History and Special Interests

The Historian's View

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Abstract: Architectural records are an essential resource for architectural historians. The archives of two architects, Bruce Goff and Louis I. Kahn, demonstrate the diversity of materials that document, both directly and indirectly, the architect's professional work and personal life. In addition, different parts of these records are important to different users, from historical, preservation, or legal standpoints, to name a few. There is no single archival principle that can be applied to appraisal and selection decisions, given the individuality of each architect or architectural firm. However, from the perspective of an architectural historian, the physical separation of the various materials making up the individual's or firm's archives should be avoided, as should deaccessioning.

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ARCHITECTURAL RECORDS ARE ESSENTIAL to my work as an architectural historian. The very manner in which they are organized can facilitate research, especially when that organization includes other, less readily recognized items that relate to the architectural practice in question, as I will attempt to show by reviewing my work on two quite different architects: Bruce Goff (1904-1982) and Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974). The archives of both architects provided primary documentation for comprehensive analysis, and also contained materials other than architectural records that have proved of significance in examining the architects' work.

Before his death, Bruce Goff had become widely known as an eccentric, unpredictable architect who designed extraordinarily original buildings. His work provides an important link between vernacular and "high style" architecture. His two most celebrated designs are the Bavinger house, near Norman, Oklahoma (1950-1955), an essay in superimposed, three-dimensional spirals; and the Price house, near Bartlesville, Oklahoma (built in three phases, 1956-1958, 1966-1969, 1974-1976), in which prismatic volumes intersect to form complex volumes. My research on Goff, which began in the early 1970s while I was a doctoral student at Columbia University, led initially to my doctoral dissertation on his work. I spent extended periods in his office, as he was still practicing at the time, and together we organized his architectural drawings, which I had found stored in unlabeled and unsorted heaps in the attic of his house. On the basis of my study of these drawings, together with Goff's recollections, I generated a catalogue raisonné of his architectural commissions, built and unbuilt. He read my dissertation with interest and, I think, appreciation. Following its completion in 1976, we remained in touch, and a few months before his death in August 1982, he asked me to undertake a broader, more interpretive study of his work, one that he had once hoped to write himself. His will provided financial support for my work as well as instructions that allowed me to be put in charge of organizing his possessions and closing his home and office. As Goff had also stipulated, these funds were administered by the Shin'enKan Foundation, Inc., under the direction of Joe D. Price, who had been his major patron.

My first task was to sort through all of the accumulated materials and arrange his office archives in preparation for a monograph and exhibition. During most of his career, which spanned almost seventy years, Goff had maintained a small office in his home, employing no more than three or four assistants at any one time, and he had moved periodically. His last place of residence was a comfortable house of no particular distinction in Tyler, Texas. He lived simply but surrounded by a lifetime's accumulation of possessions. Complicating my task was Goff's often-stated belief that all of these possessions were essential to an understanding of his work, and his wish that they all be kept together for others to study.

The house itself was something of a jumbled mess. The architectural drawings which we had carefully organized were again out of order; Goff's final illness had caused periods of mental imbalance, during which he had begun to radically edit his drawings, carrying armloads out to the trash when he thought his nurse had fallen asleep. These drawings were rescued, but unfortunately no record was made of which drawings he had wanted to discard. In the excitement all the drawings had been rearranged without reference to individual commissions, and many, as I knew from previous study, carried no identifying titles.

In addition to drawings and related documents, Goff had various other collections that included approximately five thousand books, some fifteen thousand phonograph records, and as many as fifty thousand slides. These he had stored everywhere—in dish

Bruce Goff (1904-1982) in his Tyler, Texas, office, ca. 1974. (*Courtesy of the author.*)

cupboards, wardrobes, laundry cabinets—wherever space could be found. The attic was solid with boxes and other items; pushed back into the farthest recesses, beneath the lowest part of the eaves, were the most private items, including what could be described as a large cache of intimate love letters.

I approached the problem in an archaeological manner, relying on techniques I had learned many years earlier as a member of the Harvard-Cornell Archaeological Expedition to Sardis. Measured plans and elevations were made showing the location of every bookcase, storage unit, and piece of furniture; each surface and shelf was identified according to a comprehensive numbering system. Everything was saved, as Goff wished, and put into storage for future consideration; only the trash I found in wastebaskets was discarded, and even that I checked. Each item—each book, phonograph record, letter, and so on—was numbered with reference to the measured drawings; technically, the entire house could be reassembled. It seemed to me that such adjacencies—the ways he organized his beloved phonograph records, or arranged his books—might prove important in understanding Goff's work and the things that influenced him.

Throughout the house, most of the drawers, rather than containing clothes or other items that might have been expected, instead were filled to their brims with papers: letters, notes, third-class mail, much of it undated. Upon investigation, it was clear that the more recent of these papers had a stratigraphy; Goff had routinely tossed them into the drawers as he received them. In this instance the adjacencies identified by numbering later assisted in determining not only the dates of the papers themselves, but also of certain projects.

The conventional architectural materials were moved to Columbia University and later to the University of Pennsylvania for conservation and cataloging; thus I was able to continue work on the project while teaching, and at Columbia I was provided special access to the university's remarkable paper conservation facilities. Early on in the project I consulted with C. Ford Peatross, Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Library of Congress, in an effort to devise a system of cataloging that would conform, as nearly as possible, to the standards then being developed by the Foundation for Documents of Architecture.

The core of the archives consisted of the architectural drawings (most of which I had studied before), and these fell into fairly clear categories that reflected Goff's own divisions: preliminary studies, design drawings, and contract drawings (including both working and shop drawings). The archives also contained many prints of these drawings, which often, upon examination, proved to be supports for original artwork or technical notations; these, too, were cataloged as original drawings. Duplicate prints with no original work were inventoried but left unnumbered; only multiples of these were marked as possible candidates for deaccessioning. At final count, the archives included 7,198 original drawings or prints with original work.

In addition to drawings, the more routine contents of the architectural archives included photographs, slides, letters, contracts, and other items. Any of these that had an unambiguous connection to a specific project were relocated according to that project. The expanded project files assembled from numbered items discovered throughout the house thus came to include drawings, photographs, slides, correspondence, memoranda, contracts, specifications, and clippings from newspapers and magazines that Goff had kept.

By uniting items relating to specific projects, I was able to confirm much information relating to commissions, clients, and dates in a manner that had not been possible during my earlier doctoral research, when Goff himself had little idea where such supporting materials might be and was reluctant to let me burrow through his house. It became possible to refine the earlier catalogue raisonné with more accurate dates and more complete entries. At final count, 520 individual designs for commissioned projects, including about 160 built works, were identified. The expanded format of the files should facilitate future research by others.

In addition to specific project files, general files were organized which include photographs and slides of work by others; manuscripts by Goff and others, many of which were unpublished; miscellaneous papers, including Goff's will, architectural licenses, and passports; clippings on the work of others, many of which seem to verify specific influences on his work; posters, which provide the only real documentation of his public lectures and exhibitions of his work; design drawings by Goff's students, which provide clues as to which students' work he admired; and miscellaneous designs by Goff, including murals, stationery, and book covers, which illustrate how he approached graphic design.

The architectural drawings were, to me, the most significant component of the archives. Most revealing were those by Goff himself, including several from the 1920s that reflected aspects of Dutch expressionism. Goff's knowledge of this work was confirmed

by my discovery of his correspondence with Alfonso Iannelli, in which Iannelli referred to books on Dutch architecture that he was sending at Goff's request. Presumably, the presence of these books in Goff's library will be documented by the full listing of his books now being undertaken. Other drawings in the archives, by Goff's apprentices, include several by architects who have become prominent in their own right, such as Herb Greene and Bart Prince.

The items included a special group of drawings that related not to specific commissions but to hypothetical clients. A few hundred drawings by Goff in this category further document the influences that shaped his early career, such as German expressionism and later work by Frank Lloyd Wright. Again, these influences, once suggested by drawings, were confirmed by other items in the archives: in the case of German expressionism, clippings from the magazine *The Dial*, which Goff had remembered as his introduction to that architectural movement; in the case of Wright, a letter from Henry Klumb, one of Wright's apprentices at the time, describing photographs of current work by Wright that he had sent to Goff. Other aspects of Goff's work became apparent as a result of the cataloging effort itself. For example, my comprehensive survey of Goff's surviving drawings tended to confirm his claim that he rarely spent time developing architectural details, but concentrated instead on fundamental architectural forms and on the decorative elements that embellished them.

Some of the items enumerated that would not automatically qualify as architectural records but that are clearly pertinent to Goff's practice have been accepted by the Art Institute of Chicago, where the archives now reside. Other items, however, fell further afield and, over time, have begun to be separated from Goff's archives. (Here more serious problems occur, for many of these items, I now believe, can contribute significantly to our understanding of the architect. Rarely has any architect's career been so fully documentable by the preservation of his every extant possession; yet the opportunity for such documentation is rapidly being lost.) Quite simply, no established institution was willing to accept the broad range of things that were made available. Architectural archives, for example, were unprepared to cope with Goff's paintings, but museum archives found them beneath their standards. Libraries would take the books only if they could be integrated within their own collections, and nobody was remotely interested in discussing the disposition of the phonograph records, to say nothing of the household items. The conventional shape of repositories thus imposes limiting conventions on the collections themselves and can, I believe, obscure a certain richness of knowledge.[1]

Throughout his career, Goff painted. Some four hundred of these paintings, widely divergent in date, size, and media, were found among his possessions. All but a very few were nonobjective. Because of their fragility—most were on acid-rich poster boards, and the media Goff chose tended toward instability—they were conserved by an art conservator and are still in storage awaiting final disposition. Why are they of more than routine interest? Mainly because Goff himself regarded them as compositions rather than paintings; they were exercises by which he freed his mind to explore new combinations of shapes and colors. When studied in isolation, they offer little, but when studied in conjunction with Goff's work, they point the way toward major themes of spatial organization. I now

[1]Since writing this paper, I have learned from Joe Price that the Art Institute of Chicago has accessioned several of these more unusual items, partly, I hope, as the result of my suggestions.

regard them as critical to the study of his architecture, and regret that only slides of these works are included in the architectural archives.

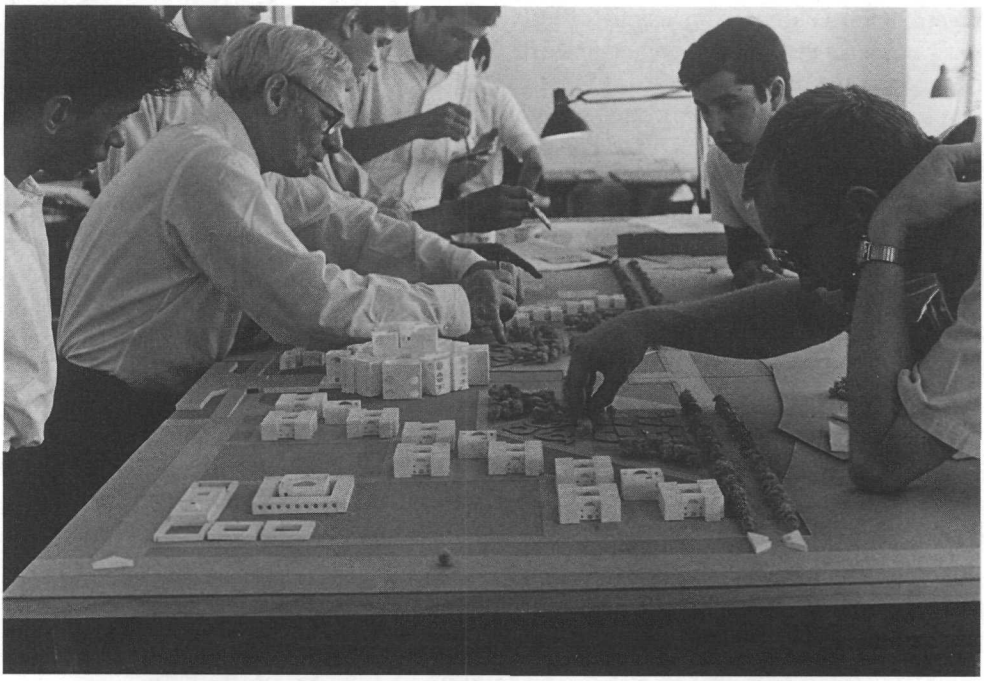
As to the phonograph records, these, too, could offer clues. Goff claimed steadfastly that music influenced his work, and that his primary sources of knowledge were the record jackets he read with each purchase he made. Even though no one wanted to take the records, they were at least cataloged, and perhaps some diligent scholar could locate copies in music libraries. Goff's books provide more obvious sources. I hope the listing of them will include notations as to the number of copies, for, in several instances, as with the phonograph records, Goff bought duplicates of those he deemed most important to ensure that one, at least, would remain in immaculate condition.

Among the ordinary household items, the deaccessioning of pans, dishes, furniture, and the like is more understandable. Yet even these record Goff's taste and interests, and I hope they can be photographed and listed in some useful manner before dispersal. Certain household items of the sort frustrating to any ordinary archives perhaps deserve special consideration. Goff's early fascination with music is documented by hand-cut piano rolls that he fabricated to record his own compositions; these, together with his player piano, survive. A collection of rocks and crystals might not attract attention without some knowledge of Goff's work and interests; the collection was his great-grandmother's, and his childhood study of the collection influenced his attitudes toward design. It was only after discovering this collection and reviewing its component parts that I could explain the first design for the Price house: its crystalline forms are derived from one of the crystals that Goff's great-grandmother had collected and that he clearly recalled. The crystal imagery is sustained throughout the house as completed. German expressionist beliefs in the symbolic power of crystals, discussed in the *Dial* clippings Goff kept, provided additional evidence of the iconography underlying this major design.

Finally, there was the problem of Goff's clothes. All were saved and put into storage, at least for the time being. In addition to contributing to the broader cultural study of our time and architecture, a few carefully selected examples might offer more focused information, for during Goff's career much was written about his unusual clothes, especially the bizarre colors and patterns of his shirts and ties. As I looked them over in preparation for packing, I realized they, too, could provide information and merited at least some archival consideration. With an architect such as Bruce Goff, the term "architectural record" resists concise definition.

The Louis I. Kahn archives differs from the Goff archives in many ways, not least because of Kahn's greater fame and more impressive commissions. His office, while not large by American standards, was still much larger than Goff's and was managed in a more conventional manner. Kahn maintained greater separation between his professional and private life than Goff did, and his household items have not been part of any archival survey. The archives is unusually complete, however, for it contains all that was in Kahn's office at the time of his death. These items were acquired by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania after Kahn's death for a sum that exactly covered his debts. They are owned by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and are on permanent loan to the University of Pennsylvania, where they have been arranged and described by Julia Converse, curator of the archives. Appropriately, the Kahn archives is housed in the Furness Building, one of the great buildings by Frank Furness that Kahn himself helped save when fashions inclined against it in the 1960s.

The architectural drawings again form the core of the archives. In preparation for the transfer of the drawings from the office, they were divided by Kahn's office staff into



Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974) and assistants working with model of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, the capital district in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The National Assembly Building is at the center. (*Courtesy of Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.*)

two categories: ''Personal,'' comprising drawings entirely or partly by Kahn (around seven thousand); and ''Office,'' comprising drawings by his assistants (around thirty thousand). While problematic, this order has been honored by the archives. Correspondence, contracts, and papers are maintained according to the system used in his office. The extensive collections of slides, photographs, and clippings are organized chronologically by commission. These latter collections continue to expand as new material is added.

In organizing the archives, extensive interviews were conducted with members of Kahn's office and with his clients. Background information was gathered on individual commissions and on personnel assigned to each project. As nearly as possible, authorship of drawings not by Kahn was established. Information of this sort continues to be added to the archives; recently, for example, Robert Venturi identified one of the key site plans for the Philadelphia City Tower project as his, an identification further confirmed by a careful analysis of drawing style, and one which amplified a significant phase of Kahn's development.

The Kahn archives is not without cumbersome components. Unlike Goff, Kahn relied heavily on architectural models as a means to develop and refine his designs, as well as present them to clients. These models are difficult to store and present enormous conservation problems, but they are essential to a full understanding of the development of Kahn's designs. Further, their highly evocative images give some measure of tangibility to his unbuilt designs.

Paralleling Goff's paintings, Kahn produced large numbers of travel sketches during his career, especially during his early, more formative years. These have proven important

to the understanding of his development, yet most remain in private hands, and when available for purchase are offered at prices beyond the means of the archives. Had their importance to the study of Kahn's work been convincingly demonstrated before dispersal began, it might have been possible to make a better arrangement for them.

Discoveries made in preparation for a retrospective exhibition of Kahn's work underline the importance of completeness. Professor David B. Brownlee, also of the University of Pennsylvania, and I served as guest curators for the exhibition, which was coordinated by Julia Converse and sponsored by the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. As part of our research into Kahn's work, we examined thoroughly portions of the archives that had been considered of secondary importance by his office, and much came to light. For example, in culling through the boxes of papers related to Kahn's commission for the capital at Dhaka, we found, on the back of an otherwise unimportant looking piece of paper, his tiny conceptual sketch of the design, together with notes on his travel schedule and his scheduled presentation of the preliminary design. The discovery allowed precise dating of this seminal concept, which, in turn, helped unravel a tangle of similar motifs which he was beginning to explore in other commissions at the time. Whenever the archives yields a discovery of this sort, the original document is replaced in the project file with a photocopy, and the original drawing is transferred to the drawing files, where its provenance is recorded.

Other seeming ephemera also contributed to our documentation of Kahn's career. From his passports, it was possible to establish the dates and places of his travels, which helped explain certain special influences. In a college yearbook which had seemed peripheral to the archives, previously unknown drawings by Kahn were discovered; these had been published as part of the yearbook and apparently survive in that form only, as no originals have been found. The archives continues to collect such items. Acquisitions include, for example, stamps and money from Bangladesh, which feature the image of Kahn's completed National Assembly Building. These items are kept separately for the interest and use of researchers.

From these experiences, I have been asked to comment on archival principles that seem particularly important to me as an architectural historian.

First, probably no single set of rules can apply. As long recognized by archivists, archives of individual architects should be organized in a manner reflecting, or at least sympathetic to, the specific approach and method of the office in question. Most, if not all, offices devise some structure of operation, and this structure clearly provides a point of departure for archival organization. Such models could also suggest patterns for deaccessioning, if such action were absolutely necessary. In the case of Goff or Kahn, both of whom had relatively small studio offices, deaccessioning fortunately has not been required, at least in the case of conventional architectural materials. But in larger, more production-oriented offices, such questions will necessarily arise. As an associate of one such office for several years (John Carl Warnecke & Associates), I was one of a few hundred employees, and together we could easily generate more than one thousand drawings each working day. We were encouraged to destroy insignificant drawings, and those which were retained but were of secondary importance were periodically bundled together according to commission and consigned to remote storage. Related files were similarly handled. Should such a large production office's materials be placed within an archives (and such a decision should raise fundamental questions about the nature and purposes of such an archives), I believe a reconnaissance team composed of an archivist, a historian (or other potential user), and a key member, or members, of the office staff could determine a

rational approach to archival deposit that would not unnecessarily eliminate significant material. The purpose of archival housing obviously affects what is saved: for the historian, a record of design development for each project, built or unbuilt, is critical; for those involved in historic preservation, full sets of working drawings, shop drawings, and specifications of built projects—including items historians might rate of secondary importance—are critical. For researchers pursuing legal questions, still other items are of critical importance, not least the contracts and letters suggesting varied interpretations of those contracts.

A second general principle that might be suggested would be to minimize the physical separation of the components of any archives. With both Goff and Kahn, it was important to get everything out on one table: significant connections among paintings, designs, letters of description, and so on, can otherwise go unnoticed. For the historian, and I suspect for others as well, there is no substitute for "hands-on" research of this sort: no degree of cataloging or description can fully substitute for the original.

Finally, a third general suggestion, more a wish than a principle: avoid deaccessioning. Disposing of any part of an archives involves judgmental choice based on the ultimate significance of the material being saved. Such choices will necessarily reflect our era's concerns, and, inevitably, mistakes will be made from the perspective of future generations. Teamwork of the kind I have mentioned might help, but ultimately it is the archivist who must decide what to retain. Historians respect the courage of archivists who undertake this difficult but necessary course of action.