Looking Backward to Plan for the Future: Collection Analysis for Manuscript Repositories

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Abstract: In recent years several archivists have challenged the profession's approach to collection development as being haphazard, uncoordinated, and random. Collection analysis, the evaluation of the characteristics of a repository's holdings, attempts to systematize and bring more planning to the collecting process. Between 1980 and 1986 three midwestern state historical repositories conducted collection analysis studies—the Minnesota Historical Society, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Staff members analyzed the manuscript holdings to determine what topics their collections documented, and in what number. The quantified data was reviewed in detail and eventually resulted in the development of new collecting priorities and strategies. The analysis was a useful managerial tool that brought greater consciousness to the collecting process. Its value, however, went beyond individual repositories to foster interinstitutional cooperation.

IN HIS 1974 PRESIDENTIAL address to the Society of American Archivists, F. Gerald Ham challenged archivists to introduce planning to the collecting process. "Is there any other field of information gathering," he asked, "that has such a broad mandate with a selection process so random, so fragmented, so uncoordinated, and so often accidental?"[1] While many archivists continue to build their collections in an unsystematic, even serendipitous way, Ham's challenge did not fall entirely on deaf ears. In recent years a number of archivists have addressed these issues, and have proposed methodologies to systematize the collecting process. Collection analysis, the evaluation of the characteristics of a repository's holdings, is one methodology through which archivists can determine the nature and strength of a repository's holdings in specified areas and then use this knowledge to develop explicit collecting priorities.

The development of collection analysis is part of a larger process of increasing systemization and standardization in all areas of the profession. Archivists have begun to develop a body of professional literature. Automation has encouraged an increasing level of standardization. Lastly, the staggering amount of paper created by governmental and industrial bureaucracies is forcing archivists to be more systematic in selecting what to keep and what to discard. Archivists can no longer collect "everything," but must begin to make choices. As Helen Samuels has pointed out, "our modern, complex, information-rich society" requires that archivists no longer be keepers, but be se-lectors, retaining only those records with substantive informational content.[2]

While the funding reductions of the 1970s and 1980s have encouraged archivists to narrow their collecting programs, the influence of social history coupled with the political idealism of the 1960s convinced many archivists of the need to broaden their mandate to include materials about the lives of ordinary men and women and radical or non-traditional political and social movements.[3] Although one might disagree with the traditional collecting emphasis on prominent personalities, it did provide a definite collecting focus. As Linda Henry has indicated, even the collections in repositories dedicated to documenting special groups, such as women or minorities, emphasized the great and famous.[4] If archivists want to document the everyday lives of ordinary people, where are they to begin? What selection criteria should be used, and how should they be developed? If archivists are to fulfill their mission "to ensure the identification, preservation, and use of records of enduring value," they need the necessary tools.[5]

Collection analysis is one such tool. As a method to assess a repository's holdings in specific categories, it provides a profile of an institution's collection at a particular time. Archivists can use such concrete knowledge of their holdings to make informed decisions about collecting priorities. Collection analysis has two parts: (1) a quantitative phase in which specific characteristics of a repository's holdings are enumerated and (2) a qualitative phase in which these findings are analyzed and

[1]F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 5.

[2]Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 110.

[3]See, for example, Patrick M. Quinn, "Archivists and Historians: The Times They Are A-Changin'," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 5–13; Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "The Shame of the Cities: Public Records of the Metropolis," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 27–34; and Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 14–26.

[4]Linda J. Henry, "Collecting Policies of Special-Subject Repositories," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 59.

[5]*Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986), vi.

placed in a larger conceptual framework. Along with other considerations, such as the universe of documentation and the realistic collecting possibilities in particular fields, collection analysis can be used by a repository to revise or refine an acquisitions policy or to gauge its success at meeting collecting goals.

In this article three recent collection analysis studies will be examined; the reasons for the studies, their methodologies, and some of their findings will be explored. The collecting priorities and guidelines developed as a result of these studies and the broader implications of collection analysis for the profession will be considered.

Collection Analysis in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan

Between 1980 and 1986 three midwestern state historical repositories conducted collection analysis studies. In each case, the study responded to a concern that the repository's collection development policy was too vague and general and a perception that collecting was haphazard, reactive, and idiosyncratic. Staff members used the knowledge of actual strengths and weaknesses as revealed by the study to formulate more explicit collecting priorities and guidelines.

The first of these projects, at the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), grew out of a self-study of public programs initiated in 1979 with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This review stressed the need for an analysis of the MHS's manuscript holdings, the development of a definitive collecting

policy, and a better definition of the collecting role of its regional centers. A planning task force was formed in 1980 at the conclusion of the self-study, and a Manuscripts Collection Committee undertook an analysis of all the collections, which took approximately six months to complete.[6]

The impetus for the collection analysis study at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW) came from the statewide assessment of historical records preservation activities funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Organized to address many of the same issues raised by the MHS project, the twenty-month study, which began in 1984, included an assessment of the holdings of the main branch of the SHSW in Madison as well as Wisconsin's thirteen area research centers. NHPRC funding supported a full-time staff member for the project.[7]

The Bentley Historical Library (BHL), which includes the Michigan Historical Collections and the University of Michigan Archives,[8] celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1985. The occasion prompted the staff to evaluate the library's success in documenting the Michigan experience. An NHPRC Fellow in Archives Administration, who began in September 1985, had primary responsibility for conducting the collection analysis, which concluded in June 1986.

The design of the Wisconsin and Michigan studies was relatively similar. Both had outside funding support and incorporated computer analysis. In contrast, the MHS, with no outside funding and

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[6]Funding for the network of regional centers ceased shortly after this. Richard A. Cameron, "Planning for the Future: The Minnesota Experience" (Paper delivered at the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 28 August 1986), 1–2; Gloria M. Thompson, "From Profile to Policy: A Minnesota Historical Society Case Study in Collection Development," *Midwestern Archivist* 8, no. 2 (1983): 29; Conversation with Richard Cameron, 12 November 1987.

[7]Timothy L. Ericson meeting with Bentley Historical Library staff, Ann Arbor, 23 August 1985.

[8]In the absence of a state historical society with a collecting mandate, the Bentley Historical Library performs this function. The Historical Society of Michigan does not maintain a library or manuscript repository. The Minnesota Historical Society and State Historical Society of Wisconsin are both state agencies, while the Bentley Historical Library is part of the University of Michigan.

no additional staff, conducted its work before the widespread availability of the personal computer. Even though the staff had to record and calculate all of the findings manually, it was the only one of the three that analyzed all repository collections, a total of 2,941. The other two studies used sampling. Topics were assigned to MHS staff members who determined which manuscript collections documented their topics. A primary and secondary topical emphasis was identified for each collection. This information, along with date span and size of the collection, was recorded on a collections log form. The analysis included the holdings of the Minnesota Regional Research Center Network, then administered by the Minnesota Historical Society, and excluded non-Minnesota-related collections and single-item local history materials. MHS finding aids, inventories, card catalog, and acquisition reports provided the information to assign topics and record date span and size of each collection.[9]

The Wisconsin study included the State Historical Society's holdings as well as those of the area research centers. Like the Minnesota project, the survey included only collections related to the state. Each collection was assigned a maximum of three subjects. Date span and size of the collection, form of material, county documented by the collection, number of decades represented in the collection, and several other assessments were recorded for a random sample of 20 percent of the manuscript collections at the society's headquarters in Madison and the regional centers. Because data entry took place in several places, the project used a number of different data base management software programs.[10]

Unlike the studies in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the Michigan study concentrated on the holdings of one repository. Each collection was assigned up to five subject designations. Given the absence of regional archival centers in Michigan, the staff particularly wanted to assess how well the collections documented various regions of the state. Thus, the project design allowed each collection to be assigned up to five geographic designations. These designations included Michigan's eighty-three counties, with additional listings for Detroit, Ann Arbor, and out-of-state. This data, along with date span, size, and decades represented by the collection, was collected for 1,106 collections. This represented a sample of one-third of those manuscript collections that contained post-1870 material. Because the focus of the study was modern documentation and prospective collecting, collections that did not contain any post-1870 material were excluded from the study. The project used dBase III to analyze and manipulate the collected data.

The creation or selection of a list of subject categories to provide the intellectual framework for a collection analysis is perhaps the most critical element in the project design. The ideal list would be detailed enough to include the universe of human activity and, by extension, the range of subjects documented in a given repository. Yet it should be simple enough to apply without a great deal of difficulty.

The Minnesota Historical Society study used the "basic hierarchy/main entries" list developed by the Midwest Archives Guide Project, an automated data base project involving the state archives of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois. This list included eighteen broad subject cate-

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[9]Thompson, "From Profile to Policy," 29, 31.

[10]Timothy L. Ericson, "Wisconsin's Collection Development: Implementing a Cooperative Documentation Strategy" (Paper delivered at the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 28 August 1986), 1–2; Ericson meeting with BHL staff; Bonnie K. Blaser to author, Kenosha, Wis., 24 October 1985.

gories, such as agriculture, business, la-
bor, politics, and religious life.[11]

State Historical Society of Wisconsin
staff grappled with the problem of devis-
ing a list of subject categories by first ex-
amining a number of existing models.
Both the Dewey Decimal and Library of
Congress classification schedules, which
attempt to classify all of human know-
ledge, were rejected as too complex and
detailed for the purposes of the study.
Not only would the unnecessary detail
slow subject assignment, but any mean-
ingful analysis would require collapsing
large numbers of categories together,
thus defeating the purpose of using such
a detailed list.[12]

Instead of using an existing model, the
SHSW decided to create a list of subject
categories. The SHSW subject list was in-
fluenced by the MHS project but used a
framework developed by the Nebraska
Historical Society, which was based,
in turn, on anthropologist George P.
Murdock's *Outline of Cultural Materials*.
Murdock's list attempted to provide a
framework of human activity that could
be used in cross-cultural comparisons. It
included eighty-eight major headings—
such as clothing, settlements, and mar-
keting—and over five hundred subhead-
ings—such as, under the heading clothing,
normal garb, special garments, and cloth-
ing manufacture.[13] The SHSW list of fif-
teen broad subjects and subcategories
was conceived as the ideal picture of what
a repository documenting the Wisconsin
experience should contain. It included

such categories as religion, recreation/
leisure activities, and transportation.
Each subject category was then divided
into subcategories that helped identify
the topic more closely. The category of
politics, for example, included the sub-
categories county/local, state, national,
organizations/events/movements, and
individuals.[14]

Although the SHSW staff produced
the list of subject categories specifically
for their own study and based it, in part,
on what they thought their holdings were,
it is a list that could be adapted for most
state collections. After similar considera-
tion of other classification lists, the Bent-
ley Historical Library staff adopted the
Wisconsin list for its study. (See appendix
for the subject list used by the Bentley
Historical Library.) Although changes
and additions to the list were necessary,
they were such that a comparison of the
two studies' findings was possible. The
ability to compare results and ultimately
coordinate collecting activities was a
compelling argument in favor of using
the Wisconsin list.[15]

Looking Backward: Findings of the Three Studies

In each study, quantitative analysis of
the collected data produced a few sur-
prises, dispelled some myths, and con-
firmed a number of assumptions concern-
ing collection strengths and weaknesses.
Looking first at the Minnesota Historical
Society project, statistical profiles were
produced for each broad subject area and

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[11]Thompson, "From Profile to Policy," 30.

[12]In order to analyze a library's collections, the American Library Association guidelines suggest a mini-
mum refinement of the Library of Congress classification schedule into approximately five hundred subdivi-
sions. American Library Association, Collection Development Committee, *Guidelines for Collection Devel-
opment* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1979), 6–7.

[13]George P. Murdock, *Outline of World Cultures* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1950).

[14]Ericson, "Wisconsin's Collection Development," 9–10.

[15]In a different, but related study, the New York State Archives documentation strategies pilot project is
also using the Wisconsin list of subject categories as the basis for its regional discussions of documentation
needs. Richard Cox, who is directing these discussions, finds that the advantages of the list are that it is short,
easily grasped and understood, yet comprehensive. Conversation with Richard J. Cox, 11 May 1987; Richard
J. Cox, "Choosing Documentation Strategies" (unpublished paper), 4–7.

compiled into a table that listed collection strengths and weaknesses within each subject. For example, in the area of military affairs, the collections were strong in documentation of the Civil War and the Dakota Uprising, but weak in documentation of the Korean and Vietnam wars and the antiwar movement of the 1960s. The study dispelled several myths concerning collection strength. For example, the analysis indicated that only 2 percent of the collections contained a primary emphasis on labor, an area in which the staff believed holdings were strong. While some political collections provided documentation of the radical formative period of trade union history, there was less documentation of labor leaders and labor unions after the early years.[16]

The study at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin revealed virtually no documentation of Wisconsin tourism—one of the state's three largest industries. Agriculture also was poorly documented, particularly considering its importance in the state; however, extensive public records and government documents compensated for the lack of manuscript collections. In the area of religion, the extensive documentation was limited to a few mainline Protestant denominations and focused on sacramental and institutional records. Seventy percent of the Wisconsin religious collections consisted of sacramental records.[17]

The results of the study at the Bentley Historical Library revealed, not unexpectedly, that the greatest number of collections documented education, particularly the University of Michigan. Faculty papers (considered personal papers, not university records), papers of former students, records of organizations with university ties, and the general influence of the university in the city of Ann Arbor accounted for the strong university component. Politics, social organization and activity, and religion completed the list of strongly documented topics. Labor was the most poorly documented subject in the study. Communications, agriculture, and natural resources were other areas documented by the fewest number of BHL collections.

Geographically, Ann Arbor in particular and southeastern Michigan in general were the locales with the strongest documentation in nearly every subject. Other state repositories have reported a similar pattern—their collections tend to be dominated by materials from the city in which they are located.[18] This is less of a concern in states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin that have regional archival centers. The Minnesota Historical Society, for example, looks to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area as a focus of collecting efforts, relying on the regional centers to document particular topics, such as agriculture, as well as their own regions.[19]

Comparison of the findings of these three studies confirms Ham's contention that there is a "structural bias in the national archival record."[20] Archivists tend to collect the same kinds of material and, simultaneously, to neglect the same kinds of material. For example, both the SHSW and BHL studies concluded that agriculture was poorly documented by their repositories and that their documentation of religion was scant for all but a few mainline Protestant denominations.

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[16]Thompson, "From Profile to Policy," 35.

[17]Ericson, "Wisconsin's Collection Development," 13; State Historical Society of Wisconsin, "Preliminary Collection Development Report" (Madison: 1986).

[18]Conversation with Richard J. Cox, June 1986.

[19]Cameron, "Planning for the Future," 3; Thompson, "From Profile to Policy," 35, 38–39.

[20]F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," *American Archivist* 47 (Winter 1984): 13.

Tourism was another topic neglected by both repositories.

There can be any number of reasons why a collection analysis reveals a repository to be "weak" in a particular topic—it could be the fault of the sample, the subject classification scheme, or the design of the study; the records may be in another repository; no records may actually exist. Moreover, any discussion of strengths and weaknesses can only be comparative. There is no absolute standard to determine the adequate amount of material for a particular topic. How many German-American family collections should a state repository have? How many records of general stores or local bakers' unions are sufficient? How many are adequate? The answers to these questions must be contextual.

While these factors may mitigate the validity of comparing study results, there are certain areas in which the studies revealed similar patterns. In addition to ones already mentioned, areas in which the studies appeared to show similar weaknesses included documentation of each state's ethnic and racial groups. While the Michigan study identified collections documenting nineteen racial or ethnic groups, for many of the groups there were only one or two small collections. Only blacks and Germans were represented by more than a few collections. In addition, the BHL had almost nothing about the "new immigrants"—Hispanics, Asians, or Arabs. (The Detroit area Arab community is the largest outside of the Middle East.) The Minnesota and Wisconsin studies revealed similar patterns. The Wisconsin ethnic collections, for ex-

ample, were dominated by documentation of Germans, Jews, Native Americans, Norwegians, and Poles.[21] All three found that they had almost no documentation concerning the Korean War and only slightly more concerning the Vietnam war.[22] In the latter, most of the Michigan collections documented the antiwar movement in Ann Arbor.

The Future: Towards New Collecting Strategies

Because repositories and the information in their collections do not exist in isolation, the Wisconsin and Michigan studies examined the results of the quantitative analysis within the larger universe of documentation. In the SHSW study, the staff surveyed published sources, public records, visual documentation, the holdings of other Wisconsin repositories, and selected out-of-state repositories, considering the results of this survey in the final formulation of the collection development policy. Intensive discussions about the quantitative data with SHSW staff, historians, and researchers were also very influential in forming collecting priorities.[23]

In the Michigan study, BHL staff placed the quantitative data in a historiographical context by reading historiographical essays and current studies in history and related disciplines.[24] This exercise enabled staff members to learn about the structure of each scholarly field and its components, the nature of current research, and the kinds of source material used by scholars. Such knowledge was one more element in the educational process leading to the development of

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[21]The SHSW's strength in Jewish and Polish materials is the result of two previous collecting projects. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, "Collection Development Policy for Wisconsin Manuscripts" (draft) (Madison: 1986).

[22]Thompson, "From Profile to Policy," 31; State Historical Society of Wisconsin, "Collection Development Policy."

[23]Ericson, "Wisconsin's Collection Development," 11.

[24]Because this study focused on research use of records rather than administrative use, it did not examine the use of records by their creators, as is suggested in *Planning for the Archival Profession*, 8.

collecting priorities and guidelines. As in Wisconsin, BHL staff considered the holdings of other repositories in Michigan, appropriate collections outside the state, as well as the realistic collecting possibilities in each field. Based on this research and reading, staff members prepared essays discussing these issues and recommending collecting priorities and strategies; the staff also participated in a day-long retreat. These last steps linked the collection analysis project to the creation of a new collection development policy.

The leap from collection analysis to the formulation of collecting strategies is not simple. The results of the collection analysis study must be evaluated within a context that incorporates the following concerns: What are the collecting priorities of other repositories? What are the collecting possibilities in the field? Is it politically wise for the repository to enter the field? Collection analysis is descriptive, not prescriptive. While it can describe the relative strengths of a collection's holdings, it is not a mathematical formula that can determine the course of future collecting. This must be a subjective process. A repository looks at the list of topics documented by its collections with their relative strengths and weaknesses now delineated, and decides to build on one particular strength and de-emphasize another, or to develop a subject area in which it has few collections while consciously neglecting another. Such decisions can be different at different times and for different institutions.[25]

For example, both the Minnesota and Michigan studies identified labor as a weak area in their collections. The Minne- sota Historical Society made it a collecting priority, while the Bentley Historical Library decided to continue to neglect the field because of the proximity of the Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs in nearby Detroit. Both the Wisconsin and Michigan studies found almost no collections relating to tourism in their studies. The SHSW decided to make tourism a collecting priority; the BHL did not, in part, because of the SHSW decision.[26]

Each study concluded its work by producing a statement of collecting priorities and suggested collecting strategies. Unlike an institution's collecting policy or mission statement, these statements of collecting priorities are seen as "living documents" that will be periodically re-examined and revised. Each of these statements briefly summarized the nature of the institution's current holdings in the field, made priority collecting recommendations, and suggested certain related activities. Such statements provide guidance for field programs as well as benchmarks to evaluate progress.

A brief description of the four areas selected by the BHL staff for intensive collecting efforts illustrates some of the elements to be considered when translating collection analysis into collecting strategy. The four priority areas identified were the auto industry, religion, politics, and family and domestic life.

The auto industry. Only forty-two collections in the BHL study fell into the subcategory of industry and manufacturing, and only a few of these concerned the auto industry, Michigan's leading industry. The staff made improvement of the BHL's documentation of the auto industry a collecting priority because of the

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[25]The Minnesota Historical Society and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin are state agencies with collecting mandates that include public records. The Bentley Historical Library does not collect public records. This difference will obviously influence the establishment of collecting priorities.

[26]Thompson, "From Profile to Policy," 31; Ericson, "Wisconsin's Collection Development," 12; conversation with Timothy L. Ericson, 14 April 1986.

auto industry's enormous size, its economic importance, the hostility of the industry to outside researchers, and the limited number of significant repository holdings. (The only major Michigan auto industry holdings are the Ford Motor Company Archives at Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village and the United Auto Workers records at the Reuther Library.)

Religion. Although the collection analysis showed that the general subject of religion was well-documented by the Bentley Historical Library, it also revealed that the religious material consisted primarily of mainstream Protestant church records. One hundred and seventy-eight collections in the study documented religion. Efforts would be made to broaden the religious holdings to include less-documented religious groups—fundamentalist Christians, smaller Protestant groups, religio-political groups, and non-Christian religious groups. While the library would continue to collect the records of the statewide Protestant denominations, offers of individual church records would receive greater scrutiny.[27]

Politics. The collection analysis revealed that politics, like religion, was a strong subject area at the BHL, with 269 collections in the category. In the subcategory of state politics (115 collections), the collection included the papers of many Michigan governors and several congressmen and senators. In the subcategory of county/local politics (72 collections), the collection analysis showed that, with certain exceptions, the local political collections generally lacked depth and focus. Even though the repository's mandate was to collect statewide, it was impossible to collect equally in all geographical areas. The only real depth in the library's collections for local politics

was in southeastern Michigan—particularly for Ann Arbor and Detroit. A collecting plan would be developed to strengthen political collections for other areas of the state. In addition, the field program would develop a more systematic plan for the area of politics considering which issues the library should document and how best to accomplish this.

Family and domestic life. The staff made this subcategory of social organization and activity a collecting priority, not because of the quantitative strengths or weaknesses of the holdings (there were 130 collections in this subcategory in the study), but because of the quality and nature of the documentation. The kinds of family papers that find their way to a manuscript repository tend to be of a certain type. They are usually the papers of families that are prominent, leading citizens, often early settlers of a community. Social historians and historians of the family, however, are interested in studying a variety of types of families, not just leading, successful, and civically active ones. Looked at from the perspective of social history, the staff concluded that the BHL needed to consider seeking family papers that were representative of particular social classes or ethnic groups or that documented social or political issues.

To redress geographic imbalance in the collections, the staff recommended geographic targeting both to broaden and focus collecting. Through geographic targeting the library would select a small group of cities, suburbs, counties, and towns in different areas of Michigan that were representative and make a commitment to document in depth and over time the political, social, religious, economic, and cultural life in the area. At the most intensive level of geographic targeting, the library would develop a working rela-

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[27]The Minnesota Historical Society has recently instituted a similar policy. Cameron, "Planning for the Future," 5.

tionship with a local repository to document cooperatively that geographic area. By selecting a few communities to collect in depth, the repository could begin to document the infrastructure of communal life. Through geographic targeting the library would seek collections that through their interrelatedness revealed the patterns of existence of a particular locale. This approach is favored by social historians engaged in intensive studies of a specific place.[28]

In order to better accomplish the library's institutional goals, the staff emphasized the importance of developing a new posture in the collecting field. In addition to the specific collecting priorities, they advocated that the library be more active—and less reactive—in collecting, have a clearer concept of what it wanted to collect, and develop criteria to guide field staff in the refusal of collections not meeting collecting goals. As a direct result of these discussions, the library established a four-member staff committee that meets monthly to review the progress of the field program toward the collecting goals, examining both the quality of documentation and the quality or significance of the issues addressed in a particular collection. The Minnesota Historical Society instituted a Policy and Planning Committee with similar responsibilities at the conclusion of its collection analysis project.[29]

Similar Issues in Libraries and Museums

While none of the studies specifically acknowledged their influence, the collection analysis projects at Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan are similar to collection analysis in the library world. Library collection analysis owes its origins to the financial crisis faced by libraries in the 1970s. Forced to consider ways to use their already limited funds more efficiently, librarians developed standards for formulating collection development policies, assessing collection strengths and weaknesses, and coordinating acquisitions in specific fields.[30]

The American Library Association codified collection analysis in its guidelines for writing a collection development policy, published in 1979. These suggest that a library first determine the number of titles held for each subject classification and then rank the level of collection density and collecting intensity for each subject on a five-point scale from minimal to comprehensive. For each subject category, the existing strength of the collection, actual current level of collection activity, and desirable level of collecting to meet program needs are to be indicated.[31]

The National Shelflist Count, organized in 1972, collected and published comparative data (organized by Library of Congress classification number) about

[28]"Archives and Social History" (Panel discussion, Michigan Archival Association Spring Meeting, Ann Arbor, 15 May 1987). There are numerous examples of local community studies. See, for example, W. Lloyd Warner, *Yankee City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress, Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development and Immigrants in Detroit 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and Robert S. and Helen Merell Lynd, *Middletown, a Study in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1937). For a statement of priority collecting areas and collection development policy statements for specific subject areas, see Bentley Historical Library, "Collection Development Policy Statements" (draft) (Ann Arbor: 1986).

[29]Cameron, "Planning for the Future," 5.

[30]See, for example, "Guidelines for the Formulation of Collection Development Policies," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 21 (Winter 1977): 40–47; *Cooperative Collection Development* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Studies, 1985); Nancy E. Gwinn and Paul H. Mosher, "Coordinating Collection Development: The RLG Conspectus," *College & Research Libraries* 44 (March 1983): 128–40.

[31]American Library Association, *Guidelines*, 3–7.

the strengths and rates of growth of major North American research libraries. Libraries were then able to compare their title counts with other institutions in over five hundred subject areas.[32]

The Research Libraries Group Conspectus, which began in 1980, probably influenced archivists' thinking about collection analysis more than the previous two models because of the participation of many manuscript repositories in RLG and RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network). The RLG Conspectus provides an overview, arranged by subject, of existing collection strengths and future collecting intensities of RLG member libraries. Through its ranking of collecting strengths or levels from zero (out-of-scope) to five (comprehensive), it serves as a location device for collections considered as national resources and as a basis for the assignment of primary collecting responsibilities to specific libraries.[33] Although the world of manuscripts does not have the same kind of standards as libraries to evaluate collection strengths, the three manuscript collection analysis studies described above used a similar framework.

While some librarians and archivists have utilized collection analysis, museum professionals have also considered application of this technique to the collections under their care. History museums, particularly those concerned with documenting contemporary life, are facing problems familiar to libraries and archives—lack of storage space, lack of funds, and the legacy of years of unsystematic, haphazard, and unselective collecting. While libraries face an ever-increasing number of books and serials published annually,

and archives watch a growing mountain of paperwork, museums observe an accelerated pace and increased variety of consumer goods. This has forced some museums to take a hard look at their current collections and collecting policies and to institute more stringent criteria for accepting new items. Thomas J. Schlereth, for example, has argued for museums to develop "an active, deliberate, analytical approach to the issue of selection and documentation."[34]

An important influence pushing American museums in the direction of collection analysis came from Sweden. The idea for the Swedish contemporary documentation program known as SAMDOK (*samtidsdokumentation*, or contemporary documentation) originated in the early 1970s when the Nordic Museum and others conducted a collections review. The survey confirmed and quantified what the staff had already known— although the holdings were very large, there were many imbalances. To redress these imbalances and provide systematic documentation of contemporary life, the Nordic Museum initiated SAMDOK in 1977. It is a coordinated effort of all Swedish history museums to collect materials representing a full spectrum of Swedish life, without duplication of effort. SAMDOK divides the documentation of society into three major spheres—home life, commercial and public life, and the workplace. These are further divided into eleven working groups, such as homes, food, agriculture and forestry, and communications.[35] While it seems unlikely that all American manuscript repositories could coordinate their collecting in such a manner, this model could be applied to

[32]Joseph J. Branin, David Farrell, and Mariann Tiblin, "The National Shelflist Count Project: Its History, Limitation, and Usefulness," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 29 (Oct./Dec. 1985): 333.

[33]Gwinn and Mosher, "Coordinating Collection Development," 128, 139–40.

[34]Thomas J. Schlereth, "Collecting Today for Tomorrow," *Museum News* 60 (March/April 1982): 30.

[35]Harry R. Rubinstein, "Collecting for Tomorrow: Sweden's Contemporary Documentation Program," *Museum News* 63 (August 1985): 55–57.

regional groups of manuscript repositories that would agree to divide and coordinate collecting responsibilities.

The second museum model for collection analysis focuses on the holdings of a specific museum, rather than the coordinated collecting of a group of museums. At Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village a collections review program instituted in 1983 requires all curatorial staff to prepare written statements of the scope and purpose of their collection areas. These statements include the historical themes to be documented by the materials, indicating their relationship to the museum's overall mission.[36] In addition, each curator must prepare a list of the kinds and types of materials which can effectively document the stated historical themes, as well as a list of objects or categories of materials in the museum's collection that do so. Museum items that do not document or illustrate the historical themes would be deaccessioned. Conversely, items not held by the museum that are significant to the expressed themes would be acquired.[37] This activity resembles the development of collecting priorities and strategies in the Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan studies.

The Future of Collection Analysis

Collection analysis is only one of several strategies that archivists have proposed in recent years to improve the effectiveness of archival programs. As Larry J. Hackman has pointed out, the activity and interest in improving archival programs can be "demonstrated merely by listing several recent Society of American Archivists task forces: Archives and Society, Goals and Priorities, National Information Systems, Automated Records and Techniques, and Institutional Evaluation."[38] Hackman himself is a proponent of documentation strategy, a methodology to systematize collecting and ensure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or geographic area. While collection analysis represents an attempt to rationalize the collecting process for a single institution, documentation strategy focuses on multi-institutional collecting. In a documentation strategy, records custodians, museum curators, librarians, records users and creators, and other interested parties come together to examine both the structure and history of a subject or region and their *perceptions* of the quantity and quality of existing documentation. Drawing on this information, the group develops collecting priorities as well as a strategy to accomplish their goals.[39]

Collection analysis begins with a clear understanding of an institution's mission. Once the institutional mission is articulated, collection analysis becomes one

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[36] A self-study in the early 1980s resulted in the clarification and articulation of the museum's major objective as the documentation and explanation of the process of social and technological modernization. This is divided into four major themes: the changing production-marketing-consumption cycle, the changing style and design of consumer products, evolving modes of leisure and entertainment, and the shifting geography of home, work, and community functions. Steven K. Hamp, "Subject Over Object; Interpreting the Museum as Artifact," *Museum News* 63 (December 1984): 34.

[37] Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, "Policy and Procedures Memorandum, No. 3B: Collections Policy" (Dearborn, Mich.: 1987); Thomas J. Schlereth has called the SAMDOK approach to collection development "collaborative collective" and the Henry Ford Museum model "competitive cooperation." See Thomas J. Schlereth, "Defining Collecting Missions: National and Regional Models," in *A Common Agenda for History Museums*, ed. Lonn W. Taylor (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 24–31.

[38] Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 13–14.

[39] See, for example, Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," 109–24; Hackman and Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process," 12–47; Cox, "Choosing Documentation Strategies." The New York State Archives is currently testing the documentation strategy model in a two-year project. Richard J. Cox, "Documenting New York: Testing a New Appraisal Approach" (Paper delivered at the Mellon/NEH Seminar, Bent-

way to meet institutional goals and objectives. In setting its collecting priorities, the repository considers the universe of documentation and the collecting activity or subject area focus of other repositories. It may attempt to coordinate its collecting efforts with other institutions. Unlike documentation strategy, however, the primary frame of reference in collection analysis is the individual repository.

While there certainly is a place for the broader perspective of documentation strategy, an archivist's first concern is usually with his or her own institution.[40] The three repositories described here conducted a collection analysis in order to assess their program's effectiveness. Collection analysis proved to be a useful managerial tool that provided the repository with a conceptual framework for beginning discussions about its collections and determining the course of future collecting. It introduced systematization to the collecting process and guided the formulation of new collecting priorities. Collection analysis moved discussions of collection strengths and weaknesses out of the realm of lore by providing quantitative data about documented topics. The numbers, however, were ultimately less important; what the institution did with the numbers, how the staff analyzed them, the discussions about them, and where they led were what mattered.

Beyond the walls of individual institutions, collection analysis has broader implications. As more institutions conduct collection analysis studies, archivists will begin to develop a body of information about specific collection strengths and weaknesses. If this information is exchanged between repositories, it can be used to establish cooperative collecting programs. As seen from comparing the results of just three studies, certain patterns in collecting begin to emerge. Special efforts can be made to document neglected areas.

If archivists are going to develop cooperative collecting strategies on the basis of the results of collection analysis studies, however, both the subject categories and the methodology of the studies need to be standardized. Archivists need to develop a list of acceptable subject categories to be used in all future studies. In the three projects examined above, only the State Historical Society of Wisconsin took the time to develop a list of subject categories. Partly for expediency, the Bentley Historical Library adopted the list for its project. There is, however, a flaw in the SHSW list: the staff of the Wisconsin project based the subject list on what they *thought* the society's holdings were, neglecting subjects in which there were no collections and in which the SHSW did not intend to collect. Thus, science and technology were not included in Wisconsin's list of subject categories. (The Bentley Historical Library added this category to its list.) Wisconsin, however, did add an XX or miscellaneous category to catch additional subjects or out-of-scope topics not already covered by the list (see appendix). Moreover, while no subject classification is entirely free of a contemporary bias, current perspectives are quite evident in certain sections of the Wisconsin subject list. It is unlikely, for example, that a similar list of subject categories produced even ten years ago would have included a subcategory for the handicapped as a special population group. While the Wisconsin list, with certain additions, appears useful for a repository with a broad mandate, it could not be applied to a special subject repository such

ley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, 19 August 1986); Richard J. Cox, "Documenting New York: A Working Packet" (Albany, N.Y.: New York Historical Records Development Project, New York State Archives, 1986).
    [40]See also Frank Boles's article, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes," pp. 364–68 of this issue for similar arguments.

as the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham, Massachusetts, or the Social Welfare History Archives of the University of Minnesota. It should be pointed out, however, that the SHSW staff did not set out to develop anything more than a subject list for their own project. Thus, they cannot be faulted for not creating a universal subject list since that was not their intent. If collection analysis is to be endorsed by archivists, the development of a reliable, universal list of subject categories is essential.

Secondly, the methodology for collection analysis must be refined and standardized. The fact that the Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan projects each assigned subject, geographical, and chronological categories in different ways limits the degree to which the three collection assessments can be reliably compared. By categorizing collections with the same subject list and using the same methodology, the conclusions drawn from comparing collection analysis studies will have greater validity. "Are we going to measure or are we going to cook?" was the question Mimi Sheraton's mother asked when her daughter began to measure the ingredients for recipes that she had always kept in her head.[41] After years of operating like Old World cooks, it is time that archivists began to standardize their recipes as well.

Thirteen years ago, F. Gerald Ham called for the development of measurements and standards in the collecting process. Surveying the collecting programs of manuscript repositories, he commented, "for the archivist, the area of acquisition strategies remains a vacuum."[42] Collection analysis is a tool that can begin to fill this void. Use of the collection analysis methodology takes archivists away from their traditional role as custodians of the past and moves them toward a more active one as shapers of the historical record. By bringing a greater consciousness to the collecting process, it should infuse archivists with an awareness of the importance of their work.

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[41]Mimi Sheraton, *From My Mother's Kitchen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 1.
[42]Ham, "Archival Edge," 7.

Appendix

Bentley Historical Library Collection Analysis

Subject List

CODE/SUBJECT   CATEGORY

AA Arts   1. Art
                                      2. Architecture
                                      3. Music
                                      4. Literature
                                      5. Performing Arts
                                      6. Individuals

AG Agriculture   1. Production
                                      2. Processing
                                      3. Organizations
                                      4. Individuals

CO Communication   1. Communication Services
                                      2. Mass Communication
                                      3. Individuals

ED Education   1. University of Michigan
                                      2. Universities and colleges—not University
                                         of Michigan
                                      3. Primary and secondary schools, public
                                         and private
                                      4. Educational organizations
                                      5. Individuals

IN Industry, Manufacturing,
    and Business   1. Businesses
                                      2. Business Organizations
                                      3. Industry & Manufacturing
                                      4. Industrial & Manufacturing Organizations
                                      5. Individuals

LA Labor   1. Activities/Events
                                      2. Organizations
                                      3. Individuals

ML Military   1. Armed Participation/Conflict
                                      2. Civilian Participation
                                      3. Military Installations
                                      4. Military Organizations
                                      5. Veterans/Postwar Activities
                                      6. Individuals
                                      7. Civil War
                                      8. Spanish-American War

	9. World War I
	10. World War II
	11. Korean War
	12. Vietnam War
NR Natural Resources	1. Conservation/Ecology
	2. Use
	3. Organizations
	4. Individuals
PO Politics and Government	1. County/Local
	2. State
	3. National
	4. Organizations/Events/Movements
	5. Individuals
PR Professional	1. Professionals
	2. Professional Organizations
PS Populations	1. Ethnic/Racial Groups
	2. Population Groups
	3. Immigration/Migration/Emigration
RE Religion	1. Churches/Organizations
	2. Sacramental
	3. Events
	4. Individuals
RL Recreation/Leisure Activities	1. Hobbies/Sports
	2. Social/Cultural Activities & Organizations
	3. Vacation/Travel
SC Science and Technology	1. Research and Development
	2. Organizations
	3. Individuals
SE Settlement	1. Pioneer
	2. Rural
	3. Small Cities/Towns
	4. Urban
SO Social Organization & Activity	1. Family/Domestic Life
	2. Genealogy
	3. Organizations
	4. Social Action
TR Transportation	1. Air/Space
	2. Ground
	3. Water
XX Miscellaneous	1. Additional Category
	2. National Collection
	3. New Subject
	4. Out of Scope