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About the Cover

Documentary photographs are loaded with potential for historical insight when studied within the context of other documentary resources. In “‘The Story They Tell’: On Archives and the Latent Voices in Documentary Photograph Collections,” Jeffrey Mifflin discusses recent books about documentary photography, linking his particular observations to more general insights about the interpretation of images and the nature of archival collections. Dorothea Lange’s caption for her 1939 Farm Security Administration photo reads: “Yakima Valley, Washington. Migratory children, living in ‘Rambler’s Park.’ They have lived on the road for three years, nine children in the family.” Mifflin discusses this image on pages 256–57. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress (FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-020300-E).*

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FROM THE EDITOR

Mary Jo Pugh

Meditation, Memory, and Mission

It is fitting that this issue begins with the impassioned and eloquent presidential address by Frank Boles. In this extended meditation, Boles elaborates the fundamental mission of our profession. The other papers in this issue address the wide range of functions and activities by which we carry out this mission. This address, deeply personal yet powerfully professional, provides a moving reminder to us when we are caught in the day-to-day trials and tribulations of our work that we are part of a larger service to humanity.

The 2009 Theodore Calvin Pease Award recognized the work of Kathleen Fear, a student in the archival education program at the University of Michigan, for her paper “User Understanding of Metadata in Digital Image Collections: Or, What Exactly Do You Mean By ‘Coverage’?” Archivists can be confident that our future is good hands, as students of these educational programs now join us in daily work. She applies her mastery of research methodology to real problems of providing access to all potential researchers, novice as well as skilled. She uses three research methods—survey, focus group interviews, and searching tasks—to understand how undergraduates interact with and understand one schema of metadata surrounding digital images, specifically the Dublin Core.

Kyong Rae Lee in “The Role of Buddhist Monks in the Development of Archives in the Korean Middle Ages” reminds us that the roots of our profession spring from generations of recordkeepers around the world. She compares how Buddhist monks in medieval Korea and Christian monks in medieval Europe contributed to the creation and management of records on opposite sides of the globe. She suggests that the differing political and social structures in Korea and Europe, as well as the different religious cultures of Buddhism and Christianity, resulted in divergent archival development in the two societies. This article offers a non-European perspective on the development of recordkeeping and archives in a premodern society. The contrast reveals a broader conclusion, that the development of archives is inextricably linked to power and that “archives are a representation of the culture in which they exist and invariably they reflect the political and social structure and the spirit of their time.”

Dominique Daniel, in “Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American Archives,” reviews the archival and social science literature on the immigrant experience, archival approaches to immigrant groups’ archives, and the gaps in the documentation of that experience. She summarizes and places major archival developments in the last half-century in perspective and usefully moves the work into digital collection and community connections.

In “Practices for College and University Electronic Records Management (ERM) Programs: Then and Now,” Lisl Zach and Marcia Peri seek to understand how college and university archives confront the challenges of electronic records. Unfortunately, their research suggests that, for the most part, college and university archives have neither the administrative nor the technical support to ensure the identification, preservation, and long-term use of today’s records, even at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It is also clear that many college and university archivists in the trenches need practical help. I note that Salvador Barragan reviews Elizabeth H. Dow, *Electronic Records in the Manuscript Repository*, in the reviews section of the issue as potential help for such archivists.

A trio of papers addresses the phenomenon of “More Product, Less Product” (MPLP), perhaps the most heavily cited article in recent times.¹ Since appearing in the *American Archivist* in 2005, it has prompted publication of at least three case studies,² an article in the *Journal of Archival Organization*,³ and many program sessions at both national and regional archival meetings. Greene and Meissner set out to revolutionize the profession and set off a storm of discussion and angst, in part, I suspect, because of the the article’s tone as much as its substance. In this issue, we have two thoughtful responses and a perspective on MPLP’s applications to other archival functions. In the first, “Much Ado about Paper Clips: ‘More Product, Less Process’ and the Modern Manuscript Repository,” Carl Van Ness carefully examines and takes issue with the survey methods used in the original MPLP article, the conclusions drawn from the article, and the metrics it recommends for processing goals.

The second response to MPLP, “Optimum Access? Processing in College and University Archives” by Christopher Prom, comes through another route. In the Spring 2008 issue of the *American Archivist*, Katherine Stefko reviewed

¹ Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 208–63.

² Christine Weideman, “Accessioning as Processing,” and Donna McCrea, “Getting More for Less: Testing a New Processing Model at the University of Montana,” *American Archivist* 69 (Fall/Winter 2006): 274–90; Michael Strom, “Texas-Sized Progress: Applying Minimum-Standards Processing Guidelines to the Jim Wright Papers,” *Archival Issues* 29, no. 2 (2005). See also Anne Foster, “Point-Counterpoint: Two Views of ‘More Product, Less Process,’” *Easy Access* 32, no. 2 (June 2006).

³ Matt Gorzalski, “Minimal Processing: Its Context and Influence in the Archival Community,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 6, no. 4 (December 2008).

College and University Archives: Readings in Theory and Practice.⁴ I was struck by her recommendation that

One chapter stands out as a must-read for all archivists—Prom’s “Optimum Access? Processing in College and University Archives.” Belying its rather staid title, the essay deconstructs Dennis Meissner and Mark Greene’s “More Product/Less Process” (MP/LP) approach that revolutionized processing, as well as conference programs, a few years ago. Analyzing the dataset collected by Greene and Meissner, Prom finds only a very weak correlation between the use of labor-intensive processing techniques and processing speed, in the range of 4 to 6 percent.

Based on a second set of data that he collected and analyzed, Prom suggests that a wide range of audits and revised practices needs to be implemented in many archives. Because many archivists might not have ready access to Prom’s chapter, I decided to bring it to the attention of a wider audience so that it could contribute to the discussion raised by the other two papers in this issue, a decision made before Christopher Prom became a member of the Editorial Board.

Some of the themes raised by Prom are more fully explicated in a perspective by Mark A. Greene, “MPLP: It’s Not Just for Processing Anymore,” in which he addresses a frequent criticism of MPLP—that it focuses only on processing in the problems of backlogs. Here he examines how the MPLP approach can have a positive impact on the processes of appraisal, preservation, reference, and management of electronic records. He provides an overview of recent research into the perceptions of MPLP by users and reference archivists. I hope that this research will result in future papers in the *American Archivist*.

One of the reviewers of the manuscript of this perspective essay noted that it suggests the start of a change in management that needs to be replicated through other aspects of archival work. The reviewer wrote, “Putting this into a more managerial framework and challenging the profession to approach other processes with a view towards using less resources while being equally effective would . . . help move the profession forward.” Although this perspective essay does not systematically apply the top-down archival approach to other archival functions, I hope that other authors will explore this insight. I think our holistic archival approach can be used to understand all the processes of managing archives. More than a management tool, the top-down model is both an effective teaching tool for students and an awareness tool for related information professionals and administrators.

Two case studies belie the familiar stereotype of musty, dusty archives presided over by dead records keepers. In “Water Tables: A Case Study of a Successful Archival Fund-Raising Event,” Patricia J. Rettig illustrates an

⁴ Christopher J. Prom and Ellen D. Swain, eds., *College and University Archives: Readings in Theory and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2008).

imaginative and effective program for educating stakeholders and developing financial support. As one reviewer noted, “I’ve done plenty of fund-raisers and this article gave me new and good ideas.” Similarly, Leigh McWhite in “‘So, Your Institution Is Hosting a Presidential Debate . . .’: A Case Study of 2008 Programming by the University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections,” provides an example of a repository leveraging limited resources to take advantage of an extraordinary outreach opportunity. Few repositories will have this particular opportunity, but many can use this model of planning and evaluation for other events at their institutions. One reviewer remarked, “It made me exhausted reading about all of the things they accomplished.”

A third case study contributes to the literature on archival digitization and archival preservation. In “Digitization as a Preservation Method for Damaged Acetate Negatives: A Case Study,” Laura Capell analyzes what it means to use digitization as a preservation strategy in practice. She explains the decision-making process used to justify the assertion that digitization can be used as a preservation strategy.

Jeffrey Mifflin adds to his considerable contributions to the *American Archivist* with a thoughtful review essay about four recent publications of and about documentary photographs. In “‘The Story They Tell’: Archives and the Latent Voices in Documentary Photograph Collections,” he discusses these publications and provides context for understanding these images and the literature about them. He extends the observations and insights about these books to delve more deeply into the themes he has discussed earlier: the interpretation of images, the nature of archival collections, and the latent human “voices” in historical photographs.⁵

Reviews editor Jeannette Bastian presents nine able reviews of eleven books, including the Dow volume noted above. The reviews examine both theoretical and practical literature, and they include reviews of electronic and film record formats and reviews of work in museum settings as well as in records management and archival disciplines.

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⁵ Jeffrey Mifflin, “Visual Archives in Perspective: Enlarging on Historical Medical Photographs,” *American Archivist* 70 (Spring/Summer 2007): 32–69, and, with Elisabeth Kaplan, “‘Mind and Sight’: Visual Literacy and the Archivist,” in *American Archival Studies: Theory and Practice*, ed. Randall C. Jimerson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000), first published in *Archival Issues* 21, no. 2 (1996): 107–27.