Making the Records Speak: Archival Appraisal, Memory, Preservation, and Collecting

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Collecting and Historical Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany

By Susan A. Crane. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000. xv, 195 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. $39.95. ISBN 0-8014-3752-0. ♾

Museums and Memory

By Susan A. Crane, ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 x, 257 pp. Illustrations. Index. $55.00 cloth. ISBN 0-8047-3565-4. $19.95 pap. ISBN 0-8047-3564-6. ♾

The Same Ax, Twice: Restoration and Renewal in a Throwaway Age

By Howard Mansfield. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000 290 pp. Bibliography. Index. $26.00. ISBN 1-58465-28-1.

Acquisition policies, collection development concepts, archival values, reappraisal approaches, and a host of other methods, worldviews, and theories have become the persistent topic of archival professional sessions, journal articles, and listserv discussions focused broadly on the nature and purpose of archival appraisal. When I sat down to write this review, the National Archives of Australia was embroiled in a public controversy about plans to reappraise and deaccession some of its holdings;[1] the United Kingdom's archives list was discussing the public perception of archivists

[1] In its May 2001 newsletter, the National Archives of Australia announced its intention to reappraise its records: "Over the years we have collected hundreds of thousands of shelf metres of records created by government. To house them, we have needed huge repositories in every State and Territory. It is part of sound archival practice to review the collection to make sure that we are keeping the right records, in the right places, and in the best way for all Australians to have access to them." This institution argued, "We've discovered that many of the records deposited with us in the past have no archival value. In Australia we have collected far more records than other national archival

(dredging up those stereotypes of dusty, mild-mannered individuals squirreling away old documents); the Smithsonian Institution was under attack about new alliances with businesses and private individuals concerning the content of its exhibitions;[2] and Americans were captivated by Nicholson Baker's scathing denunciation of library and archives preservation practices, the heart of which was based on misconceptions about the nature and mission of libraries and archives.[3] Archives and archivists were in the news, but not in the positive way that they might have hoped for.

While archivists have become more sophisticated in how they consider appraisal, the public perception of what archives are about, especially in their selective identification and preservation from the vast documentary universe, is still weak. While I know of books, research projects, and Web-based tools in the works to try to strengthen the public's understanding of the archival mission and appraisal's role in that mandate, it is clear that archivists have a long way to go in correcting misperceptions.[4] Nicholson Baker is outraged that orig-

institutions, especially when you consider the size of our population and the fact that the Commonwealth government has existed for only 100 years." Because of the fact that "the buildings holding these records are getting older and more expensive to maintain," the National Archives "needed to reduce the size of the haystack to make the needle easier to find, without throwing out the needles with the hay. To do this we are reviewing our collection to ensure we have kept the right records, and we are using new approaches to appraisal to make sure we collect the right records in the future." See "Archives on the Move," *Memento,* no. 17 (May 2001), available at <http://www.naa.gov.au/publications/memento/ISSUE_17/html/feature_three.htm>.

[2] Bruce Craig, on behalf of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, summarized the case in this fashion: "On June 7, 2001, the Organization of American Historians sent a letter to the Smithsonian Board of Regents stating its 'full support' for the staff of the National Museum of American History in their efforts to uphold exhibit standards. The letter also requested 'respectfully [that] the Regents review and reconsider their recent agreement with Catherine B. Reynolds respecting the establishment of a Hall of Fame for American Achievers.' According to sources inside the Smithsonian, efforts are currently underway to create a separate 'points of agreement' document necessary for implementing aspects of the Reynolds gift agreement.

On June 12, under the signature of James Bruns (the Smithsonian Director of Operations), with copies being distributed throughout the historical community and to various members of Congress, the Smithsonian responded to the OAH letter. Bruns stated that in its letter the OAH relied on one-sided opinions and 'distorted media accounts.' 'The visionary changes that the Institution's new Secretary has presented may indeed be unsettling to some staff' stated Bruns, and that staff is engaging in 'a campaign of manipulation of facts and selective leaks to the press to delay or reverse such progress.'

The letter, put in writing for the first time, assurances that the 'professional staff members on the achievement exhibition team will control all aspects of the exhibitions content and presentation . . . that the control of the content for this exhibit will reside with the staff' and that the exhibitions standards adopted by the OAH and other groups, 'will be among the guidelines that are used by staff in the creation of an accurate professional exhibition.'" From *NCC WASHINGTON UPDATE,* Vol. 7, #24, June 15, 2001, available at <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~ncc>.

[3] The book I am referring to is Nicholson Baker's *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (New York: Random House, 2001). At the time of writing this review, I was in the midst of preparing a book-length response to this tome, building off of my earlier responses, "The Great Newspaper Caper: Backlash in the Digital Age," *First Monday* 5 (December 4, 2000) available at <http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue#5_12/cox/> and "Don't Fold Up: Responding to Nicholson Baker's *Double Fold,*" *Archival Outlook,* May/June 2001, 8–14, available at <http://www.archivists.org/news/doublefold.html>.

inal printed and other artifacts are reformatted and discarded, and he seems to suggest that *all* books, newspapers, and other textual documents must be saved. His reviewers have been forceful in saying just that. Australian historians, journalists, and the public are confused that most, if not all, records are not saved, or angry that records once thought important enough to be stored in their national archives could now be removed. Despite a century of a modern archives movement, we are still not understood; and much of this misunderstanding revolves around the crucial function of appraisal, or, if you will, how and why archives are formed.

Certainly, archivists need to explain, clearly and patiently, how they appraise and ultimately acquire records. In the meantime, archivists can learn much from how others are writing about selection and preservation issues closely akin to the archival appraisal function. Susan Crane's study of collecting in early-nineteenth-century Germany reveals much about how historical collections are formed. Crane's edited volume on memory and museums provides a glimpse into the similarities and differences between archives and museums, as well as giving a prototype for similar investigations into archives. And Howard Mansfield's popular discourse on preservation (he uses the term "restoration") should suggest to archivists just how difficult it is to lead the public to an understanding of the difficult decisions archivists and other records professionals face in forming archives. A documentary heritage does not appear magically, but it is the result of many factors, incidents, and accidents—along with the dedicated work of archivists.

In this review I have tried to provide a brief critical assessment of each book, while stressing insights about archival appraisal and acquisition derived from these volumes. I should state at the outset that all three books are noteworthy in their own right, and all could be analyzed merely for what they suggest about museums and historic preservation. Crane's edited volume on museums and memory fits nicely into an expanding literature on these topics, and it is one of the few efforts to relate the two in a direct fashion. Crane's study on collecting and public memory also relates two subjects that are receiving considerable new attention, and her conclusions about the impact of the move-

[4] Archivists and records managers looking for a useful Web site for explanation of records might consider the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library at Curtin University of Technology's new site, "Understanding Society Through Its Records", at <http://john.curtin.edu.au/society/>. The site endeavors to explain the "concepts and universal importance of recordkeeping to personal life and to business and government." The site includes "explanations of the principles and concepts for managing all forms of purposefully recorded evidence for as long as required"; "a sensible and accessible framework for understanding recordkeeping in most environments offices and repositories, collecting and in-house, large and small, traditional and electronic"; "images, references, and links to print and online readings selected from across the Australian, US, Canadian and International Council on Archives (ICA) literature"; and "summaries of the best of English-speaking practice and showcases Australian contributions to recordkeeping knowledge and practice." The site was prepared by Kandy-Jane Henderson (Archivist, John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library) and Ann Pederson (Visiting Fellow in Recordkeeping Studies in the School of Information Systems, Technology & Management at the University of New South Wales).

ment from individual collecting to organized (voluntary and government sponsored) acquiring will probably lead to new scrutiny of the development of historical organizations in other nations and eras. Mansfield's popular ruminations on preservation give us insight into how many Americans view the maintenance of objects, traditions, and sites.

Crane's book on German collecting examines "two conceptions of historical consciousness" in that nation in the early-nineteenth-century. Crane, a professor of modern European history, sees that "first, the 'historical sublime,' represented the initial, personal, highly emotional historical sensation or revelation in the presence of certain objects. The second, secondary experience of historical consciousness was received upon encountering historical objects that had been collected, preserved, and presented for repeated viewing in a collection which attempted to instill coherent meanings through a narrative context—and succeeded insofar as viewers began to think historically" (p. 176). In this era, two centuries removed, we discover an almost religious quest with the use of objects and rapidly emergent historical preservation societies, academic disciplines, and public museums and other repositories—all very familiar to us today, but very innovative and sometimes controversial in the early nineteenth century. Tying her study to the vast scholarship on public history, Crane writes, "This is a study of how we begin to remember history" (p. xiii). It looks very similar to what was happening in the United States at the same time.

Crane commences her analysis by considering the emergence of the historical sublime (much like what transpired in religious experience or in the described experiences written by Romantic poets), and the role of collectors in enumerating ruins and gathering artifacts and older documents. It is a fascinating chapter, as we marvel today at the popularity of eBay, antiquing manuals, and television antique shows. Ruins, for example, became important because of their "ability to refer to already existing historical knowledge," (p. 21), but it was a deeply personal process: "Ruins and decrepit buildings are one and the same until someone 'sees' otherwise" (p. 26). Ruins, manuscripts, and artifacts were all acquired in unprecedented ways, with a new role for government authorities publishing lists and building and opening repositories. There is a universality involved in such collecting, something that should resonate with us today. Crane notes, "Once the inspiring object has been marked for preservation, it is usually removed from its context (the physical context of its site or the emotional context of its sudden apparition) and placed in a collection which then creates a new historical context of visibility and explicability, as well as a site in which that object and that experience can be revisited" (p. 28). In other words, the collective process of individuals establishing associations to expedite the gathering and preserving of historical artifacts created situations where individual collectors no longer had control over how they viewed or experienced such objects or history. No coherent collective memory developed, but, rather, contested memories between individuals, organizations, and the state emerged.

Crane's study also documents the transition from individual to collective collecting, chronicling the origins of what often remains, today, an uneasy relationship. She traces the formation of historical associations, part of a broader movement of organizing, providing a "political forum for liberal nationalism" and serving the "cultural interests and ambitions of the rising bourgeoisie" (p. 81), again paralleling events in the United States in the same era. Behind the formation of historical organizations was also the concern that individual collections would disappear unless there was the opportunity for them to be joined into more publicly accessible repositories, certainly similar to what we often have seen in our own era in the tensions between individual and institutional collecting. Collectors themselves wrote memoirs, articles, and sometimes-voluminous correspondence explaining their work, with at least a partial eye to preserving not just their collections but the reasons for their efforts. Someday, an outside observer might look on our archival literature on appraisal in this same light, as part of a self-conscious effort to explain us or to justify our own selection efforts. In fact, these associations stressed collecting to the degree that there was little effort to interpret the collections, sometimes out of fear that museums and libraries indulging in such interpretation might anger the political authorities (a topic that became much more of an issue in Germany in the era of Nazism and its aftermath).[5] In this present era of congressional scrutiny and media coverage of exhibition controversies such as the Smithsonian's proposed use of the Enola Gay fuselage, it is interesting to see how such concerns are not new at all.

Regardless of the intentions about interpretation, the museums and other repositories were new, and they provided a new context for the objects they stored and exhibited there. Crane suggests that the objects were placed in a new historical context "in which the presence of the past could be alluded to while the present's interest in the past was displayed" (p. 106). We might argue that if the new placement of objects changed their meaning, then this process would make the selection of what came into the museums all that more critical. Crane senses this: "The new definition of what constituted a historical object, and how it came to be collected, preserved, displayed, and interpreted—and by whom—was perhaps the single most important development in the museology of this time" (p. 109). The emphasis on what happens to museum and other objects is very illuminating for any group, certainly archivists, involved in decision making about preservation, although this is a process only beginning to receive scholarly treatment and certainly one that is not understood by the public (and one that is prone to attract somewhat hysterical commentaries in newspaper coverage).

[5] Read, for example, Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Meridian, 1994); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York: Random House, 1996); and, especially, Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

The relevance of Crane's study for archivists resides not just in her depiction of a period of the formation of institutions like museums and archives, but in her description of how artifacts and objects are seen and change. She describes how in the early nineteenth century, Germans did not collect or display objects simply because of their age. Crane surmises, "The historicity of an object lies not in its age but in its capacity to bear the meanings attached to the perception of the object in the present. The object must excite a sense of history in the viewer" (p. 111). Left apart from such collections, the early Germans believed, the objects not only faced physical deterioration but also a loss of meaning. As Crane writes, "Once the context of meaning was secured in the museum, the objects themselves became less important than the site in which they were brought together" (p. 139). The meaning of objects derives from their being part of a collection, specifically, a museum. Some archivists, such as Hans Booms, have argued a similar view in the formation of twentieth century archives, and it is interesting to understand that the implications of the process of collecting have been scrutinized and speculated about for a very long time.[6] Still, it is an issue deserving more analysis.

An interesting parallel between what was occurring in Germany in this period with the United States was the publication of new scholarly journals. Crane notes the number of journals founded between 1770 and 1850 employing "museum" as part of their title, and functioning as vehicles for bringing together source materials and creating a network of scholars. Crane argues, "We think of modern museums as social contexts, places of meeting, as well as repositories of historical or art objects. In this sense, nineteenth-century journals performed a similar function, only the meeting place was mental rather than physical" (p. 118). These journals, publishing facsimiles of art and artifacts, served scholarship and also gave the "viewer a sense of the historical and a desire to participate in preservation" (p. 123). These journals and various historical associations and museums also existed in the United States, prompting one historian of this phenomenon to refer to this same era as a period of "documania."[7] Such analysis should also make one wonder how future historians will consider our own time and the archives field, especially as archivists wrestle with how to use the World Wide Web for heightening awareness of archives in the public and scholarly communities. While debate continues in the field concerning the content and purpose of archival journals (usually in the guise of how much practice versus theory should be represented in their pages), to an outsider, the growth in the number of journals, along with that of specialized

[6] See, for example, Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 69–107.

[7] David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Societies in America 1607–1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) coined this phrase. See also George H. Callcott, *History in the United States 1800–1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970) for another analysis emphasizing the fixation with documentary sources in this period.

archival repositories and increased access to archival records through digitization will prompt some discussion about the significance of these developments. Certainly the pioneering German collectors, historians, museum officials, and preservationists had similar debates as well, while still conveying the sense of increased concern about the past and societal memory.

Crane ends her book on an interesting note—the personal experience of interacting with an historical object. Crane states that "what history means to a culture . . . is measured by its repetition. The repetition occurs with each writing, each visit to a museum, each reading of a text." Crane sees that these remaining objects are "empty forms readily available for the frequently repeated filling-in of historical memory" and she sees that this "filling-in" is very personal (pp. 176–177). Yet her book shows how the individual connection to the past actually seemed to be lost as historical organizations were established and individual collectors banded together to preserve the remains of that past. There is an ironic note in her analysis, not unlike what some archivists representing repositories have probably experienced when discussing their mutual concerns with individual collectors. An historical consciousness seems to be both lost and gained.

Crane's edited volume, *Museums and Memory,* has a broader purpose and is less focused on either chronological or geographical eras, but it can certainly be read as a companion to her book on nineteenth-century German historical collecting. With essays by contributors gathered about three themes—thinking through the museum, memories in the museum, and collections and institutions—the book explores how museums and memories "shape each other" in the United States, China, Japan, and Germany, from the disciplines of anthropology, art history, museology, and history. Crane, in her introduction to this volume, is interested in museums because of their storage of memories. "Like an archive," she writes, "it holds the material manifestations of cultural and scientific production as records, articulated memories removed from the mental world and literally placed in the physical world. Like an archive, it has its own sense of organization, but that sense is deeply complex" (p. 3). The allusions to archives are fascinating, making an archivist, wonder why we do not yet have a book called *Archives and Memory*. While we are beginning to find more interest in archives by historians of culture and memory, many of these studies stretch their definition of archives far beyond how we have approached our work (either stimulating us to rethink how we define the term and our work, or burying a more literal sense and the importance of archives so far into postmodernist jargon as to give us little to compare with or relate to our work and mission).[8]

The eleven essays in this volume provide many stimulating ideas for archivists to mull over in relation to their own work and profession. Michael

[8] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993) are two recent examples. No matter what insights these works provide (and they provide many), one must still work hard to capture the precise meaning of "archive" or "archives" as utilized by these authors.

Fehr's essay on a German museum contends that a museum "has no meaning at all if it is not related to a context shared by a community" (p. 46), causing an archivist to reflect upon about how this corresponds to archives, most of which have connections to local communities. Susan Crane's essay on the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles includes her statement: "If early modern curiosity cabinets included objects such as fossil men, giants' thighbones, mermaid tails, and unicorn horns, we must consider the possibility that these were not expressions of irrationality, antiscientific or mystical in their conception, but rather were consistent with the imaginary of the time, structured within a concept of Nature's inexhaustible plentitude" (p. 70). Crane's assessment of early museum collecting suggests the difficulty of imposing professional criticism on archival practice of any era, especially our own, given how close we are to it and how immersed we are in the culture that archives operate within.

The connection of museums to history and historians is a common theme throughout the essays. The essay by Julia Adeney Thomas on how some Japanese photographic museums cut themselves off from history leads to some interesting speculation about the role of archival finding aids. Thomas writes, "Curators can release images to function historically as points of reference for the viewers' engagement with the past, or they can highlight the qualities of these images in such a way that the photographs fail to intersect with any dialectic between past and present. In other words, photography curators create histories not from necessity but from desire and from aesthetic, social, and political commitments. If this desire is not present, the photographs themselves will not by themselves emerge as resources for public recollection" (p. 113). If the museum curator's intervention in labeling exhibitions is so explicit, what are the implications for how archivists describe archival records in finding aids? Paula Findlen's essay on Renaissance collecting notes how portraits became a popular form of commemoration with collectors even placing their own images in their collections. Is the role of the archival collector so obvious in archival collections or in the guides to these holdings, such as finding aids? If we can study Renaissance collecting because of explicit clues left by the collectors about themselves, will future generations of scholars be able to understand who we were and how we made decisions about what went into archives in the twentieth century?

Other essays in Crane's collection also pose interesting questions for archivists. Diana Drake Wilson's essay on her experience of accompanying Native American Indians into three museums exhibiting their culture and history raises some points regarding how archivists see visiting researchers, and vice versa. Wilson concludes, "For some American Indians, things exhibited in museums *are* events that took place in the past and are still taking place; they are artifacts that carry the material traces of events of the past into the present. Many Euro-Americans read exhibits like texts, a series of discrete signs having an arbitrary but shared meaning" (p. 120). Native Americans viewed the exhibits very differently. What does this suggest about the variety of people who come and use archives?

What are the implications for how archivists use finding aids, exhibitions, and web sites to explain what archives are and how they might be used? What are the audiences archivists seek to engage, and are they successful with the use of devices as diverse as registers and inventories and web pages? Visitors to archives (literally and figuratively) might view archival records not as inert holdings but as living collections, with present significance to their lives. Tamara Hamlisch's discussion of the formation and preservation of the Chinese Imperial collections also poses similar issues. In considering what has happened to these collections, she writes: "For centuries, the Chinese imperial collections had symbolized both political and moral authority. Throughout Chinese history, dynastic succession was marked, in part, by the appropriation of the imperial palace and its collection of art and antiquities. Thus the state's appropriation of the imperial collection legitimated its political power and authority" (p. 150). Such an assessment raises issues about the symbolic power of archives, and certainly the role such power plays in how archivists appraise, acquire, and depict archival records. These are matters also raised in Crane's study of early German collecting, and there is certainly contemporary relevance in how governments, institutions, and particular societal groups identify, care for, and generally respond to records related to them.

Howard Mansfield's *The Same Ax, Twice* is not a scholarly tome (unlike the other two books reviewed here): It is, instead, a series of homilies about individuals who have labored to restore or preserve older items. Mansfield, a journalist and freelance writer who has written other books on similar themes[9], says that his book "looks at the impulse to preserve and restore, an impulse we share with the farmer who keeps changing the handle and head of an old ax in an attempt to have the same ax. This impulse leads us into the contradictions of time and history (and some of the folly and silliness)" (p. xi). *The Same Ax, Twice* is an effort not only to understand the impulse, it is an effort to understand ourselves, and, as a result, it is almost a religious text: "What I am looking for is the trick of having the same ax twice, for a restoration that renews the spirit, for work that transforms the worker. We may talk of saving antique linens, species, or languages; but whatever we are intent on saving, when a restoration succeeds, we rescue ourselves"(p. xii). Mansfield is quite explicit about the religious aspect of restoration in the last paragraph in the book: "Ours is an age of broken connections, lost connections between heart and work, soul and politics, community and the self. Restoration is renewal—and effort to mend the world—or else it is not worth doing. Good restoration is a prayer, an offering. It's praise, attention paid; it revels in the glory and spirit of this life" (p. 276). While there is a "New Age" religious tone to such sentiments, it is precisely what confronts archivists in their efforts to appraise, knowing they must destroy more than they save. While Mansfield acknowledges such a process of decay and loss as natural and inevitable,

[9] Most notably, *In the Memory House* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993), which describes the work of historical societies.

it is a process that is nevertheless difficult to describe in an understandable fashion to those who look at archives and libraries from the outside.

Mansfield gives us a series of vignettes about restoration efforts. There are descriptions of restoring and maintaining old ships, houses, airplanes, technologies, and furniture, and of running historic sites and house museums, participating in reenactments of historic events, and carrying on old techniques. Each story focuses on an individual, and there is ample recounting of each individual's reflections on what he or she is doing. Scattered through all Mansfield's stories are reflections on the meaning of such work: "Each time we renew the meetinghouse steeple, replant a forest, heal an injured animal, teach someone to read, each time we do this we are restoring the life, the best in us, as well. Mending the world, rebuilding it daily, we discover our better angels. We are on the side of life" (p. 10). Or, "As our society has become more ordered and corporate, there is a greater desire for pageantry, for myth, a hunger to touch something of a grand scale, if only for a weekend. Pageants restage the grand movement of time. They put us, the nine-to-five workers, on the stage of great moments. One has extended one's life, taken a timeline and shot it like an arrow into the air" (p. 44). And, "There is something hopeful and American about never finishing your house, like Jefferson at Monticello. There was an optimism, a buoyancy, in all the fashionable remodeling and destruction. There was a belief in new beginnings" (p. 150).

If one is looking for an understanding of how Americans think about their past, there are more sophisticated studies to draw upon.[10] The value of Mansfield's writing is in how he captures the more personal feel of the past, something archivists need to bear in mind as they work with the public, donors, the media, and researchers. As archivists appraise or reappraise, they need to keep in mind how the public will react to their decisions to destroy certain documents. In describing what goes on in some museums, Mansfield reflects, "Curators have an impossible mandate: First, find the truth about the past, and then communicate that truth to visitors. They are supposed to make objects, documents, and artifacts speak" (p. 62). Making records speak is a task archivists must consider since they know that there is a general lack of understanding about how archives are formed and for what purposes. Archival appraisal is difficult because it is about *selection*. As Mansfield writes about the restoration of historic structures, "To restore is to choose. To restore is to create, to compose a new picture out of the pieces we find. Every large restored cultural monument is surrounded by a passionate debate about its authenticity. Each age creates willfully, or by accident, the ruins it likes" (p. 70).

You are not mistaken if you detect that Mansfield's latest book is part of the growing chorus of concern over the impact of technology on our society. When

[10] See especially, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

he writes about maintaining place, Mansfield muses, "What we may really lack is place. We are not at home in any one place. We are here in these small towns, but not here. We are uplinked, downloaded, commuting, encapsulated by shell after shell of our clever devices" (p. 171). Mansfield delves into the "hidden meanings" of things because they represent continuity versus the unprecedented change of modern society. This is how he describes someone acquiring an old rocking chair at an auction: "People bid and you have to guess about hidden meanings. A rocker may be just a rocker, but to one person it may represent the home they lost, the unrecoverable past, and to another, the home they hope to create. Each auction is a story of greed and desire, loss and gain" (p. 203). These seem to be the sentiments supporting the bidding on eBay. As archivists, we must be prepared for the fact, no matter how uncomfortable it is, that what we recognize as debris may be valuable to others for a variety of reasons.

What we find in the writings of the authors represented here are challenges to what we do. I must admit that they do not make me feel any easier about the already difficult process of archival appraisal. Therefore, I will keep reading and looking for answers.