

“Five ‘Easy’ Pieces of a Five Year Plan”

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The 1970 Jack Nicholson film classic *Five Easy Pieces* has been described as chronicling “the difficult, awkward life of a gifted man who hasn't discovered a way to fully express his talent or found his place in the world” (http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/five_easy_pieces/#). Or, more simply, “a disaffected man seeks a sense of identity”

(http://www.fandango.com/fiveeasypieces_v17654/summary). In certain respects these synopses encapsulate the situation facing the American Heritage Center (University of Wyoming, Laramie) at the end of the 20th century. It was a gifted repository, disaffected from both the University and the archival community, without a way to express the talent of its archivists or its place in the archival or research world. This is the repository I came to direct in August 2002.

First a brief picture of the repository, including its history.

INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENT: The American Heritage Center (AHC) is the University of Wyoming's (UW) manuscripts repository, rare book library, and university archive. Internationally known for its historical collections the AHC first and foremost serves the students and other citizens of Wyoming. The AHC also sponsors a wide range of scholarly and popular programs including lectures, concerts, symposia, and exhibits. Access is free and open to all. The AHC is among the largest non-governmental archives in the nation, currently consisting of approximately 75,000 cubic feet of manuscripts and 55,000 rare books. The total number of researchers and long-distance reference requests last year exceeded 6,000, including individuals from all 50 states and 12 foreign nations. The AHC's single largest user group is UW undergraduates, and the Center takes pride in the extent and quality of its outreach to undergraduates and grades 6-12.

AHC collections go beyond Wyoming's or the region's borders and support a wide range of research and teaching activities in the humanities, sciences, arts, business, and education.

- Major areas of the manuscript collections include Wyoming and the American West, the mining and petroleum industries, U.S. politics and world affairs, conservation, journalism, transportation, and 20th century entertainment such as popular music, radio, television, and film.
- The Toppan Library is the University of Wyoming's rare book center. The collections document the history of the book from medieval illuminated manuscripts to the 21st century. Subject strengths of the holdings include the American West, British and American literature, early exploration of North America, religion, hunting and fishing, natural history, women authors, and the book arts

The AHC is also home to educational programs like the Alan K. Simpson Institute for Western Politics and Leadership and the Wyoming History Day Program. Each year the AHC offers a variety of symposia, lectures, exhibits, and concerts that feature the AHC's collections for both a scholarly and public audience. AHC web pages (<http://www.uwyo.edu/ahc>) received 91,928 visitors (403,897 page views) in 2007 and rank among the most visited college and university

repository sites. The Center has a budget of \$1.5M and employs 12 archivists and 12 non-archivists (plus many students).

THE PAST: Begun as the personal collection of distinguished University of Wyoming professor and trustee Grace Raymond Hebard, the nucleus of UW's manuscripts and special collections were donated to the school prior to Hebard's death in 1936. Twenty years later, the department of Western History and University Archives, created in 1945 and housed within the University Library, welcomed a new director who stayed for nearly forty years. The department grew and was renamed the American Heritage Center; the director earned praise for his vision and broad collecting but critics felt the collecting lacked focus and that AHC had become "the vacuum cleaner of the Plains." Hundreds of collections consisted of single publications, a folder of newsclippings, or even copies of materials in other repositories.

Several of AHC's largest and best known collections, such as entertainment (radio, TV, and movies) had little relationship to the University's geographical region, which bothered some faculty and the president hired in 1997. Virtually all of the department's resources were devoted to collecting; little to cataloging, reference, or even proper storage. By 1983, there was a 30,000 cubic foot processing backlog. Formal external reviews in 1980 by leaders of the Society of American Archivists confirmed that the lack of collecting guidelines and the "disproportionate amount of resources...concentrated on soliciting for and acquiring archival collections at the expense of making them available for research" were professionally unacceptable.

A new director was appointed in 1988, professional staff was hired, and concerted efforts were made to retrospectively acquire deeds of gifts for undocumented collections previously acquired, end the most egregious collecting practices, and process the backlog. Staff worked with teaching faculty to bring undergraduates in for research in the collections. The professional archivists were granted faculty status, bringing them both increased stature and pay increases. But most of the archives program faculty was not confident enough to participate professionally outside of Wyoming and Colorado.

The second director was let go in 2000, much to the consternation of some of the faculty and staff. That same year, the Vice President for Academic Affairs (Provost), probably at the behest of the President, created a review board to determine whether the AHC should retain its administrative independence or be merged under the University Libraries. The administration was concerned about unfocused collecting, unprocessed backlogs, insufficient curricular engagement, and an antagonistic relationship between the director and the Dean of the Libraries.

Faculty and staff interpreted this as an attack on themselves and the AHC. Morale was low; employees very defensive. There were 12 faculty members and as many non-faculty employees (professional, para-professional, and administrative support), plus student workers. Only a few archivists, however, were active in the profession.

When a new director was appointed in 2002, it seemed clear that the AHC was on the cusp of becoming a great institution, based on progress made since 1989: a core of exceptional collections; skilled, dedicated staff and faculty; successful commitment to broad access; dedication to outreach; relatively new but aggressive digitization efforts; and a shift of emphasis

from collecting to processing. The AHC in 2002 included an 85,000 cubic foot manuscript collection, the university's archives, and a 45,000 item rare book library and served 9,000 researchers that year. The budget was approximately \$1.2 million -- 45% from public funds (part of the University's block grant from the state) and 55% from endowment income, annual fund, and user fees.

The AHC had no formal collecting policy or collection management policy. The one grant in place was for a digitization project called Western Trails. AHC had developed a web site that was among the most popular at the University. Depending on whether the number of collections or the volume of collections is considered, the AHC had 16% or 34% of its collections unprocessed, respectively. Only 20% of its collections were cataloged on-line. The Center had a robust speaker's bureau and an active mostly in-state traveling exhibit program and it administered the state's History Day program.

The director set to work to communicate to the AHC faculty and staff that they should be proud and confident about their accomplishments, while at the same time starting to identify areas where change and improvement were needed. Guidelines for faculty promotion and tenure were revised to demand more national professional engagement, and additional resources were made available to support professional development. More frequent communication was directed to UW administration conveying among other things benchmark accomplishments of the AHC, significant activities and collections, faculty distinctions, and increasing outreach to UW undergraduates. Fundraising was improved. Three successful grants were submitted by the director to national agencies, including one to NHPRC to support (with professionals and funds) the AHC's commitment to make its collections more accessible and to refine its collections.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

Overall, the r/evolution of overall collection management at the AHC relied on one concept and five "easy" pieces:

Vision

1. Collection Management Policy
2. Cataloging Project
3. Collection Analysis/Development Policy
4. Reappraisal/Deaccessioning
5. Active Collecting

Pieces two and three were supported to some extent by NHPRC funding, while the other three steps were taken by reallocating existing AHC resources.

THE VISION THING. It would be perfectly reasonable for the crucial step of establishing a vision, and achieving the commitment of faculty and staff to that vision, as the first "piece" in the AHC's five year r/evolution. (However, that would have ruined my clever title conceit.) Nevertheless, what was missing most keenly in 2002 was a vision of what the AHC could and should be, and a belief that the repository could achieve significant and substantial enough change so as to find not simply a respectable, but a leading, place in the archival community. Hence vision must spawn change, and both must be built on the development of strong buy-in by the archival professionals.

In the case of the AHC, one important element of vision and change was creating the conviction among the faculty and staff that they themselves were more than capable of taking a leading role in the profession; and if they could do that then their archives could do it. So the development of policies and projects was concomitant with encouragement and support of archivists to present papers on the national and international stage, assume appointed and elected positions in regional and national organizations, and internalize that professional confidence into overcoming a long-held defensive posture within UW itself. As the archivists' professional stature grew, so did their stature on campus and in the eyes of the administration.

With deliberate speed, the faculty and staff not only accepted the vision and necessary change, but set about implementing projects. The cataloging project and the deaccessioning project, both supported by NHPRC grants, were completed ahead of schedule and beyond agreed-to goals. This in turn reinforced the sense that indeed the archivists and the archive were "gifted" and could rightfully claim a distinguished "place in the world."

Of course, vision and change require one additional element to be successful, and that is planning. Like so many things, the AHC's five easy pieces required a plan, a reevaluation of priorities, and a certain leap of faith—that the changes would result in better work rather than more work. Fortunately, in 2003 the AHC, along with all other academic units at UW, was required to develop a formal five-year plan, and this allowed us to make concrete our vision for change (<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/documents/about/administration/academicplan/PlanFinal.doc>).

The plan identified ten action items in priority order. The first two were

- 1 Create a clear, comprehensive, and sustainable collecting policy.
- 2 Eliminate the backlog of manuscript collections that are completely uncataloged, and reduce the backlog of collections not cataloged on-line to 40% (by volume) by 2009, by increasing the pace of processing, by concerted reappraisal and deaccessioning, and by active solicitation of grant funding.

These two action items compacted three of the five pieces of the AHC's collection management goals: collection analysis/development; collection cataloging and processing; reappraisal and deaccessioning. Before the Center could accomplish those items, it needed a collection management policy, the foundation for, among other things, the processes of acquisition and deaccession. And having completed those four pieces, the repository could then naturally look toward reinstating active collecting, with its concomitant requirements for appraisal practice.

1. A COLLECTION MANAGEMENT POLICY. The first major policy undertaken in 2002 was development of a Collection Management Policy (<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/documents/about/administration/coll%20mgt%20policy2007.doc>), consisting of such things as acquisition process and limitations, access and use parameters, loan and deaccession policies and procedures, and an ethics statement. This was a necessary platform for the AHC to begin moving toward excellence and change grounded on sound archival principles. The policy was approved by the UW Provost, and formed the bedrock of AHC archival operations. It was slightly modified in 2007, and will be amended again once the collection development policy is fully approved by the University. It will remain a living document, susceptible to changes as

warranted. For the most part, such changes are first discussed by the AHC department heads, and then submitted to the Provost's office for a stamp of approval.

2. THE CATALOGING PROJECT, OR MPLP TO THE NTH DEGREE. The AHC's strategic plan identified making collections intellectually accessible as one of the two highest priorities. Given the extent to which the repository's intellectual backlog was composed of collections inaccessible through any on-line catalog (much less "processed" to some degree in order to produce an online finding aid), the Center submitted a proposal to NHPRC to focus on three steps: creating collection-level on-line records for unprocessed collections; creating on-line accessible EAD finding aids; deaccessioning following the outlines of its evolving collection development plan. The grant began in 2006 and effectively ended the third quarter of 2008. As reported to NHPRC:

The first and most important product of the grant is on-line catalog records for *all* AHC collections assessed as permanent now without them. This will result in a dramatic increase in the information about the AHC's holdings accessible in the web catalog. The catalog records are submitted to OCLC, and from there loaded monthly into the campus Voyager catalog (<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/usearchives/catalog.htm>). The second goal is to create on-line accessible EAD-encoded box lists for at least 200 collections. These first two steps represent a strong step forward in the AHC's strategic planning goal of reducing its backlog and improving access to all its holdings. Tangentially these two steps also begin to address the AHC's highest planning priority, that of refining its collections, by emphasizing collecting areas that have already undergone intensive review.

The project proceeded ahead of schedule for the most part, and accomplishments exceeded those projected in the original proposal. This was in part due to deployment of permanent staff in support of the project goals, a decision made based on the mission-critical goals of the grant. Twenty-two hundred and ninety-two collections were surveyed, of which 700 were cataloged and 1592 identified for possible deaccessioning. The cataloging numbers represent 175% of the numbers proposed in the grant application. Our catalog records are entered into OCLC and our OPAC, Voyager. The cataloged collections complete our cataloging project, *meaning we have created catalog records for every one of the collections we intend to hold permanently.*

In addition, the grant created 265 EAD finding aids for cataloged collections. This represents 132% of the number projected in the grant application. The finding aids, in addition to being posted on our own web site (<http://www.uwyo.edu/ahc>) are now part of the Rocky Mountain Online Archive (RMOA: <http://rmoa.unm.edu/>), which went live at the end of February 2007. (In total the AHC has 400 finding aids in RMOA). In addition, during this period, we processed 12 collections (using standard MPLP processing) and converted 10 legacy finding aids to EAD without re-processing. The AHC's finding aids are also harvested for inclusion in ArchiveGrid.org, the union database of archival finding aids.

It might also be noted that, though outside the parameters of this grant, we have also implemented an accessioning system that creates abbreviated (but live) MARC records for new collections, along with EAD-encoded box-lists, thus ensuring that even the newest collections have minimal intellectual access for researchers, and that the previous backlog cannot be repeated. To be specific, during the grant period we created 72 EAD-encoded box-lists, and 16 catalog records for new collections.

We have begun to see the fruits of our labor. Off-site researchers have begun to find some of our newly cataloged but unprocessed collections through WorldCat and our OPAC. Specifically, 20 newly cataloged collections have been requested 48 times. This in turn has illuminated some unforeseen but so far manageable difficulties for our Reference department, when these researchers ask questions about the collections that are too specific to be answered from a catalog record alone. We convened a meeting of Reference, Accessioning, Processing, and the director to discuss these difficulties, and to identify partial or complete solutions (including deployment of student labor to create on-the-fly folder-level lists for unprocessed collections asked for by remote users). These issues and their responses was the focus of a paper presented at SAA 2007 by the member of our Reference staff who sits on our grant advisory committee, Shannon Bowen.

In addition, we have taken steps to make clearer to researchers that our collections exist in several stages of description and organization, to minimize their confusion and stress on our reference staff. A short narrative explanation now appears on the entry screen to our on-line catalog (<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/usearchives/default.htm>), and each catalog record notes whether or not there is a finding aid associated with the collection (for those with EAD finding aids there is a direct link, but hundreds of our other collections have legacy finding aids of various degrees of quality).

In addition, the AHC devised a survey to solicit user opinions about the repository's cataloging approach. Again, as reported to NHPRC:

survey was targeted to users of archives, to gauge their response to minimal processing and in particular the cataloging of unprocessed collections.... **600 responses were received.** The survey was sent to a number of institutions and online discussion networks, [particularly h-net lists, and it found its way to several blogs including those of the American Historical Association and Chronicle for Higher Education] A link to the survey was also sent out to the Reference, Access, and Outreach section for discussion and potential posting on additional institutional web sites....

In terms of how respondents were referred to the survey, by far the most common response was an h-net list. The American Historical Association [blog] figured as a prominent second.... While we have not yet been able to fully analyze the results, what is immediately clear is that those respondents who expressed an opinion (that is, who chose 1, 2, 4, or 5 rather than 3 on the Likert scale) twice as many approved of the minimal processing approach as disapproved, when it was understood as a choice of focusing resources....

The impact of the survey results will be interesting to monitor, since the repository survey (over 100 manuscript repositories) done for the MPLP article asked them “If you knew for a fact that your researchers would be willing to trade processing thoroughness for gaining access to more collections, would that change the way your institution processed collections?” Astonishingly, 66% said no, meaning they do not really care what their users think or want.

3. HOW THE COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY WAS CREATED: The creation and maintenance of a formal and public collection development policy is a part of the AHC’s 5-year academic plan, finalized in 2004. However, work on the policy began in the fall of 2002, when AHC faculty and staff were assigned to the first set of a series of task forces, each lasting approximately six months, and each focused on one or more topical collecting areas. The specific topics into which the collecting universe was divided for this work were borrowed from a major collection analysis and development exercise undertaken by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (now the Wisconsin Historical Society) in the 1980s, amended where necessary to best fit the AHC’s collections.

Each task force was charged with 1) analyzing the quantity and quality of AHC holdings in its assigned topical areas, and where necessary breaking that analysis down into more workable sub-categories. 2) Determining the location and holdings of other repositories in the U.S. with collections directly related to AHC holdings. 3) Analyzing use records for materials in the major sub-categories, and to analyze and prioritize likely user groups for current and future collections (this will include discussion with relevant UW faculty). 4) Recommending a specific collecting policy for each of the sub-categories. 5) Recommending, based on that collecting policy, extant collections at AHC for deaccessioning or significant reduction. 6) Recommending, based on that collecting policy, appraisal guidelines for retained and yet to be acquired collections.

The recommendations from each task force were forwarded to the AHC’s senior management staff for further discussion and (usually) revision. When all topical areas had completed this stage, the full collection development policy was presented for comment to the Center’s Board of Advisors and Board of Faculty advisors. After responding to these comments, the draft policy was presented to the University’s deans and directors for further comment. The draft then was posted online and a call for comments was sent to the University faculty. Finally, the revised draft was forwarded to the university’s office of academic affairs for further review and ultimate approval. Now that the final policy is placed for public assessment, comments are still welcome, and will be considered when the policy undergoes formal review.

It is the intention of the AHC’s administration to conduct formal (though probably abbreviated) reviews of the entire collecting policy every five years. Prior to the first review, however, attention will be focused on further and formally prioritizing among the many actively collected topical areas. This process will better match the policy to the AHC’s resources. Concomitantly, decisions will be made concerning division of responsibility among Center archivists for actively managing portions of the collecting policy. In this way the policy will remain an active and flexible document, rather than one shoved to the back of everyone’s shelves and forgotten. Finally, one or more AHC archivists will be encouraged to write and submit for professional

publication an article about the process undertaken to create this policy, to further archival discourse on the importance of such endeavors.

4. THE REAPPRAISAL AND DEACCESSION PROJECT, BRIEFLY: As an essential part of our overall collection management program, and particularly relevant to our effort to define our collecting plan, the AHC began a major reappraisal and deaccessioning project in 2002. Reappraisal and deaccessioning only make sense as concepts if set against clear, formal, and realistic statements of institutional mission, broad collecting policy, and narrower appraisal standards. One cannot make intelligent decisions about what to deaccession if one is unclear about what to be accessioning in the first place. The processes of defining collecting policies, and appraisal standards involve (among other things) reviewing a repository's current holdings—or substantial subsets of the holdings—in a systematic way. This in itself is an activity that may seem wholly impractical, but enough repositories have done it that its practicality should be above question. It is important to remember that collecting policies and appraisal standards—and any other acquisition or appraisal limits you develop for your repository—will apply both to appraisal and reappraisal.

Reappraisal itself, at its simplest, is the application of collecting and appraisal criteria to material already in the repository. The decision to actually apply the criteria—to do the reappraisal and thus to reach the stage of actual deaccession—will be based at the practical level on the “bang for the buck”, basically whether implementing a reappraisal project will produce some sort of “gain” for the institution equal to or greater than the resources put into it. That “gain” may be monetary (from sale of deaccessioned collections); it may be staff time (not spent recataloging or providing reference service to deaccessioned collections); it may be stack space; it may be clarifying the institution's mission; it may be (as it partly is for the AHC) restitution for past sins; it may be, too, an altruistic desire to see collections placed where they will be best curated and most used. For the AHC, the benefits of reappraisal encompass all of these gains. The threshold for adequate payback for the AHC, with holdings of 85,000 cubic feet, will probably be larger than for a repository with holdings of 5,000 feet.

What were the AHC's past sins? Over the course of almost forty years, c. 1950-90, the Center's long-time director earned a nationwide reputation. His admirers considered him an ambitious, energetic, creative, and successful collector who seized every chance to build a large, wide-ranging, and nationally significant collection of historical material that brought attention and prestige to the university. His detractors saw him, rather, as a rapacious, unscrupulous, unfocused, and unethical collector, stretching the original aims of his department to include acquisition in any topic and from any place that caught his personal interest, and interested so narrowly in the excitement of the hunt that he gave no thought to organizing or making the collections accessible.

What seems irrefutable is that “The expansion into collecting Hollywood materials and other areas, such as the creation of the Transportation History Center in 1967, water resources in 1971, conservation and antitrust in 1972, led to space and funding allocations concerns from within the university.” With no collecting policy beyond the director's proclivities, there was little basis on which to question these decisions. Increasingly pressing questions were asked about what was happening to all the collections acquired—virtually all of the department's resources were devoted

to collecting, none to cataloging, reference, or even providing proper storage. By 1983, a 30,000 cubic foot backlog existed in conditions that did not pass muster by the fire marshal. Archivists and scholars around the nation more and more questioned the director's tactics and the unorganized, inaccessible, unfocused accumulation that resulted.

Formal external reviews in 1980 by leaders of the Society of American Archivists made abundantly clear that the lack of collecting guidelines and the "disproportionate amount of resources...concentrated on soliciting for and acquiring archival collections at the expense of making them available for research" were professionally unacceptable. While the AHC sent to work in the early 1990s to pull back its collecting and devote resources to processing, the impact of forty years of unbridled collecting remained.

An institutionally approved reappraisal and deaccession policy in writing is absolutely required. To prepare for creating a formal deaccession policy, the easiest avenue is to review the deaccession sections of the ethics statements of the International Council of Museums, the American Association of Museums, the Association of Art Museum Directors and the Association of Canadian Archivists, all of whom have directly addressed the ethics and practice of deaccessioning. There is little reason for archival deaccessioning policies and procedures to differ significantly from those recommended and employed by museums, no reason to reinvent this wheel. The deaccessioning process has followed the terms codified in our Collection Management Policy:

DEACCESSIONING....

The American Heritage Center may under certain circumstances and under carefully controlled conditions deaccession collections from its holdings. By adhering to the principles below, the Center will more efficiently fulfill its mission to preserve and make available its resources to UW students and faculty, visiting scholars, and the general public who wish to use the Center's collections.

Deaccessioning is considered only for material that meets one or more of the following conditions:

- 1) it is no longer relevant and useful to the mission of the AHC
- 2) it cannot be properly stored, preserved, or used
- 3) it no longer retains its physical integrity, identity, or authenticity
- 4) it is unnecessarily duplicated in the collections
- 5) it is part of a larger collection other portions of which are owned by another repository that makes its holdings accessible to the public

In addition, deaccessioning can occur only when the item is clearly owned by the AHC. This includes ownership by provision of Wyoming Statute 34-23-101 as it relates to undocumented material....

Deaccessioning Procedures

When the conditions for deaccessioning have been met, any AHC faculty or staff may recommend deaccessioning to the Acquisitions Committee. The Acquisitions Committee will make a recommendation regarding deaccessioning to the director....

The basis upon which the Acquisition Committee makes its recommendation will be recorded in the committee minutes, a copy of which will be placed in the relevant accession and donor files. A formal document, indicating that all necessary recordkeeping has been accomplished, and signed by the director, will further document the decision and process. Documentation of the disposition of deaccessioned materials is also maintained as part of the AHC's permanent records.

Disposition of Deaccessioned Material

The decision about method of disposition is separate from the decision to deaccession. That is, material will not be deaccessioned for the purpose of a specific disposition....

The early reappraisals were based on the first set of topical collecting area assessments as well as on collections that were by anyone's definition outside our scope (e.g., the papers of an Australian cartoonist) or that were clearly the purview of another repository (e.g., the papers of a cabinet officer in the California government). At the time a collection is approved for deaccessioning by the Acquisition Committee, a short list of possible repositories that might be interested in generated; this list is pursued and if necessary expanded by the archives specialist. The number of collections reviewed during 2006-08 exceeded that proposed in the grant by almost a factor of two. Of the collections identified for deaccessioning, 219 were formally reviewed during this first grant segment (146% of the number proposed in the application), of which 32 were cataloged, 10 deferred for further consideration, 7 transferred to UW Libraries, and 170 deaccessioned. Of the deaccessioned collections, 60% were transferred to other repositories, 10% were returned to donors, 12% were discarded, and the remainder are still looking for homes. Collections sent to other repositories were either donated or transferred with the donor's permission. The cubic feet represented by these collections was 5,619.

The AHC has donated collections to repositories throughout the US and even to foreign countries, from presidential libraries to state archives, from small historical societies to major university special collections. A second survey was undertaken, of repositories to which we have deaccessioned collections to determine the impact on their processing and programs (e.g., have the collections they received from the AHC been cataloged, or placed into another backlog?). To date we have mailed 100 letters with surveys (plus a link to an online version of the survey) and have received 50 responses. While this survey may not sustain a publishable article, we intend to report the results to several sections and roundtables of the Society of American Archivists using their newsletters: Acquisition and Appraisal, Manuscripts Repository, College and University Archives, Archival Management.

A few additional points should be noted. First, while the total amount of deaccessioned material is large, so are the Center's holdings, which now total approximately 75,000 cubic feet. Second, to date only two donors have expressed anger over the AHC's decision to deaccession their

papers; most are fine knowing that the collections can go to other repositories, and two even sent donations to the Center in gratitude for how the deaccession was handled.

5. MOVING FORWARD: ACTIVE COLLECTING WITH LIMITED PERSON-POWER. For a decade during the 1990s the current AHC director was employed as the Curator of Manuscripts Acquisitions at the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). He and his associate curator were assigned full time to a) develop collection projects; b) solicit collections; c) respond to donation offers; d) appraise collections (over the phone, on-site, on the loading dock); e) negotiate donor agreements; f) create acquisition records (including basic catalog information, including bio and scope notes, box lists when appropriate, and provenance and appraisal notes); g) collaborate with the MHS Processing Department on any further appraisal during processing, and the organization of collections into series; h) continue to “steward” donors. There were at the time few repositories in the nation large enough and organized by function such that individuals were dedicated acquisition (sometimes referred to as “field”) archivists. Not only does this remain true, such positions have become even more scarce (for example, MHS now employs only a curator, not also an associate curator).

At the AHC our staffing will not support such a position, with the partial exception of our Simpson Archivist (archivist of the Alan K. Simpson Institute for Western Politics and Leadership), who devotes a majority of her time to acquisition functions relating to politics and business. Other topical areas, however, had no acquisition personpower behind them. Over the past six years acquisition has fallen almost entirely to the director, associate director, and collection manager, none of whom can give adequate attention to the function. Thus few leads are generated, some leads are indefinitely deferred, contact is not maintained with past donors, and generally the Center has been purely reactive (often to inquiries from potential donors who were originally contacted 20 or more years ago by the long-time director and whose collections are now out of scope). Hence, by January 1 2009 we will implement an approach that brings all members of the AHC archival faculty into the collection development, donor relations, appraisal, and acquisition process, by assigning each individual to one or more topical collecting areas. As our draft documentation lays out:

The expectation is that Acquisition responsibilities will account for 5% of work time averaged over a year. This work will displace, rather than be added to, other “professional” job responsibilities. To take an example, this might entail researching and writing 4 solicitation letters in a month; or responding to 4 inquiries; or appraising and negotiating for one medium collection. If during a given month the amount of time required to, say, appraise and negotiate for a large collection (or to respond to an unusually large number of inquiries), significantly exceeds 5%, subsequent months may entail little or no acquisition work. If/when resources are judged by the administration to be expended to acquire a collection (e.g. travel in- or out-state), these will be provided beyond normal faculty/staff development funds.

Educational resources (appraisal manuals; other related publications) will be provided, as will on-site workshops (appraisal, donor relations, for example). Other resources are available as well, including for example Susan Scratchley’s access to Development address databases. Moreover, those of us with the most acquisition experience: Mark,

Rick, Bill, and soon Leslie, will be available whenever necessary for informal consultation.

TO BEGIN: Each individual will review the collecting policy related to his/her area(s). Within that policy there is usually room for additional prioritization, and each individual will be asked to create a one-page essay suggesting his/her specific acquisition priorities and how s/he will go about developing them in the next three months. These essays will be reviewed by the Department Heads, but also circulated to all acquisition individuals, for feedback, refinement.

An email distribution list will be created for acquisition staff, to enhance informal communication about their work. Working documents will be posted to the J:/ drive to further communication. For example, the prioritization documents will be hosted there, but so will draft lists of specific contacts being developed and/or responded to; or individual collections being worked on.

As specific leads are identified, these will be brought to the Acquisition Committee (whether or not the individual is usually a member of the committee); this is to ensure no accidental overlap between individual efforts, and to take advantage of any expertise/contacts that the members of the committee may have.

In the beginning, for perhaps the first ten solicitation letters, each individual will circulate draft letters to Mark G. or Rick E [Associate Director of AHC]. for review and comment. Once sent letters themselves will be posted to the J:/ [shared network] drive to serve as examples for others and to ensure the letters are appropriately backed up.

Acquisition work will normally entail “related documentation,” which is envisioned to include creation of a first-line MARC record and an EAD-finding aid at either the box or folder level (depending both on size and organization of the collection). Other accessioning work, including sending formal accessioning acknowledgment forms and (if not already signed) deeds of gift, will continue to be done by the Accessioning unit. However, it is ideal if a) the acquisition archivist informally acknowledges all accessions; b) has negotiated and signed a deed of gift (if one does not already exist) before the accession arrives.

Expected deviations from the norm will include situations where standard deeds of gift are not sufficient (in which case usually Mark or Rick will have to be involved in drafting the document), where unusual restrictions are sought, or where there is difficulty obtaining a deed of gift at all. Other deviations might include accessions/collections that upon arrival/inspection are not as advertised, to a degree that our acceptance is thrown into question; that might be split between two institutions, or that might properly belong to another institution. In which case Mark, Rick, Bill [accessioning manager], or Claudia [manager of processing] would normally be consulted.

While this approach is dictated by necessity, it promises several advantages. The most important is the most basic—it provides a means for the AHC to reinstitute pro-active collecting, within the

definitions of its collection development plan. It also allows us to both build topical expertise among our archivists and to play to existing expertise, in the assignment of acquisition areas. This will make for more educated development of leads and collection appraisal at the front end, but will also improve our processing and reference on the back end (this is particularly true because some of our processing archivists work reference shifts and some of our reference archivists do small amounts of processing—decisions that in themselves are outside the bounds of this paper). Finally, and much less concretely, we believe this approach will assist in maintaining professional morale, through breaking the potential monotony of all reference all the time (or all processing, etc).

Of course, there will be some impact on the speed of work in processing, reference, accessioning, and the other departments, as some time is devoted to acquisition. Moreover, there will be some impact on the AHC's budget, in two ways: some resources will have to be devoted to fully training all our archivists in appraisal, through purchase of literature and attendance at workshops; there will be an increase in our shipping costs, as more collection material is received. And what of the potential impact on our "backlog"? First, remember that our backlog currently consists only of cataloged but unprocessed collections. Our accessioning procedure creates preliminary catalog records and (when appropriate) EAD-encoded box lists for all newly acquired material, so that while it is not cataloged it is accessible immediately. Moreover, we have implemented MPLP for our standard processing approach. Plus we do not anticipate a flood of new acquisitions, because of the limited amount of time each archivist will be devoting to such work.

So we do not anticipate acquiring more material than we can process using MPLP, meaning we intend to continue making progress on our unprocessed collections even while increasing our intake. If it turns out this is not true, the Center will find ways to reduce its collecting, because it is a disservice to acquire material faster than it can be made fully intellectually and physically accessible, something the AHC was guilty of for so many years prior to the 1990s. On the other hand, for a modern manuscripts repository, a static collection represents a continually weakening collection, as the institution's documentation becomes further and further removed from more recent developments. As we proceed, then, the Center will be calibrating its acquisitions and its processing, as well as its accessioning and reference, to do our best to manage our limited resources to serve the greatest number of students and other researchers.

CONCLUSION: The five pieces the AHC put together for collection management between 2002 and 2008 have, I believe, changed the repository from one with awkward and difficult prospects to one fully capable of expressing its talents and its place in the archival world. Specifically, the Center's comprehensive r/evolution of collection management has placed it in a leadership position within the profession, particularly in the realms of policy, intellectual access, collection development, and reappraisal. Even its collection management policy, something I would have thought would be viewed as banal and uninteresting, has received multiple inquiries from other archives which, finding the policy on the web, were interested in studying or borrowing from it. (Whether this is because few such policies exist, or few exist accessibly on the web, I do not know.)

The impact of the AHC's implementation of MPLP has been much greater than expected, having spawned numerous SAA and regional conference sessions, an SAA workshop, and several articles. Several AHC archivists are in demand as speakers on our intellectual access project (both from a processing and a reference perspective) and our reappraisal project. Our reappraisal work has spawned an SAA session and two articles, though it seems clear that reappraisal and deaccessioning remain much scarier topics to archivists than minimal processing. The Center's comprehensive collection analysis and development plan have not yet been publicized, so the repository can claim no leadership in this area as of yet. Similarly with our approach to active collecting using limited person-power, though the intellectual bases upon which both our collection development and appraisal processes are based have been widely presented and published over the past 15 years (and form the backbone of SAA's appraisal manual).

In addition to carving a better place for the AHC within the profession, the collection management r/evolution has also brought benefits closer to home, from UW's administration. Within the first year of formal collection analysis and reappraisal, the AHC was able to reverse five years of hinting to the provost that it would soon run out of space and begin assuring him that space would not be a problem for the foreseeable future. Though not definitive, it does not seem to be coincidence that immediately after the Center stopped asking for more space it suddenly got something else the repository had needed for a decade—university resources to improve the space already occupied (upgraded security systems, roof repairs, improved handicapped access). The AHC could also resume active collection-building in the well-defined areas that emerged from the collection analysis, which too pleased the provost, particularly as some of our collecting areas supported broader university priorities. The successful cataloging project and collection analysis impressed the provost sufficiently to invite the AHC director to give a presentation on the projects to the college deans.

Now, *Five Easy Pieces* was ultimately a bleak movie, with the tagline "He Rode the Fast Lane on the Road to Nowhere." Obviously, while I believe the AHC is in the fast lane of change and professional leadership around collection management, I also believe we're heading someplace good. The main character, in a soliloquy to his dying father, espouses what can be taken as a familiar management truism, that stagnation is an enemy of success, and goes on to say, "I'm looking... for auspicious beginnings, I guess...." This is what the AHC was looking for at the turn of this century, and found, I believe, by putting five pieces together over five years. And that's as far as I'll strangle this poor metaphor.

Relevant Readings

Related Documents

AHC Collection Management Policy, 2002-07

(<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/documents/about/administration/coll%20mgt%20policy2007.doc>)

AHC Mission and Vision Statement, 2003

(<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/documents/about/administration/mission2003-07-20.doc>)

AHC 5-Year Academic Plan, 2003

(<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/documents/about/administration/academicplan/PlanFinal.doc>)

AHC Collection Development Policy, 2008 (**appended**)

AHC Final Report to NHPRC: Final Report, 1 February 2007 – 31 January 2008 -- NHPRC Grant #2005-057 (**appended**)

AHC Interim Report to NHPRC: NAR06GRANT-074—Interim narrative June 1, 2007—December 31, 2007 (**appended**)

Syllabus of Readings on Collection Development and Appraisal, for Advanced Appraisal course
Society of California Archivists, April 2003 (**appended**)

Bibliography of appraisal literature, appendix to Frank Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts (Archival Fundamentals Series II)*, SAA, 2005.

Articles and Papers by Mark A. Greene,* on Appraisal, Collection Development, Reappraisal and Deaccessioning, Vision and Planning, Risk Taking, Archival Values

“The Power of Archives: Archivists’ Values and Value in the Post-Modern Age,” SAA Presidential Address, 2008

(<http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/GreeneAddressAug08.pdf>)

“Trying to Lead from Good to Great and Some Reflections on Leadership at All Levels,” Bruce Dearstyne, ed., *Leading and Managing Archives and Records Programs: Strategies for Success* (Neal Schumann, 2008), pp. 137-62.

“I’ve Deaccessioned and Live to Tell About It: Confessions of an Unrepentant Reappraiser,” *Archival Issues*, 30:1 (2006), 7-22. (**Appended.**)

“Strengthening Our Identity, Fighting Our Foibles,” SAA Presidential Inaugural Address, 2007

(<http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/ma-green2007.pdf>)

With Dennis Meissner, “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” *American Archivist*, 68:2 (Fall/Winter 2005). Supported by 2003 NHPRC Archival Research Fellowship.

<http://archivists.metapress.com/content/c741823776k65863/fulltext.pdf>

“What WERE We Thinking? Embracing Reappraisal and Deaccessioning as a Collection Management Tool,” *Provenance* 20 (2002) 33-49. 2002 David B. Gracy II Award.

“Not Magic, not Science, but Art: Comment on ‘Archival Appraisal Alchemy’” (Response to Richard Cox), *Choices and Challenges, Collecting by Museums and Archives*, Dearborn, MI, November 1-3, 2002; available on the web at

<http://www.hfmgv.org/research/publications/symposium2002/papers/greene.asp>

“The Power of Meaning: The Mission of Archives in the Postmodern World,” *American Archivist* 65:1 (2002), 42-55.

<http://archivists.metapress.com/content/1914668v881wv19n/fulltext.pdf> Republished as “La

- fuerza del significado: la mision de los archivos en la era posmoderna,” in Luis Hernandez Olivera and Terry Cook, eds., *Tabula: Estudios Archivisticos de Castilla y Leon*, 10 (2007), 195-212.
- With Frank Boles, “Confusing the Bun for the Burger: Rehabilitating the Role of Content in the Archival Context,” *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* [Swiss Historical Revue], vol 51 (2001), 424-47.
- With Frank Boles, Richard L. Pifer, Bruce Bruemmer, and Todd J. Daniels-Howell, “The Archivist’s New Clothes; or, the Naked Truth about Evidence, Transactions, and Recordness,” University of Michigan Sawyer Seminar (Winter 2001). Available on the web at <http://ahc.uwyo.edu/documents/faculty/greene/papers/Manifesto6.pdf>.
- “The Existential Archivist: Use as a Measure of ‘Better’ Appraisal,” 1999 Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting.
- “‘The Surest Proof’: The Use of Business Records and Implications for Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998), 127-69. Republished in Rand Jimerson, ed., *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice* (Chicago, 2000), 301-44. (**Appended.**)
- With Todd J. Daniels-Howell, “Documentation with ‘an Attitude’: A Pragmatist’s Guide to the Selection and Acquisition of Modern Business Records,” James M. O’Toole, ed. *Records of American Business* (SAA, 1997), 161-229.
- With Frank Boles, “Et tu, Schellenberg? Thoughts on the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory,” *American Archivist* 56 (Summer 1996), 176-88.
- “‘Never Eat Anything Bigger Than Your Head’: Appraising and Reappraising Modern Collections,” 1996 Society of American Archivists Conference.
- “Expanding the Community Connection in Minnesota,” 1996 American Association of Museums Annual Meeting. Published in *Provenance* 17 (1999), 53-66.
- "Appraisal of Congressional Papers at the Minnesota Historical Society: A Case Study," *Archival Issues* 19:1 (1994), 31-44.

*This list risks looking decidedly conceited. It is presented not because my articles are particularly important among the larger archival literature (represented in the Boles bibliography and the course syllabus), but because my views on these aspects of archival administration and collection development have not surprisingly heavily influenced the r/evolution at the AHC.