

ADVANCED APPRAISAL WORKSHOP
Society of California Archivists
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Appraisal has been called “the most significant archival function.” The decisions—active or passive—that determine which material is selected for long-term preservation determine what tiny sliver of human documentary production will actually become “archives” and thus part of society’s documentary heritage. Appraisal is, arguably, the most intellectually demanding of archival functions; indisputably it is the area of archival work which has seen the most controversy and debate within the profession.

This reading list will help ground you in the evolution of professional thinking about appraisal from the 1920s to the present. The readings begin with the elemental questions which underlie much appraisal theory: what is the nature and purpose of archives? From that foundation, six sections take a generally chronological tour through the discourse on appraisal during the past 70 years. The next three sections provide introductory coverage of sampling as an appraisal tool, appraisal of non-textual material, appraisal of electronic records, reappraisal and deaccessioning, case studies in appraisal of specific topical areas. The final section looks at the transition between appraisal and actually acquiring the material selected for long-term preservation, the ethics of collection development and donor relations, and the role of appraisal in other archival functions.

The goal of these readings is to provide a thorough knowledge of the basic theories, strategies, and professional practices concerning appraisal and an orientation to doing this job well as working archivists. The readings will ensure that you are familiar with all the seminal works in the field, have been exposed to appraisal writing from the US, Canada, and Australia, and have a sense of the way in which appraisal discourse has changed over time.

READINGS

1) The Prior Questions—What Are Archives and Why Do We Keep Them?

Terry Cook, one of the foremost writers on appraisal, has posited a strict distinction between archival theory and appraisal theory. “Archival theory is derived from the characteristics of records.... Such classic **archival** theory has no direct relevance, however, to **appraisal** theory, which concerns the value of records....The inherent nature of records does not help determine **which** records...actually have long-term, enduring, or archival value.” This course, however, assumes that theories about the nature of archives are very relevant to theories about the value of records. This session will explore that inter-relationship.

Readings:

William L. Joyce, “Archivists and Research Use,” *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984), 124-33

Kenneth Foote, “To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture,” *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990) pp. 378-93.

Glenda Acland, “Archivist: Keeper, Undertaker or Auditor,” *Debates and Discourses: Selected Australian Writings on Archival Theory, 1951-90*, ed Peter Biskup [et. al] (Canberra, 1995), 218-24.

James O’Toole, “The Symbolic Significance of Archives,” *American Archivist* 56 (Spring 1993).

Richard J. Cox, “Re-Discovering the Archival Mission: The Recordkeeping Functional Requirements Project at the University of at the Pittsburgh; A Progress Report,” September 1994, at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Information Sciences, Functional Requirements for Evidence in Recordkeeping website, <http://www.lis.pitt.edu/~nhprc/Pub1.html>

Luciana Duranti, “The Records: Where Archival Universality Resides,” *Archival Issues* 19:2 (1994)

Verne Harris, “Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa”, *Archivaria* 44, Fall 1997

2) The Stubborn Paradigms of Archival Appraisal—Jenkinson and Schellenberg

Several attempts in the past 25 years to pronounce the writings of Hilary Jenkinson and Theodore Schellenberg passe or worse have not succeeded in diminishing their resonance and, many would argue, relevance. Jenkinson’s “moral defence of archives” was an anti-appraisal jeremiad and a manifesto for a certain fundamental archival theory. He lived long enough to see both his archival and appraisal theory largely overthrown in the US by Schellenberg who, while challenged during his lifetime, died before the major assaults on his theories.

Readings:

Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, (London 1922), pp. 1-16, 115-33.

T.R. Schellenberg, “The Appraisal of Modern Public Records,” *National Archives Bulletin* 8 (Washington, 1956), pp. 1-46, and on the web at <http://merrimack.nara.gov/arch/techinfo/bull8.html>

Richard Stapleton, “Jenkinson and Schellenberg: A Comparison,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), 75-85

Luciana Duranti, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,” *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994).

Frank Boles and Mark A. Greene, “*Et tu Schellenberg?* Thoughts on the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory,” *American Archivist* 59/3 (Summer 1996), pp. 298-310.

3) Other Early Voices and Perspectives

Despite the subsequent dominance of Jenkinson and Schellenberg in archival discourse on appraisal, the 1940s and 50s produced other important voices. Two of Schellenberg's colleagues in the National Archives both influenced and contradicted him. Margaret Norton, a pioneer women archivist in the US, is often viewed as an American Jenkinson, though this is a gross simplification. Writing on appraisal in the US was almost completely moribund during the 1960s, and interest began to revive only at the end of that decade.

Readings

Philip Brooks, "The Selection of Records for Preservation," *American Archivist* 3 (October 1940)

G. Philip Bauer, *The Appraisal of Current and Recent Records*, Staff Information Paper 13, National Archives and Records Service (Washington, 1946).

Margaret Cross Norton, "Records Disposal," (1944) and "The Archivist and Records Management," (1956) in Thornton W. Mitchell, ed., *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archives and Records Management* (Chicago, 1975), 231-65.

Arthur Johnson, "Identification of Business Records for Permanent Preservation," *American Archivist* 24:3 (1961), 329-32

Thornton W. Mitchell, "New Viewpoints on Establishing Permanent Values of State Archives," *American Archivist* 33:2 (1970), 163-74.

Meyer H. Fishbein, "A Viewpoint on Appraisal of National Records," *American Archivist* 33:2 (1970), p. 175-87

4) Activism, Edges, and the Dawning of the Post-Custodial Era

Inside of ten years, Gerry Ham (State Historical Society of Wisconsin) issued a challenge to the profession to improve appraisal, helped define (and gave name to) an era of energetic collection development, and limned the threads of many of the methods and arguments that dominated the late 1980s and 1990s. Whether active collecting by archivists is synonymous with "activist" collecting, first debated in the mid-1970s, continues to have echoes today. Just as all this ferment was about to start bubbling, SAA attempted to codify appraisal practice—though the "edge" of archival discourse bypassed the 1977 manual almost immediately, many archivists in the trenches learned from this slim volume.

Readings

F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975), 5-13.

Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," *Midwestern Archivist* 2:2 (1977), 14-25.

Gregory Stiverson, "The Activist Archivist: A Conservative View," *Georgia Archives* 5 (Winter 1977)

Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning* (Chicago, 1977) - original SAA manual.

F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981), 207-16.

F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Records in an Age of Abundance," *American Archivist* 47:1 (Winter 1984), 11-22

5) The Black Box, Social Values, Australian Perspectives

The "black box," one of the first responses to Ham's demand for better appraisal, sought to give additional depth and complexity to Schellenberg's taxonomy of appraisal values—it remains the most influential treatment of "micro" appraisal since the 1950s. The major debates, however, would concern "macro" appraisal. The publication in English of a 1972 German essay, suggesting a form of appraisal

socialism, and the success that same year of an Australian archival manual, marked the beginning of a widening discourse—US appraisal discussion could no longer exist in splendid isolation.

Readings

Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985), pp. 121-40.

Robert Sink, "Appraisal: The Process of Choice," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990), 452-58

Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 69-107

Terry Eastwood, "How Goes it with Appraisal?" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), 111-21

Barbara Reed, "Acquisition and Appraisal," *Keeping Archives*, ed. Ann Pederson (Sydney, 1987), pp. 73-114.

James O'Toole, "On the Idea of Permanence," *American Archivist* 52:1 (Winter 1989), 10-25.

6) Total Archives; Collection Development

US appraisal thinking owes a special debt, however, to Canadian archivists. The 1980s concept of "total archives" has resonated less explicitly in the US than the theory of "macro appraisal" in the 90s, threads of total archives are visible in US writings on collecting policies, documentation strategy and electronic records. If non-governmental archives were to avoid becoming vacuum cleaners sucking up old stuff, they too needed to clearly articulate what it was they wanted and to live by those limits—improving collection analysis and collecting policies (concepts borrowed from library science) became two means of improving selection.

Readings

Wilfred I. Smith, "'Total Archives': The Canadian Experience," *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, Tom Nesmith Ed (Scarecrow Press, 1993), 133-50

Terry Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives,'" *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, 403-13.

Laura Millar, "The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999), 46-65.

Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 47:1 (Winter 1984), 30-42.

Judith E. Endelman, "Looking Backward to Plan for the Future: Collection Analysis for Manuscript Repositories," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987), 340-55.

Christine Weideman, "A New Map for Field Work: The Impact of Collections Analysis on the Bentley Historical Library," *American Archivist* 54:1 (Winter 1991), 54-61.

7) Documentation Strategy

Whether collection development sufficiently supported archival appraisal was a matter of some debate—documentation strategy argued that single institutional plans were inadequate, that archivists must develop an inter-institutional plan "to assure the adequate documentation of an on-going issue, activity, function, or subject." Documentation strategy commanded archival attention for many years, produced grants, controversy, many conference sessions, and a wealth of articles. It also fed a growing discontent among many archivists over the disjunction of archival theory from their daily work—was a theory that didn't seem to work in practice still significant?

Readings

Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?" *American Archivist* 49, no.2 (Spring 1986).

- Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987), pp. 12-47.
- Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987), pp. 356-68.
- John Roberts, "Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987), 66-74.
- Terry Abraham, "Collection Policy or Documentation Strategy," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991)
- Tim Ericson, "To Approximate June Pasture: The Documentation Strategy in the Real World," *Archival Issues* 22 (1997)
- Jennifer A. Marshall, "Documentation Strategies in the Twenty-first Century? Rethinking Institutional Priorities and Professional Limitations," *Archival Issues* 23:1 (1998), 59-74.

8) The Role of Use and Users in Appraisal; Archival Methods

The role of use in appraisal theory has been particularly controversial. Terry Cook has argued that while archivists appraise records for use by researchers, they don't do this by appraising records or considering use. This paradox reflects one side of a conceptual divide over both archival and appraisal theory. At the close of the 1980s, David Bearman, who was not an archivist, issued a formidable challenge to the previous 15 years of writing and activity.

Readings

- Elsie T. Freeman, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Administration from the User's Point of View," *American Archivist* 47:2 (1984), 111-23.
- Frederic Miller, "Use, Appraisal, and Research: A Case Study of Social History," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986), pp. 371-92.
- Terry Cook, "Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 14-22.
- Mark Greene, "'The Surest Proof': A Utilitarian Approach to Appraisal," *Archivaria* 45 ((Spring 1998), pp. 127-69.
- Danielle Wickman, "Bright Specimens for the Curious or the Somewhat Imponderable Guided by the Unfathomable: Use, Users, and Appraisal in Archival Literature," *Archives and Manuscripts* 28:1 (2000),
- David Bearman, *Archival Methods* (1989), ch. 1 "Selection and Appraisal," on the web at http://www.archimuse.com/publishing/archival_methods/#toc

9) Functional Analysis; Macro Appraisal

Functional analysis posited that by understanding what functions were performed by each part of an organization the archivist could think through selection. The archivist could determine core functions—that is, what the organization most fundamentally sought to accomplish—and what forms of documentation was needed to document these functions. Macro appraisal, too, urged that the appraisal process start by evaluating record creators rather than records. The goal was to identify not the functional results of creators' actions but the purposes and intents of the creator. For macro appraisal both function and structure were important to identifying records of enduring value. The best records, however, were those that showed the creators' interactions with clients.

Readings

- Timothy L. Ericson, "At the 'Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92).

- Helen W. Samuels, "Improving our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 125-40.
- Catherine Robinson, "Records Control and Disposal Using Functional Analysis," *Archives and Manuscripts* 25:2 (1997), 288-303.
- Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara Craig, ed., *The Canadian Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992, pp. 38-70.
- Richard Brown, "Back to the Strategic Roots: Appraisal Reform at the National Archives of Canada" *Archival Issues* 24:2 (1999), 113-22.
- Mark A. Greene and Todd J. Daniels-Howell, "Documentation with an Attitude: A Pragmatist's Guide to the Selection and Acquisition of Modern Business Records," in James M. O'Toole, *The Records of American Business* (Chicago, 1997), pp. 161-229

10) Electronic Records, part 1

Though archival writing on electronic records dates to the mid-1970s, not until computer technology settled on every organizational desktop in the late 1980s did the discussion enter the professional mainstream. For some archivists, electronic records demanded a "paradigm shift" in archival thinking—either toward totally new theories or a return to abandoned traditions; for others electronic records represented only new formats for the same old challenges of the last 50 years. Discussion about what archivists should be appraising, when they should be appraising it, and even whether archives as a physical place remained relevant, came front and center. Once again the very role and purpose of archives seemed to intertwine with appraisal debates.

Readings

- Philip C. Bantin, "Strategies for Managing Electronic Records: A New Archival Paradigm? An Affirmation of Our Archival Traditions?" *Archival Issues* 23:1 (1998), 17-34.
- Terry Eastwood, "Appraisal of Electronic Records: A Review of the Literature in English," A Report Prepared for the Appraisal Task Force of the InterPARES Project, May 30, 2000, on the web at <http://www.interpares.org/documents/ERAppraisalLiteratureReview.pdf>
- Kenneth Thibodeau, "To Be or Not to Be: Archives for Electronic Records," David Bearman ed., *Archival Management of Electronic Records, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report No. 13* (1991), 1-13
- David Bearman, "An Indefensible Bastion: Archives as a Repository in the Electronic Age," David Bearman ed., *Archival Management of Electronic Records, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report No. 13* (1991), 14-24.
- Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," *Archives and Manuscripts* 22, no. 2 (November 1994), pp. 300-29.
- "In the Agora," *Archives and Manuscripts* 25:1 (1997), 88-103 [excerpts from an Australian Archives list discussion concerning the place of appraisal in the records continuum].

11) Electronic Records, part 2; Other "Non-Traditional" material

Electronic records are not the only materials which have seemingly demanded special appraisal consideration. The concept of "total archives" notwithstanding, moving images, photos, and sound recordings have often been treated as completely distinct from traditional textual records. Most often, however, such material comes to archives as part of a body of mixed formats—should they be treated as part or apart?

Readings

- Anne Gilliland-Swetland, "Digital Communications: Documentary Opportunities Not to Be Missed," *Archival Issues* 20:1 (1995), 39-50
- Michael L. Miller, "Some Thoughts on Central Files, Electronic Records, and Appraisal," presented at The Power of Free Inquiry and Cold War International History conference, 1998, on the web at <http://www.nara.gov/research/coldwar/mmpap.html>
- Lucie Paquet, "Appraisal, Acquisition and Control of Personal Electronic Records: From Myth to Reality," *Archives and Manuscripts* 28:2 (2000), 71-91.
- Verne Harris, "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective From The Global Periphery," presented at the International Congress of Archives conference (Seville, 2000), on the web at <http://www.archivists.org.au/sem/misc/harris.pdf>
- Sam Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study* (Paris, 1983), pp. 59-98, on the web at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0005/000576/057669e.pdf>
- Joan Schwartz, "We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995).
- Christopher Ann Paton, "Appraisal of Sound Recordings for Archivists," *Archival Issues* 22 (1997), 117-132

12) Sampling; Reappraisal

Though not itself an appraisal approach, sampling is an important tool for implementing certain appraisal decisions—there is an important difference, however, between true sampling and the selection of examples. Looked at one way reappraisal is simply the retrospective application of appraisal; but reassessing material that once passed archival muster has been so controversial that it has been called “the word never uttered aloud” in our profession.

Readings

- David R. Kepley, "Sampling In Archives: A Review," *American Archivist* 47:3 (Summer 1984), 237-42.
- James Gregory Bradsher, "The FBI Appraisal," *The Midwestern Archivist* 13 (1988), pp. 51-66.
- Terry Cook, "'Many are called but few are chosen': Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 25-50.
- Leonard Rapport, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981),
- Karen Benedict, "Invitation to a Bonfire: Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in an Archives--A Reply to Leonard Rapport," *American Archivist* 47 (Winter 1984), pp. 43-49.
- Todd Daniels-Howell, "Reappraisal of Congressional Papers at the Minnesota Historical Society: A Case Study," *Archival Issues* 23 (1998).

13) Records Management, Fieldwork, Ethics, and Appraisal as a Part of Processing and Preservation

No discussion of appraisal would really be complete without considering how archivists actually get their hands (literally or virtually) on the material they appraise—usually through records management (institutional archives) or through donor relations and fieldwork (collecting repositories). Donor relations, particularly, require attention to ethical issues. Finally, appraisal is not solely a front end activity; properly understood it has implications for (and can be used in conjunction with) other aspects of archives administration.

Readings

- John Dojka and Sheila Conneen, "Records Management as an Appraisal Tool in College and University Archives," ed. Nancy E. Peace, *Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance* (Toronto, 1984), 19-40.
- Eldon Frost, "A Weak Link in the Chain: Records Scheduling as a Source of Archival Acquisition," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92)
- Virginia R. Stewart, "A Primer on Manuscript Field Work," *The Midwestern Archivist* 1:2, 1976, 3-20.
- Philip P. Mason, "The Ethics of Collecting," *Georgia Archives* 5 (Winter 1977)
- Society of American Archivists, *Code of Ethics*, 1992, sections 3-4, 6, on the web at http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/app_ethics.html
- Megan Floyd Desnoyers, "When Is A Collection Processed?" *Midwestern Archivist* 7, no. 1 (1982): 5-23
- Tyler O. Walters, "Contemporary Archival Appraisal Methods and Preservation Decision-Making," *American Archivist* 59 (Summer 1996), pp. 322-20