

10

Acquiring archives

One cannot collect all the beautiful shells on the beach; one can collect only a few, and they are more beautiful if they are few.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906–2001) *Gift from the Sea*, 1955

How does an archivist decide which archives to acquire? How does she decide which specific items within a particular acquisition should be kept? Whatever an archivist decides to keep becomes valuable in large part because it has been kept. And whatever is not kept is, in the normal course of events, gone forever. Appraisal decisions can be daunting, to say the very least.

This is one reason appraisal is considered the most important and the most difficult aspect of archival work. If every record were valuable, and if every archivist had all the money and space in the world, there would, in theory, be no need for appraisal. The archivist could pack up all the documents in her care, put them in acid-free boxes or store them on a stack of computer hard drives and tell researchers to come and get them. Many archivists and digital experts are arguing this very idea, suggesting that with the unlimited capacity of cloud computing systems and the tremendous potential for research into 'big data', keeping more – in theory, keeping all – is easier and potentially more fruitful than ever before.¹

Others, and I count myself among them, prefer to think about Anne Lindbergh's seashells. What is the point in keeping everything? What is the point in trying? If archivists and society decide just to keep everything, how can we actually know which bit of information is core evidence and which is just dross that clutters our hard drives and our minds?

In order to cope with the challenge of deciding what to keep and what to reject, archivists have invented (and rejected and redefined and reinvented) a range of theories and principles surrounding the appraisal and acquisition

of archival materials. Some of these approaches are highly objective, others exceedingly subjective.

As suggested in Part I of this book, archivists centuries ago did not even consider the idea that they might keep only some of the archives offered to them. Everything from 13th- and 14th-century scrolls, 16th-century government records, handwritten pioneer diaries to parchment treaties were deemed worthy of preservation. The archivist of the 18th or 17th centuries rarely identified one codex or treaty as having more or less value than another. Both would be kept. As a result of the increase in literacy, burgeoning paper boom, growth in documentation and parallel expansion in the number and nature of archival institutions, the archivist of today has to make a choice about what to acquire, and how much of that acquisition to keep.

This chapter looks at issues associated with two stages of appraisal: deciding broadly which groups of archives should be acquired to fulfil the institution's mandate, and deciding which materials within a specific acquisition are actually worth keeping. The archivist needs to think about the variety of appraisal criteria that might be applied at both stages. The processes by which archives may be acquired are also discussed here, along with the legal and administrative actions involved with documenting the transfer of custody or control from the creator to the archivist. The chapter ends with a brief look at the difficult question of monetary appraisal.

Appraisal for acquisition

Appraisal for acquisition involves identifying appropriate collections of archival material to add to the holdings of the archival institution. No matter how 'valuable' a body of archives may seem, if the materials do not fit in with the mandate and scope of the institution, then the archivist who acquires them is doing a disservice not only to the creator of the records but also to potential users and the archives themselves. Researchers will not look for the archives of a sports star in an institution devoted to the history of architecture. Citizens of a city should not find their local government's records in a museum in another country. Taxpayers may object to public expenditures to purchase a manuscript of a Mozart symphony if their local, publicly funded library has insufficient budget to maintain regular reference services. The collections of an archival institution should make sense. 'Making sense' requires – what else in a heavily policy-driven discipline? – developing a firm policy and defining a strategic plan for action.

Defining an acquisitions policy

The logic behind an institution's acquisition focus should be articulated in an acquisitions policy. Building on the core archives policy examined in Chapter 8, an acquisitions policy defines the scope of collecting. What will the archival agency acquire and what will it exclude from its holdings? Why?

Often an archival institution's primary responsibility is to manage its own sponsor records and archives. The fictitious Cascadia University introduced earlier might be responsible for University records, but it might also acquire non-institutional archives directly related to the University, such as the records of alumni, faculty, staff, associations, clubs or groups. The institution might also collect archives related to the research priorities of the university: fishing or forestry, for example. The University needs to be sure it can support any acquisition path chosen, with resources, space, staff time and technologies. Any acquisition is a commitment that will, ideally, be honoured *ad infinitum*.

When developing an acquisitions policy, the archivist needs to consider the following:

- 1 What related activities are under way in the same jurisdiction or wider region? Are other archival institutions interested in similar records, such as sports archives, women's studies archives or literary papers? The local historical society archives may want to preserve archives related to Polish immigrants in the area, but the Polish Community Centre may already be acquiring similar materials. To prevent competition, one or the other agency may need to step aside, or they may choose to work co-operatively. The archivist needs the Wisdom of Solomon to prevent the archives from being lost or damaged through a battle of wills.
- 2 How will the institution receive archival materials? Will it accept loans? Will it purchase materials? Will it receive transfers of digital archives directly from departments within the sponsor agency? A clear understanding of the scope and boundaries of acquisition will ensure the archivist does not end up making ad hoc decisions.
- 3 How will the institution fund not only acquisition but also preservation and storage? What is the cost of keeping those archives as permanent holdings? The archivist needs to be accountable not just for acquiring archives but for supporting ongoing care.
- 4 Will the archivist have sole authority to negotiate and accept acquisitions or transfers, or will an advisory board or other stakeholders play a role? If more than one person is making acquisition decisions, it can be very difficult to ensure efforts are co-ordinated. One party may feel compelled

to ‘do a favour’ by accepting one acquisition, and then the next thing the archivist knows, a dozen people are hoping for the same favour.

- 5 How will the institution administer restricted or confidential material? Breaching privacy and access laws or policies is a serious infraction. For instance, in some government institutions, volunteers are welcome supporters, but they are not allowed to work with restricted archives. Such conditions may be required by law, but they may limit the scope of volunteer service, which changes the archivist’s calculations around how long it will take to process acquisitions and make them available.

The imaginary Cascadia University has brought all its archival services together under one agency, Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections, which manages official University archives and also collects archival materials and other resources related to areas of scholarly focus within the University, including fisheries, forestry, mining and the development of railways in western Canada. The sample acquisitions policy shown in Figure 10.1 sets out the collecting focus of this hybrid institution.

Introduction

Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections, established in 1955 and administered as a department of Cascadia University Library, houses a significant collection of rare books and archival materials that support research by scholars, students and the general public within the University, from the region and around the world.

Role of Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections

Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections is responsible for the selection, acquisition, care, preservation, storage, exhibition and use of published and unpublished materials designed as rare or special, and also for the acquisition of archives created by and specifically related to the University and its students, alumni and surrounding community.

Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections collects official University archives; archives of associations, groups, faculty members, researchers or others with a relationship to Cascadia University; archival and historical materials that by their contents and nature provide special insight into topics relevant to the research interests included in the institution’s acquisition mandate; and rare books relevant to the acquisition mandate of the institution.

Acquisition priorities for research collections

When acquiring archival and manuscript materials, or rare books, associated with research areas beyond the life and activities of Cascadia University itself, Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections prioritizes the collection of materials related to fisheries, forestry, mining and the development of railways (primarily but not exclusively related to the west coast of Canada both before and after Confederation).

Figure 10.1 *Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections acquisitions policy*

The archival collection is founded on two significant archival acquisitions: the personal and research papers and personal library of Dr Cedric Arthur Galloway (1869–1953) and the research collection of Robert Allison (1901–93). Dr Galloway, a professor of history at Cascadia University from 1907 to his retirement in 1946, developed a vast collection of published and unpublished resources related to the history of the Pacific fishing industry. Mr Allison actively collected archival and reference materials related to the development of railways across the country. The Special Collections Department has expanded on these original donations and developed additional acquisition areas, as described below.

West coast fisheries

The research collection related to fishing focuses on the development of the Pacific fisheries industry, on the west coast of Canada and the USA. Included in the research focus are publications and archives related to First Nations fisheries; the commercial fishing industry from the 1800s to the present day; the lives of immigrant populations in the fishing industry, including the Japanese, Chinese and Europeans; the development of canneries along the Pacific coast; fishing boats and equipment; and the state of fishing and canning in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Forestry

The research collection related to forestry focuses primarily on the softwood forest industry, as the primary focus of forest business in western Canada, including both coastal and interior logging. The archives and rare books collected relate to logging companies and individual loggers; sawmills; environmental management of forest areas to support sustainability; land management issues related to forestry and other activities; community involvement in the forest industry; logging equipment and the lives of loggers and sawyers; and the marketing, sale and use of timber products within and outside of Canada.

Mining

The research collection related to mining focuses on the history and development of the mining industry across western Canada. Activities documented include the mining of oil, natural gas, copper, coal, gold, zinc, molybdenum, silver, lead and other minerals. Materials, which relate mining from pre-historic times to the present, document such activities as exploration and prospecting; the development and management of mines; the reclamation and reuse of lands; processing and refining of minerals; marketing and sale of mineral products; and equipment and machinery used for mining purposes.

The development of railways

The research collection related to the development of railways focuses on the history of railways across Canada. Included in the collection are archives and rare books related to the history and development of railways in Canada, including the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian National Railway and other national, regional and local rail projects. Archives relate to the history and development of rail services; the impact of rail services on the economic, cultural and social life of the country; rail equipment and supplies including rolling stock and engines; ancillary services such as the development of hotels; the relationship between rail services and tourism; and the restructuring of rail services across the country in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Figure 10.1 *Continued*

Reference collection

Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections also maintains a more general reference collection in support of academic research, including bibliographies and other reference materials in support of the University's research interests intended to facilitate academic and student studies throughout the University.

Limitation of scope

When considering possible acquisitions, Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections will take into consideration the following issues:

- the authorized mandates of other archival institutions, in order to avoid conflict of interest or overlap in acquisitions
- the availability of appropriate storage facilities and the resources required to make the material available for research purposes within a reasonable time after acquisition
- the physical condition of the materials and any costs associated with ensuring their physical stability and security over time
- the nature and extent of any conditions on access to or use of the archives, including access, privacy and copyright restrictions
- the relationship of potential acquisitions to existing holdings and the benefits of or drawbacks to investing the resources and time required to acquire, preserve and make available the materials in question.

Cascadia University Archives and Special Collections will review its acquisition strategies annually and revise its services as required to make most effective use of all resources available.

Approved by

Clifford Leach, Chief University Librarian, 18 October 2015.

Review date

This acquisitions policy will be reviewed and revised as required on or before 31 December 2020.

Figure 10.1 *Continued***Acquisition planning**

As an acquisitions policy is developed, the archivist must keep thinking about how the goals and priorities outlined in the policy will be achieved. A clear acquisition plan helps ensure that the institution stays on track and that its efforts do not overlap with the work of other relevant institutions. An acquisition plan should set out a clear, well focused and constructive approach to building collections.

Sometimes an area of potential interest is not yet represented in archival holdings. For instance, a local archives based in a community with a growing ethnic population may find that its existing collections do not represent the story of that ethnic minority. By actively seeking out and acquiring relevant archives from that community, the archivist may help the society move away

from one vision (a society with a marginalized sub-group) to another (a society with several groups in greater balance). Such a shift may be seen as political, but it may also be seen as a forward-thinking effort to reflect the reality of the community within the archival collection, by filling gaps or weaknesses in the existing holdings.

Any effort to identify collecting areas should be done co-operatively. Acquisition strategies can be developed by bringing together representatives of institutions in a region or country, or institutions with academic or research mandates, to devise a collaborative approach. The members of the group can identify spheres of acquisition activity and 'divide the pie', so that different institutions acquire particular sets of archives without (too much) competition.

Some archivists have extended this concept of strategic planning even further, arguing not only that the archivist should *collect* materials related to a particular topic or issue but also that if records on that topic do not exist, the archivist should actively *create*, or support the creation of, documents to fill the gaps. Activist archival institutions are particularly engaged with this type of interventionist archival service. Many see their role not just as protecting the existing archives of one group but as supporting the creation and care of records to represent the interests of marginalized groups or under-documented activities.

While the principle of co-operation is laudable, the move toward interventionist archival services, whether out of a concern for social justice or any other reason, is fraught with risk. Some detractors present philosophical objections, suggesting that the archivist should be a record *keeper* not a record *maker*. Other critics are more pragmatic, arguing that most archivists simply do not have the time or resources to manage the archives in hand, let alone manufacture new records.

Ultimately, the wise archivist turns back to the core principles of service, as outlined in Chapter 6, taking into account the legal, social and political framework in which her agency is placed. What are the legal requirements of the archivist as a member of her institution? What are her duties as a citizen? If they diverge, how can she find a balance between doing her job and sleeping comfortably at night?

Representative or comprehensive?

Another question to consider is whether the institution's acquisitions will be representative or comprehensive. The institution interested in the archives of forestry may acquire archives representing different aspects of that work:

from forestry companies, environmental groups, individual loggers, forestry consultants and so on. But how many collections from different logging companies in the region need to be acquired before enough is enough? How many are enough to represent a strong and balanced documentary record, and how many are too many for time and space and resources to support? The archivist has to decide if the objective is to provide evidence of every logging company in the region or if the goal is to preserve a strong, but not exhaustive, collection of forestry archives to document this particular part of the community's story.

The archivist also has to consider the politics of saying no. Will a logging company find another home for its archives? Should it preserve the materials as part of its own business? Destroy the archives? When an institution starts to acquire archives in a particular geographic, thematic or other area, a message is sent out to the community that *this subject* is *that institution's* responsibility. The institution needs to decide if it can and should accept that expectation of service years or decades into the future, before it agrees to head down that path.

In the end, if a potential acquisition does not fit with the institution's acquisitions criteria as outlined in its acquisitions policy, the archivist needs to present a very strong argument for accepting the material. Inevitably, there are times when the archivist may agree to take in archives that are seemingly out of scope. Perhaps a potential donor is offering a large donation with great research value, and he also agrees to provide the funds to arrange, describe and preserve the materials. The archives may be about events on the margins of the institution's acquisition mandate, but there may be no other suitable repository for the archives. Maybe the donation presents an opportunity for an overdue course correction in the institution's acquisition focus. In the end, the benefits of acquisition may outweigh the fact that the archivist will have to revise her institution's policy. Still, any time the archivist reaches beyond stated directions, she needs to have a clear and justifiable rationale, or else the archival programme loses coherence.

Acquiring digital archives

In general, the criteria for appraising digital archives are the same as for analogue or paper archives. Do the materials fit within the institution's acquisitions policy? What terms and conditions govern their access and use? Do the materials provide best evidence? Acquisition issues specific to digital archives also need to be considered: does the institution have the capacity to accept and preserve digital objects, which come with such enormous technological requirements for care?

There are four ways in which digital materials may come into archival custody or control:

- as a formal, planned process of transfer from a creating agency, with all metadata intact
- through transfer from a creating agency but with custody elsewhere
- as a deposit into storage systems directly managed by record creators
- as part of a donation or after-the-fact rescue attempt.

Each presents its own challenges, which are discussed below.

Formal, planned transfers from a creating agency

Digital archives may come as a formal, planned process of transfer from a creating agency to the archival institution, with all the metadata intact. If the archivist can plan for the receipt of digital archives from her sponsor agency, she can establish processes for ensuring they are managed effectively as evidence, with no loss of context, content or structure. She still needs to invest in all the technologies required to develop a trusted digital repository to preserve those materials safely and provide reference access to the information in them.

Transfer from creating agency to archival control, but with custody elsewhere

Control of digital archives may be transferred from a creating agency to the archival institution, but actual custody may be somewhere else: with the originating office, in a cloud computing environment or in a shared digital repository. In this case, the archival institution is responsible for preserving materials and supporting access, but the digital objects and the technology needed to manage them are kept in another location. This is the approach taken with digital collaboration projects, and it is also a feature of commercial online storage systems. The savings in equipment and technology costs need to be weighed against the risks associated with not actually having the materials themselves in hand. There is also a greater risk, especially when relying on commercial services, that the 'trusted' requirement in the 'trusted digital repository' does not meet best practice standards.

Deposits into storage systems

Digital archives may be deposited into storage systems (whether in archival

custody or control) directly managed by records creators. This approach is common when organizations establish electronic document or records management systems for staff, allowing employees to ‘declare’ something as an official record and add it to a digital storage system. The archivist responsible for ensuring archival materials in this system are protected may decide to set up mechanisms for identifying records with archival value and ‘transferring’ them to safe storage sooner or later. The transfer could involve actually moving files from one storage location to another, or ‘locking down’ a record to prevent further changes, so that it retains its value as evidence. Both scenarios require that the archivist play a central record-keeping role, building policies, procedures and technologies associated with accountable records care into the system.

Donations or after-the-fact rescue attempts

Digital archives may arrive as part of a donation or through an after-the-fact rescue attempt. For instance, the archivist may be handed a USB stick from a local resident, who says, ‘This is everything copied off Uncle Frank’s computer, and by the way he was an avid photographer who took thousands of digital pictures of trips to Iceland and Costa Rica and other wonderful places. Good luck.’ The archivist is faced with opening every file on that USB stick before she can decide which materials are worth keeping. What are the costs of such after-the-fact donations, and will the resulting growth in the archival collection be worth the effort?

Appraisal for selection

Having constructed an archival acquisitions policy, established acquisition priorities (ideally in collaboration with allied institutions) and formalized decisions in an acquisition plan, the archivist is then equipped with objective measures for deciding whether any particular donation fits within her institution’s collecting scope. Her next challenge, when archives come through the door, is to decide which materials within the new acquisition are actually worth keeping. This process is known as appraisal for selection.

No matter how relevant the topic or scope of the acquisition, not every piece of paper in the box or every digital document on the CD will be worth keeping. A potential acquisition of archives from a fish packing plant may include digital copies of original audited financial statements and annual reports, along with 20 boxes of paper receipts for the sale of fish products over 20 years. The financial statements and annual reports provide valuable

summary information about the operations of the plant. The receipts show individual sales, and the total figures should have been summarized in the financial statements and reports.

Despite the remote possibility that a researcher might someday be interested in the details of individual fish sales, the archivist has to take a risk-based approach. What is the cost of keeping all the receipts as well as the financial statements and reports? Is the effort worth the time and resources? The summary financial records carry greater evidential value and require considerably less space and fewer resources to preserve than the receipts. Usually the decision is clear: keep the reports; destroy the receipts.

On the other hand, if only *one* receipt was left from the fish packing plant, and no reports exist, the archivist would likely keep that lone document. It may be the only evidence, however meagre, of the plant's financial transactions. It may also provide unique evidence of the cost of fish a century ago, or it may be a rare example of a type of financial record never seen before.

The archivist needs to balance potential research interests and evidential value with time, resources and space. But she also needs to remember, as discussed in Chapter 2, that sometimes an item may be worth keeping even if it does not provide the best evidence. A Brazilian land grant from the 1800s or a 16th-century ledger showing household accounts in rural Belgium may be as valuable for their rarity as for their content. The only manuscript copy of the 11th-century saga *Beowulf* is an irreplaceable treasure, in large part because it has survived for several centuries.

Criteria for selecting archives

So what criteria can the archivist use as a basis for selecting archives for permanent preservation? No amount of archival theory can provide a definitive answer: there is no scientific formula or master checklist. But some common appraisal guidelines can help the archivist consider the questions to ask.

Focus on evidence

As emphasized throughout this book, the first value of archives is as evidence, particularly in these days when the absence or mismanagement of documentary evidence is bringing governments and organizations into disarray and disrepute. If materials contain core evidence of actions, transactions or decisions, their archival value is greater than if they offer nothing more than discrete bits of information. The archivist has to sort the

evidential wheat from the informational chaff. She can start by asking herself if the archives under consideration were originally created and used for the following purposes. If the answer is yes to these questions, then these records usually provide 'best evidence':

- Were the records used to help the creator make, confirm or remember decisions, particularly about policies, operations or significant actions?
- Were the records used to help the individual or agency remain accountable to himself or itself and to others?
- Were the records used to identify or confirm the individual's or organization's legal, financial or other obligations?
- Were the records used to identify or support the rights and obligations of others who may be involved with or affected by the work of the individual or organization, such as business partners, clients or the public?

Functional appraisal

When the archivist works closely with the creators of records, perhaps in the post-custodial records continuum favoured by many, determining evidential value is not about assessing actual archives in hand but identifying important functions and activities and then targeting relevant records for preservation. Functional appraisal or macro-appraisal (a concept first articulated by the Canadian archivist Terry Cook, as introduced in Chapter 3) focuses on an analysis of the functions and activities performed within an organization, not on the content of extant archives, with the goal of deciding which records should be kept on the basis of which functions are more or less significant.

Following the macro-appraisal approach, the archivist would not sift through all the archives of a particular agency to find those materials that best reflect past actions. Instead, she would work with the agency to identify core functions and activities, particularly those that support the agency's central responsibilities, and together they would identify the documentary materials that ought to be kept to provide best evidence of those functions and activities.

As already discussed, functional or macro-appraisal encourages (if not actually demands) that the archivist play an active role in record keeping, not just in archives management. Functional appraisal would ideally take place as part of the process of classifying and scheduling records in the office, so that the need for valuable evidence is identified even before actual records are created. Then, the records can be created and managed securely,

regardless of whether they are in paper or digital form, and brought into archival custody or control at an appropriate time with their evidential value protected. (However, as argued in Chapter 3, this approach is built on the premise that creating agencies will document their activities accurately and fully, a presumption not always borne out by reality.)

Other appraisal criteria

While evidential value is a primary concern, archives can be used for many other reasons, as discussed in Chapter 4. Thus the archivist also needs to consider if archives provide informational, aesthetic or symbolic value. Does their preservation help foster community or individual identity or support collective or personal memory? Archives may not provide best evidence, but they might shed light on aspects of life and work that give the community a richer image of itself. A certificate of achievement may provide evidence that Ashley Fonseka received top marks in speech and debate in university. The framed document may also be beautifully illustrated, a testament to the work of an unknown artist. An author's first royalty cheque might have no value as financial evidence, but it is a powerful symbol of a literary milestone. If the archivist considers not only pure evidential value but also the wider worth of archives in her society, she will likely succeed in keeping wheat, not chaff.

Selecting digital archives

The biggest challenge with appraising digital archives for selection is that, in the absence of a formal record-keeping process, the archivist must review every item, sometimes painstakingly, to assess value. Software tools and technologies can help: computer algorithms can be employed to search for duplicate documents or to locate keywords that identify high-value records. But after-the-fact digital appraisal still demands infinitely more time and effort than defining minimum expectations for records preservation and receiving specific materials as a result.

The archivist who wants to expand her institution into the digital age – and there is no going back on that road; every institution operating today needs to deal with the consequences of computers – needs to equip her institution, and herself, with the technology, skills and knowledge required to do the job well. The most important question the archivist has to ask, and be able to answer to her and her institution's satisfaction, is whether the institution can afford to acquire, preserve and make available digital materials, knowing they will receive the best possible care.

Going down the digital road requires starting with a solid and sustainable digital records management strategy; the journey must be carefully planned. A box of paper archives will likely survive a century, even sitting in a broom closet. A USB stick of unidentified digital documents should not be accepted today in the hope that the archivist will find time to figure out what to do with it a month or a year from now. The chances of success are too slim.

Sampling, weeding and culling

The archivist might consider sampling, weeding and culling when faced with large volumes of archives, such as individual case files. Case files are digital or paper files related to particular interactions between individuals and agencies. Examples include military service records, student files, employee files or client records.

Weeding and culling can be a relatively straightforward, if time consuming, process. With paper files, the process involves sorting through physical files and taking out duplicate records or obsolete documents. In the digital environment, the process can involve searching for documents with a particular title or keyword, such as 'draft', or using algorithms to search for duplicates, and then deleting them. With paper, the process is intensive but the results fairly reliable: if two identical copies are found, the archivist can destroy one knowing the other remains. In the digital process, the archivist has to know that every draft was a draft and not a final version that was never properly renamed; the risk of losing a valuable document is quite high.

Sampling, which aims to identify and retain a representative portion of a group of case files rather than keep every file, is more complicated. Sampling requires that the archivist formulate a structured approach to deciding which portion of the archives to keep, based on scientific or random criteria. Sometimes an entire series of case files might be digitized but only some files might be kept in paper form. Or the archivist may judge that not all the case files need to be kept as evidence, whatever medium, so she establishes a process for keeping only a representative sample.

Before deciding to sample archives (keeping some and destroying others) the archivist has to ensure the records as a whole contain no enduring evidential value. A complete set of pension case files might not need to be kept permanently if no one represented in the pension files has been alive for several decades. But a complete set of land registry case files would likely have permanent value: the history of ownership of a piece of land can serve as essential legal evidence, even decades or centuries after the first land title record was put in the file.

Sampling for paper and analogue archives

There are two approaches to sampling for paper and analogue archives: statistical sampling (which can be either random or systematic) and targeted sampling. Both approaches have benefits and drawbacks.

Statistical sampling

Random statistical sampling involves selecting files based on a random numbering table: files numbered 1, 3, 35, 57, 99 and so on would be kept. In systematic sampling, the archivist might keep every tenth file, such as every file created in 1932, 1942, 1952 and so on, or every file for people whose last names end in R or T. In order to select files, they need to be numbered or named in the first place, which can be an onerous job.

Systematic statistical sampling is easier than random sampling to carry out, but it can result in a less arbitrary sample. If the archivist decides to keep only files for people whose names start with a particular letter, has she taken into account the naming conventions in her society? Choosing 'Mc' and 'Mac' to sample case files in Scotland may not reduce the volume of archives noticeably. Choosing 'Q' or 'Z' may leave the archivist with very few files. Therefore, the criteria for systematic sampling must be carefully considered against the purpose of the records and the nature of the community in which they were created and used.

The archivist also has to take into account historical events over time. Say she wants to sample a sample of 150 years' worth of individual student records at an American community college. She needs to take into account the effect the Depression and Second World War might have had on enrolment. Sampling specific years, even though the dates were arbitrarily chosen, might leave a misleading impression of the number and nature of students over time.

Targeted sampling

Targeted sampling is not designed to capture a representative sample of archives. Some people argue it is not really sampling at all. Targeted sampling preserves archives that contain evidence or information the archivist believes merit retention, irrespective of other appraisal decisions. For instance, the archivist might retain all files related to police incidents involving firearms while destroying other incident files. Or she might keep all the personnel records for management staff but none for support staff. Archivists sometimes also look for what are called 'fat files': large or voluminous files that, it is

assumed by their size, are likely to be more complex and thus more informative.

Targeted sampling leaves a highly selective body of materials. Therefore the archivist has an even greater responsibility to explain in detail the criteria used. Otherwise, researchers may end up thinking that all police incidents involved firearms or that an organization did not have any support staff at all.

Digital data and 'big data'

Sampling digital archives is such a new concept that little has yet been written on the topic. Indeed, as already suggested, the question is reversed. Rather than focusing on whether to sample a selection of electronic files to reduce the bulk of holdings, the archivist has to decide whether it is better to keep everything, in the quest for sources of 'big data' analysis.

The research benefits of large data sets are important, but the challenge of storing, preserving and protecting huge aggregations of digital evidence can be significant. And the responsibility to protect the privacy of individuals is only harder when preserving large data sets of personal information, such as found in medical or financial records. Big data can be a boon to research, but such large volumes of digital archives still need to be preserved and managed effectively.

Appraisal and the cost of ownership

An archival institution is not a business, and decisions should not be driven by an economic bottom line. But even the archivist has to put on an accountant's hat periodically and step back to consider the very real costs associated with collecting and preserving archives. A repository's holdings inevitably continue to grow, and a strategically minded archivist has to develop a tough shell, acknowledging both the benefits and the costs of archival acquisition, preservation and access.

The archivist needs to assess the 'total cost of ownership', a term first used in the financial sector and later by software developers to assess the costs and benefits of technology upgrades. What are the real hard and soft costs of owning archives in perpetuity? The archivist assessing the total cost of ownership of a potential acquisition should ask the following sort of questions:

- If materials are going to be purchased, what is the total cost of purchase, including any taxes, legal fees or administrative costs?

- What are the costs of boxing, moving, receiving and storing the materials until they can be processed?
- What are the costs of arranging, describing, processing and conserving, and housing materials in acid-free folders, boxes and other containers?
- Will the archives need to acquire more shelving space or storage cabinets and what will that equipment cost?
- How long can the archives be kept in storage containers, whether acid free or not, before they need to be moved to new folders or boxes? What would be the total costs of changing the storage containers periodically over the next ten, 20 or 50 years?
- What are the costs of acquiring *and maintaining* the digital technologies needed to open, appraise, preserve and provide continued access to digital holdings?
- What are the indirect costs of storing the materials, such as heat or electricity, floor space, technological support, security systems or staff time? Will those costs increase dramatically with a particular new acquisition?

After assessing costs, the archivist can then calculate benefits. The donor might be willing to provide some resources to help process the collection. The materials might be a source of income through permission fees, reproduction rights or other revenue-generating activities. Are those anticipated revenues reliable, and would they be a one-time benefit or an ongoing income stream? Acquiring the collection might increase the institution's profile, perhaps encouraging other donations, monetary and otherwise; that benefit may warrant the expenditures of time and resources.

After doing the maths and considering all the benefits and drawbacks to acquisition, the archivist can make a much more informed decision. In the end, she needs to balance costs with the wider benefits to society. Will adding the collection to the archives' holdings strengthen the community – by enhancing its sense of itself, improving the scope of its documentary heritage or preserving touchstones of identity – such that, in the end, the financial cost of ownership is offset by the value of the archives as tools for accountability, identity and memory?

Other appraisal considerations

The archivist needs to consider other criteria as well, particularly when appraising non-sponsor archives. Many of the issues raised here have already been introduced in earlier chapters. Some involve archival theory and principles; others are highly practical.

Physical condition

The physical condition of the acquisition can affect the cost of ownership. Are materials so poorly damaged that restoration may not return them to a reasonable state? Or are the items so historically significant that no cost is too high? A tattered copy of a municipal newspaper from 1939 may not be worth keeping, let alone treating, even if it does commemorate a visit by the King of Norway. The original treaty between two aboriginal groups may be precious beyond belief, and no expense should be spared to protect it.

Volume

Can the archival institution manage the volume of archives in the acquisition? While the solution to a space crisis is not simply to reject all donations larger than four boxes or 100 GB of data, the archivist needs to assess current and future capacity for preservation, storage and reference before committing to an unexpectedly large and complex acquisition.

Medium

Archivists argue that a record is a record is a record, and that the medium on which the content is held is not relevant to the value of that record as evidence or information. From a preservation perspective, however, the media used to create records can significantly affect the time and resources needed to manage them, especially for digital archives, as discussed already. The archivist must not forget the practical realities of preserving archives in different media when considering new acquisitions.

Uniqueness

All archival materials are unique in their context. A duplicate item may be 'archival' in the sense that it provides evidence because of its particular location within a larger body of archives, such as the different copies of meeting minutes considered in Chapter 1. And a published item may be unique within its context, as shown in the example in Chapter 2 of Ashmole's book with Newton's handwriting. But an entire series of Frank Sinatra's records in the collection of a music lover, while valuable in many other ways, especially to members of Frank Sinatra's fan clubs, may not be unique. It would be a rare archival institution indeed – aside from the Sinatra fan club or the institution housing Frank Sinatra's own papers – that could justify their preservation.

Accessibility

The archivist needs to determine if there are any legal restrictions on access to materials within a potential donation and then decide if those restrictions will place an excessive burden on the institution or hamper access to an unacceptable degree. It may be reasonable for the donor and archivist to agree to close all personal correspondence for 50 years. It is not appropriate for the donor to demand that people of a particular gender, sexual orientation or colour be prevented from using archives.

Potential use

It is impossible to predict how archives will be used. But sometimes, perhaps foolishly, archivists try. While it is dangerous to overemphasize the immediate research value of archives, it is equally risky to choose not to keep archives because no one can see a possible use for them today or next week. Decisions about use should be linked to questions of preservation and cost, not to the perceived research value of a body of archives today. Who would have thought 50 years ago that ships' logs or farmers' crop charts would be used to track weather patterns and climate change today? The lure of big data is a timely example of the value of keeping more, not less.

Acquisition and personal bias

As discussed in Chapter 6, the archivist has to guard against letting personal preferences interfere with her duties, including (especially?) with acquisition. The archives of poets may be more enticing to one archivist, and the archives of scientists more compelling to another. To avoid bias, the archivist must always return to the institution's acquisitions policy as an objective and formal guide. But bias can creep into institutional policies too; appraisal has always been influenced by political and social conditions.

In the 1950s, environmental issues were far removed from the everyday lives of people, governments and corporations. Few governments had separate offices responsible for environmental issues; those agencies that did exist may have been more concerned with managing parks or servicing recreational facilities. Only the smallest quantity of public or private records created in the mid-20th century might overtly relate to environmental management as we define it today. In 2017, the environment is top of mind for many around the world. It is perhaps not surprising to know that archivists today are increasingly focused on preserving evidence of climate change.

But the only constant in life, or in archival service, is change. In her quest

to document the story of climate change or political protests or economic inequality in 2017, what topics is the archivist of today *not* considering, some of which might become pivotal issues 50 years from now? Rather than dust off her crystal ball, all the archivist can do is respect her institution's acquisitions policy, work co-operatively with other archival institutions and revisit acquisition strategies regularly, so that the wider archival community moves forward in a strategic and sustained fashion.

Dealing with donors

In theory, the archivist should only acquire material that fits with the criteria in the acquisitions policy, and she should be able to document all acquisitions so that they can be received and managed in an effective, accountable and efficient manner. In reality, the archivist has to deal with the donor who leaves a folder of photographs on the desk when no one is in the reference room, or with the couple who donate one or two items as a test, to see how grateful the archivist is before they bring in more materials. The archivist also has to negotiate with the organization that threatens to destroy records if the archivist does not come and take them away immediately, as well as with the departmental officer who refuses to transfer records at all, even though he is bound to by company policy, because he believes they are 'safer' in his own filing cabinet.

Sometimes, the archivist becomes a combination of psychologist and politician, striving to serve the institution's interests while still keeping on the right side of the community. The biggest political challenge is to avoid making so many 'side deals' with individuals that the institution's policies and procedures no longer apply. At that point, the archivist might have lost so much credibility that she cannot stand firm on any point of policy. The person on the other side of the desk may legitimately ask, 'If it was good enough for Fred, why isn't it good enough for me?'

In the end, any appraisal decision is a judgement call. If the archivist decides that good donor relations outweigh a strict adherence to policy, it is up to her to make the call. And to deal with the consequences.

The process of acquisition

Having considered issues of acquisition and appraisal, the next topic to address is how exactly – administratively and legally – archives move from the creator or donor to the archival institution. The archivist may receive archival materials in four ways: through transfer, donation, loan and purchase. Each method is explained below.

Transfers

Transfers come from within one agency: from a creating office to an archival facility. Transfers can take place as part of a formal records management programme or they can happen periodically or informally, such as when a department needs to make more room in the office. Whenever a transfer takes place, the process should be formalized and the transfer documented, in order to maintain the chain of custody and to identify the specific materials transferred. Because archives are being transferred within one organization, legal ownership does not change; the archival institution is a unit within the larger creating agency. But administrative custody and control will shift from the creating office to the archival institution. This shift in control allows the archivist to carry out appraisal, arrangement, description and access tasks unimpeded. Typically, the transfer process is documented in paper form or in an electronic archival management system, in order to ensure the transfer is formally executed. Even if the actual archives, such as digital records, are stored in another location, the archivist needs to record the transfer of control from creating agency to archival institution. At that point, the creating agency no longer has the authority to decide to destroy or change any of the materials transferred; they now serve as enduring evidence of the organization's activities.

Donations

A donation is typically defined as the permanent deposit of archives from person or group to an archival institution, with legal ownership transferred and no payment provided. If the materials are only to be left in the archives for a certain time, then the transmittal would be considered a loan, discussed below. (Archivists have been known to negotiate 'permanent loans', but these are ungainly and somewhat illogical arrangements, best avoided if possible. The institution should have legal authority for the materials, or else how can it justify the expenditure of time and space on archival care?)

A donation is executed through the completion of a legally binding donor agreement. If any of the conditions in the agreement are violated by either party, the other has every right to seek a legal remedy, so the archivist and the donor must each negotiate the transmittal in good faith, according to core principles, such as the following:

- Both parties must be legally capable of entering into the agreement.
- The agreement must not be contrary to public policy (such as a contract based on fraudulent information or a contract that supports criminal activity).

- The agreement will be considered void if it is based on misinformation or errors that, had they been known, might have prevented one or the other party from agreeing, or if either party has been coerced.
- The major elements of a donor agreement form should include:
 - the names and signatures of the donor (or an authorized agent) and the representative of the archival institution, confirming the transmittal according to the criteria outlined in the agreement
 - the date ownership is transferred and (if different) the date the materials are physically transferred
 - confirmation of copyright ownership and a clear indication of whether or not copyright, when known, will be transferred to the archival institution
 - a clear, if necessarily brief, description of all the materials conveyed
 - information about the physical condition of the materials, including documentation about potential preservation concerns
 - a clear explanation of any restrictions to be imposed (as emphasized earlier, every effort should be made to avoid unreasonable conditions)
 - a description of the procedures the archivist is to follow in order to dispose of unwanted materials (return to the donor, shred, burn and so on).

A sample donor agreement is shown in Figure 10.2.

<p>The Nakouru City and Community Archives (the Archives) gratefully acknowledges the gift of the archival material described below, received from</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Martin Kisembi</p> <p>The donation described below has been received by the Nakouru City and Community Archives as a gift, and the owner or his/her agent confirms full authority to transfer full title, thereby completely transferring to the Archives and its successors the property described below, without any restriction, unless noted on this form. This transfer is permanent and forever and includes (when applicable) the transfer of any copyrights held by the donor in the materials donated.</p> <p>Description of acquisition</p> <p>Three items: a 25-page scrapbook containing newspaper clippings related to Alfred Kisembi's family and his career as Mayor of Nakouru from September 1959 to March 1964; a 20-page photograph album containing 100 colour prints of a visit by Alfred Kisembi and his wife Maude and son Martin to Ghana in November 1963; and one reel of 16 mm film, unidentified, that apparently includes footage of Alfred Kisembi at an official function in Nakouru sometime in 1960.</p>
--

Figure 10.2 *Sample donor agreement*

Donor name and address:

Martin Kisembi
 1209–1667 Canterbury Street
 Nakouru West 2000

E-mail address: mkisembe447@internet.nk

Telephone: 02 9999 9999

Please indicate below how you would like to be acknowledged in any news releases, exhibit labels, or other publicity regarding this donation.

Credit line: Dr Martin Kisembi

Restrictions or conditions: none

Care of your donation

The following is a list of services the Archives will provide regarding your donation:

- 1 The donation will be arranged and described according to archival principles, and it will be preserved in non-damaging containers and stored securely in the Archives.
- 2 The donation will be available for researchers and the public after it has been arranged, described and prepared for storage and use.
- 3 The Archives will provide reference services for the donation and, if appropriate, will add information about the donation to online databases to support public access.
- 4 Should the donor agreement contain restrictions on portions of the donation, the restrictions will be strictly enforced.
- 5 When applicable, the Archives will alert researchers to existing copyrights relating to the donation and will include such copyright statements in archival descriptions.
- 6 The Archives will require that appropriate and complete citations be included in all information relating to the donation, such as exhibitions or publications.
- 7 The Archives will permanently maintain confidential files documenting the donation.

Donated by

 Date signature of donor

Accepted on behalf of Nakouru City and Community Archives

 Date signature of archivist

Figure 10.2 *Continued*

Loans

Loans can be of three kinds: reproduction or copy loans, exhibit loans or indefinite loans. (As mentioned, a permanent loan is an oddity that should be avoided if at all possible.)

Reproduction loans

A reproduction or copy loan allows an institution to receive archival materials in order to photocopy, photograph, microfilm or digitize them. Once the work is done the originals are returned to the lender. The lender needs to surrender the materials for an agreed time, and the archivist must ensure that the originals are protected while in the archival institution.

At the time the loan is negotiated, the archivist and the lender need to clarify the ownership and transfer of intellectual property rights to the copies. For instance, if the archival institution copies individual images in a photograph album but the lender of the album retains copyright to all those images (assuming the lender holds those rights in the first place), anyone wanting to publish an image from the album would need to contact the lender first.

Exhibit loans

More common in museum environments than in archival institutions, exhibit loans traditionally involve the temporary deposit of a physical archival object (such as a photograph, map or diary) for the purposes of display. Most often, an exhibit loan is agreed between two institutions, though borrowing an item from an individual is not uncommon.

Whenever the archivist wishes to borrow something, she must ensure that the item will be safe and well managed from the moment it leaves its original home to the moment it is returned. The lender of the item, whether an individual or institution, may want to confirm the environmental conditions under which the item will be displayed; the security and emergency systems in place to protect materials; and the borrowing institution's insurance coverage in case anything is lost or damaged. The lender and the institution will both want to know that any objects in an exhibition have not been secured through inappropriate or illegal means; proof of ownership and records showing provenance and custodial history may need to be shared.

Virtual exhibit loans

The archivist might also borrow materials in order to create digital copies to add to virtual exhibits. In this instance, the archivist will negotiate a reproduction loan, not an exhibit loan, collecting additional information such as answers to the following questions: Who owns the intellectual property rights to the original, and will that owner agree that a copy can be added to a virtual exhibit? Will that agreement expire at the end of the exhibit? What

will happen to the copy in the archives once the virtual exhibit is over? Will the copy be destroyed or added to the archives' holdings? Will the virtual exhibit itself be maintained as an archival record, and if so how can the archivist respect the intellectual property rights in any of the items used?

Indefinite loans

Similar to agreeing permanent loans, taking on indefinite loans is not considered good archival practice. Why should an archival institution spend money, often public money, arranging, describing and preserving archives it does not legally own? Someday the owner could take all the materials back. What happens to the 'value-added' components, such as the acid-free folders and boxes, never mind the archivist's time, if everything is returned to the owner? In almost all cases, receiving materials through an indefinite loan is an unsound approach to archival management.

There is one particularly worthy exception, though. An archival institution might agree to accept archival materials indefinitely on behalf of an organization or group that simply cannot care for its own archives. A local community group, for instance, might value its archives but might not be able to manage them for another couple of years, as it upgrades its storage facilities. A larger institution in the region could step in for a year or so to provide storage, if not access.

Temporary custody can also be critical to safeguarding archives in an emergency. In 2016, the National Archives of Finland took control of digital copies of archival materials from Syria, materials that have been in grave danger throughout the Syrian Civil War. While it is hoped that the original documents will survive and that a functioning archival service can be re-established in Syria when the war ends, the decision by Finland to step in and provide a safe haven for these copies ensures that the evidence is preserved in some form, whatever happens in Syria in the near future.

No matter how noble the intent, the action needs to be formally structured. A service agreement should be executed, transferring custody of holdings to the stable institution while the other improves capacity or waits for war to end. The original owners of the records should retain legal control, and the two parties would agree how much work the receiving institution will do to address storage, preservation and access requirements. The agreement should be reviewed regularly and renewed or cancelled as circumstances allow.

Purchases

Sometimes, archivists do purchase materials, from individuals, book and manuscript dealers or auction houses such as Sotheby's or Christie's. Many large institutions such as university libraries or national or state archives have a dedicated budget for purchases, but most small institutions have only limited funds, if any. In the event that an archivist is considering purchasing archival items, she needs to decide not only if funds are available but also whether the cost is warranted. When the archivist does purchase archival materials, she needs to maintain complete documentation, including sales receipts, invoices and records confirming the seller's right to own and dispose of the item.

Managing copyright

As discussed in Chapter 7, to own copyright is to own the right to be recognized as the creator of an intellectual product and to be credited for that work. A copyright holder has the exclusive right to reproduce his work and the right to prevent others from publishing or disseminating that work without permission.

When archives are transferred from one part of an organization to another, such as from the Legal Department to the Corporate Archives, copyright is still held by the overarching agency, so administering copyright is relatively straightforward. But when archival materials are donated, loaned or purchased, managing copyright becomes a challenge. When the archivist is negotiating donations or loans, she must strive to identify who owns copyright to the materials in question. If possible, it can benefit the archival institution to obtain the rights to archival items, allowing it to reproduce and publish those materials without having to seek permission from the copyright holder each time. Any transfer of rights must be explicitly included in the donor agreement. The archivist will also want to clarify copyright issues if possible when purchasing materials, though this may not be easy, particularly because purchases are so often made through a third-party dealer.

Accessioning archives

After the negotiations are complete and the materials have been donated, purchased, transferred or loaned, the next step is to document their legal and administrative transfer into the archives.

Accessions, archives and accruals

Accessioning is defined as the process of transferring legal and physical control of archives from the creating agency or donor to the archival institution. The materials received at any one time, as part of one specific accessioning process, are referred to as an accession. An accrual is an accession of archives added to an archival unit, such as a *fonds* or group, already held by the same archival institution.

Sometimes, an accession will represent an entire body of archives. The personal papers of Marie Lévesque or the official records of the defunct Itsabanger Motor Company are one archival collection *and* one accession if they all come in at the same time as part of the same process of transfer from owner to archival institution. But five boxes of archives from the poet José Salazar are one accession if they come in to archival custody on 22 May 2013. Three boxes of Mr Salazar's archives that arrive on 13 October 2014 are another accession, and the boxes also constitute an accrual, since they are an addition to existing holdings.

Consider this example. Lee Yuan Chang, a prominent local author, may negotiate an agreement with the archivist in the university library for the regular deposit of his literary and business papers. Each year, the archivist meets Mr Chang to review new files to be transferred, after which the archivist completes legal agreements as needed. Each donation is a new accession, legally and administratively separate from any donations that come before or after. Each donation is also a new accrual: an addition to the existing holdings of Mr Chang. Every new accession and every new accrual form a new part of the author's personal papers.

The archivist arranges and describes each new accession and adds information about each to the entry for Lee Yuan Chang in the descriptive database. The archivist also updates administrative documentation about how each new accession has been managed. The goal is to ensure that, while the 'whole' body of Lee Yuan Chang's archives is now larger and more complex, each separate accession can still be identified as needed.

When Mr Chang dies, and the last accession of his papers comes after his daughter has cleaned out his office, the archivist processes this new accrual and updates descriptive and administrative records. At this point, it is quite reasonable to assume that no further archives *from* Mr Chang will be added to his archives, as he is not around to create any more. Should the daughter find an errant box in the basement, those materials would be added as a new accession and an accrual. But if someone else comes in with archives *about* Lee Yuan Chang, those materials would be considered a different acquisition and not part of Mr Chang's archives.

The distinction between archives, accessions and accruals applies equally in the digital environment, though applying a series-based approach can help immeasurably. Each distinct series can be managed administratively as its own entity, and the linkages between functions and agents can be made through descriptive tools. Building up a totality of archives from one creating agency ceases to be the focus, replaced by the task of documenting each archival unit as it comes into archival control and linking information about it to the different agencies responsible over time. (More information on how to apply this series-level control in description is given in Chapter 11.)

The purpose of accessioning

Accessioning is not just a tracking process. It is an integral step in gaining legal and administrative process over archives, which is one reason that a clear distinction is made between archives, accessions and accruals. Accessioning supports the following two functions: it documents the transfer of title from the owner(s) to the repository; and it documents any restrictions on access, copying and use. In the case of donations, the accession record can also document the donor's preferences for disposing of unwanted materials, information that should also be captured in the donor agreement, as discussed above.

Accessioning usually involves two steps. The first is to complete and execute formal authorizations confirming the legal transfer of ownership from the creating agency or donor to the archival institution. These authorizations may be transfer forms, purchase receipts or donor agreements. The second step is to document the existence of the new accession in the archival institution, by completing an accession record. This record is an internal document that identifies and briefly describes each new accession so that the materials can be identified, stored and tracked. Information captured in an accession record should include, at a minimum:

- a unique identifying code or number
- the date of the acquisition
- the name of the source or donor
- the type of accession, such as donation, transfer, purchase or copy loan
- a brief description of the materials acquired, ideally including:
 - an estimate of quantity or extent (as precise as possible)
 - the medium or format of the material (photographs, textual records, maps and plans and so on)
 - the years covered by the archives
 - a general statement of the content, subject or scope of the materials

- a brief description of how materials were stored before arriving in the archives, particularly to highlight any changes in custody that could affect what remains and the organization or physical condition
- an indication of any conditions or restrictions on access
- whether or not the accession is an accrual or shares provenance with other archives in the institution
- a note on physical condition, particularly if there are immediate preservation concerns
- the present storage location of the materials.

The accession record will be updated whenever new materials come in, showing each new accession separately. As mentioned in Chapter 9, the accession record should be considered vital and must be protected in an emergency. It is also a permanent record, giving the full picture of all the holdings of the institution from its beginnings to the present moment. The archivist needs to protect accession information, along with the legal records associated with transfers and donations, more securely than almost any other items in her institution.

Accession records are permanently valuable, as shown in this example. Imagine if Lee Yuan Chang's grandchildren came to the institution 50 years after his death, claiming that he never meant to donate his archives and arguing that the institution should give them back. The archivist in charge – who will certainly not be the same one who worked with Mr Chang in the first place – will need to turn to the evidence (the accession record, which is part of the institution's own archives) to demonstrate proof of ownership. Similarly, if ten boxes of archives disappear when the institution moves from one building to another, the accession record will be an essential tool as staff try to find out what is missing.

The accession record also serves a valuable descriptive purpose: if the archivist is not able to arrange and describe archives right away, the summary information in the accession record can serve as a high-level description of what was received, when and from whom. While confidential details in an accession record would not be made available to researchers, the archivist is able to use the data to extract a summary of new or unprocessed holdings, thus helping researchers understand everything in the custody of the institution.

It is unwise, by the way, to use accession records as location registers. The archivist will just have to update accession documents every time she rearranges her storage room. It is better to maintain information about where archives are stored in a separate location file, discussed in Chapter 11, and

only identify the first location of a new accession in the accession record, so that materials can be found immediately after they are brought into custody. The archivist can then make a note later, when the items have found a more permanent home, that the initial information on the accession record is now obsolete.

Increasingly, the process of accessioning and overall archival management is carried out using software technologies such as purpose-built or off-the-shelf software tools. A variety of software packages are available to support all types of archival duties. Every archivist will need to decide which tools are best for her own situation. A commercial vendor in England, for instance, may not be able to provide technical support easily for an archival institution in Sri Lanka. A tool that supports one set of archival standards may not be useful if the institution does not follow those standards. And open-source tools, while seemingly inexpensive, may not have all the features needed by an institution with complex requirements, such as an integrated institution that wants to manage its archival, museum and library acquisitions in one database. The best course of action when investigating options for archival management software is to solicit advice from staff in relevant professional associations and national archival institutions, who can help steer the archivist in the direction of tools or resources best suited to her particular environment.²

Monetary appraisal

The extreme prices paid on eBay or the jaw-dropping value of treasures on *Antiques Roadshow* can leave the public with a misconception about the value of 'old' books and papers. The reality is that few 'treasures' that come into archival institutions are worth the thousands of dollars a donor may wish. But donors still come into the institution hoping to discover that their archives have monetary value. The archivist needs to know how to react.

As with any financial transaction, an assessment of the monetary worth of archives is based on an understanding of fair market value, which is the highest price that the material would bring in an open and unrestricted market. But fair market value is not always a meaningful benchmark with archives. Just because an archival collection *might* have a high commercial value does not mean it has any meaningful value to an archival institution.

A classic example is a collection of autographs. The original signatures of politicians, actors or musicians may claim a high price at auction, but if the documents containing those signatures are taken out of their original location, the value of the collection as evidence is pretty much erased. The collector

may see dollar signs, but the archivist sees an example of lost provenance.

When deciding to purchase archival materials, the archivist cannot just set a price, write a cheque and take hold of the items. She needs to be accountable to her sponsor agency for the sums paid and to have sufficient budget for the acquisition. The sponsor agency may demand that she prepare a monetary appraisal, and the institution may be bound to carry out due diligence to comply with legal or financial regulations for the acquisition of cultural or historical property.

When appraising archives to provide a tax receipt for a donation, the evaluation process can be even more drawn out. Both the donor and the institution will likely be bound by legal or administrative requirements such as the following:

- The donor needs to confirm he holds clear title to the archives and can and will transfer ownership fully to the institution.
- The two parties need to draw up a formal donation agreement before a monetary appraisal can be completed. Conducting an appraisal in the hope that materials will be donated is not logical and may not even be legal.
- Monetary appraisal is based on an assessment of the materials the institution intends to keep, not all the documents in the donor's basement. The donor may have 30 boxes of archives but the institution might only decide to keep five after it has completed its appraisal. Thus the archivist has to finish that archival appraisal before anyone can assign a monetary appraisal.
- In many countries, monetary appraisals have to be undertaken by specialists if the anticipated value is above a certain threshold. For instance, in Canada, the rule of thumb is that an archivist can provide an in-house appraisal if the material has a value of less than \$1000 or so, but an independent appraiser may have to be brought in if the value is between \$1001 and \$5000. If the materials are anticipated to be worth more than \$5000, the appraisal may have to be done by two or more appraisers, in order to comply with Canadian tax law.
- A conservation assessment may also have to be carried out, especially if materials are in poor condition, are stored on fragile or high-risk media (such as audiocassettes) or are unidentifiable without technological intervention (like unlabelled floppy disks or CDs). The costs of preservation or restoration may have to be factored into the monetary appraisal.
- In many jurisdictions the institution pays for the monetary appraisal, but

if the donor does not like the results he will be responsible for paying for a second review.

- The tax receipt is invariably issued for the year in which the donation was finalized. If the original donation arrives in the institution in 2014 but the materials are not appraised, arranged, described and valued until 2016, the tax receipt will be issued for the 2016 tax year. The archivist needs to be realistic with herself and the donor about the time frames involved in processing the collection.

Monetary appraisal is a complex area of archival work, and few archivists engage in monetary appraisal often enough to build up a store of knowledge and expertise. The websites of government revenue offices or tax departments often include information specifically related to issues of cultural property management, and so that is the best place to start researching issues of monetary appraisal and archives.

Deaccessioning archives

How should the archivist dispose of unwanted materials? The first and fundamental principle is this: *all* archives that are not going to be kept in the institution must be disposed of legally and with respect for both the materials and the creator or owner. It is not appropriate for an archival institution to sell individual items from an acquisition, put archives in an insecure recycling bin or keep documents as personal property. Such actions tarnish the image of the archivist as guardian, leaving potential donors wondering what might happen to their own materials in the same situation.

Deaccessioning is the act of removing archival or other resource materials permanently from the physical control and legal ownership of the archival institution. The best way to deaccession is not to have to deaccession in the first place. The archivist should appraise archives as soon as possible after they are received, identify those materials not worth keeping and return them to the donor or destroy them right away, depending on the donor's wishes, which should be documented fully in the donor agreement.

If items *are* to be destroyed, that process must be secure. Paper archives should not be recycled until they have been shredded or pulped. Computer disks should not be erased and reused but should be destroyed entirely, unless the archivist can confirm that all electronic data have been removed. The archivist should not sell items, give them to another institution or otherwise dispose of them unless those actions are fully legal and in keeping with original donor agreements.

A difficult scenario is when a donor takes back boxes of materials rejected by one archival institution and then offers them to another, perhaps without even telling anyone at either institution that the records do not represent a 'whole' body of archives. The unwanted materials likely have little or no enduring value; otherwise the archivist would have kept them in the first place. But now the donor has created what is sometimes called a 'split *fonds*', creating confusion among archival institutions and the research public.

Such a situation comes up most often when celebrity figures, such as authors, musicians or politicians, 'shop' their personal archives around from institution to institution looking for the best 'deal'. The archivist on the other side of the desk would be wise to have a conversation with the donor about notions of provenance, original order and archival value. If the archivist decides that having some of the materials on offer would be a good decision archivally, so be it; she needs to decide how firmly she will stand on archival principles of unity and totality. (As already discussed, the idea of an archival 'whole' is not realistic anyway.) But yet again the point must be made, the goal of archives is not empire building; it is documenting aspects of society to leave an authentic and valuable record of the past.

Dealing with the backlog

Sometimes the archivist opens a closet door and finds shelves filled with dozens of boxes of unidentified stuff. The materials may bear no relation to the institution's current acquisitions policy. There may be no administrative or legal paperwork. The story of their arrival in the institution may have been buried with the first community archivist, who died 20 years ago.

In these cases, if the archivist cannot locate a donor, a creator or some likely descendants, she has to consider whether she should even keep the archives. What are the risks of arranging, describing, preserving and making available a body of archives and then discovering you had no legal right to do so in the first place? But equally, what are the risks of destroying materials with wonderful archival value?

There may be some comfort in remembering that the more complete the body of archives, the more likely it is that provenance and source may be identified, somehow. The records themselves may tell at least some of the story. The archivist may be happy to pitch a single newspaper clipping in the recycle bin, but she may find it worth her while to settle into the detective work involved with figuring out the origins of five boxes of personal diaries.



Appraisal is considered by many archivists to be the most important and the most challenging of archival tasks. The decision to keep can be continually reassessed; the decision to destroy is, by definition, final. Digital technologies are forcing archivists to reconsider the foundation of traditional appraisal criteria, and another edition of this book in five years may present an entirely different approach. There is nothing that today's archivist can do but make the best, most thoughtful decision she can given the circumstances she is in now.

Once archives are under the institution's legal or administrative custody or control, the archivist's next task is to bring them under intellectual, physical and/or virtual control. Arrangement and description are addressed in the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Without getting sidetracked into a discussion of the value of statistical analysis and data sets, it is useful to define big data, a term that refers to extremely large data sets that may be analysed using computer technologies. The goal of big data analysis is to search for patterns, identify trends or find commonalities across different pieces of information. Such analysis, largely but not only statistical, can provide deep insights into human and social behaviour. But the analysis relies on data, which often takes the form of records or evidence.
- 2 Two open-source software packages in common use in archival institutions in 2017 are *Access to Memory (AtoM)* and *ArchivesSpace*, which are described briefly in Chapter 11, since their most prominent features relate more to description than to administrative control. The information given in that chapter is intended to be illustrative only and not an endorsement of those packages. Every institution must make choices based on its own needs and priorities.