

## Perspective

# Contemporary Archival Appraisal Methods and Preservation Decision-Making

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**Abstract:** Archival administrators are beginning the search for administrative tools that rationalize difficult preservation priority decision-making processes. Some are suggesting that the new appraisal literature be evaluated for its application to preservation selection. This article reviews the literature covering archival appraisal's role in the process of selection for preservation in archives, and addresses recent efforts to create archival preservation assessment and selection tools. It also provides overviews of some modern appraisal models which are intended for collections and preservation archivists who are working with selection-for-preservation issues. The author suggests that archivists need to concern themselves less with implementing preservation selection tools. They must concentrate first on understanding the values that make archival records significant, and then rationalize their preservation selection decision-making processes. Then, and only then, should the decisions' hierarchy and flow be incorporated into a preservation assessment and selection tool that is adaptable to individual archival institutions, yet consistent enough to yield comparable data.

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## Introduction

“THE SELECTION OF RECORDS of enduring value is the archivist’s first responsibility.” This is perhaps the most often quoted line from the Society of American Archivists’ *Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities*.<sup>1</sup> The following sentence is quoted far less often, yet it embodies important ramifications for archival administrators: “All other archival activities hinge on the ability to select wisely.” This sentence begs the question, once archival administrators select materials for acquisition, how do they decide on preservation priorities on a repository-wide basis? Also, how will this process be applied to an inter-institutional environment? Today’s archival administrators are confronted with flat budgets and aging physical facilities. At the same time, their archives are experiencing increasing demand for access. This translates into a situation where a decision to preserve one collection means that another collection may not receive adequate preservation attention. With finite resources and increased use, archival administrators are beginning to search for administrative tools that will assist them in making rational preservation priority decisions.

Through the 1980s and early 1990s, methodologies involving archival appraisal have been scrutinized to the point of substantially revising how archivists select materials for acquisition. Can the new methods of identifying priority materials for acquisition assist archivists in prioritizing preservation activities for materials already held in their archives? This article provides a review of the literature regarding archival appraisal’s potential role in the process of selection for preservation in archives. It will address recent efforts to construct archival preservation selection tools utilizing appraisal methods and adapting standard library preservation assessment tools as well. Brief overviews of some modern appraisal models are given, which are intended for collections and preservation archivists working with selection-for-preservation issues. Last, recommendations for future steps will be offered. The intent of this article is to move the archives profession toward a fuller appreciation of the steps to be taken and the information that is necessary in developing reliable, testable, and comparable models for use in selection for preservation decision-making.

## Connecting Archival Appraisal with Preservation Selection in Archives: A Brief Literature Review

There are a few major writers in the archival and library fields who have recognized the challenge of creating preservation priorities and applying archival appraisal methods to that challenge. Perhaps the most forceful call for this integration of methods between archival sub-fields was written by Paul Conway, former Preservation Officer at the Society of American Archivists, and Head of the Preservation Department at the Yale University Libraries. In his 1990 *American Archivist* article, Conway wrote, “the appraisal of archival records does not stop at the receiving dock. Archival institutions need to develop and implement more systematic strategies both for selecting materials from among the holdings for preservation action and for using preservation methods appropriate to the value of selected materials....Archivists can enhance their capacity to develop comprehensive pres-

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<sup>1</sup>*Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986), 8.

ervation programs by acting on the essential relationship between appraisal and preservation strategies.”<sup>2</sup>

Another prolific writer on archives, Richard J. Cox, has supported and reinforced Conway’s observation: “Archivists have long been concerned about the criteria for appraisal decisions and the need to determine preservation actions is but an extension of this basic archival function.” He has written about the major issues currently demanding attention in archival preservation. Of the nine major issues he articulates, the second issue is “archivists need to coordinate preservation with the archival appraisal process,” and the third issue is “archivists need to develop more precise selection criteria for preservation actions.”<sup>3</sup>

There have been several references in the archival literature to the significant relationship between archival appraisal and selection for preservation, but few archivists have taken steps to explore this relationship. Despite Conway’s and Cox’s early calls in 1989-90,<sup>4</sup> an essay published in 1994 by Linda M. Matthews and William K. Wallach indicates that little progress has been made during the intervening four years. Their words, found in the first chapter and first appendix in the Research Libraries Groups’ *RLG Archives Microfilming Manual* (1994), state “This manual does not contain a separate chapter on the crucial function of selecting archival materials for preservation. The decision to exclude a discussion on and recommendations for selection was reached as it became clear that the issue is unsettled across the archival profession.”<sup>5</sup> Ironically, while Matthews and Wallach accurately observe that the profession has not been able to progress on this topic, their essay in Appendix 1, “The Relationship Between Archival Appraisal and Selection for Preservation,” goes a long way toward adequately framing the issue and establishing a base from which progress can be made.

The appendix is subtitled, “The Archivists’ First Responsibility,” and its authors aptly recognize that the preservation selection issue should be understood as a spinoff of the recent literature and methods devised for appraisal. They write with force that “an understanding of modern appraisal theory and methods is crucial for the archival manager responsible for setting preservation priorities in an archives or manuscript repository.”<sup>6</sup> To establish a model for preservation selection, Matthews and Wallach suggest answering the following set of questions: “Once we have identified records of enduring value...how do we ensure that the records...are preserved for future use? How do we select what to preserve within our own repository? What, if any, reference should such local decisions have to the larger context of preserving archival records and manuscript collections in our nation’s repositories? What tools do we use to aid us in this decision? What frameworks

<sup>2</sup>Paul Conway, “Archival Preservation Practice in a Nationwide Context,” *American Archivist* 53 (Spring 1990): 221-22.

<sup>3</sup>Richard J. Cox, “Archival Preservation Issues and Interests,” in *Advances in Preservation and Access*, volume 1, edited by Barbra Buckner Higginbotham and Mary E. Jackson (Westport, Conn. and London: Meckler Corporation, 1992), 234-35.

<sup>4</sup>For an early attempt to produce a selection for preservation decision-making model in archives, see Richard J. Cox, “Selecting Historical Records for Microfilming: Some Suggested Procedures for Repositories,” *Library & Archival Security* 9 (1989): 21-41.

<sup>5</sup>Linda M. Matthews and William K. Wallach, “Managing an Archival Preservation Microfilming Project: Introduction,” Chapter 1 in *RLG Archives Microfilming Manual*, edited by Nancy Elkington (Mountain View, Calif., 1994), 3-4.

<sup>6</sup>Linda M. Matthews and William K. Wallach, “The Relationship Between Archival Appraisal and Selection for Preservation,” Appendix 1 in Elkington, *RLG Archives Microfilming Manual*, 105.

are available to guide us in the decision-making process?"<sup>7</sup> These are indeed the questions surrounding the selection-for-preservation issue that need to be pursued and resolved. As a first step in finding the answers, Matthews and Wallach suggest that "archivists and curators may want to revisit this appraisal literature to evaluate its value for preservation selection."<sup>8</sup>

Before attempting to re-examine the archival appraisal literature for its relevance to preservation, it is worth noting that a few archivists and librarians have turned to the literature on selection for preservation in libraries for some answers applicable to archives. This is a logical exercise since the library profession has well-developed assessment tools for preservation selection and has concentrated much of its resources on inter-institutional preservation of published materials relating to a variety of subject matter. As has been the case with many other professional issues, cross-fertilization between archives and libraries is being looked at again in solving the parallel challenges in this arena.<sup>9</sup>

Margaret S. Child, who has written frequently on selection for preservation in libraries, covers the major library approaches in her 1992 article, "Selection for Preservation." She explains and summarizes the "Great Collections" approach, the condition at the shelf approach, the condition and use approach, and the national and local priorities of libraries. In each case, Child covers their pros and cons concerning library applications. She also makes an observation in her article that is significant to archivists: all these library approaches to selection for preservation do not translate well into models of selection for preservation in archives. On archives, Child concludes, "The problem that really needs to be addressed is how to construct a national strategy and develop guidelines for selection priorities for the preservation of non-print documentation."<sup>10</sup>

An interesting twist on applying archival appraisal strategies to preservation selection has been offered by Richard J. Cox. In one instance, he writes about applying archival appraisal criteria to the preservation selection of library materials. In 1988, Cox wrote, "Archival appraisal models suggest that preservation selection follows information selection, and propose various methods for systematic evaluation of information content." He also, once again, advocates the potential for cross-fertilization between these fields on selection for preservation issues: "This is another opportunity for different branches of the information professions to cooperate."<sup>11</sup> The cross-disciplinary writings of Cox and Child indicate an interest in attempting to adapt the more well-developed preservation assessment and priority-setting standards found in libraries to the uncultivated ground of

<sup>7</sup>Matthews and Wallach, "The Relationship Between Archival Appraisal and Selection for Preservation," 106–7.

<sup>8</sup>Matthews and Wallach, "The Relationship Between Archival Appraisal and Selection for Preservation," 108.

<sup>9</sup>For a representative view of the literature on selection for preservation in libraries, see Ross W. Atkinson, "Selection for Preservation: A Materialistic Approach," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 30 (October/December 1986): 341–53; Margaret S. Child, "Further Thoughts on 'Selection for Preservation: A Materialistic Approach,'" *Library Resources & Technical Services* 30 (October/December 1986): 354–62; Christinger Tomer, "Selecting Library Materials for Preservation," *Library and Archival Security* 7 (Spring 1985): 1–6, and Lisa B. Williams, "Selecting Rare Books for Physical Conservation: Guidelines for Decision Making," *College & Research Libraries* 46 (March 1985): 153–59.

<sup>10</sup>Margaret S. Child, "Selection for Preservation," in Higginbotham and Jackson, *Advances in Preservation and Access*, volume 1, 147–58. The quote is from p. 156.

<sup>11</sup>Richard J. Cox, "Contending with the Hydra-Headed Monster: Preservation Selection of Enduring Information," in Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990), 243, 256–57.

archival preservation management. However, this approach has not yet resulted in workable models of selection for preservation decision-making in archives.

Given archivists' attention to the selection for preservation issue, the Society of American Archivists has developed a broad, strategic plan to promote preservation in archives and society, including the need for selection for preservation models. At the instigation of former Preservation Officer Paul Conway, the SAA has also recognized the critical importance of applying archival appraisal to selection for preservation in archives. In 1992, the SAA completed *Preserving History's Future: Nationwide Initiatives for the Preservation and Use of the Archival Record*.<sup>12</sup> Paul Conway, when writing about a nationwide strategy for archival preservation, said, "Archivists have long recognized that their first professional responsibility is to identify and protect the small portion of the overall record that has long-term value." Referring to the SAA report, he says that, "the document implies that systematic judgement is required...to select specific materials for preservation."<sup>13</sup>

The fourth objective of the nationwide strategy presented in *Preserving History's Future* emphasizes intelligence and precision in preservation selection. The objective is to "identify and promote the use of systematic selection procedures for preservation." The objective's rationale statement comments further, "Archival appraisal techniques and procedures can provide a basis for making preservation selection decisions," and calls to "encourage the application of appraisal and collection development approaches, including documentation strategies, to the selection of materials for preservation."<sup>14</sup> However, even with this mandate, it is clear that the SAA has done nothing to date to promote selection for preservation research. The SAA itself has not dispatched any group to examine selection for preservation in archives, although there have been recent discussions within the SAA Preservation Section and sessions at the last two SAA annual meetings to take up the selection issue. One thing is certain, after all these calls for studying modern appraisal methods in devising new methods for selection in an archives' preservation management program, little research into the topic has been forthcoming...except for one notable endeavor.

### **The Commission on Preservation and Access' Task Forces on Archival Selection**

By 1991, the Commission on Preservation and Access (CPA) decided that standard preservation assessment tools and selection for preservation models for archives needed to be developed, as has been done in the library profession. This decision resulted in the CPA's Task Forces on Archival Selection, which were led by Margaret Child, and the Research Libraries Group's testing of the Task Force-produced Preservation Priority Worksheet. The Task Forces were charged individually—one to examine archival appraisal, and

<sup>12</sup>See the SAA report, *Preserving History's Future: Nationwide Initiatives for the Preservation and Use of the Archival Record* (Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 1992), as presented by Paul Conway in his essay, "Preserving History's Future: Developing a Nationwide Strategy for Archival Preservation," in Higginbotham and Jackson, *Advances in Preservation and Access*, 244–60. The SAA report is appended to Conway's essay and appears on pages 254–60.

<sup>13</sup>Conway, "Preserving History's Future," 250.

<sup>14</sup>Conway, "Preserving History's Future," 258. (These quotes come from the SAA report).

the other to examine documentation strategy.<sup>15</sup> They both worked to relate their respective areas to archival preservation management and the need to set preservation priorities. Documentation strategy, with its inter-institutional perspectives, was to play a leading role in shaping inter-institutional archival preservation priorities. However, there is little, if any, evidence that documentation strategy concepts have been integrated into the Preservation Priority Worksheet and the Task Forces' brief published final report.<sup>16</sup> This line of inquiry still needs to be pursued because documentation strategy can contribute positively to preservation priority setting, as discussed later in this article. The Commission's goal was to establish a relative ranking of collections in an institution, thereby providing a list of collections in priority order. The worksheet provides a method for determining the value, condition, and use characteristics of a repository's collections in order to establish its preservation priorities. It was also hoped that the tool could provide a basis for comparing the value of archival collections across repositories and to determine their risk for deterioration.

The methods employed to design the Commission's archival preservation assessment tool came from a variety of sources. Chief among them were the California Preservation Needs Assessment Survey Project and the National Archives and Records Administration's holdings maintenance program.<sup>17</sup> These programs incorporate the latest approaches to assessing the preservation needs of library collections and creating matrices to quantitatively evaluate the preservation status data gathered through holdings survey activities. The Preservation Priority Worksheet features a means to collect data on the appraisal value of the particular archival collection and the risks posed to the material by such factors as the collections' level of use, physical condition, and storage situation. The final report of the Commission's Task Forces' project mentioned the archival Preservation Priority Worksheet, although this tool was not attached to the terse published report for profession-wide review, comment, and testing.

The Research Libraries Group's experience with field testing the Preservation Priority Worksheet illustrated its many problems.<sup>18</sup> The nineteen testing libraries provided several areas of criticism. In short, most of the critiques point to the fact that the worksheet does not compile and generate information that facilitates strategies to devise collection preservation priorities and the specific actions necessary. The worksheet particularly fails

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<sup>15</sup>“Documentation Strategy” is defined by Helen W. Samuels as a “plan formulated to assure the adequate documentation of an on-going issue, activity, function, or subject.” See Samuels' article entitled, “Who Controls the Past,” *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 115.

<sup>16</sup>See Task Forces on Archival Selection, *The Preservation of Archival Materials: Report of the Task Forces on Archival Selection to the Commission on Preservation and Access* (Washington, D.C.: The Commission on Preservation and Access, April 1993). Notes and documents from the Documentation Strategy Task Force were made available to the author by the Task Force Chair, Timothy L. Ericson. After reading these materials, it is clear that the Task Force offered many suggestions on how certain aspects of documentation strategy can positively shape and influence selection for preservation processes in the archival community. These suggestions did not appear in the final report, nor has any information from the Task Force been published to date.

<sup>17</sup>See Barclay Ogden, “Toward a California Preservation Program: Preservation Needs Assessment Survey Report,” (Unpublished report, University of California at Berkeley, November 19, 1991), and Ogden's “Preservation Selection and Treatment Options,” in *Preservation: A Research Library Priority: Minutes of the 111th Meeting of the Association of Research Libraries* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1987), 38–42. See also Karen Garlick, “Planning an Effective Holdings Maintenance Program,” *American Archivist* 53 (Spring 1990): 256–65 and Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, “Holdings Maintenance at the National Archives of the United States,” *Restaurator* 10 (1989): 151–59.

<sup>18</sup>Laurie Abbott, *Final Report of the Archives Preservation Needs Assessment Field Test* (Mountain View, Calif.: The Research Libraries Group, January 1994).

to serve as a tool for inter-institutional comparisons. This last point was the unanimous decision of the RLG testers who claim that the values produced from the assessment tool are too imprecise and subjective for this lofty purpose. The worksheet instructs its users to attach a numeric value to judgements made about the value, condition, and use of archival materials. But testers found the way in which they derived information for numeric value assignments was too subjective and idiosyncratic.<sup>19</sup> It is the processes of developing information about the value, use, and condition of archival materials that must be better understood and rationalized in order to construct standard assessment tools to aid selection for preservation decisions. Only then can this information be applied in efforts to standardize their measurement. Attaching a number to the same old fuzzy, difficult-to-explain value judgements archivists make about their collections is not going to result in a standard selection tool that the profession needs.

The published report of the Task Forces' work is troubling as well. It is preoccupied with institutional assessment and displays little regard for the analysis of the broader universe of documentation and the characteristics of contemporary appraisal theories. The report also fixates on tangential aspects of preservation without getting into the heart of the matter. For instance, the report discusses at great length the confusing use of the term "preservation" in the field of archives. Yet this discussion does nothing to tell archivists why their "misuse" of language has had an impact on their inability to devise standard assessment tools.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, too much is made of the issue of archivists invoking the concept of "enduring value" as opposed to "life expectancy." Instead of being explained in the short published report, it is the longer unpublished report that informs readers about the preservation priority worksheet's intellectual underpinnings and why certain decisions were made that affected its composition. But once again, neither the worksheet nor the longer report describing it were published and disseminated for profession-wide review, comment, and testing.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the range of problems with the Commission report and worksheet, together they advance the archives field into a full discussion of the relevant issues and bring us closer to developing a useful preservation assessment tool. Further examination and review of the Commission Task Forces' contributions are now appropriate. In the future, leading archival constituent groups like the SAA Preservation Section and the SAA Acquisitions & Appraisal Section should work together and take the lead in this examination. In this way, archivists will be assured of being prominently involved and in control of the assessment tool's development. They will also be sure to receive a public analysis of the work. Archival administrators sorely need a standard preservation assessment tool to assist them in gathering necessary preservation status information to devise institutional and inter-institutional approaches to the preservation challenge. Carrying on the work of the Commission on Preservation and Access Task Forces on Archival Selection is important to them.

<sup>19</sup>Abbott, *Final Report of the Archives Preservation Needs Assessment*, 7 and "Summary of the Report" (no page number).

<sup>20</sup>Instead of including this discussion in the short published report, the authors could have simply referred readers to James O' Toole's article, "On the Idea of Permanence," *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989): 11-25, from which much of this section of the report was borrowed.

<sup>21</sup>The Preservation Priority Worksheet and brief instructions were attached to the RLG *Final Report*, which was available through RLG upon request.

Further examination of the Preservation Priority Worksheet will yield findings beyond what is discussed in the RLG field testers' report. The Preservation Priority Worksheet does not adequately account for the complexities inherent in selection for preservation and appraisal processes. For instance, why was documentation strategy singled out for such prominent scrutiny, then abandoned? What appraisal theories did the Appraisal Task Force examine? Appraisal theory is not monolithic, but rather consists of a diversity of ideas on assigning social value to records. These questions and complexities are not answered, nor are they recognized in the published report. In the end, the Task Forces seem to confuse the act of determining archival value with the act of developing implementation tools. Before implementation tool development occurs, the concept of value—why a collection of records is significant to society—must be further developed, analyzed, and understood. Without a deep understanding of appraisal theories and why certain theories hold particular contexts and characteristics of records in high regard, any implementation tool will be empty. Appraisal theories and the values they bring to bear on the determination of archival value must be given a far more prominent role than they currently have in the Preservation Priority Worksheet.

There are many values accounted for in appraisal theories that can be represented in implementation tools. Among these are the physical and functional characteristics of the records, their intellectual content, their relation to other records, the significance of the processes which created the records, and the ability of the records to give evidence of those important social processes. But what is more difficult to model are the sociological and philosophical values underlying the archival value of records.<sup>22</sup> The cultural values that regard certain social processes and interactions as significant, and subsequently the record of their actions as significant, can be invisible, change over time, and elude analysis. Yet, it is our set of cultural values that determine the significance of all social actions. This is the problematic dwelled upon by Terry Cook in much of his writings on appraisal. Archivists do bring a set of learned cultural values to their appraisal decisions.<sup>23</sup> Representing in a decisions flow model all the values inherent in the appraisal process and finding a place for them in a corresponding implementation tool is going to be difficult. Clearly, there are factors that the Task Forces did not adequately address before designing their implementation tool.

Both appraisal and selection for preservation have one important feature that links them together. They both seek a determination of archival value—the significance of the collection based on its continuing value to society. Archival appraisal's role in selection for preservation is to determine why collections of records held in archives are significant and which ones are more significant than others. Once archival value is determined and

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<sup>22</sup>For a historical overview of social values in appraisal, see Roy C. Schaeffer, "Transcendent Concepts: Power, Appraisal, and the Archivist as 'Social Outcast,'" *American Archivist* 55 (Fall 1992): 608–19.

<sup>23</sup>There are several scholarly works which analyze the role of dominant culture in cultural institutions, such as archives. Among the best general sociological studies is Raymond Williams' *The Sociology of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982). For the effects of dominant culture on the field of library and information science, see Michael H. Harris, "State, Class, and Cultural Reproduction: Toward a Theory of Library Service in the United States," *Advances in Librarianship* 14 (1986): 211–52. The effects of cultural hegemony has been best articulated in the sociology of education literature, particularly by Michael W. Apple. See Apple's *Ideology and Curriculum*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1990), *Teachers and Texts* (New York: Routledge, 1986), *Education and Power* (Boston: Routledge, ARK Edition, 1985), and *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education* (Boston: Routledge, 1982). For an example of Terry Cook's work, see his "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, edited by Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992).



collections are prioritized based on their value, decisions on other archival actions can be brought into line with these established priorities. Any group wishing to extend the selection for preservation work started by the Task Forces on Archival Selection should take into account these and other considerations yet to be discovered.

### Overview of Recent Appraisal Methods with Thoughts on Selection for Preservation

With the Task Forces on Archival Selection's mixed results, going back to a basic review of recently developed archival appraisal models should prove beneficial. This is exactly what Matthews and Wallach called for in 1994. There are several new approaches to appraisal. Among these methods are documentation strategies, the "macro-appraisal" approach, the information systems, "reinventing archives," and risk management concepts coming from the electronic records perspective, the Boles and Young appraisal taxonomy, and neo-Jenkinsonian<sup>24</sup> points of view on appraisal. A characteristic shared among many of the approaches is their assumption of a broader appraisal perspective than any one collection of records or the holdings of any one archival institution. Many methods focus on broader analytical constructs to determine significance. Brief overviews of some of these appraisal methods are supplied to point out initial linkages between them and selection for preservation. They are intended for archivists with primary responsibilities in collections management and preservation who may not be fully aware of recent developments in appraisal. These overviews are no substitute for the in-depth research required to understand the values and techniques of appraisal theories and how they can be applied in preservation management. Much work in this area remains to be done.

### Documentation Strategies

Documentation strategy is a plan formulated to assure adequate documentation of an on-going issue, activity, function, or subject. It analyzes the functions and activities that are to be documented and anticipates the kind of records necessary to best document those aspects. Its proponents claim that "contemporary record selection must take place through analysis and planning in a broad, multi-institutional setting. Without inter-institutional cooperation, archivists risk needless replication about some aspects of a subject, while retaining nothing about other important aspects."<sup>25</sup> The SAA *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers* provides a lengthy and useful description of documentation strategy:

<sup>24</sup>Neo-Jenkinsonian views as espoused recently by Luciana Duranti in her article, "The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory," *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 328-44, are not reviewed in this article. They do not appear to apply to the selection for preservation debate since Duranti recommends, as does Jenkinson, that appraisal should not be done by archivists, but through the natural attrition and selection of the records creator. This model cuts archivists out of the appraisal process. However, for records in the custody of archives, it is the archivists who make the preservation decisions, not the records creators.

<sup>25</sup>F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993): 95. For a representative view of the literature on documentation strategy see Helen W. Samuels, "Who Controls the Past;" Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 12-47; Richard J. Cox and Helen W. Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter and Spring 1988): 28-42, with Frank Boles' subsequent "Commentary," 43-46; and Helen W. Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press and Society of American Archivists, 1992).

Documentation strategies are an analytic and planned approach to solving problems posed by modern documentation. The key elements encompassed in this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or geographic area. The strategy is ordinarily designed, promoted, and in part implemented by an ongoing mechanism involving records creators, administrators (including archivists) and users. The documentation strategy is carried out through the mutual efforts of many institutions and individuals influencing the creation of records, the archival retention of a portion of them, and the development of sufficient resources to carry out the cooperative preservation effort. The strategy is refined in response to changing conditions and viewpoints.<sup>26</sup>

There are several documentary strategy aspects that have significance for selection for preservation. On one level, its key components can be utilized from the perspective of examining what already exists within archival repositories. Clearly this application means the most to groups like the Commission on Preservation and Access who were attempting to devise ways to perform inter-institutional comparisons of archival collections; their aim being to arrive at determinations as to which archival materials should receive the utmost in preservation attention. To carry out selection for preservation in the spirit of documentation strategy, inter-institutional, project-oriented boards examining particular functions, activities, subject matter or geographic areas are necessary. This approach would give that all-important meaning and context to an institution's documentary priorities. The boards would examine collections across many institutions, evaluating the collections' ability to document the significant phenomena in question, their ability to serve research needs, their physical condition, and exposure to risk of further degradation. Next, they would determine which records provide the best documentation on the topic under discussion and arrange for their preservation, thereby reducing preservation resources on redundant and marginally-valuable records.

The inter-institutional boards would make many decisions about which documents would be receiving the most preservation attention. To do this, they would clearly need detailed information about the existence and character of collections. Archival collection information as found in bibliographic databases must be fortified and continue to be shared across institutions. The on-line bibliographic utilities need to become more comprehensive than they currently are.<sup>27</sup> Records of use, appraisal information, physical condition, and preservation status must also be readily available, in addition to basic descriptive information. This aspect of the information infrastructure remains undeveloped. Archivists must become involved with and promote ALA's and RLG's activities to standardize preservation terms for use in the USMARC 583 field.<sup>28</sup> This will assist archivists in better understanding the physical condition and preservation needs of archives across the United States. More development is also needed to make collection-level appraisal information available. There

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<sup>26</sup>*A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*, edited by Lewis Bellardo and Lynn Lady Bellardo (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992), 12.

<sup>27</sup>Tyler O. Walters, "Adapting Library Bibliographic Utilities and Local System Software for Use in Archival Information Systems: The Case of NOTIS 5.0," *Archival Issues* 19 (Fall 1994): 107-18.

<sup>28</sup>Paul Conway, "Preserving History's Future," 259 (objective 6).

should be follow-ups to the RLIN Seven States Project which initiated the on-line sharing and standardization of appraisal information as well.<sup>29</sup>

### Macro-appraisal

Macro-appraisal approaches have some common attributes with documentation strategies but differ in important, conceptual ways. One of the shared characteristics is the move away from the Schellenbergian view that the records are the source of value. Records are not sources of value, but are sources of discourse—the physical expression of personal interactions and organizational processes.<sup>30</sup> Terry Cook explains that macro-appraisal is a shift away from the records themselves to the social context in which the records are created.<sup>31</sup> Cook describes macro-appraisal in the following way:

The goal of [macro-appraisal]...would not be the search for research value per se, but rather the articulation of the most important societal structures, functions, records creators, and records-creating processes, and their interaction, which together form a comprehensive reflection of human experience. Any such “macro”-level model must enunciate the generic characteristics of these factors which are likely to produce records of high archival value *before* the resulting records themselves are actually appraised using more traditional criteria. This assumes that values are not found in records...but rather in theories of value of societal significance which archivists bring to records.<sup>32</sup>

Macro-appraisal identifies the organizations most important to understanding the society of which they are a part. It also prioritizes them for further appraisal. Macro-appraisal’s goal is to identify primary locations and sources of potentially significant archival records within defined records-generating entities.<sup>33</sup> “It assesses the capacity of institutions to create records of value in a global way rather than dealing directly, one by one, with the tens of thousands of records series, databases, and media collections which any large jurisdiction will contain.”<sup>34</sup> Archivists using macro-appraisal methods perform this assessment by utilizing a structural-functional analysis of a pre-determined jurisdiction and its records-creating capacities. This analysis forms the basis of an archival research agenda which facilitates the appraisal of the jurisdiction and its documentation. By contrast, documentation strategy focuses on current and potential major trends in user research and bases its approach on a subject theme or on the functional analysis of institutions.<sup>35</sup> Cook

<sup>29</sup>On sharing appraisal information, see David Bearman, “Archives and Manuscript Control with Bibliographic Utilities: Challenges and Opportunities,” *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989): 32–33; Max J. Evans, “The Visible Hand: Creating a Practical Mechanism for Cooperative Appraisal,” *Midwestern Archivist* 11 (1986): 7–13; and National Archives and Records Administration, *Intergovernmental Records Project: Phase I Report* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, July 1990).

<sup>30</sup>Richard Brown, “Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics,” *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 52. See this issue of *Archivaria* which presents several other articles on appraisal.

<sup>31</sup>Cook, “Mind Over Matter,” 46. For another source on macro-appraisal, see Terry Cook, *The Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study With Guidelines* (Paris: UNESCO, 1991).

<sup>32</sup>Cook, “Mind Over Matter,” 41.

<sup>33</sup>Brown, “Records Acquisition Strategy,” 39.

<sup>34</sup>Cook, “Mind Over Matter,” 53.

<sup>35</sup>Brown, “Records Acquisition Strategy,” 36.

and others, mostly staff members of the National Archives of Canada, advocate that an entire layer of appraisal be performed prior to traditional “records” appraisal.

Trying to anticipate future reference use is a hollow exercise when determining the significance of records, claims Terry Cook. He tells his readers that “archivists have usually appraised records according to theories of value defined by users or by expectations of future use. This approach by definition *decontextualizes* the record from the internal, organic relationship of its creation and imposes instead an external standard for judging value. This external standard naturally has no connection with the internal context of records creation.”<sup>36</sup> Macro-appraisal does away with appraisal by “guessing” at future use. Instead, as Cook further explains, “archivists would seek to understand why records were created rather than what they contain, how they were created and used by their original users rather than how they might be used in the future, and what formal functions and mandates of the creator they supported rather than what internal structure or physical characteristics they may or may not have.”<sup>37</sup>

Many information professionals involved in developing selection for preservation in archives have designated estimates of future collections use as an important factor in determining preservation priorities. However, incorporating macro-appraisal into the equation may mean the casting aside of future use perspectives for the primacy of social theories of value. The latter assists archivists in deciding which records creators, structures, and functions within their collecting universes are most important; the former does not. These same determinations must be made in selection for preservation processes as well. It is the significant areas within archivists’ well defined collecting jurisdictions that should be documented and understood. This approach has great promise for selection for preservation determinations, especially when they can be attached to reappraisal projects of archival institutions’ existing holdings. After the “macro-reappraisal” has been conducted, then “traditional appraisal” of the records, as Terry Cook calls it, can get underway, along with preservation assessment procedures.

### **Electronic Records Management’s Influence on Appraisal: The Information Systems Concept, “Reinventing Archives,” and Risk Management**

When archival collections and preservation managers look toward appraisal models for assistance in selection for preservation, they should realize that the last word on appraisal theory is far from being written. Approaches to appraisal are dynamic and are being influenced heavily by the world of electronic records. The information systems concept of archival appraisal is one new approach. It was designed in response to the increasingly complex automated information systems that generate, store, and transmit electronic record material. To put it rather crudely, instead of producing distinct series of records from a particular function of an organizational unit, electronic records can result from broader information systems reflecting many functions which may even cut across several organizations. Proponents of the information systems concept recognize that traditional archival appraisal methods do not work as well in this new technological arena. In fact, the new Canadian macro-appraisal theory and strategy, just discussed, was itself developed in part to cope with the appraisal of electronic records, using concepts and timing which were

<sup>36</sup>Cook, “Mind Over Matter,” 44 (emphasis in original).

<sup>37</sup>Cook, “Mind Over Matter,” 47.

fully compatible with those of the multi-functional universe of records and transmission that characterizes the computer age.

The information systems concept intends for archivists to retain records from automated systems while achieving the ends of maintaining evidence of the records' creation and their relationship to other electronic records and information systems, and to document the impact of automation on an organization's or individual's behavior.<sup>38</sup> This appraisal model shares with documentation strategy the value of examining the total records system available to be preserved, or the "universe to be documented," before placing value on collections and expending resources on preservation actions. It also requires that the context of records be maintained through the preservation of the information system and its metadata, which is the information describing data content, structure, and the information system itself.

The information systems concept also dictates archival involvement from the point of records creation. Automated information systems must have provisions in their design for identifying and retaining records deemed archival. Otherwise, electronic records are irretrievable and unidentifiable within an information system, and nontransferable between them. In this realm, preservation essentially means ensuring the technical readability and intelligibility of electronic records across technologies and over time.<sup>39</sup> Preservation is present in the information systems concept of appraisal through initial systems design, identifying records systems of continuing high value, and identifying standards in reformatting and data migration activities. The information systems approach maintains critical archival concepts which seek to preserve the contextual characteristics of records and contextual information's capacity to inform users of the records producers' activities. Preservation actions recommended through standard assessment tools, and by individual archivists, should take into account these information system concept attributes.

The appraisal of electronic records has brought about other strategies in addition to the information systems concept. Authors on archival management such as Margaret Hedstrom and David Bearman have called for "reinventing" archives, which may have an impact on how archivists carry out appraisal. This perspective is informed largely by the concepts of reengineering in corporations, reinventing government, and risk management.<sup>40</sup> The attributes of reinvention involve a non-custodial, distributed approach to managing

<sup>38</sup>Margaret Hedstrom, "New Appraisal Techniques: The Effect of Theory on Practice," *Provenance* 7 (Fall 1989): 1–21. For a representative view regarding appraisal and the information systems concept see Hedstrom, "New Appraisal Techniques;" Charles Dollar, *Archival Theory and Information Technologies: The Impact of Information Technologies on Archival Principles and Methods* (Macerata, Italy: University of Macerata, 1992); *Archival Management of Electronic Records*, edited by David Bearman, Archival and Museum Informatics Technical Report #13 (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1992); Katherine Sue Gavrel, *Conceptual Problems Posed by Electronic Records: A RAMP Study* (Paris: UNESCO, 1990); and Alan Kowlowitz, *Archival Appraisal of On-Line Information Systems*, Archival and Museum Informatics Technical Report #2 (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1988). For further sources and information, see *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*, edited by Margaret Hedstrom, Archival and Museum Informatics Technical Report #18 (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1993) which contains an annotated bibliography on 250 sources relating to electronic records, compiled by Richard J. Cox.

<sup>39</sup>Dollar, *Archival Theory and Information Technologies*, 67.

<sup>40</sup>See Bearman, *Archival Management of Electronic Records*; David Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom, "Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Options," in Hedstrom, *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*, 82–98; Richard J. Cox, "Archives and Archivists in the Twenty-First Century: What Will They Become?" *Archival Issues* 20 (Fall 1995): 97–113; Michael Hammer and James Champy, *Reengineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution* (New York: Harper Business, 1994); and David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* (New York: Plume Books, 1992).

records. Instead of archivists performing all the actions taken upon records, they would manage the distributed records environment through regulation and standards, as well as auditing organizations' information management activities for compliance and offering assistance. The big change this approach brings to archival management is that it empowers the records creators to select, preserve, and provide access to their records. Archivists will be able to concentrate on their roles as appraisers and metadata managers.<sup>41</sup>

In his *Archival Methods* (1989), Bearman writes on the use of risk management perspectives in the appraisal process, describing it as existing when "the institutional costs of retaining records are weighed against the social benefit of having them preserved." He further writes that "instead of asking what benefits would derive from retaining records, they (archivists) should insist on an answer to the probability of incurring unacceptable risks as a consequence of disposing of records."<sup>42</sup> In other words, the costs of maintaining electronic records' context, migration of metadata, information systems interoperability, and software and hardware upgrades are weighed against the potential benefit of having continued access to the records in question. The principles behind risk management and the reinvention of archives may be relevant to collections and preservation archivists as well as appraisal archivists. In fact, the risk management concept has great potential in the preservation selection context. The "cost-benefit" perspective should be refined and better articulated for application in the context of preservation management. However, one would be hard pressed to find an archives reporting successful applications of Bearman's "reinvention" concepts in archival management today; in fact, there are only a very few archival institutions operating within adequate legal and policy environments that could even consider it.

Selection for preservation may become one and the same as appraisal because the records will not be in the physical custody of archivists; appraisal will need to be performed much earlier in the life cycle of records, particularly in the case of electronic records. The preservation actions to be taken will involve activities such as data migration and verification of metadata for completeness and accuracy. Holdings maintenance as traditionally conceived for paper-based collections will hardly be applicable. It is difficult to forecast completely the impact these electronic records perspectives will have on selection for preservation in traditional paper and film-based archives. However, they are having their influence on contemporary appraisal literature and how archivists appraise records. Archival collections and preservation managers should scrutinize this area for applicable aspects and continue watching for new developments.

### The Boles and Young Appraisal Taxonomy

In *Archival Appraisal* (1991), Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young strive for standard selection methods for acquisition. Boles and Young recognize that archivists utilize items such as mission statements, collecting policies, records schedules, and accessioning procedures as macro-level guides for acquisitions processes. However, linking these macro-level tools to the micro-level tools incorporating specific appraisal criteria is frequently

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<sup>41</sup>David Bearman, "Archival Data Management to Achieve Organizational Accountability for Electronic Records," in *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Society*, edited by David Bearman (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1994): 12–33.

<sup>42</sup>David Bearman, *Archival Methods*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report 3, no. 1 (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1989): 10. For more recent discussions on risk management, see Bearman, "Archival Data Management to Achieve Organizational Accountability for Electronic Records," 23–28.

not done. Boles writes, "The micro-level elements of selection can be used meaningfully only in the context of institutional policies. Micro-level tools identify characteristics and features of given records. Institutional policies answer the question of whether or not the material possessing certain characteristics and features belong in a particular archives."<sup>43</sup>

In an effort to create generalized micro-level selection tools that can be adapted to individual archives, Boles and Young developed a taxonomy of appraisal decision-making. The taxonomy is broken down into three modules. The Value-of-Information Module brings together how "archivists...evaluate the nature, quality, independence, and usefulness of the information contained in a specific set of records."<sup>44</sup> In this module, archivists examine records' functional characteristics, perform content analysis, and examine their relationship to other documentation (meaning other archival record material) and their use. The Costs-of-Retention Module examines "the many expenses archival institutions incur if records are accepted."<sup>45</sup> Elements incorporated into this module are acquisitions, processing, preservation/conservation, storage, and reference. In the Costs Module, Boles and Young seek to integrate knowledge of preservation costs into the initial selection for acquisition process. This is different from what is being reviewed in this article, which is how to integrate acquisition criteria and values into the selection for preservation process for collections already existing in archives. The last module, the Implications-of-the-Selection-Decision Module, addresses "the impact of a particular recommendation upon the institution's general selection practices and...a particular selection decision and the overall goals of the archives or its parent institution."<sup>46</sup> The impact on policies internal to and external from the archives are considered in this module.

The lesson extracted from Boles' and Young's work for selection for preservation is that archivists should concern themselves less with implementing selection tools such as the Preservation Priority Worksheet and concentrate on understanding and rationalizing their decision-making processes. This is what Boles and Young have done for the selection-for-acquisition process and it needs to be done for the selection-for-preservation process. Archivists must also continue to improve their understanding of appraisal models used in the acquisitions process and the specific records' values which move archivists to acquire them.

It should be established by now that decision-making in archival appraisal and preservation management are inextricably linked. The result should be a generalized model, perhaps utilizing flow-charting techniques, which maps the hierarchy and flow of decisions in selection for preservation in archives. Only when the values and ideas in appraisal theories are better understood and the decisions-flow processes rationalized and modeled, should archivists set their sights on creating implementation tools to assist them in their selection for preservation decisions. Numerical methods applied to misunderstood theories and idiosyncratic decisions flow processes will only create inaccurate data and false interpretations in the end.

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<sup>43</sup>Frank Boles in association with Julia Marks Young, *Archival Appraisal* (New York: Neal-Schumann Publishers, Inc., 1991), 101.

<sup>44</sup>Boles and Young, *Archival Appraisal*, 21.

<sup>45</sup>Boles and Young, *Archival Appraisal*, 22.

<sup>46</sup>Boles and Young, *Archival Appraisal*, 23.

### What Do We Do Now? Recommendations for the Next Steps

There are essentially three steps that must be taken before improved preservation selection tools can be developed. Much of the debate over which values to examine during selection for preservation has been settled. These values are the level of archival value assigned to the records, the state of the collection's physical condition, and the intensity and nature of use. Future archival studies that examine how values are determined in these three areas as well as the flow of decisions followed to assign those values will serve selection for preservation decision-making well.

The first step should address adapting modern appraisal theories for use in preservation management. Archivists still need to further examine modern appraisal theories and the ideas within them that identify and illuminate the archival value in records. Archivists need to base their selection-for-preservation decisions on broader perspectives than just the holdings of their own archival repository. Modern appraisal theories almost universally emphasize this. The macro-appraisal and documentation strategy approaches should be considered as sources for tools that can assist archivists in eliminating certain collections from archival institutions altogether and for identifying those of utmost significance before more resources are invested in preservation. Each appraisal theory holds certain qualities of records in high regard. Archivists should fully understand what these qualities are and how they are applied through different appraisal theories. This article only initially touches upon some of the techniques and perspectives found in a few appraisal approaches.

The questions archivists ask about records and the decisions made from the answers they receive should be identified and modeled through a means such as flow charting. The Boles and Young appraisal taxonomy should be a useful model for this exercise. After completing the decisions-flow modeling, then each appraisal theory which has been analyzed and modeled can be tested. Recent studies in appraisal such as Helen W. Samuels' *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* and Joan Krizack's *Documentation Planning for the U.S. Health Care System* are excellent examples of applying modern appraisal theory. They lead the way toward mapping out how archivists reach their appraisal decisions and should be studied for their potential influences on selection for preservation.

The next two steps should be rationalizing further how archivists derive information about their collections' physical condition, as well as the intensity and nature of their use. Collections condition surveys should be improved so that they provide data which yields a clear decision from the archivist on which preservation actions to take. The lack of clear results coming from the RLG test of the CPA Preservation Priority Worksheet, as documented by the testers themselves, demonstrates that simply "getting data" is not good enough. Data gathering on collections condition must be conducted in such a way that, once completed, the place of the collections in a scheme of preservation priorities and the range of preservation action options should be readily apparent. Karen Garlick's holdings maintenance chart with its built-in numeric value system is one important attempt at getting data to perform this function clearly and easily. Further work and development must be done so that conditions data can be correlated with the level of archival value assigned during appraisal. The CPA's Task Forces on Archival Selection did not come up with a happy marriage of these two concerns.

Much the same can be said about use and user surveys as well. The data must be easily gathered and organized, and in a way that renders clear understandings as to the nature of the collections' use. Also, the designers of use and user surveys should remember



that their goal is not only to determine who is using what. It is also to determine the intensity of use and the nature of that use. Preservation concerns enter in when attempting to estimate the amount of damaging stresses records undergo, such as photocopying, scanning, photographing, tracing, folding, and transporting, as well as the amount of support they receive on table tops, shelves, and in users' hands. Clearly the nature of the use itself, what users are doing with the records once in their possession, and the attempt to gauge this through some means of data gathering, is critically important in determining preservation priorities.

Analysis and discovery in the aforementioned areas will give archivists an improved basis for creating worthwhile selection-for-preservation procedures and tools. These new selection tools, which should be adaptable to a wide array of archival circumstances and be able to support an inter-institutional perspective, should provide the best means in determining preservation priorities and the actions to be taken. Archivists, under the aegis of the SAA, should also conduct a thorough examination of the work and products of the CPA Task Forces on Archival Selection. They should ask themselves, "What have we learned from this earlier attempt? What works and what does not?" They should also keep in mind that other fields address information selection issues as well. Exchanging ideas and techniques across disciplines to benefit selection for *archival* preservation could bear fruit. Archivists need to press forward to better understand the theories of social value in archival appraisal and appraisal's modern perspectives, to scrutinize their decision-making processes very closely, and to formulate general decision flows. Then and only then should analytical tools be developed to model archivists' selection for preservation decisions.