Branch separately.[11]

The first step of the project was to identify the unprocessed records that needed to be reappraised. For this step, the project staff used the Argus database.[12] From 1994 to 1999, the State Archives used Argus software by Questor to accession state government records (Argus replaced another database that was originally created in 1988). The State Archives continues to use Argus for collection management of the entire holdings of state and local government records and manuscripts, but in 2000, the staff began using Versatile software by Zasio for accessioning state government records and for maintaining intellectual control of them until they are processed.[13]

The Argus database contains useful information about each accession, such as creating agency, accessioning date, and shelf location, but it does not indicate which records series are stored in each box. As a result, select information from Argus was entered in a Microsoft Access database.[14] Then, additional information was acquired from the transmittal forms for each accession so the project staff could determine which records series were in the boxes and their inclusive dates.[15] Next, the project staff identified which Retention and Disposal Schedule regulated the retention requirements for the records. This often involved tracing the genealogy of a record series from its initial version through several versions of superseded schedules and agency organizational changes to identify an active schedule. Once all of the data about the boxes were assembled into a single database, the project staff was able to identify which records series were stored in the backlog and how complete the run of a particular records series was. Armed with these data about the backlog, the priority list, and appraisal policy, the archivist began appraising records.

Many appraisal decisions could be made without inspecting boxes, but those with questionable content were pulled off shelves so they could be inspected. These inspections determined whether the records had been described accurately on the transmittal form and whether they possessed historical significance. Appraisal decisions were primarily made at the record series level, allowing for box-level exceptions. In some cases, the decisions that were made during the reappraisal project required a modification to the priority list, but the appraisal decisions did not require changes to the appraisal policy or the appraisal criteria.

Once the appraisal decisions were made, the deaccessioning policy mentioned above was implemented. The project staff determined which boxes the State Archives already had the authority to destroy and which Retention and Disposal Schedules had to be changed to authorize the deaccessioning of the remaining boxes.

## *Results*

The project, completed on July 23, 2002, took a total of 41 months.[16] During that time, the project staff appraised the records in the processing backlog from all 18 Executive Branch departments, which totaled 13,275 boxes.[17] Of those boxes, the project staff determined that 5,533 (42 percent) contained archival records and 7,742 (58 percent) did not. Of the 7,742 boxes to be deaccessioned, 4,075 (53 percent) were already authorized for destruction, which means that they never should have been accessioned by the State Archives in the first place, and 3,667 (47 percent) will be held until a new Retention and Disposal Schedule authorizes their destruction or return to the creating agency. It is important to note that this project focused on reappraising records series and boxes and not on processing the contents of each box. When the staff processes these records in the future, additional materials will be identified for destruction.

This project and other simultaneous reappraisal projects conducted by the State Archives resulted in the identification of over 760 records series that are no longer scheduled for archival preservation.[18] In fact, the State Archives reduced the number of records series that are authorized for transfer to the repository by over 30 percent. It has taken the Records Management Services a while to revise the Retention and Disposal Schedules to reflect the changes in appraisal decisions, but they recently completed a major project to remedy the situation; all of the new schedules were sent to the agencies for approval by November 2002.

## *Conclusion*

Appraisal is a very subjective exercise; professional archivists always bring their own biases to the decision-making process. As a result, it is not realistic to expect a group of professional archivists to always agree upon every appraisal decision for every records series.

Throughout the course of these projects, the staff identified select records series (often voluminous case files) that were difficult to reappraise. As a result, more intensive efforts were conducted to resolve long-standing debates about the series' value as an archival record. These "mini-projects" included attorney general case files, judicial case files, mental health case files, and correctional facility administrative records. Some of the appraisal debates over these records series had endured for decades, so the staff was relieved to finally resolve them.

"Appraising is at best an inexact science, perhaps more an art ..."[19] Good practitioners of the art of appraisal generally have many years of experience to use as a guide. The priority list and appraisal policy were created to strengthen the scientific component of the decision-making process so that new archivists could continue the collecting tradition of the State Archives. The State Archives' staff wanted to ensure that public records would not be appraised or reappraised according to "transitory criteria."[20]

These projects produced a lot of short-term benefits. For example, they resulted in better-informed and more consistent appraisal decisions by the State Records Archivist. Furthermore, thousands of boxes will be deaccessioned before valuable time is invested

in processing them, which allows the processing archivists to focus their efforts on records with confirmed archival value. The processing backlog is now at a more reasonable size and more space is available for incoming records. The reappraisal database is a useful tool that the processing archivists can use to identify records they want to work on and it is a useful tool for the reference staff because it provides more comprehensive intellectual control over the unprocessed records than does Argus. The staff is also using the database and the new Retention and Disposal Schedules to identify gaps in the State Archives' holdings, so they can contact the creating agencies in search of the missing records.

While these short-term benefits serve to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the staff, these projects will also have a long-term impact on the State Archives' ability to fulfill its mission to document Michigan government. For example, the State Archives has streamlined its business processes for conducting up-front appraisal and for accessioning and deaccessioning records so the backlog should be populated only with archival records in the future.

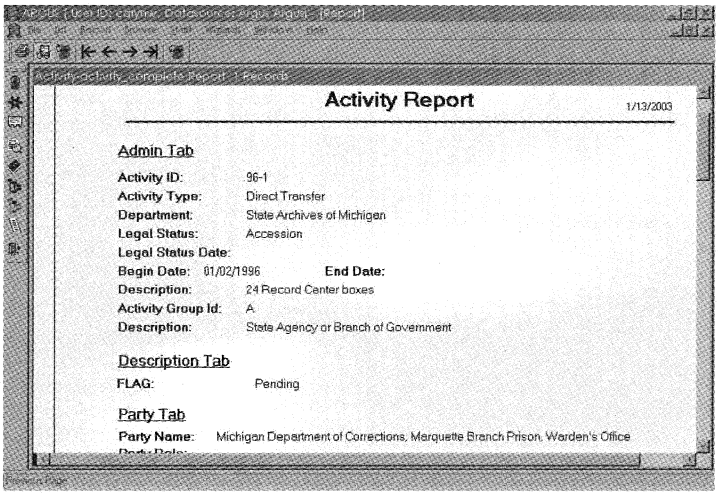
***ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*** Caryn Wojcik has worked for the State of Michigan since 1996. She is responsible for appraising state and local government records for their historical value and for developing electronic records management and preservation strategies. Ms. Wojcik received her bachelor's degree in history and her master's degree in information and library studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is a Certified Archivist.

## NOTES

1. Leonard Rapport, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44:2 (1981): 143–150.
2. Karen Benedict, "Invitation to a Bonfire: Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in Archives—A Reply to Leonard Rapport," *American Archivist* 47:1 (1984): 43–49.
3. Timothy L. Ericson, "'At the Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (1991-1992): 66–77.
4. The State Archives of Michigan is a section within the Michigan Historical Center (MHC). The State Archives is responsible for the identification and permanent preservation of Michigan government records with historical significance. In 2001, the MHC moved organizationally from the Michigan Department of State to the newly created Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries (HAL).
5. The State Records Center (SRC) is operated by the Records Management Services. The SRC offers free off-site temporary storage for state agency records. In addition, to operating the SRC, the Records Management Services is responsible for establishing records management policies and procedures, establishing retention periods for public records, educating state employees about records management, and designing efficient and effective record-keeping systems. In 2002, the Records Management Services moved organizationally from the Department of Management and Budget to HAL. Both the State Archives and the Records Management Services now report to the director of the MHC.
6. The full text of "General Schedule #1—NonRecords" can be found on-line at <http://www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement/>.
7. Ericson, 66–77.

8. Mark A. Greene and Todd J. Daniels-Howell, "Figures and Charts for the 'Minnesota Method,'" from "Documentation with 'An Attitude': A Pragmatist's Guide to the Selection and Acquisition of Modern Business Records," preliminary paper, MAC Appraisal Workshop, October 1998.
9. Ericson, 66–77.
10. Benedict, 43–49.
11. Throughout the course of the project, three student assistants were hired. Their terms of employment did not overlap. They worked a total of 812 hours on the project. The professional staff time committed to the project was approximately 10 percent of one FTE for 41 months.
12. Screen shots of the databases mentioned in this article:

## Figure 1: Argus Screen Shot




## Figure 2: Versatile Screen Shot

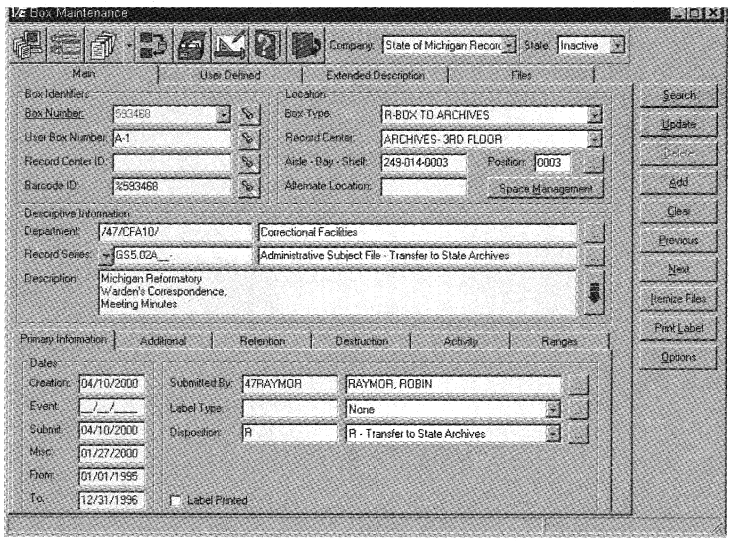
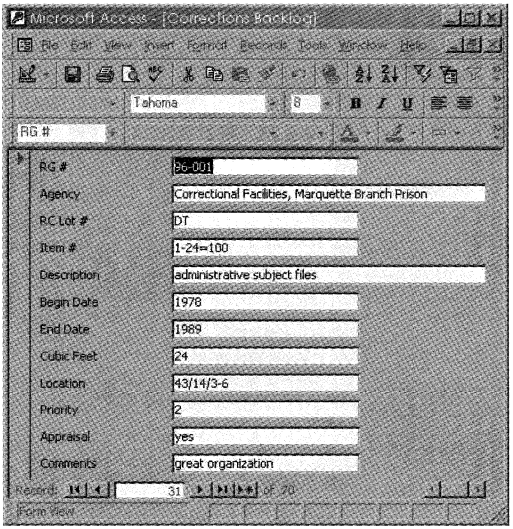


**Figure 3: Backlog Reappraisal Database (MS Access) Screen Shot**




13. There were several reasons for switching to Versatile, but the overriding reason was that the State Records Center began using it to control its inventory of boxes. In 1997, the State Records Center began bar coding boxes and eliminating human-readable box labels. If the State Archives wanted to know what the contents of these boxes were when we took custody of them, we needed Versatile.
14. The three databases mentioned in this article, Argus, Versatile, and Microsoft Access, all operate independently of one another.
15. It is important to keep in mind that transmittals are often filled out by untrained staff who frequently inadequately or inaccurately describe the records in the boxes.
16. Work on the project was interrupted on many occasions as student assistants left and as other activities occupied the time of the archivist.
17. We did inventory the records we received from the courts and the legislature, but decided it was not necessary to reappraise them because their archival value was readily apparent. Furthermore, we decided which judicial case files we would preserve when we were developing the appraisal policy.
18. Other projects conducted in collaboration with the Records Management Services to reappraise records included several different reviews of boxes stored at the State Records Center and a comprehensive review of approved Retention and Disposal Schedules.
19. Rapport, 143–150.
20. Benedict, 43–49.

*Trophies of War and Empire: The Archival Heritage of Ukraine, World War II, and the International Politics of Restitution.* By Patricia Kennedy Grimsted. Foreword by Charles Kecskeméti. Harvard Papers in Ukrainian Studies. Cambridge, Massachusetts: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2001. $19.95. 749 pp. Index, illustrations, appendices, and bibliography. Soft cover.

*U.S. Restitution of Nazi-Looted Cultural Treasures to the USSR, 1945–1959: Facsimile Documents from the National Archives of the United States.* Compiled with an introduction by Patricia Kennedy Grimsted. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2001. CD-ROM. Windows system requirements: Pentium-class processor; Microsoft Windows 95 OSR 2.0, Windows 98 SE, Windows ME, Windows NT 4.0 with Service Pack 5 or 6 (6 recommended) or Windows 2000; 16 MB RAM (32 recommended); 15MB available hard disk space. Macintosh system requirements: PowerPC processor; Mac OS 8.6, 9.0.4, 9.1, or OS X; 64 MB RAM; 24 MB hard disk space. Requires Adobe Acrobat Reader 5.0 (provided). Available free of charge from the National Archives and Records Administration, Research Support Staff, Room 406, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20408-0001. Fax: 202-401-7170. Toll-free phone: 866-325-7208.

It would not be much of an overstatement to say that in *Trophies of War and Empire,* Patricia Kennedy Grimsted has single-handedly—in a book as sweeping as the great steppe of Ukraine itself—brought together international politics, legal dilemmas, cultural restitution, European history, and complex issues of archival provenance and pertinence in an intriguing, surprisingly readable, and very valuable examination of the archival heritage of Ukraine.

Grimsted skillfully takes the reader through a labyrinth of complicated issues surrounding archival restitution, using Ukraine as an extremely detailed case study. Some of the factors that affect the restitution of Ukrainian archives include the suppression of a distinct Ukrainian identity under Soviet rule; the plunder of manuscripts and archives during World War II (to which nearly half of the book is dedicated); and the diaspora of the Ukrainian documentary heritage through the movement of refugees and émigrés throughout Europe and elsewhere. As if these and other historical issues didn't make the matter difficult enough, Grimsted also looks at recent efforts toward restitution taken by organizations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, and the International Council on Archives, as well as through international treaties, that often call for action, but seldom truly achieve satisfactory resolution.

Grimsted advocates the establishment of international norms to guide the restitution of records for Ukraine and other nations that face similar issues from wartime displacements or the creation of newly independent nation-states. Critical first steps proposed by Grimsted include an examination of categories of materials that may have different legal considerations. To make this possible, she proposes the careful documentation of "institutional and territorial provenance, circumstances of alienation and migration, the present location and archival arrangement of the materials, and legal factors affecting ownership" for any records under consideration for restitution claims (p. 16). This includes the development of descriptive inventories and registers of holdings for Ucrainica removed to Moscow or abroad.

Although an imposing work at over 700 pages, Grimsted has provided thorough documentation of an archival issue of extreme international importance. Her detailed documentation of the fate of Ukrainian records during World War II stands as one of the most exhaustive studies to date of the impact of the war on archival matters, both past and present. Her thoroughness of research, her examination of competing claims, and her advocacy for international resolution through legal agreements and precedents put her at the forefront of this issue. Her clear, precise writing makes a large work very approachable and educational.

Individuals who wish to learn more, or who want to explore the subject but are intimidated by the size of Grimsted's book, may find the CD-ROM *U.S. Restitution of Nazi-Looted Cultural Treasures to the USSR, 1945–1959* worthwhile. Available free of charge from the National Archives, the disk contains facsimile documents of U.S. restitution transfers to the USSR. They include correspondence, inventories, and memos. Photographs of the Munich Central Collecting Point, the Offenbach Archival Depot, and related illustrations are also included. An introduction by Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, based in part on chapter 6 in *Trophies of War and Empire,* entitled "Western Allied Restitution in the Postwar Context," provides a context for the materials contained on the disk. This introduction gives a good overview of the process of U.S. restitution to the USSR in the immediate postwar years; a list of these transfers is provided in the appendix.

Although the resources contained on this disk are worthwhile and useful, the organization and operation of the interface, through Adobe Acrobat Reader 5.0, is sometimes problematic. For instance, the list of illustrations described in the Acrobat "bookmarks" navigation tool is too narrow in its description. The back cover of the CD tells me there are photographs of the Offenbach Archival Depot, for example, but unless I look at the title page for the chapter of illustrations, the image descriptions provided in the "bookmark" section are too specific, and do not state where or when they were taken. My interest was in seeing photographs taken at Offenbach; an image title such as "Books from Schloss Banz, Bavaria" does not tell me where it was taken nor does it give me enough context to know if it is of interest. In fact, this particular image is not of books per se, but rather of cartons of books being hauled in an open-top U.S. Army semi-truck. Although an inconvenience, such descriptive issues would be minor if, when returning to the list of illustrations, it remained expanded. Instead, it collapses to the folder level and a reader again has to expand the folder to see the listing of illustrations provided. This interface problem is the same with the facsimile documents on the disk.

Nevertheless, despite these problems, this disk makes available an interesting sample of documents and images relating to U.S. archival restitution to the Soviet Union, and Grimsted's introduction points out the larger archival issues at stake.

Both of these works are important because they explore largely uncharted territory. *Trophies of War and Empire* is by far the most extensive examination of the subject of archival restitution in print. It serves as a benchmark for other works related to similar issues for other nations or concerning other periods. Grimsted is to be commended for her unceasing study of these issues and her strong and compelling advocacy for international standards.

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*Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial.* By Richard J. Evans. New York: Basic Books, 2001. $16.00. 318 pp. Index. Soft cover.

Richard J. Evans, a professor and specialist on modern German history at Cambridge University, found himself in London's High Court in January of 2000, attempting to defend the virtues of truth, justice, and historical standards. *Lying About Hitler* relates the peculiar series of events that placed Evans in the witness stand and forced him to address complex issues that his colleagues largely consider in the more rarified atmosphere of university lecture halls and campus coffee shops. His story reflects important changes in the nature of the historian's craft and offers archivists an intriguing insight into current scholarly debates concerning professional values and ethics. Historical objectivity remained central to the case although, as Evans readily acknowledges, this notion itself remains a slippery and elusive concept.

Indeed, few historians believe that pure objectivity constitutes a realizable possibility. Most contemporary academics live comfortably in a world of multiple perspectives, ambiguous data, and conflicting interpretations. Widespread skepticism greets any author who claims to discover absolute and timeless truth. Many postmodernists would argue that truth telling serves more as a comforting fiction than a lofty professional goal. Scholars, according to this view, need to acknowledge and openly embrace the inherently relativistic and political nature of their activities. Yet, some recent events have reintroduced questions concerning objectivity, truth, and standards into historians' deliberations. An unsettling series of accusations alleging plagiarism by several senior and very visible historians received widespread media attention throughout 2002 and 2003. Criticisms concerning the misuse of source material in a prize-winning book recently caused the Organization of American Historians to convene a special investigative review panel. Another best-selling historian received a reprimand from his college for inventing stories concerning his military career in an effort to build a rapport with undergraduates. Considered together, these controversies created a troubling sense that many historians had sacrificed accuracy, integrity, and honesty in the interest of advocating particular political perspectives and advancing personal careers. As Evans discovered in the real-world atmosphere of a London courtroom, however, truth matters.

The case in question arose from a dispute normally confined to the book review sections of academic journals. Deborah Lipstadt, a prominent United States historian at Emory University, had published a book entitled *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* in 1993. She extensively studied the culture and literature of Holocaust deniers, linking their activities with right-wing, anti-Semitic extremists and demolishing their academic pretensions. Lipstadt accused the deniers of falsifying evidence, manipulating data, ignoring solid scholarship, and creating pseudohistorical works in order to promote an overtly racist political agenda. David Irving, an independent historian who had authored dozens of books concerning the Second World War, received some critical treatment in her monograph. Lipstadt accused Irving of misrepresenting evidence, harboring neofascist sympathies, consciously seeking to exonerate Adolph Hitler, and trafficking with Holocaust deniers. Irving denied all of these accusations, demanded that Penguin Books remove Lipstadt's book from circulation, and eventually filed a defamation lawsuit against the author in the

British courts. Lipstadt's barristers engaged Richard Evans as an expert witness, charging him with the task of examining Irving's works in order to prove that their client's assertions had merit. Evans meticulously combed through Irving's books, examined the documentary record in order to evaluate the plaintiff's use of archival sources, and constructed a convincing case that the independent historian had misrepresented evidence. The judge ruled in favor of Lipstadt and *Denying the Holocaust* remained in print. Evans's eloquent account of his investigative efforts and his experience as an expert witness reads like a fast-paced detective novel, making historical methodology highly accessible to the nonspecialist. A few implications, however, should especially interest archivists.

First, Irving had trumpeted his own use of primary source materials and argued that his critics relied primarily on secondary works in order to construct their interpretations. Even many reviewers who disagreed with Irving's viewpoint praised his meticulous research and use of archival sources. Evans's investigation painted a very different picture. Irving frequently ignored provenance, rarely contextualized individual items, routinely manipulated evidence, failed to verify documentary authenticity, and ignored information that cast doubt upon his ideological preconceptions. In one notable instance, for example, Irving relied on "a carbon copy of a typed-up transcript of another typed-up transcript of a handwritten transcript of an extract from an unknown document, unauthenticated by any distinguishing marks such as a signature or an official stamp of any designation" (p. 154) as a key piece of evidence. His intentional and unwitting missteps demonstrate the need for historians to build solid methodological training concerning archival principles and practices into their graduate programs.

Second, the dispute illustrates the problems inherent in evaluating historical works. Irving's books appeared legitimate, contained standard scholarly citations, relied heavily on archival sources, and sounded authoritative both to general readers and some academic peers. Only when Evans followed the footnote trail and examined the original documentation did distortions become apparent. Few reviewers or readers possess the motivation or leisure to visit the archives and consult the primary sources. Modern historical scholarship typically relies upon highly disparate documentation contained in widely scattered repositories. Academics usually privilege such factors as interpretive breadth, creativity, and engagement with the secondary literature in judging new work. *Lying About Hitler* underscores the fact that accuracy and authenticity sometimes should be examined rather than assumed.

Finally, the Irving case suggests that historians need to define their core values more carefully and communicate their operating standards more effectively to a broader audience. Outside the halls of academia, objectivity remains an important principle. For many, it justifies the very existence of the historical profession. Historians need not naively embrace nineteenth-century positivist assumptions or delude themselves into thinking that they can write definitive history by consulting all available sources. They should think hard, however, before fully forfeiting claims to objectivity and wholeheartedly embracing trendy postmodernist notions. As Judge Charles Gray, who presided over the Irving trial, observed: "Whilst I accept that an historian is entitled to speculate, he must spell out clearly to the reader when he is speculating rather than reciting established facts. An objective historian is obliged to be even-handed in his

approach to historical evidence: he cannot pick and choose without adequate reason" (pp. 226–227). His useful prescription bears repeating in every historical methods seminar.

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