

Now that you have seen your adopted archives, and read some good articles on appraisal, I would like for you to combine these in your discussion. Discuss issues such as use, uniqueness, or collecting criteria in light of your adopted archives, your other experience, or just your inspired flights of fantasy.

For some reason this part of *Candide* came to mind when reading the first article on uniqueness:

“Just for the sake of amusement, ask each passenger to tell you his story, and if you find a single one who hasn’t often cursed his life, who hasn’t often told himself he was the most miserable man in the world, you can throw me overboard head first.” P49 *Candide*, Voltaire.

I tried to figure out why this thought crossed my mind in relation to uniqueness and I settled on the assumption that although the participants are different and the activities vary, we all share the same stories; we have lived the same life. Though parts and parcels may be unique, related outcomes were for the most part similar. So in the end, was it necessary to collect the unique parts and parcels to prove something that is universal?

That is near where my thoughts ended and although I cannot answer my own question; I feel like the above answered the question of uniqueness rather well and added its voice to O’Toole’s quote: “If everything is unique, however, how useful is that idea?” p656

The articles this week brought up the above idea and several things that made me question the validity of archives. The uniqueness issue brought up the *Candide* quote and two equally important points. The first point is stated in the O’Toole article as one of the principles of archivists; “The careful preservation and guarding of information that could be found nowhere else was the archivists first responsibility.” P635 This point made me reflect on my visit to the GA Tech archives; they have a large amount of unprocessed science fiction books that are destined for inclusion in their science fiction collection. The collection does have ‘unique’ items such as manuscripts, but also has a large number of science fiction and fantasy books. These books could be found in many other places and after reading the article I wondered why they have made a decision to accept them in the first place. I researched into my adopted archives further and found that the science fiction collection is part of the rare book collection and in alignment with its mission statement, supports the Bud Foote Science Fiction Center. “This 5,000 volume collection has been augmented by an additional 5,000 works of science fiction donated by friends of the library. In addition, noted science fiction writers David Brin and Patrick Malone have donated many of their works to this collection.” I searched for a finding aid that would list what was in this collection, but only found minimal material available online (and no books at all). I would really like to discuss this collection and the conditions of its appraisal visa vi the idea of uniqueness and the ‘black box’ method with the archivists. I was told that this collection generates interest and disappointment, but not much use; the books are sought out for pleasure reading, but are not allowed to leave the building. I asked if the patrons who sought the books ever read them in the reading room, returning each day to finish the book. The answer was unfortunately that no one had done so. I found this to be very sad in terms of use and I thought of this situation as I read the Greene article on the ‘surest proof’.

The second point that came up was the importance of information over artifact. As O'Toole pointed out, the nature of uniqueness in an information sharing, digital age is 'fruitless'. P656-657 I thought about this and came up with the following example: I have a piece of paper signed by John Adams and on the back side is a note from Ben Franklin that says "I attest as witness to this signature" signed Ben. I also have a book that talks about the history of the US and mentions the piece of paper, the names John Adams and Ben Franklin, and discusses at length concerning their importance. If given a choice between the two, which would I keep? Which do I consider to have more value? The piece of paper is out of context and is just that a piece of paper with two signatures on it. The book is also paper, but contains knowledge gathered from (appraisal of) many pieces of paper (by persons with a passion for the information). I would choose the book. Of the pieces of paper, once the data have been transformed into information and onwards toward knowledge, why save the pieces of paper? I am sure this idea is not a pleasant one for holders of romantic notions of history and artifact and I am not trying to raise a debate. I am just thinking in terms of storage space; how many pieces of paper can I get rid of because the information contained within them has been simulated into mass knowledge?

In earlier articles it was mentioned that one of the tenets of archives was to be accessible to the public, having information in book form or in digital form allows many people to access the information and become 'guardians' of that information (even if it is not in original form). This idea of 'guardian' brings me to my last thought concerning the articles of the week. This thought originated with this passage:

"...the concept of permanence is and always has been an illusion." P146 (note 45)

This quote is used in the Greene article concerning the use of the 'use of archives' as a determining factor in the appraisal (and reappraisal) process. It stands out in relation to another topic I have been discussing lately: that of 'who writes history?' or in the confines of this class: 'who chooses which history to save writes the proverbial book.' In discussing this topic I was exploring the notion that history is not true, that it is merely a collection of the 'strongest will survive', in relation to archives many collections may have been based on what artifacts survived. I went on to speculate that appraisal processes as related in this week's articles actually dis-services history because it takes out the 'survival' factor. Society has shown that it will covet or save what it will, regardless of actual value; and I feel that this gives a more accurate view of that society.

It was pointed out that I may be missing a larger point, that of the republic. With the rise and fall of kings and rulers, history was written, destroyed, and rewritten according to the whims of the successor. As noted in the French Revolution case, a need was found to save and destroy information according to new rules. Under these rules, guardianship of history was transformed from the rulers to the people and more specifically to the archivists. The archivists via appraisal processes (even the 'black box' and 'Minnesota Methods') are the keepers of lore, the guardians of the knowledge of their society. They choose what to save and what to 'erase' from the pages of history. Either way the illusion still holds.

Lastly, I was reminded of the movie *Poltergeist*, where the family finds out that their home had been built on top of a burial ground and the reason they are having ghost problems is because the construction company just moved the headstones and not the bodies. This came to mind because most

people think that when they are buried, the grave and headstone will remain until (at the end of permanence) it is reduced to dust. How does this relate to archives? In terms of 'use' and in particular this quote from Greene's article:

"To repeat what will increasingly be a familiar theme-in practical terms, archivists need to consider who will be using the records they acquire. The question for lower priority sources should be, which series will satisfy the most needs and users within the least space and with the least effort on the part of the repository?" p135

This quote deals with the money issue. Money means more space and it also means that those who give the money may have more control over what is 'higher' priority. What does this have to do with the movie? It got me thinking of the future of archives. People pay to have a headstone and what they think is a permanent marker in the world; are people paying to have their recorded works 'saved' in archives? Could donations be considered such a payment to guarantee the donator's permanence in the world? And further still, in light of consumerism, is a commercial archive in the near future where anyone can pay to make sure their recorded works remain in archival care (paying for space, much like paying for the headstone?)

This reading log brought up more questions than answers, but I wanted to share my thoughts.

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