

Successful adoption of the Georgia Tech Archives & Record Management Narrative Style:

I guess I should start this paper with my follow through on the initial assignment. I started by searching for archives in the Atlanta area that held collections that were of interest to me. However I found that I was missing a key piece of the pie; I needed a map of what archives actually existed in the Atlanta area. I did not find one (a key) right off that bat, but I did find this web site after the fact: <http://www.tulane.edu/~lmiller/ArchivesResources.html>. I haven't checked it out yet, but it has been marked for future inquiry.

Anyway, I was a bit nervous and contacted Deborah for advice on how to find appropriate contact people and how to approach them with this project. She gave me a few pointers and I decided to 'cold call' three institutions that I had researched and thought would have greater importance to my archival interests: The Fernbank Museum of Natural History, The Georgia Tech Archives, and The Cartoon Network/Turner. I contacted an HR person at the Fernbank, a visual materials archivist at GA Tech, and an information specialist at Turner (contact from an animator) via phone (message) and followed up with an email. I sent each person the specs of the assignment and asked if they would be willing to participate. Fortunately, I got one response and did not have to find more likely participants; the archivist, Mandi Johnson, at GA Tech said she would be glad to help out.

After a few emails concerning dates, times, directions, and parking, I found myself walking the GA Tech campus toward the Library (actually around the corner and down the stairs from the Library, but you get the point.) Walking the campus brought back many memories of being a young college student and it felt strange to be in school (the MLIS program at VSU) and yet not at school. Admittedly, I felt very old. I was also a little excited and after a wrong turn down a different tunnel, I found myself standing in front of the entrance to the Archives and Records Management building. I was sure this was the right spot because there was a sign that could barely be seen through a tinted upper window over glass doors that read "Archives and Records Management" and there were paper flyers taped to the door that said it was the "Archives and Records Management" office and what the hours were. Unlike the entrance to the library, it was very quiet and had no one going in and out of the front door. I had brought my camera to document my trip and so I pulled it out and captured my first visit to an archive. I photographed the front of the building, the interesting signage, and walked on through the door. Immediately, I was a little shocked and amused at the same time to see a stairway leading down. I was a little early, but I was greeted half way down the stairs by someone who quickly went in search of Mandi before I had reached the bottom stair.

Mandi greeted me warmly and I apologized for being early. Thankfully, she did not seem inconvenienced at all. We proceeded in to the reading room (just off the stairs to the right of the reception desk) and had a seat. There were about three tables with about 20+ chairs very tightly packed and all facing front. Mandi explained that they had just had a class in the reading room and had to gather chairs from all over to accommodate the students. After getting comfortable in some very comfortable chairs, I asked Mandi if she would mind me recording our conversation, and she said it would be fine. I started the interview by asking what her background was and what brought her to archives and we proceeded through the questions from there. Mandi was able to answer most of the questions, even though she has only been at the archives since December; she brought in her boss, Jody Lloyd Thompson, afterwards to cover any missing information. I was able to get 30 minutes of sound recording (I failed to check the tape and get a longer one,) with Mandi and I found using the tape recorder a great way to conduct an interview.

At the conclusion of the interview, Mandi gave me a tour of the closed stacks, the unprocessed hallway, the processing room, the news paper stacks, and the offices. I found myself liking what I was seeing in all aspects except for the 'basement' part; but I'm guessing that the 'basement' comes with the territory more often than not. After the tour, I thanked Mandi for her assistance and said farewell. I then rushed home through one accident and rush hour traffic to record the day's events while it was still fresh in my memory.

Below is a summary of the information gathered from the interview and has some accent information gathered from their web site (my photos documenting the trip follow the text):

Archive: Georgia Tech Archives & Records Management

Address & Phone:

Archives & Records Management

Library & Information Center

Georgia Institute of Technology

704 Research Avenue

Atlanta, Georgia 30332-0900

404-894-4586

Interviewed Archivist: Mandi Johnson, Visual Materials Archivist

Other Archivists: Jody Lloyd Thompson (Department Head-MA History 2000, BA History 1995), Christine de Catanzaro (Access Archivist-MLIS 2006 & ACA certified 2001, PHD Music History 1990, BA Modern History 1971), Kirk Henderson (Records Manager), Mandie Mitchell (Records Coordinator II), Germaine Schanzmeyer (Library Assistant II), and Kent Woynowski (Digital Collections Archivist-MLIS/Archives Management slant 2001, BA Philosophy 1996)

*3 student workers (freshman, and older students who had been working there awhile), no interns at this time, past interns have come from the Georgia Archive Institute. Students are used to watch the front desk, answer the phone, and some processing of collections with supervision (mainly in the science fiction donations checking current copies against contents of boxes), and for various needed tasks: alphabetizing, cutting strips of paper, etc...

Mandi's background:

Mandi has background interests in Architecture & Historic Preservation (from a research perspective). She went to Armstrong Atlantic State University for the Public History Program to specialize in historical preservation. While she was there she took an archives course that led to a visit with the Georgia Historical Society. Upon entering, she knew at once that she wanted to work there and completed her Master's program in Public History with a focus in archives.

After completing her degree, Mandi spent eight years working with the Georgia Historical Society as a visual materials archivist and spent one year working with the city of Savannah, as part of a grant, archiving records from the Department of Emergency Service (in particular those of the Fire Departments). At the end of the grant period she was hired on to work with the public relations photograph collection. She is currently the newly appointed visual materials archivist for the GA Tech Archives and Records Management department and a member of the Georgia Society of Archivists. I asked if there were any major differences between archiving visual materials vs. non-visual materials and she pointed out that her experience has shown a greater need for more item level descriptions for visual materials to make those materials more useful to researchers.

We went on to discuss the darkroom procedures for making an 'archival' print and she informed me that in the care of visual materials (in a smaller archive like a university might have), there is often not enough funding to care for them properly (i.e. museum quality for archival storage of prints and negatives with separate room requirements from non-visual materials), but they are given the same care as the rare books or documents as far as room temperature and humidity. The climate control system in the closed stacks is a Liebert Challenger 3000 and temperature is kept at 68%+or-2%, with humidity at 48%+or-2%. In working within these limitations, material items such as negatives and prints are separated out more thoroughly for protection. Mandi enjoys sharing her experiences with the issues of photographic storage in a small archive, and has taught several workshops on the best practices for preserving photographic materials; she also mentioned that sometimes there is just nothing that can be done due to bad

processing of the photographic materials which causes negatives to deteriorate and prints to darken or change colors over time.

The archives part of the Archives & Records Management collection is 10,370 linear feet and 304 cubic feet; the records part has over 8000 cubic feet. Building wise the archives are made up of the main archives building (offices, reading room, processing room, and closed stacks), the Neely gallery (in the main Library that holds some rare books and occasional exhibits produced from the archive), the online digital collections ("dark archive"-virtual infinite space is a good thing), and a second storage area in the main library. The records management area is housed in an off-site warehouse. NOTE: The Research Center for Paper is totally separate from the GA Tech Archives.

Records in the warehouse are not necessarily permanent; they fall under a records retention policy similar to the one that was presented in the audio lecture this week, where certain daily records like timesheets are destroyed after a certain period of time. Occasionally something will come up that will be classified as needing to be retained permanently and will then be transferred over to the archives from records (records being more of a holding tank). Mandi and I discussed the differences in the records and how the policy is actually altering the historic evidence, and thus the value of the historic record. She went on to explain that this is done because of the amount of duplication of various records; and noted that somewhere the information is still recorded-if not necessarily in the same form (14 box loads). Concerning any difference between records and archives, she granted that there is a division, but at GA Tech records and archives work very closely together.

What is collected generally: Materials dealing with the history of the University (GA TECH), and things relating to the university or written about the university; materials written by staff and faculty, materials that related to courses and colleges (textiles and cotton mill stuff relates to the early textiles program at GA TECH), and heavily donated works for the science-fiction collection (extra copies are sent to the Library's general collection and remaining copies are used in the Library's Book Swap or sent to other institutions.) The main bulk of the archives are pretty balanced between text items and non-text items (mainly photos and architectural drawings.) Some collections of photos have 1 or 2 images and others have 100's. Digital files are also currently being collected from faculty and private donors (files are papers, presentations, images, notes, or scanned copies and are required to be in particular formats based on the media: text, images, video, audio, author ware, and special). Concerning 'operational records' collections: all records produced by the University go through Record Management before they are considered for permanent storage in the archive. Materials/Collections are accessioned using open source software called Archivist Tool Kit. The Archivist Tool Kit was chosen because it dealt with accessions and descriptions (which the competing software ARCHON does not); and because the archives participated in the beta testing for the Archivist's Tool Kit in 2006.

How are the archives used: Mainly by faculty and students, also used by departments (i.e. College of Architecture celebrating their 100th anniversary) to gather materials, classes are held in the reading room (11 classes are using the archives this semester), not many people come in to read from the science fiction collection, but many are disappointed when they come in to get one of the sci-fi classics and find out they can't take it with them. Some outside researchers do come in primarily for light genealogy research, but for the most part researchers are interested in the Fulton Bag & Cotton Mill collection and the Olympic collection. The rarer books (Issac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* and *Opticks: or A Treatise of the Reflexions, Refractions, Inflexions and Colours of Light*; and Joan Blaeu's *Grooten Atlas*-featuring hundreds of hand colored maps) are sometimes pulled out for classes and for administrative functions (i.e. fundraising). Beyond actual visitors to the archives, many researchers opt for using the archive web site, requesting materials in a digital format.

The archives' web address can be accessed at:

<http://www.library.gatech.edu/archives/index.html>

Although the archives' finding aids can be accessed via the web site, there is no formal digitizing program in place, as materials are requested in digital format, they are scanned and converted as such. Even so, the archives already have several digitized collections that are accessible from their web site: Fulton Bag & Cotton Mills, Georgia Tech Photographs, Photographs of the Historic American Buildings Survey, Splendid Growth: Architectural Drawings of the A. French Textile Building, A Photographic Atlas of Selected Regions of The Milky Way, and An Illustration and Mensuration of Solid Geometry to name a few.

As for governance, reporting, and financing: the archives are headed by Jody Lloyd Thompson who reports to the Associate Director of Technical and Resource Services who then reports to the Dean of the Library. Jody oversees both Archives and Records Management; there are two records management personnel and 3 archives personnel in addition to 1 library assistant and 3 student workers. The Archives are state funded through the library budget; and does not have its own budget. The archives have been a recipient of the GHRAB grant from the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board in the past and have a small endowment that can be used for special collection development, but is not used very often since the majority of the collections are donated to the archives.

Mandi feels biggest strength of the archives is the support and funding from the Library and in particular the technology that is available and the support that goes with it; she also feels that her expertise and that of the other archivists is a considerable asset. I spoke briefly with Jody to cover questions Mandi was uncertain of; Jody added that she felt the biggest strength of the archives in terms of collections was the Fulton Bag & Cotton Mill collection and she add that the archives will be growing its strengths to include the soon to be acquired/completed Heffernan Design Archives (see this link for more information: <http://www.coa.gatech.edu/research/heffernan.php>)

The biggest weakness of the archives seems to be the biggest weakness for all archives: the need of more space. Mandi and Jody both agree that they need more space. The reading room shares its utility with that of a lecture room that can be a disruption for researchers. In addition the reading room is too small to house 20+ students comfortably with enough to room to spread the materials out and take notes. All though there appeared to be extra space in the closed stacks, the shelves are narrow and make it difficult to store larger materials. Lastly the processing room is overflowing into the hallways with the percent of unprocessed/cataloged collections at 40%.

Denise A. Wallace, January 21, 2008

Images from my visit to the Georgia Tech Archives & Records Management on January 17, 2008.



Front of archive's building, I think...



Yep! Can you see the sign?



How about now?



This must be the place where permanent documents are stored,

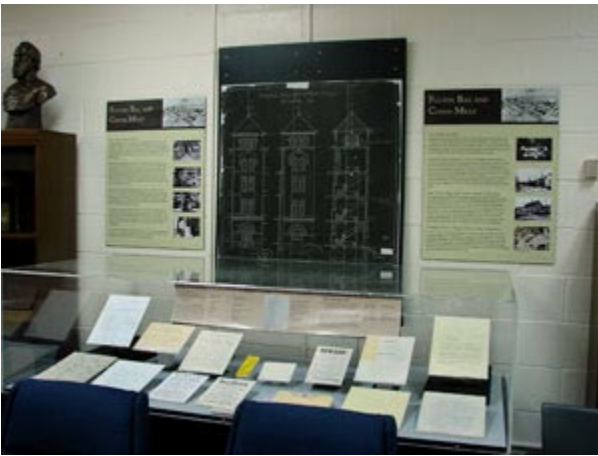
love the signage. 😊



I hadn't expected the archive to be in a basement, so this was a little of a shock to see when I first walked through the door.



This is the reading room and when needed the lecture room; note the chairs that were left over from an earlier lecture. I highly recommend the bluer cloth chairs for comfort. Some of the collections align the back wall and the center is a small display for the Fulton Bag & Cotton Mill collection.



Closer detail of the Fulton Bag & Cotton Mill display.



Document protection devices for greasy finger prevention☺.



Inside the closed stacks, flat files in center are for architectural drawings. (A key was needed to access the room and the lights are kept off when person are not in the room.)



My gracious host, Mandi Johnson, shows off some of the flat files that she works with.



Photo collection storage boxes.



love.

Mostly processed materials, the photo albums are awaiting some



Detail of inside of photo albums above, includes letters to staff and cards sent to staff. (I think I saw this correctly) that this is part of the Robert Lee Dodd (former head football coach for GA Tech) collection. It is not yet fully processed, we discussed the task of dealing with the photo album adhesive; as materials were taped on the outside of the plastic and firmly secured underneath it, held in place by the glue.



View of the rare books stacks, blue must be a popular color with book binders 😊.



Outside the closed stacks, in the hallway leading to the process room, these boxes of donated Science-Fiction books are waiting to be processed.



Detail of Science-Fiction donation box: The book on top is *Howl's Moving Castle* which was made into a great animated film, underneath is a German copy of Frank Hubert's *Dune*. Yeah, I am into this stuff.



These are the oldest books I saw during my visit, but Mandi did not know what they were or why they were perched atop this stack of boxes in the processing room.



These files sat across from the 'old books' above and had 2 other brothers. Mandi explained that this was where newspaper clippings concerning the university were filed.



This is a detail of some of the types of sports clippings that can be found in the newspaper files.



Mandi pointed out that some drawings come in rolled up and have to be pressed before being stored. This image shows documents being 'pressed' with weights and is one of the reasons for needing more space, as this process is timely and takes up quite a bit of table area when documents are blue print size or larger.

These are all the photos I have from my visit, I didn't not photograph all the areas that made up the archive, just enough to share my experience.

Many thanks to Mandi Johnson and Jody Lloyd Thompson for their assistance in this adoption project.