

Selection and Appraisal Reading Log :

Dealing with any one or more of the articles read discuss at least one of the challenges that the modern nature of records brings to archives. You may assess (or attempt to explain) some of the solutions discussed in your articles. If you have time, please discuss any evidence of this shift in your adopted archives

All the information presented this week is not necessarily the latest news and as such it is somewhat difficult to discuss some of the challenges that the modern nature of records bring to archives without more information about current practice. Granted our textbook is the more recent with a publish date of 2006, but the assigned readings do not deal with the modern nature of records in the year 2008.

The most current article by Cox, "Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective" was written in 1994 and presents a good overview of how archival theory and practice has adapted to meet the challenges that the modern nature of records have brought to the archives of the past.¹ The specific challenge that the nature of modern records has brought is seen mainly through the sheer abundance of those records. To deal with this abundance, archivists came up with two important additions to the archival process: Samuel's 'documentation strategy' and Ericson's 'institutional integration theory'. Cox examines how these earlier solutions to modern record keeping have taken hold and established themselves somewhat successfully, he presents these solutions and his own in the forms of twelve principles for archival appraisal.

Cox pointed out that the nature of modern records (the sheer abundance and variation of type) demanded a rethinking of archival practice that in-turn led to a 'blending' of the public archives and the manuscripts traditions.² This blend could be seen in how the appraisal process had changed archivists from 'keepers' of records regardless of informational content to 'selectors' of records for the information they contain.³ The selection process itself was restructured using Samuel's 'documentation strategy' to combat the abundance and increase the amount of 'good' information that was saved. The four points of the strategy: choosing and defining the topic to be documented, selecting the advisors and establishing the site for the strategy, structuring the inquiry and examining the form and substance of the available documentation, and selecting and placing the documentation are some of the foundation blocks of Cox's twelve principles of archival appraisal.⁴

Samuel's briefly touched on the need for archives to integrate their collections with other collections to help minimize the duplication factor and Ericson expound the idea through his support for collaboration between Archives, Museums, and Libraries not only in collection patterns but in collection 'sharing' between institutions. Samuel gave voice to Boyd's statement: "There is little virtue in mere acquisition if it is divorced from intelligent purpose."⁵ Ericson placed emphasis on accessioning 'good' information based on content (regardless of information form) and collaboration with other institutions; Cox brought this emphasis forward in his 10th principle: "Archival appraisal is an incomplete process if it is done without consideration of the information found in non-textual records that archivists often do not take responsibility for in their work".⁶ Quoting from Taylor, Cox adds in his defense: "We need to give a great deal more study to the cultural impact of our media of record to the ways in which they 'work us over' as we communicate with them, and to

develop a kind of meta-diplomatics as we come to understand how maps, photos, film, sound recordings, and fine art are to be ... 'read' if they are to be interpreted accurately and their impact on us and society in general assessed. This is essential for effective appraisal, since we may have to recognize the most appropriate medium of many to preserve an event."⁷

I would be very interested to see if the challenges of the old 'modern nature of records' are still present today, if the solutions presented in these articles have been effective in the long term, what new challenges are facing archives in 2008 and what solutions have been suggested in facing them.

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¹Richard Cox, "The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective", *Archivaria*, 38 (1994) 11-36.

²Cox, "Documentation Strategy", 14.

³Timothy L. Ericson, "At the "rim of Creative dissatisfaction": Archivists and Acquisition Development", *Archivaria*, 33 (Winter 1991-92) 70.

⁴Ericson, "At the rim", 67.

⁵Julian P. Boyd, "The Function of State and Local Historical Societies with Respect to Manuscripts", *Archives and Libraries* (Chicago, 1940) 129.

⁶Cox, "Documentation Strategy", 26.

⁷Hugh A. Taylor, "The Totemic Universe: Appraising the Documentary Future", in Christopher Hives, ed., *Archival Appraisal*, 24