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## Appraising archivists: documentation and the need for accountability in the appraisal process

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**Appraising Archivists:  
Documentation and the Need for  
Accountability in the Appraisal Process**

By

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Accepted in Partial Completion  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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## **MASTER'S THESIS**

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Samantha N. Cross

April 27, 2011

**Appraising Archivists:  
Documentation and the Need for  
Accountability in the Appraisal Process**

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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April, 2011

## **Abstract**

Appraisal is one of the first steps in archival processing and arguably the most crucial. Embedded in this process are two concepts fundamental to archives: power of the archivist over the collection and trust, by the public, in the archivist to make decisions regarding the historical record. Justification for decisions regarding appraisal, however, are lacking and archivists have yet to make any headway in establishing a means of accountability. Through the implementation of a formalized appraisal report, archivists can thoroughly document the appraisal process while simultaneously justifying their decisions to the greater archival communities and the public at large. This study focuses on the state of archival appraisal, chronicling the works of Sir Hilary Jenkinson and T.R Schellenberg and their impact on appraisal theory, as well as current and past appraisal methods. With such variety and the impossibility of a universal approach to appraisal, archivists must earn the public's trust by accepting and acknowledging their own biases in the course of appraising collections. Documentation encourages archivists to consider the weight of their work in appraisal and their impact on future users in shaping the memories of society.

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There was once a little girl and every night her grandmother would read her a story from an old picture book. There was excitement and danger, laughter and tears, but every night the story would end the same, satisfying the little girl that everything was as it should be. As she got older, there were no more stories read at bedtime, but she never forgot those happy memories of nights with her grandmother. When she was finally grown up and about to have a child of her own, she went searching through the attic to find the old book. Having found it, she caressed the leather bound cover with its gilded etching, smiling wistfully as the memories came back.

She opened the book.

To her shock, she found pages missing. Reading through the book again, the story was the same as she remembered, but why were there pages missing? Taking the book down to her mother, she asked her that very question. Her mother shrugged, at a loss for an explanation.

“Maybe Grandma thought the story didn’t need those pages,” she offered.

The discussion over, the young woman was at a loss. She could not ask her grandmother why the pages were missing; she had passed away long ago. Should she read the story to her child? Was it responsible to read a complete yet incomplete story without an understanding as to why the pages were missing? Should she trust that the decisions of her grandmother were in her best interest and do the same for her own child?

Returning to the attic, the young woman searched the boxes of her grandmother’s things. Surely there was something, anything that would explain what her grandmother had

done? For hours she searched until finally she came across what appeared to be a diary. Leafing through the pages, reading through the familiar script of her grandmother's handwriting, she found what she'd been searching for; a single entry expressing her concern over the violent content of the story. Though swashbuckling heroes and princesses flourished, the villainous agents, people and creatures, gave her pause. The distress they might cause her granddaughter prompted her actions: the removal of pages, the softening of the narrative, all to spare the child the harsh reality of the story.

Grandmother and granddaughter represent the archivist's approach to processing collections and the future users that utilize the information. The choices grandma made in removing pages from the story affected her granddaughter in the same way the choices an archivist makes towards a collection affect the users and society. Her choices reflected a specific bias towards the material, the content of which might have given us a fuller understanding of its source. Though the granddaughter was fortunate enough to find an explanation of her grandmother's actions, users in the archives are not always afforded the same luxury. In most cases users are only left with the result of the archivist's actions. This is unacceptable in a society that places more value on transparency than ever before.

Appraisal, as defined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA), is "the process of identifying materials offered to an archives that have sufficient value to be accessioned."<sup>1</sup> Problematic to this definition are the inherent similarities of appraisal to selection in that selection is defined as a "process of identifying materials to be preserved because of their enduring value, especially those materials to be physically transferred to an archives."<sup>2</sup> The only difference between the two processes is their position before and after accessioning.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, Society of American Archivists, retrieved January 27, 2011, <http://www.archivists.org/glossary>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

These vague definitions place selection before appraisal, but the position of appraisal in archival processing can vary. In some instances, appraisal occurs after a selection of records has been made and requires the archivist to bring the selected materials together as a cohesive collection. In other cases, appraisal occurs before accessioning, requiring the archivist to appraise materials and select what is essential for their repository or institution. Appraisal can also be viewed as an on-going process, allowing for the re-appraisal of collections at any time.

Appraisal and selection are difficult to separate, but I would point out that in selecting materials to be preserved in an archives, the archivist must appraise the materials in order to determine their value for preservation. Appraisal requires the archivist to determine the long term value and potential of materials for current and future users. In the case of this thesis, my focus will be more on the evaluative nature of appraisal through the decisions of an archivist, but there will be a heavier emphasis on appraisal before selection since I find appraisal to be a far more influencing process to archival accessioning.

Appraisal is a decision-making process performed by an archivist. The result of these decisions has a tremendous effect on society that should require every decision made to be as clearly documented as the collections produced. As Randall Jimerson states, “The question is not whether archivists impose their personal interpretations, but whether they act consciously in doing so and whether they transparently document such decisions.”<sup>3</sup> In order to accomplish this goal, archivists must commit to a complete and significantly more detailed documentation of the appraisal process.

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<sup>3</sup> Randall C. Jimerson, “Archives For All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2007): 277.

According to Barbara Craig, an individual has an organizational process, a means of decision making, that is internal and “may appear to be unsystematic, even shambolic” but masks a “group of related logical assessments, each firmly grounded in personal needs and knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, any person has a logical system of organization in her head. It makes sense to the individual who created the system because it is unique to her thought process despite others appearing puzzled by the madness in the method. Archivists rely on an internal process during appraisal but think very little of its explanation to an audience removed from the profession or the material. They have yet to produce a comprehensive translation of *their* decision-making process for users.

This thesis, then, will examine and justify the need for appraisal documentation, specifically, documentation in the form of an appraisal report capable of incorporating collection inventories with the inclusion of a thorough custodial history, biographical details about the archivist, and an explanation from the archivist about her decisions regarding the collection. Without documentation, our means of accountability and transparency are limited. Archivists cannot rely on the presupposed inherent trust of the public in archivists to do what is right, nor can they point to codes of ethics and collecting policies as the only foundational justifications for their actions. Appraisal documentation acknowledges the involvement of the archivist in shaping collections. It is another avenue of accountability, one that allows the voice of the archivist to speak directly to users, colleagues, and professionals alike.

Current forms of documentation, though serving their intended purposes of providing information about collections, fail to account for the decision-making process that precedes their creation. Appraisal reports read like glorified inventories while finding aids require no justification for decisions made towards collections. In our present predicament, we

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Craig, *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice*, (Munich, Germany: K.G. Saur, 2004), 12.

acknowledge the need for transparency, but have failed to truly implement a means of accomplishing the task. The problem is the existing forms of accountability that archivists have been content to fall back on in the event of charges of wrong-doing.

Institutional criteria are the answer for some. While a person's decisions can be haphazardly made, an institution's place within the confines of the law requires "appraisal of information and records in organizations" to be placed "on a foundation which establishes criteria, processes, and procedures."<sup>5</sup> Organizational and institutional archivists knowingly establish criteria in order to avoid potential and costly lawsuits, providing a means of accountability for those under their employ as well as safeguards for themselves. But is it truly enough to stand by an institutional collecting policy? Do the criteria, articulated from the beginning of a project, reflect all possible decisions made in the course of processing materials? Can the archivist simply stand back, point to the collecting policy and wash her hands clean of all responsibility? Codes of ethics are another source of accountability cited by archivists in the decision-making process. While codes of ethics are necessary for any profession, they are left intentionally vague to compensate for the multitude of scenarios possible in any given situation.

Appraisal itself is a silent function within the archives. When one peruses the finding aid or checks an online collection, he or she will find little to no information on appraisal, if only a small mention of acquisition, scope and content, and a brief custodial history. Reflections on why materials are contained within each box, reasoning behind the arrangement and description of boxes and materials, as well as an account of materials removed from the collection are minimal. What the user sees is the final product and the archivist asks the user to trust her judgment. But what have we done to earn this trust? How

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

can the user know that the decisions made by archivists were the most informed? What is their background, their biases? Who is the archivist? Through documentation, not only will the archivist be able to answer these questions, but she will have the means of providing suitable measures of accountability, thus acquiring trust from the public, users, and professional colleagues.

In my efforts to prove the value and soundness of a modified appraisal report I believe it is necessary to examine the literature concerning archival appraisal as well as issues surrounding the archive and archivists in regards to trust and accountability. Appraisal, as a process, is itself an issue of concern for some archivists who feel it is disruptive to the “naturalness” of records and collections while others see appraisal as a necessary process essential to reducing the bulk of records while simultaneously preserving records of enduring value. Where appraisal occurs in archival processing and how an archivist perceives appraisal are crucial to this division. Through the writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson, T.R Schellenberg, and a variety of appraisal methods, the nature of appraisal becomes one rooted in trust and accountability with the archivist at the center. Only when these concerns are sufficiently covered will the discussion of a new appraisal report be justified in both its necessity and implementation.

## **Appraisal**

Appraisal is one of the first actions performed by archivists on a collection. It is from this process that all other aspects of archival processing follow. In undertaking appraisal archivists select the records that fulfill the requirements for completing the record, the

byproducts of which are the records that are unnecessary and are therefore removed from the collection. Through appraisal, the archivist infers the appropriate descriptors for collections to be found in finding aids and institutional databases as well as confirms or reorganizes the arrangement of the records within the collection. Appraisal decisions also affect the longevity of records through recommendations for preservation as well as determine what records should be available to the public based on access restrictions. Appraisal is therefore the process from which all other archival functions originate. Without this crucial first step, processing records begins without a clear purpose.

While this may seem like a fairly clear cut, almost simplistic depiction of the importance of appraisal, I assure you it is anything but. Appraisal is considered by many archivists to be “the critical archival act by archivists” and the “first responsibility upon which everything else depends.”<sup>6</sup> It is the most important and most powerful piece of archival processing, and as such, the approaches taken by archivists towards effective appraisal vary. Appraisal serves both theoretical and pragmatic purposes. It is based on external factors such as, but not limited to, geographical location, institutional collecting policies, and repository materials, as well as internal factors related to the personality, education, and admittedly biased opinions of the archivist.

In North America, value-based criteria inherited from Theodore Schellenberg have driven appraisal methodologies like documentation strategy, functional analysis, and macro-appraisal, the latter two finding considerable support in Canada. European countries, however, have far greater documentary histories than the United States and Canada, but even their approaches to appraisal and the archival mission differ. British policies concerning

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<sup>6</sup> Terry Cook, Foreword in John Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory*, (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2008), xiii.

records emphasize the authority of administrative bodies to make decisions regarding their records without the input of archivists, a philosophy reflected in the influential writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson and solidified in the Grigg Report in 1954 and the Public Records Act of 1958.<sup>7</sup> These policies and writings follow the traditional European School of thought regarding archival documents.

The European School considers the characteristics of documents to be of primary concern, focusing more on form than content, disregarding any notions of determining value for documents when all are considered of equal value.<sup>8</sup> This is also reflected in the records continuum approach utilized in Australia and in collaborative projects such as InterPARES. The European School, therefore, does not find appraisal to be an issue of importance since there is no reason for its usage in archival processing. Germany, however, appears to be at the other end of the spectrum, especially by European standards, regarding appraisal. In 1926, appraisal was declared to be a crucial component of archives as a means of “denying administrative bodies the right to be the sole arbiter of the fate of records.”<sup>9</sup> German policies evolved as the country experienced a multitude of regime changes that were just as influential in shaping attitudes towards records and the appraisal thereof. American appraisal methods have followed similar progressions over time.

The result, then, is a profession already divided at the beginning stages of processing. Such conflicting attitudes result in societal and organizational records without a clearly defined standard practice or universal theory from which to begin working. Comprehension

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<sup>7</sup> Ole Kolsrud, “The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles – Some Comparative Observations,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 55, (Winter, 1992):28-29.

<sup>8</sup> “The European School,” University College London, The School of Library, Archive and Information Studies, last updated August 22, 1997, accessed October 12, 2010, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uczczw09/appraisl/european.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Kolsrud, “The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles,” 30.

of these methods and theories is important to an overall understanding of the necessity for documentation of the appraisal process. Archivists are “determining what the future will know about its past,” and there must be some form of accountability built into the process to assure current and future users, as well as colleagues in the field, that appraisal is not an invisible function of archival processing.<sup>10</sup> If repositories cannot agree on a unified standard of appraisal, then the least they can do is agree on a means of holding themselves accountable to the decisions made in shaping the societal record and our documentary heritage.

## **Jenkinson and Schellenberg**

Archival theory on appraisal inevitably begins with a discussion of the two well known archival canons produced by Sir Hilary Jenkinson and T.R. Schellenberg. This comparison is essential since it not only reveals the opinions of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on appraisal, but traces “the evolution of their ideas in the subsequent archival discourse in an attempt to identify their lasting contributions and continued relevance to the debate on appraisal in archival theory.”<sup>11</sup> That we continually return to these two men indicates not only their influence on archivists well into the twenty-first century, but the origins of an archivist’s view on appraisal and one of the means by which they make decisions regarding collections.

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<sup>10</sup> Terry Cook in *From Polders to Postmodernism*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>11</sup> Reto Tschan, “A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on Appraisal,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2002), 177.

According to Reto Tschan's "A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on Appraisal," Jenkinson's *Manual of Archive Administration*, published in 1922, emphasized the archivist's chief duty in the "physical and moral defense of the records" integrity, impartiality, authenticity and their resultant ,archive value."<sup>12</sup> The logical extent of this view was that "any alteration or destruction of records resulted in both diminution of their integrity and of their value as impartial evidence of the past."<sup>13</sup> In this sense, Jenkinson was an advocate of the passivity of archivists as custodians of the records in order to maintain their purity. Under no circumstances were archivists to become involved in the destruction of records, the decision being left to the administrative body that created them.<sup>14</sup>

Jenkinson's goals are twofold: the continuation of the chain of custody from administrative bodies to the user and preserving objectivity in the role of the archivist. These goals are founded in the European School which adheres to Roman legal concepts of perpetual memory and public faith. Perpetual memory emphasizes the relationship between archival documents and the facts, retaining the information via the document that embodies those facts and "converting the present into the permanent."<sup>15</sup> Public faith, the more relevant of the two concepts to archival theory, "expresses the relationship between archives and the society they serve."<sup>16</sup> Additionally, public faith relies on an implied trust between the public and the archives in such a way that documents entered into the archive are considered trustworthy based on their creation by public authorities to carry out public affairs and then deposit them in the archive. The key to ensuring public faith is that the chain of custody

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>14</sup> Ole Kolsrud, "The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles," 27.

<sup>15</sup> Luciana Duranti, "The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory," *The American Archivist*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Spring, 1994), 331.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 331-32.

remained unbroken. To further guarantee trust in the archives, the form of the document came to symbolize security and authenticity in archival documents. These concepts heavily influenced Jenkinson and since his “initial exposure to archives was through the handling of British medieval records” it is logical that he would develop a rigid set of fundamentals emphasizing the “legal character of archives.”<sup>17</sup>

In accordance with maintaining the chain of custody, Jenkinson was most concerned with preventing the interruption of the “naturalness” of archives in that records were accumulated over the course of regular business activities. Key to the natural development of records was impartiality on the part of records creators. Records were created without being intended for posterity, a natural byproduct of business activities. Impartiality contributed to the trustworthiness of records by remaining without bias, created out of necessity but not intentionally. Jenkinson stresses this point when he says:

“Archives are not collected: I wish the word 'Collection' could be banished from the Archivist's vocabulary, if only to establish that important fact .... They came together, and reached their final arrangement, by a natural process: are a growth; almost, you might say, as much an organism as a tree or an animal.”<sup>18</sup>

The concept of “collecting,” of picking and choosing what is contained in the archives troubled Jenkinson greatly. As we will see, there is a reason why Jenkinson thought of Schellenberg’s ideas as dangerous. Embedded in this argument is the idea that not only does “collecting” disrupt the natural creation of archives, and thus break the chain of custody,

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Stapleton, “Jenkinson and Schellenberg: A Comparison,” *Archivaria* 17, (1983): 76.

<sup>18</sup> Sir Hilary Jenkinson, “The English Archivist: A New Profession” (1947), in Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne, eds., *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2003), 238.

affecting the impartiality of records, but in the very process of collecting, those responsible, namely archivists, create this disruption.

Jenkinson's theory does not account for appraisal because appraisal does not exist as a viable process. Appraisal is far more damaging to the record as it disrupts the natural processes of archival growth and places the archivist in a position in which her objectivity is questioned and the impartiality of the record's creation is suspect. Jenkinson's reasons behind leaving appraisal out of the archives hinge on his own assessment of natural biases in human beings. According to Jenkinson, archives should not be "singled out for preservation...on account of their believed value for esthetic, historical or any other purposes, by the more or less fallible judgment of an expert for whose inevitable bias and possible ignorance we have to allow."<sup>19</sup> How could an archivist make the right decision when other external and internal biases could factor in to their decision-making process? Better to leave the archivist out than risk reprisal later for poor decisions and damages made to the record. Jenkinson, in his own way, was trying to ensure accountability by taking the archivist out of the equation.<sup>20</sup>

Jenkinson's passive approach to appraisal and archives is outdated in an age bombarded with a significantly greater amount of records. His advocacy for the purity of the record is commendable, but nearly impossible. I say nearly because digital records, specifically records born digital, appear to uphold Jenkinsonian theory behind appraisal. But Jenkinson was a product of his time. While the upheaval of World War I challenged the faith of British citizens in their government, historians felt the need to uphold their reliance on

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<sup>19</sup> Sir Hilary Jenkinson, "Reflections of an Archivist," in Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1984), 18.

<sup>20</sup> Tschan, "A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg," 182.

objectivity and empirical methods of conducting research by focusing on medieval and local history, which were “less subject to contemporary popular movements.”<sup>21</sup> Jenkinson’s writings reflect these attitudes towards accountability and historical objectivity. His theory was based on the needs of the British archives and the technological and societal changes of Britain.

Theodore Roosevelt (T.R.) Schellenberg was similarly a product of his time. During the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt led the country by establishing the New Deal, “a set of extremely important and highly influential relief programs... between 1933 and 1937” that was “solely responsible for the new role the federal government played in the lives of its citizens during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>22</sup> The results of the New Deal and the entrance of the United States into the total war of World War II were new ways of dealing with and creating records as well as the creation of “massive amounts of documentation of the government’s activities.”<sup>23</sup> The additional establishment of the National Archives in 1934 placed its employees, one of whom was Schellenberg, in charge of “ten million cubic feet of records that had been accumulated over a period of a century and a half.”<sup>24</sup> The unprecedented bulk of records became the primary problem of modern archives in the United States, not only for the government that housed them, but also for the scholar using them.

Schellenberg noted that the government could not afford to keep all the records “produced as a result of multifarious activities,” nor could it “provide space to house them or

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<sup>21</sup> Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism*, 44.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Stapleton, “Jenkinson and Schellenberg: a comparison,” *Archivaria* 17, (1983): 76.

staff to care for them” due to the increasing costs.<sup>25</sup> And though scholars required records for their research, there was no benefit when scholars were required to “find their way through huge quantities of modern public records.”<sup>26</sup> To reduce the amount of bulk, archivists had to rethink their methodology in order to combat the ever increasing volume of records and the limited space available to store them. Appraisal was no longer an option but a necessity to alleviate technological and societal changes afflicting the processes of archives.

In his work, *Modern Archives*, published in 1956, Schellenberg “stressed the need to reduce bulk by selecting from among the masses of documentation that which was permanently valuable, and to make this selection intelligently available to researchers.”<sup>27</sup> Already, then, are the beginnings of justification for an archivist’s as advocated by Schellenberg. In the need they have to reduce redundancy and bulk, the very act of appraisal in deciding what stays and what is destroyed must be justified.<sup>28</sup> To ensure that appraisal decisions were made intelligently, Schellenberg provided sets of values, primary and secondary, by which selection and appraisal of records would be determined.

The primary value of records related to their “originating agency.” Of first importance, primary value accounted for public records to “accomplish the purposes for which an agency has been created.”<sup>29</sup> Schellenberg divided primary value into three separate criteria by which records could be characterized: legal, fiscal, and administrative.<sup>30</sup> If any of these criteria pertained to the documents as necessary to the creator, then the records

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<sup>25</sup> T.R. Schellenberg, “The Appraisal of Modern Public Records,” *Bulletins of the National Archives*, No. 8, (October, 1956): 237.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Tschan, “A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg,” 180.

<sup>28</sup> Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Appraisal or Documentation: Can We Appraise Archives By Selecting Content?” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Summer, 1994), 530.

<sup>29</sup> Schellenberg, “Appraisal of Modern Public Records,” 238.

<sup>30</sup> Frank Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2005), 12.

remained primary. Schellenberg believed that records were only archival when they became unnecessary to their creator and the function for which they were created. Once they were no longer of use to the creator they became the concern of the archivist. Secondary value, however, related more to “other agencies and private users.”<sup>31</sup> Once records for preservation had been obtained, the archivist was responsible for finding the “historic and cultural functions” of records for those other than their creator.<sup>32</sup> This was accomplished through the application of subcategories within secondary value, evidentiary and informational value, to make the selection of saved materials that much more precise.

Evidential and informational values of records, as defined by Schellenberg, were the evidence contained about “the organization and functioning of the Government body that produced them” and the information contained on “persons, corporate bodies, things, problems, conditions, and the like, with which the Government body dealt.”<sup>33</sup> Evidentiary value breaks down further to include three additional criteria: position of the office within the organization, the function of each office within the organization, and the activities carried out to perform the function.<sup>34</sup> Informational value entailed no additional criteria, but advised archivists to keep records that “documented a person, thing, or phenomenon considered „important.”<sup>35</sup>

Schellenberg’s appraisal criteria present a turning point for archivists. Firstly, he created a position of power, placing more control over the records, once they entered the

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<sup>31</sup> T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, first published in 1956, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 133.

<sup>32</sup> Tschan, “A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg,” 180.

<sup>33</sup> Schellenberg, “Appraisal of Modern Public Records,” 238.

<sup>34</sup> Tschan, “A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg,” 180.

<sup>35</sup> Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, 13.

archive, in the hands of the archivist.<sup>36</sup> By making appraisal a secondary process after the creation and use of records for their intended purposes, archivists avoided infringing on the natural process of record-making. Secondly, he established a differentiation between archives and records. Schellenberg envisioned archives as a separate “species of records” based on their potential value to future users for purposes other than their original creation.<sup>37</sup> To make this distinction possible, records were transformed, through the process of appraisal, by the archivist. The appraisal of records ensured that the records kept were of value to society while ultimately reducing bulk by eliminating the need to keep everything.

These ideas entail the fundamental differences between Jenkinson and Schellenberg on appraisal and records in general. Jenkinson makes no distinction between archives and records, determining them to be synonymous by virtue of the fact that they were preserved and not destroyed by the creator. Records/archives needed no value-based criteria. Their “appraisal” stemmed from inherent value achieved through the maintenance of impartiality and objectivity without disrupting the natural processes of records creation. Jenkinson saw the willful destruction of records to be “by its very nature anti-archival” while Schellenberg believed the integrity of the archival profession hinged on the archivist as the professional making the decisions about what to keep and what to destroy.<sup>38</sup>

Schellenberg’s appraisal theory, however, does not completely replace Jenkinson nor is it without flaws. Of great concern is the concept of the archivist as appraiser. As Reto Tschan states, Jenkinson understood the prejudicial nature of individuals and believed appraisal to be dangerous because “not only could personal bias not be eliminated from a process designed to select the “important” and destroy the “valueless,” but that such a

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<sup>36</sup> Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> Tschan, “A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg,” 181.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-186.

process was ultimately a misguided effort since it was impossible to anticipate the research interests and requirements of the future.”<sup>39</sup> John Ridener agrees with this assessment in that Schellenberg’s theory assumes that the archivist will make the most logical, well informed choice.<sup>40</sup>

Schellenberg believed that the archivist would be guided by her educational background in history and remain in check by the requirements of her sponsoring entity. Schellenberg once again distinguished himself from Jenkinson by supporting the education of archivists in history as an asset to the profession, especially in appraisal. Jenkinson believed that archivists should not be historians as it would color their attitudes towards records and tempt them to retain records of “historical value.” But Schellenberg points out that “an archivist, no matter what his training, will appraise primarily on the basis of their historical value or interest” and a background in history bolsters the ability of the archivist to document less obvious historical movements and persons.<sup>41</sup>

The most notable of weaknesses found within Schellenberg’s value-based criteria is its vagueness, particularly in what constitutes “informational value.”<sup>42</sup> How is informational value to be judged? If the only guidance provided by Schellenberg requires the “importance” of documented material to be considered, then what constitutes “importance”? Informational value therefore becomes a matter of interpretation requiring the archivist to make subjective decisions about the value of records. Schellenberg, however, fully acknowledged the complicity of subjectivity in appraisal.<sup>43</sup> The open interpretation of informational value is a result of Schellenberg’s opinion that “historically trained archivists would be able to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>40</sup> Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism*, 85.

<sup>41</sup> Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 150.

<sup>42</sup> Stapleton, “Jenkinson and Schellenberg,” 83.

<sup>43</sup> Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism*, 84.

recognize a valuable document” that would be beneficial for future use as something “they would want to use if they were doing research.”<sup>44</sup> Informational value, according to Schellenberg, is “ordinarily called research value...because of the information they contain that may be useful in research of various kinds.”<sup>45</sup> To place any more criteria within informational value would ultimately limit the historical record. Jenkinson, however, criticized the “arbitrary nature” of Schellenberg’s methodology, noting that experience and education could still have negative results in the decision-making process.<sup>46</sup> Schellenberg’s assumption that archivists will make the “right” decisions and his lack of additional criteria in an arguably crucial part of archival processing have created considerable divisions in how archivists approach appraisal.

## Appraisal Methods

The staying power of Schellenberg’s arguments cannot be ignored. His assignation of values for records and his advocacy of the archivist’s participation in the appraisal process appeals to more archivists today than ever before. As Richard Stapleton says, “It is difficult to imagine a present-day archivist working with modern public records who would deny the necessity of the archivist’s involvement in appraisal.”<sup>47</sup> The problems of the modern-day archivist, however, are still the same as they were in Schellenberg’s time. We are dealing with an ever-increasing bulk of records requiring our attention whilst still maintaining our professional responsibilities towards the institutions of our employment, users, both current

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<sup>44</sup> Boles, *Selecting and Appraising*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Sir Hilary Jenkinson, “Modern Archives. Some Reflections,” in Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne, eds., *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2003), 341.

<sup>47</sup> Stapleton, “Jenkinson and Schellenberg,” 83.

and future, and society. Appraisal, then, as the first step in processing, should allow the archivist to reduce bulk while upholding those responsibilities. Somewhat problematic to this mission are the variety of record types and appraisal methods.

Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young attempted in the mid 1980s to expand upon Schellenberg's "limited assistance" to archivists by developing their own model for "institutional records" that allowed for "diverse acquisition mandates and institutional settings."<sup>48</sup> They created three "general categories of decisions" for appraisal evaluation: value of information, costs of retention, and the "political and procedural implications of the appraisal recommendations."<sup>49</sup> As Robert Sink states, they "delineated various components essential for an appraisal decision" within each category.<sup>50</sup> Their efforts to implement the new model were met with mixed results. Robert Sink recounts the initial testing of the new model at the New York Public Library (N.Y.P.L.) in 1987. Boles and Young "developed thirty-eight appraisal questions and a methodology for rating the answers on a numerical scale."<sup>51</sup> After a training session from Boles and Young, the supervising staff developed weighted questions relevant to their repository. Once the questions were agreed upon, the supervisors trained six more staff members in "applying the modules and making specific calculations," giving them each a collection to work on and a worksheet to complete.<sup>52</sup> The experiment was both enlightening and disheartening in what it revealed about the archivists who conduct appraisal and the effectiveness of a process based on commonalities.

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<sup>48</sup> Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," in *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, edited by Randall C. Jimerson, (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2000), 282.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Sink, "Appraisal: The Process of Choice," *American Archivist*, Vol. 53, (Summer, 1990): 453.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 454.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

On the one hand, the Black Box Experiment, as it was referred to by Boles and Young, at N.Y.P.L. revealed the resistance of archivists to assign quantitative value to materials as opposed to values based on intuition and “common sense.” Schellenberg’s open ended interpretation of informational value ultimately left archivists with an assumed superiority of knowledge over what was worthy of remaining in the archive and what was worth destroying. This attitude is a hindrance in that it prevents research from being conducted that could potentially reinvent or restructure archival processes. In order for the archival profession to grow, we have to be able to evaluate ourselves and how we function as professionals. Resistance to change inevitably leads to stagnation and as archivists we cannot afford to stand still while the rest of society moves forward. The human element in archives, while its greatest asset, is also its greatest enemy.

On the other hand, Boles and Young’s evaluation criteria exposed the interrelatedness of records via the model’s categories and components. The authors state that:

“...the components of the model are cumulative; none stands alone. Nor can one module operate without the other two. Rather, each interacts with the other and must be evaluated with them in mind. This interaction of the elements and components means that the collective value of the records is greater than the sum of its parts.”<sup>53</sup>

In conducting appraisal, the interaction of documents within the collection requires the archivist to consider the whole of the records’ value. They must also take into account the risk in removing items versus retention of the entire collection. The logical extent of this argument has carried over with the progression of society and its production of more records.

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<sup>53</sup> Boles and Young, “Exploring the Black Box,” in *American Archival Studies*, 297

Archivists cannot entirely separate collections from each other. If records are interrelated on the item level, then the collections from which they belong must interact as well within the institution of their creation. Likewise, the growing interaction of institutions domestically and abroad presents a global scale of interaction amongst records creators and archivists. This series of interactions and interrelations presents a heavy burden for archivists approaching the appraisal of records since many are most concerned with the needs of *their* repository or *their* institution. How can archivists possibly account for global needs in documentation, let alone the appraisal thereof, when the burdens of the individual repository or institution are more pressing and, at the very least, present attainable goals?

Helen Samuels's documentation strategy, first examined in 1986, proposes cooperative interaction between archival and other repositories as the most effective means of documenting society. In her article, "Who Controls the Past" Samuels posed the question, "how many archival repositories does it take to document the complexities of the moonshot?" as an example of the interrelatedness of archival repositories and the proliferation of information concerning one event.<sup>54</sup> Institutions, as society progresses, have become more and more integrated which means records are more integrated and yet more widely dispersed than ever before. In order to effectively document society, the entirety of the record must be considered.

Documentation strategy assures "the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or geographic area" through the use of four activities: choosing and defining the topic to be documented, selecting the advisors and establishing the site for the strategy, structuring the inquiry and examining the form and substance of the available documentation, and selecting

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<sup>54</sup> Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist*, Vol. 49, No. 2, (Spring, 1986): 112.

and placing the documentation.<sup>55</sup> The point of these criteria is to eliminate the illusion of self-sufficient collections within the archives.<sup>56</sup> Documentation strategy, however, requires a strong “agreement about the appraisal process” in order to work effectively.<sup>57</sup>

Appraisal is a critical process in documentation strategy as it affects which topics are chosen, the scope and purpose of the topic, advisors needed for consultation, as well as the placement of documents in repositories. These factors, however, are critical in influencing *any* appraisal decisions, not just ones within documentation strategy. Making these influencing factors more transparent would be an excellent first step in revealing the nature of the appraisal process. Agreement on appraisal criteria and the ability to engage “records creators and records users in a continuous discussion about the nature of what the archival record should be” would ensure effective collecting and a better selection of documentary material.<sup>58</sup> The on-going nature of documentation strategy is unique in its allowance for re-appraisal based on the “availability of records and repositories.”<sup>59</sup>

Critics of documentation strategy focus more on the practicality of its implementation rather than its intellectual implications. The very element that makes documentation strategy “visionary” and “desirable,” its focus on cooperation amongst institutions, has had more failures than successes.<sup>60</sup> Patricia Aronsson, however, in her discussion of the growing volume of congressional records considers documentation strategy as a means of alleviating

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>57</sup> Sink, “Appraisal: The Process of Choice,” 457.

<sup>58</sup> Boles, *Selecting and Appraising*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Samuels, “Who Controls the Past” 123.

<sup>60</sup> Boles, *Selecting and Appraising*, 22.

the bulk of congressional papers through cooperative appraisal amongst repositories.<sup>61</sup> She finds great benefit in the possibilities documentation strategy holds for saving shelf space, staff time, and administrative dollars. Though there are reservations on the part of repositories having difficulty working together coupled with resistance on the part of senators and representatives to place their papers in cooperative institutions, she believes that an explanation of the difficulties of traditional processing and the potential for greater usability is all the convincing needed.

Other appraisal methods such as macro-appraisal and functional analysis are utilized more often by archivists in government institutions and universities to handle the bulk of records created. Macro-appraisal was conceived by Terry Cook as a method of “total archives” to document the people and government of Canada.<sup>62</sup> Essential to macro-appraisal is determining the “function” of the records creator based on “the purposes and intents of the creator” and the “structure” of the creator, or the actions of the creator.<sup>63</sup>

He further expands on this in his examination of architectural records as the “archival documents that give evidence of the building’s plan, design, construction, use, and subsequent alteration and possible demolition” as opposed to the building itself.<sup>64</sup> As Tawny Ryan Nelb states, architectural records do not exist in a vacuum and the overwhelming multitude of influencing factors can make appraisal difficult without an effective strategy.<sup>65</sup> Cook is critical of traditional methods of appraising by looking for the “value” of material for

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<sup>61</sup> Patricia Aronsson, “Appraising Modern Congressional Collections,” in *An American Political Archives Reader*, Karen Dawley Paul, Glenn R. Gray, and L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin, eds., (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 163.

<sup>62</sup> Boles, *Selecting and Appraising*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Terry Cook, “Building an Archive: Appraisal Theory for Architectural Records,” *American Archivist*, Vol. 59, (Spring, 1996): 137.

<sup>65</sup> Tawny Ryan Nelb, “Architectural Records Appraisal: Discussion of Problems and Strategies for the Documenting Michigan Architecture Project,” *American Archivist*, Vol. 59, (Spring, 1996): 229.

“actual or anticipated research” rather than focusing on “value” as “evidence of functions, programs, activities, transactions, and structures of the records creator or creators.”<sup>66</sup>

Through appraisal of functional value, archivists reveal the context of records creators and records creation, placing records within a contextual timeframe that connected them with other collections. This “top-down” approach provides two levels of appraisal: 1) assessment of which records-creating entities were the most important and 2) assessment of internal functions and structures *within* the records-creating entity that had importance.<sup>67</sup> This functional analysis, according to Cook, ultimately provides archivists with a “sense of direction, a strategy, and a theoretical basis for coping with the voluminous and very fragile records of complex organizations.”<sup>68</sup>

The inclusion of appraisal in Schellenberg’s archival process reinvented archivists as agents of society’s documentary heritage. This change coupled with technological shifts and societal growth required reconsideration of how records interacted in order to effectively document as comprehensive an image of society as possible. Schellenberg’s legacy provided a baseline theoretical structure that has been shaped and molded to fit the needs of individual repositories and institutions. The result of this is a multitude of appraisal methods that Schellenberg would not find disconcerting at all. Schellenberg states that, “Diverse judgments will spread the burden of preserving the documentation of a country among its various archival institutions” and “may well assure a more adequate social documentation.”<sup>69</sup> But while variety breeds innovation and spreads documentation, problems arise when one considers that there is no standardized approach to appraisal.

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<sup>66</sup> Cook, “Building an Archive,” 139.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 149.

Suffice it to say, the creation of a universal appraisal theory that would apply to all repositories and all record mediums is nearly impossible. What works for the National Archives and its requirements for federal records retention must also work for smaller repositories with “fragments of history because of their potential significance within a narrow documentary history.”<sup>70</sup> Also under the umbrella of a universal appraisal theory are the variety of archival materials such as paper, electronics, and other “non-textual formats,” none of which can be easily categorized in the same way as the others. The very fact that we have this problem – that we cannot decide on a unified theory – speaks to our reasons for cultivating trust in the archives and archivists specifically. If we cannot agree on what methods to employ when appraising collections, then we must at least agree on a method of justifying our actions towards the collections.

## **Trust**

Our prologue revealed the history of appraisal theory. What then will be our story of archivists? In understanding appraisal theory, we now recognize that the very nature of appraisal requires an act of selection. In doing so, archivists shape the nature of collections and shape the nature of society itself. Appraisal endows the archivist with a tremendous amount of power that holds the archivist responsible for the decisions he or she makes. But if appraisal is the most important act of archival processing and archivists have a multitude of appraisal methods at their disposal, then how are those outside of the archival community

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<sup>70</sup> Sink, “Appraisal: The Process of Choice,” 453.

supposed to entrust archivists with power over the historical record when the very first step is without consensus?

The concept of power is not commonly associated with the archive as far as the general public is concerned. The archive receives records and the public, eventually, uses them with very little thought given to what happens in between or how the records will be used in the future. This complacency allows structures of power to build around the archive through the use of records. Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* is a deconstructive work that mutually implicates "the concept of archival science and the scientific claims of psychoanalysis" in the use of language and text to construct power.<sup>71</sup> Derrida is troubled by the archive, not just in the materials housed therein, but by the very word, stating: "Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word „archive.“<sup>72</sup> The word itself has its origins in the Greek *arkheion*: "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded."<sup>73</sup> Though the perception of the archive is as a repository of records, Derrida exposes the inherent power built into the very word "archive" and the possession of that power through control of the place where "official documents are filed."<sup>74</sup>

The truth of the matter is that while claiming authority and authenticity, the archive only houses materials that are *impressions* of previous truths. Absolute truth cannot be obtained through archival materials because time and space inevitably separate the historian and the archivist from the original intent and context of the materials.<sup>75</sup> What is left is the

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<sup>71</sup> Brien Brothman, Review of *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* by Jacques Derrida, *Archivaria* 43 (Spring, 1997): 189.

<sup>72</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

ability to interrogate Derrida's "phantoms," the spectral traces of truth in the archive, and interpret them.<sup>76</sup> But once those interpretations are written, set in text, their acceptance permits the continued construction of history and identity through the legitimization of society's "memory."

Verne Harris utilizes Derrida to describe the archives of South Africa under apartheid, stating that:

"...it takes only a slight jiggling of memory to recall the obsessive guarding, patrolling, and manipulating of consignment by apartheid's *archons* – apartheid's memory institutions, for instance, legitimized apartheid rule by their silences and narratives of power..."<sup>77</sup>

The archive, in this instance, is complicit in the oppression of black South Africans because those in power used documents and records to construct narratives that empowered and simultaneously oppressed. This is reminiscent of Derrida's statement: "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory."<sup>78</sup> Engrossing South Africa in the bureaucratic ideology and culture of apartheid allowed the regime to limit black South Africans' access to public archives while encouraging "establishment-aligned Afrikaner" appraisal practices that poorly documented the country's underclasses, effectively eliminating them from the historical record.<sup>79</sup> Though these are only two examples of the intertwining methods of exclusion in apartheid South Africa, the correlation between power and the use of archives becomes clearer.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 84-87.

<sup>77</sup> Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective*, (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2007), 43.

<sup>78</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Harris, *Archives and Justice*, 176-178.

Richard White in his work, *Remembering Ahanagan: A History of Stories*, presents an historian's perspective on the challenges of reconciling history and memory via the journey of a son to reconstruct his mother's past.<sup>80</sup> In trying to make sense of the stories told to him by his mother he attempts to find a place where memory and history meet, working together to tell the same story without sacrificing the essential identity of its storyteller. White focuses on the historical profession and the inherent power of historians and archivists in the shaping of memory. During a visit to Ireland, White and his mother, Sara, visit the archives at the University College in Dublin in order to look at stories compiled by the Department of Folklore. These stories were a project set up by the leaders of the Irish Free State in order to construct a "true" Irish culture.<sup>81</sup> What they found were stories different from the ones Sara remembered. The problem presented here is that of a country with two sets of stories.<sup>82</sup> Sara and others like her in Ireland contain the lived-in memories passed down through the generations. The archives, however, contain the established memories that will be researched and utilized as "authentic."

White also warns historians about the dangers of personal value judgments within their work, specifically, in the case of a graduate student's thesis on the dance halls of Chicago. The graduate student's paper reflects his own attitudes, placing words in the mouths of other men to mask his own rejection by girls in the dance hall.<sup>83</sup> He makes broad judgments, merging the entire working-class population of the dance halls without taking into account the individuals. That the graduate's work ended up in an archive presents a danger in that the value judgments of an individual can be damning to an entire group of

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<sup>80</sup> Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagan: A History of Stories*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 5.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 203.

people. The use of language is a powerful tool, one which, if naturalized in the archive, has a lasting and detrimental effect.

Through these examples it is clear that to control the archive is to control memory and what goes to the archive is not as important as what stays in the archive. And if the archive is a repository for the memories of society, then “archivists are part of a process that helps shape society’s memory.”<sup>84</sup> As Terry Cook states, archivists “are deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not.”<sup>85</sup> Appraisal allows the archivist to determine what is necessary to stay in the collection while weeding out superfluous material. If, however, there is no public awareness of who the archivist is and what he or she does, then how can the public trust what remains in the archive is the truth?

Though Schellenberg’s appraisal theory has become more widely accepted within the archival community, there are still plenty of critiques not only against his method but against the intellectual and ethical dilemma placed upon the archivist as active selector. As Roy C. Schaeffer says, “The appraisal process determines the fate of our documentary heritage and thereby contains perhaps the only socially significant element of archival power.”<sup>86</sup> By choosing to accept this role we acknowledge the position of archivists as one of power firmly planted in appraisal.<sup>87</sup> We can learn a great deal from Spider-Man’s creator, Stan Lee, when

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<sup>84</sup> Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, (Spring/Summer, 2002): 27.

<sup>85</sup> Terry Cook, “Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Roles of Archives in Constructing Social Memory” in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, edited by Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 169.

<sup>86</sup> Roy C. Schaeffer, “Transcendent Concepts: Power, Appraisal, and the Archivist as ‘Social Outcast,’” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Fall, 1992), 609.

<sup>87</sup> Mark A. Greene, “The Power of Archives: Archivists’ Values and Value in the Postmodern Age,” *American Archivist*, Vol. 72, (Spring/Summer, 2009): 29.

he proclaims that “with great power there must also come – great responsibility.”<sup>88</sup>

Archivists, though many may not necessarily be comic book fans, still appreciate the sentiment of this adage so much so that many are “scared silly of appraisal and most of them really don’t want to do it even if they could.”<sup>89</sup> But inaction is still a choice and in making that choice, claimants of “neutrality” are accountable for *refusing* to act.<sup>90</sup>

By professional standards, especially in the United States, archives are very young. But we are a profession nonetheless. As a profession, there is an inherent trust between us and those that we serve. The same is true of doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. But integral to the status of “professional” is not just “specialized knowledge” nor is it a theoretical base that gives “intellectual coherence to specific facts.”<sup>91</sup> Of great significance to professionals is the idea of accountability. Accountability is the acceptance of responsibility for one’s actions. In a public setting accountability is essential when trust is placed implicitly in a professional body. Present and future users can only know what they are given access to within the archives, placing archivists in a position that draws trust from the public yet requires very little justification. We as archivists believe it is our responsibility to hold *others* accountable through the use of “authentic” records as evidence, but we have no mechanisms at our disposal capable of holding *ourselves* accountable for our own actions.<sup>92</sup>

Central to this issue of trust is how conscious the public is in regards to the actions of archivists. Richard J. Cox states that the “public perception of what archives are, and what

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<sup>88</sup> Stan Lee (writer) and Steve Ditko (illustrator), *Amazing Fantasy #15*, (August, 1962), Marvel Comics.

<sup>89</sup> Frank Boles quoted in Greene, “The Power of Archives,” 28.

<sup>90</sup> Randall C. Jimerson, “Archives For All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2007), 262.

<sup>91</sup> Rudi Volti quoted in Greene, “The Power of Archives,” 22.

<sup>92</sup> Heather MacNeil, “Trusting Records in a Postmodern World,” *Archivaria* 51, (2001): 46.

archivists do, is cloudy at best.”<sup>93</sup> Though the archival community places a great deal of emphasis on outreach to the public in order to garner attention and awareness as to the usefulness of archives, public perceptions of the archivist and her job in relation to the archive are quite dim. Archivists are the essential components in archival processing, but the public is far more aware of the archival institution than the person or persons behind the scenes. The disconnectedness of archivists from public perception is why matters of trust require examination. The “cloudy” realm in which archivists and archives exist creates distrust because no one outside of the archival community knows or understands the purpose of archives or the job of an archivist.

Without knowledge of the archivist’s position, public unawareness leaves archivists unchecked but capable of asserting or conceding their approach to records. At the 1970 SAA Conference, Howard Zinn famously criticized archivists for their apolitical attitudes, saying:

“Professionalism is a powerful form of social control...By social control I mean maintaining things as they are, preserving traditional arrangements, preventing any sharp changing in how the society distributes wealth and power...Equally important for social control as the military scientists are those professionals who are connected with the dissemination of knowledge in society: the teachers, the historians, the political scientists, the journalists, and yes, the archivists...The archivist, even more than the historian and the political scientist, tends to be scrupulous about his neutrality, and to see his job as a technical job, free from the nasty world of political interest...but I will stick by what I have said about other scholars, and argue that the archivist, in subtle ways, tends to perpetuate the political and economic status quo simply by going about his ordinary business.”<sup>94</sup>

If we cannot be neutral, if the archive and archivists are central to societal memory and the continuance of the historical record, then how do we cultivate trust in ourselves and in our profession? How do we hold ourselves accountable for appraisal’s powerful consequences?

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<sup>93</sup> Richard J. Cox quoted in “Trusting Archivists: The Role of Archival Ethics Codes in Establishing Public Faith” by Glenn Dingwall, *The American Archivist*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2004), 19.

<sup>94</sup> Howard Zinn, “Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest,” *Midwestern Archivist*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1977): 2-6, retrieved from Progressive Archivists, <http://www.libr.org/progarchs/>, June 22, 2010.

Before documentation of appraisal can be examined, we must examine two forms of trust essential to building an effective means of accountability: trust in the archives and trust in the archivist.

## **Trust in the Archives**

An archive is subject to factors both internal and external. Whilst archivists are agents within the archive, institutions, users, donors, and the general public act as outside forces pulling the archivist in multiple directions in order to serve multiple masters. These external factors significantly affect the future of an archive as any negative attention incurred by the archive could potentially lead to “loss of reputation, loss of funding, loss of donors, and loss of public trust.”<sup>95</sup> Archives, however, are in an unfortunate position where most of their attention is found through negative press via media outlets that reach the public. With few exceptions, archives are rarely in the news for something positive. Stories about material theft from archival employees, “secret agreements” between institutions, and the granting of “preferential access” to persons of higher authority portray archives as morally ambiguous entities.<sup>96</sup> And while this may seem more suited to an issue of ethics and the archivist, the fact is that the actions of archivists, whether on a personal or professional level, affect the reputation of the archive, which affects the trust outsiders have in the archive.

On a professional level, how an archivist approaches records and collections can be of specific importance in cultivating trust, especially in the realm of appraisal. In her 1994

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<sup>95</sup> Jason G. Speck, “Protecting Public Trust: An Archival Wake-Up Call,” *Journal of Archival Organization*, 8: 1, (2010): 38.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

work, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,” Luciana Duranti advocates Jenkinson’s approach to archival appraisal and archival science. Archival records are, through Jenkinson’s definition, “created as a means for, and a by-product of, action,” not in the interests of posterity.<sup>97</sup> In direct contrast to Schellenberg, Duranti believes that to assign any “value would arbitrarily affect the integrity of the archival body and would influence the meaning of the whole and of its parts.”<sup>98</sup> Though she agrees that archivists should justify their actions to future generations of users, she does not find the cultural function of archivists existing within the concept of appraisal and the active involvement of the archivist in shaping the record. Instead we should respect the past rather than try to control it.<sup>99</sup>

Duranti attempts to expand upon European School concepts of public faith and perpetual memory, tracing them back to Ancient Rome as the legacy of archival science and the archival tradition. Public faith, her most pressing concern, explicitly states the relationship between archives and the society they serve.<sup>100</sup> If, in the tradition of Rome, only public authorities could have an archive, then only archival documents created by public authorities in carrying out public affairs were endowed with public faith.

The argument is essentially about trust between the archives and society, specifically with the “fundamental issue of...the theoretical validity of the concept of appraisal within archival science.”<sup>101</sup> Duranti advocates Jenkinson’s ideas regarding the absence of archival appraisal. She believes that Jenkinson’s moral defense of archives is best suited because it emphasizes the purity of the record and an unbroken chain of custody. By appraising

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<sup>97</sup> Luciana Duranti, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Spring, 1994), 334.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-32.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

collections, archivists create a situation in which the veracity of the archives is in question, making appraisal responsible for the loss of trust in archives.

The interrelationship of records is also essential in promoting trustworthiness. Each record is related to the records before and after due to the fact that they were created, giving each record a unique placement within the collection, a notion which Duranti applies even to duplicates. The links and relationships of records to each other as they are created is part of the “naturalness” of archives. To break the “links in the chain” by pulling records out of the archive based on value criteria is to disrupt their naturalness and make the records untrustworthy by virtue of the archivist’s actions. This makes the archives, as a whole, untrustworthy. If we simply allowed for the “naturalness” of archives and remained the passive servants of the record, then there would be no need to prove our trustworthiness. As a means of solving the obvious problem of bulk, which Schellenberg supporters claim is the necessity of appraisal, Duranti believes that archivists should work with the institutions not by “attributing externally imposed values” but by “defining archival jurisdictions and acquisition policies and plans.”<sup>102</sup>

The problem with Duranti’s reliance on Jenkinsonian theory is that, as theory, it is not applicable to actual repositories, according to her critics. To remain passive in the creation of records, relying on strict interpretations of form, provenance, and the decisions of creators about destruction of records is to privilege “those in power with a recognized productivity.”<sup>103</sup> There have certainly been instances in which creator control has had negative consequences, such as the case files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Under scrutiny for the first time in 1978 due to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA),

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>103</sup> Jimerson, “Archives for All,” 276.

scholars and records managers alike discovered the massive destruction of documents that had been occurring since 1945. Prior to approval of records disposal requests filed by the FBI, archivists had examined files with descriptions provided by the bureau, but had not examined the files themselves.<sup>104</sup>

When organizations that are meant to be accountable to the public are left to their own devices we have more cause for concern because there is no oversight of the organization. Once records are viewed by outsiders, they are left with what the creator wants them to see versus what they should see or what should be available to the public. As Roy C. Schaeffer says, “We cannot keep everything but we cannot trust the intentions of creators to eliminate the proper records in order to preserve the societal record.”<sup>105</sup>

Frank Boles and Mark Greene responded to Duranti’s claims in their article, “Et Tu Schellenberg? Thoughts on the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory.” Point by point, they attempt to refute Duranti’s criticism of appraisal theory by focusing on the impracticality of Jenkinsonian theory in accordance with the concerns of trust in the archives. At the heart of their argument is the fact that as society changes, so too will its record-keeping culture. If that is the case, if archives are supposed to reflect an image of society, and if archives are responsible for taking on the ever-evolving records of that society, then why do archival principles have to remain static?<sup>106</sup>

They also criticize her ideas for directing an organization internally as “for all intents and purposes, the same as doing it oneself.”<sup>107</sup> Defining actions within the organization in the

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<sup>104</sup> Susan D. Steinwall, “Appraisal and the FBI Files Case: For Whom Do Archivists Retain Records?” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 49, No. 1, (Winter, 1986), 54.

<sup>105</sup> Roy C. Schaeffer, “Transcendent Concepts,” 611.

<sup>106</sup> Frank Boles and Mark A. Greene, “Et Tu Schellenberg? Thoughts of the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Summer, 1996), 302.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

guise of “mediation” is performing the same tasks as appraisers in the archive, making the same value judgments from the inside rather than the outside. Furthermore, to believe that the intentions of creators are pure and impartial, that the records submitted are without bias, is to completely deny human nature in regards to posterity. Certainly the Founding Fathers wrote with intention, acknowledging that, even if they failed, what they were doing was making history. They constructed their correspondence to reflect an image of themselves as they would like to be perceived.<sup>108</sup>

Duranti’s article, however, not only expresses her concerns over issues of trust within the archives based on Schellenberg’s appraisal theory, but also critiques appraisal theory and its coupling with postmodernism. Postmodernist thought challenged the “historical sensibility and its emphasis on order” as it developed during the nineteenth century, “affecting the cultural role of archives.”<sup>109</sup> Theoretically, it is a rejection of hierarchical systems, structured categorization, and *a priori* methods. Instead, it, “critiques universal knowledge and foundationalism, claiming that there is no reason, only *reasons*.”<sup>110</sup> Western scholarship champions the ability to label and place materials, ideas, and even people into scientifically created categories. Postmodernism, however, postulates that these categories are constructions themselves and are dubious in their intentions, resulting in negative consequences overall for society since categorization privileges one over the other. Archives are built on these Western principles, evidenced by the concepts of provenance and original order, and certainly Duranti’s neo-Jenkinsonian stance is a defense of this empiricist thought.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>109</sup> Carolyn Heald, “Is There Room for Archives in the Postmodern World?” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Winter, 1996), 90.

<sup>110</sup> Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., first published in 1988, (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 1993), 132.

Postmodernism relies on the belief that we cannot have one pure truth reflected in the records of society. As such, we should collect more material in order to better represent society as a whole and appraise the material similarly. Documentation strategy is particularly rooted in postmodernism as it calls upon the archivist to add material to the record if she finds it missing and believes it necessary to the record's completion. Documentation strategy also allows for the inclusion of non-standard archival materials such as oral histories, art and imagery, etc. to further inform and enrich the record. It is, therefore, a deliberate act to document society, one which Duranti and colleagues of a similar mindset, like Richard J. Cox, find problematic in regards to cultivating trust in the archives. If archivists are actively participating in the creation of the record, how can the public trust that the collections are impartial and objective? Cox in particular looks at the less structured approach to appraisal and runaway collecting policies with concern, advocating more aggressive appraisal methods that value order over "magical attributes."<sup>111</sup> Terry Cook reveals that other critics of postmodernism find the "historian's personalized interpretation of the past becomes more important than the people, places, and events in the past itself" creating a situation in which Holocaust deniers have a means of historical interpretation that can be accepted.<sup>112</sup>

Archivists like Frank Boles, Mark A. Greene, and Helen Samuels have, in fact, embraced postmodernism in one way or another as a tool to making a more complete record of society through appraisal. It is another aspect of appraisal, placing archives squarely in a position of power by acknowledging the false sense of authenticity that nineteenth century empiricism created and utilized within the archives. Through postmodernism archival

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<sup>111</sup> Richard J. Cox, *No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal*, (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), 39.

<sup>112</sup> Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51, 16.

collections are not the objective and impartial aggregations believed by past generations. Archives and the documents produced, such as finding aids, are constructions telling a story in their own way, creating their own hierarchies and structures.<sup>113</sup>

Not only does this allow archivists to acknowledge their biases, but it reveals the untrustworthiness of Jenkinsonian theory and its illusion of authenticity through passive custodianship. Ultimately, postmodernism allows archivists to proclaim their position in society and acknowledge their professional responsibility as shapers of the record. This comes with the added responsibility of justifying themselves to the public in order to cultivate and maintain trust in the archives.<sup>114</sup>

## **Trust in Archivists**

Through this acknowledgement of power and responsibility archivists situate the archives as cultural constructions of society that in turn shape the record through appraisal. It is therefore impossible to completely separate ourselves from the collections we process. Assertions of neutrality in keeping society's records create a situation in which archivists exist as mere custodians, incapable of making decisions yet morally exempt from responsibility. That is not to say that archivists do not want to maintain some detachment and fairness when dealing with the records, but we do not want a total "disengagement from life."<sup>115</sup> If we want to uphold "public faith," archivists need to engage the public and place

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<sup>113</sup> Heald, "Is There Room For Archives in the Postmodern World?" 91.

<sup>114</sup> Sarah Tyacke, "Archives in a Wider World: The Culture and Politics of Archives," *Archivaria* 52, 22.

<sup>115</sup> Jimerson, "Archives for All," 271.

themselves in the public eye. Trust only comes with awareness and hiding in our ivory towers (now called archives) does not and will not inspire trust from anyone.

Archivists, however, share responsibility for the hidden nature of the profession. Society calls for accountability and transparency on the part of institutions, but glosses over functionaries such as archivists. If an archivist is effectively told that her contributions are not worthy of notice by the public at large, then what could possibly motivate her to step forward and announce her actions regarding archival collections and the historical record? This makes trust in archivists a more pressing concern since their perceived invisibility may not last for long. Though archivists acknowledge their placement in the grander scheme of history and the societal record, once the *public* acknowledges them there will be a greater call for accountability on the part of archivists. Effective means of accountability will then determine the amount of trust placed in archives through the actions of the archivist.

In order to achieve trust from the public, archivists have to be held to certain ethical standards. According to Glenn Dingwall, “As public servants, we try to draw a line between right and wrong acts, differentiating between those that contribute to the public good and those that detract from it.”<sup>116</sup> Appraisal cannot be seen as a process that occurs based on the whims of the archivist. There has to be a foundation for these choices. Dingwall examines two categories of normative ethics and finds archival codes of ethics favor deontological theories “that seek to establish the morality of an act based solely on the act itself, without regard to the consequences of that act.”<sup>117</sup> To put it another way, archivists make the decision and believe it to be the right one without considering the outcome of such actions.

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<sup>116</sup> Glenn Dingwall, “Trusting Archivists: The Role of Archival Ethics Codes in Establishing Public Faith,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2004), 12.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

This is in contrast to teleological theories that stress the “moral act is that act out of all possible acts that produces the best possible consequences.”<sup>118</sup> Basically, the decision is made based on what the archivist believes would be the best outcome overall. Criticisms of the teleological theory contemplate the scenario in which the best outcome may in fact be immoral. Immorality, however, is also subjective when one considers the actions of archivists under powerful regimes or within the boundaries of a repository. The best outcome may be the one that requires the archivist to act as whistleblower or break the law to bring attention to a greater problem. The point is that even from an ethical point of view, decisions have consequences and those consequences are what archivists have to deal with and justify to society.

Is an established ethical code enough to ensure the trust of the public in archives and in the decisions made by archivists? It certainly doesn’t hurt. But Richard J. Cox thinks that “while archivists have become more sophisticated in how they consider appraisal, the public perception of what archives are about, especially in their selective identification and preservation from the vast documentary universe, is still weak.”<sup>119</sup> And upon viewing the Society of American Archivist’s Code of Ethics, the ethical standards to which archivists might be held are still just a skeleton guideline. Factoring in individual repositories and ethical guidelines upheld by institutions as well as responsibility to the donors, archivists might have some trouble choosing to whom and what they are beholden. As Dingwall points out, archivists hamper the trust of the public by lacking “any enforcement mechanisms within the archival profession.”<sup>120</sup> In order to truly “professionalize” ourselves, we need to take

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>119</sup> Richard J. Cox, “Making the Records Speak: Archival Appraisal, Memory, Preservation, and Collecting,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2001), 395.

<sup>120</sup> Dingwall, “Trusting Archivists,” 27.

more action in holding our own members accountable for the decisions made in shaping collections.

“Archivists have perhaps been fortunate that as functionaries of society they have not as yet been called upon to answer to the community for their selection and acquisition choices or their methodologies,” says Roy C. Schaeffer.<sup>121</sup> It is true, archivists as professionals often blend into the background. From this perspective, we have been able to exist with little interference from the outside world, placing us in a position in which we would not need to justify our actions since no one seems to think we exist. Society, however, has changed from placing tremendous value on secrecy and privacy to a more open, transparent culture, which makes “appraisal a harder standard to justify.”<sup>122</sup> Archivists and the archival profession have now come under more scrutiny with this change in society as more and more people acknowledge the position of archivists as shapers of society and memory.

Many archivists see this shift as a good thing. Archivists such as Randall Jimerson, Elizabeth Snowden Johnson, and Mark A. Greene are advocating for the “activist archivist” as a model to which archivists should strive. “Activist archivists,” a term coined by historian Howard Zinn, “realize the elite bias of their collections” and “actively seek records to document the lives of ordinary people.”<sup>123</sup> In the Information Age we acknowledge the fact that knowledge is power and as archivists we have “a moral professional responsibility” to be “active agents for change, in accordance with...existing professional principles, by taking

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<sup>121</sup> Schaeffer, “Transcendent Concepts,” 615.

<sup>122</sup> Menne-Haritz, “Appraisal or Documentation,” 531.

<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth Snowden Johnson, “Our Archives, Our Selves: Documentation Strategy and the Re-appraisal of Professional Identity” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2008): 191.

active steps to counter biases of previous archival practices.”<sup>124</sup> In this case, archivists embrace their position as agents of social change, making decisions about their collections in favor of representing a broader image of society without favoring the elite practices that relied on provenance and original order to tell the story.

We must also acknowledge our own inherent biases as human beings. In making a decision, an archivist is not just calling upon an ethical background cultivated through training. They are actually making decisions based around aspects of their own identity whether a political bias, cultural background, or education. Because of these biases there is a danger in becoming active agents and we must heed the warnings of archivists like Verne Harris who see the possibility of “activist archivists pursuing any and every political agenda.”<sup>125</sup> The potential is there for archivists to become entangled in the social and political climates of their time. To place ourselves too much in the public eye would call upon further scrutiny in which all decisions are questioned, preventing us from doing our jobs effectively. The question is: how might we accomplish this? How can archivists remain active agents yet still have the confidence in our jobs to make decisions without fear of making mistakes?<sup>126</sup>

## **Documentation**

At the heart of this discussion of appraisal and archivists are the issues of trust and accountability. Though postmodern thought opened archives to the broader spectrum of

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<sup>124</sup> Jimerson, “Archives for All,” 254.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>126</sup> Greene, “The Power of Archives,” 28.

historical interpretation and contextualization it similarly exposed archives as an institutional tool responsible for the societal record and complicit in any gaps or slights within the record detrimental to its citizenry. With such high stakes, archivists become heroes or villains, figures of necessity or obstacles in the way of the truth. Regardless, archivists, in order to meet the demands of an ever-increasingly transparent society, require a form of documentation, a justification of their decisions, especially in the realm of appraisal. The necessity of documentation in appraisal is predicated on its position as one of the first steps in the archival process because “if the appraisal function is flawed, then the record is flawed and if the record is flawed, the profession will never achieve its strategic ends.”<sup>127</sup> It becomes our job as archivists to make sure that even if there are flaws then we have a means of accountability for them.

As we have already established, appraisal methods and theory function on the assignation of value to records in order to “weed” through the material to find what is worth preserving and what should be destroyed. Brien Brothman utilizes this gardening metaphor to acknowledge the construction of value by archivists through appraisal. He claims that, “we are not simply “acquiring” and “preserving” records of value; we are *creating value*, that is, an order of value, by putting things in their proper place, by making place(s) for them.”<sup>128</sup> If we are creating value and making places for records, then it seems as though we need a means of accountability not only to protect archivists but also to instill trust in the archivist’s actions to the public. Archivists are in positions of power and authority over societal records and “an effective society expects those who can exercise their authority to be accountable for

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<sup>127</sup> Brian P.N. Beaven, “Macro-Appraisal: From Theory to Practice,” *Archivaria* 48, 155.

<sup>128</sup> Brien Brothman, “Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice,” *Archivaria* 32, (Summer, 1991): 82.

their actions.”<sup>129</sup> Documentation is another step towards building trust with the public and it is our responsibility to ensure that the actions we take are traceable and justified. We have to be just as transparent; to say so and do otherwise is to make archives a profession of *hypocrisy*.

Appraisal documentation is a means of documenting the actions of an archivist and holding her accountable for her decisions toward the record. Though the archive, as the institutional body, might have more visibility in the public eye, it is the archivist and her actions that require the most scrutiny. The previous section discussed the importance of ensuring trust in both the archive and archivists, and though the two are interrelated, it is trust in the archivist that I am trying to bolster. The public and users in general are on the outside looking in while archivists are on the inside looking out. Documentation of appraisal requires outsiders to look at what happens to records within the archive, allowing them access to the internal functions of the archive and how archivists do their job. In the reverse, appraisal documentation gives the archivist the ability to showcase their decision-making process and training while emphasizing the interconnectedness of the archivist to the collections as well as the institution.

There are other mechanisms within archives that are relied on as forms of accountability. Collecting policies, ethical codes, risk assessments, records retention schedules, and appraisal reports serve as tools for archivists to meet institutional requirements but do not necessarily take into account the actions of the individual archivist. And at the end of the day, the institution is not making the final appraisal decisions for each collection. It is an archivist making those decisions; a biased, flawed human being attempting

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<sup>129</sup> Laura Millar, “An Obligation of Trust: Speculations on Accountability and Description,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 69, (Spring/Summer, 2006): 61.

to make objective decisions. Codes of ethics and collecting policies can tell us what is significant, what is ethical, what is important, but the individual archivist will also have a personal idea of significance and importance. It is therefore *important* that we justify the *significance* of our decisions.

But what form should appraisal documentation take? Should it be its own separate entity? Can it replace other forms of accountability or is it an additional mechanism? Accountability literature amongst archivists has certainly increased within the last decade with many trying to find ways of incorporating forms of accountability into archival processing. Personally, I find this approach the best. We are not trying to reinvent the wheel, but documentation of appraisal must become an inherent aspect of archival processing. And though much of the literature discussed is not addressing appraisal specifically, it would not be difficult to incorporate appraisal into these suggestions.

Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, in their intriguing work, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” examine the possibilities of adding information to the finding aid that relates the decisions and the decision-making process of the archivist. Their primary focus is the failure of the finding aid for generally omitting the impact of the processor’s work and only allowing one viewpoint on the collection to be represented.<sup>130</sup> Their solutions are the colophon and annotations. The “colophon represents a certain self-conscious perspective on the part of the archivist and the processor’s role in shaping the collection and presenting a specific view.”<sup>131</sup> This is not unreasonable when one takes into account, as Heather MacNeil states, that “finding aids, like scholarly editions, are not simply

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<sup>130</sup> Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2002), 217.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

neutral tools for facilitating research. They are cultural texts, historically situated in time and place.”<sup>132</sup>

The finding aid is created in the archive and it is the first thing any researcher or user will often see of the collection. What is included in the finding aid tells as much of a story as the information found in the collection. In the postmodern age we are concerned as much with the narrative as we are with the form and context of a document.<sup>133</sup> Robert McIntosh similarly observes that “the creative role of the archivist – authorship – encompasses the spectrum of archival functions,” and “to acknowledge our authorship, our vital place in the creation of society’s memory.”<sup>134</sup> McIntosh is essentially calling for archivists to acknowledge their role as the shapers of society through which documentation would leave behind an evidentiary record of those actions. Richard J. Cox points out that, “collectors themselves wrote memoirs, articles, and sometimes voluminous correspondence explaining their work, with at least a partial eye to preserving not just their collections but the reasons for their efforts.”<sup>135</sup> By adding a colophon to the finding aid we have a means of recording “information about the records” chain of custody, the kinds of choices made by the archivist in the course of appraising, arranging, and describing those records, as well as information about the archivist and her perspective on the records.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Heather MacNeil, “Picking Our Text: Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2005), 274.

<sup>133</sup> Heald, “Is There Room for Archives in the Postmodern World?” 92.

<sup>134</sup> Robert McIntosh quoted in Luciana Duranti, “Meeting the Challenge of Contemporary Records: Does it Require a Role Change for the Archivist?” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 63, No. 1, (2000), 8.

<sup>135</sup> Richard J. Cox, “Making the Records Speak: Archival Appraisal, Memory, Preservation, and Collecting,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2001), 398.

<sup>136</sup> MacNeil, “Picking Our Text,” 273.

Heather MacNeil takes archival description standards to task by “exploring the link between and among authenticity, archival description, and archival accountability.”<sup>137</sup> Specifically, she focuses on the *General International Standard Archival Description* or *ISAD(G)* because “it emphasizes certain aspects of the records” representation and downplays others,” which “predisposes both archivists and users to particular modes of understanding.”<sup>138</sup> Her most pressing concern is the inability of *ISAD(G)* to account for the entirety of a collection’s history. The standard’s emphasis remains on the actions of creators towards collections, but neglects to set standards for the description of a collection’s *archival history*. This failure to account for archival history guides archivists away from documenting the “journey records have taken before their arrival in an archival institution” as well as changes made to collections once they enter the archive.<sup>139</sup> Without this additional information about the context of collections, MacNeil believes future users will remain misinformed. To rectify this situation, she proposes the addition of *creator history* and *archival history* areas to descriptive standards. These changes would force archivists to alter their approach to description by acknowledging the before and after nature of archival processing.

Appraisal is already incorporated into MacNeil’s proposal, though it is not explicitly stated. While MacNeil focuses on the need for documentation of archivists in accounting for their statements in description, appraisal fits into the descriptive area of *archival history* perfectly. Appraisal decisions can influence description, so to have an area that requires an explanation on the part of archivists gives them and the archival institution a chance to

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<sup>137</sup> Heather MacNeil, “Trusting Description: Authenticity, Accountability, and Archival Description Standards,” *Journal of Archival Organization*, 7:3, (2009): 90.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

“demonstrate, rather than simply assert, their role as trusted custodian.”<sup>140</sup> This element allows an archivist to explain the state of the collection upon its acquisition, the appraisal of the collection via whatever methods the archivist or the institution utilizes, and reasons behind the preservation or destruction of materials. The element not only addresses the custody of the collection, but also the *custodian* of the collection. If appraisal is necessary to *archival history*, then understanding who is in charge of the collection is just as important.

*Describing Archives: A Content Standard* or *DACS*, the American archival descriptive standard, should also be subject to similar changes. MacNeil points out that *DACS* has a custodial history element, but is critical of the manual’s commentary to create an access point for a custodian, but not necessarily for someone who “merely stored the materials.”<sup>141</sup> *DACS* neglects to account for the archivist as part of the custodial history of collections, which diminishes the role of archivists in the construction of collections starting with appraisal. Without the ability to include ourselves in the history of a collection, archivists are, to some extent, excluded from accounting for their own actions because the descriptive standards, arguably the only “universal” mechanism in the archival community, tell them that their actions are not important enough to warrant inclusion. Those unaware of the impact of custodial history would assume that the collection presented to them in the archives was always as it appears. If descriptive standards cannot effectively guide archivists in preparing the proper means of explaining their place in the collection’s history or construction, then the content standard has to be revised.

Though the custodial history element in *DACS* lacks the inclusion of the archivist, it may be possible to incorporate the archivist into *ISAD (G)*, *DACS* and its computer-oriented

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>141</sup> *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2004), 59.

sibling, Encoded Archival Description or EAD. All three have appraisal descriptive elements, but *DACS* actually states that the appraisal element “provides information about the rationale for appraisal decisions, destruction actions, and disposition schedules that are relevant to the understanding and use of the materials being described.”<sup>142</sup> There is the potential here to include the archivist within the appraisal descriptive element and acknowledge her position as part of the collection and the reason behind its past and present states. If an element is created for the archivist, then she can explain her part in the archival process, not only in her position as custodian but as appraiser and how those decisions correlate to the institution and its standards. EAD has no specific element that addresses the archivist, but one could be created that would allow archivists to keep up-to-date information not only on the collections they process but on themselves.

Terry Cook has been the most prominent, and the most controversial, in his discussion of accountability on the part of archivists. In his defense of postmodern thinking as a relevant approach to archival practice, Cook advocates complete documentation of the *archivist*. He states:

“I believe that appraising archivists should themselves be formally documented and linked to these same appraisal reports and descriptive entities, with a full curriculum vitae placed on accessible files, complimented by autobiographical details of the values they used in appraisal and that they reflected in description.”<sup>143</sup>

Like Brien Brothman, Cook is concerned with the tremendous power granted to the archivist to interpret information in the collection without justification to the user.<sup>144</sup> This should be

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>143</sup> Terry Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51, (Spring, 2001): 34-35.

problematic on the part of the users since they have no knowledge as to the identity of the archivist. His solution is the thorough documentation of the archivist as a professional and as a person.

The impact of Cook's statement has been a matter of discussion amongst archivists over the extent of documentation needed about the archivist. Catherine Bailey questions the necessity of the curriculum vitae since the individual archivist's appraisal "is only the first of many levels of approval, and that each of the subsequent levels can have an impact and influence on the resulting decisions."<sup>145</sup> Her criticism, however, is reflective of her status as an employee of the Canadian National Archives where, as in any governmental position, there are administrative hierarchies requiring more paperwork than some smaller repositories. Her concerns necessitate consideration of the plethora of different archival institutions domestically and abroad, all of which operate by different standards. Other critics, such as Heather MacNeil, find the amount of documentation and its potential to overwhelm users worrisome.<sup>146</sup> If archivists continue to add more information to the finding aid, then there is a risk of overloading users with information that could alter the perception of archival research as more work than it's worth.

Problematic to Cook's documentation of the archivist is the inclusion of autobiographical details in justifying their appraisal decisions. Postmodern thinking asks: What information is necessary for this autobiography? Can an archivist write an objective autobiography? If we already acknowledge that archives and archivists are biased and flawed, how are users to trust that the biographical details provided about the archivist *by* the

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<sup>144</sup> Brien Brothman, "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction," *Archivaria* 48, (Fall, 1999): 74.

<sup>145</sup> Catherine Bailey, "Trust Me, It's All Good Stuff," quoted in Heather MacNeil's, "Trusting Description," 104.

<sup>146</sup> MacNeil, "Trusting Description," 104.

archivist are trustworthy?<sup>147</sup> There is also the matter of the archivist's right to *personal privacy*. Professional information is all well and good since every archivist has to supply such information to her employers, but Cook seems to want every detail of the archivist's life documented and linked to the collections she produces. But how far is too far? How much personal information are archivists, though public servants, willing to share?

To be clear, archivists, no matter what their position within an institution or repository, are public servants. My discussion of archivists, thus far, has been in the general sense, making the assumption of archivists as employees of historical societies, libraries, and federal or university archives. Admittedly, these are all institutions that serve the public, but my discussion does not exempt archivists working within the private sector (e.g., corporate or religious repositories) from their responsibility to serve the public as well. The archivist for the Coca Cola Company, for example, though she utilizes record-keeping practices that best serve the company, must also keep in mind Coca Cola's obligation of trust and accountability to the public as a corporation. Businesses and corporations serve the public by providing for the public. If the company upholds a mission of maintaining accountability, then the records within the archive must reflect this and it is the responsibility of the archivist to remain committed to that mission.

While I agree with Cook's call for documentation of the archivist, we might be able to limit the amount of information necessary in the autobiography. The intellectual challenge displayed by the archivist in "making the leap...through contextual and content reading and intellectual inference," should require the inclusion, at minimum, of an educational

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<sup>147</sup> Geoffrey Yeo, conversation with the author, December 9, 2010.

background.<sup>148</sup> Other details such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, religion, etc. might simply be stated without going into significant detail or remain optional in the same way that we are asked to proclaim these aspects of our identity on forms and applications. It is also worth noting that this kind of information is sought out when one looks for professional help from a doctor or a lawyer, so it is not unreasonable that someone would be curious about the background of an archivist as a professional.

Appraisal documentation, however, does not apply to archivists alone. Records and information managers (RIM) also benefit from documentation. In this case, however, I believe RIMs have an advantage over their archival counterparts. As Richard J. Cox states in his book, *Ethics, Accountability, and Recordkeeping in a Dangerous World*, records “create a trail of an individual’s or organization’s activities.”<sup>149</sup> As such, they “must be seen as purveyors of evidence that can be readily deciphered to identify when an organization or individual has stepped over legal or ethical boundaries.”<sup>150</sup> Though he is speaking from the perspective of an archivist, if we are to apply Cox’s statements to records management, then institutions and organizations, under the watchful eyes of records managers and a host of legal and ethical obligations, already have built-in forms of accountability “deemed a bureaucratic function.”<sup>151</sup>

Internally, records retention schedules, and to some extent risk assessments, provide documentation of the position of records and a time schedule by which one can decipher if and when a record will be kept or destroyed. Externally, legislation, most recently the

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<sup>148</sup> Jennifer Meehan, “Making the Leap from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description,” *The American Archivist*, Vol. 72, (Spring/Summer, 2009): 80.

<sup>149</sup> Richard J. Cox, *Ethics, Accountability, and Recordkeeping in a Dangerous World*, (London: Facet Publishing, 2006), 162.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, requires the auditing of businesses and organizations in which documentation is essential in providing evidence of legal and ethical compliance.

Records retention schedules are essentially the tool by which records and information managers perform appraisal. From within businesses and institutions, records are created and, depending on long-term or short-term function, stored for a period of time before they are either destroyed or kept to later be transferred to a records center or archive. The physical or electronically created retention schedule is, at its most basic, a form of documentation. By supplying information such as what is kept or destroyed and for how long the records will be kept before they are destroyed, records managers essentially document their decisions. When issues of accountability are factored in, one need only consult the retention policy and the retention schedule in order to observe the decisions of the records manager.

Laurie Fischer provides a sample of a retention schedule form that includes the record number or code, the name of the record or record series, a description of the record series, its functions, and purpose, a retention category/code/citation for legal cross-referencing, the total time period the record should be retained, the active retention period in which a record is retained in active or onsite office filing areas, and an area for “additional explanatory notes or clarifying comments.”<sup>152</sup> It is in the “additional comments” section that documentation is provided. The records manager has the ability to justify the placement and description of a record or a record series, the basis of which would hopefully come from any of the aforementioned categories of the retention schedule. While this might seem superfluous, whatever insight we might glean about the decisions made by those in charge of records and collections can only help in our preservation of the societal record.

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<sup>152</sup> Laurie Fischer, “Condition Critical: Developing Records Retention Schedules,” *Information Management Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (Jan/Feb, 2006), 28.

Absent from the retention schedule is a place for biographical information, which makes sense considering that records and information managers are one part of a greater administrative body. Records retention schedules pass through many hands before they are approved, but only one or two archivists will work on a collection at a given time. Including the curriculum vitae of every member of the administration who worked on the retention schedule would be superfluous. Retention schedules are based on clearly defined requirements that have legal consequences if not followed correctly, making the decisions of records managers more transparent and easier to justify. I would, however, suggest that the “additional comments” section be renamed. The title implies that this end section is optional and does not necessarily have to be filled out in order to have a complete record. The same problem can be found in finding aids. Though archivists value the finding aid as a form of documentation, indeed a record in and of itself, the various note fields rarely stress the importance of providing information. The point is that the finding aid and the retention schedule form could be a means of implementing documentation, but only if those note fields are *required* to be filled out in order for the form to be accepted.

Appraisal reports are the most misleading documents in archival processing, more so than finding aids. Though the name implies a very cut-and-dry interpretation of its function as “transparent record of decisions,” appraisal reports resemble glorified inventories reporting more on the condition, size, and type of records and materials rather than reporting on the decision-making process practiced by the archivist through appraisal and how that has affected the outcome of the collection.<sup>153</sup> That is not to say that the initial function of the appraisal report is without merit. All of the information included is still important, but

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<sup>153</sup> Helen Mercer, TNA Inspection, and Client Manager Unit, “How to Compile an Appraisal Report,” Version 2, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, (November, 2006), 4, retrieved online December 28, 2010, [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/appraisal\\_report\\_v2.pdf](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/appraisal_report_v2.pdf)

appraisal reports should reflect a greater understating of the longevity of collections. The archivist who initially appraised the collection may not be the only archivist to ever work with the materials. The addition of new material or the hiring of a new archivist require appraisal reports to be far more detailed in their assessment of the content of collections, the condition of materials, the intellectual and contextual placement of the collection, and the archivist's position as appraiser.

Appraisal reports, however, hold a great deal of potential for a standardized, if not "universal" appraisal documentation. In my research, I came across a document through the Archives Association of Ontario (AAO) that provides criteria questions for making appraisal reports. "Archival Appraisal: What to Keep and What to Destroy?" (*Appendix 1*) presents a series of questions the archivist should keep in mind whilst composing an appraisal report, such as: What is the administrative, evidential, or informational value of the records to the organization? Are the records primary or unique? Can the records be properly preserved?<sup>154</sup> Though the report only encourages archivists to keep these questions in mind, a more effective approach would require the archivist to *answer* these questions in the report.

By presenting the questions as a guideline, the archivist has the option of whether or not to report as much or as little information as possible. If the archivist is especially burdened by a large backlog, she may only put enough information to meet organizational requirements. But, if the appraisal report questions were *required* to be answered, then the archivist would have to take the time to think about the necessity of the materials in the collection as well as the gravity of her position in making these decisions. Additional

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<sup>154</sup> "Archival Appraisal: What to Keep and What to Destroy?" Archives Association of Ontario, (1990), 1; retrieved from AAO Archives Association of Ontario on January 2, 2011, [http://aao-archivists.ca/services/archives-advisor/archives-advisors-notebook/cat\\_view/32-advisors-notebook](http://aao-archivists.ca/services/archives-advisor/archives-advisors-notebook/cat_view/32-advisors-notebook)

questions, based on the needs of the repository, would have to be included in the appraisal report questionnaire in order to fully enhance the document.

To further emphasize my point, I have created a sample of a modified appraisal report (*see Appendix 2*) incorporating changes advocated by Heather MacNeil and Terry Cook as well as the criteria questions provided by Appendix 1. The first section of the appraisal report would begin with questions of custodial history, allowing the archivist to acknowledge the creator of the collection, any previous custodians, the current state of the collection, as well as changes in provenance and original order that may have occurred. The body of the report would encompass an inventory of the collection as well as recommendations for restriction of materials, preservation, and destruction. Recommendations for arrangement and descriptive elements could be included and later incorporated into the finding aid. The last section would be significant to the archivist as the appraiser. Biographical information could be included, but if the repository already has the archivist's biographical details on a website, then it can be linked to the report. There would also be questions about the archivist's methodology, asking for their reasoning behind decisions for acquisition, preservation, destruction, as well as the arrangement and descriptions used in the collection.

It is the last section that may cause the most problems in terms of how archivists view the report. Some might see the report as either an invasion of privacy or a questioning of the archivist's abilities as a professional. First of all, aspects of identity are not the end all be all of the decision-making process by any stretch of the imagination. To say that a person makes their decisions entirely based on those aspects is foolhardy. Though I am a woman that does not mean that every decision I make is based on gender. However, being a woman can influence how I might approach a collection or provide insight into a particular subject. The

same might be true of my religious affiliation, topics of interest outside of the archive, or the time period in which I grew up. One can never know the extent that identity plays into decisions made, but the last section of the report provides a space in which the archivist can recognize the potential influence.

The report is also flexible enough to accommodate the decision-making process of an archivist in terms of appraisal instead of documenting their entire life's history as justification. For example: sampling materials from a collection. Sampling is a method used by archivists in the event of receiving materials that are numerous in quantity and also contain repetitious information like financial records or inventories. The archivist then selects from the collection a sample of what is contained that effectively covers the scope of the collection, but reduces the size. In the case of a modified appraisal report, an archivist could simply explain this methodology. I do not want to set too rigid a standard by which to complete this report since there are a multitude of appraisal methods in practice. This may be a case in which best practices win out, at first, until more research can be done as to how the new appraisal report can be effectively implemented.

After composing the appraisal report, the archivist would sign off on the report and if she has a supervisor have them sign off on the document as well. The appraisal report could then be attached to the finding aid as an additional document, included in the collection's inventory, or filed away separately by the head archivist. By conducting appraisal reports in this way, the repository and the institution have a record of the archivist's decisions, collections are more thoroughly understood by users and in-coming archivists alike, and there is a document on file to which the archivist can be held accountable in the case of legal recourse or accusations of wrong-doing.

What I have essentially outlined is the formalization of the appraisal report as a document of accountability for archivists during the process of appraisal. The outline effectively led to the creation of the sample in Appendix 2. In describing the modified appraisal report, a sample, I felt, was required for my own visualization of what the report could encompass. Some of the questions are directly borrowed from the AAO questionnaire while others are amalgamations of descriptive elements from *DACS*, recommendations from Heather MacNeil's article regarding *ISAD(G)*'s descriptive elements, and my own assumptions of relevant questions for appraisal.

The problem with such a recommendation for a modified appraisal report is the size and scope of archival repositories and their backlogs. This new appraisal report would take up more time in the processing of collections. Repositories, especially smaller organizations with fewer employees, will have a harder time adjusting to new requirements that force them to set aside their already sizable backlogs. Current archival practices stress the need to process less and make more materials accessible to users since they are, in many ways, the lifeblood of the archive.<sup>155</sup>

Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner are the most notable for suggesting this approach. "More Product, Less Process," or MPLP encourages archivists to process collections faster, minimize backlogs, and make more collections available to users. They believe that minimal "processing should become the new baseline approach to arranging and describing series and collections."<sup>156</sup> They do not, however, consider MPLP a "universal template," arguing that there are some collections that "certainly justify more traditional

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<sup>155</sup> Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Processing: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68:2 (Fall/Winter, 2005): 212-213.

<sup>156</sup> Mark A. Greene, "MPLP: It's Not Just for Processing Anymore," *The American Archivist*, Vol. 73, (Spring/Summer, 2010): 176.

processing approaches.”<sup>157</sup> Though not originally included in the article, appraisal is a time consuming function of processing – especially for Greene – occurring, too often, at the file or item level.<sup>158</sup> To remedy the situation he suggests that: 1) a clearly defined acquisitions policy will help archivists appraise materials to meet the needs of the repository and 2) more on-site or loading dock appraisals will encourage speedier acquisitions by assessing relevance and meaningful aggregations at the source of creation or via questions with the creator prior to the collection’s arrival at the repository.<sup>159</sup> It is understandable, from the view of smaller repositories, that a thorough appraisal report might be discouraged based on MPLP recommendations.

Formalized appraisal reports, however, can comply with MPLP to ensure quick access to materials. Biographical information is a one-time creation, easily linked to the finding aid online or attached as an additional document if the repository does not have online finding aids. Questions on the report can be adjusted depending on the repository, the only requirements being that the archivist answers questions regarding previous ownership of the collections as well as questions about decisions made towards the collection. For on-site or loading dock appraisals, as suggested by Mark Greene, the appraisal report can be modified to fit the nature of the appraisal process. If the archivist is following a specific acquisition policy, then, like records managers, she can cite the policy as justification for her appraisal of the collection and the resultant acquisition of materials in the last section of the report. If communication occurred with the creator prior to appraisal or acquisition of the collection, then questions asked of the creator can be included as well. On-site appraisal will

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-181.

also contribute greatly to the custodial history of the collection found in the first section of the report.

Where we might improve in order to reduce the amount of time on appraisal are collecting and acquisition policies. The collecting policy of a repository sets the tone for what will or will not be accepted into the archive. If the policy is vague (e.g., “Our repository collects materials pertaining to aviation.”), then the repository leaves itself open to any and all materials that fall under their vague policy as well as any sundry material included when collections are donated. Just because the collection belonged to a pilot, to keep with the aviation example, doesn’t mean the repository needs his magazines. Explaining a vague policy to donors can be difficult, especially when the donor makes the assumption that the archive will take the entirety of the collection. Many donors do not expect an archive to be that picky. However, if the collecting policy is stricter in outlining what the repository wants, then the archivist, when she is appraising a collection, can explain to the donor what they will accept and what they won’t based on the policy.

Once the appraisal report is complete, much of it can be copied into the corresponding elements on the finding aid. By making the appraisal report *DACS* compliant it also meets the corresponding EAD requirements, which increases the flexibility of the report to adapt to other archival standards. Database systems, such as Archivist’s Toolkit, would also work favorably at this stage. Most, if not all, archival repositories have computer access or free database systems and many of these database systems have the ability to generate finding aids. If appraisal reports could similarly be generated through these database systems, then archivists could essentially fill in the blank sections and generate the corresponding document, which would considerably cut time during processing.

Though more time may be consumed, initially, by creating the modified appraisal report, the additional time is well spent, giving the user a better understanding of the collection and the archivist's decisions as well as providing protection for the archivist in the future. As archivists become accustomed to the process, responses to questions can be shortened or copied based on the similarity of materials, descriptive elements, or subject matter. Essential to the appraisal report is the archivist and her understanding that her answers have real consequences for the future of the collection and its potential users.

## **Conclusion**

Appraisal theories and methods were developed out of necessity in the advent of technological shifts after two world wars that significantly increased the amount of records produced. Prior to World War I, archival practices adhered to the European School and its rigid structure rooted in the assumption of authenticity in form over the content of records while bestowing trust and authority in the creator. According to Sir Hilary Jenkinson, records and archives were synonymous, interchangeable and indistinguishable. Through their placement in the archives, by their creator, records automatically became archival by the sheer fact that they had been saved in the first place. Acting as anything more than trusted custodians, archivists overstepped their bounds and intruded on the authenticity of the record in Jenkinson's mind.

In defense of Jenkinson, European practices were adequate for their time period. Record-keeping technology was minimal and society had not yet progressed to the point that more sophisticated and complex methods were required. However, technological

improvements in the aftermath of two world wars created an unprecedented bulk of records and documents that archivists were incapable of storing in their entirety. In order to combat the bulk, archivists needed a way to determine which records were valuable enough to keep so that the rest could be destroyed. Advocated, at first, by T.R. Schellenberg and others, appraisal was born out of the necessity of archivists to meet the demands of their profession in service of both the records and society.

Though appraisal is now an essential component of archival processing, it remains an open forum, a process evolving with society as record-making and record-keeping practices shift to accommodate the people they serve. Through appraisal, archivists better understand the placement of collections within the historical record, creating a more accurate representation of society. The nature of appraisal allows for variation and adaptability, a necessity given the variety of repositories and institutions and the materials they contain. But the proliferation of appraisal practices creates inconsistency, preventing standardization and a universal appraisal theory.

Without an agreed upon appraisal theory, scrutiny of the archivist's decisions becomes of the utmost concern. Only after appraisal can other aspects of processing occur, which places the archivist in a position of power not only over the collection and its materials but over the historical record as well. The lasting image of society is dependent on the decisions of the archivist to preserve that which she deems the most valuable and accurately representative of her society and culture. With the responsibility of this position, archivists agree that "in making such decisions regarding archival selection and appraisal, archivists run the risk of intruding their own concepts of history and society into the archival record."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Jimerson, "Archives for All," 277.

Documentation not only provides evidence of the decision-making process of appraisal and selection, but it also provides a means by which archivists can be held accountable for their decisions. In every other profession, documentation is required so that when professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, go before review boards they have something to present as evidence. Archivists are just as likely to become “targets of „malpractice“ suits” because of our precarious position between history and society and should have documentation implemented during processing even if they believe in the Jenkinsonian paradigm.<sup>161</sup>

Of course, equity in terms of the level of “malpractice” on the part of archivists versus doctors and lawyers is worth noting. While other professions have a sense of immediacy about righting wrongs that have occurred, archival wrong-doing may not be noticed for an extensive period of time. Punishments for archivists are minimal in comparison to other professions as well. Unless the archivist is caught in the act of theft or selling items illegally, prison sentences rarely occur. At most, the archivist is fired from her job, but the social stigma of being fired and the subsequent search for a job comes with its own sense of justice. Punishment is difficult to enforce on a profession in which decisions are ethically based. If an archivist acts ethically we must also determine how much weight her personal ethical decisions carry within the legal boundaries of society.

Furthermore, documentation allows for current and future generations of archivists to look back and determine who and where the archivist came from and what might have influenced them in making their decisions. With documentation, we can have access to the mind of the archivists, why they made their decisions, what influenced them at the time. It is not enough to look at codes of ethics or collecting policies, we have to know the mind of the

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<sup>161</sup> Sink, “Appraisal: The Process of Choice,” 457.

person primarily involved in shaping the collection before we have even an inkling as to the true meaning of the collection. Above all else we have to remember that “in the very act of soliciting and preserving the records...archivists actively legitimize” their collections and present them as “worthy to remember and integral to understanding society as a whole.”<sup>162</sup> Without documentation we remain in the same rut, striving for a way to stop privileging the few and broadening awareness of the many and the undocumented.

The next step would be further research into how we can incorporate many of the recommendations of this thesis. A survey of archival repositories and their appraisal practices would have to be conducted as well as a survey of appraisal reports. Though I have provided my version of a modified appraisal report it would be wise to form a committee, possibly through the Society of American Archivists, that could get together and generate an officially sanctioned document that could then be utilized in implementation experiments not unlike the work conducted by Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young. At the same time, more research should be conducted on incorporating the archivist into descriptive standards such as *DACS*, *ISAD(G)*, and *EAD*. Even if a modified appraisal report does not come to fruition, the archival community must create a space for archivists to become more visible to the public.

Grandma, as we have discovered, was well intentioned in her decision to remove pages from the picture book. And though the granddaughter was fortunate enough to find an explanation from her grandmother, the important question to keep in mind is: Should the granddaughter continue to pass down this story to her child? There is nothing wrong with reading a story that has been manipulated so long as the audience is aware of what has happened. The granddaughter is free to read the story to her child, to pass on the same memories that made her childhood so happy, but it now falls on her shoulders to reveal to her

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<sup>162</sup> Light and Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations,” 220.

child that information was removed, that the story is not what it seems. In doing so, she acts responsibly and shows her daughter that the power in knowledge goes both ways.

## Appendix 1: Archives Association of Ontario's (AAO) Appraisal Criteria

### **ARCHIVAL APPRAISAL: WHAT TO KEEP AND WHAT TO DESTROY?**

The following factors should be kept in mind when deciding what to keep and what to destroy:

**1. What is the administrative, evidential or informational value of the records to the organization?**

Are the records required for the on-going administration of the organization or to protect its financial and legal interests? E.g. board minutes, by-laws, charter of incorporation. Do they document an event that is of cultural and/or historical significance to the organization? E.g. photographs of an awards banquet.

**2. Do the records meet the terms of your mandate and acquisition policy?**

Certain records may seem interesting but they may not belong in your archives. Do you have a mandate to acquire them? This speaks to the need to have a policy in place against which acquisitions can be reviewed. All records in your holdings should reflect your mandate and should be created by or pertain directly to your organization.

**3. Are the records primary or unique?**

Archives do not preserve published materials such as books and magazines, but rather primary records. The only exceptions to this apply to items such as annual reports, financial statements and newsletters (to name but a few) where one copy is being preserved for archival purposes even though the original was created in multiple copies. These types of records, however, must be unique to your organization. Scrapbooks of activities and functions can be considered archival, but only if the clippings are no longer attainable or are annotated.

**4. Is the information in the records duplicated in another set of records?**

For instance, most financial information is summarized in financial statements. For archival purposes, it is therefore not necessary to keep all bills and receipts. Also, most committees in an organization keep the same types of documents. It is not necessary to keep more than one copy of a report if that report is already being preserved in another set of records.

**5. Can the records be properly preserved?**

Occasionally records arrive at the archives in extremely poor physical condition. Do you have the resources to conserve and/or preserve them to make them useable? Will their presence in the archives jeopardize other records? For instance, mould on records can often spread.

...cont'd

## **Archival Appraisal - What to keep and what to destroy? (cont'd)**

### **6. Can the records be made available?**

Undue access restrictions may be cause to question if the records should be acquired in the first place.

#### **Summary**

Although it is often difficult to turn away certain records, keep in mind that archives are an on-going function. By keeping acquisition activity focused, one is able to ensure future growth to the collection and better service on the existing collection. The archives should never be a "dumping ground" for items that happen to be old. There must be some redeeming quality to the records to merit the investment into their preservation and care.

### Appendix 2: Sample Modified Appraisal Report

Series/Collection ID:	
Title:	
Quantity/Extent:	
Dates:	Languages:
Creator(s) Name:	
Repository:	
Series/Collection Location:	
Archivist(s):	

Section I: Series/Collection History (*answer all of the following questions relevant to the collection*)

1. Who is the creator? Are there multiple creators? If so, provide names and a brief summary of their contributions to the collection.
2. Where was the collection previously stored?
3. Has the collection been stored in any other locations? If so, where?
4. Has the collection had any previous custodians? If so, who?
5. Describe any changes to the provenance and original order of the collection prior to retention in the repository.

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<sup>163</sup> Appendix 2 was created by the author, Samantha N. Cross. The document is based on the AAO questionnaire as well as works by Heather MacNeil and Terry Cook.

Section II: Series/Collection Inventory

Provide a brief summary of the contents (*additional details may be added or attached*):

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What is the current state of the collection?

Recommendations for preservation/conservation of materials (*with brief explanation*):

Access restrictions (*with brief explanation*):

Recommendations for subject headings (*with brief explanation*):

Is the information in the records duplicated in another set of records or in another repository? If so, where?

Section III: Archivist Self-Assessment

3.1 Biographical Information (*check which will be included with the report*)

1.  Link to biography on repository website (*provide link or link to report if online*)
2.  Hard copy attached to report
3.  Written biographical information

If #3, please include in the space below, at minimum, your **name, date of birth, age, and educational background.**

If there is not enough space, please attach additional pages to the report.

Section III: Archivist Self-Assessment (Cont'd)

3.2 Methodology

Describe your approach to appraising the series/collection:

1. What is the administrative, evidential, or informational value of the records to the repository?
2. Do the records meet the terms of your collection or acquisition policy? Why or why not?
3. Should any materials in the series/collection be destroyed? If so, why?
4. Should the series/collection be re-arranged? If so, why?
5. Are you the only archivist working on the collection? If not, please provide the names of any other archivists or interns working on the collection.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND SIGNATURES

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