Appraisal Guidelines for Reprint Collections

DEBORAH COZORT DAY

Abstract: Appraisal of reprint collections or large series of reprints within manuscript and archival collections is of particular interest to archivists working with voluminous contemporary scientific collections. They have sought to identify and eliminate from collections material that is not unique and has little research value. A dozen articles and books in the archival literature have discussed the collection and appraisal of ephemera, near-print material, and reprints. While several authors have suggested that reprints be appraised closely, they have failed to provide appraisal guidelines.

A review of the existing literature and a set of questions to ask in appraising reprint collections are provided in this article.

About the author: *Deborah Cozort Day received an M.L.S. from Simmons College and certificates from the NARS-George Washington University Institute in Archival Administration and the Case Western Reserve University advanced workshop in university archives. She is archivist of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego, in La Jolla. She was previously assistant archivist at the Institute Archives, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access

A SCIENTIST CONSIDERS HIS PUBLICATIONS to be as important as, or more important than, his manuscript collection and commonly interprets an archivist's request for "papers" as a request for a full set of reprints. There are several reasons for this response. A scientist often considers his publications to be his intellectual autobiography. He is evaluated by his peers on the basis of his published work and on his grasp of and influence on the current literature of his field. According to A. Hunter Dupree,

> the scientist approaches the mountain of past literature with an emphasis on selecting easily and painlessly the lines which lead to the most adequate formulation of his problems. . . . A published paper takes precedence over an unpublished paper.[1]

Nathan Reingold has observed that "scientists tend to assume that all significant results will be published, and therefore documents created in the course of an investigation are not worth preserving."[2] Drafts, preprints and reprints of articles are at the heart of scientific communication. They are passed from hand to hand, photocopied, and discussed at conferences, and they often become part of the intellectual consciousness of the scientific community even before they are available on library shelves. The final report of the Joint Committee on Archives of Science and Technology (JCAST) notes that

> scientists and engineers view published articles as an archival record because their purpose is to stake a public claim to findings which already have been communicated to those in the discipline for whom the findings are significant.[3]

Although archivists frequently discuss the enormous growth of scientific literature, science citation studies demonstrate that a relatively small number of current and "classic" articles within a given scientific field are cited frequently.[4] The scientist wants these articles conveniently at hand. He wants a set of his own reprints for ready reference. He may keep a supply of his own reprints to distribute to his colleagues. It is little wonder, therefore, that the archivist will often find that the scientist had two treasured collections: his own "papers" in reprint form, and reprints by others on subjects that interest him. Because the scientist consults these frequently, he assumes that scholars studying his work or his field will also find them invaluable. While the scientist carefully preserves his reprints, it is often difficult, as Frank Cook has noted, to prevent him from destroying his correspondence and other manuscript material before the archivist has had an opportunity to examine it.[5]

The scientist correctly values his reprint collections in one sense: scientific publications are important. As Maynard Brichford notes, "published material forms the core of the modern archival collection."[6] Clark Elliott has found that historians of science, and particularly those interested in the develop-

[1]A. Hunter Dupree, "What Manuscripts the Historian Wants Saved," *ISIS* 53 (March 1962): 63.

[2]Nathan Reingold, "The National Archives and the History of Science in America," *ISIS* 46 (March 1955): 23.

[3]Clark A. Elliott, ed., *Understanding Progress as Process: Documentation of the History of Post-War Science and Technology in the United States. Final Report of the Joint Committee on Archives of Science and Technology*. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1984), p. 26.

[4]Derek J. de Solla Price, "Networks of Scientific Papers," *Science* 149 (July 30, 1965): 150.

[5]J. Frank Cook, "The Archivist: Link Between Scientist and Historian," *American Archivist* 34 (October 1971): 377–81.

[6]Maynard J. Brichford, *Scientific and Technological Documentation: Archival Evaluation and Processing of University Records Relating to Science and Technology*. (Urbana-Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois, 1969), 11.

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access

ment of scientific ideas, cite published material in their work far more frequently than unpublished material.[7] The question centers not on whether or not scientific literature should be saved. Everyone agrees that it should be. The question is instead in what form should it be saved, who should save it, and where should it be stored?

Scientists have specifically recommended that subject reprint collections be accessioned by archivists.[8] It is important to note, however, that scientists are more concerned with the informational value of a reprint collection than with its evidential value. At a conference on scientific reprint collections held at the American Philosophical Society in April 1984, several distinguished historians of science stated that they and their colleagues do not use reprint collections to document the work of the persons who collected them. They found reprint collections to be valuable largely because they are convenient to use and may contain items that would be difficult to obtain readily through interlibrary loan. The conferees concluded that it is rarely necessary to retain a particular scientist's subject collection of reprints intact and that the provenance of a particular reprint, unless it is annotated, is immaterial to their research.[9]

Archivists have considered the appraisal of reprints within general guidelines formulated for the appraisal of printed material within manuscript collections. Richard C. Berner and M. Gary Bettis recommend that as a general policy, printed material should be kept with the manuscript collection with which it was found. In their survey of current archival practice, they have found that half the archives surveyed retain such material in collections and half disperse it to other libraries or other institutional units.[10] Kenneth Duckett recommends the removal of all printed matter from manuscript collections as a general rule but notes many significant exceptions and a general consensus among curators that "manuscript notebooks, first and subsequent drafts, galleys, and page proofs of an author's work ought to remain in a collection."[11] JCAST makes an even more specific recommendation:

> when appraising reprints of a given scientist, archivists should realize that they provide adequate service to historians and other future researchers if they retain a listing of the scientist's bibliography plus any reprints of his/her articles in journals not available in their archives or library, and destroy the rest of the reprints of that scientist.[12]

The ground for the appraisal of reprints has been surveyed in archival literature and practice but no appraisal map has been drawn. Appraisal is a process that requires judgement and interpretation. Like all such intellectual processes, a specific appraisal decision is often less important than the formulation of questions that define the problem. The following seven basic questions have been developed to help archivists

[7]Clark A. Elliott, "Citation Patterns and Documentation for the History of Science: Some Methodological Considerations," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981): 138. Richard Shryock makes the same point in "The Viewpoint of an Historian and a Manuscript Librarian," *ISIS* 53 (March 1962): 10.

[8]Kendall Birr, "What Shall We Save," *ISIS* 53 (March 1962): 74.

[9]Conference on Scientific Reprints, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 9 April 1984. Proceedings will be published in *ISIS*.

[10]Richard C. Berner and M. Gary Bettis, "Disposition of Nonmanuscript Items Found Among Manuscripts," *American Archivist* 33 (July 1970): 277.

[11]Kenneth W. Duckett, *Modern Manuscript: A Practical Manual for their Management, Care and Use.* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1975), p. 177.

[12]Clark A. Elliott, ed., *Understanding Progress as Process*, p. 37.

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access

appraise reprint collections. They are augmented by a number of lesser questions requiring factual answers. It is hoped that the facts thus gathered will provide data with which archivists may formulate the more subjective answers to the basic questions. It should be emphasized that these questions are merely an aid to the archivist and are not meant to substitute for judgement and interpretation. It may be necessary to ask additional questions during the appraisal of some collections; and, of course, not all of the following questions will be appropriate to all collections in all repositories.

What is the context of the collection which includes printed material?

When was the collection started and when was it closed?

What are the dates of the earliest and latest items among the printed material?

Whose collection is it?

Who was responsible for the selection and/or accession of printed items in the collection?

Where was the collection housed?

For what purpose was the collection created?

For what purpose was the printed material collected?

Were these purposes changed or modified? When and how?

How are printed items arranged? Were items always maintained in this order?

What persons and/or groups used the printed material? When and how was it used?

What subjects are represented?

Is the series of printed matter comprehensive?

Has the printed matter been collected consistently, or are there gaps and weaknesses in subject coverage? What are they?

Are items missing from the series or collection? How many? And what are they?

Does the printed material have long-term research potential?

What does it document?

Is the series valuable largely because it documents the work of the person who created the collection?

Is the series valuable largely because it documents a field of research or subject?

How long will this material interest scholars?

Who else will use this material? For what purpose?

Who advocates the acceptance of this material? Why?

Does this material complement or duplicate other holdings in your repository?

Does this material complement or duplicate other holdings in another repository in your institution?

Does this material complement or duplicate other information sources in your area or in other repositories?

Can this material stand alone, or does its research potential depend upon something (i.e., a collection of specimens) or someone else?

Are printed items in the collection suitable for exhibition?

Is the printed material unique?

Physically, what types of items are included: Reprints or photocopies of printed articles? Books? Manuscripts? Photographs? Data? Serials?

Is the material annotated? Are annotations substantive? Whose annotations are they?

Does the material include autographed items? Are these valuable or significant to your institution?

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access

Does the material include rare items?

Is it necessary to preserve the material in its present form? Why?

What bibliographic access is provided for the printed material?

Is full bibliographic data provided on the title page of items?

Is there an accessions log?

Are there author/title and/or subject catalogs? If so, do they give full bibliographic data for items?

Is there a bibliography?

If bibliographic information is available, is it necessary to retain the material physically?

If no bibliographic access is provided, is it possible and practical to generate a catalog, bibliography, or narrative description of the material?

Are there restrictions on the administration or use of the material?

May your repository reserve the right to deaccession this collection or items in it?

Is the series of printed material offered intact?

Is the acquisition of this material tied to the acquisition of other collections?

Must the items in this collection or series remain together?

Are there restrictions on access to or use of this material?

Does this material fit your collection policy?

Why is this material being offered to your repository?

Does your repository hold other collections including printed material, reprint "libraries" or series of reprints?

In what repository would researchers expect to find this material or material on subjects represented in this collection?

Does this collection better fit the collection policy of another repository?

If your repository does not accept this material, what will happen to it?

What is the physical condition of the material?

What is the extent in linear feet of the printed material?

Are items in good physical condition?

Are bindings in good repair?

Is there evidence of mold or infestation?

Have you the space and resources to care for this collection?

Are funds available to preserve or film the material?

Except for the first question, which establishes the context within which a particular collection was created, the seven questions are not necessarily ranked in order of importance. Once one has determined when, how, and for what purpose a collection was created, information on the scope of the collection and the relationship of series and items within a collection begins to emerge. The provenance of a collection yields important clues to its contents and its subject strengths and weaknesses. Evidence of primary and secondary arrangement of files or items may reflect significant changes in the purpose and use of the collection. Background information on the persons who contributed material to the file may lead the archivist to individuals who can offer valuable advice on the research potential of a collection or the importance of printed matter within a collection to a particular discipline.

The second question—does the printed material have long-term research potential?—helps the archivist determine what the collection documents and the quality and relative importance of that documentation. Printed material

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access

within a manuscript collection may document the career and interests of the person who created that collection. Such material may also document access to knowledge at a particular time.[13] The Archives of the University of Louisville retains printed material within tenure and review files because it is the raw material for tenure deliberations and documents the intellectual life of the campus.[14] Some series of reprints are important because they document a discipline or an emerging technology. For instance, the University of California at San Diego retains rare early catalogs of electronic musical instruments within musicians' manuscript collections.[15]

On the other hand, many collections include isolated reprints or passively collected series of reprints that document neither the activities of a person or group nor the development of a discipline. Prominent scholars regularly receive unsolicited reprints that may be unrelated to their research interests. In some cases these are dutifully filed into a scientist's papers by clerical staff and are never consulted. In other cases, a once complete collection of reprints is missing so many items that the collection is virtually worthless. An archivist might decide that the retention of a bibliography or card catalog of a collection will meet documentary needs and that the reprints themselves need not be retained.

The archivist must also determine if the particular printed matter at hand substantially duplicates material available in the general library collection or material accessible in some other repository. It is helpful to select a sample of items from a series of reprints and check these against general library holdings and holdings of other repositories. If done properly, the sample can indicate what percentage of the series is unique and what percentage would be generally available to the scholar elsewhere.[16]

The third question helps determine if the printed matter is unique. Is it composed of rare items, autographed items, annotated items? Answering the question requires close item-level scrutiny of reprint series. Such scrutiny may yield unexpected dividends, for on close examination, some reprint collections or series are found to include manuscripts as well as printed items.

Restrictions imposed by donors on the use or administration of a collection have been extensively discussed in the archival literature.[17] While previous authors have urged archivists to accept collections with as few restrictions and as much disposition discretion as possible, some archives have found it politic to retain some printed material for a time, even if it meets none of a repository's criteria for retention. Most donors are aware of space limitations in archives, and their anxiety about the fate of their published material is relieved when they learn that it is already available in the general collection. One scientist has even noted that the use and perceived usefulness of personal reprint collections decline when scientists receive

[13]Personal communication with Helen Samuels, Institute Archivist and Head, Special Collections, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, October 1983.

[14]Personal communication with Dwayne Cox, Archivist, University of Louisville, October 19, 1982.

[15]Personal communication with Garrett Bowles, Music Librarian, University of California, San Diego, November 1982.

[16]There is an enormous literature on sampling techniques. See, for instance, William G. Cochran, *Sampling Techniques.* 2d ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1963) and Herman Burstein, *Attribute Sampling* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971).

[17]See, for instance, Sue E. Holbert, *Archives and Manuscripts: Reference and Access* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977).

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access

bibliographic instruction from librarians.[18] Some donors respond favorably to the suggestion that their reprint collection remain in their department or that it be passed on to a young colleague or graduate student. Some donors request that their reprints be sent to libraries whose limited acquisitions funds encourage them to acquire reprints. In rare cases, however, donors have required repositories to accept and retain extensive collections of printed matter in order to obtain a manuscript collection. This may establish a potentially damaging precedent, and every effort should be made to secure for the archives the right to deaccession unneeded items. If the administration or use of a collection is encumbered by restrictions, the research value of that collection may be diminished.

The sixth question requires that the archivist determine whether the printed matter fits the repository's collection policy. If it does, the archivist must also ask whether a researcher would expect to find this material in a particular repository. Duckett discusses this point and concludes that the decision on what to retain within a collection and what to separate might rest in part on what will be done with a separated item. He notes that the relevance of a particular item to the collection within which it is found must be a factor in the decision.[19] The archives of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography found extensive printed genealogical material on the family of an oceanographer among his papers. Some of the material was unique, but researchers would certainly not expect to find such material in a marine science archives. The archivist decided that a record of the material would be retained, but the material itself was offered to a genealogical library in the scientist's native region.

The physical condition of materials is an important though secondary factor in appraisal. If the reprints have been attacked by mold or insects, the archivist must determine how extensive the damage is and the approximate cost of conservation. If the conservation resources of the repository are limited, the archivist must seriously weigh the research value of the material against the high cost of conservation, though research value should remain the primary consideration. Although archivists should not allow space considerations to influence appraisal decisions, Mary Janzen notes that

> the archivist in the general repository, where scientific records compete for shelf space with other more traditional records and papers, must carefully consider the research potential of these types of records before deciding to retain them.[20]

There are three main options for dealing with printed matter in collections. They may be discarded, separated, or retained. If a series of reprints is not unique; has little research value; does not reflect the work, research interests, or access to knowledge of its creator; or does not significantly document a discipline, the archivist may decide to discard the entire series. This is especially true if the reprints are described in a catalog or some other bibliographical control device which may be retained in lieu of the printed matter.

Archivists use many separation methods. The most common involves the use of a separation sheet which gives a full citation for the printed item. This sheet

[18]Stacey E. Palmer, "Teaching Students to do Research: Professors Get Help from Librarians," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 May 1983, p. 27.

[19]Kenneth W. Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts*, p. 177.

[20]Mary E. Janzen, "Scientific Records in A 'General' Repository," *Midwestern Archivist* 5 (1980): 35.

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access

replaces the printed item, which is discarded or integrated into a general collection of printed material. Other archives photocopy or microfilm the title pages of printed items and discard the items. One can retain a bibliographical device and discard the printed matter. Any one or a combination of these techniques can allow an archives to meet its documentary obligations while reducing the bulk of its collections.

The Institute Archives at Massachusetts Institute of Technology has recently experimented with a new separation technique. Voluminous series of printed matter are described by category in a narrative which is included in the guide to the collection. The printed matter itself can then be discarded or separated.[21]

The appraisal of reprint series within a manuscript or archival collection is equally as important or time consuming as the appraisal of the collection of which the series is a part. If such material is not carefully appraised, useless material may inadvertently be retained and space wasted, or valuable materials may be inadvertently discarded. Scholars' time may also be wasted if valuable items within a collection are buried in an avalanche of worthless ephemera.

[21]Personal communication from Helen Samuels, 12 April 1983. See also Joan Haas, Barbara T. Simmons, and Helen Slotkin, "An Appraisal Process for the Records of Science and Technology" (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1984).

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-07-01 via free access