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**About the Cover:**

Section of north elevation, Union Station, Durham, North Carolina. Drawing by Felix D. Markham, 1968. From the Historic Architecture Research Project Records, 1951-1976, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries.

Union Station was built in 1905 to consolidate many separate train depots in Durham. The structure was demolished in 1968 to provide room for a parking lot. This elevation is one of 8,000 drawings and photographs digitized through “The Built Heritage of North Carolina,” a project developed by the NCSU Libraries and Preservation North Carolina. The project will create an online resource for the study of North Carolina's architectural history. “Built Heritage” is funded through a Library Services and Technology Act grant. More information on the project can be found at <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/specialcollections/digital/builtheritage/index.html>.

The project attests to the strength of the Special Collections Research Center's architecture and design collections, which include papers of such prominent architects as Henry Kamphoefner, George Matsumoto, Matthew Nowicki, and G. Milton Small.

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# **The Repository of Last Resort? Three-Dimensional Objects in Archives**

**by Dean Jeffrey**

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## **Abstract**

This study documents issues involved in the collection, use, cataloging, and storage of three-dimensional objects in archives. Little has been written regarding collecting and managing objects in archives. This study summarizes the available literature on the topic and addresses some of the differences between museum practice and archival practice. The study finds that three-dimensional objects have value as objects for display but often have little other value to researchers in archives. If, however, the acquisition of objects reflects the mission of the archives and adheres to a collection policy, the objects are more likely to have research value beyond their use in displays.

## **1. Introduction**

When most people think of archives, they usually envision collections of papers and manuscripts, things that

are flat, sorted into folders, and housed in boxes. Other items often found in archives are also relatively flat. Diaries, scrapbooks, photographs, film, sound recordings, and video are all things that can usually be stored in a records center box. Oversized but still flat items such as maps and posters can be rolled or put into map cases.

There are, however, three-dimensional items that find their way into archives, and they often don't neatly fit into the usual boxes. Some of these three-dimensional items may include clothing, uniforms, flags, trophies, plaques, awards, plates, glasses, silver, dolls, toys, scale models, and any number of other shapes and materials. These items are referred to as artifacts, as specimens, as realia, and as three-dimensional objects. (For simplicity's sake, they will hereinafter be referred to as "objects.")

Objects arrive in archives in a number of ways. An object may arrive as a single item, in and of itself, such as a trophy from a sporting event. Objects may be mixed in with "traditional" collections, such as a letter opener or fountain pen that arrives in the same box as a collection of letters. Objects may also be part of collections composed entirely of objects, such as a collection of political lapel buttons. An archive may actively seek objects for its collections. It may also have a clear collection policy pertaining to the acquisition of objects. Alternately, an archive may not have a policy concerning the collection of objects. It may acquire objects by chance, sometimes by choice, or sometimes attached to other records.

From the scant literature on objects in archives, it would seem that many archives do not have a specific collection policy regarding objects, and that objects often arrive in archives almost at random. Once there, objects are

often not described or catalogued because they are “different” from the other items in the archives, presenting problems in description. Insufficient description, or a lack of description, leads to objects not being discovered and used by researchers. In addition to cataloging difficulties, the size and shape of objects may present challenges to the archivist in terms of access, storage, and preservation. Archivists, who have been trained to collect, arrange, describe, and preserve paper and a number of other types of materials, don’t always know quite what to *do* with objects. How are archivists dealing with issues that are more commonly dealt with by museum registrars and curators? The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the issues involved in the collection, uses, description, cataloging, and storage of objects in archives.

### **2.1. Terminology and Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, “object” is defined as a three-dimensional item, as something with width, depth, and height, as opposed to nearly two-dimensional objects made of paper. Paper, the item found most often in archives, is, of course, technically three-dimensional. It has depth in addition to width and height, but its third dimension typically does not contain any useful information. The definition of “object” used here also excludes many objects commonly found in archives that are technically three-dimensional, such as phonograph records, reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes, and other types of sound and video recordings; maps, globes, and other cartographic materials; diaries, scrapbooks and photograph albums; and notebooks, journals, and books. Most of these items are in archives because of their ability to hold or contain or represent information. They are usually not

collected in and of themselves, but are collected for their informational value. A reel-to-reel tape is a three-dimensional object, but it is also a container or carrier for a sound recording. A photograph album is a container for images. Conversely, a wedding dress, a school uniform, a pair of bronzed baby shoes, a trophy from a sporting event, or the desk on which a particular document was signed are not three-dimensional items that are containers for information. They may convey information to researchers, a use beyond that for which they were originally intended, but they were not created as a means of storing information. Esther Green Bierbaum has defined “realia” (a term here considered synonymous with “objects”) as “not a representation of the world, but part of the world itself.” (1) Writing about the uses of realia in public libraries, the American Library Association’s Children’s Services Division Toys, Games, and Realia Committee defined “realia” as “actual articles and other three-dimensional objects that offer direct, hands-on experience,” as opposed to “the symbolic representations of reality offered in words and pictures.” (2)

There are, of course, instances where this definition becomes problematical. What if there is a Rolodex in an archival collection? Does it fit this definition of “object”? Presumably, the Rolodex is in the archives because it belonged to some person considered to be of importance by the archives. If it is being kept simply for the information that it contains—so that a researcher can determine the contacts of that important person—then the information in the Rolodex is textual, and its presence in the archives is for its informational value. It doesn’t fit the definition of “object.” If, however, the Rolodex is being saved in and of

itself, because of its associations with the important person, then it is being saved for its intrinsic value and is an “object” according to the definition. Clearly, however, there are some items that can have both intrinsic and informational value.

An instance where this definition of “object” might seem not to work is in the case of representational art. A drawing, painting, or sculpture can convey how a person or scene or object looks and could therefore be considered a container for information. However, it can be argued that representational art does not contain information in the same manner as a manuscript or sound recording, but is merely a depiction of the subject of the piece. For the purposes of this paper, paintings, drawings, sketches, and other flat works of art are excluded from the definition (and from the study) as they seem to straddle the line between two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects. Unframed works seem closer to two dimensions; framed works, merely by virtue of having been framed, seem closer to three-dimensional objects but are not essentially different from their unframed cousins. Additionally, the issues surrounding the collection of artworks by archives seem to merit their own study. (3) Other forms of art, such as a sculpture, bust, or bas-relief may also convey how a person or scene looked, but these objects obviously have three-dimensions. To exclude them from the definition of “object” used here, simply because they are representational, seems illogical. Sculptures and other three-dimensional representations, such as scale models, are (perhaps arbitrarily) included in the definition of “object.”

Objects, as defined here, are the types of items (except for flat art) that one would normally expect to find in a museum rather than in an archives. James E. Fogerty of the



Minnesota Historical Society says, “In my business artifacts are generally defined as those three- dimensional things that populate the Museum Collections department, which does for items like furniture, political buttons, clothing, Indian beadwork, and farm equipment (for instance) what my department does for everything not classified as a museum artifact.” (4) If museums, as Fogerty implies, are in the business of collecting objects, the answer to the question, “What should we do with objects in archives?” would seem to be, “The same thing that museums do with them.”

## **2.2. Museum Practice vs. Archival Practice**

One may be tempted to say that archives should look to museums for the treatment of objects in terms of description, cataloging, storage, and preservation. Indeed, some archives have borrowed techniques from the museum world. An article about the Downtown Collection in the Fales Library and Special Collections of New York University (a collection documenting New York’s art and literary movement from 1975 to the present) stated, “Part of the challenge for archivists in processing the Downtown Collection is its sheer variety of formats.” The senior archivist said, “the blurring of the line between manuscript and object in the Downtown Collection has forced the library to borrow some techniques for managing and cataloging the material,” and that the archives had “adapted museum- registration techniques to catalog and classify the objects within the collection, because I felt that the descriptive tools available within the archival community were not robust enough to adequately describe and manage the materials.” (5)

However, museums, archives, and libraries, while

similar institutions, have differences that affect their respective treatment of objects. Their missions vary, and the differences in mission will affect their handling of objects. Wallach points out some of these differences.

Many institutions, such as libraries, museums and historical societies, make it their mission to preserve and provide access to cultural heritage information. Because of the variety of institutional missions, however, each institution will define cultural heritage information and what kind of preservation and access it requires differently. Museums, for example, establish classification and description practices based on their mission of preservation and display of artifacts. Libraries, on the other hand, have a mission of public access to information that influences their development of shared cataloging practices. (6)

There are similarities between museums and archives, in that they typically collect one-of-a-kind items, while libraries generally collect and provide access to published resources. “At a very basic level, libraries have seen themselves as repositories of shared items; archives and museums, as repositories of unique items.” (7) But besides their similarities as repositories of unique items, there are enough differences between museums and archives to render impractical any recommendation that they universally adopt the same treatment for objects in their care.

In many instances, museums and archives are not similarly staffed. While museums often have different personnel for the positions of curator, registrar, and

conservationist, in an archive, one person frequently handles all three roles. Museum personnel and archivists often do not receive the same training concerning the items in their care. Archivists, usually well versed in the storage and preservation requirements of paper, photographs, film, and sound and video recordings, are often not trained in the preservation of the different types of materials one may find in a collection of objects.

One of the greatest differences between archival and museum practice is in the area of descriptive cataloging. Many archives are actively engaging in the creation of standardized and sharable records by creating Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) records or Encoded Archival Description (EAD) finding aids for their collections and by following content standards such as those found in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)*. Objects, unfortunately, don't always neatly fit into EAD or MARC. *DACS* makes no recommendation for the description of objects, merely referring the user to the Cataloging Cultural Objects (CCO) standard. (10)

It might appear, then, that cataloging is an area where one might look to museum practice, but standards for cataloging traditionally have been less commonly employed by museums. In 1990, Hennessey wrote, "Unlike the library community where descriptive standards abound and nationally accepted subject classification lists have been in existence since 1895, the museum community has few agreed-upon standards and even fewer shared vocabularies." (9) The same year, Bierbaum noted

Libraries and museums are alike in creating surrogate records to stand for the materials in their collections. Standardization of records is another

matter. Thanks to the Library of Congress and its printed card program, library records have a long history of uniformity (at least for printed materials), while museum records have been largely local and idiosyncratic. (10)

In 1998, *The New Museum Registration Methods* provided “information about organizations that are currently involved in the development of standards in the museum community” but made no recommendations for one standard over another. Nor did it particularly advocate the use of structure, content, or value standards, merely saying that those standards exist and that using them may have some benefits. (The careful wording employed to avoid a stance either for or against the use of standards seems designed not to anger members of the museum community who have been using local practice.) (11)

There have been recent attempts at creating standards for museum cataloging. The Museum and Online Archives of California Project (MOAC), for example, has been experimenting since 1998 with catalog standards for museums. Interestingly, it has been employing EAD.

One of the specific goals of MOAC is to explore the use of the EAD standard in museums as a way of allowing integration of museum information with archival and library collections in one online resource, and as a way of describing structure and relation between objects in a collection. Another goal is to test the use of EAD with object or item-level description (more common in museums than archives) and with images. (12)

There have been other standards created and explored as well, including metadata element sets such as the Categories for the Description of Works of Art (CDWA) (13) and the Visual Resources Association Core Categories (VRA Core). (14) Potentially, these will be supplemented by CCO, a content standard for cultural works. (15) CCO's creation would seem to imply that there is a distinct need for cataloging standards in the museum community, but it has only recently (as of 2006) moved from Beta testing to implementation.

In addition to a long-standing lack of standards, museum cataloging also serves needs within the museum community that are different from those of the archival community. Smith, writing of the differences between ephemera cataloging in museums and libraries, notes that a difference in mission leads to differences in cataloging: "The museum's distinctive mission to interpret its collections, above and beyond making them accessible, is an aspect of intellectual control that requires different criteria for cataloging than those employed by libraries." (16) Interpretation, according to Smith, is where museums "have the charge to go beyond making the collections accessible." (17) Interpretation, in Smith's view, involves assigning themes to items (defined as "broad movements or concerns in American humanities, of an intangible nature" such as "westward expansion, immigration, racism, sexuality, commerce, politics, entertainment, humor, and rites of passage") and subjects (such as proper names, object names, classifications, "as well as any noun that can be seen or read on the object"). (18)

Jan Blodgett, college archivist at Davidson College, elucidates this distinction between museums and archives.

In general, museums interpret; they create exhibits that show that culture has changed over time. Archives, in general, don't interpret. We try to give as value-neutral a description as possible. We let researchers look at these items and interpret, analyze, and combine as they see fit. We don't do it for them. Even when we create exhibits, they tend to be "Treasures from the Archives." A label in one of our exhibits will just say "1916 Yearbook." It won't say "1916 Yearbook that shows a trend toward..." or "Notice the use of..." We don't do that. (19)

Exhibits, of course, predominate in museums and are less likely to be found in archives. Richard Pearce-Moses' definition of "exhibit" gets at the difference between museums and archives. "An exhibition generally includes materials such as artworks, documents, or objects that have been selected and ordered so that their interaction demonstrates an idea or theme for cultural or educational purposes." (20) Blodgett expresses the same idea: "There's an assumption of interpretation in exhibits in museums that isn't there in archives. If I show you a mug from the Davidson College Mid-Winters in 1972, it's about Mid-Winters in 1972. It's not about who made the mug, the design of the mug, or what the choice of mug style says about the group that chose it. In a museum, the mug would be placed in the much greater context of glassware. In the archives, we just present the stuff, and *you* figure out what it means." (21)

In addition to matters of interpretation, there are other differences in museum and archives cataloging. Taylor

contends, “Historically, museum records had been used by registrars or curators largely for on-site collection management, insurance, and appraisal purposes,” rather than for providing means of discovery to patrons. (22) Bierbaum echoes this idea: “For the most part, the record systems have been internal, created to enable museum staff to describe, organize, and exhibit the collections, but not designed to make the information available to visitors or other museums.” She notes the situation is changing, but also asserts, “Proposals for imposing uniformity on museum records have fallen on stony ground; there being neither institutional incentive to share in the creation of records and exchange of data nor a mechanism, such as the libraries’ bibliographic databases, to do so.” (23) White also notes that museums and archives have different needs regarding the type of information that should be stored in an item’s record. “Museums place great importance on researching and describing objects and regard changes to the object—its condition, its history of display—as valuable documentation.” (24) An item’s “history of display” is often of little use to an archivist.

Smith implies that museum personnel have a “preference for item-level control” that puts museum cataloging practice at odds with the archival practice of collection- or series-level description. It can be argued that objects lend themselves to item-level rather than collection-level description, but it would seem that an archives will be more likely to catalog a collection of objects as, say, “Collection of Political Lapel Pins, 1900-1964,” rather than to describe each pin individually.

In 2005, even as an increasing number of museum descriptions and catalog records become available online,

Bearman and Trant note that these records are often of little use.

Unfortunately, museum collections remain relatively inaccessible even when made available through searchable online databases. Museum documentation seldom satisfies the online access needs of the broad public, both because it is written using professional terminology and because it may not address what is important to—or remembered by—the museum visitor. (25)

Most museum records do not seem intended to facilitate patron access. Museums most often provide access by putting items on display (usually in a look-only, hands-off situation.) In an archive, the means of access is usually a surrogate, a catalog record or a finding aid. If this surrogate does not exist or is not made available, then a researcher usually has no means of accessing the object (unless through direct contact with a helpful archivist.)

None of the foregoing discussion of the differences between museums and archives is meant to imply that archivists should *not* borrow from museum practice, but the differences in the missions and needs of the two types of institutions will often result in different practices.

### **2.3. Literature Review**

While one can find some information concerning objects in libraries, very little literature has been written concerning objects in archives. One of the few authors to deal explicitly with objects in archives is Cooke in her 1991 article, “What do I do with the Rowing Oar? The Role of Memorabilia in School Archives.” She states, “All school



archivists sooner or later find themselves having to deal with non-archival material of historical interest. These include the expected school uniforms, prizes, trophies and rare books but can also include such unlikely items as a barber's chair, rowing oars and playground equipment of great sentimental value." (26)

While concerned specifically with a school archive in Australia, she discusses issues of interest to all archivists with collections of objects. She sees two advantages to collecting objects, which she calls "museum material."

- Donations of records and other materials related to her school usually have objects mixed in with the documents or photographs in which she has an interest. By having a collection policy that allows her to accept objects, she can take entire donations without having to refuse the objects and risking the ire or disappointment of the donor.
- Having objects on hand gives her easy access to materials needed to mount displays or exhibits at the school. (27)

Cooke likens the collecting of objects to maintaining a museum within the archives to "running a museum and an archives in harness." In order to "provide appropriate finding aids and storage conditions for a wide variety of materials," she declares that certain systems must be in place. (28) Her first priority is the writing of a collection policy for objects—although she refers to it as a "museum policy"—and she states that it will be similar to the archives' collection policy for any other type of item. (29) This thought is echoed in literature that addresses the collection of objects by libraries. The Children's Services

Division states (rather obviously) that “criteria for the selection of realia should be based on the needs of the target group.” (30) Bierbaum states that libraries should evaluate the acquisition of realia in terms of “instructional or other objectives.” (31) Whether an archive (or museum or library) collects objects should, of course, be based on the institution’s mission. In asking, “Should libraries, archives, and research institutes collect art,” Kam points out that the question “begs the consideration of the institution’s identity and mission.” (32)

Even with a collection policy in place, the acquisition of objects is often passive rather than active. Based on a survey that she conducted in 1985, Bierbaum concluded that objects were most often acquired by libraries as donations rather than by being actively sought. (33) Cooke seems to feel that archivists may prefer passive acquisition, saying that after writing a collection policy, “we may well need to decide how actively we are going to collect for the museum. This will largely be governed by the space and time available, and most archivists will be content to sit back and wait for the museum artefacts to come to them.” (34)

The topic of a collection policy for objects in archives raises the accompanying issue of whether, as a matter of policy, objects should remain in the archives or be sent to a related institution. Following a 1970 survey on practice regarding the “Disposition of Nonmanuscript Items Found Among Manuscripts,” Berner and Bettis found that “most manuscript collections are parts of a larger institutional complex such as a library or historical society and often have other special departments or units in which many of these record types will be normally acquired or

wanted. Often in these institutions there will be rules stating to which units such materials are to be sent.” (35)

Brazier, an archivist in a natural history museum, suggests that, “generally, archivists view the proper place of objects as being in a museum,” but from her vantage point as a worker in a museum, she notes the separation of objects from archives “is often desirable for better storage and use. It is not that objects per se do not belong in archives but that generally, for reasons of space, storage requirements, use and access, objects are felt to best belong in museums.” She later reiterates, “Storage and conservation requirements are often the major factor in the decision” of whether to keep objects in archives or transfer them to museums. (36)

The senior archivist at Fales Library, however, disagrees with sending archives’ objects to a museum. She states that in “traditional archives,” materials are “split up, with ‘the objects going to a museum, the media going to a film archive, books and printed materials going to a library, and the manuscripts, journals, and letters going to a literary archive.’” She remarks that that is not the practice at Fales, that her goal is to “to fully describe the totality of the archive because all of the materials are equally significant and essential to understanding an artist’s ‘entire creative output.’” (37) Hadley suggests that this separation of items based on their genre or form can possibly lead to a loss of context. (38) (This practice routinely happens in some archives—not just those that collect objects—where photographs, sound recordings, videotapes, or other items are routinely stripped out of collections and put into other, “artificial” collections.)

There has been some mention in the literature of cataloging needs of objects. Content standards for the

cataloging of objects were included in the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* beginning in 1978. Bierbaum's 1985 survey of librarians, however, found that among her respondents, "Local code and practice prevailed as the cited basis for cataloging three-dimensional objects." (39) A lack of standards for the description of objects, or a difficulty in using the standards that exist (such as *AACR*) most likely leads to a lack of cataloging or description for objects. Brazier, while not talking specifically about cataloging, says, "Objects are generally consigned by archivists to the 'too-hard' or 'not-enough-time' basket—along with ephemera." (40) CCO content standards may provide archivists with additional guidelines for describing and cataloging objects in their collections. Lanzi has stated that CCO covers a broad range of cultural objects and their images. Museum objects, such as paintings, sculpture, prints, manuscripts, photographs, archeological artifacts and material culture objects, are incorporated, as well as architecture and other aspects of the built environment. The targeted audience is visual resources professionals, museum registrars and catalogers, library catalogers, archivists and others engaged in documenting cultural heritage objects and images. (41)

CCO's focus, however, is on providing content standards for item level description. It remains to be seen if it will be adopted by the archival community and if its standards can be adapted to series- or collection-level description.

Recommendations for the storage of objects in museums can be found in *The New Museum Registration Methods*. (42) *A Library Manager's Guide to the Physical*

*Processing of Nonprint Materials* provides recommendations for the storage of objects in libraries. (43) Cooke, however, seems not to be concerned with storage issues: “While museum artefacts need specialised treatment and storage, their basic requirements are almost identical to those of archives and a good storage environment will be suitable for your museum artefacts.” (44) While outside storage may need to be found for large items, Cooke points out that, “It is important to remember that the linkage between items in a collection is intellectual, not physical, and it therefore does not matter how disparate an accession may be.” (45)

Issues arising from the collection of objects in archives show some similarities to those that arise from the collection of ephemera in museums, libraries, and archives. There is a somewhat significant body of literature on issues of ephemera, including two issues of *Popular Culture in Libraries*. (46) Stanley, discussing the acquisition of ephemera, asks the basic question of just what to *do* with ephemera: “Once we had it, how did we treat it? How was it housed and how was it made accessible for researchers?” (47) Stanley finds that collectors of ephemera have the same questions concerning whether the appropriate repository for ephemera is a library, museum, or archives. (48) Stanley also sees the difficulties of cataloging ephemera leading to a lack of cataloging, thus leading to a lack of access. (49)

### **3. Interviews and Results**

The available literature allows one to make some assumptions concerning current archival practice with respect to objects in archives, but it does not give a clear

indication of current practice or the issues and challenges being faced by archivists with three-dimensional objects in their collections. Based on the review of the literature as well as on personal observation, it was assumed that:

- Most college and university archives have objects in their collections
- Objects are usually not actively sought by most institutional archives
- Objects are often given little description or cataloging, or are given cataloging that is inconsistent with current archival practice, leading to a lack of use by researchers
- Objects are often separated from the collections in which they arrive
- Objects often raise preservation, display, and storage issues that challenge archivists

In order to test these assumptions and to learn more about the collection, uses, descriptive cataloging, storage, and preservation of three-dimensional objects in institutional archives, five practicing archivists at schools in North Carolina were interviewed. The schools included a small public school, a small private school, a large public school, and a large private school.

### **3.1. Collections and Collection Policies**

The types of objects found in collections included many textiles: uniforms, class blazers, letter sweaters, marshall sashes worn during commencement, pennants that decorated dorm rooms, student-made class flags, t-shirts, quilts, coverlets, dresses, hats, and samplers. There are also

mugs, cups, bumper stickers, trophies, fraternity and honorary society pins, fraternity and sorority paddles, class rings, debate society cups, and other items related to school organizations and events. Many of the objects related to the history of the schools, but there are also a few items pertaining to local history and some items not necessarily related to the school at all, such as a bow and arrow, a shotgun, shoes owned by slaves, an ear trumpet, beer steins, and a collection of World War II military unit patches that were donated by alumni that served in the war.

Collection policies ranged from no written policy to overt statements of exactly what would be included in a school's collections. Some collection policies specifically mentioned objects, while some made no mention of them at all. The reason most often stated for having a written collection policy was that it granted the archives the ability to turn away items. Reasons cited for refusing items included a lack of relevancy to the collection, a lack of storage space, and the inability to care properly for a particular object. However, it was also noted that unwanted objects were sometimes accepted as parts of larger, more desirable collections, or were sometimes accepted when there was the implication that there may be a future donation (either monetary or of other items that the archives might find more acceptable.) All of the institutions, even those with written collection policies, reported taking in undesirable objects in order to be able to acquire other, more desirable items. Perhaps it seems like common sense to accept items in order to secure subsequent donations—doing so is one of Cooke's reasons for accepting objects—but taking in items with unique cataloging, storage, and preservation issues creates demands that many archives may not be equipped to handle.

There would also seem to be some correlation between the existence of a written collection policy and the use of the objects by researchers. The institution with the most explicit collection policy regarding objects reported the greatest use of its objects for research. In contrast, the institution with no formal collection policy reported little use of its collections for research.

### **3.2. Uses of Collections**

All of the archivists save one cited exhibits as the most prevalent use for objects at their institutions. Sometimes the objects were used as a way of illustrating a school's history, with the thought that exhibits, rather than text, may be a better way to engage students. Beyond use in display cases, however, archivists often had difficulty in finding applications for objects, did not consider them to have much informational value, and felt that few of the objects received much attention from researchers. Only one institution cited patron research as the primary use of the objects in its collection, citing a number of research projects where objects in the collection had been used, including a book on samplers, a paper on the use of a particular type of loom during a specific time period, and an article concerning the influence of community connections on weaving styles.

### **3.3. Description and Cataloging**

Means of description and cataloging included a long-dormant card catalog, an in-house database, an Inmagic database, online finding aids, and accession records. Few of the records, except for the online finding aids, are available to the public. In some cases, the records are not available to the public because an archive does not want to promote the



use of the object collections, the thought being that, for the most part, they have little relevance to the mission of the archives.

In other instances, objects are not cataloged at all. Reasons cited for the lack of cataloging include no fixed location for the object—if the item is just sitting on the floor or constantly being moved from one place to another, its database entry cannot be completed, and it tends not to be entered in the database in the first place. Other reasons for a lack of cataloging include the fact that many objects do not seem pertinent to the mission of the archives, and creating descriptive records for objects would merely take away from the time that could be spent creating records for items that are felt to be more important or useful. In the archives that *do* value their objects, a lack of time and resources is often cited, along with the notion that the cataloging and description of objects is more difficult and is therefore relegated to the bottom of the pile.

One of the initial suppositions of this study was that a lack of cataloging or description for objects would lead to a lack of discovery and use, but that, oddly enough, was not the case. One institution with little description for its objects sees significant research use being made of them, while another with thorough online descriptions of its object collections sees little use being made of them. Additionally, the institutions with the most thorough documentation of their objects do not make those records readily available to the public, either because of a lack of time and resources, or because of the notion that objects have less value to users.

Another supposition of this study, that objects were often physically and sometimes intellectually separated from their original collections with a corresponding loss of

context, did not appear to be a matter of importance. Except for one institution, where objects are physically removed from their collections as a matter of policy, objects most often remained physically and intellectually a part of their original collections. The problem of an object losing context through physical separation was minimal.

### **3.4. Storage**

Repeatedly mentioned at some institutions was a lack of storage space and how quickly objects could eat up that space. Other institutions seemed, at least at present, to have adequate storage for their objects. However, items that were too big to be stored properly were likely to be rejected at all repositories. In fact, the issue of storage seemed most important in its influence on whether an object was collected in the first place.

Storage practices varied somewhat from repository to repository, but for the most part, objects were identified in some way and merely stored on shelves, sometimes in boxes, sometimes not. Only one of the archivists interviewed had received any special training in handling, cataloging, or storing of objects.

The issue of storage space brought up the fact that the archives is often a repository for unwanted items, where collections of questionable value are nonetheless stored there because no other campus department or organization will have them, and where the archives becomes the caretaker of items that are of little archival value.

### **4. Objects and the Mission of the Archives**

For the most part, archivists do not always seem sure of their reasons for collecting objects. Acquisition often

seems to be based on whether the archive can physically store the objects or on the supposition that accepting objects may lead to a concurrent or future donation. Sometimes objects are “inherited” from or pushed onto the archives by some other department. Objects sometimes find their way into archives because there just does not seem to be anywhere else to put them. Perhaps these sometimes murky and ill-defined reasons for the acquisition of objects come from unfamiliarity. While archivists are usually comfortable with the appraisal of paper-based collections, they may not be as confident when judging the long-term value of object-based collections. Most of the archives reported engaging in passive rather than active object collecting, and the fact that objects were often not actively collected implies that the archivists do not place as great an importance or value on objects as they do on other types of collections.

Once acquired, objects can serve to liven up displays and keep exhibits from being nothing but cases full of documents and photographs, but beyond their potential for display, many objects do not seem useful either to archivists or to their patrons. If objects are not being used for anything other than display, does their exhibit justify the expense of acquiring, describing, and storing them? Most archives contend with a lack of storage space, a backlog in processing, not enough time, not enough money, and not enough personnel. Archivists with objects in their collections might do well to examine the role of those objects. Is there informational value in them? Is there information that cannot be gained elsewhere? Or are they taking up space and resources that could be better devoted to other collections?

The key to the value of objects in archival collections seems to be whether the objects are pertinent to

the mission of the archives. If the acquisition of objects reflects the mission of the archive and adheres to a collection policy, then the archives is more likely to acquire objects that actually have an informational value, objects that might be used by patrons instead of just serving as fodder for display cases. If the acquisition of objects is used to support the mission of the archives, the archives is much less likely to be the repository of last resort, the dumping ground of old unwanted artifacts. The relevance of an object to an institution's mission should be the deciding factor in acquiring or keeping objects for the collection. The notion that the items acquired by an archives should reflect its mission may seem obvious, of course, but it is particularly important in the collection of items like three-dimensional objects with unique and often problematical cataloging and storage issues.

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## **2007 Gene Williams Award Winner**

*The Gene Williams Award is to recognize excellence for a paper on an archival topic written for a graduate-level course by a student in North Carolina. This award honors the late Gene J. Williams, archivist at the North Carolina Division of Archives and History and at East Carolina University, and charter member of the Society of North Carolina Archivists.*

## **The Selection of Materials for Digitization by NEH-funded Digitization Projects: An Analysis**

**by Jesse Brown**

Jesse Brown is a project archivist with the States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project at the New York State Archives. He wrote this article in 2006 while pursuing his Masters of Library Science degree at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

### **Introduction**

Since the 1980s, libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions have been captivated by the potential of rapidly developing information technologies

to digitally preserve and provide access to analog materials. Proceeding from the era of CD-ROM and personal computer workstations to broadband Internet access and terabyte servers, technology has allowed for more and more digitized materials to be offered to users in real time. In addition, the expectations of a new generation of information users have increased the urgency with which cultural heritage institutions have entered into the digital realm. A 1996 report by the Benton Foundation showed that Americans from the ages of eighteen to twenty-four were less enthusiastic about using libraries than any other age demographic, while younger adults tended to attach a much higher importance to having access to computer systems than older adults. (1) As a result, libraries and other cultural institutions have made digitization a key strategic priority: a 1999 Association of Research Libraries survey showed 91 percent of responding libraries were conducting or planning digitization of special collections materials. (2) With increased demand for online digital materials, and a technological infrastructure able to store and transport a massive amount of digital data, some may be tempted to believe that all currently analog information should be converted to digital formats as quickly as possible, lest they be left behind by users demanding instant access to digital materials.

However, the costs of digitizing materials remain prohibitive for such an approach, at least for most cultural heritage institutions. In addition, issues relating to copyright status, the physical condition of materials, and other factors argue against a “digitize everything” approach. Clearly, institutions interested in initiating digitization efforts must selectively choose materials that will best meet the goals

they have set for their digitization projects. Over the past decade, various organizations, including the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), the Research Libraries Group, and the Library of Congress, have released guidelines to assist libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage organizations in making systematic decisions related to the selection of materials for digitization. Such guidelines have been used by various institutions to form their own selection policies. One of the most-cited sets of guidelines grew out of a Harvard University task force project in 1995. Published in 1998 as *Selecting Research Collections for Digitization*, the report of this project includes a decision-making matrix meant to guide institutions through the set of questions that need to be asked about materials that are candidates for digital collections. (3) While these standards have often been adopted by other institutions over the years, quite a bit has changed in the digital library environment during that time. The aforementioned advances in technology may call into question some of the assumptions made about selection by organizations in the past.

In order to discover the extent to which current digitization projects are being guided by these published guidelines, ten projects funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) during the years 2004 and 2005 were selected for this analysis based on their intention to digitize materials. The grant applications for these projects were obtained from the NEH and analyzed to determine the criteria they used to select materials for digitization. Most of the grants were awarded under the Grants to Preserve and Create Access to Humanities Collections program. According to its online description, this program exists to support projects that preserve collections and create

intellectual access to collections that, because of their intellectual content and value as cultural artifacts, are considered highly important for research, education, and public programming in the humanities.

One of the eligible activities funded by these grants is the “digitization of collections to enhance their accessibility.” (4) In order to be approved for one of these grants, a recipient must fill out an application, which includes a narrative of the project. This narrative includes a discussion of the project’s significance; the history, scope, and duration; the methodology and standards that are to be applied; a work plan; project staff; and how the project’s results will be disseminated. (5) Within this narrative, the explanation of selection criteria is crucial to establishing the importance of the proposed digitization effort. The project’s significance is closely related to the intellectual value of the materials being selected, while the dissemination of the digitized materials will largely be determined by the types of use and user groups suggested by the selected materials.

The narratives of the ten selected applications were analyzed based on categories derived from the decision-making matrix included in CLIR’s *Selecting Research Collections for Digitization*. These categories include:

- The copyright status of the materials being considered for digitization.
- The intrinsic value of the materials in their present state.
- The enhanced access to the materials that digitization can bring.
- The value that can be added to the materials through

digitization. (6)

Through this analysis, we can gain a sense of how the selection principles laid out in previous publications are being applied by institutions in today's online cultural heritage environment.

### **Copyright: The First Step of Selection (Or Is It?)**

For many institutions considering a digitization project, the question of copyright is the first issue to address when selecting materials. Copyright is a convenient place to begin because, while most factors of the selection process must be weighed against each other to determine their ultimate importance, a work's copyright status provides a clear "yes" or "no" answer to whether that work can be digitized. If a work is in the public domain and is not covered by copyright restrictions, or if the institution itself holds the copyright to the work, it can be digitized and placed online. However, if the work is still covered by copyright, the permission of the copyright holder must be obtained before digitization can proceed. Due to the extreme difficulties inherent in determining the copyright holder of a given work, as well as in obtaining their permission to duplicate their works, digitization projects have generally been limited to non-copyrighted materials (usually materials produced before 1923). (7)

This focus on public-domain works has severely limited the ability of digitized collections to accurately reflect the full range of knowledge available. As Abby Smith of the Council on Library and Information Resources notes

The notion on the part of many young students that, if it is not on the Web or in an online catalog, then it

must not exist, has the effect of orphaning the vast majority of information resources, especially those that are not in the public domain...This skewed representation of created works on the Web will continue for quite some time into the future, and the complications that surround moving image and recorded sound rights means, ironically, that these will be the least accessible resources on the most dynamic information source around. (8)

However, a few institutions have begun to enter into the murky waters of copyrighted materials in order to present a far broader range of resources than ever thought possible before.

Most notable among these efforts has been Google's recent attempt to digitize books from five major research university libraries, including the entire collections of Stanford University and the University of Michigan. Under this plan, called Google Print, approximately 15 million books will be digitized by Google. These would include both non-copyrighted, or public domain, books and books protected by copyright. Full-text versions of books in the public domain would be made available to users, while short excerpts of books would be available for books under copyright. (9) The project eventually has evolved into two distinct ventures: Google Print Library and Google Print Publisher, brought together under a search engine called Google Book Search. Google Print Library encompasses the original library digitization effort, while Google Print Publisher allows publishers to submit their copyrighted works for inclusion in the Google search index in exchange for half of the revenue from contextual ads placed next to the

search results. (10) As of November 2005, ten thousand public domain works have been digitized and made publicly available through Google Print. (11)

This plan was not universally well received. Initial negative reaction centered on the fear that Google, a for-profit firm, would replace the library as the main provider of print information for the public. Later concerns, however, arose from the publishing industry, which believed that reproducing copyrighted materials and storing them in a database constituted a violation of intellectual property rights. Google countered that they were only digitizing the books so that they could be indexed and made available for search queries. The display of search results from copyrighted materials in Google Print, they argued, would be limited to either a couple of sentences, in the case of Google Print Library, or a couple of pages, in the case of Google Print Publisher. Nevertheless, the American Association of Publishers and the Authors Guild filed lawsuits claiming that Google Print was reproducing copyrighted material for commercial gain, thus negating any claim of fair use. Google claims that Google Print simply does for books what Google has been doing for Web sites since its inception, namely saving them for indexing purposes, an action that has been recognized as legal in court. While Google initially agreed to halt the digitization of books in an attempt to reach a compromise with the litigants, they resumed digitization in November 2005 without an agreement in place. (12)

What is interesting to note here is how Google's approach to copyright has shaped the nature and functionality of their respective projects. Google, aware that it is walking a legal tightrope by duplicating copyrighted material, has relied on the defense that it is only copying these materials for indexing and



search purposes, and is not offering access to entire copyrighted works. As a result, Google Print's essential purpose is to serve as a "free-text search" version of a library catalog, pointing a user to materials rather than providing full access to the materials themselves. As Google Book Search's own help page notes: "The aim of Google Book Search is to help you discover books and learn where to buy or borrow them, not read them from start to finish." (13)

Among the NEH-funded projects profiled in this paper, a few are testing the boundaries of copyright laws. The Vanderbilt Television News Archive is a repository of video recordings of nightly news programs and news specials broadcast by NBC, ABC, CBS, and CNN. The archive has operated under a specific clause in the 1976 Copyright Act that allows an archive or library to record and archive television news programs and to make a limited number of copies of these programs for public access. The archive received funding from the NEH to convert their entire collection to MPEG-2 digital format and to eventually offer lower-resolution versions of these programs as streaming video files over the Internet. Thus, the archive is stepping into a gray area in the copyright law, since the "limited number of copies" restriction obviously cannot be applied to a file that streams continuously over the Internet, allowing for an infinite amount of viewings. The archive argues in their grant application, however, that most legal scholars believe that "streaming video represents performance rather than loan." Therefore, while they are working on obtaining agreements from news networks to allow streaming video content, the archive believes that they are likely to win any lawsuit brought against them by a news network. (14)

The Berkeley Language Center at the University of

California at Berkeley faces different issues relating to the offering of streaming media. Their NEH-funded project involves converting field recordings of Native American languages into digital files and offering Windows-Media audio files of these recordings on the Internet. While the recordings are technically the property of the institution, the language center also has to take into account the wishes of the Native American communities that these recordings document. Some of the recordings are of sacred ceremonies, whereas others contain information of a private nature about specific tribe members. Therefore, the language center devised a permission system years ago that has allowed consultants from Native American communities to place access restrictions on certain collections or parts of collections. However, these agreements were made before the advent of online technologies; therefore, the interested parties could not have perceived the ease of dissemination that would be associated with these materials on the Internet. Therefore, the center foresees the necessity of re-contacting the original collectors of these collections, as well as representatives of the documented Native American tribes, to reassess the access permissions attached to these collections in light of their increased level of access as streaming audio files. (15)

The other projects profiled appear to focus on materials that are safely in the public domain (pre-1923) or on materials owned by the repository. Nevertheless, it appears that cultural heritage institutions are beginning to test the boundaries of the copyright laws and no longer treat the copyright status of their material as an absolute determinant of its appropriateness for digitization.

### **Intrinsic Value of the Materials**

After dealing with copyright status of the materials, the process of selecting materials for digitization can become much more subjective. The first question put forth by Harvard's decision-making matrix is particularly nebulous: "Does the material have sufficient intrinsic value to ensure interest in a digital project?" (16) One could certainly argue that such "value" is in the eye of the beholder, and that reliance on individual judgment could lead to fragmentary, little-used digital collections. Nevertheless, archivists and digitization experts have endeavored to base their value judgments on more objective criteria. From copyright status, the Northeastern Document Conservation Center divides the concept of intellectual value into six facets:

- *Informational value*, or the topical content contained in the material
- *Administrative value*, or the functional usefulness of the material to the creating organization
- *Artifactual value*, or the uniqueness and rarity of an item related to its physical form
- *Associational value*, or the value of the materials stemming from their association with a prominent individual, group, or other entity
- *Evidential value*, or the ability of the materials to serve as legal or historic proof of an event or activity
- *Monetary value*, or the current market value of the material (17)

These criteria must, in turn, be viewed within various contexts. First, an institution's existing collection

development practices will inevitably shape the value judgments placed on materials that are candidates for digitization. Institutions who have invested in resources dealing with a particular topic or time period are more likely to digitize materials within this conceptual area, especially since such an intensive collection is more likely to contain unique materials that would benefit from increased access. (18) In addition, existing cooperative collection development agreements between institutions often influence which institutions will develop a digitized collection in a given subject area.

All of these facets of intrinsic value, or intellectual value, are evident in the written justifications examined in this study. Certain aspects, however, appear more consistently and prominently than others. The aspects chosen for emphasis are indicative of the priorities cultural institutions, and the NEH as a funding agency, place on what should be represented in the digital record.

A noticeable number of projects chosen to receive NEH grants involve the digitization of materials in which not only the documents themselves, but also the contents, are unique and irreplaceable. In the case of the Berkeley Language Center, the selected materials include the recordings of the languages of 107 Native American communities. According to the center, nearly all of these languages are endangered: only 38 of the 187 extant Native American languages are currently being taught to children in the home. Therefore, the field recordings and notes kept in the center often represent the only known documentation of many of these languages. (19) Likewise, the University of Michigan's Museum of Anthropology has received funding to digitize its collection of color slides from the James B.

Griffin Collection. Griffin, a noted archaeologist, had created slides of various archaeological sites around the world from 1950 to 1980. In many cases, the archaeological sites no longer exist; therefore, the slides constitute the only visual evidence of their existence. (20)

Furthermore, the Vanderbilt Television News Archive claims to be the “only comprehensive, publicly accessible, unedited collection of broadcast national news” available to the public. (21) The efforts of news networks to preserve their own copies of past broadcasts has been incomplete and resulted in copies that are difficult for the public to access. Thus, the digitization effort by the Television News Archive is likely the only effort from which the unique nature of the television news medium can be evaluated by future scholars and students. (22) Similarly, many of the cultures represented in the American Museum of Natural History’s project to produce digital images of objects from their Pacific ethnology collection (encompassing Australia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia) either no longer exist or have been irreparably transformed by contact with the outside world. Making these objects available in an online environment can add substantially to the scholarly record. (23)

All of the digitization projects profiled have made great efforts to prove the informational value, or topicality, of their collections. Many of the efforts also deal with the documentation of groups underrepresented in the cultural record. The Carnegie Museum of Art has received funding to digitize more than thirty thousand negatives produced by Charles “Teeny” Harris, a photographer for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, an African American newsweekly. In the museum’s own words, “the Harris photographs will make

black America ‘visible’ to the whole nation, overturning centuries of invisibility...a collection of 40,000 photographs can remake history.” (24) The photographs document black urban life in the city of Pittsburgh, as well as many notable civil rights leaders, musicians, and politicians.

In addition, some of the projects that received NEH funding emphasize that their materials deal with subject matter that is highly relevant to America’s current cultural and political situation. This is especially evident in the two projects that deal with the Middle East. The Afghanistan Digital Library, a project of New York University to catalog, digitize, and create a bibliography for Afghan publications from 1871 to 1930, has partnered with private collectors who are donating these publications for the project. This partnership has been necessary since libraries and cultural heritage institutions have been destroyed and looted in the years encompassing the Soviet invasion, the rule of the Taliban government, and the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. As the grant application states: “This means that a crucial element of the cultural heritage of this nation, a country of great importance to the United States today, is unavailable to students of Afghanistan, to policymakers, and indeed even to the citizens of Afghanistan itself.” (25)

In addition, the California Museum of Photography (affiliated with the University of California at Riverside) has received funding to catalog and digitize stereo images from the Keystone-Mast collection depicting scenes of the Middle East, Central Asia, India, and Pakistan. The museum notes that the proposed collection is “culturally and politically valuable: it is a rich concentration of images from nations now central to world affairs, where regional, religious, territorial, and cultural conflicts send political ripples around

the globe.” (26)

In these collections, the intellectual value of the selected materials extends far beyond the traditional realm of academia to encompass broader political and cultural objectives. It is easy to see how the NEH, a funding agency of the federal government, would be attracted to digital collections dealing with topics that directly relate to areas of the world that figure prominently in U.S. foreign policy. Thus, intellectual value can serve purposes far beyond the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake.

### **Increasing Access to Materials**

Many of those who have studied the issues surrounding creating digital collections have concluded that enhancing and broadening access to fragile, dispersed, and unique materials constitutes the most important benefit of the digitization process. In her retrospective of the digitization efforts of major research libraries, Abby Smith notes that digitization projects undertaken in order to enhance access can serve three purposes. First, digitization can serve to provide outreach to user groups and communities outside of the traditional scholarly users. Secondly, it can serve to provide access to documents within a coherent, subject-based collection. Thirdly, the documents can be provided in response to a specific user’s, or group of users’, requests for access to digitized versions of materials. (27)

Interestingly, while non-scholarly outreach seemed to be cited as the least common access-related motivation, almost all of the projects studied project their potential user population beyond the bounds of academia. The Carnegie Museum of Art is indicative of this attitude when they state in their application narrative that the Teeny Harris Archive

will serve “scholars and historians, teachers, students, media, publishers, museums, and the general public.” (28) One might suspect that such projects might be exaggerating the range of its potential users in order to appeal to NEH funders. However, some projects have actively selected their materials and designed their online products for non-scholarly audiences. For instance, the Schenectady Museum and Planetarium plans to “create an educational website, entitled ‘Inventing Modern America,’” using digitized images from the museum’s GE Photograph Collection. The Web site will be developed with the input of a professional educator and will meet the standards for social studies, mathematics, and science instruction set by the State of New York. The digitized resource, therefore, would be designed specifically for elementary to high school students. (29) The actively pedagogical nature of such a tool may stem from the nature of the museum community, which may see itself as a promoter of history and culture rather than simply a repository for such knowledge. Nevertheless, these projects can serve as a challenge to libraries and archives to be more proactively pedagogical in their presentation of digitized materials in order to engage the wider public.

The second and third access-related motivations Smith mentions tend to be more prevalent, but not to the same degree. In 2001, Paula De Stefano conducted an informal survey of twenty-five digitization projects to determine which access-based approach to selecting materials for digitization was most used in academic libraries. She found that, overwhelmingly, most projects preferred to select materials by subject or by date range, with, as she stated, “little regard for use, faculty recommendations, scholarly input, editorial boards, or



curriculum.” (30)

This preference seems to carry over to the NEH-funded projects studied in this paper. All of the materials selected in these projects are taken from collections related to a specific subject, culture, geographic area, or time span. Most of the projects detail how the items are used in their current state as well as which user populations access the items. However, few of the projects mention demands by specific users or user groups that the materials in the given project be digitized. Even the ones that do (for instance, the Berkeley Language Center) do not report users requesting that distinct items or groups of items undergo digitization. (31)

In some cases, materials have been selected specifically on the basis of their *lack* of use, since they are currently inaccessible to the outside public in their physical form. For instance, the Afghanistan Digital Library draws its content from the publication collections of private collectors who hold virtually all of the materials relevant to the Afghan publishing world of the time. Since these collectors generally have not made their holdings publicly available, the digitization effort represents the first time that these publications will be exposed to a wider audience. (32) In addition, the concentration of such widely-dispersed texts in one collection allows students and scholars the opportunity to make informed comparisons and criticisms about the entire era of publishing being documented, actions that would have been practically impossible before the advent of their digital library.

It should also be noted that some of the NEH-funded projects studied in this paper use digitization as only a part of a larger effort to provide access to a group of

primary source materials. For instance, the Library Company of Philadelphia received an NEH grant to “describe, catalog, and conserve” their collection of Civil War era ephemeral material. Of the roughly fifty thousand items in the collection, only two thousand items will be reproduced digitally. The primary thrust of the project is the creation of an EAD finding aid for the ephemera collection as a whole, as well as MARC records describing series and items within the collection. The digital images are then linked to their related MARC records and the EAD finding aid. (33) The images essentially serve as an augmentation of the descriptive records, and are not meant to support in-depth remote research. However, the inclusion of these images can make the physical collection of materials more attractive to casual researchers and can give experienced researchers a representative sample of what is contained in the collection. In this way, even such a limited digitization effort can enhance access to materials.

### **Value-added Benefits to Materials**

Converting physical items into digital surrogates does more than simply provide access to remote users. It can also provide added functionality and other ancillary benefits that cannot be realized with the original items. The Harvard decision-making matrix specifies four added benefits that may be realized through the digitization process and that should be used to select materials that can foster these benefits. They are:

- Preservation, either through replacing the original with a digital surrogate or by reducing handling of the original by providing a surrogate
- Improved intellectual control, through finding aids,

catalog records, indexes, etc.

- Added functionality (i.e. full-text search, wide distribution, image manipulation)
  - Cost savings, through creating online collections that can be maintained by more than one institution
- (34)

The first added benefit, preservation, has been a controversial topic within the realm of digitization. Initially, many information experts saw digitization as a powerful tool in preservation, one which could possibly replace older techniques such as preservation microfilming. However, after discovering that digital storage media often deteriorates over time, and after realizing the necessity of migrating digital resources to new hardware and software formats as technology advances, digitization experts withdrew much of their initial enthusiasm. Although research into digital preservation is progressing, most librarians and archivists do not see digitization as a way of making replacement copies of original materials. If anything, digitization is seen as a way to divert users away from the original materials, thus reducing the wear and tear on the originals. (35)

A few of the NEH-funded digitization projects specifically mention preservation as a motivation for embarking on the digitization of materials. Notably, all of these projects involve the digitization of audiovisual materials. This is quite appropriate, since the media used to store audio and video content are known to be unstable and prone to rapid deterioration. Therefore, audiovisual archivists have become accustomed to the necessity to migrate their content to more stable media. In this environment, the longevity of digital surrogates is less of a

concern when weighed against the ease of duplication and migration that digitization offers. (36) However, only one of these projects, the Carnegie Museum of Art's Teeny Harris Archive, intends to selectively digitize materials that are in especially poor physical condition. (37) Furthermore, none of the projects intends (at least for now) to discard the original materials once the digital surrogate is made and stored. It is apparent that preservation may be a commonly-applied factor in selecting collections for digitization, but it is less often a factor in selecting individual items, and is not used to justify replacing deteriorating originals. (38)

While preservation concerns are an inconsistent motivator in the selection policies of NEH-funded projects, enhancement of intellectual control is evident in virtually all of the projects. Digital surrogates in these projects are typically paired with some form of descriptive metadata. This metadata can range from traditional MARC catalog records for individual items and collections of items to EAD finding aids for digitized collections of archival materials to the use of advanced metadata schema such as METS. (39) In some cases, the original materials have already been described previously in catalog records and the description can be either applied directly to the digital surrogate or converted to another metadata scheme, thus greatly decreasing the time and effort needed to produce useful digital surrogates of these materials. However, in cases where no such metadata exists for their records, the institutions plan on creating new descriptive metadata for both the originals and their digital surrogates.

The ability to create and leverage detailed metadata for digital surrogates also appears to be the driving force behind the enhancement of the functional capabilities of

digitized materials. All of the projects studied plan on utilizing or creating powerful search mechanisms to enhance the retrieval of digitized content. In many cases, the institution already has such a search mechanism in place through their digital library or collection management system. In cases where there is no such mechanism in place, such as the Schenectady Museum and Planetarium's "Inventing Modern America" project, the institutions are generally planning to contract with vendors such as ContentDM to provide such solutions. (40) In either instance, the metadata attached to the digital surrogates will allow for retrieval based on both keyword searches and advanced searches within the different metadata fields. Thus, digital images can be collected and distributed in ways previously unthinkable with physical items. This enhanced functionality seems to encourage the selection of large amounts of materials for digitization, since relevant digital items can be quickly and precisely separated from the mass of digitized material through precise searches of the accompanying metadata.

### **Collaboration and Other Considerations**

It appears from the above analysis that the guidelines for selecting materials for digitization set forth by Harvard University and other organizations years ago are still applied and considered relevant by current digitization projects. NEH-funded digitization projects are selecting materials that are intrinsically valuable, both as unique physical documents and as providers of rare and valuable content. They are selecting materials that will attract diverse groups of users and that can be made highly functional through enhanced description and retrieval. However, two classes of selection criteria mentioned in the Harvard model are not as thoroughly addressed in the

application narratives of these projects. The omission of one of these criteria is understandable. The omission of the other is more troublesome.

The final set of criteria for selection represented in the Harvard model deals with the technical requirements involved in digitizing the selected materials. (41) However, a complete discussion of all the technical and infrastructure issues surrounding the selection of materials for digitization is outside the realm of this study. First, the application materials provided by the NEH only included the narrative description sections of the applications. While these materials contained some discussion of the equipment and technologies being utilized to create, store, and make available digitized materials, more detailed discussion was included elsewhere in the applications, and was not included by the NEH in their submission to the author. Furthermore, while technical requirements are elucidated within the applications, they do not appear to have a direct impact on the institutions' processes for selecting materials for digitization, or, at least, their impact is not explicitly discussed within the application narratives.

However, it may be that this lack of explicit discussion is indicative of a broader truth. It is possible that, with technological capabilities advancing at a breakneck pace, technological considerations are no longer as much of a limiting factor in the selection of materials for digitization. One common characteristic of these NEH-funded projects, apart from their diverse subject matter and high degree of functionality, is their remarkable scope. Just a few years ago, it would have been unthinkable that a digitized collection from a single institution could contain more than 30,000 photographic images, over 19,000 hours of digitized

video recordings, or 3,750 books. However, thanks to the development of broadband Internet access, high-capacity networked storage, advanced digital imaging devices, high-resolution displays, and advanced multimedia software, collections can be digitized and represented on the Web in their entirety. Also, as mentioned before, powerful search mechanisms and metadata schema ensure that these collections can be easily navigated and manipulated by the user.

With the size of digitization projects rapidly increasing, it is likely that overlaps in content between collections will become more frequent. Another of the key criteria that the Harvard decision-making model suggests is crucial to selecting materials for digitization is whether or not another collection exists in the online environment that is similar to the collection a given institution wishes to create. (42) This consideration is important to avoid duplication of digital surrogates between digitized collections and ensures that a wide range of digitized materials is represented in the online cultural heritage environment.

However, this consideration is not evident in the application narratives of NEH-funded projects. Of the narratives studied, only a few even mention the existence of similar collections of primary source materials. Even among projects that show an awareness of related online collections at other institutions, none appear to have collaborated with these other institutions in order to avoid duplicative effort. Of course, since these projects are generally digitizing primary source materials, they may assume that their materials are unique, and that, therefore, their collections will not overlap with other online resources. However, while the materials themselves may not be redundant, the subjects and

time periods represented in a given collection might be already well represented in other digitized collections. As noted at the beginning of this paper, more and more users are looking to the online information environment as their primary source for knowledge about the past. In order to gain a complete and accurate picture of past societies, there must be a sufficiently wide range of populations, events, topics, and time periods documented by online digital collections. Although it seems that the National Endowment for the Humanities has taken this need into some consideration, by funding digitized collections documenting underrepresented populations and geographic areas, the cultural heritage community cannot rely on the government or other funding agencies to manage the digital collections landscape. Institutions must work together and reach agreements on which types of materials need to be digitized, both to reduce needless costs and to ensure a vibrant cultural research and learning environment in the online world.

### **Afterword**

Since the completion of this article, Google has progressed with its book digitization project, now named Google Book Search. For current information, refer to the Google Book Search help page at: <http://books.google.com/support/>.

Information on the following digitization projects analyzed in this article can be accessed online:

- [The Teeny Harris Archives Project](http://www.cmoa.org/teenie/info.asp) (Carnegie Museum of Art)  
<http://www.cmoa.org/teenie/info.asp>
- [The McAllister Collection of Civil War-era Ephemera](#) (Library Company of Philadelphia)



- <http://www.librarycompany.org/mcallister/>
- [Afghanistan Digital Library](http://afghanistandl.nyu.edu/) (New York University)  
<http://afghanistandl.nyu.edu/>
  - [GE Photograph Collection](http://www.schenectadymuseum.org/05_archives/05.htm) (Schenectady Museum)  
[http://www.schenectadymuseum.org/05\\_archives/05.htm](http://www.schenectadymuseum.org/05_archives/05.htm)
  - [Survey of California and Other Indian Languages](http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/Survey/)  
(University of California Berkeley)  
<http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/Survey/>
  - [Keystone-Mast Collection](http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/) (UC Riverside/California Museum of Photography): <http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/>
  - [Baldwin Library of Children's Literature Digital Collection](http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/UFDC/UFDC.aspx?c=juv) (University of Florida)  
<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/UFDC/UFDC.aspx?c=juv>
  - [Image Database \(includes James B. Griffin slide collection\)](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?c=anthro1ic) (University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology) <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?c=anthro1ic>

#### **NEH Grant Application Narratives**

American Museum of Natural History. "Digitization of Pacific Ethnology Collection." NEH Grant Proposal PA 51199-05. National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 2004. Photocopy.

Carnegie Museum of Art. "The Teenie Harris Archive Project." NEH Grant Proposal PA 51335-05. National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 2004. Photocopy.

Library Company of Philadelphia. "The McAllister

Collection of Civil War-era Ephemera.” NEH Grant Proposal PA 50791-04. National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 2003. Photocopy.

New York University. “Afghanistan Digital Library.” NEH Grant Proposal PA 51227-05. National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 2004. Photocopy.

Schenectady Museum Association. “Preservation and Creation of Access to Historic Acetate and Nitrate Negatives Within the GE Photograph Collection.” NEH Grant Proposal PA 51398-05. National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 2004. Photocopy.

University of California Berkeley. “Digital Preservation of and Access to the Field Recordings and Notes of the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages.” NEH Grant Proposal PA 50624-04. National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 2003. Photocopy.

University of California, Riverside. “Network Accessible Stereographs: Crossroads of Humanity.” NEH Grant Proposal PA 50673-04/05. National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 2003. Photocopy.

University of Florida. “Cataloging and Creating Digital Access to American and British Children’s Literature, 1870-1889.” NEH Grant Proposal PA

50680-04. National Endowment for the Humanities,  
Washington, D.C., 2003. Photocopy.

University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology.

“Enhancing Access to North American and World  
Archaeology Slides: Digitizing the James B. Griffin  
Slide Collection.” NEH Grant Proposal PA 50676-  
04. National Endowment for the Humanities,  
Washington, D.C., 2003. Photocopy.

Vanderbilt University. “Vanderbilt Television News Archive  
Digitization Project.” NEH Grant Proposal PA  
50677-04. National Endowment for the Humanities,  
Washington, D.C., 2003. Photocopy.

#### NOTES

1. “Buildings, books, and bytes: Libraries and communities in the digital age,” *Benton Foundation*, <http://www.benton.org/publibrary/kellogg/buildings.html>, quoted in Anne R. Kenney and Oya Y. Rieger, “Introduction: Moving Theory into Practice,” in *Moving Theory into Practice: Digital Imaging for Libraries and Archives*, ed. Kenney and Rieger (Mountain View, CA: Research Libraries Group, 2000), 1-10.
2. Kenney and Rieger, “Introduction: Moving Theory into Practice,” 1-10.
3. Dan Hazen et.al, *Selecting Research Materials for Digitization* (Washington: Council on Library and Information Resources, 1998). <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/hazen/pub74.html> (accessed April 19, 2006).
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<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pcahc.html>  
(accessed April 16, 2006).

5. Ibid.
6. Hazen, et al., "Selection for Digitizing: A Decision-Making Matrix," in *Selecting Research Collections for Digitization*.
7. Melissa Smith Levine, "Overview of Legal Issues for Digitization," in *Handbook for Digital Projects: A Management Tool for Preservation and Access*, ed. Maxine K. Sitts (Andover, MA: Northeastern Document Conservation Center, 2000). <http://www.nedcc.org/digital/dighome.htm> (accessed April 19, 2006).
8. Abby Smith, *Why Digitize?* (Washington: Council on Library and Information Resources, 1999), 11. <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub80-smith/pub80.pdf> (accessed April 19, 2006)
9. "Google Partners With Libraries in Massive Digitization Project," *American Libraries* 36, no. 1 (2005): 26.
10. Jessica Dye, "Scanning the Stacks: The Digital Rights Issues Behind Book Digitization Projects," *E-Content* 29, no. 1 (2006): 33.
11. "Google Makes Its First Public Domain Books Available Online," *American Libraries* 36, no. 11 (2005): 14.
12. Dye, "Scanning the Stacks," 36-37.
13. "Google Book Search Help," <http://books.google.com/googlebooks/help.html> (accessed April 19, 2006).
14. Vanderbilt University, "Vanderbilt Television News Archive Digitization Project," NEH Grant Proposal PA 50677-04 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2003), 6.
15. University of California Berkeley, "Digital Preservation of and Access to the Field Recordings and Notes of the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages," NEH Grant Proposal PA 50624-04 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2003), 13-14.
16. Harvard's use of the term "intrinsic value" in this context appears to be far broader in scope than the traditional archival conception of the term. The SAA's *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* limits

the concept of intrinsic value to the value derived from an item's physical form, and is synonymous with "artifactual value." By contrast, Harvard seems to define "intrinsic value" as any sort of value an item contains before it is digitized.

17. Diane Vogt-O'Connor, "Selection of Materials for Scanning," in *Handbook for Digital Projects: A Management Tool for Preservation and Access*.
18. Janet Gertz, "Selection for Preservation in the Digital Age," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 44, no. 2 (2000): 100-101.
19. University of California Berkeley, "Digital Preservation of and Access to the Field Recordings and Notes of the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages," 2.
20. University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, "Enhancing Access to North American and World Archaeology Slides: Digitizing the James B. Griffin Slide Collection," NEH Grant Proposal PA 50676-04 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2003), i.
21. Vanderbilt University, "Vanderbilt Television News Archive Digitization Project," 3.
22. Ibid, 3.
23. American Museum of Natural History, "Digitization of Pacific Ethnology Collection," NEH Grant Proposal PA 51199-05 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2004), 2.
24. Carnegie Museum of Art, "The Teenie Harris Archive Project," NEH Grant Proposal PA 51335-05 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2004), statement of significance and impact.
25. New York University, "Afghanistan Digital Library," NEH Grant Proposal PA 51227-05 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2004), statement of significance and impact.
26. University of California, Riverside, "Network Accessible Stereographs: Crossroads of Humanity," NEH Grant Proposal PA 50673-04/05 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2003), i.
27. Abby Smith, *Strategies for Building Digitized Collections*, (Washington: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2001), 8-10. <http://www.clir.org/>

pubs/reports/pub101/pub101.pdf (accessed April 19, 2006).

28. Carnegie Museum of Art, "The Teenie Harris Archive Project," statement of significance and impact.
29. Schenectady Museum Association, "Preservation and Creation of Access to Historic Acetate and Nitrate Negatives Within the GE Photograph Collection," NEH Grant Proposal PA 51398-05 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2004), 15-16.
30. Paula De Stefano, "Selecting for Digital Conversion in Academic Libraries," *College and Research Libraries* 19, no. 1 (2001): 67.
31. University of California Berkeley, "Digital Preservation of and Access to the Field Recordings and Notes of the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages," 6.
32. New York University, "Afghanistan Digital Library," 2.
33. Library Company of Philadelphia, "The McAllister Collection of Civil War-era Ephemera," NEH Grant Proposal PA 50791-04 (Washington, D.C.: NEH, 2003), 17.
34. Hazen, et al., "Selection for Digitizing: A Decision-Making Matrix," in *Selecting Research Collections for Digitization*.
35. Abby Smith, *Strategies for Building Digitized Collections*, 7-8.
36. Ibid., 8.
37. Carnegie Museum of Art, "The Teenie Harris Archive Project," 6.
38. It should be noted that, although few of the projects specifically mention preservation as a motivating factor for selection of materials, virtually all of the projects have carefully considered the long-term maintenance of their digital products. Certain preservation practices (creating high-resolution master images in TIFF format and saving multiple copies of images) appear to be universal. Many projects specify methods for creating and preserving administrative metadata, and some even cite published best practice guidelines (i.e. NEDCC's *Handbook for Digital Projects*).

39. University of California, Riverside, "Network Accessible Stereographs: Crossroads of Humanity," 14-16.
40. Schenectady Museum Association, "Preservation and Creation of Access to Historic Acetate and Nitrate Negatives Within the GE Photograph Collection," 12.
41. Hazen, et al., "Selection for Digitizing: A Decision-Making Matrix," in *Selecting Research Collections for Digitization*.
42. Hazen, et al., "Selection for Digitizing: A Decision-Making Matrix," in *Selecting Research Collections for Digitization*.

# **Online Tutorials for Archives Users: An Appraisal by Karen Paar**

Karen Paar completed her PhD in history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) in 1999 and her MLS at North Carolina Central University in 2007. She has worked in the Photographic Archives of UNC's North Carolina Collection and the North Carolina State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center. Karen Paar now serves as the Director for the Ramsey Center for Regional Studies and Archivist for the Southern Appalachian Archive at Mars Hill College.

## **Abstract**

With the “golden age of usability” brought about by digitization and other means of providing online access to archives and special collections materials, repositories face the challenge of responding to increased demand for user instruction. This paper examines online tutorials offered by eight institutions in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom and discusses what topics the tutorials cover and how they present this information. The study evaluates the effectiveness of different features in the tutorials with the goal of understanding how archives can create tutorials that best serve their researchers.

## **Introduction**

A *Library Journal* article from November 2005 entitled “Rarities Online” proclaims in its subtitle: “With digitization, special collections are entering a golden age of



usability.” The article goes on to describe some truly breathtaking projects, such as the partnership between Stanford and Cambridge universities to digitize more than five hundred medieval manuscripts and make them available on the Web—in effect flinging open the door to the room where archivists have secluded these treasures from all but a select few for centuries. As further evidence for this being a “golden age of usability,” the *Library Journal* article discusses the growing number of finding aids published online in the widespread effort to bring “hidden” collections to light. These measures are bringing about the “democratization of history,” in the words of historian Edward Ayers. If anything, the growing visibility of special collections materials on the Web has only increased use of the originals and broadened the group of users coming into these repositories. The *Library Journal* article gives the example of the University of Virginia, where students who use online collections for courses visit the library to see the original documents in greater numbers than ever before. (1)

Technological changes such as those described above particularly affect archives and manuscript repositories within the “special collections” category. These changes have also brought many challenges, however, particularly in the area of user services. A “golden age of usability” by definition includes a commitment to providing broad access to these materials, yet the materials themselves present barriers to use, such as difficult script, obscure language, and fragile physical condition. Even digitized documents that remove most of these obstacles through transcription, translation, or formatting retain the challenge of primary source interpretation. With repository information, finding aids, and even digital objects available

online every hour of the day to people all over the world, archivists face pressure to offer user services beyond the traditional hours of opening. (2)

Providing remote reference services is nothing new to archivists, who for centuries have been answering questions about their holdings and services by post, if not by telephone and e-mail. (3) However, archival reference has traditionally involved individual assistance—whether remote or in person—to expert researchers. The growing presence of inexperienced users in these repositories’ reading rooms, whether virtual or actual, requires a shift in archivists’ reference services toward more basic instruction, such as the “information literacy” that has been a fundamental duty of librarians for decades. Archivists lag behind librarians in the development of a shared understanding of not only what, but also how, repositories should teach inexperienced users about research in archives. (4) Individual reference assistance will continue to be required, but archives must also move toward “broad service directed toward targeted audiences,” in order to meet the demand from online users. (5)

While technology has caused this expansion in archives’ clientele, it also offers archivists solutions to handling this increased demand for resources. (6) One tool that archives have developed to educate inexperienced researchers in the knowledge and the skills they need is the online tutorial. With these tutorials, archivists can meet these patrons where they enter the repositories—through the virtual front door, or home page, the place where most institutions announce their presence to the wider world, post their hours and locations, describe their holdings and services, and issue invitations to use their collections.

Tutorials can be an expensive and time-consuming tool to develop and maintain, yet they offer archivists an efficient means to orient large numbers of users to the procedures of and principles behind archival research. (7)

Given the apparent consensus in the scholarly literature that archivists lag behind their librarian colleagues in developing a common understanding of how to provide basic education to their users, I was curious about the content that the institutions I studied choose to present in their tutorials. Archivists, after all, face particularly difficult challenges in their efforts at user education, in no small part because of the amount of information they need to convey. Systems and arrangement of resources in libraries have in many ways evolved over time to meet users' needs, but archivists do not have the flexibility to change most of their repositories' procedures for the users' convenience. Principles such as respect for provenance or arrangement according to original order are simply not negotiable in the archival community, even if these practices are difficult for users to comprehend. Preservation is one of archivists' key responsibilities, and so they will provide physical access to these materials only with restrictions of one sort or another.

In addition to the content of the tutorials, I was also interested in exploring the ways repositories present this potentially large amount of information. Format, language, and structure are all important in engaging users with complicated material. Furthermore, the Web offers interactive options that printed text does not possess, and I wanted to see if or how online tutorials make use of these options. I also wondered whether these collections take advantage of their materials' captivating nature in order to draw users to their lessons about archival research. For my

study, I examined tutorials from a variety of institutions: the National Archives of the United Kingdom, the United States National Archives and Records Administration, Archives and Libraries Canada, the University of California at Berkeley, Yale University, Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I also explored the tutorial for an online collection, the Columbia River Basin Ethnic History Archives, created through the collaboration of Washington State University at Vancouver, the Idaho State Historical Society, the Oregon Historical Society, the Washington State Historical Society, and Washington State University at Pullman. This study is my effort to gauge the state of online archives tutorials, to evaluate which features work well in them, and to explore how they can be even more effective.

(8)

### **The Tutorials**

On the most basic level, online tutorials communicate the information users need to conduct research in the repositories' collections. Looking at what the tutorials include gives a good indication as to what information these institutions deem most important for their users to know. The Columbia River Basin Ethnic History Archives (CRBEHA) is a digital collection funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and presented through a CONTENTdm database. Making digital objects accessible and useful is the goal for user services in this type of archives, and so the CRBEHA's online tutorial has the dual focus of instructing users in Boolean searches of its database (without using the term "Boolean") and explaining the use of primary sources through a general essay as well as separate

sections on using photographs, documents, and oral histories as primary sources. (9) Instruction in primary source use was, in fact, a goal of this IMLS grant, and the project coordinators claim, “The tutorials provide online researchers the tools necessary to become their own historians.” (10)

Searching for primary sources is also the subject of a University of California at Berkeley Library Research Guide. This document provides a brief explanation of what a primary source is, then launches into a detailed explanation of how to locate primary sources, both in the holdings of that university and beyond. This tool integrates the search for primary sources into the broader library context, rather than focusing specifically on the world of archives. The research guide, in the way that it is structured, does also bring users through the process that expert researchers employ to identify primary sources. In several places, the guide reminds the user that finding background information may be helpful, and it also provides users with ways to search from different entry points. Tables demonstrate how to search if the user wants a particular type of primary source or how to go further if the user already has a certain kind of information. (11) While this library research guide appears to have been one of the earlier online tools for archives users, archivists’ assertion of their role as instructors in the use of primary sources only seems to be increasing. (12)

Some of the tutorials remain on a fairly concrete level, including information about archival theory and practice only on a “need to know” basis. The National Archives and Records Administration’s (NARA) “New to Archival Research?” section of its Web site is in this category. The scale of the demand on NARA’s reference staff seems to drive the design of this guide, which, in

essence, is a self-service reference interview that takes users through four steps to determine first, whether NARA is the right place for them to seek the information they want, and then, if so, how they should proceed with their research. The most detailed information the guide offers about the nature of archives is the third question under Step 1: “Should I use a library or an archives?” This text basically prepares users for search methods for finding archival materials and the process of requesting and using these materials. The only detailed explanation of archival principles is a pop-up box on “Record Groups” that explains series, gives everyday examples to illustrate this concept to users, and notes that NARA organizes its materials into record groups. (13)

The National Archives of the United Kingdom approaches its user education not by offering a broad survey of the use of its collections, but rather through “in-depth learning guides” about the archives’ most popular research topics, “Family History” and “Local History,” as well as on essential skills for using the repository’s resources, namely “Palaeography” and “Beginner’s Latin” and “Advanced Latin.” (14) Experts in these fields prepared the topical guides, which reflect a thorough understanding of the approach to research of these subjects. The “Family History” guide, for example, allows users to select a subtopic such as “Ancestors and the Law” and then, from that category, choose a particular type of record, such as criminal registers, to learn what sort of information these documents contain, what they look like, and where they can be found. Some initiative is, of course, required on the part of users, but the detail these topical guides offer in many ways replicates online the experience of researchers consulting a knowledgeable reference archivist about their particular

interests and needs. (15)

Through the “Beginner’s Latin” and the “Palaeography” in-depth learning guides, the National Archives staff offers users skills to read many documents in this repository, documents that have previously been accessible only to expert researchers because of the barriers of language and difficult handwriting. A new addition to this Web site teaches “Advanced Latin” in an effort to make more documents accessible, since the English government used Latin as its official language from 1086 to 1733. While many users will not bother to acquire these language skills or learn to read the handwriting of previous centuries, the creation of these guides at least offers the opportunity of access to older documents since most will never be transcribed or translated. Such instruction truly offers the potential for the “democratization of history,” at least for those users willing to take advantage of it. (16)

The final four online tutorials explored for this paper all take a more comprehensive approach with regard to preparing users for archival research at their institutions. These tutorials seek, at least on some level, to present broader archival practices and principles as well as specific information about their repositories. The first is “Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers,” an online publication on the Library and Archives Canada Web page. This guide frames its discussion around the metaphor of the first visit to an archives being a trip to a foreign place, where first-time users experience “culture shock ... as they struggle to adapt to new concepts and procedures.” The guide orients the user by comparing more familiar libraries to archives before addressing “The Language and Customs of Archives,” where it defines and explains key terms and concepts such as

archival fonds (essential for Canadian archives), arrangement based on provenance, and respect for original order. This section also discusses finding aids and their role in providing access to archival material, and it even treats different types of finding aids, however briefly.

The rest of the Libraries and Archives Canada tutorial offers general information about archival research in one of Canada's eight hundred archives, alternatives to conducting research besides visiting the repository, then the process of preparing to visit, and concluding with fairly detailed sections on the research process and issues surrounding the use of materials, such as copyright. Some of the suggestions this tutorial provides are a bit unrealistic for inexperienced researchers, such as using their imaginations to explore what sources might be available for their topics (the guide does caution users to back up these ideas with evidence). The guide also calls for users to "guesstimate" how long it will take them to go through materials, although it acknowledges that beginners will not be able to do this. Even if users cannot follow all of these tips on their first visit to the archives, however, they will at least have learned something about how expert researchers conduct their archival investigations. (17)

Three university repositories also take a more comprehensive approach to preparing researchers to use their archives and manuscript collections, perhaps as part of their institutions' educational missions. Of these, the Georgia Tech Archives and Records Management Tutorial is the simplest. The tutorial pages are generally brief and to the point. On the front page is a two-paragraph introduction to the collection and potential research in it, followed by links to the different pages included in the tutorial, namely



“Services”; “Rules” (a link to this page also appears in the introductory text, making two links to the rules on this page); “Finding Aids”; and “Types of Sources.” “Types of Sources” briefly defines what primary and secondary sources are, gives guidance as to the format of citations for archival materials, and lists the different types of sources, such as “Visual Materials,” with further brief explanations and links on those pages to databases and finding aids. The “Finding Aids” section uses a sample finding aid page to discuss what the different elements are, using a rollover technique that highlights the different sections. Clicking on a section brings up a pop-up box with a discussion of the elements in that section and the archival principles behind them, such as “provenance” in “administrative information” and “original order” in the “arrangement” section. The banner on the tutorial’s home page cycles through a series of images, including photographs of the repository. (18)

Both the Yale University tutorial and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Manuscripts Research Tutorial are geared to their own institutions, but both claim that they can also be used as an orientation to research in other repositories. The University of Minnesota Libraries links to both these tutorials from its Web page, “Using Archives and Special Collections: Tutorials, Tips, and Useful Links.” (19) The Yale University Library’s “Using Manuscripts and Archives: A Tutorial” seems to be if not the oldest, then the best known, of the Web tutorials. (20) Given this reputation, it is surprising that it does not offer more background information about archival concepts. The introduction to this tutorial states that users will learn more if they have knowledge of the “basic concepts and terminology of the language and customs of archives,” but this phrase

links to a Yale University Library research tool that gives only basic definitions for terms used with primary sources, such as “document,” “records,” “archives,” “personal papers,” and “collections.” (21) The “Handwriting Examples” page links thumbnail documents to larger images accompanied by a brief description of a handwriting style. This page is interesting, but it does not offer any real instruction in reading the handwriting. The handwriting and the “General Tips” pages that appear in the “Getting Started” section read more like warnings that archival research is complicated (and that users need to allow ample time for projects), rather than serving as sources of general information about archives.

This tutorial’s greatest strength is the thorough way in which it orients new users to research in the Yale University Manuscripts and Archives department. The tutorial takes its users through a long “Finding Sources” section that offers many options for searching, both within the Yale system and beyond. Its discussion of finding aids gives a brief overview of the elements in a finding aid and includes a link to a sample that shows these elements as well as demonstrations of how online catalog searches work with finding aids. Yet another helpful feature of this tutorial is the “Sample Searches” page. The searches range from “undetermined topic” and “unspecified primary source,” to information on “a person affiliated with Yale” or “a Yale building.” The creators make clear that they do not intend this tutorial to be a substitute for assistance from the Manuscripts and Archives reference center, and they urge users to contact staff for more detailed information. Photographs of the department and even its call slips—complete with pop-up instructions for filling them out—also

help to make the repository more familiar to first-time researchers.

The “Manuscripts Research Tutorial” of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill goes beyond the Yale tutorial in its discussion, not only of how to locate sources, but also how to incorporate them into the research process. (22) It also is geared toward a particular repository and offers some very specific information about its home institution, but this tutorial has greater use for a broad audience. The tutorial’s strengths lay both in the breadth of its coverage and in the way it uses technology to engage the user and reinforce its lessons. With its graded quiz at the end, the tutorial also provides a means for teachers to assign the tutorial to students with at least some way to know that they have grasped its concepts.

The areas where UNC’s “Manuscripts Research Tutorial” have particularly broad relevance are its sections on “Fundamentals of Library Research” and “Using Manuscripts.” “Fundamentals of Library Research” covers many archival definitions and concepts in a variety of ways and over multiple Web pages. It defines primary sources, manuscripts, and repositories by giving examples using different methods, including showing images and linking to pop-up boxes. This section discusses organization within archives with separate pages for provenance, collections, and arrangement. Under “Description,” the tutorial explains both finding aids and catalog records and treats their common features as well as the different functions of both. The “Using Manuscripts” section also goes into greater depth than Yale or the other tutorials by addressing complicated questions of interpretation as well as the more mechanical challenges of reading difficult handwriting, handling

materials in fragile condition and wrestling with questions of copyright. Throughout the tutorial, ungraded “quick review questions” periodically appear in the text and request a multiple-choice answer. These little quizzes serve to reinforce the more difficult concepts in the text and keep the user engaged. A link to a glossary on the bottom navigation bar ensures that users always have somewhere to turn for a quick answer.

The UNC tutorial also includes information about “Finding Manuscripts,” “Collections in the Manuscript Department,” and an “Orientation” to that department, complete with photographs, but the device that serves to cement all this information for users is the quiz. The quiz consists of ten questions, and its success lies not in grilling users in everything the tutorial covers (it is a long tutorial, with potentially much new information), but in requiring them to engage with the search tools and archival concepts as part of the process of taking the quiz. Next to the questions are links to the relevant sections of the tutorials, which reinforces the goal of teaching, not testing. Some questions request simple answers, but others ask the user to perform searches in the online catalog or to look at finding aids. Users who receive a score of at least 70 percent can print out a certificate that they passed the quiz. The exam reinforces the correct answers by explaining any the user missed.

### **Presentation of the Tutorials**

The online tutorials discussed above vary greatly in the sophistication and level of technology of their presentation. Even simple formats can be effective, such as the Libraries and Archives Canada guide, which is just a long document containing many subsections with internal

links in each section to the table of contents and to the top of the page. This format works, to a large degree, because the creators kept the text in each section to a manageable length. Some of these tutorials do this better than others, but all seem to realize that—particularly for text being read on a screen—brief text works best. This guide incorporates no illustrations, however, and relies on the content to keep users engaged. This factor probably limits its use by certain groups.

The Georgia Tech tutorial was not much more complex in structure, being a central page linked to a few related pages, but it manages to use technology in effective ways and communicate at least basic information to users. The finding aid with the rollover highlights and pop-up explanations is an engaging way to communicate valuable background information to users who might just skim over this content in straight text. The “Types of Sources” page offers links to relevant finding aids and databases, but one would expect to see some images to draw in the user and to make these distinctions come to life. The Georgia Tech archives may have done this to allow the pages to load more quickly, but a few more images would be a worthwhile addition. Georgia Tech was not the only repository observed for this study that seemed not to take advantage of its fascinating holdings to draw users into its tutorial.

Organized structure is also helpful for making an online tutorial usable, and the Yale tutorial has the tidiest structure of all those reviewed. It has few enough sections that all can be listed on the left menu at all times. The menu and navigation bar at the bottom of the page that takes the user page-by-page through the tutorial keep the user oriented and also offer options for faster or slower progress through

the material. The UNC tutorial has similar means of navigation and also works well, but its structure is more complex. The National Archives and Records Administration's "New to Archival Research?" section of its Web site has the least organized structure of all these tutorials, both in terms of navigation through the steps (and especially going backwards to other parts of the discussion) and in all of the competing information that is on each of these pages.

Organization and attractive, clear displays are important, particularly when archives are attempting to engage users with a significant amount of unfamiliar material. Interactive technology, when used appropriately, also has the potential to make these tutorials dramatically more effective. As mentioned above, the Georgia Tech interactive finding aid example is far more effective than a text-only discussion of these concepts would be because of its use of technology. At least one study has found that even experienced users have trouble interpreting the different parts of finding aids, and a tool like this might help them. (23) Something as simple as the "reality check" questions in the UNC tutorial helps to keep users alert and engaged as they work through difficult material. The final quiz for the UNC tutorial is an excellent example of a computer format serving an educational function, for it allows users to practice with the actual tools and continues instructing them even as it evaluates their understanding of these tools. The British National Archives "Latin" and "Palaeography" in-depth learning guides are really only possible because of sophisticated interactive software that allows learners to obtain the guided practice they need to master such skills. This interaction also keeps the learning fun. Both the

“Beginner’s Latin” and “Palaeography” in-depth learning guides won the Times Higher Awards 2006 for “Most Imaginative Use of Distance Learning.”

Online tutorials require great time and effort to prepare, but they are ideal tools for archivists to use to meet the needs of the growing numbers of inexperienced users, both those who use collections on the Web and those who are preparing themselves for research in a repository. More user studies are necessary, however, for archivists and scholars to gauge how much information tutorials should include about archival concepts and practices. Besides testing and interviewing users, in-depth questioning of reference archivists in these institutions would also reveal much about how tutorials do or do not prepare their researchers. Surveys also might be useful for gathering data about researchers’ level of experience. Although much of the information about searching for and using materials is specific to an institution, surveys could reveal that there are many common elements that could serve as the essential learning points in a master tutorial linked to many repositories’ Web sites. Such a tutorial could reach more users while preventing a drain on the resources of multiple institutions. Collaboration would also allow the tutorial to include more sophisticated technology than many archives could support alone, such as incorporating Web 2.0 features to enhance the learning process in ways that librarians have already begun to explore. (24) Whether archives follow the tutorial model or not, the demand for online instruction and guidance in using these collections only seems certain to increase.

### **Web Sites Selected for Discussion**

[www.vancouver.wsu.edu/crbeha/tutorial.htm](http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/crbeha/tutorial.htm)  
Columbia River Basin Ethnic History Archives

<http://www.library.gatech.edu/archives/tutorial.html>  
Georgia Tech Archives and Special Collections

[www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416_e.html)  
Library and Archives Canada

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/gettingstarted/  
in\\_depth\\_guides.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/gettingstarted/in_depth_guides.htm)  
National Archives (United Kingdom)

[www.archives.gov/research/start](http://www.archives.gov/research/start)  
National Archives and Records Administration

[www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/  
PrimarySources.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/PrimarySources.html)  
UC-Berkeley Library

<http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/manuscripts/>  
UNC Chapel Hill Manuscripts Research Tutorial

[www.library.yale.edu/mssa/tutorial/tutorial.htm](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/tutorial/tutorial.htm)  
Yale University Archives and Manuscript Collections

### **NOTES**

1. Andrew Richard Albanese, "Rarities Online: With Digitization, Special Collections are Entering a Golden



- Age of Usability,” *Library Journal* 130 (November 1, 2005): 40-43.
2. Elizabeth Yakel, “Thinking Inside and Outside the Boxes: Archival Reference Services at the Turn of the Century,” *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000): 142-143.
  3. Ibid., and Katharine A. Salzmänn, “‘Contact Us’: Archivists and Remote Users in the Digital Age,” *The Reference Librarian* 85 (2004): 44-45.
  4. Yakel, 144.
  5. Yakel, 141-42, 145, and Salzmänn, 44, 50.
  6. Richard V. Szary, “Encoded Finding Aids as a Transforming Technology in Archival Reference Service,” *Journal of Internet Cataloging* 4, no. 3/4 (2001): 191-92; Salzmänn, 48.
  7. Yakel, 149.
  8. As I indicate in my discussion below, not all of these Web pages or learning guides claim to be “tutorials.” I chose those that did not bear the title “tutorial” because I thought that their complexity of structure and their depth of content place them in this category.
  9. “Tutorials,” <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/crbeha/tutorial.htm> (accessed 13 April 2007).
  10. Laurie Mercier and Leslie Wykoff, “Columbia River Basin Ethnic History Project,” <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/crbeha/projteam/> (accessed 21 April 2007).
  11. “Library Research: Finding Primary Sources,” August 2004, <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/PrimarySources.html> (accessed 13 April 2007).
  12. Yakel mentions this tutorial in her 2000 article, “Thinking Inside and Outside the Boxes,” 149. For archivists’ calls for the profession to play a role in primary source instruction, see, for example, Marcus C. Robyns, “The Archivist as Educator: Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into Historical Research Methods Instruction,” *The American Archivist* 64 (Fall/ Winter 2001): 363-84; Shan Sutton and Lorrie Knight, “Beyond the Reading Room: Integrating Primary and Secondary Sources in the Library Classroom,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 3 (2006):

- 320-25; and Elizabeth Yakel, "Archives and Manuscripts Information Literacy for Primary Sources: Creating a New Paradigm for Archival Researcher Education," *International Digital Library Perspectives* 20, no. 2 (2004): 61-64.
13. "New to Archival Research?" [www.archives.gov/research/start](http://www.archives.gov/research/start) (accessed 14 April 2007).
  14. "In-depth Learning Guides." [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/gettingstarted/in\\_depth\\_guides.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/gettingstarted/in_depth_guides.htm) (accessed 14 April 2007).
  15. "Family History." <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/familyhistory/guide/> (accessed 21 April 2007).
  16. "Palaeography," <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/> (accessed 14 April 2007); "Beginner's Latin," <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/latin/beginners/> (accessed 14 April 2007); and "Advanced Latin." <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/latin/advanced/> (accessed 21 April 2007).
  17. "Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers," 2 September 2003. [www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416_e.html) (accessed 13 April 2007).
  18. "Tutorial," <http://www.library.gatech.edu/archives/tutorial.html> (accessed 21 April 2007).
  19. "Using Archives and Special Collections: Tutorials, Tips, and Useful Links," 20 September 2005, <http://www.lib.umn.edu/site/ascttul.phtml> (accessed 21 April 2007).
  20. I could not tell when Yale University Library created this tutorial, but the department revised it in 2000 and 2002, according to the Web page. See "Front Page," [www.library.yale.edu/mssa/tutorial/tutorial.htm](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/tutorial/tutorial.htm) (accessed 14 April 2007).
  21. "Primary Sources," 11 May 2006, <http://www.library.yale.edu/instruction/archives.html> (accessed 21 April 2007).
  22. "Manuscripts Research Tutorial," 6 December 2004, [www.lib.unc.edu/instruction/manuscripts](http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruction/manuscripts) (accessed 14 April 2007).

23. Wendy Duff and Penka Stoyanova, "Transforming the Crazy Quilt: Archival Displays from a Users' Point of View," *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998): 44.
24. Elizabeth Yakel, "Inviting the User Into the Virtual Archives," *International Digital Library Perspectives* 22, no. 3 (2006): 159-63.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Antoinette Burton, ed. *Archive Stories: Fact, Fiction, and The Writing of History*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005. 396 pp. Bibliography and index.. \$84.95 (cloth); \$23.95 (paper).**

These eighteen carefully selected essays elucidate both the personal and the political aspects of historians' experiences working in archives around the world. The authors share a wide range of emotions evoked by their research encounters. In the process, they often reveal disturbing individual, bureaucratic, and political influences that affect the writing of history and the creation, maintenance, and revision of national identity.

Burton suggests that there is a need to write about "how archives are created, drawn upon, and experienced by those who use them to write history...and that all archives are 'figured'" (p. 6). In other words, by an archives' nature, the archives will have an agenda. Researchers, therefore, must look beyond the records in an archives and take a critical approach to the archives space: how the archives is constructed, policed, experienced and manipulated to determine the records' objectivity (p. 7). Since these ethnographies describe either an emotional, intellectual, physical, or political challenge in documenting historical facts, Burton is hopeful that "the kind of interrogations on offer here forms one of the bases from which histories in the twentieth century, with all their passion for and humility about what can and cannot be known, will come to be written" (p. 21).

The book is divided into three sections, each covering a different theme, and includes a lengthy introduction. In the acknowledgements, Burton, who is professor of history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, notes that she had presented her research to Canadian audiences from the Canadian Historical

Association and the University of Otago. Burton's introduction is an essay in itself, offering solid arguments, analysis, and full explanations of each section. Though a minor flaw, the introduction could contain fewer details about the pieces that follow. The essays are sharp and tightly woven into each theme, filled with thought-provoking ideas.

Part I, "Close Encounters: The Archive as Contact Zone" is written by scholars who share their unique experiences in archives. They reflect upon the difficulties and frustrations of working as a historian in unusual and sometimes dangerous circumstances, different parts of the world, and in the non-traditional archival worlds of cyberspace and the "living archive" of the transgendered activist and performer Teresita la Campesina. In "National Narratives and the Politics of Miscegenation: Britain and India," historian Durba Ghosh describes her difficulties researching eighteenth-century cohabitation between British men and Indian women in India during British rule. Ghosh finds that histories are shaped by many forces beyond a researcher's control, since the process of gathering and providing access to documents can be different from country to country, particularly when the subject matter is sensitive. In this case, Indian archivists denied that interracial relations had occurred, because the very notion conflicted with their profound belief in the purity of Hindu women. British archivists were quite comfortable with the idea and far more forthcoming with resources. "For some Britons, admitting that one is mixed-race, even a little, has recently become a sign of cosmopolitan identity." (p. 30). Having a nice soft brown color tone is in keeping with the Brits' own myth and places a positive view on the colonial experience in India, thus maintaining a political and cultural correctness. For Ghosh, then young, unmarried and Hindu, her own gender brought obstacles to her research and writing as two quite diverse cultures, Indian and British, tried to protect and project their own myths.

Part II, "State of the Art: 'Official' Archives and Counter-Histories," includes one fictional archive and five official institutions. These essays focus on events or people who shaped an archives and allowed history to be written

based on a questionable or an incomplete set of facts. In “Creating the Suffragette Spirit,” Laura Mayhall argues that what is excluded from an archives may significantly distort history. The British women’s suffrage movement was comprised of a number of diverse organizations spanning a wide political spectrum. Yet the archives assembled in the 1920s and ‘30s to document the movement privileges documents created by the militant Women’s Social and Political Union over those of more moderate groups. The author urges historians to determine the source of their documents to learn about the events that shaped the archives.

The last section, Part III, “Archive Matters: the Past and the Present,” consists of three essays examining the role of history on the present, the importance of an archives and an historian’s ability to write history in a climate of political unrest. It is the most compelling section for several reasons. As the subject matter is the most recent, we can match a face to a name, a location to a nation, and a photograph to an atrocity. These essays present the disturbing reality of nations taking control of records, re-writing histories by falsifying records, and destroying evidence. The final essay by Ann Curthoys, “The History of Killing and the Killing of History,” examines the heated debate generated by Keith Windschuttle’s 2002 book, *Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. Windschuttle claimed that historians in previous years had greatly overstated the number of deaths in a massacre of Aborigines in Tasmania. In Curthoy’s own investigation of the book and the historical record, she discovered that Windschuttle had raised issues that applied not only to interpretation of documents relating to the case, but also to historiography: theory, methodology, and the perception of legitimate evidence and its interpretation. How do we know when facts are correctly interpreted? Historians are still divided on the question of whether there is only one legitimate interpretation or many ways to view the past. In Burton’s introduction, she argues that history is never over, but renews itself through a variety of new interpretive frameworks (p. 18). The debate rages on.

In her final paragraph, Curthoy writes that “the vagaries of the archive and a desire for self-reflexive

narration can go comfortably hand in hand with quite traditional disciplinary practices such as extensive research, careful interpretation, clear argument, and intelligible writing” (p. 369). This seems to sum up every one of the pieces in this book. Each essay is clear, concise, well written, and well argued, carrying Burton’s themes throughout each section as well as having its own purpose. Burton compiled an important anthology that successfully expresses serious issues from a very personal viewpoint. The book also raises a number of questions that warrant a lively discussion between historians and archivists.

While Burton’s book focuses on “people’s archive stories,” the essays are written mostly by historians who devoted significant attention to the pitfalls of relying upon an archive for evidence to write history. Archivists, like historians, should know the history of their archives and the context and the contents of its physical and intellectual space. They should protect, preserve and share what are presumably the facts. It is when historians and archivists share their experiences—the joy of a document discovered or the sadness of evidence destroyed—that we can engage in an ethical relationship between an archives and its “objects of desire.” *Archive Stories* is highly recommended to any intelligent reader interested in history, and the “history of writing history.”

**Cilla Golas,  
Archivist**

**Association of Professional Flight Attendants**

**Verne Harris. *Archives and Justice, A South African Perspective*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007. 476 pp. Forward by Terry Cook. \$56.00 (nonmember); \$40.00 (member).**

Archivists in the United States spend much of their professional lives preoccupied with records’ contexts—how

to select, describe, preserve and provide access to them. They spend much less time reflecting on the context of their own institutions, practices, and profession; that is, the context of archives, archiving, and archivists. It is just this, the contexts of “the archive” in their entire social, cultural, political, and theoretical complexity that Verne Harris has spent much of his career considering, problematizing, and embracing. The twenty-one essays, speeches, and writings compiled in Archives and Justice, A South African Perspective provide American readers with a fine introduction to Harris’s body of work. They span more than ten years of archival activity from 1995 through 2005 (2007 if we count Harris’s introduction to the collection) and are drawn from an impressive array of international archival conferences and publications. Terry Cook’s passionate introduction to the works of his long-time friend and colleague affords a uniquely well-situated perspective into the intellect and psyche of Verne Harris and orients the reader to the singular historical trajectory that Harris has traveled. Not only has Harris lived and worked in archives outside the pale of European and North American traditions, but he has done so in South Africa, a nation that has undergone tectonic changes over the past decade as it struggles to reinvent itself in the wake of the fall of apartheid ideologies and technologies of power of which record-making was one of the most potent and sinister.

Cook maps out the major themes and concerns that permeate Harris’s work: international perspectives on archival traditions and practice; the connection between archives, politics, and justice; and a willingness to engage academic and theoretical work that is outside strictly archival circles. Underlying all of Harris’s work is openness and “hospitality” to humanism, poetry, and even spirituality. Cook explains, “Archives for Verne are a passion, not a profession or a job—a feverish heat, a sensuous partner, *mal d’archive* indeed” (p. xiv). The archives fever that grips Harris provokes compelling symptoms: Harris experiments with unusual and varied writing styles, such as the dialogue



structure employed in the piece with Sello Hatang (p. 215-238). And Harris is quite willing to expose the personal relationships and passions that propel his work and practice, invoking at various turns his friendship with Terry Cook, his admiration for Jacques Derrida, and his passion for jazz and Bob Dylan.

The twenty-one works are arranged by Harris himself into five sections: “Discourses,” “Narratives,” “Politics and Ethics,” “Past and Secrets,” and “Actualities.” “Discourses” explores the discursive formations that swirl around the practice of archives. Harris is most heavy on Derridian deconstruction here, addressing and invoking his hero at length and in depth. Hence, “Discourses” may be the most challenging (or possibly frustrating) read in the collection. However, I found Harris’s meditation on Derrida’s contribution to archival discourse quite straightforward, first describing the misconceptions about Derrida’s work and then listing the “myriad of gifts” that Derrida has afforded archivists (p. 75). “Narratives” focuses the discursive eye on specific aspects of archival practice such as appraisal and description. The writings in this section emphasize the role that archivists play in the construction and meaning of “the record” and question the “naturalness” of archival interventions. Such a constructionist perspective leads Harris, along with Wendy M. Duff, to conclude that, “records are always in the process of being made, that ‘their’ stories are never ending, and that the stories of what are conventionally called records creators, records managers, archivists, users, and so on... are parts of bigger stories understandable only in the ever-changing broader contexts of society” (p. 133).

The next three sections— “Politics and Ethics,” “Past and Secrets,” and “Actualities” —are the strongest in

the collection and convincingly argue for the inextricable ties that bind archives and justice. In these writings Harris draws extensively from first-hand experiences and discusses working (uneasily) for the South African government under the apartheid regime, the subsequent struggle to develop archival policy and practice inclusive of the otherness that was systematically denied a voice under apartheid, and the technical, social, and political challenges of working with the records of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Harris is most successful here, massaging archival theory, practice, and action out of concrete historical experience and then introducing these into a conversation with the broader political and cultural context in which they operate and perform their work. Throughout his writings Harris wrestles with the concept of justice, circling it again and again, unable to pin it down but finding meaning and, perhaps, purpose in the grapple. For Harris, “the archive,” in its broad, society-pervading, Derridian sense, “is the law determining meanings and significances.” Meaning and signification are none other than archival context and thus the unfolding of justice demands democratic participation in the establishment of context and in the construction and contestation of the archives (p. 245-246).

It is this reflexive and critical gaze that is Harris’s hallmark as he raises questions about the complicity and dangerous ignorance at times embedded in archival practice. He implores archivists to “not allow their engagement with law and policy, regulations and standards, management and administration, strategies and systems, evidence and accountability to make them forget the archive as locus of memory and story” (p. 125). But he is also the first to admit that there are no easy answers. Harris understands that archivists must account to an almost impossible range of interested parties, but maintains that, “in the end, and in the beginning, the most important accounting is the one geared

to answering the call of justice” (p. 250).

**Patrick Stawski**  
**Human Rights Archivist**  
**Duke University**

**Karen F. Gracy. *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007. 287 pp. \$56.00 (nonmember); \$40.00 (member).**

Although the effort to preserve motion picture film as a record of world events and our cultural heritage began more than a century ago, the field of film preservation in the United States has grown considerably and undergone dramatic changes in the last two decades. Many events during the past twenty years have shaped the contemporary climate within which the field of film preservation thrives and continues to evolve, from the National Film Preservation Act of 1988 to the advent of more recent annual events such as “World Day for Audiovisual Heritage” and “Home Movie Day.” The critical recognition of moving image materials as a valuable resource for studying our cultural heritage and the danger of losing this resource through physical deterioration, technical obsolescence, and neglect have fueled a national effort to save these materials. More than ever before, professionals working in all types of institutions—museums, libraries, special collections, archives, and historical societies both large and small—are seeking the education and technical information needed to understand and preserve motion picture materials in their own collections. Yet, until the recent publication of Karen Gracy’s book, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice*, the field lacked a comprehensive study that considers the social and cultural aspects of the field of film archiving and highlights contemporary practical experience.

*Film Preservation* combines a scholarly précis of the history of film preservation with archival theory and practical advice for anyone working with motion picture film today. This study provides a singular look into the world of

film preservation in the early twenty-first century, a time when the profession and the standards that govern that profession are in a state of flux and expanding with the emergence of digital cinema and the challenges and benefits of file-based preservation. Theoretical, historical, economic, and social frameworks are developed and used to outline the issues, practices, and future goals of the various people and institutions participating in film preservation today. Gracy's combination of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and qualitative research methods provides the reader with a rare glimpse into the many facets of film preservation work and the daily routine of a film archivist. Influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his ideas surrounding "the field of cultural production," Gracy ultimately suggests her own theoretical framework in her final analysis of film preservation.

The book is divided into nine chapters consisting of two major sections: chapters 2, 3, and 4, which outline the historical, economic, and theoretical frameworks that support film archiving and preservation; and chapters 6, 7, and 8, which consist of thematic narratives derived directly from the data gathered during ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. Chapter 5 separates the two sections and consists of Gracy's review of several concepts from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, in particular the concepts of "field" and "field of cultural production."

Chapter 1, "An Introduction to the Field of Film Preservation in the United States," provides a well-written summary of the trajectory of film preservation since the invention of film. A definition of film preservation is introduced as a series of procedures and ideas shaped by job responsibilities, institutional affiliation, and professional experiences in the field. Highlighting the widespread indication that film archiving is gaining strength as an autonomous field and describing the book's mission, Gracy writes: "The literature of moving image archiving is sparse, limited largely to a few historical overviews, reports on recent projects in the professional literature, and specialized technical information on preservation and restoration processes.... This book represents an attempt to study film

preservation in action” (p. 4). Indeed, this is one of the book’s greatest strengths—its in-depth look at the daily functions and procedures involved in working within a film archives that consists of data that not only benefits film archivists, but also professionals working in diverse institutions with film holdings, such as museums, libraries, and historical societies.

Opening the first section, chapter 2, “Birth and Development of Film Archives and the Film Preservation Movement,” details the breadth of institutions engaged in film preservation and points out ties with the broader motion picture industry. Gracy’s outline of all the “stakeholders” that have an interest or participate in the field of film preservation—from studios and film libraries to public institutions and collectors—is a fascinating look at the widespread impact of these materials and the possibilities generated by their preservation. Current and future challenges to film preservation are also outlined with an emphasis on funding and the implications of digital filmmaking for film preservation. The issues surrounding the preservation of digital materials are largely addressed by outlining Howard Besser’s now classic identification of five difficulties to ensuring the longevity of digital objects: problems of viewing, scrambling, inter-relation, custodianship, and translation. In chapter 3, “The Economics of Film Preservation,” Gracy details economic theory in relation to film preservation and touches upon the tension between the film industry and film archives, the intellectual property market, and copyright. I found her discussion of traditional, market-driven approaches to placing a value on cultural heritage and her discussion of scholarship concerning classic economics as a method for determining the value of culture to be the most interesting piece in this chapter (p. 50). During a time when many information professionals must make difficult decisions about what to preserve, digitize, and make accessible, this discussion forces us to look at how and why we place value on some records and not others in a new light. Gracy also provides an insightful discussion of the schism between high and low culture and a nice overview of appraisal theory in

chapter 4, “Film Archives as Cultural Institutions.” Before moving on to the thematic narratives, chapter 5, “The Social Economy of Film Preservation: Implementing a Bourdieuvian Framework,” outlines Gracy’s own theoretical framework as influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of “cultural production.” She summarizes the participants and outlines the position of an archive within the hierarchy of the field as predicated on two factors: “the degree of consecration granted to the type of work done, and the degree of autonomy that the archive has to conduct its work. Thus there are two sets of poles: one corresponds to degree of consecration and the other corresponds to degree of autonomy” (p. 92).

The second section begins the thematic narratives and ranges in topic from the practical steps in the process of preserving a film and the definition of preservation to the authority archivists have in making preservation decisions. The first thematic narrative, “Documenting the Process of Film Preservation,” may be one of the most valuable sections in the book, as its detailed description of the process of preserving a film on both the macro and micro levels is certain to appeal to a diverse audience, extending far beyond the community of film archives in providing information that can be used by professionals working in other types of cultural institutions with film holdings. Although Gracy is correct to point out that this chapter “should not be taken as a how-to manual for preserving all films in every institutional context,” as the steps were developed and outlined based on ethnographic fieldwork and procedures observed in very specific contexts, settings, and organizational cultures, it is nevertheless a valuable tool for librarians and archivists in its presentation of the architecture of film preservation today (p. 97). Chapter 7, “The Definition of Preservation,” discusses preservation in its multitude of meanings, indicating that various definitions of film preservation rely heavily on job responsibilities, institutional affiliation, and professional experiences in the field. Chapter 8, “Power and Authority in Film Preservation,” looks closely at the level of power and authority that exists in various professional roles and institutions, from the politics of selection and archival

autonomy to the “orphan film” movement. Gracy states that “although film archivists have exclusive authority over many aspects of physical preservation, their decisions regarding the selection of materials for preservation are not as autonomous” (p. 184). Gracy’s summary of the factors that affect the selection process is comprehensive and concise. This discussion is of particular interest to a wide range of information professionals, as the “politics of selection” that Gracy highlights could be applied to the preservation and/or digitization of any format and looks at common values such as condition, use, historical or cultural significance, format, and the availability of funding.

In addition to answering many questions about the social and cultural aspects of film preservation in both commercial and noncommercial settings, Gracy’s study leaves readers with ample fuel to begin asking further questions and to consider film preservation in other institutional contexts. One of the book’s many accomplishments is that it provides a platform from which to begin thinking creatively about the future of film preservation in all types of institutions. In summary, Gracy writes, “Not every cultural institution faces the same degree of competition or the same financial exigencies that characterize the field of film preservation. Therefore, it would be unwise to predict a similar future for museums, traditional archives, and libraries without a careful consideration of players, stakes, and power structure of each field” (p. 211). *Film Preservation* mainly focuses on data gathered from “players, stakes, and power structures” within film archives: institutions devoted exclusively to the acquisition, preservation, description, and access of motion picture film. Thus, the social and cultural aspects of film preservation in multi-format institutions such as libraries, traditional archives, and historical societies are not discussed in-depth. Although the majority of our motion picture heritage exists in these larger film archives, I would venture to say the majority of this study’s readers are likely to work in cultural institutions that have “film holdings” but are not necessarily *film archives*. Perhaps we’ll see a future study focusing on the acquisition, preservation, and access of

moving image materials in an academic institution, historical society, or public library. Whatever the future of literature on moving image preservation may be, it will certainly benefit from this long-overdue study by Karen Gracy. In her words: “This book represents the first attempt to consider the social and cultural aspects of the field of film archiving.... In choosing to approach film preservation from this perspective I emphasized social activity over technical processes, because I am convinced that preservation needs to be studied as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself” (p. 217). This impressive “first attempt” is likely to become essential reading for anyone interested in the preservation of motion picture materials.

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**Thomas P. Wilsted. *Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007. 194 pp. \$49.00 (nonmember); \$35.00 (member).**

In recent years, archives across North Carolina have been renovating and constructing new facilities. In 2007, the building that houses the North Carolina State Archives in downtown Raleigh underwent a major renovation resulting in updated collection storage areas, staff workspaces, and a newly designed search room. Renovations to the Special Collections Research Center at North Carolina State University were also completed in 2007. The Special Collections at Appalachian State University were installed in the new Carol Grotnes Belk Library in 2005 and the History Collections of the Laupus Library at East Carolina University moved into the new Health Sciences Building in 2006. As of early 2008, the Rare Book, Manuscripts, and Special Collections Library at Duke University is in the process of renovating its existing space and planning a new archival processing facility.



Thomas Wilsted's *Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities* guides the reader through the process of designing and constructing new physical spaces for archival collections, staff, and researchers. He begins with selecting the building site and ends with maintaining the new facility. Along the way, he describes the ins and outs of working with architects and contractors, the steps that must be taken to create a stable and secure environment for collections, and the mechanics of moving into the new facility. A chapter dedicated to renovations explains how to evaluate buildings for archival use and tells of potential issues to be resolved.

Wilsted's introductory chapter gives a brief history of archival buildings and building development from the Tabularium in Ancient Rome to National Archives and Records Administration Archives II in College Park, Maryland. Wilsted sets the context for this book by reviewing other significant works on archival buildings. The most recent book-length work on this topic, *Solid, Safe, Secure: Building Archives Repositories in Australia*, was written in 1998. Wilsted also includes an extensive bibliography; a listing of new and remodeled archival facilities since 1990 (no North Carolina institutions are listed); a glossary of building and construction terms and acronyms; and a list of archival movers and archival equipment suppliers.

Wilsted elaborates on topics that are significant to buildings that house archival collections. There is a discussion of how elements in the building fabric (the foundation, roof, walls, and floor) need to be constructed for archival facilities. Wilsted explains the components of heating, ventilation, air conditioning, fire detection and suppression, and security systems. The chapter on moving collections includes a list of potential moving expenses and a proposed move schedule. Projecting the amount of shelving needed in a new storage facility and the pros and cons of mobile shelving systems are also addressed. Additionally, four case studies featuring the Center for Jewish History in New York City, the Special Collections at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the state archives in Delaware and Utah add practical examples to the discussions.

Throughout the book, Wilsted emphasizes the significance of the archivist's participation in the building process and points out where it is crucial that the archivist advocate for the needs of the collection. He clearly spells this out in a chart titled "Archives Staff Responsibilities During a Building Project" that is broken down into sections listing each phase of the building process (p. 39). The archivist must be involved in the creation of the building program document, which is used by the architects to develop their initial building plans. This document articulates how the archives functions at broad and specific levels and describes in detail the requirements for the new facility. Wilsted lists and elaborates on the document's elements, describes the steps involved in its creation, and shows examples of various diagrams that should be included. Here and throughout the text, Wilsted gives archivists the information that they need to be a part of the discussion about the new facility.

The book will be helpful to archivists who want a general introduction to the topic as well as to those who need more detailed information. Chapter text is broken into clearly delineated sections, important information is displayed in charts or lists, and illustrations are plentiful and meaningful. This presentation of information allows the reader to move quickly through the text absorbing the whole of the building process in one sitting. For those who wish to spend more time, topics are treated with depth and it is possible to gain specific information about various aspects of archival facilities. Wilsted's suggestions for additional readings with his comments point the reader to other relevant sources in the archival, library, and museum worlds.

Designing and constructing new spaces for storing, caring for, researching, and exhibiting archival materials is an incredibly daunting proposition. The fact that so little has been written on this topic might in itself make *Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities* a valued contribution to the archival field. However, Wilsted's effort here does not simply fill a gap but succeeds in demystifying the process of developing new archival spaces and providing archivists with the knowledge

they need to be active and effective collaborators in a building or renovation process.

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## Submissions and Subscriptions

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