

ARCHIVES WITHOUT ARCHIVISTS

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Abstract:

When considering the future of archives, it is essential to consider the role of archivists. Archives have suffered from a multi-decade cycle of poverty that stunts their ability to provide adequate care for records and services for users. The role of archival interventions carried out by archivists is often overlooked and invisible to users and the general public. Well-managed and useful archives require archivists to oversee their care. Archivists play a critical role in responding to concerns about digital cultural heritage loss, but their marginalization from the public sphere remains a significant challenge.

INTRODUCTION

"[T]he public values records but not keepers of records," remarked David Gracy in his 1984 Society of American Archivists Presidential address.¹ Gracy, and the Task Force on Archives and Society he helped create, have been credited by many in raising awareness of archives to the American public, and equally, to elevate the position of archivists in society.² Almost 30 years after his remarks, professional archivists still struggle to gain a recognizable foothold in public consciousness, as both professionals who work with historical records, and as agents who shape the raw materials of history.

Many Americans can articulate some shaky definition of archives, even if it is as simple as "old important documents." Every year, the National Archives hosts over a million visitors who come to gaze at the Charters of Freedom, including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.³ People understand the importance of the records, yet few understand how archivists continue to identify, select, preserve and

make accessible records of importance to all peoples. Almost every archivist has a colorful story in their background about someone mistaking them for an architect, archaeologist, or anarchist. This confusion over the work of archivists does not merely end at polite dinner party conversations, but carries over into perceptions of archivists' work. The commodification of cultural heritage, the chronic underfunding of archives, and the erosion of public records mandates threatens to marginalize archivists' work even further.

The marginalization of archivists' labor has long-term repercussions. The vast majority of American archives are situated within a larger institutional parental organization such as a government, university, cultural heritage organization, or corporation. These archives are only as usable as the professional staffing available to ensure records are processed, described, preserved, and made accessible. As American culture has expanded neoliberal business models to institutions such as government and education, invisible labor is often a target for budget cuts and other practices that normalize the experience of "doing more with less," a mantra that is all too often accepted as *fait accompli* in archives. This is especially worrisome, because more than ever, users of archives want larger quantities of analog content digitized and made available online. At the same time, archivists are grappling with gaining control over the mounting electronic records needing digital preservation.⁴ Interest in using archival content does not appear to be waning, but this demand can only be met with strong archival labor.

How is it possible that use is increasing in archives, but the professional future of archivists is often so precarious? The survival of records for future generations often depends upon archival intervention. Without examining the work that archivists perform, and the value of archivists as professionals, we risk having archives without archivists.⁵

UNDERFUNDING AND COMMODIFICATION

Archives are chronically underfunded relative to the resources needed to acquire, process, and make available records to users. This underfunding manifests in many visible ways: archives have significant backlogs of "hidden collections" unavailable to

users, archives rely on volunteer or intern labor to get professional-level work accomplished, and archives still face significant challenges in preserving electronic records — a problem that has existed for close to three decades.

Against this background of underfunding, archives must contest the forces of commodification within their already limited means. Events such as the sale of archives, the treatment of information as a monetized resource instead of a public good, and archivists' own tendencies towards emphasizing the records we work with over the services we provide all contribute to the forces of commodification.

ARCHIVES ARE PART OF LARGER ORGANIZATIONS

Archivists rarely work in archives that are stand-alone institutions. Instead, the vast majority of archivists work in archives under the aegis of another institution, such as a university, government, corporation, or another cultural heritage organization (such as a library or museum). Archivists face significant challenges in getting non-archivists higher up in the organization to recognize the value and mission of archives.

In 1984 the Society of American Archivists commissioned a report (known as the Levy report, after its investigator) studying the perceptions of resource allocators towards archivists.⁶ The Levy report deeply influenced subsequent efforts by archivists to reassert their importance not only in administering archives, but in their value to larger society. Since it was released, the Levy report has been cited dozens of times in further studies on how archivists perceive themselves, advocate for their programs, and how they are viewed by others.

The report's investigators surveyed several dozen resource allocators (e.g., directors, deans, or executives of larger areas to which archives report) to determine their attitudes towards archives and archivists. These resource allocators were located in education, government, private industry, and other organizations. The report noted that while resource allocators generally had positive views of archives, they often undervalued the knowledge and services provided by professional archivists.⁷ The majority of those interviewed generally valued the mission of archives and the work of archivists. However, resource allocators thought that they were funding the work of

archives to an appropriate amount, in line with their perceptions of archival work and other organizational constraints. When asked how the archives in their organizations were funded, allocators typically noted that archives tend to compete with other units for a budgetary share, and felt that archives should not merit special consideration on an ongoing basis for funding. Only unusual circumstances, such as an upcoming major anniversary might merit greater resource allocation to archives.⁸

While allocators viewed archives and the work of archivists as valuable, they did not indicate that archivists occupy an influential role higher up in the organization, or outside of their immediate archives purview. This is generally satisfactory from the point of view of allocators, who do not see archivists as overall needing more influence among organizational policy. Allocators had mixed feelings about promoting archives — on the one hand, they recognize that archives are more than “storehouses of facts,”⁹ but believe that promoting archives may bring in curiosity seekers rather than “serious” users, operating under the assumption that “serious” users already know about archives.¹⁰

In the introductory analysis to the report, archivists from SAA’s Task Force on Archives and Society noted that it appeared the profession has the “impotence of virtue.”¹¹ Archivists are generally liked and respected, but their middle management position limits their ability to influence organizational policy. Archivists have long noted that archival records are easier to acquire and preserve if archivists are able to insert themselves into organizational discussions affecting record keeping (for example, serving on a group determining organizational policy on email storage) rather than getting whatever “left overs” trickle down to the archives. If archivists are shut out of these critical decision-making areas located higher up on the organizational chart, preserving the archival record becomes a piece meal process that can only be accomplished with whatever limited resources the archive is lucky to get.

In addition, the perception that archives only serve “serious” users is a perception that has seriously diminished the influence of archivists in the public sphere. If archives are perceived to only serve small audiences such as academic historians, they are unlikely to be thought of as a critical operational need, and conceived of as a luxury. When organizations need to make deep cuts to resource allocations, critical operational

needs are likely to suffer fewer cutbacks than services perceived as luxuries.

The archivists who summarized the Levy report noted the sheer difficulties of overcoming resource allocators' perceptions:

The status quo may actually satisfy both parties in a rather perverse way. Introverted archivists do not know how to fight for their needs, tending to accept what is handed to them. Resource allocators welcome the situation because it frees them to respond to "real" problems. There is evidence to support the proposition that archives' poor relationship with resource allocators actually suits the archival personality, although it does so at great cost to the archives.¹²

Indeed, when preliminary findings of the Levy Report were presented for the first time to a small group of archivists, "none of the archivists had ever considered cultivating resource allocators' support."¹³

THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

Many of the parent institutions of archives are chronically under-funded, and as a result archivists suffer from "a cycle of poverty," a phenomenon that archivists have discussed for at least three decades.¹⁴ When archival work is marginalized or made invisible, it has downstream effects on the continued survival of archives. The phrase "cycle of poverty" was probably first used in the context of archival work in an early 1980s assessment of state archives programs prepared by Edwin C. Bridges, as part of a larger report on the overall conditions of America's historical records.¹⁵ The phrase was used to indicate the sorry condition of state archives records programs. Bridges noted that similar to developing countries, archives were "trapped in the cycle of poverty", caught between exploding populations (of records) and a lack of investment in basic infrastructure to meet the needs of managing such records.¹⁶

The theme of constrained resource allocation has appeared in virtually every major survey of American archivists and their institutions since the Levy report. In A*CENSUS, the last large-scale census of American archivists (published in 2006), limited budgets were cited as a barrier to continuing education.¹⁷ Given the challenges presented by managing electronic records, continuing education in digital preservation

is critical for training archivists to maintain their skills in dealing with new formats. Limited access to continuing education due to budget cuts widens the gap between archives with archivists able to care for electronic records and archives that continue to lose control over electronic records.

Thirty years after the Levy report, archivists still grapple with public image and advocacy. Recently, the Society of American Archivists created two new committees, the Committee on Advocacy and Public Policy and the Committee on Public Awareness. The former is devoted to “address public policy issues and concerns affecting archivists, archives, the archival profession, and its stakeholders.”¹⁸ The latter focuses on “promot[ing] the value of archives and archivists to institutions, communities, and society.”¹⁹

ARCHIVAL FUNDING SINCE 2008

Even within the landscape of perpetually lacking resources, the 2008 economic recession was particularly brutal to archives. An OCLC research report on archives and special collections libraries indicated that “75% of respondents saw their 2008-09 budgets drop as a result of the recent decline in the global economy”.²⁰ The most frequently cited reason (69% of institutions) for barriers to caring for electronic records are directly related to funding levels.²¹ Meanwhile, use has increased in most archives²² and large backlogs (i.e., unprocessed collections) continue to remain a serious challenge in most archives.²³

Reports from the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) confirm that cuts to state archives and records management programs have been dramatic in recent years. In its 2012 survey, CoSA found that state archives had suffered almost 40% in budget reductions from 2006-2012, and an 18% reduction in staffing levels.²⁴ As a result, there has been a 30% increase in state archivists identifying funding as one of their most pressing priorities.²⁵

The cycle of poverty has direct implications for the employment conditions of archivists. Archives with severely constrained budgets are not able to hire as many professional archivists and as a result, collection management and services provided by

the archives suffer. Most archives are dependent on volunteer, student worker, or paraprofessional labor to a certain extent. However, the inability to hire appropriately-compensated professional archivists can lead to extremes of labor undervaluation and exploitation, such as the suggestion in a professional records manual to use prison labor for archival tasks in an understaffed archive.²⁶

COMMODIFICATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

A number of social media channels and websites exist to share historical pictures and videos, quite often without context or attribution (either to the creator or the host institution). One of the most popular accounts, with 2.4 million followers, is the Twitter feed @HistoryInPics (<https://twitter.com/HistoryInPics>). @HistoryInPics tweets several pictures a day, many of which appear to originate from cultural heritage organizations or media outlets, however it does not provide any link back to the source. An example of this can be seen with a tweet from May 5, 2015 when a picture of lumberjacks cutting down a redwood tree was shared,²⁷ with a barely visible watermark for the Humboldt State University Library. The image has been widely shared elsewhere, including 3 years earlier in the Daily Mail, which correctly attributed the hosting institution for the photographs (and includes a copyright watermark very similar to the one on the HistoryInPics account).²⁸ The original image is available both from the Library's website itself and the California Digital Library.²⁹

In an article published by Atlantic on the two teenagers who started @HistoryInPics, the teenagers' disregard of copyright and citation of sources was framed as a manifestation of new media, particularly in light of their pattern of selling off monetized social media accounts.³⁰ One of the creators claimed that images were hard to credit, which underscores the attitude of treating the pictures shared from the feed as commodities. Forgoing proper citations is not a hindrance to the popularity of the accounts, and therefore the content is commodified for its ability to draw clicks, as opposed to allowing people to engage further with the records in their original context.

Many historians have reacted strongly to these accounts, criticizing the presentation of historical content without additional information or citation.³¹ The

carelessness of not linking to the source is symbolic of how historical records have become commodities to be exploited, not cultural heritage with a chain of context. This phenomenon is not new, however it may be more widespread thanks to the web's ability to give everyone a publishing platform.

Virtually every archivist encounters situations where images or film clips are supplied for a documentary or publication, and no credit is given to the institution, despite giving specific instructions for how the institution should be credited. This obviously has implications for viewers or researchers who also want to use the content — how are they to find it without proper citation? However, it also has other effects, of writing hosting institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums out of the picture when historical content becomes just another form of click-bait web content. When archival records show up in popular web culture without acknowledgment of the hosting institution, this erases how much archives and archivists' labor contribute to popular interest in history.

A major risk with the commodification of cultural heritage is the tendency to treat archival records as curiosities or objects. Archival records gain their power not because of their object nature, but because of the information embedded in them and the ability to demonstrate an archival record's authenticity. When archival records are treated as interesting objects, the information recorded in it often becomes secondary. A photograph of Martin Luther King at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston is not only a symbol of his legacy, but also documents the context and authenticates the role of the church in the history of the civil rights movement.³²

In the most visible expression of the commodification of archives, the private sale of archival records contributes to an atmosphere that values cultural heritage for its monetary worth and weakens its claim to being a public good. Archives are valuable precisely because they are not one-off items that are cared for independent of one another, but because the records are treated as a collective group. The archival principle of provenance holds that records from a single source should be kept together as much as possible, and should not be alienated from the context of their creation. In other words, if an archival repository has multiple collections from authors writing on a similar topic, their papers should not be mixed together in a single collection, but should

remain separate collections, reflective of each author.

The sale of archival records often compromises provenance, particularly when records are held by multiple individuals. An example can be seen with the John Kennedy Toole papers, author of *A Confederacy of Dunces*. The major collection of John Kennedy Toole papers resides at Tulane University in New Orleans, where his mother, Thelma Toole donated his papers as part of her estate, and where Toole himself was an undergraduate student.³³ Several years ago, Toole papers that were in private hands went on the auction market, and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (where Toole briefly taught) purchased the lot from Sotheby's for \$25,000.³⁴ The vast majority of personal papers held in archives take the form of a donation, however because there is a small market for materials, this can distort the availability of archival records available to the public. When materials go up for auction, it is rarely certain that they will join existing collections from the same individual. When archival records from a single source are spread across multiple institutions, this has severe ramifications for those who wish to use the archival records. These ramifications include increased travel costs and logistical burdens by making researchers use multiple sites to access records with the same provenance.

The existence of a market for archival records may lead those who own archival records they would otherwise donate to an archive hold on to them on the assumption they may eventually realize some form of profit. A *New Yorker* article described that the current owner of writer Dawn Powell's diaries put the diaries up for auction, but there were no winning bids. As a result, the diaries appear to be temporarily housed at Columbia University with the rest of her papers. However, if a purchase is ever completed, the diaries may be alienated from the rest of her papers,³⁵ thus adding barriers to researchers who might have to visit multiple sites. Although digitization of content and hosting it online has the potential to ameliorate the "one source, multiple archival repositories" problem, digitization is an expensive process, and many archives are only able to digitize a small fraction of their holdings.

THE ROLE OF ARCHIVAL INTERVENTIONS

Archival records housed in archival institutions do not spring fully-formed from records creators: a number of “archival interventions” are performed by archivists that transform records into archival collections that are accessed by users.³⁶ Records of personal or organizational activity may be lost over time due to benign neglect or deliberate destruction, but the act of archival appraisal and acquisition intervenes by mitigating against loss. The act of describing and arranging records intervenes against chaos in attempting to establish a form of physical and intellectual control in a group of records now alienated from its creator. This description and arrangements orients users to understanding the context of records, and helps users understand why the records were created and how they came together. The act of preservation intervenes in the inherent tendency of all recorded content, whether fixed in paper, film, or electronic format, to degrade over time. The act of providing access to records intervenes against societal forgetting, by informing larger communities that traces of the past still exist. The act of advocacy intervenes against larger tendencies to erase the past, whether motivated by the cost of storage, or the fear of political embarrassment.

ARCHIVAL PRACTICE

Archivists actively shape the archival record through practices that actively shape the materials later used by others.

The 5 core functions at the heart of professional archival practice are:³⁷

- Appraisal and Acquisition
- Arrangement and Description
- Preservation
- Reference and Access
- Outreach and Advocacy

Every one of these functions shapes the nature of archival materials that researchers use within archival repositories. Archival appraisal refers to the process undertaken to evaluate the authenticity and enduring value of records prior to acquisition, and to establish physical, and preliminary intellectual control of materials. Appraisal is the most critical step in archival practice, since appraisal frequently results

in a decision to forego acquisition of archival records. During the acquisition process, an archival institution may negotiate transfer of some legal rights to the materials if the transfer of materials involves donation or purchase from an external party. Institutional archives (e.g., governmental archives, university archives, corporate archives) tend to have established procedures for transfer of parent institution records, often by institutional records retention schedules.

Once archival materials are transferred to archival custody, they undergo what is known as processing, or arrangement and description. Archival staff physically arranges the content so that it may be used later by others. During this process, contents are also described in an inventory, catalog, and/or finding aid so that users may determine what records they need to consult. Processing involves two of the most important principles within archival theory: provenance and original order. Provenance involves maintaining records from a single creator together. Mixing records from different creators destroys the intellectual ties of a creator's output. Original order is respecting the order in which the records were created. If an organization or person created their records in a specific manner, the archivist should not impose a new or different order on the records. A major exception is if a collection arrives at an archive with no discernible order in place. In these cases, archivists must create an order that facilitates access to users.

Processing practices have radically shifted within the American archival profession in recent years. Processing is an inherently labor-intensive process, but in the past a great deal of time was devoted to creating more granular levels of physical arrangement and description at the item or file-level. While this level of description is often held in high esteem by researchers, this method of processing resulted in growing archival backlogs.

Backlogs have long been an issue in archives, and are problematic because they result in a problem known as "hidden collections." This means that archival repositories have collections that are inaccessible to researchers, often for years at a time. These remain unusable until the collections are processed. In recent years, archival processing has dramatically shifted towards minimal-level processing, or "MPLP," a reference to an influential article by American archivists Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner, titled "More Product Less Process".³⁸ A call to arms to re-examine accepted

archival processing practice, Greene and Meissner argued that spending less time rehousing and describing collections at granular levels was necessary to reduce archival backlogs. MPLP is now a widely-recognized professional acronym, with scores of articles published in the last 10 years discussing the application of MPLP to all manner of archival records.

The preservation function within archival practice encompasses many different activities, including monitoring environmental conditions (i.e. temperature and humidity control), storing archival contents in protective housing (e.g., acid-free boxes, in temperature or humidity controlled vaults, etc), performing conservation steps (actions intended to “repair or stabilize” materials for continued use,³⁹ and preparing for and responding to disasters that threaten the physical integrity of archives.

Reference work is critical to ensuring that all the work archivists do in shaping the archival record makes it into the hands of users. Since archival repositories do not have open browsing stacks, and not all content is comprehensively described online, most users must have some degree of interaction with archival staff to determine what materials to access. Archivists may also teach instructional sessions to potential users (especially in college and university archives) on how to find and work with archival records.

Finally, archivists must continually perform outreach and advocacy, not only on behalf of the archives that they manage, but for the larger profession. Archivists do not work in a vacuum; the majority of archives exist within some other organization (such as a university, corporation, government, or other institution). Many of these parent institutions have suffered enormous cutbacks in recent years, and archivists work in often precarious employment conditions, such as grant-funded short-term archives projects. Archivists have found that integrating advocacy for their professional contributions is essential to getting those higher in an organization to value their work and archives.

WHY ARCHIVAL FUNCTIONS MATTER

Many users of archives often do not realize the extent to which these archival functions shape the historical record. Non-archivist scholars often theorize about

archives (either as institutions and the materials within) or the archive (as a concept) without acknowledging the vital role archivists play in the creation and stewardship of archives. Popular culture and societal commentators wring their hands about a digital memory hole without realizing that solutions already exist within the field of professional archival practice.

The functions of appraisal and acquisition, arrangement and description, preservation, reference and access, and outreach and advocacy are the core features of any archive, regardless of whether it is an archive situated in a school or university, church, government, or corporation. The practices that underlie those functions are often radically different. For example, outreach will be quite different in a university archive versus a corporate archive. The former may reach out to students and faculty to help them incorporate records into instruction or academic projects, while the latter may promote the archive's records to be used in a marketing campaign.

The word "archive" has been used by many outside the field, but many popular uses of "archive" are alienated from the foundational aspects of archival practice. This has prompted many archivists to debate the merits of how other professional fields use the word "archive." The word "archive" as used outside of professional archival practice often refers to a collection of objects, gathered together because of their perceived value, or as a form of data storage backup (for example, when someone "archives" email in an email client).⁴⁰ While it is certainly not the best use of archivists' time to police how others use the word "archive," there remains a significant gap between what archivists hold as common professional functions, and how those outside the field understand the work of archivists.

Without an appreciation of how archival practice intervenes against total loss of records for use by others, many people often don't realize how archival practice can address a range of issues related to organizational transparency, historical research, information literacy, and restorative justice. Often, those working outside the archival field propose solutions or warn about dire situations that archival practice is uniquely poised to address. In an essay for *Inside Higher Ed*, professor Glenn Altschuler supports preservation of university presidents' email as part of the archival record of the contemporary university. This is a challenge that archivists have grappled with for years,

and significant work has been carried out to appraise, process, and preserve email. However, his recommended solutions do not appear to involve any sense of archival practice or archivists themselves, despite noting that university archives would be the appropriate home for such content:

In my view, boards of trustees should act – with a sense of urgency. They might begin by appointing a task force, composed of professional historians, lawyers, board members, and administrators, to recommend procedures for an independent review of the correspondence of presidents and provosts.⁴¹

Most universities already have formal records management programs, or informal records transfer agreements to acquire university records for the university's archives. However, limited resources often constrain the effectiveness of these programs. It is telling how invisible archival practice is that the author did not propose that existing programs should be reinforced, but assumed that brand new programs needed to be created outside of the expertise of archivists.

In his article on the gaps between post-modern theories of the archive as formulated by historians and archivists, Canadian archivist Terry Cook traces the diverging paths of historical and archival practices. This divergence has had enormous effects on how historians, a consistent user group of archival records, perceive the work of archivists:

In summary, despite the impressive external theorizing on the “archive” in recent historical writing, what is still missing is the voice of the archivist, who, after all, is the principal actor in defining, choosing, and constructing the archive that remains, and then in representing and presenting that surviving archival trace to researchers. Given the sensitivity of many of those same historians to the past marginalization from history of women, certain ethnic groups, the working classes, or First Nations peoples, it is all the more surprising that such historians studying the archive have marginalized the archivist. Can one imagine writing about the history of nursing or engineering without researching any of the literature produced by nurses or engineers? Yet in my reading of works by those few historians recently writing directly on the archive, I have almost never seen citations (with very rare and then very spotty exceptions) to any of the thousands of articles, books, and published studies, let alone internal reports, produced by archivists, in English alone, in the past three decades, including no few such writings by archivists that from the inside both theorize the archive, the archives, and their historical evolution.⁴²

WHY ARCHIVISTS ARE VALUABLE

In recent decades, the demand for archival records has shifted. While many may think that the primary users of archives are academic scholars (specifically, historians), archives serve an increasingly diverse group of users. Many of these users find exciting and imaginative new uses of archival records, and the archival community has rightly recognized ways to attract and cultivate these new audiences. However, this work in reaching out to new and potential users is stymied by the problems of underfunding and devaluing the services that archivists provide.

WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT ARCHIVISTS

The most visible consequences of archives without archivists take place when archives are shut down without an immediate continuity plan. Archival records are only as valuable as their ability to be used. A major threat to archival records is when the records exist in a purgatory in which no one knows how to access them, care for them, or ensure their integrity. The labor of archivists ensures that records are available to users in the first place, and it is archival labor that ensures those records remain accessible for future generations of users. Three examples of threatened or actual closures of corporate, government, and university archives from the last decade illustrate the dire consequences for archival records that do not receive the care of professional archivists.

In 2013, two corporate archivists from Target were suddenly laid off from their jobs.⁴³ Archivists who work in corporations are perhaps the most skilled at justifying their continued existence. Making the case for the long-term contributions of archival work to the bottom line is challenging against short-term outlooks of major companies. That the Target archivists so quickly lost their jobs is a reminder that archivists' professional mission to advocate broadly for the profession is far from accomplished.

In a letter written by the Society of American Archivists Issues and Advocacy Roundtable to Target following news of the layoffs, the writers noted that when archivists are laid off without a succession plan, archival records are threatened:

We also fear that the closing of the Target Archives will negatively affect Target's business operations. Corporate archives are key sources for ensuring the integrity of corporate fiscal, intellectual and proprietary interests. The discontinuation of the archives does not mean that its functions cease, rather in most cases the duties and tasks are distributed to staff that neither have the skills

or training to meet the unique needs of archival records. The result is often that crucial documents are mislaid, lost, or accidentally destroyed, leaving Target vulnerable both legally and financially. Professional archivists ensure that the company maintains the appropriate chain of documentation and records retention.⁴⁴

The response from Target did not address the future of the corporate archives. It is unclear what has happened to the Target corporate archives since the archivists lost their jobs.

In September 2012, Georgia's Secretary of State announced the closure of the State Archives. This closure was prompted by budget cuts, however accounts from Georgia's former state archivist indicates that the state archives had a strained relationship with the secretary of state's office as early as 2003, likely due to leadership changes that were increasingly anti-government.⁴⁵ Ultimately a solution was found to keep the state archives open by transferring control of the state archives to the University System of Georgia in 2013.

The State Archives has a long history of helping Georgia's citizens and political leaders. For example, records from the State Archives have been used to settle county and state boundary disputes, where to replant extirpated plant species, and assuring citizen access to public records.⁴⁶ Although the Archives were ultimately saved from closure thanks to the efforts of archivists, archives users, and community supporters, it is not yet clear whether the State Archives has recovered from the several years of cutbacks it faced prior to the threatened closure in 2012.

Lincoln University, a historically black university, closed its Special Collections and Archives in 2010, and terminated the position of its only special collections librarian, who also managed the archives. This decision was originally put forth by the University Librarian. Leading up to this experience, the library — which housed the archives — closed for renovations, but alternate arrangements were not made for temporarily relocating or allowing access to the archives. Challenges for continuously managing the archives had existed for years up to the appointment of a professional archivist.⁴⁷

There was only person dedicated to managing the archives. When the university made the decision to close the archives, alternate arrangements were not made to transition management of the archives elsewhere. As the first degree-granting HBCU,

the history of Lincoln University is important to many alumni and supporters of the university, however the lack of support for the archives indicates that resource allocators do not value the archives' role in stewarding the university's history. As of June 2015, Lincoln University Library's website does not list any archives staff member or professional archivist, despite information about the archives appearing on its website.

For archival records to be useful to a wide audience, they need to be managed by professionals primarily charged with those duties. Archival management is not a set of functions that can be easily passed off to others who have other professional duties that consume much of their time. For this reason, if archival records housed in an organization are to be useful, they must be cared for by professional archivists.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH ARCHIVISTS

The foundational work that archivists carry out enables the subsequent work of those who use archival records, whether for a class project, conflict resolution, family history, journalism, scholarship, or other myriad uses. An archive without archivists may be simply a heap of records, not usable by others. The public perception of what archivists do to archival records before users access them is visible around the tensions over the concept of "archival discoveries."

A pair of articles that appeared on *The Atlantic* website focused on whether it was appropriate to claim that a "discovery" could be made by a researcher using archival collections.⁴⁸ The situation in question was the finding of a medical examiner's report of President Lincoln's assassination in the National Archives. Helena Iles Papaioannou, a research assistant working on The Papers of Abraham Lincoln, brought the item to national attention. The first article, written by curator Suzanne Fischer, argued that it's inappropriate to claim that one can "discover" an item that has been professionally cared for in an archive. Archival collections are rarely processed at the item-level. Unlike librarians or curators who generally work at the item-level (e.g., establishing intellectual control over a book or painting), archivists work with large aggregations of records. In the vast majority of archival processing, archivists describe

and arrange an archival collection's records as groups, not as individual records. Fischer argues, "...those documents made it to the archives because a professional made an appraisal choice to acquire, preserve and provide access to them." If one can claim they made a "discovery" in an archival collection, what implications does this have?

In the response from Papaioannou, she addresses the concerns, and argues that one can make a "discovery" if the archivists did not know the item in question existed, despite contents being typically described at an aggregate level. Papaioannou identifies as a trained archivist (she has a Masters of Library Science), and "concur[s] with the sentiment that [archivists] crucial role deserves more public recognition."

While this may seem like a semantic argument, it is important to distinguish discoveries within archives versus discoveries of records outside of institutionalized care. Clearly there is a major difference between the type of discovery Papaioannou made versus the discovery of records in an abandoned warehouse. However, this distinction is not always made in mainstream discourse, and it shows up with the enduring popularity of the word "dusty" in news stories about archives and archivists. After all, discoveries in dusty venues have the veneer of adventure more so than discoveries made in clean and well-lit archives reading rooms. The articles included several readers' comments from archivists who thought that ultimately, the issue was not about how to appropriately define a "discovery," but whether the researcher gets the glory and the press while the work of archivists remains unknown and behind the scenes. Further responses from archivists attempted to define a space for both valuing the essential work of archivists, and the new knowledge creation that a well-managed archive facilitates for users.⁴⁹

Archivists often encounter perceptions that historians are the primary group of archival users. When it is assumed that historians are the primary audiences of archives, this often reinforces resource allocators' perceptions that the main value of archives is to provide the raw grist for the historian's mill. In reality, archives serve diverse audiences, such as elementary school students working on National History Day projects, engineers mapping out historical flood levels in coastal areas, graphic designers referencing vintage artwork, or plaintiffs in slavery reparations lawsuits. In all

of these examples, the archivist's services, not just the content, are critical to a diverse audience of users. Archivists teach instructional sessions to students on how to use archival materials, they perform reference services in identifying maps with flood data, they construct online exhibits of archival records, and they can establish the authenticity of records for people to secure their rights.

Many of these diverse audiences are often encountering archival records for the very first time. The reason it is so critical to acknowledge the role of archivists in archives is that when archives are simply perceived as content warehouses, they are only able to serve a specialized audience. When archives are reduced to the "stuff" and the roles that archivists perform are written out of the picture, only the most practiced users of archives will be able to navigate the archival environment. Recognizing and remunerating the valuable services provided by a professional archivist encourages diverse and imaginative uses of archives by those who might not think that they can benefit from archival records.

CONCLUSION

Google's vice-president recently warned that we risk losing much of our contemporary cultural heritage because of the fragility of digital content.⁵⁰ Several archivists noted that the profession has been warning about this issue for decades without much public concern, but the issue only gains public notice when someone from Google says it.⁵¹ Archivists have been on the front-lines researching, educating the public, and doing the hard work of digital preservation for several years. Archivists are actively archiving social media, the web, email, and all manner of digital cultural heritage.

This incident illustrates many of the challenges archivists face going into the future. If archivists and archives are well-resourced by parent organizations, they will be in a strong position to continue the digital preservation work that has been started in averting a total loss of digital cultural heritage. The role of archival interventions, developed in a paper-based age, continues to have value when working with born-digital archives. Finally, archivists have the training and knowledge to help ensure that diverse groups of users can continue to access digital cultural heritage generations

into the future.

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