

THEODORE CALVIN PEASE AWARD

Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them

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Abstract

This paper examines the archival potential of blogs, a popular form of electronic record in which personal accounts and commentaries are entered regularly in an on-line journal. A historical survey of the diary—the blog's paper-based antecedent—suggests how the two records are alike and where they diverge, taking into account their evidential values, their seemingly contradictory public and private qualities, and their very diverse physical natures. The paper discusses the role that traditional archives should play in preserving blogs, while considering the implications that their loss would have for our cultural memory, and offering some suggestions for ensuring their preservation.

The study of electronic records preservation is not new to the field of archival management. For the past decade or so, archivists and preservation specialists have given considerable thought to the

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stability of our cultural memory and the future of traditional archives in the digital age. Much of this scholarship has focused on the preservation of electronic correspondence, or e-mail, owing to the unique information that letters generally possess.¹ The same value, however, can be applied to various other forms of electronic media, particularly the “blog” or “live journal,” which is fast replacing the conventional pen-and-paper diary.

Historians have long recognized the diary’s merit as a window onto the past and an exceptional source of information for the life and times of a particular diarist. Its diurnal format, which has remained largely unchanged since the seventeenth century, increases the diary’s value as a consistent and reliable informant of historical incidents. Sociologists mine diaries for material concerning social structures and relationships, anthropologists read them for their candid cultural insights, and literary scholars regard them as legitimate narrative forms, worthy of study in their own right.² Today’s on-line diaries hold potentially the same evidential value, provided that they are preserved and adequately archived for the benefit of future researchers.

Electronic records differ greatly from their pen-and-paper counterparts in ways that have significant implications for the means by which they are managed, maintained, and accessed. Paramount to these differences is the appreciably shorter life span electronic records have without some form of human intervention due to the gradual obsolescence of hardware and software environments. Their survival, however, involves a great deal more than the mere capture, migration, and storage of information. New approaches to accessioning and saving electronic records must also be taken to avoid future loss. Proactive behavior on the part of archivists and diarists and a better understanding of copyright law in the digital domain are also required. Other nontechnical questions still remain regarding the role traditional archives will play in maintaining electronic diaries. Will archivists have to adapt archival principles and practice to meet the needs and limitations of electronic records? Will archives have to modify their approach to administrative operations and policy-making procedures in the digital age? How do digital records factor into the collection development policies of collecting archives? Amid all these questions, one thing is abundantly clear: if certain measures are not taken now, the likelihood of future loss to archives is great. The purpose of this paper is to examine these issues in greater detail and offer a few suggestions that may diffuse the imminent dangers facing the future of traditional archives.

¹ Susan Lukesh, “E-Mail and Potential Loss to Future Archives and Scholarship or The Dog That Didn’t Bark,” in *First Monday* 4 (September 1999), http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue4_9/lukesh/index.html.

² Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, “Issues in Studying Women’s Diaries: A Theoretical and Critical Introduction,” in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, ed. Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, 1–20 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

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I will begin with a general account of the diary, discussing its basic form and function while placing the practice of diary keeping in a broader context of culturally prescribed modes of self-expression. I will draw some general conclusions about the protean nature of the diary, and establish its value as a significant source of information for researchers. I will then introduce the “blog” or “live journal,” discuss its likeness to the diary, and note where the two diverge. I will investigate some key issues regarding the stability of these electronic records: What steps are being taken to preserve them? Who has copyright or ownership of their intellectual content? Who is responsible for data migration or recovery of lost material? Do people recognize these records as legitimate subjects for future study? Lastly, I will consider the role that traditional archives will play in preserving on-line diaries, discuss the implications that their loss will have for our cultural memory, and offer some suggestions for their preservation.

D i a r i e s

While the diary has its origin in no single historical development or occurrence,³ the advancement of literacy and the Protestant Reformation were certainly two significant factors in the West. The rising tide of Western literacy reached unprecedented levels in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴ Although reading and writing remained restricted to the more privileged sectors of society, their distribution shifted to encompass not only the clergy, but also a significant proportion of France, England, and Germany’s urban-dwelling laity.⁵ With the advancement of literacy came the widespread circulation of printed materials and the ever more common practice of silent reading.⁶ Unlike reading aloud, which had long been the only way to read, silent reading encouraged solitary reflection. It allowed the individual to form personal

³ The earliest extant diaries date to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is possible that earlier attempts were made, but as the word “diary” itself suggests, the practice of journaling or keeping a daily record of one’s personal accomplishments, engagements, and observations was a late arrival. *Diarium*, the Latin root of diary, did not come to represent this sort of record until the late medieval, early modern period. Prior to that, *diarium* referred simply to one’s daily allowance or ration of food.

⁴ Harvey Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Society and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 108–72.

⁵ Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy*. Tessa Watt argues that the “growing specialization of publishers in printed works for humble readers” and the wide-reaching network of itinerant book peddlers, who ventured off the main roads and into small villages to sell their wares, suggest a segment of England’s rural population was also reading at this time. Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5, 267.

⁶ Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640*, 5–8 and 260–67. Philippe Ariès, “Introduction,” in *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Philippe Ariès and George Duby, 4–5 (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989).

judgments of the surrounding world based on insights derived from books, pamphlets, and broadsides. Silent reading liberated the individual from the traditional mediators and communal constraints of the medieval world. Understanding, thus, became a personal, private experience rather than a collective, public act.⁷

The dissemination of printed materials among a wider, more introspective audience also helped to smooth a path for the various Protestant reform movements that emerged throughout Europe at this period.⁸ From the late sixteenth century on, a steady stream of devotional manuals flowed into reformed territories where a radical new type of personal piety was being cultivated.⁹ Readers of these manuals were prescribed a daily diet of prayer, meditation, and self-examination. They were encouraged, moreover, to keep a written account of their spiritual progress, to chart out their spiritual life's course and to note any deviation from its path in the pages of their diary.¹⁰

In his devotional tract, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650), Protestant preacher Richard Baxter advised the aspiring saint to put pen to paper each night and acknowledge his personal failings. He was to bring this reckoning with him when he went to the "Examination."¹¹ At approximately the same time, Isaac Ambrose proposed in his *Prima, the First Things in reference to the Middle & Last Things* (1654) that "after supper, when you lie down, and are ready to sleep . . . have a great quietnesse and silence, without presence or disturbance of any, [and] erect a Tribunal for your own Consciences." He then went on to suggest that after long reflection, an "accounting" of "tryals" should be reckoned in a "Register" so that the penitent may reflect further in the future on his daily transactions with God.¹² As these passages suggest, diaries became an accepted form of confession in a Protestant world that had rejected the demand for priestly intervention in the absolution of sin. And it is to this religious impulse that the immense number of early diaries given over to self-deprecation, repentance, and supplication are owed.

In a diary she kept from 1656 to 1678, the English viscountess Elizabeth Mordaunt, granddaughter of the Earl of Monmouth and mother of the Earl of Peterborough, recorded her daily failings and prayed for her family faithfully. In 1657, she developed an elaborate classification scheme that allowed her

⁷ Roger Chartier, "The Practical Impact of Writing," in *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance*, 111–16.

⁸ Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy*, 132–34.

⁹ Tom Webster, "Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality," *Historical Journal* 39, no. 1 (1996): 36–38.

¹⁰ Webster, "Writing to Redundancy."

¹¹ Cited in Germaine Fry Murray, *A Critical Edition of John Beadle's A Journall or Diary of a Thankfull Christian* (London and New York: Garland Press, 1996), xxx.

¹² Murray, *A Critical Edition of John Beadle's A Journall*, xxxi.

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better control over each objective. She divided her diary into two columns; one headed *To Returne Thanks For* and the other, *To Aske Perden For*. In the former column she wrote of the virtuous deeds she divined from God: "I bles my God for geving me patient to ber with my Husband when he is in his passionat Humers." In the latter she recorded her personal faults: "I have ofended this day in ometing my pryvet prayers in the morning; and in eydel discors; and in the vane desirs of being thought handsum."¹³ Lord Wariston took an equally unusual approach to spiritual accounting in the diaries he kept from 1632 to 1639 and 1650 to 1654, by simply humiliating himself before God. On the pages of his diary, Wariston pronounced himself "thy poore, naughty, wretched, unuseful, passionat, humerous, vayne, proud, silly, imprudent, phantastick barroman" or "the unworthiest, fillthiest, passionatest, deceitfullest, crookedest, backslydingest, rebellionest, perjurest, unaiblest of all his servants."¹⁴ Devotional diaries such as these reflect the intensely introspective, self-examining religiosity of seventeenth-century Protestants, particularly Quakers, Covenanters, and Puritans, who lived in a realm where life in this world and salvation in the next were real uncertainties.

Far more common, still, were the sort of diaries kept by their contemporaries, Ralph Josselin and John Evelyn,¹⁵ in which supplications and prayers were interwoven with personal commentary on public and private events, such as the restoration of the monarchy, the Fire of London, the death of a neighbor, or the birth of a child. These were, after all, the workings of divine providence and merited comment. Typical entries appeared much like these from Josselin's diary: 28 January 1665, "I was not aware this begun the yeare, the Lord remember mee for good, when my eye is not distinctly on him; an abatem^t of plague at Colchester to 36, London 272, plague 79," and 8 July 1666, "God good in y^e season. I was blamed to neglect a hay day on y^e fast; in sad skies my hope was God would make it up and he did. London plague, 35, tot 222. Colch. 175: the plague in many places in y^e country hott, the enemy braves us at sea, o^r fleet unreadie, threatning invasion, o^r counsels divided, and very low in y^e esteem of y^e nacon."¹⁶

¹³ Arthur Ponsonby, *More English Diaries: Further Reviews of Diaries from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century with an Introduction on Diary Reading* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1927), 71–73.

¹⁴ Arthur Ponsonby, *Scottish and Irish Diaries from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century with an Introduction* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1927), 34–40. This was Archibald Johnston, framer of the Scots National Covenant (1638), who after being made a Lord of the Sessions in 1641 took a prominent part in the Westminster Assembly and became a member of the committee representing Scotland in London. He was subsequently made Lord Advocate and Lord Clerk Register, but was eventually arrested and hanged in Edinburgh at the time of the Restoration.

¹⁵ E. Hockliffe, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Ralph Josselin* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1908); William Bray, ed., *The Diary of John Evelyn* (London: Gibbings, 1890).

¹⁶ Hockliffe, *The Diary of Rev. Ralph Josselin*, 151, 154.

The most celebrated diary (1660–1669) of this period, however, is that penned by English civil servant Samuel Pepys.¹⁷ Pepys was, in many ways, an exception to most seventeenth-century diarists; he did not set out with the intention of laying bare the light and shade of his character through self-reflection and self-revelation. Nor did he intend to meditate on God's plan for humankind. A tepid Anglican, Pepys was far more interested in food, drink, and women than God. Although the pages of his diary bear frequent marks of his church attendance and interest in theology, they also reveal his uncontrollable roving eye and frequent infidelities. On 1 October 1666, he wrote unapologetically: "To Whitehall, and there did hear Betty Michel was at this end of the town; and so did stay to endeavor to meet with her and carry her home; but she did not come, so I lost my whole afternoon. But pretty, how I took another pretty woman for her, taking her a clap on the breech, think verily it had been her."

Pepys "was by nature a man of system, and one to whom the keeping of records was necessary to the art of living."¹⁸ He clearly felt the need to preserve on the pages of his diary every pleasure he had experienced so that it became a memento of his life. He wrote of feasts he enjoyed, pleasurable tunes he heard, an agreeable stroll, a play he attended, or the glimpse he stole of an attractive woman at church. He also wrote of disagreeable incidents, such as his gallstone attacks and hangovers, and such times as when, on 12 January 1669, his wife Elizabeth tried to punish him for his philandering ways: "She silent, and I now and then praying her to come to bed, she fell out into a fury, that I was a rogue and false to her." Then, "about one a-clock, she came to my side of the bed and drew my curtaine open, and with the tongs red hot at the ends, made as if she did design to pinch me. . . ." Remarkable for its candor and outstanding for its detail, Pepys's diary provides a distinct authorial voice and narrative style that allows the modern reader to glimpse a world on the cusp of major social, cultural, economic, and ideological change.

Introspective journaling yielded to a more prosaic, utilitarian form of diary keeping borne of a secular milieu. In form, these diaries are terse and exact, their pages given over to brief episodic notations concerning the diarist's health, occupation, business transactions, purchases, conversations, travels, or weather. They were kept ostensibly as records of fact and reflect the arrival of a modern age devoted no less to religion, but consumed more and more by matters of the state, domestic affairs, natural phenomena, exploration, scientific discovery, and commerce. The English scientist and inventor Robert Hooke intermingled fragments of the day's events with empirically derived evidence of the physical

¹⁷ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Mathews, 10 volumes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). See also The Online Diary of Samuel Pepys, <http://www.pepysdiary.com/>.

¹⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 1: xxviii.

world. An anonymous eighteenth-century diarist filled his *Universal Cash Book and Newcastle Pocket Diary* with methodical lists of noteworthy people, acts of Parliament, local horse races, and annual fairs.¹⁹ The *Kearsley's Gentleman and Tradesman's Pocket Ledger* kept by a Chichester man, circa 1791, contains similar lists and tables, but includes astute observations such as: "if you walk with an umbrella and meet a similar machine lower yours in time lest you break it or get entangled with the other."²⁰ A more unusual example comes from the English-born merchant, Samuel Sewell. For fifty-five years, Sewall kept two diaries. One chronicles Colonial life in America from the vantage point of a husband, father, businessman, and, of course, a pious Puritan. It has all the markings of a devotional diary. The other provides descriptive accounts of objects and events in the material world: a coin, a coat, the body of a dwarf, the hair on a horse's tail, or a well-prepared meal. The two sit side by side in one book.²¹

Diaries of this nature seem to have developed out of an increased knowledge of bookkeeping methodology and accounting theory, which had been ingrained very early in the Christian sensibility. The creation of a daily diary provided an efficient form of recordkeeping for Martha Ballard, a midwife living in eighteenth-century Kennebec, Maine.²² Her diaries served as account books for all aspects of life: recording the babies she helped deliver, funerals she attended, pleasure visits, items she bought, payments she received, and domestic chores she completed. On 21 August 1787, she records, "A rainy day. I have been at home knitting."²³ Three days latter, "Calld from Shaws to James Hinklys wife in travil. Put her safe to Bed with a son at 7 O Clok this morn. Left her as well as is usual for her. Came to Mr Shaws receivd 6/8. Receivd 6/8 of Mr Hinkly also. Came to Mr Cowens. Find his dafters & Jedy ill. Claton & David cam inn from Sandy river. People well there. Arivd at home at 5 afternoon. Doctor Coneys wife delivrd of a dafter. Last Evening at 10 O Clock. Birth James Hinkleys son."

Ballard's diary lacks artifice and clarity; its entries are short, coded, and devoid of stylistic devices. The modern reader is seemingly unable to enter Ballard's world, inhibited by the exigencies of the time and place. A diary such as this does not stand on its own; it must be deciphered and elucidated with the aid of maps, census records, birth and death certificates, medical treatises, and histories from Ballard's own time. A tedious and laborious task no doubt, but when

¹⁹ Ponsonby, *More English Diaries*, 10.

²⁰ Ponsonby, *More English Diaries*, 10.

²¹ Samuel Sewell, *The Diary of Samuel Sewell*, ed. Thomas Halsey, 2 volumes (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973); Mary Adams Hilmer, "The Other Diary of Samuel Sewell," *New England Quarterly*, 55 (September 1982): 354–67.

²² Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

²³ Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 39.

achieved the rewards are enormous, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's modern edition of Ballard's diary attests. In Ulrich's care, Ballard's diary becomes an exceptional account of domestic productivity and "a female-managed economy" in an early American town.²⁴ It sheds light on a life that was at once difficult and simplistic. Moreover, it serves as an invaluable witness to the social, cultural, and economic transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁵

Diaries continued as domestic accounts throughout the nineteenth century, remaining spaces for recording births, deaths, and marriages together with mundane topics such as the weather. On 29 June 1873, Massachusetts housewife Jane Fiske penned a single entry in her diary: "My baby born!" Her next entry on August 3 revealed: "Extremely hot morning but thunder shower this afternoon. F. [Fuller] took me to ride after breakfast to where our baby is buried." When time permitted or circumstances demanded it, Jane Fiske would occasionally reveal something of herself on the limited pages of her small pocket diary: "Jettie and I washed & then I fixed up my stove & lots more truck all myself as my husband isn't worth shucks to do everything for his wife. & if I had more room I'd say more about it."²⁶

As time went on, however, diaries developed as sites of self-exploration, self-expression, and self-construction. The process of self-monitoring adapted to meet the rhythms and demands of individualism, capitalism, nationalism, and industrialism, the hallmarks of modern society.²⁷ The diary became a space where an individual's identity was actively conceived and constructed. Diarists were no longer abstracted from their personal experiences for the sake of spiritual assessment or placed on the periphery when calculating the day's achievements. Instead, they became the focus of their diary's attention.

This quest to discover the individual self on the pages of a diary was spurred by a number of external factors. The nineteenth century witnessed another sharp increase in literacy rates.²⁸ Pleasure reading advanced, with women, in particular, becoming avid readers of romance. The experience of romantic love, even if only through books, fostered an "ideal of an essential self, what we today call personality."²⁹ Diary keeping in the nineteenth century reflected this flowering of a romanticism, which "encouraged the recording of reveries as part

²⁴ Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 33.

²⁵ Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 32.

²⁶ Quoted in Molly McCarthy, "A Pocketful of Days: Pocket Diaries and Daily Record Keeping among Nineteenth-Century New England Women," *New England Quarterly* 73 (June 2000): 275, 278.

²⁷ Andreas Kitzmann, "That Different Place: Documenting the Self within Online Environments," *Biography* 26 (Winter 2003): 50.

²⁸ Graff, *Legacies of Literacy*, 260.

²⁹ Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 16.

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of an exploration (or construction)” of one’s own identity.³⁰ Harriet Burton’s diary, which she kept between the ages of thirteen and seventeen, is a text sodden with romantic disclosures so typical of this period. Though she believed her passions were unnatural for a young woman of her age, and she imagined “how anyone would laugh, how greatly amused they would be at the mere idea of a ‘mere-child’ of fourteen—*loving*,” she believed them too “sweet.” On a summer holiday to Oneonta, New York, she writes: “I am in a very hilarious frame of mind today, and can hardly curb my prancing spirits enough to ‘wright’ as this scrawl bears witness . . . My mind is so filled with plans which wont come true that I’m nearly crazy. My emotions for other people . . . become so conflicting that they brake from the narrow bounds of my inner man and find vent in a mad race around the house.”³¹

Tensions naturally arose between the dictates of romanticism and the religious moralism of an earlier, well-rooted tradition. The development of a sound moral character became a preoccupation in the nineteenth century, particularly among the bourgeoisie. Diaries assumed new significance as both regulators of behavior and testimonies of sustained virtue.³² Adolescents, and girls in particular, were encouraged to keep diaries as a means of self-discipline and a safeguard against idleness. An 1878 issue of the magazine *St. Nicholas* suggests that the primary benefit of keeping a diary is that “it taught habits of order and regularity.”³³ In his *Advice to Young Ladies on Their Duties and Conduct in Life*, T. S. Arthur emphasizes similar benefits of diary writing, suggesting that it develops character and refinement.³⁴ In an 1886 entry of her diary, sixteen-year-old Charlotte Norris charted her course for the year that lay ahead: “Duty shall precede pleasure. Save ten dollars by June 1st. Bathe regularly every day. Use chest weight every day until June 1st.”³⁵

The emergence of a distinct middle class also led to the greater pursuit of a Victorian-defined individual identity. Hired servants afforded the middle class more leisure time to pursue personal interests and pleasures as they now had others to carry out their domestic chores. It is within this context that diary writing emerged as a necessary ritual of the bourgeoisie. Peter Gay marks the nineteenth century as “the golden age of the diary,” arguing that diaries

³⁰ Jane Hunter, “Inscribing the Self in the Heart of the Family: Diaries and Girlhood in Late-Victorian America,” *American Quarterly* 44 (March 1992): 52.

³¹ Hunter, “Inscribing the Self,” 68.

³² Hunter, “Inscribing the Self,” 54.

³³ W. S. Jerome, “How to Keep a Journal,” *St Nicholas* 5 (October 1878): 789, quoted in Hunter, “Inscribing the Self,” 55.

³⁴ T. S. Arthur, *Advice to Young Ladies on Their Duties and Conduct in Life* (Boston: Phillips & Sampson, 1848), 57, quoted in McCarthy, “A Pocketful of Days,” 285.

³⁵ Hunter, “Inscribing the Self,” 63.

“became almost obligatory companions to a class endowed with . . . leisure.”³⁶ Travel diaries, which were quite common owing to a rise in pleasure excursions, often exceeded the simple recording of objective observations to construct subjective narratives of place and identity.³⁷ John Fox, a nineteenth-century London solicitor and avid sojourner, kept descriptive records of his walking tours between 1819 and 1843. It is clear from Fox’s diary that traveling was a diversion from his ordinary course of life; he filled its pages with descriptions of the landscapes he saw, the fresh air that he breathed, and the inhabitants he encountered. Of his Derbyshire tour in 1839, he wrote: “I met about 17 or 18 good vulgar Manchester and Dublin men and their wives with a son and a flippant daughter or two. There seemed to be but one south countryman a wanderer and an idler of some place near London a dark bilious eyed man”³⁸ Travel diaries such as Fox’s are noteworthy as they bear witness to developing conceptions of local and national identity at this period.

Diaries were, to a large extent, self-referential and served as repositories of memory. It seems that a number of diaries were constructed around “the premise that they will serve as records or artifacts of the present for the future.”³⁹ Gabrielle Laguin, a sixteen-year-old bourgeois woman from Grenoble, started a diary in July 1890 with this very premise in mind: “Many years from now, perhaps I shall feel pleasure on my reading these scribblings, begun in a time of youth and joy” (July 12), and “Later, when I am quite old, it will amuse me to reread this diary, to see myself in the mirror of the past as I was then” (October 30).⁴⁰ Fifteen-year-old Etta Luella Call, writing in the American Midwest, expresses a similar thought in a diary entry for 1881: “In this diary, I shall put down all my experiences and trials, sorrows and fun, so that, in after years I can read this book and recall to my mind all that happened during my school days, and who knows how much pleasure it may afford me.”⁴¹

In other instances, diaries acted as sites of memory, intended to preserve the diarist’s past from future oblivion. Marie Bashkirtseff, a wealthy Russian woman living in France toward the end of the nineteenth century, wrote in the

³⁶ Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud: Education of the Senses*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 446–48.

³⁷ Alain Corbin, “The Secret of the Individual,” in *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, 508.

³⁸ Ponsonby, *More English Diaries*, 17–18.

³⁹ Kitzmann, “That Different Place,” 54.

⁴⁰ Anne Martin-Fugier, “Bourgeois Rituals,” in *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, 265.

⁴¹ Suzanne Bunkers, *Diaries of Girls and Women: A Midwestern American Sampler* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 66.

preface to her diary (1858–1884): “If I do not live long enough to become famous, this diary will be interesting for the naturalists; it is always curious to see the life of a woman, day after day, without pretense, as if nobody in the world were ever to read it, but written all the same, in order to be read one day. . . . For I know that *you* will think I am a very nice person. . . . And I am telling everything . . . everything. If I did not, what for write a confession? As it is, *you* will see that I am telling everything. . . .”⁴²

Bashkirtseff’s entry is interesting, moreover, as it suggests that a diary was written with the intention of being read by someone other than the diarist. This raises an important issue of ongoing debate among literary scholars and historians: are diaries public or private documents? Many believe this is an artificial and unnecessary dichotomy, stating that they are personal works with an undefined audience. Elizabeth Pepys’s diary is a perfect example of a personal document that hovered between the realm of public and private. On 9 January 1663, Samuel Pepys recorded the “discovery” and subsequent destruction of his wife’s diary:

At last we were pretty good friends and my wife begun to speak again of the necessity of her keeping somebody to bear her company; for her familiarity with her other servants is it that spoils them all, and other company she hath none (which is too true); and called for Jane to reach her out of her trunk, giving her the keys to that purpose, a bundle of papers; and pulls out a paper, a copy of what, a pretty while since, she had writ in a discontent to me, which I would not read but burned. She now read it, and was so picquant, and wrote in English and most of it true, of the retirednesse of her life and how unpleasant it was, that being writ in English and so in danger of being met with and read by others, I was vexed at it and desired her . . . to teare it – which she desired to be excused it; I forced it from her and tore it. . . .

Pepys’s description suggests that Elizabeth’s diary was a medium through which she could channel her emotions and a means of comfort or solace in times of loneliness, but in no way private as she was so eager to read its contents to her husband. Although kept under lock and key, it can be presumed that her handmaid or servants could obtain it with relative ease if they so desired, as Samuel himself hints at.

Other diarists clearly wrote with an intended audience in mind. Jonathan Swift, dean of Saint Patrick’s, Dublin, and Theobald Wolfe Tone, early Irish revolutionary, kept diaries specifically for their wives.⁴³ Tone concluded one of

⁴² Cited in Philippe Lejeune, “The ‘Journal de Jeune Fille’ in Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Inscribing the Daily*, 119.

⁴³ Ponsonby, *Scottish and Irish Diaries*, 137–47 and 153–61; Melosina Lenox-Conyngham, *Diaries of Ireland: An Anthology, 1590–1987* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), 81–91.

his many diaries: "Here is an end of my journals now for some time at least. Since I came to France, which is now above fourteen months, I have continued them pretty regularly for the amusement of my dearest love. As we are now together once more they become unnecessary."⁴⁴ Although Marianne Estcourt made a point of buying journals with locks, she wrote of several occasions when she invited her friends to read and critique specific entries that she made in her diary (1841–1856).⁴⁵ Hester Thrale showed entries of her massive *Thraliana* (1776–1809) to long-time companion Fanny Burney,⁴⁶ who also kept a diary. Burney's diary, which she amassed over a seventy-year period, was published just two years after her death in 1842.⁴⁷ Sharing diaries with a select audience was common practice. Marilyn Ferris Motz notes that in the nineteenth century, "Many diarists specified that they had shown the diary to a friend or that they intended to leave it for their children."⁴⁸ They were intended as family legacies, histories for future generations.

It is little wonder why the recent discovery of a lost diary immediately captures our attention, and the possibilities of its long concealed passages our imagination.⁴⁹ Few historical texts seem as compelling or as satisfying to read as personal diaries. They are, to quote Arthur Ponsonby, "better than novels, more accurate than histories, and even at times more dramatic than plays."⁵⁰ Their frank, plainspoken style brings us immediately into another world and reveals details of distant lives now familiar and near. They bear witness to the strengths and frailties of our ancestors, and on occasion they present evidence that either confirms or refutes commonly held beliefs. Seemingly trivial observations can shed light on major historic events. The evidential value that diaries possess for a particular age, or a particular diarist, cannot be overestimated.

⁴⁴ Ponsonby, *Scottish and Irish Diaries*, 155.

⁴⁵ Cynthia Huff, "Textual Boundaries: Space in Nineteenth-Century Women's Manuscripts," in *Inscribing the Daily*, 131.

⁴⁶ Judy Simons, "Invented Lives: Textuality and Power in Early Women's Diaries," in *Inscribing the Daily*, 257.

⁴⁷ Simons, "Invented Lives: Textuality and Power in Early Women's Diaries," 259.

⁴⁸ Marilyn Ferris Motz, "Folk Expression of Time and Place, 19th-Century Midwestern Rural Diaries," *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (April–June 1987): 133.

⁴⁹ Neil A. Lewis, "Nazis and Jews: Insights From Old Diary," *New York Times*, 22 April 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/22/politics/22diary.html>; Dennis Overbye, "From a Companion's Lost Diary, A Portrait of Einstein in Old Age," *New York Times*, 24 April 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/24/nyregion/24EINS.html>; Dan Glaister, "When Einstein Was Left as Sick as a Parrot," *The Guardian*, 26 April 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,1203188,00.html>; Sara Rimer, "Harvard Student's Love Story Endures Beyond the Grave," *New York Times*, 11 February 2004, Late Edition, Section B, page 8, column 2.

⁵⁰ Arthur Ponsonby, *English Diaries: A Review of English Diaries from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century with an Introduction on Diary Writing* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1923), 4.

“Blogs” and “Live Journals”: The On-line Diary

So what of “blogs” and “live journals,” the on-line heirs of the manuscript diary? How do they compare to their now archived pen-and-paper predecessors? What will they offer prospective researchers in the way of unique documentary source material? In the introduction to *English Diaries*, Arthur Ponsonby asserts that “Diary writing is within the reach of every human being who can put pen to paper . . . people of all ages and degrees who may never have ventured to write a line for publication and may be quite incapable of any literary effort, are able to keep a diary the value of which need not in any way suffer from their literary incapacity.”⁵¹ The implication of Ponsonby’s statement is subtle yet significant. As the dearth of archived diaries by people of color, immigrants, and members of the working class suggests, diary keeping was a pastime of a privileged few, who could read, write, and afford the luxury of putting pen to paper.

While some may argue that the same is true today with the expense of personal computers and Internet access, the “blogosphere,” or on-line community of “bloggers,”⁵² actually constitutes a wider-reaching and more diverse group than do previous generations of diarists. Nowadays, most major universities and public libraries provide their broad-based constituencies with some level of on-line services, while popular Web diary portals such as LiveJournal, Opendiary, Diaryland, and Blog*Spot have multitiered account structures that include free accounts.⁵³ Advanced technical skills are not necessary either, as each portal provides its diarists with automated and easy-to-use Web-based publishing tools which format and post entries for them.⁵⁴ Free blogging software and on-line services (provided at the cost of an advertisement “banner” at the top of a page) have dramatically increased the percentage of Web users creating unique records of their daily lives.

The Internet space that on-line diaries occupy is, according to Todd Levin of Salon.com, one of the few places today where “a level ground for publishing” actually exists.⁵⁵ Design and literary skills are not required; “all you need is a healthy obsession and a modest amount of disk space on someone’s server.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ponsonby, *English Diaries*, 1.

⁵² Christine Carl, *Bloggers and Their Blogs: A Depiction of the Users and Usage of Weblogs on the World Wide Web* (Master’s thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, 2003), 3.

⁵³ See, for instance, LiveJournal’s Terms of Services, which shows the account structure and gives a run-down of the various types of accounts that are offered, at <http://www.livejournal.com/legal/tos.bml>. All accounts through Diaryland are free, <http://diaryland.com/faq.html>.

⁵⁴ Blogger is one: <http://www.blogger.com/about.pyra>. Movable Type is another: <http://www.movable-type.org/>. Many sites provide their own, in-house software.

⁵⁵ Todd Levin, “Dear Diary,” <http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/1999/12/10/diaryland.html>.

⁵⁶ Levin, “Dear Diary.”

This is no doubt part of the problem for literary scholar Laurie McNeil, who has recently admitted:

Something about the online journal . . . makes me distinctly uncomfortable. After several hours of reading these journals, I often feel sick, as if I've watched too many tell-all talk shows on daytime television. I've learned too much I didn't need to know about too many people's everyday lives—lives without anything particularly extraordinary to recommend them, except the diarists' own sense of importance and relevance.⁵⁷

A recent “blogcount,” taken in June 2003, estimated that at the time there were roughly 2.4 to 2.9 million active diaries on the Web. Based on blog growth rates of previous years, that number is expected to quadruple by 2004.⁵⁸ This phenomenal proliferation of on-line diaries marks an equally unprecedented interest in the lives of ordinary individuals who, before the Internet, had few opportunities to publish their life stories on such a wide scale.

Since the mid-1990s, people have been presenting accounts of their lives in a medium known as the homepage.⁵⁹ Homepages may have marked the “democratization of the World Wide Web,” but they were often uninteresting to read in their relatively static state as few progressed beyond scanned holiday photos, a bit of text, and oft-broken links to other homepages.⁶⁰ At approximately the same time, other Web users were creating active weblogs, regularly updated lists of Web addresses that the weblogger deemed worthy of note. The blog or on-line diary essentially evolved through a merging of these two media.⁶¹ Rebecca Blood, author of *We've Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture*, points to Dave Winter's “Scripting News,” which was started in 1997, and Steve Bogart's “News, Pointers & Commentary,” which was started in 1998 (today called “Now This”⁶²), as two of the earliest and most distinctive examples of the genre.⁶³ Their curt, diurnal posts directed followers to interesting news stories or current events. There were, however, earlier, less prominent examples that remained

⁵⁷ Laurie McNeill, “Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks: The Diary on the Internet,” *Biography* 26 (Winter 2003): 24.

⁵⁸ Blogcount, <http://dijest.com/bc/>. A recent survey conducted by Perseus estimates a total of 4.12 million blogs have been published on the Web, but 66% (or 2.7 million) of these became inactive just two months after they were created. Only 13,600 abandoned blogs were later resumed or updated. Perseus derived its statistics from major weblog portals only and they do not include smaller portals. Perseus predicted that “The number of hosted blogs created to exceed five million by the end of 2003 and to exceed ten million by the end of 2004,” <http://www.perseus.com/blogsurvey/thebloggingiceberg.html>.

⁵⁹ Simon Garfield, “New Kids on the Blog,” *The Guardian*, 4 April 2004.

⁶⁰ Garfield, “New Kids on the Blog.”

⁶¹ Carl, “Bloggers and Their Blogs,” 3.

⁶² <http://www.nowthis.com>.

⁶³ Cited in Carl, “Bloggers and Their Blogs,” 19.

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true to the form and content of the traditional diary. Carolyn Burke, credited with having made the first on-line diary entry on 3 January 1995, posted this entry in “Carolyn’s Diary”:

I’ve found that hope is the thing that keeps me interested in anything, including living, including good books, including people. The hopeless make me feel desperate, trapped. Hope. What was her brother, the emperor’s name? . . . Hope is the sun in the sky feeding all of us. Hope is the feeling that my life will have a purpose for me. With it I can feel the future rising up fuzzily unpredictable, and yet malleable. My own will uses hope to sculpt what will be my present.⁶⁴

It could almost pass for a diary entry written decades ago by a Victorian counterpart.

Between 1999 and 2000, blogs had definitely caught on with over 136,000 recorded in that period.⁶⁵ “Suddenly, everyone was a Pepys,”⁶⁶ confessing their sins, complaining about work, or celebrating small, personal achievements. 2001 saw a dramatic increase in the number of diaries that were being created on-line, pushing the number up to 958,000.⁶⁷ Many attribute this sharp rise to the events of September 11.⁶⁸ According to one *Guardian* reporter, Americans were on “a war footing, and quite a few people were unhappy with the way the ‘mainstream’ media were covering the story,” so many created their own “war blog.”⁶⁹ A report for the *Seattle Times* claims, “the only way to tell what was going on was through bloggers posting updates in the minutes and hours after the tragedy.”⁷⁰ A similar view is echoed in a 2003 *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* editorial entitled “How Blogging Changed Journalism”:

Then Sept. 11, 2001, came. As media fumbled in the aftermath of the attacks, and a never-ending stream of events, rumors and paranoia fueled an insatiable desire for news, commentary and basic cathartic expression, the blogosphere boomed like never before. CNET⁷¹ commentator Charles Cooper even wrote that blogging, “came of age” after 9/11.

⁶⁴ No longer available, but excerpts and interview with Burke can be found on the Online Diary History Project, <http://www.diaryhistoryproject.com/>.

⁶⁵ <http://www.perseus.com/blogsurvey/thebloggingiceberg.html>.

⁶⁶ Garfield, “New Kids on the Blog.”

⁶⁷ <http://www.perseus.com/blogsurvey/thebloggingiceberg.html>.

⁶⁸ Carl, “Bloggers and Their Blogs,” 21.

⁶⁹ Glenn Reynolds, “On the Warpath,” *The Guardian*, 20 February 2003, 5.

⁷⁰ Cited in Carl, “Bloggers and Their Blogs,” 22.

⁷¹ <http://www.cnet.com/>.

Others speculate that blogging arose as an alternative to other forms of on-line communication, chiefly Bulletin Board Services (BBSs).⁷² Pyra Labs developed its software “Blogger” with the BBS model in mind; blogs were originally designed to be on-line community-oriented discussion forums. An element of this survived as most on-line diary portals or hosting sites emphasize their community centeredness. One need only look at the American-based Blog*Spot and LiveJournal, the English-based 20six,⁷³ and the Irish-based P45Blogs to see this.⁷⁴ It should be noted, however, that although these blog portals are based in their respective countries, their communities are global.⁷⁵

The “about me,” “bio,” or “profile” page has become a standard feature of on-line diaries, providing diarists an opportunity to introduce themselves to other members of their community by supplying them with some background information. This is just one effect of the community-oriented environment in which on-line diaries exist. Diaries have also become interactive in their on-line form, as most diarists accept, even solicit, feedback from their readers via a guestbook. As Andreas Kitzmann notes about this emphasis on community, “within its cultural spaces, the Web significantly reworks the distinction between public and private.”⁷⁶

Many historians and literary scholars believe this is the point at which the on-line diary departs from the true diary tradition. Given the conventional understanding of the manuscript diary as a private record, a highly public on-line diary seems to be a contradiction in terms. In considering the revolutionary impact the Web has had on the diary, Philippe Lejeune writes that in many ways the on-line environment is “*totalemment opposé aux conditions de développement du journal intime, fondé sur une autre conception . . . de la communication (différée ou exclue: le secret).*”⁷⁷ As already noted, however, not all manuscript diaries were intended for private consumption; many were shared with or written for a specific audience. On-line diarists still hold the key to their diaries as most of the major on-line diary portals give their diarists ultimate control over access.⁷⁸ With the click of a few buttons, today’s on-line diarists have the ability to restrict anyone from reading their diaries if they so choose.

⁷² Carl, “Bloggers and Their Blogs,” 23.

⁷³ <http://www.20six.co.uk/>.

⁷⁴ <http://www.p45blogs.net/>.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, the LiveJournal Directory, <http://www.livejournal.com/directory.bml>.

⁷⁶ Kitzmann, “That Different Place,” 55.

⁷⁷ Philippe Lejeune, *‘Cher écran. . .’: Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 193.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, <http://www.livejournal.com/support/faqbrowse.bml?faqid=24>.

D I A R I E S , O N - L I N E D I A R I E S ,
A N D T H E F U T U R E L O S S T O A R C H I V E S

So what of the content? Will there ever really be an on-line equivalent of Samuel Pepys? What do diary entries such as this one by “el baño del pájaro” reveal to future researchers, if anything?

Wednesday

Someone made me smile. The sun is out. I've just found out that Peter Ustinov is dead. One of those people who you can truly say the world is a worse place for losing. How often can we say that these days? Work ends at nine in the evening. I sprint across the city to see the Ireland game. I get to 'St. Patricks'. I get to the bar to discover that both screens they have are showing the England v. Sweden game. I ask can they change one of the TV's. An English barman tells me 'Sorry mate'. Asshole of all assholes. Would you be so kind as to take the words 'Irish bar' down from over the door?

I sprint again. I get to Finnegans. We're winning 1-0. Against the team that many fancy to win the European championships. Duff is making a mockery of them. How the fuck does he do that? It's effortless. You can't take your eyes from him. Duff, having bagged the man of the match, goes off. Then Doherty. Then we let a goal in. I feel like puking. It's nauseating. It was shamobolic. And then of course it happens. The classic, quintessential, scabby, last minute Irish Goal. Another man named Keane makes me leap out of my seat and scream like a maniac.⁷⁹

Perhaps nothing, or perhaps everything, depending on what one is looking for.

Wading through the dross that admittedly constitutes a large part of the blogosphere, archivists will no doubt find a select number of on-line diaries worthy of their consideration and preservation as potentially valuable sources of information for future generations to come. On-line diaries are the next logical step in the progression of diary keeping. Like their pen-and-paper predecessors, they serve multiple purposes and, thus, reflect many facets of life in a particular time and place. They reveal the effect technology has had on the diarist's sense of self (construction and representation) in the computer age. They reveal shifts in cultural norms of privacy and ideas of community. Not to mention, they often provide interesting, insightful, or humorous perspectives on contemporary events. But these are just a few, obvious suggestions. On-line diaries, like other electronic records, open numerous possibilities for enriching the future researcher's understanding of life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The physical nature of on-line diaries differs significantly from that of manuscript diaries, and this poses serious questions concerning the manner in which future researchers will read them, understand them, and, more importantly,

⁷⁹ <http://www.p45blogs.net/elbano/archives/001665.html>. This site has since been removed from the Internet.

access them. There is something very satisfying about holding an age-worn manuscript diary. Whether it is a vellum-bound quarto from the seventeenth century or the commercially produced pocket diary variety commonly sold by nineteenth-century stationers, the physical nature of a manuscript diary reveals something of its history to the reader. The same cannot be said of documents viewed behind the flat, cold, glassy glare of a computer screen.

On-line diaries exist not as physical artifacts, but as intangible hypertext documents stored digitally on a server often far removed from their diarists and readers. They are perpetually revisable, revealing no marks of revision and no traces of previous versions. This will be problematic for future researchers hoping to discover something of the twenty-first century diarist's writing process, especially where it relates to self-representation in a medium that has always straddled the public/private divide. The diarist's ability to incorporate links and fancy multimedia elements one day and remove them the next with just a few clicks of the mouse, will no doubt frustrate some researchers. If nothing else, all of this foregrounds the context and environment in which the diarist was writing, one highly mediated by computer technology.⁸⁰

Yet more importantly, the materiality of on-line diaries has profound implications for their survival beyond the life of the diarists. Broken or neglected links often lead to dead-end thoughts. While manuscript diaries have their own preservation problems, they are thought to be more stable and stand a greater chance of permanence if given the proper care. Philippe Lejeune touches on this in his article "How Do Diaries End?" when he writes, "Paper has its own biological rhythm. It will long outlive me. It will end up yellowing and crumbling, but the text that it bears will have its own reincarnations, it can change bodies, be recopied, published."⁸¹ On-line diaries are inherently unstable objects, constantly changing, sometimes disappearing altogether.⁸² Blogging pioneer Dave Winer, for instance, expunged nearly 3,000 blogs from the Web one Sunday afternoon when he unexpectedly pulled the plug on his free blog hosting service, weblogs.com.⁸³

Preserving On-line Diaries

On-line diaries have the potential of being permanent records, owing to a fairly recent on-line development known as the Internet Archive. Launched in

⁸⁰ Madeleine Sorapure, "Screening Moments, Scrolling Lives: Diary Writing on the Web," *Biography* 26 (Winter 2003): 4.

⁸¹ Philippe Lejeune, "How Do Diaries End?" *Biography* 24 (Winter 2001): 110.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸³ <http://www.wired.com/news/infrastructure/0,1377,63856,00.html>.

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1996, this digital, on-line database offers the general public permanent and free access to a collection of archived Web pages that date back to 1996,⁸⁴ the Internet Archive holds 100 terabytes of data, including institutional, organizational, and personal Web pages. Using the “Wayback Machine” search engine, visitors to the site can type in a URL, select a date range, and search an archived version of a Web page. So, for instance, one can still view Magdalena Donea’s on-line diary, *Moments*, by typing www.moments.org in the Wayback Machine, even though the site was technically removed from the Web in 2000.

The Wayback Machine is an automated Web crawler that makes mirror images of all currently available Web sites. Some sites, however, may not be included in the archive because the automated crawlers were unaware of their existence at the time of the crawl. It is also possible that some sites were not archived because they were password protected, otherwise inaccessible to the automated crawling system, or because the Web site administrator requested that the site be removed from the Internet Archive. There is also a great deal of redundancy in the archive. An asterisk beside an archived site suggests that its content is identical to the previously archived copy. Another downside is that visitors to the site must know the URL for the specific sites they are looking for, as the Wayback Machine does not have word or subject search capabilities yet.

While the Internet Archive is no doubt a useful preservation tool and a step in the right direction, it is not without its limitations. Even if on-line diaries were to survive, they might pose significant challenges to future researchers if sufficient documentation regarding the context in which they were created or used is not provided. Contextual information can help researchers answer such questions as why, when, where, and how was a diary created? In which social and cultural milieu was it written? Who read it? What was the effect of its having been read? And more importantly, why has it survived? In other words, the Internet Archive does not provide adequate intellectual control over the on-line diary; it does not enlighten the researcher to the broader social, cultural, and historical relevance of the diary in the way that a traditional archives can.

So how can collecting institutions contribute to the preservation of on-line diaries? It is not practical to keep every on-line diary for posterity’s sake, nor would we want to; however, archivists should act now to determine which ones will be relevant to future researchers and are, thus, worthy of preservation, or loss to their collections will be inevitable. They should begin with their acquisition policies, developing broader collecting strategies that include on-line diaries. Developing a sound method of appraising and acquiring on-line diaries for their own repositories is essential. This needs to occur before a method of managing and preserving this information is developed. The physical form

⁸⁴ <http://www.archive.org/>.

of an on-line diary must not distract archivists from the processes and functions behind its creation. In this first and most important phase of appraisal, the archivist must consider why the on-line diary was created and determine its significance to the researcher and history, rather than what types of multimedia it may contain.

The actual management and preservation of on-line diaries do not have to be complicated, owing to the very simple and open nature of the hypertext markup language. Emulation software would not be necessary, nor would saving various models of personal computers to show future researchers what the on-line diary looked like in its "original" setting. On-line diarists do not dictate in which html browser or on what type of pc their diaries are read. The high-tech milieu in which on-line diaries are created is constantly changing, offering vast software and hardware possibilities for creating and viewing them.

One possible method an archives might use is to set up a dedicated system that operates a Web crawler, much like the one operated by the Internet Archive, which goes out on the Web and archives on-line diaries of interest to the repository on an ongoing basis. Essentially, this would perform the same function as the Internet Archive, but on a smaller, more focused level by collecting selected diaries that relate strictly to the archives' collection. The system would be a local archived mirror of the on-line diary. It must be an archived mirror and not just a mirror, as an archived mirror captures the diary in its various stages should the diarist try to rewrite history by making changes to the diary. The Web crawler can also have a built-in warning system that alerts the archivist to links in the diary that cannot be archived due to restrictions imposed by the linked site's robots.txt configuration or other issues.⁸⁵ The archivist can either seek out permission if the link is important or summarize the importance or relevance of the linked site, leaving it up to the researcher to seek out the site on the Web (assuming that site is preserved!). Naturally, the archives would have to contact and enter into a legal agreement with the diarist before embarking on such a project.

Preservation comes at a cost. This will no doubt be a labor-intensive process and at times difficult to rationalize because the documents may not be "unique," as a copy may still be floating around on the Web or in the Internet Archive.⁸⁶ Among the financial implications are the costs associated with purchasing hardware and software for the dedicated system, and perhaps those of hiring a part-time employee who will carry out the task at hand.

⁸⁵ A robots.txt file is a control file that a Web site maintainer uses to restrict a Web crawler from accessing parts of the site, generally information that the site maintainer does not want copied or indexed by a search engine. It is a voluntary mechanism that Web crawlers are encouraged to obey. See http://www.webpro.co.za/services/robots_explained.htm.

⁸⁶ Although there are no guarantees that it will remain on the Web in ten or a hundred years to come, so it may become "unique" in the future.

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Some will oppose the idea of saving on-line diaries. Many communication and information technology specialists believe that blogs, being native to the Web, would lose all meaning and context if taken out of their natural environment. It is important, however, that archivists keep a perspective on their obligation to future researchers. Electronic records are disappearing at a rapid rate through neglect, ignorance, or just plain shortsightedness. The survival of historical documents has always been subject to natural and man-made forces. It is true that some electronic records will survive by chance, or accident, but they should all be given the opportunity to benefit from a well-thought-out and carefully implemented preservation campaign. And who knows, posterity may find a few cyber-Pepys among us.