

## INTRODUCTION TO PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

# Introduction to President Mark Greene

Dennis Meissner

**T**he crazy thing about my introducing Mark Greene is that he really does need no introduction, not to this gathering, and certainly not from me. In fact, he should have shown the courtesy to explain who the devil *I* was before I got up here to introduce *him*. Mark has made himself a household name, and a well-known quantity, through any number of channels. He has written widely, usually bluntly, on a jaw-dropping range of important archival topics, including things that he knows absolutely nothing about. He'll demonstrate that again in just a few minutes. Mark has occupied numerous elected and appointed leadership positions in SAA, the Midwest Archives Conference, State Historical Records Advisory Boards, and other associations. He has tutored, mentored, befriended, collaborated with, and argued with—mostly argued with—a big slice of American and international archivists. Oh. . . .and sometimes he's really crabby.

But Mark Greene, for all his legendary crotchiness, can also be the most gracious and generous of people, something that is well remarked by his friends—I fact checked that with all three of them before I got here—as well as by his many collaborators over the years. Here's an illustration taken from my own notes of an actual phone conversation with him a few years ago:

ME: Hey! How about Meissner-Greene? That has a nice ring!

MARK: Not so much.

ME: "M" would, of course, hit that sweet spot right in the middle of the alphabet. . . .

MARK: I don't think so.

ME: I'm older than you. Technically, that makes me the senior partner.

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Dennis Meissner, head of Collections Management, Minnesota Historical Society, introduced President Mark A. Greene at a plenary session on 28 August 2008 during the 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists in San Francisco.

MARK: No, no, and—um—NO!

ME: Oh, P-L-E-E-E-Z-E. I'll give you \$50.

MARK: Go away! Anyway, I've already used it the other way in a bunch of footnotes, so it's gonna have to stay.

ME: Fine!!

But enough of that; I was hired to introduce Mark. And that means that I'm pretty much *required* under contract to find something good to say. So, good luck to me on that one, and here's my best shot.

### Contributions to the Literature and Professional Discourse

Intellectually speaking, Mark gets around a lot. At the archival buffet table he's a decided omnivore. We all share this to some extent. You might be an electronic records specialist but, when pressed, you can still pull off a pretty smart remark about, say, the stability of gall-based inks. But Mark, unlike most of us, makes a *really* annoying habit of speaking in an erudite voice on a truly wide range of important topics. Although his heart lies in the area of archival appraisal, he has written and spoken with equal authority on such dispersed topics as privacy and confidentiality, the administration of business records, archival program management, many aspects of college and university archives, the nature and meaning of records, service to users, and, of course, processing and description. Still some years shy of geezerhood, he has already contributed a legacy of twenty-one published articles and book chapters to the professional literature.

And, even more maddening, Mark does none of this at the B-level. Now, I grant you, the archival community is home to many brilliant people; you'd be hard-pressed to elbow your way through a Fellows' reception without spilling your drink on one or another genius. The notable thing about Mark Greene is not that he's another smart kid in the room, but that he's the *utility* fielder among them. His publications in *several* of these areas have received awards, have been reprinted in anthologies, or have received other critical distinctions.

### Collaborator

The large number of us who have worked with Mark on big projects are among the luckiest of SAA members. Mark is the very best of collaborators. Rather than using shared endeavors as a way to shirk work or to promote himself, Mark seems to shoulder 60 percent of the effort in everything he shares. He uses collaboration as a tool to leverage knowledge in addressing a problem and thereby to produce a result superior to what he could have achieved alone. The goal is almost always building up the profession's knowledge base, not serving his ego. This, to my mind, is a mark of some greatness.

His mentoring and his friendships within the profession have been no less notable or important. Mark has, beginning fairly early in his own career, influenced careers of a large number of younger archivists who, I think, found meaning and motivation in his pragmatic, frank, and pugnacious advice in so many areas of archival thought and endeavor. He has influenced people by his actions in the profession and by the passion of his writing and teaching and not by calling attention to himself. In all of these actions, he has, in a real way, helped to shape the American archival profession.

### Career

Mark's career is a retelling of the classic rags-to-riches story of the American archivist. I made that last bit up. After earning his master's degree in U.S. history from the University of Michigan,<sup>1</sup> he served for four years as the archivist at Carleton College. He spent the following ten years as the curator of manuscripts acquisition at the Minnesota Historical Society, from which experience he built a national reputation as a thinker in the areas of appraisal, reappraisal and deaccessioning, and the management of business records and congressional collections. He went on to serve for two years as the head of research center programs at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. In this capacity, he deepened and expanded his thinking about processing management and service to end users. Mark is now the director of the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, where he continues to glower and fulminate from a higher elevation. Here Mark came up with the very quotable catch-phrase: "If it ain't broke, don't process it, or IIAB-DPI." Um. . .that got fixed in the first stable release.

I've been relating here what I might call the Mark Greene core values: intelligence and a high-voltage intellectual energy, original thinking, dedication to his profession and to its audiences, and a pragmatic approach to solving archival problems. In that sense, they presage his presidential address this afternoon, in which he posits a set of common values that he hopes all practicing archivists can agree upon. As always, his ideas are thoughtful and assertive, and they have the success and well-being of the greater archival community firmly in mind. His remarks will challenge us today, as Mark has always challenged us before.

So, having just listened to all this myself, and hardly believing my own ears, I guess we can count ourselves pretty lucky after all to have spent this past year under the benevolent and talented fist of Mark Greene. During his presidential year, Mark has expended near heroic efforts on behalf of SAA members in several crucial areas: in direct political engagement at the national level—especially

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: At the University of Michigan, Mark took his first course in archival administration from the current editor of *American Archivist*, who claims full credit for his success.

with regard to legislation concerning public access to presidential records and to the PAHR initiative, in advancing SAA's agenda with regard to public awareness of our profession, and in pressing forward the critical pieces of SAA's strategic plan. In this work on our behalf, as in everything else he does, Mark has shown thoughtful energy married with a bulldog determination to achieve the possible.

And, since I still own the microphone, I want to add something on a purely personal level. If you know Mark, as so many of you do, only by his brilliant writings and presentations, you don't know the half of him. Mark is the best of friends and colleagues—the most generous, thoughtful, helpful, and unselfish.

And with that, enough from me. Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce to you . . . in this corner . . . wearing white trunks . . . with a lifetime footnote count of 5,107 . . . the Earl of End-Users . . . the Marquis of Manuscripts . . . the Duke of Donor Relations . . . the Prince of Processing . . . the Undefeated Supreme Sultan of SAA . . . M-A-R-K-G-R-E-E-N-E. . . .

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

# The Power of Archives: Archivists' Values and Value in the Postmodern Age

Mark A. Greene

## Abstract

This article argues that one significant reason we archivists do not have the visibility and power we seek from society and our institutions is that we have a weak sense of identity. One essential ingredient for defining our identity is to define our values. Values are the embodiment of what an organization stands for and should be the basis for the behavior of its members. This article proposes ten values to give identity to our profession. Putting forward these specific values is meant to prompt the profession to engage in a forthright discussion of its values and its value to society and institutions. Adopting clear values will enhance the power and value of the archival profession.

## Introduction

In 1985, my first year in my first permanent archives position, I attended my grandfather's eighty-fifth birthday party. In attendance were many relatives, of course, and one distant cousin, an elderly deaf gentleman who was an expert at reading lips, asked me what I did for a living. I faced him so that he could see my lips, and said "I am an archivist." He blinked and looked back at me. "A

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This paper is the expanded version of my presidential address at the SAA 2008 Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California, 29 August 2008. This essay has benefited immensely from the creative and considered review of several friends and colleagues. Needless to say none of them are responsible for the end product, but I do want to acknowledge their generous and substantial assistance in making this paper better than it started out to be: Elizabeth Adkins, Nancy Beaumont, Frank Boles, Tom Hyry, Kathy Marquis, Christine Weideman, and Joel Wurl.

what?" he asked. "I am an archivist," I repeated, "an archivist." He looked blank and said he had no idea what I was saying. It was a word he had not encountered before, and he could not "read" it on my lips. This was not an auspicious start to my encounters with relatives on that occasion, none of whom it turned out had ever heard of an archivist. I immediately fell back on this simple but misleading explanation: "I'm a cross between a librarian and a historian." This seemed to satisfy my cousins, uncles, aunts, and grandfather.

But of course it was not particularly satisfying for me. I soon changed the short explanation of *archivist* to someone who "identified, appraised, preserved, arranged, described, and provided access to historical material." But, over the years, I have become more and more dissatisfied with this litany of our tasks. As I have suggested on past occasions, one of our profession's weaknesses is that we tend to focus too much on our processes and not enough on our purpose. How many of us, when asked what an archivist is, retreat to reciting our core functions? This list is apt to reinforce a public perception that archivists are functionaries, concerned with "doing things" rather than with why they're done. As John Fleckner recently admonished, "Our attention must go beyond 'how we do archives work' to 'why we are doing it'."<sup>1</sup>

In my early years as a professional, I was too consumed with those daily tasks to give much thought to why I was doing them. I was not alone. In 1984, SAA president David Gracy commissioned a Task Force on Archives and Society, which commissioned a report by a professor of marketing that looked at resource allocators' perceptions of archivists. Few saw archives as important enough to fight budget battles for, and this, the report concluded, was largely due to archivists' inability or unwillingness to define and promote themselves. Archivists, the report noted, were perceived to have some worth but no power: higher level administrators saw archivists as having "the impotence of virtue, which is expected to be its own reward. . . ."<sup>2</sup> In summarizing the report, SAA's Task Force on Archives and Society noted: "Archivists are viewed as quiet professionals, carrying out an admired but practically frivolous activity. . . . Unfortunately, archivists have not disabused them of their misconceptions."<sup>3</sup>

Gracy concluded, "Is there any doubt that the most basic, if not the first, step we must take in changing the public's image of us is changing our own impression of ourselves and thus the image we project?"<sup>4</sup> We are hardly alone in

<sup>1</sup> John A. Fleckner, "The Last Revolution and the Next," *Journal of Archival Organization* 2, nos. 1–2 (2004): 16.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney J. Levy and Albert G. Robles, "The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocators Perceptions," report to Society of American Archivists (1984), iii.

<sup>3</sup> SAA Task Force on Archives and Society, "Archivists' Resource Allocators: The Next Step," report summary to Society of American Archivists (December 1985), 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> David B. Gracy III, "What's Your Totem? Archival Images in the Public Mind," *Midwestern Archivist* 10 (1985): 19.

this dilemma. Our colleagues in libraries struggle with it,<sup>5</sup> and I suspect many other professions do as well. Defining ourselves in terms other than what we do each morning speaks to our ultimate ability to communicate our value to resource allocators, to find a suitable and sustainable place for ourselves in this information age, and to define and assert our power as a profession.

### Archival Power

Yes, power. Not a word we frequently associate with our profession, even inside government archives. But “the distinctive roles and specialized skills of professionals confer considerable power,” according to one sociologist of occupations.<sup>6</sup> In a presentation to senior academic librarians, Harvard librarian Robert Darnton recounted an anecdote about one of his associate librarians, who, upon being asked, “What’s it like to be a librarian?” had taken to answering: “It’s all about money and power.” And so it is with us, though one might hardly know it by eavesdropping on our conversations or reading our articles.

As the 1984 SAA Task Force on Archives and Society noted about this absence of power, “The status quo may actually satisfy both parties in a rather perverse way. Introverted archivists do not know how to fight for their needs, tending to accept what is handed to them. Resource allocators welcome the situation because it frees them to respond to ‘real’ problems.”<sup>7</sup> Though the Task Force lamented “stereotypes” of archivists among resource allocators, it also acknowledged some of these perceptions mirrored reality. In a related article, Gracy quoted an anonymous archivist as lamenting, “Archivists are partly to blame for their low recognition factor in society. Too many of us come off as passive, uptight hoarders and protectors of materials in our control rather than as people who play a worthy role in society. . . .”<sup>8</sup> More recent observers<sup>9</sup> sustain this view.

How do we claim and exercise power? When we seek resources, we cannot continue to behave as if we “deserve” resources and recognition because we are meritorious; that is, because we do good work. Of course we must do good work, but we have to seek resources and recognition actively, and that is done by

<sup>5</sup> See, for examples, George E. Bennett, *Librarians in Search of Science and Identity: The Elusive Profession* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1988); John M. Budd, *Self-Examination: The Present and Future of Librarianship* (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Rudi Volti, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Work and Occupations* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2008), 99.

<sup>7</sup> Task Force, “Archivists and Resource Allocators,” 2.

<sup>8</sup> Gracy, “What’s Your Totem?,” 19.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Pederson, “Professing Archives: A Very Human Enterprise,” in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, ed. Sue McKemish, Michael Piggot, Barbara Reed, and Frank Upward (Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.: Centre for Information Studies, 2005), 65.

exercising the tools of professional power—at whatever hierarchical level one happens to reside.<sup>10</sup> All of us should demand, cajole, finagle, bargain, collect points, win friends, influence people, and in general do whatever it takes to build and exercise power for our programs. This is, of course, part of an overall goal of replacing the image of the lab-coated, dust-coated, withdrawn, and quiet archivist preciousizing over “old stuff” in dead storage with an image (and self-image) of a confident, articulate, savvy professional.

Moreover, we claim power by articulating the ways in which we wield power: by shaping the historical record, by promoting freedom of government information, by protecting rights, by educating young minds, by affecting the way scholars apprehend and understand the materials in our repositories, by providing substance to powerful entertainment (whether on PBS or the History Channel or in top-ten bestsellers). The gist, however, is that we are a powerful profession and we must internalize that strength and be able to communicate it to others. To begin with, we must agree to focus on our strengths, our purposes, and our importance, rather than on our weaknesses, processes, and trivialities. We must maintain this focus not only in our public personae, but by and large in our private conversations as well. It is difficult to project strength forcefully in public when we are wrapped in our weaknesses in private.

“Archivists need to translate their importance into more power,” says the report to the SAA Task Force on Archives and Society.<sup>11</sup> How do we do that? The answer is twofold. First, archivists must recognize that power is grounded in values. Power itself is not a value, but it is a mechanism for supporting and implementing values. The problem with this argument is, of course, that before it can be put into play archivists must define our values. *Values* are the embodiment of what an organization stands for and should be the basis for the behavior of its members. Second, we archivists must recognize and exercise our power. In considering this matter, I conclude that although power flows from values, it is sometimes most useful and least complicated to discuss values and power together, because they often intertwine. But we must recognize that power is a means and values are the ends.

### Archival Values

Ultimately, then, I see the answer, or at least an answer, to the questions, Who are we? Why are we here? and How can we do what we need to do? in a definition of our core values. What *are* our common values? I am hardly alone in

<sup>10</sup> See Bruce Dearstyne, ed., *Leading and Managing Archives and Records Programs: Strategies for Success* (New York: Neal Schumann, 2008), and particularly the chapters by Mark A. Greene, “Trying to Lead from Good to Great and Reflections on Leadership at All Levels, 137–62, and Leon J. Stout, “Leading from the Middle: Building a University Archives,” 243–67.

<sup>11</sup> Levy and Robles, “The Image of Archivists,” iv.



worrying about this question. I was honored to be a guest “speaker” for an online archival graduate course, and one of the students lamented: “There seems to be a conflict of ideas and obligations pertaining to just what and who we are” as professionals. We have heard many attempts to identify some values, but as far as I know, we have not attempted to do what the American Library Association has done by formally defining the “core values” of the profession.<sup>12</sup> Those core values of librarians are:

- Access
- Confidentiality/Privacy
- Democracy
- Diversity
- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Intellectual Freedom
- Preservation
- The Public Good
- Professionalism
- Service
- Social Responsibility

What are the concomitant archival values? Let me start the conversation by laying out what I think they are and ought to be, not in any formal order:

1. Professionalism
2. Collectivity
3. Activism
4. Selection
5. Preservation
6. Democracy
7. Service
8. Diversity
9. Use and Access
10. History

Let me take some time with each of them, apologizing in advance for the cursory nature of my analysis because of the amount of space I have here.

### ***Professionalism***

Perhaps it goes without saying that archivists should have the characteristics of professionals, though there has been much discussion about whether we meet

<sup>12</sup> “The foundation of modern librarianship rests on an essential set of core values that define, inform, and guide our professional practice. These values reflect the history and ongoing development of the profession and have been advanced, expanded, and refined by numerous policy statements of the American Library Association.” See <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues.cfm>, accessed 17 January 2009.

the qualifications of a profession. I strongly believe we do, but we do not always act as if we believe ourselves to be professionals. The American Library Association has made professionalism a matter of ethics—"We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession"<sup>13</sup>—as has ARMA International—"Enrich the profession by endorsing the sharing of knowledge, experience, and research; encourage public discussion of the profession's values, services, and competencies."<sup>14</sup> Surely it should be at least a matter of values for us.

One of the most salient features of a profession, according to one author, is that its practice "is based on specialized knowledge"; not "knowledge that is intuitive, informal, and cookbooky"—"a professional's knowledge is deeper and more sophisticated than that of an ordinary worker [and] it is supposed to be grounded in well-established theories and conceptual schemes that give intellectual coherence to specific facts and procedures."<sup>15</sup> Sadly, not all archivists take this professional need seriously. We see an awful lot of "intuitive, informal, and cookbooky" knowledge exchanged on our listserv and presented in our sessions—the ubiquitous "this is how we done it good" papers.<sup>16</sup> Professionals are also defined by "being motivated by their mission rather than by rules and regulations."<sup>17</sup>

I want to focus on internalizing a common set of values, defining our importance, and claiming power, all characteristics of a profession. To a certain extent our importance lies with our values, but of course values must be communicated, always reached for, and, when necessary, explained. Beyond that, however, our importance lies in a much broader, deeper relevance to society. None of this will vault us to importance equal to doctors and lawyers, or even to engineers who

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm>, accessed 20 January 2009.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.arma.org/about/overview/ethics.cfm>, accessed 1 July 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Volti, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Work and Occupations*, 98.

<sup>16</sup> One sociologist of work has identified six more characteristics of a profession: formal instruction; work deemed to be of great value, both to society as a whole and to the individuals who make use of professional services; roles and skills that confer power, power that must be deployed in the interests of clients, not of the professionals themselves; ethical interactions with other members of the profession; ability to function with a high degree of autonomy; internalization of appropriate values, behaviors, attitudes, and demeanor. In general, we archivists have done an extremely poor job of defining our importance to our users, institutions, and society, and of claiming power (though we have done a creditable job, I think, in deploying whatever power we do have in the interests of our users rather than ourselves). We have also failed to internalize a common set of values. Volti, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Work and Occupations*, 98–99, 223.

<sup>17</sup> David Osborne and Ted Gaeler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector* (New York : Penguin Books, 1993), 19, as quoted in Richard J. Cox, "Archives, Records, and Knowledge Management in the Twenty-first Century: What Is the Future of the Records Professional?," *Records & Information Management Report* (April 2004), 5.

design the dwellings we live and work in, but we have to begin to rally around definitions of “why we are here” that mean something to nonprofessionals.

As Rand Jimerson states, “We can overcome the public’s lack of knowledge and understanding about archives. We can explain why archives are essential in modern society.”<sup>18</sup> Examples can be inspiring but abstract, such as “our work is a reaffirmation of the value of human life and a celebration of the human spirit,” which is a nice phrase turned by Maygene Daniels.<sup>19</sup> They can be linked to current societal values: “Your profession represents and promotes the kind of independent learning and thinking that equips children to take their places in the world as productive and fulfilled adults.”<sup>20</sup> Or, examples can be more prosaic, such as explaining the concrete uses to which archives of all kinds can and have been put—from asking what would Ken Burns’s *Civil War* documentary be without archival sources to showing the continuing usefulness of land records. We should have a broad range of examples in our arsenal, both for archives in general and for our particular institutions.

### **Collectivity**

I use this term to signify the importance both of context and of aggregation in how we view the world. Archivists value aggregations of material—record groups, collections, series, fonds. We have developed descriptive tools designed to work with aggregates. We believe that aggregation is both an essential reflection of the organic nature of recordkeeping and a recognition that context matters in fully understanding individual items. This should go without saying except that our digitization mania has reinforced a longstanding fascination with individual items. There is no reason for this to be so; Joshua Ranger, for one, has amply demonstrated the utility and efficiency of mass-digitization and aggregate metadata in digitization programs, while at NHPRC Max Evans called for the very same orientation.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Rand Jimerson, President’s Message, “Archival Stories,” *AO* (Jan/Feb 2005): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Maygene Daniels, President’s Address 1995, “On Being an Archivist,” *American Archivist* 59 (Winter 1996): 6–13, also available at <http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/daniels.asp>, accessed 17 January 2009.

<sup>20</sup> This is actually a description of librarians, but works equally well for archivists, as does archives “are a vital community resource, filling an educational role that is unique in the world.” Julie Andrews, “Seven Special Days,” *American Libraries* (April 2008): 8.

<sup>21</sup> Joshua Ranger, “More Bytes, Less Bite: Cutting Corners in Digitization,” unpublished paper presented at the fall 2006 Midwest Archives Conference symposium, available at [http://www.midwestarchives.org/2006\\_Fall/presentations/Ranger%20mahapresentationranger.doc](http://www.midwestarchives.org/2006_Fall/presentations/Ranger%20mahapresentationranger.doc), accessed 1 July 2008; Max J. Evans, “The Archival Time Machine: A Closet Engineer Looks at Our Profession,” *NEA Newsletter* 31, no. 1 (January 2004), 8 and “Archives of the People, by the People, for the People,” *American Archivist* 70 (Fall/Winter 2007): 387–400.

With Dennis Meissner, I have beaten half to death the horse of shunning focus on individual items in paper form, and in an upcoming article I will argue the same for electronic records. A relentless focus on the aggregate is part of what sets us apart from librarians and museum curators in the cultural heritage business. Collectivity goes beyond the material within a collection and should encompass, for example, the way we approach collecting (or acquiring) as a whole. We should be making acquisitions based not on one-off “this looks interesting” decisions but on well-planned policies that approach the documentation universe broadly. We should be seeking documentation that builds upon itself, collections and record groups that interrelate, and description approaches that help to make these interrelationships clearer to our users.

Our ability to work in the aggregate is also an important source of our power. While other cultural professionals struggle with the mass of individual items before them and require vast budgets to undertake their missions (consider, for example, the various projects to publish the papers of the founding fathers), archivists offer an alternative path; a path that many resource allocators will often see as an attractive alternative to item-level work; a path that through our values leads to power. A colleague at a university archives and special collections department recently noted to me that the changing nature of libraries, particularly the impact of shelf-ready books, offers a great opportunity for archivists to partner with book catalogers to show them how archival descriptive practices can be of assistance to them. “With fewer and fewer new books to catalog, our catalogers are now turning to those myriad of odd items, like the thousands of pamphlets on the . . . Library shelves that have never had adequate description to actually make them findable by the research community.” The head of archives and manuscripts processing is collaborating with that library’s head of cataloging “to introduce the idea of organizing these pamphlets into groups and then making an online finding aid for them.” The payoff, beyond better service to patrons? “Although we are already highly thought of by library administrators, this outreach and sharing of practices has raised our visibility and has enhanced their view of the usefulness of archivists.”

Collectivity is also a key source of power when it applies to how we treat colleagues, sister institutions, and allied professions. There is strength, of course, in numbers—while there is advantage to a certain degree of diffusion, such as the sections and roundtables of SAA, which take advantage of common interests (or regionals taking advantage of common geography), fracturing into smaller and smaller organizations based on subsets of archival functions, institutions, or formats endangers the entire archival enterprise. There is also power in strategic alliances. In digital work, collectivity must include partnering with museums and galleries to develop digital infrastructures that support searching for materials across all of our institutions. More and more, researchers want one-stop shopping when it comes to finding materials pertinent to their research, and to

facilitate that we have to partner with other cultural institutions. Also, partnering with these sister professionals enables us to present a united front to our sponsors and facilitate stronger arguments for centralized digitization and preservation facilities.<sup>22</sup> If we are clear enough about our own identity we need never fear being confused with or subsumed by related professions.

### Activism

I see activism as having three distinct components: first, what I would call “agency”—our active shaping of the historical record; second, advocacy of archival issues and values in a variety of settings including the political arena; and third, what Howard Zinn refers to as “activist archivists,” or our deliberate decisions to give voice to the otherwise underdocumented individuals and communities in our midst.<sup>23</sup>

Our values include a recognition, acceptance, and deliberate application of our own agency in the work we do with records and users. This simply means that we are neither neutral nor objective<sup>24</sup> protectors and transmitters of primary sources, but shapers and interpreters of the sources as well. Archivists have to understand, accept, and work within the reality that we—through our selection, through our description, and even through our marketing—do as much to create the documentation of the past as the individuals and organizations that generated the records in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

During appraisal this agency is most clear—by making any selection at all not only within record groups but among them as well, we are deliberately and

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Michael Fox, “Achieving Alignment with Our Users; or, How Do You Spell Synergy?,” unpublished paper delivered at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, San Francisco, California, available at <http://www.archivists.org/conference/sanfrancisco2008/docs/session309-Fox.doc>, accessed 17 January 2009.

<sup>23</sup> For reasons that would require an entirely separate article to sufficiently explain, I do not include within the value of activism what is referred to as “social justice.” While I have sympathy with the social justice movement within archives, I cannot at this point agree that it is a profession-wide value.

<sup>24</sup> Some incisive commentators, such as Rand Jimerson, suggest that archivists should strive for objectivity but not neutrality. I believe we should strive for both while realizing we can attain neither. Rand Jimerson, “Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice,” *American Archivist* 70 (Fall/Winter 2007): 270–72.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Fran Blouin has written that archivists “will need to become much more aware of our role as mediators, that is, mediators between records creators and records repositories, between archives and users, between conceptions of the past and extant documentation,” Francis X. Blouin, “Archivists, Mediation, and the Constructs of Social Memory,” *Archival Issues* 24, no. 2 (1999): 111. Others outside the archives profession note the importance of our mediating role. “[Your discipline] is about appraising and keeping records of history-making events and the acts spoken by history-makers, and doing that in a way that allows you to be effective *partners* for those history-makers in their re-membering of the past,” Chauncey Bell, “Re-membering the Past: Organizational Change: What Is It, and What Does It Mean for Records Professionals?,” keynote address to the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators, Sacramento, California, 17 July 1997 (emphasis added), available at <http://www.mybestdocs.com> under “Guest Authors,” accessed 20 January 2009. Bell was at the time senior vice president of Business Design Associates.

irrevocably shaping the archival record. But we also influence the record, or at least the way in which researchers encounter and understand the record, by our organizational and descriptive choices and by our interactions in the reading room. Digitization, too, increasingly shapes the historical record because of the growing tendency of certain researchers to assume that only what is available on the Web is extant.

Agency is neither good nor bad, it just is an ineluctable part of what we do—we need to accept, understand, and communicate this agency to our resource allocators and researchers; it is part of our power. How? It is part of our ability to shed the image that “archives hark to the past, seem passive, stored, compared to more current, ongoing, aggressive demands”<sup>26</sup> on resource allocators’ attention and funds. It is part of our ability to claim importance and relevance: we make decisions that define what our institutions and society can remember, attain, conceive; we actively shape the way that users encounter our materials and the way they in turn shape the past, including controlling what portions of the past are easily accessible to all and which are accessible only to our physical visitors. We should be proud of these decisions, not shrink from them.

My first point under activism was agency; my second is advocacy. We must more consistently project our strong belief in the importance of what we do and why we do it. In other words, we must steadily and staunchly advocate for ourselves and our values. We need to do that as individuals, certainly, such as in the recurrently successful campaigns to convince Congress to reinstate funding for NHPRC. But we also must each—and for each of our institutions—find other, consistent, grassroots methods of promoting and advancing the mission of archives (or of your individual archives). Whether that is developing concise, “user friendly” definitions of what archives are and why they’re important; participating in Archives Month activities at a local level; submitting press releases to our institutions’ press offices or the local media; or just talking up our programs and our profession with donors, transferring departments, or bosses. Institutional archivists can offer to write columns for their institutions’ newsletters, which has been done successfully by organizations as varied as Carleton College and Alcoholics Anonymous.

We need to pursue advocacy through our organizations when it counts, from testifying to Congress on the Presidential Records Act to presenting our position on copyright to the Library of Congress; from urging a U.S. district court to ensure preservation of records relating to Guantanamo detainees to participating in an *amicus curiae* brief against destruction or sale of the Theodore Kaczynski papers<sup>27</sup>; from making inquiries to national governments about the

<sup>26</sup> Levy and Roble, “The Image of Archivists,” ii.

<sup>27</sup> On 9 January 2009 the appeals court in California threw out Kaczynski’s latest appeal of the district court’s plans to sell his papers: <http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2009/01/08/0610514.pdf>, accessed on 20 January 2009. Kaczynski can be given legible copies of all of his papers before their sale; SAA’s argument that copies are not the equivalent of the originals was unconvincing to the court. Thanks to Peter Hirtle for providing this citation.

destruction of a Palestinian archives to lobbying NARA to reinstate evening and weekend hours for researchers. These are activities that can only be undertaken successfully by organizations, and usually by national organizations with the power of combined membership behind them. But advocacy like this comes at a cost, both in time and money. Advocacy must be part of our professional priorities, and members should be willing to support this work with effort and with dues.<sup>28</sup> It is also a most obvious exercise in power.

My third point under activism is that I believe that as a profession—though not always as individual practitioners—we must embrace the importance of deliberately acting to identify (even create), acquire, preserve, and make accessible material documenting those whose voices in our institutions and in society are marginalized or overlooked. This is part of our commitment to the value of diversity, but it is also a commitment to the more abstract notion of trying to ensure documentation that reflects the true complexity of our target institutions or collecting areas. This value includes building connections to those underdocumented communities.<sup>29</sup> We are only beginning to discuss many difficult issues, such as cultural imperialism, in working with these communities, but articles such as Joel Wurl's "Ethnicity as Provenance,"<sup>30</sup> and documents such as the *Protocols for Native American Archival Material* make clear our need to address seriously this concern. It is also, however, a source of power through our ability to expand what we do and how we serve our institutions.

### Selection

"The appraisal process determines the fate of our documentary heritage and thereby contains perhaps the only socially significant element of archival power."<sup>31</sup> This is a function archivists perform, but it is also one of our values insofar as why we perform it. We select because we affirm the necessity of such appraisal and our professional ability to do it thoughtfully and defensibly (though not objectively and scientifically). Our institutions and society, we

<sup>28</sup> In his inaugural address as SAA president, 31 August 2008, Frank Boles pursued this issue at some length: <http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/BolesClosingPlenary-Aug08.pdf>, accessed 10 September 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Mark A. Greene, "Expanding the Community Connection in Minnesota," *Provenance* 17 (1999): 53–66.

<sup>30</sup> Joel Wurl, "Ethnicity as Provenance: In Search of Values and Principles for Documenting the Immigrant Experience," *Archival Issues*, 29, no.1 (2005): 65–76. *Protocols* are at <http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>, accessed 1 July 2008. See also Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections," *Archivaria* 63 (2007): 87–101. Shilton and Srinivasan overlook any and all arguments against their proposal for community participation in appraisal and arrangement, but as with Wurl and the *Protocols*, raise a perspective that must be wrestled with in the twenty-first century.

<sup>31</sup> Roy C. Schaeffer, "Transcendent Concepts: Power, Appraisal, and the Archivist as Social Outcast," *American Archivist* 55 (1992): 609.

argue, are best served if presented a professional selection of primary sources rather than the totality of such sources. We preserve material because the material is important. Archivists are important, and exercise power, because archivists are the professionals best educated to make this selection.

Although I raise selection as a core value, I do so with a heavy heart. Many repositories do not do much if any appraisal when they acquire collections or record groups; whatever the donor or transferring agency wants picked up or delivered they accept. In some collections, this means dozens or even hundreds of cubic feet of material is placed on shelves that will not remain with the collection once it is finally processed. The appearance to an outsider is not that of a professional selecting what matters, but a janitor clearing away the refuse. And when processing does occur, appraisal too often occurs at a file or item level, whether it is separating duplicates or identifying individual items of no long-term value—a preciousizing of the individual document and a continuation of the image of an archivist as a fussy milquetoast.

Why do archivists do this? The reasons are complex and perhaps deep-seated. First and foremost is archivists' apparently entrenched and widespread aversion to doing appraisal at all. Frank Boles sketches this reluctance, insisting that "archivists are by and large scared silly of appraisal and most of them really don't want to do it even if they could. Why are they scared silly—because they think they will be criticized for making mistakes. . . . What archivists really see themselves as . . . are guardians of the past: . . . [that our mission is] . . . to receive from others their important material and then preserve and protect it. . . ." <sup>32</sup>

The fear of making mistakes, of discarding a series that is 99 percent junk and discovering (somehow) later that it contained one fairly interesting and substantive item, combined with the holdover conviction that archivists are custodians rather than active agents in the process of preserving material, causes many of us to relegate selection to the slow, painstaking, item-level activity that it often becomes. When we avoid doing appraisal when it should be done, at the point of acquisition, and only grudgingly do it during processing, we are left with the question about appraisal Gerry Ham posed to the profession more than thirty years ago: "Why must we do it so badly?" <sup>33</sup>

When, perhaps if, we surmount our fears and our custodial heritage, the path to doing appraisal better is relatively simple. As with processing, we must accept that the size of modern collections is simply too great to permit the luxury of item- and often even file-level appraisal. We must accept that we cannot afford to be 100 percent certain that no document that might possibly be of value to someone is discarded. As Ham noted *fifteen* years ago, "Today's information-laden world has lessened the value of any single set of records; the

<sup>32</sup> Frank Boles, unpublished paper, Society of American Archivists, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* (January 1975): 5.



documents may be unique but the information is usually not.”<sup>34</sup> We must accept that “good enough” is better than “one of these days.”

We must also accept that selection is fundamental to who we are and why we are here. Archivists must, finally, realize that by doing appraisal badly we do ourselves a huge disservice; we eviscerate what should be one of our principal sources of power. The consequences of this action frustrate each of us almost every day, but for this problem we have no one to blame but ourselves and can find no way to fix it but to change our values to better serve our mission.

### **Preservation**

I am almost reluctant to make preservation a core value, because it has been misused so often as an obstacle to selection and even to use. In our profession, it has long been a truism that we “balance” use and preservation, but I believe that gives too much weight to our custodial instincts. Use should almost always trump preservation, particularly now when we have so many options for providing use with minimal preservation risks. In a major study of access in the 1990s, one-fifth of researchers reported being barred from using collections because of poor physical condition.<sup>35</sup> What is the point of “preserving” collections that we will not let researchers use?

And it is not sufficient to insist that “someday” resources will become available to conserve the collections. Given the more recent report on our profession’s preservation abilities—which finds that “Only 20% of institutions have paid staff—whether full-time or part-time—dedicated to conservation or preservation responsibilities”—such claims are mere bravado.<sup>36</sup> We should instead consider giving heed to one of Maynard Brichford’s seven sinful thoughts, in which he provocatively but seriously argues that archivists should accept that not all accessioned materials are worth extraordinary conservation measures. Instead, he said, we should “Let them rot.”<sup>37</sup> What that would mean in practice is that we would allow them to be used up, if necessary, in the belief that some use is better than no use.

However, it remains true that we must preserve material in some sense and to some degree for it to be used at all, and for this reason preservation is a fundamental value. But, like selection, we seem to honor it most often in the

<sup>34</sup> F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993), 72.

<sup>35</sup> Ann D. Gordon, *Using the Nation’s Documentary Heritage: The Report of the Historical Documents Study* (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1992), 46.

<sup>36</sup> Heritage Preservation, *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America’s Collections* (Washington, D.C., December 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Maynard Brichford, “Seven Sinful Thoughts,” *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 14.

breach. The findings of the *Heritage Health Index* are troubling to say the least in pointing to the large percentage of cultural heritage institutions—some of them archival repositories—with extremely poor preservation abilities, whether that means an absence of disaster plans or storage areas without climate controls. It is an area, I believe, where we, on the one hand, are too apt to accept what we get from our parent institutions, and on the other, too apt to let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

My own institution is one example of a facility that lobbied, supported parent missions, lobbied some more, and eventually won improvements in leak abatement, fire suppression, security, and better climate control. It did not hurt, certainly, that we had done everything within our direct power to create a sound preservation environment—completed the university's first disaster plan, for instance. In working during my career with small repositories, I have seen far too few willing to take steps within their control: local air conditioners even when dehumidification was not available; disaster plans even when fire suppression was not available.

We must more clearly define the place of preservation in our constellation of archival values. While in some respects fundamental to all we do, it is a means rather than an end. We preserve in order to use. And we preserve only what we consciously and methodically select. *We are not preservationists, we are archivists.* And again this is part of our power. We know that our institutions and society cannot and should not support with resources the simple instinct to preserve. We provide a professional assessment of what should be preserved and why. Otherwise, we wind up arguing that we need more space, and more staff, to store more and more stuff that nobody actually uses. This is not a new formulation, by any means. "Society," Gerry Ham wrote in the 1980s, "must regard such broadness of spirit as profligacy, if not outright idiocy."<sup>38</sup> Our hardheaded assessment of preservation as a means to a utilitarian end must be part of our image as sensible and practical administrators, providing the best cultural or accountability bang for the buck.

## Democracy

While our librarian and records manager colleagues define their democratic value as supporting a generally informed citizenry and the right to free

<sup>38</sup> F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," *American Archivist* 47 (Winter 1984): 12. G. Philip Bauer presents a similar formulation, arguing that society should not be expected to allocate unlimited resources to preserve government records, in *The Appraisal of Current and Recent Records*, Staff Information Paper 13 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1946).

expression,<sup>39</sup> archivists are more concerned with governmental accountability in a republic. The transparency and accountability of the government to the people is a hallmark of our democracy. In a letter to W. T. Barry in 1822, James Madison wrote that “a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives. A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both.” As SAA stated in a letter to congressional leaders requesting they overturn the Executive Order that undermined the Presidential Records Act: “As do all citizens, we believe, archivists have a vested interest in protecting the fundamental tenet of democracy that holds leaders accountable not solely to history in the long term but to the electorate in the short term as well. Access to the records of office—to the people’s office—is an essential part of that accountability. The existing Executive Order thoroughly undermines that accountability.”

SAA has carried this principle further, protesting the alienation of mayors’ and governors’ records from municipal and state archives respectively, expressing outrage over the failure of the Executive Office of the President to properly protect official emails, and objecting when proposed appointees to Archivist of the United States seemed to politicize that institution and undermine its ability to act as nonpartisan arbiter of selection and access to public records. We can probably do more. For example, although a long shot, archivists should express their judgment that the records of congressional offices should be public records rather than private property. Serving as a public watchdog in support of access is another fine example of how doing our job is interrelated to power. A watchdog, or if need be a whistleblower, is clearly a valued asset. In this case, power comes from both being able to utter the needed warning and the public’s expectation that we will play such a role.

### Service

There has been controversy over whether we do or should serve society or our institutions first. I posit that our first service obligation is to our institutions and their clients, that indeed we do not have a social service role so much as we have a value as a social good. To put it another way, as individual archivists, our allegiance is to our institutions; as a profession we have committed to certain social responsibilities. “The world we live in is the world of the host system we

<sup>39</sup> Librarians state, “A democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community the library serves,” see <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues.cfm>, accessed 17 January 2009. Records managers “Support the free flow of publicly available information as a necessary condition for an informed and educated society,” see <http://www.ama.org/about/overview/ethics.cfm>, accessed 1 July 2008.

serve, and our value is manifest in terms of our contribution to it.”<sup>40</sup> All archives and archivists must be committed to institutional service, whether that service includes the public or not. We are charged with providing an effective and efficient connection to our holdings, so that our users, whoever they are, can benefit from them to the fullest extent. Service is the linchpin between access and use, and, as such, of fundamental importance to our profession. Whether processing, appraising, or directly providing reference, all that we do must be seen in terms of service to our users. Ultimately, archives and archivists are foremost about people and not things—we serve our users first, not our collections.<sup>41</sup>

An article on marketing repositories observes that “Archives presented as a [*sic*] cultural and social institutions can be marketed . . . and understood by the target market community.”<sup>42</sup> I find the use of “target market community” interesting, because it suggests to me that we are not best off addressing or serving “society” as a whole, but our institutions’ targeted audiences. It is difficult to see success in marketing the abstract notion of archives to the even more abstract notion of society—instead we must market to our constituents, internal or external, narrow or broad, private or public. Rather than argue about whether archives have a universal “social” mission, we should instead focus on fully internalizing the very commitment to a clearly defined mission on the one hand and to marketing on the other—we have done neither well in the past. Targeting also speaks to one of the key elements of power—developing a constituency. Service results in more than good will; it results in good allies who can assist the archives.

### **Diversity**

The American Library Association has adopted as one of its core values that “We value our nation’s diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve”<sup>43</sup>—archivists must maintain this value just as strongly. We must renew and maintain our commitment to ensuring that our holdings adequately reflect the variety of ethnicities, religions, cultures, and so on that comprise our documentary

<sup>40</sup> Eleanor Jo Rodger, “What’s a Library Worth? Piecing Together the Structure of Value,” *American Libraries* (September 2007): 60.

<sup>41</sup> For example, see Colleen McFarland, “Minimal Processing as Management Strategy,” presentation at the 2008 SAA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California: assisting users “comes before processing and preservation. That’s not to say we don’t attend to these important archival duties. We simply treat the people with more care than the stuff” (9), available at <http://www.archivists.org/conference/sanfrancisco2008/docs/session408-McFarlandA.doc>, accessed 1 October 2008.

<sup>42</sup> W. Bernard Lukenbill, “Social Marketing for Archives: The Austin History Center Experience,” in *Strategic Marketing in Library and Information Science*, ed. Irene Owens (Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth, 2002), 169.

<sup>43</sup> ALA, “Libraries: An American Value,” available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/americanvalue/librariesamerican.cfm>, accessed 20 January 2009.

universes. And, joined with this, we must strive to break down barriers between mainstream institutions and “underserved” communities to help ensure that our user populations and our members are as diverse as our holdings. On the one hand, we should take some heart in knowing that our profession’s current racial diversity equals that of the library profession (which has been focusing on recruitment for many years longer); on the other hand, neither profession’s ranks come close to mirroring U.S. society as a whole.

While SAA has a role to play in recruitment and in helping to break down barriers between those holding primary sources and those who might use them, individual repositories must do most of this work. How does one institution change the ethnic balance of the profession? By helping to introduce minority populations to the profession—by attending local career fairs and community events, by offering tours and presentations to K–12 and undergraduate groups, by acquiring and publicizing multicultural collections. The first step in increasing the roles of minority archival graduate students is making their communities aware of archives as a career and as a contribution to those very communities’ identity and heritage.<sup>44</sup> SAA’s new minority graduate scholarship, and other scholarships offered by regional associations, can help this process along, and SAA will be exploring other profession-wide initiatives; but, fundamentally, diversity must be a value and a goal for every professional.

Reinforcing the significance of this value, the profession is grappling with the *Protocols for Native American Archival Material*, which has clear implications for how we respond to a wide range of potentially culturally sensitive materials in many of our repositories. We have been challenged, too, to wrestle with the “provenance of ethnicity” and the extent to which mainstream repositories can/should be “owners” or, instead, one of several “stakeholders” in the curation of primary sources generated by cultural, ethnic, and other groups. These challenges reinforce the importance of our agency, by questioning whether our unchallenged curation of materials adequately represents or acknowledges the perspectives of the creators; and begs the question of whether the creators’ perspectives are any more or less “valid” than those of the archivists. Values often raise tensions between “goods.”

### **Use and Access**

“Use is the end of all archival effort,” Theodore Schellenberg declared, and we must give it a priority value. “It is the duty of an archivist to open up the research treasures that are entrusted to his care. . . . He should not only

<sup>44</sup> In response to a call originally issued by SAA president Elizabeth Adkins in her presidential address, the College and University Archives section proposes exactly this type of individual action as important in achieving the profession’s diversity goals. Email from Betsy Pittman to Mark Greene, 25 April 2008.

accumulate and preserve documentary material; he should also make it accessible to others.”<sup>45</sup> We should do everything we legally, ethically, and practically can to promote, ease, and sustain use by whomever our user group(s) happens to be. Dennis Meissner and I have argued long and hard to reform processing practices to speed and promote use. I believe we can and should alter other practices—appraisal, preservation, digitization, and electronic records administration—to the same end.

If, for example, we really value use, then we may want to shift our digitization approaches from item-level, metadata intensive to lower resolution and metadata at the file and series levels. This may serve more users better at the same or less cost than our traditional approaches. Of course, to determine the validity of such assumptions we will need to directly engage our users and be willing to change our practices in response to their needs.<sup>46</sup> Electronic records have to first be accepted as an essential part of our documentation universe; second, to be wrestled with an understanding that we can do something to make them usable without having the perfect answers to long-term preservation; and, third, to be described and presented in the same aggregate units—series, files, and so on—as traditional records. Here, too, our fear of making the “wrong” decisions has kept us from dealing with these records at all, at a cost to our users and our institutions.

We value access because we hold use as our highest value. However, our access values are broader and deeper than this. For example, archivists should declare as librarians have that “we respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.”<sup>47</sup> Intellectual access to our collections is being diminished by the expansion of rights-holder interests in law, so that at present our need is to support information users to the furthest extent possible. We must also, I believe, support access by not falling into the trap of believing that we should or must protect “private” and “sensitive” information outside of a few clear categories of materials defined by law, and even then we should understand the law and not exceed its demands. Too many archivists believe it is their ethical duty to protect the

<sup>45</sup> Theodore R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 108.

<sup>46</sup> For our MPLP article, we surveyed over a hundred manuscript repositories and asked them, “If you knew for a fact that your researchers would be willing to trade processing thoroughness for gaining access to more collections, would that change the way your institution processed collections?” Astonishingly, 66% said no, meaning they do not really care what their users think or want.

<sup>47</sup> ALA Code of Ethics, <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues.cfm>, accessed 17 January 2009. On the other hand, records managers focus entirely on the interests of rights holders in their code of professional responsibility: “Recognize the need for careful action to assure appropriate access to information without violation of the intellectual property rights of the owners of that information.” See <http://www.arma.org/about/overview/ethics.cfm>, accessed 1 July 2008.

sensibilities of donors or third parties, when instead this amounts to censorship and diminishment of access.<sup>48</sup>

Access is perhaps most crucial when it applies to public records and is a core component of our value of democracy. The people have a right to access the papers of their elected and appointed leaders, except in narrow instances relating to legitimate national security concerns and clearly delineated privacy rights. Even then, archivists should, whenever the value of access bumps up against the need for privacy, err on the side of access. One salient example of this is arguing for public release of certain grand jury records; while normally sealed in perpetuity, some grand jury records have compelling public interest in their accessibility. To date, SAA has supported release of the Rosenberg and Hiss grand jury records and should stand ready to do the same in similar circumstances. Of less notoriety, archivists should also fight to ensure that other records legislatively defined as private, under laws such as FERPA and HIPPA, are not inaccessible permanently; our interest in supporting, promoting, and defending historical (and other academic) inquiry demands that we work toward restrictions that end with the death of subjects.

We must not only promote relentlessly but also welcome use. I am alarmed and disheartened every time I hear an archivist say that he or she is a victim of his or her own success in promoting use.<sup>49</sup> There is no such thing. Success is success, and we are back to our ability to communicate that success and translate the success into power and resources. I have yet to hear of an archives—collecting repository, business archives, whatever—where the resource allocators didn't care most about use of one kind or another,<sup>50</sup> and I know of several, including

<sup>48</sup> Mark A. Greene, "Moderation in Everything, Access in Nothing?: Opinions about Access Restrictions on Private Papers," *Archival Issues* 18, no. 1 (1993): 31–41. See also the ALA Code of Ethics: "We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources." Part of this argument is practical, that in large modern collections archivists cannot hope to identify all materials that any third party might consider private and that because the concept of privacy rests on social norms and personal sensibilities that differ from place to place and change over time that there is no reasonable way for archivists to know with any reasonable certainty what material is private. Part of this argument is legal, in that, as Behrnd-Klodt has suggested, the more archivists claim the responsibility for protecting third party privacy the more likely they are to be held legally accountable for doing so, Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt, "The Tort Right of Privacy: What It Means for Archivists . . . and for Third Parties," in *Privacy and Confidentiality Perspectives: Archivists and Archivist Records*, ed. Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt and Peter J. Wosh (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 53–60 (particularly 58–60). This contrasts with ARMA's Code of Professional Responsibility, which includes "Affirm that the collection, maintenance, distribution, and use of information about individuals is a privilege in trust: the right to privacy of all individuals must be both promoted and upheld," see <http://www.arma.org/about/overview/ethics.cfm>, accessed 1 July 2008. There are good reasons for this difference, but no space to examine them here.

<sup>49</sup> In part, this lament is based implicitly on the fact that other duties wind up suffering. But "reference service to on-site and remote researchers takes precedence over other duties" because the "dream archivist" "views supporting the use of collections as his or her top priority," Shan Sutton, "Staffing the Dream Archives: A View from the Other Side of the Reading Room Desk," *C&RL News* (October 2007): 590.

<sup>50</sup> I refer here to types of use, rather than types of users. Certainly, use matters most when groups defined by the parent institution as priorities do the using. If we are overrun by low-priority users, we can take steps either to a) moderate such use (by charging fees for certain activities), or b) encourage more use by priority groups.

my own, where increased use is directly rewarded with additional resources. Translating success into resources is not simple, but is in part a test of our ability as professionals and leaders within our institutions.

One further note. Not all use is direct. On the one hand, we all know the sort of indirect use that occurs when an author or documentary maker transmits his or her work to thousands of readers or viewers. But less obvious is what might be called symbolic use. Some people “use” certain material simply by being proud or happy or secure that it exists. I believe that this is part of what Joel Wurl points to when writing about community stakeholders and the provenance of ethnicity.<sup>51</sup> It is also part of what Jim O’Toole identifies when discussing the “symbolic” importance of archives.<sup>52</sup> It matters to some people that archival material exists even if they never “use” it in any conventional sense. This, too, is a source of our power, even if it comes from people who have never entered an archives.

## History

“The principal justification for archives to most users, and to the tax-paying public at large, as also reflected in most national and state archival legislation, rests on archives being able to offer citizens a sense of identity, locality, history, culture, and personal and collective memory.”<sup>53</sup> If one of our enduring values is accountability for democracy, surely another is our core relationship to history and culture (history in its broadest meaning, transcending the specific discipline and encompassing understanding the past of any discipline). During the 1990s, our profession witnessed an assault on the cultural purpose of archives and their material, in favor of an argument that our most important purpose is maintaining evidence of transactions for institutions. It seemed to me then, and still today, that this legalistic vision of archives excludes the very value that our institutions and society most often identify and cherish about our profession. Of course accountability matters, but not to the exclusion of history any more than history can simply exclude accountability. However, for most people, the archival value they most appreciate and rely on is that of preserving history and

<sup>51</sup> Joel Wurl, “Ethnicity as Provenance: In Search of Values and Principles for Documenting the Immigrant Experience,” *Archival Issues* 29, no. 1 (2005): 65–76.

<sup>52</sup> James M. O’Toole, “The Symbolic Significance of Archives,” *American Archivist* 56 (Spring 1993): 234–55.

<sup>53</sup> Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” 2000, available at <http://www.mybestdocs.com/cook-t-postmod-p1-00.htm>, accessed 1 July 2008. See also the Australian Society of Archivists, *Archives Matter!* (Australia: Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authority, Australian Society of Archivists, 2007), 5: archives “constitute our collective memory bank,” among other prominent references to history.



culture. We see this in the studies conducted of public perceptions of archives.<sup>54</sup> We see it in the institutions that received infusions of resources over the past two decades. We see it in the vast majority of uses to which our holdings are put, whether we are institutional archives or collecting repositories, and whether we serve internal clients or external ones.

I was struck recently by a comment sent to me by a colleague ruminating on the connection of archives to history:

As I was walking to work today from the subway, I was reminded again of the central location in DC that the National Archives occupies, with its statues, including the one containing the Shakespeare quote "What is Past is Prologue." I think this speaks to your points about "history." NARA receives hundreds, if not thousands, of visitors each day who are easily able to grasp something about its significance, even if at a superficial or instinctive level (and maybe that makes it all the more noteworthy). They are there because the Archives connotes history. If the general public can get this very basic connection between archives and history, why don't archivists? Why do so many still want to distance themselves from that fundamental link? Is there any better, more resonant way to connect with the public than to assert the reality of this connection?<sup>55</sup>

And what is it we connect to the public with? Primary sources. I strongly prefer to assert primary sources as the term of choice rather than "records," because as Richard Pearce-Moses noted in his presidential address two years ago, we have spent far too much time arguing about definitions of records,<sup>56</sup> definitions that virtually none of our users or resource allocators care about or understand.

I think there is resonance in the word *primary* that we have yet to mine. Our collections are *first, most important, chief, key, principal, major, crucial*—all the synonyms for primary. They are also, though we might think it too trite to say, alive with possibilities—open to multiple interpretations and multiple uses. The same document can be used to support differing sides of an argument; the same item can be used one day to prove citizenship, another day to complete a genealogy,

<sup>54</sup> "As well as the physical definitions of archives, authors include descriptions of what archives represent. Archives, whether records collections or the repository, are history." Arlene B. Schmuland, "The Image of Archives and Archivists Fictional Perspectives," master's thesis, Western Washington University (August 1997), 5. Also see her related article, "The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography," *American Archivist* 62:1 (Spring 1999): 24–73. Additional evidence is provided by a study of newspaper articles about archives and archivists, which notes that "the single most common reason archives were newsworthy was because they played a role in creating cultural products currently being offered for public consumption. Such products included books, music, films, plays, exhibitions, festivals, and museums. . . ." Sally J. Jacobs, "How and When We Make the News: Local Newspaper Coverage of Archives in Two Wisconsin Cities," *Archival Issues* 22, no. 1 (1997): 50.

<sup>55</sup> Joel Wurl, email to author, 30 July 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Pearce-Moses, "Janus in Cyberspace: Archives on the Threshold of the Digital Era," *American Archivist* 70 (Spring/Summer 2007): 13–22, available at <http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/pearce-moses.asp>, accessed 1 July 2008.

a third day to buttress a History Day paper, and a fourth day to illustrate a PBS special or form the basis for a “true” Hollywood production. Primary sources also provide *historical* accountability for government and other entities and individuals. So, in a very real sense, archives are synonymous with history.

Archives have always played a role in accountability, particularly in a democratic society. Our holdings, especially in government archives, help hold our elected and appointed officials accountable to the people who place them in power. But accountability is only part of the purpose and powers of archival primary sources. The other purpose is much more ethereal, supporting the mystic chords of memory that form a basis for all individuals, institutions, and societies. We preserve and make accessible for use the primary sources of history. Through our active selection, our conscious choices in writing descriptions, and our role as mediators in reference, we help translate primary sources into sources of meaning for users. I have in the past referred, in fact, to the “power of meaning” as a source of archival strength and identity.<sup>57</sup> It is indeed a critical source of our power.

## Conclusion

It should go without saying that my ten values are not the only ten that could be put forward. Ethics, for instance, could be cited as a value, although I would argue that it is a part of being professional. Some, of course, would argue that social justice should be a value, and that is a conversation well worth pursuing even though I personally don’t think, as currently defined (or ill defined), it is an appropriate value. Education could be cited as a value. So could accountability, though I have tried to encompass that within the value of democracy. Privacy could be a value, though I have folded it into access and argued that we cover too many sins with calls to protect privacy.

What I believe is most important is not necessarily the endorsement of the ten particular values presented in this article but rather that we collectively consider our values, debate them seriously, and consider adopting a formal set as our library colleagues have done. In some respects, I see this as more pressing than a revision (sorely needed) of our code of ethics. A statement of values tells us more about who we are as a profession and speaks not only to ourselves but

<sup>57</sup> Mark A. Greene, “The Power of Meaning: The Mission of Archives in the Postmodern World,” *American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002): 42–55; republished as “La fuerza del significado: la mision de los archivos en la era posmoderna,” in Luis Hernandez Olivera and Terry Cook, eds., *Tabula: Estudios Archivisticos de Castilla y Leon* 10 (2007): 195–212; republished as “O Poder do Significado: A Missao Arquivistica na Era Pos-Moderna,” in Marta Eloisa Melgaco Neves and Leandro Riberios Nereiros, eds., *Documentos Eletronicos: Fundamentos Arquivisticos Para a Pesquisa em Gestao e Preservacao* (Secretaria de Estado de Cultura, Arquivo Publico Mineiro [Brazil], 2008), 14–32. None of my other articles have received the international interest this one has, and I think for good reason—the power of historical meaning resonates broadly as an archival value.

to our resource allocators and users. It is a source of guidance and a source of power. What is it about defining, understanding, and exercising these values that breeds power? Is it the cohesion this might produce? Does it evoke a kind of conscious awakening? Does it produce a new kind of communication mechanism that carries potent quality? In other words, what are the ingredients of power that emerge from focusing on values?

To a certain extent, I've tried to address the last question during discussion of each separate value. But the answer to the larger question of how the sum of these values translates into professional and/or individual power is more complex. One way of looking at this is "Living your values is one of the most powerful tools available to you to help you lead and influence others."<sup>58</sup> When values are shared, a new level of shared meaning evolves, leading to aligned, effective action and results—in other words, power. The U.S. Navy lists as the "goals of core values": "Educate the public; Accountability through leading by example; Create a climate that enhances esprit de corps, self-esteem, and teamwork."<sup>59</sup> Certainly, educating the public, assigning accountability, and building self-esteem are significant aspects of power. In such ways does power derive from values.

Power is a byproduct of values even when a repository's institutional home does not immediately accept archival values. A colleague recounted to me such an instance having to do with finding-aid acknowledgment of restricted records, noting that "even if you find that you can't adhere to all of the values all of the time, you can use them to educate your sponsors about what archivists stand for. Our discussions with [our university] about access and use and what they mean to archivists have at least illuminated [these values] and given [our administrators] something to think about as we try to work out what might be in online inventories to restricted records that concerns [our bosses]." There is power, certainly, in education; indeed, only with clearly articulated values can education such as this occur, and when it does occur, only with values can there be the strength of a clear and compelling position.

I believe this matter to be so important that during its 25 August 2008 meeting I asked Council to approve the creation of a task force to consider whether it makes sense for SAA to adopt a values statement. After discussion, Council unanimously approved my request. In this first phase, the only recommendation will be whether or not to pursue such work; if the answer is yes, and Council agrees, then that same task force or a new one will be charged with drafting a values statement after conferring with all SAA units and the broad membership. That draft, too, would be presented to Council for discussion, amendment, and acceptance or rejection. In this manner, I will have launched

<sup>58</sup> Susan M. Heathfield, "Leadership Values and Ethics: Secrets of Leadership Success," available at [http://humanresources.about.com/od/leadership/a/leader\\_values.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/leadership/a/leader_values.htm), accessed 1 July 2008.

<sup>59</sup> "Goals of Core Values," available at <http://www2.ku.edu/~kunrotc/academics/101/COREVAL.ppt#258,3,3>, accessed 1 July 2008.

a process that I deeply believe in, but will not be in a position to influence it once underway.

I know that some members of our profession believe that an attempt to define ourselves is inherently exclusionary and will drive individuals out of the field or out of SAA. In the broadest sense, definitions *are* exclusionary. Moreover, professions by definition are exclusionary; it is one of the key definitions of a profession. And it is true that I am suggesting these values define us as professionals. This certainly will exclude some nonprofessionals; not on the basis of what types of records they work with, what degrees<sup>60</sup> they hold, what repositories they work in; not on the basis of private or public or open or closed, of regional or national affiliation, or of function performed. These values I put forward are meant to define us as a profession, yes, but as a broad profession, of curators and archivists, of those who work with government records and business records, of those with MLSs and without. . . . But we have to have some definition or else we are nothing, just a bunch of individuals who share nothing but . . . what? Lab coats?

We must accept definition if we wish to be accorded the status of professionals; there is no escape. I am convinced that if we are to be confident in answering such questions as *Who Am I?* and *Why Am I Here?*, we need to wrestle with a set of values. In addition, as I indicated in my inaugural address,<sup>61</sup> I believe we need to reshape our attitudes as well. We need to be consistently proud, creative, aggressive, and optimistic. We have to see ourselves and have others see us as the antithesis of the dusty, lonely, downtrodden, optional bureaucrats we have seemed to resource allocators in the past. If one were to encapsulate this into an “elevator speech,” something I could have used in 1985 to explain my profession to my relatives, it might go something like this: “Archivists are professionals with the power of defining and making accessible the primary sources of history, primary sources that protect rights, educate students, inform the public, and support a primal human desire to understand our past.”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> I have deliberately avoided concentrating any attention on the question of academic degrees as part of our values or the value of professionalism, because to even limn the outlines of the issue requires more than a paragraph. However, I was struck by an article entitled “BackTalk: Diversity and the MLS,” in which Tony Greiner notes that “nonwhite groups work in libraries in higher numbers when a master’s-level degree is not required” (1), and states that “I believe the biggest factor keeping minorities out of our profession isn’t racism or neglect but the financial burden that accompanies our entry-level degree” (2). *Library Journal* (1 May 2008). Archivists have heard similar sentiments from some of our Native American colleagues recently. I believe this is something we must be willing to consider unflinchingly.

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/ma-green2007.pdf>, accessed on 1 July 2008.

<sup>62</sup> One critic of this phrase politely but overtly labeled it “obtuse,” and suggested substituting, “Archivists preserve society’s greatest treasures.” Leaving aside the merits of my phrase, my concerns about such a substitute are several: it emphasizes preservation, not access or use; in so doing it makes archivists passive rather than active actors; it equates primary sources with monetary worth, and in this age of E-bay, that seems reinforcement of an all too common vice. This may only exemplify the difficulty of encapsulating what we—or any profession—does in fifty words or less. Personally, I will try my formulation to see what response it gets; after all, it is meant to be the beginning of a conversation, not the sum total of communication.

Defining and committing to values and changing attitudes will increase and broaden our power as a profession and as professionals. We can do so without becoming too narrow or too obsessed with credentials, institutions, formats, and functions. We can become stronger, more powerful, more respected, and more visible. We can become more valuable; but only if we know our own values.