

January 2011

## Reappraising Leonard Rapport's "No Grandfather Clause" at Thirty

Ashby Crowder

*National Archives, College Park*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Crowder, Ashby, "Reappraising Leonard Rapport's "No Grandfather Clause" at Thirty," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 29 no. 1 (2011) .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol29/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

## Reappraising Leonard Rapport’s “No Grandfather Clause” at Thirty

Ashby Crowder\*

Identifying enduring value in records is elemental to the concept of archives. Consequently, the question of reevaluating past determinations of endurance goes to the core of archival theory. Despite the substantial professional literature on the appraisal of records, relatively few archival scholars or practitioners have analyzed how and whether archivists should revisit original appraisal decisions.<sup>1</sup> Professional organizations are only beginning to deal with the issue formally. While archivists could benefit from more professional guidance in reappraisal, the small amount of literature that does exist suggests a consensus that reappraisal, when done properly, can be a component of sound collections management.

---

\* The views presented in this article are the author’s own, and do not represent the official positions of the National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>1</sup> No monograph in English treats this question. Books on appraisal typically devote only a few sentences or paragraphs to reappraisal. See, for example, Barbara Craig, *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2004); Frank Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005); and Richard Cox, *No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004).

While the principal archival theorists of the Western world, the Englishman Sir Hilary Jenkinson and the American Theodore R. Schellenberg, held contrasting views on archival appraisal, neither directly addressed the question of reappraisal. Leonard Rappoport touched off the debate in 1981, and virtually all scholarship on reappraisal pays homage to Rappoport as the person who broke the taboo on questioning permanence and stood up for a controversial approach to collections management. For all the assumed controversy around Leonard Rappoport's recommendations in his 1981 piece entitled "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," his view that reappraisal can be necessary, ethical, and appropriate has had a remarkable staying power.<sup>2</sup> Not only have Rappoport's ideas been incorporated into mainstream archival practice in the course of three decades, but even in the wake of their articulation in the pages of *The American Archivist*, they elicited nowhere near the slew of rejection that the subsequent literature suggests. For all the supposed debate on whether reappraisal is acceptable, it appears that no archivist has published a direct, categorical rejection of reappraisal in every instance. Works on the subject are overwhelmingly supportive of reappraisal. In the late 2000s, the Society of American Archivists began the process of formally developing guidelines for reappraisal and deaccessioning. This paper argues that a consensus on reappraisal largely favorable to Rappoport has quietly emerged. It also argues that reappraisal has earned its place as one among many acceptable tools to manage modern collections.

A critical step in accepting reappraisal is recognizing that the notion of absolute archival permanence is an illusion. Permanent retention is not only impossible, but undesirable. No record can be preserved forever from

---

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Rappoport, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44:2 (1981).

the perspective of geologic time. By permanence we must mean not literal permanence but its functional equivalent or, as James O’Toole observes, preservation “into the indefinite future.” Rapport contends that records may be considered permanent at the time of appraisal but later lose their permanence. For this reason, Rapport disapproves of the concept of “permanent records” and proposes the rather clunky designation “records worthy of continued preservation” as an alternative, although he admits that permanent is a “convenient term for which no simple substitute comes to mind.” A recognition of the impossibility and undesirability of literal permanence led archivists to begin referring to “enduring value” rather than “permanent value.” William J. Jackson also points out the ambiguities inherent in the idea of permanence and observes that whatever permanent value may be, it “must be based on continuing value.” These alternatives to permanence are more accurate and also more flexible, as they imply that criteria for retention may change, which is precisely the kind of conceptual shift reappraisal advocates support.<sup>3</sup>

Writers favoring reappraisal as a collections management tool have different perspectives and experiences that influence their approaches to reappraisal. For Rapport, archivists’ unwillingness to reappraise stems from a lack of self-confidence and imagination as well as a reluctance to overturn previous appraisal decisions.<sup>4</sup> He observes that limitations on spatial, material, and personnel resources mean that archivists must consider which records they can afford to keep. Rapport argues that old accessions should be subject to the same appraisal criteria as new

---

<sup>3</sup> James O’Toole, “On the Idea of Permanence,” *American Archivist* 52:1 (1989), 11, 23; Rapport, 148-149; William J. Jackson, “The 80/20 Archives: A Study of Use and its Implications,” *Archival Issues* 22:2 (1997), 143.

<sup>4</sup> Rapport, 144-145.

accessions. He asks: “If we wouldn’t accept them today, why would we permit these records to occupy shelf space?”<sup>5</sup> Rapport maintains that public funds should not support the preservation of records that do not have sufficient retention value, and insists that research use is the primary determinant of such value. Reappraisal solves the problem of records that should not have been accessioned, records that were poorly appraised or not appraised at all, and records whose value no longer endures.<sup>6</sup>

Rapport proposes integrating a reappraisal program as a regular and systematic component of holdings management. Archivists should be required to make the case for keeping records rather than to come up with reasons they should be deaccessioned.<sup>7</sup> They should determine whether there exists a “reasonable expectation,” and not just a “conceivable expectation,” that the records in question will ever be used.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, Rapport is recommending that records be subject to a cost-benefit analysis.

Rapport, recognizing potential negative consequences of loss of information and context associated with reappraisal, offers some comforting words and proposes some safeguards. First, archivists should not fret too much over the mere act of destroying unique materials. Few unique government records are scheduled or appraised as permanent in the first place. Applying the same standards to old records that apply to new ones does not pose a problem if previous standards have been improved upon. To legitimize the deaccessioning process, a review process can be instituted so that multiple individuals or committees must authorize the new decision.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-148.

Rapport’s argument for reappraisal drew a critical response from Karen Benedict, but her “Invitation to a Bonfire” appears to be the only article in our professional literature explicitly arguing that reappraisal is a poor and dangerous choice. While Benedict recognizes that reappraisal may be necessary under certain circumstances, she cannot accept it as a routine part of archival management. She warns that regularly deaccessioning records by balancing cost against use is a shortsighted solution that may “seriously undermine an archival program.” Benedict contends that archivists must approach reappraisal with far more care than librarians. “There is no other repository,” Benedict warns, “where a copy of the same item, or even another item containing the same information, will repose.” Benedict recognizes that past appraisal decisions may not be perfect, but advises that they should be allowed to stand unless the previous appraisal criteria were “generally unsound.” She considers large-scale reappraisal acceptable only as a “crisis management technique” of last resort; even when it is necessary to make space, deaccessioned records should be microfilmed. Reappraising can also send the wrong message to resource allocators, Benedict cautions. If records can be so easily discarded, funding authorities may decide to save money by reducing archival holdings.<sup>10</sup>

Some of Benedict’s objections are thoughtful while others rest on questionable assumptions. The observation that lack of use may indicate poor reference services or inadequate finding aids should give pause to ardent reappraisers who see level of use as the sole criterion for reappraisal.<sup>11</sup> Other arguments, however, fail to convince.

---

<sup>10</sup> Karen Benedict, “Invitation to a Bonfire: Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in an Archives: A Reply to Leonard Rapport,” *American Archivist* 47:1 (1984), 44-47.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

Benedict's concept of the absolute uniqueness of archival records is flawed. For example, government documents are produced in multiple copies and different documents can in fact have the same informational content, her contention that once an individual document is destroyed the information it contains is gone forever is not always true. Context may be lost, but not necessarily unique information. Reappraisal in crisis situations—the only kind she can accept—may lead to far worse decisions than an unhurried reappraisal. As Jackson points out, reappraisal cannot be carried out in a “rational and consistent manner” if done in the midst of a crisis.”<sup>12</sup>

While Benedict was alone in publishing a written rebuke, a number of archivists have written in support of reappraisal as a legitimate archival function. Some contributions reinforce Rapport's points while others support enhanced reappraisal efforts, albeit not on Rapport's exact terms. William Jackson stresses that reappraisal initiatives form a critical component of sound archival management. His preliminary research on applying library bibliometric studies of use to archival repositories suggests that the “80/20 rule”—the finding that 80% of research use involves 20% of the collection—applies to archives as well as it does to libraries. Jackson contends that anticipated use has not been a sufficiently weighted criterion in appraisal decisions. He predicts that archivists will have serious trouble with resource allocators if they continue to spend 80% of their space, processing materials, and staff time “for no apparent purpose.” According to this view, funding authorities will not and should not support the retention of “valueless records.”<sup>13</sup>

Archivists should, Jackson argues, abandon the notion that their entire collections are permanent. Rather, they should focus on retaining records for as long as they

---

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, 141-142.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

are useful. Reappraisal decisions need not be made willy-nilly. The very bibliometric techniques that revealed the 80/20 problem can be used to trace the patterns of use of archival materials and therefore support sound reappraisal decisions.<sup>14</sup> Jackson is concerned with the practical application of reappraisal policy, and he devotes no consideration to the ethical dimension. His preoccupation with the possible objections of resource allocators once they learn of the “80/20 rule” contrasts with the lack of consideration for harming the public image when developing a reappraisal program.

Sheila Powell and Caryn Wojcik defend reappraisal but take issue with Rapport’s arguments. For Powell, reappraisal “does have a place in archival theory, but not for the reasons put forward by Leonard Rapport.” Powell considers reappraisal appropriate when an original appraisal decision is “discovered to be incorrect or incomplete” or when a newer accession is found to better document the same activities.<sup>15</sup> She bases her views on reappraisal upon her experience with immigration case files at the National Archives of Canada. Powell observes that a faulty organizational structure contributed to redundancy in the collections. At this repository, appraisers of different medium types worked separately from one another and did not realize that they were duplicating each other’s collections. A reappraisal of such records, Powell contends, should take the form of an original appraisal, once the conditions that contributed to the original flaws have been removed.<sup>16</sup> This view of reappraisal contrasts with the focus on researcher use within a defined period that characterizes Rapport’s and Jackson’s positions.

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 138-141.

<sup>15</sup> Sheila Powell, “Archival Reappraisal: The Immigration Case Files,” *Archivaria* 33 (1991/1992), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 106-107.



Wojcik discusses the usefulness of a reappraisal program for sorting through the backlog of unprocessed records at her own repository, the State Archives of Michigan. This repository had an enormous backlog of records, many of which the staff suspected to be of “marginal value.” Recognizing a potential conflict in deaccessioning records that had been made publicly available in the past, the Michigan archives chose to limit the reappraisal program to unprocessed materials.<sup>17</sup> The Michigan reappraisal project turned out to be an excellent way of deaccessioning records that should never have been transferred to the repository in the first place: the staff found that half of the deaccessioned items had already been scheduled for destruction.<sup>18</sup>

The literature on the reappraisal debate that treats the effect of a reappraisal program on the image, reputation, and public relations of an archival repository is especially useful to archivists considering reappraisal programs for their own repositories. Mark Greene holds that reluctance regarding reappraisal and deaccessioning has harmed the archival profession. Arguing against the supposed conventional wisdom, he maintains that reappraisal is an ethical exercise that should be a “normal part of standard archival administration.” Moreover, a “public and transparent” reappraisal program can even improve the reputation’s relations with donors, researchers, and resource allocators.<sup>19</sup> Greene is well qualified to comment on this topic. The University of Wyoming’s American Heritage Center, which he directs, is well known for instituting its reappraisal and deaccessioning program

---

<sup>17</sup> Caryn Wojcik, “Appraisal, Reappraisal, and Deaccessioning,” *Archival Issues* 27:2 (2002), 151-152.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Greene, “I’ve Deaccessioned and Lived to Tell About It: Confessions of an Unrepentant Reappraiser,” *Archival Issues* 30:1 (2006), 7-8.

after refocusing an ambitious collections policy. Reappraisal and deaccessioning were necessary for this repository to strengthen its holdings in the areas on which it has chosen to concentrate. Deaccessioned records were, in many cases, transferred to other repositories where they could be better cared for and of more use to researchers. This reappraisal program was, therefore, more than what Greene calls a “necessary evil.” As a repository’s mission, goals, and clientele change, collections must change for the repository to remain relevant. As Greene’s work demonstrates, records that have research value can be transferred to a better home and need not be destroyed just because they are being deaccessioned.<sup>20</sup>

Greene suggests some public relations strategies for repositories that reappraise. First, it is critical to be open about reappraisal and deaccessioning. In newsletters and public forums archivists can frame the practice and explain their decisions. If archivists are not vocal about reappraisal, critics are assured the loudest public voice. Second, archivists should contact donors or records creators to discuss reappraisal decisions. Greene himself was successful in gaining the permission of donors. His experience suggests that archivists have misjudged their constituents and stakeholders in presuming they would not understand and support reappraisal.<sup>21</sup> Third, reappraisal should proceed only after careful thought and the development of written reappraisal policies and procedures based upon institutional mission and collection development policy. Fourth, reappraisal should be carried out either for the entire collection or for “significant defined subsets.” Random reappraisal of individual collections, apart from being inefficient, makes for

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 8-12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

inconsistent reappraisal decisions, which would open the repository to well-deserved criticism.<sup>22</sup>

Other archivists have found reappraisal to have a beneficial or neutral effect on public and donor relations. The reappraisal program of congressional collections at the Minnesota Historical was intended to align the collection with the Society's mission to document congressmen not as national figures but as representatives of Minnesota and in relation to state politics. The society began applying these appraisal criteria to new collections in 1993, and only later began reappraising its holdings using the new criteria. The Society found that the former elected officials trusted the archivists' judgment to dispose of what was needed to make the collection most useful and accessible to researchers.<sup>23</sup> Richard Hass, who conducted a crisis-driven reappraisal of the holdings of the University of Cincinnati Special Collections Department, did not run into the expected wall of donor resistance. He found that half of the donors or offices of origin he contacted to discuss deaccessioning were surprised that the archives had retained the records in question.<sup>24</sup> Wojcik, whose experience at the Michigan State Archives was discussed previously, found that reappraisal provided the occasion to rebuild a damaged relationship with state agencies. Because of poor communication, outdated records schedules, and inconsistent deaccessioning practices, agencies feared that transferring records to the state archives meant they were lost forever. Part of this reappraisal program sought to build trust between archivists and records creators by revising records schedules and improving communication and

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 12-14.

<sup>23</sup> Todd Daniels-Howell, "Reappraisal Of Congressional Records at the Minnesota Historical Society: A Case Study," *Archival Issues* 23:1 (1998), 35-40.

<sup>24</sup> Richard L. Hass, "Collection Reappraisal: The Experience at the University of Cincinnati," *American Archivist* 47:1 (1984), 52.

coordination among archivists and records managers. As a result, the archives could assure that no records scheduled for transfer to the state archives would be deaccessioned.<sup>25</sup>

While reappraisal and deaccessioning are not synonyms, they are deeply intertwined. Reappraisal may lead to deaccessioning, but it may also lead to retention. Deaccessioning itself can have multiple outcomes. Records may be returned to the donor or originating body, they may be transferred to another repository, they may be sold, or they may be destroyed. In any event, archivists must consider the legal issues that arise when reappraised records are selected for deaccessioning. An archivist must confirm that nothing in the governing documents of the archives or of its parent institution prohibits deaccessioning. The archivist must also be certain that the archives has legal custody of the materials and that no restrictions placed by the donor or creator are being violated. Even when a collecting repository is not legally bound to contact the donor, it is usually wise to do so anyway. The entire deaccessioning process and the reasoning supporting it should be meticulously documented so the archives can justify its actions if they are ever questioned.<sup>26</sup>

Selling is one way of disposing of deaccessioned records. While this strategy brings some benefits, it also poses additional legal and ethical questions. Benefits to selling include the possibility of escaping from the “cycle of poverty,” although careful attention must be paid to how proceeds from sales are budgeted. Institutions considering selling deaccessioned holdings must examine the regulations to which they and their parent bodies are bound

---

<sup>25</sup> Wojcik, 153-154.

<sup>26</sup> Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt, *Navigating Legal Issues in Archives* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2008), 63-65. See also Melissa Mannon, “Deaccessioning,” *Managing Archival Collections* 4:1 (2003/2004), 1-2.

in order to ensure that such a means of disposal is permitted. Public institutions generally have much less freedom than private ones to sell their holdings. Whether public or private, a repository must be attentive to how donors and the public perceive the sale of records. Michael Doyle, who defends auctioning in certain situations as a “legitimate collection management activity,” recognizes that selling materials may have negative long-term consequences for acquisitions.<sup>27</sup> To be considered for sale, deaccessioned materials should have substantial financial but little or no research value. Ethical behavior demands that records proposed for deaccessioning because of a realignment of their repository’s collecting policy be transferred to a new home rather than sold.<sup>28</sup> Doyle observes that the online auction services that appeared in the 1990s offer archives a cost effective way to connect deaccessioned materials to prospective buyers. Since this method of sales is much better for an archives than relying on a dealer, archival sales via online auctions have grown.<sup>29</sup>

The Society of American Archivists has finally begun the process of developing reappraisal and deaccessioning guidance. In 2009 the SAA created a Deaccessioning and Reappraisal Development and Review Team to propose guidelines. The web page of this team, like the literature on reappraisal, refers to the reappraisal and deaccessioning as “controversial topics.” Yet the time has come for these topics to be addressed under the auspices of SAA for two reasons. First, archival repositories have not been furnished with resources commensurate with the volume of records they accession. Second, high profile examples of successful projects at the Minnesota Historical Society and the American Heritage

---

<sup>27</sup> Michael Doyle, “Experiments in Deaccessioning: Archives and Online Auctions,” *American Archivist* 64:2 (2001), 353-358, 361.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 353-354.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 355-357.

Center have sparked profession-wide interest in reappraisal and deaccessioning as an approach towards collections management. The SAA recognizes the need to provide practical guidelines and articulate ethical standards for deaccessioning and reappraisal.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the wider acceptance of reappraisal under the auspices of professional bodies will encourage the compilation of statistical and survey data on the practice.

Reappraisal should be understood as one among several related responses to the challenges of modern collections. Every type of repository struggles to secure staffing, space, and resources to deal with the growth in volume of holdings. Greene and Meissner propose their “More Product, Less Process” approach to archival processing with these constraints in mind. Observing that “our profession awards a higher priority to serving the perceived needs of our collections than to serving the demonstrated needs of our constituents,” they propose a light processing approach that makes needed records available more quickly.<sup>31</sup> Reappraisal, too, puts the needs of constituents ahead of the needs of records.

Despite the dearth of specific arguments against reappraisal and deaccessioning in the professional literature, we should recognize that a trend in archival thought implicitly disputes the legitimacy of reappraisal. While Luciana Duranti does not specifically warn against reappraisal, she does reject methodology driven by practice rather than by archival theory. In other words, reappraising

---

<sup>30</sup> “Deaccessioning and Reappraisal Development and Review Team,” Society of American Archivists, <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/acq-app/DeaccessioningWG.asp> (checked November 13, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” *American Archivist* 68:2 (2005), 208-211. The author thanks an anonymous reviewer for the encouragement to mention Greene and Meissner in the context of reappraisal.

simply because space has run out is not theoretically rigorous enough to be justifiable; Duranti rejects any archival decision “arrived at...on purely pragmatic grounds.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Duranti opposes the very idea of the archivist attributing value to records. This neo-Jenkinsonian perspective understands archivists’ proper role to be mere keepers of records, “to preserve them uncorrupted, that is, endowed with the integrity they had when their creators or legitimate successors set them aside for continuing preservation.”<sup>33</sup> Essentially, a rejection of reappraisal logically follows the Jenkinsonian disapproval of archival appraisal *tout court*.

Other arguments indirectly reject reappraisal. For example, Roy Turnbaugh criticizes archivists’ understanding of archival use as measured by reference services and research visits. Since advocates of reappraisal cite level of use as a reappraisal factor and a determinant of archival value, Turnbaugh’s perspective is relevant. He insists that accessioning is the primary “use” of an archives by the parent body. According to this point of view, archivists have a responsibility to preserve certain records regardless of their level research use.<sup>34</sup> Even if we accept Turnbaugh’s elegant conception of archival use, all forms of use are not equal. When repositories have access to limited resources, they must prioritize.

The literature makes clear that archivists’ approaches to reappraisal are associated with the types of repositories in which they work. As Rapport acknowledges, his own view of reappraisal is based upon his experience at the United States National Archives and Records Service

---

<sup>32</sup> Luciana Duranti, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,” *American Archivist* 57:2 (1994), 339, 343-344.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>34</sup> Roy Turnbaugh, “Archival Mission and User Studies,” *Midwestern Archivist* 11:1 (1986), 28.

and is especially applicable to public records.<sup>35</sup> A public archives, however, may have a stronger ethical and legal mandate to preserve evidence despite level of research use. Certain government archives may by law only reappraise holdings that were accessioned before the development of detailed schedules. An archivist in a collecting repository, on the other hand, can embrace reappraisal but recognize that he must deal with certain ethical and public relations issues specific to his type of repository. A private repository’s relations with wealthy individual donors of records (and of money!) are quite different from a government archives’ relations with originating offices. Deaccessioning, therefore, presents certain specific problems for each type of archives.<sup>36</sup>

Reappraisal can be placed in a logical development pattern of archival theory. Jenkinson’s preferred approach that leaves appraisal decisions to offices creating and accumulating records may have been manageable when the volume of records was low. The expansion of the state in the twentieth century, coupled with advancements in reproduction and document creation technologies, challenged Jenkinson’s impartial approach. “Can we,” Jenkinson asks,

faced with the accumulations which the War has left us and the difficulties they involve, leave any longer to change the question what Archives are to be preserved? Can we on the other hand attempt to regulate them without destroying that precious characteristic of impartiality which results, in the case of older archives, from the very fact that their preservation was settled either by pure chance or at

---

<sup>35</sup> Rapport, 144.

<sup>36</sup> F. Gerald Ham, “Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance,” *American Archivist* 47:1 (1984), 17; Turnbaugh, 28.



least by considerations which did not include the possible requirements of future Historians?<sup>37</sup>

Jenkinson expresses hope that such a method could be found, but the sheer volume of postwar records necessitated what we now know as the Schellenbergian approach of retaining only permanently valuable records.<sup>38</sup> Although Schellenberg does not discuss the reappraisal of already-accessioned records in *Modern Archives*, reappraisal carries his strain of archival theory and practice into the next era.<sup>39</sup> Reappraisal deals with a new set of practical constraints, but it also presents a way to actually improve collections through refinement rather than just reduce them with minimum damage. Gerald Ham's endorsement of reappraisal as a "creative and sophisticated act...that will permit holdings to be refined and strengthened" is particularly significant given his previous warnings that archivists should not pay too much attention to the "changing winds of historiography." For Greene, the evolution of Ham's views suggests a "larger philosophical shift within the archival profession."<sup>40</sup>

As recently as 1997 William Jackson asserted in *Archival Issues* that "the idea of culling an archives in response to relative use has not been embraced by the profession."<sup>41</sup> Although it is a bit meager, the professional literature demonstrates that a range of archivists have in fact argued in support of reappraisal. The literature has also evolved to recognize the various motives to reappraise.

---

<sup>37</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual for Archival Administration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 21.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. See also Reto Tschan, "A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on Appraisal," *American Archivist* 65:2 (2002), 177-181.

<sup>39</sup> T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

<sup>40</sup> Doylen, 351-352; Ham, "Archival Choices," 17; F. Gerald Ham "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (1975), 8.; and Greene, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Jackson, 134.

Whereas for Rapport limited space and dwindling resources were the key practical considerations, reappraisal is now considered appropriate in response to a changed repository mission. Today, reappraisal is emerging as a normal part of archival management, much as Rapport hoped it would become back in 1981. Even if the SAA abetted the silence through its failure to provide a “clear rationale for reappraisal and deaccessioning,” it has finally taken steps to create such professional guidelines.<sup>42</sup>

Virtually the entire literature on archival reappraisal since the 1980s shares a curious feature. It contains numerous statements presuming that a wall of professional opposition has stood against reappraisal, but the footnotes after such statements contain only a single citation: Karen Benedict’s “Invitation to a Bonfire.”<sup>43</sup> Either the supposed multitudes of anti-reappraisers are timid or they are not and never were numerous. Indeed, if reappraisal were such a threat, why have not more archivists made their arguments known in the professional literature? It appears, rather, that a consensus has easily emerged in the face of little opposition: Reappraisal is much more conventional and

---

<sup>42</sup> Greene, 12; Society of American Archivists, “Deaccessioning and Reappraisal Development and Review Team,” <http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/acq-app/DeaccessioningWG.asp> (checked November 13, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Powell contends that “Rapport’s position has been greeted with concern by many American archivists, who fear that reappraisal according to Rapport’s criteria would lead to the destruction of records simply because few researchers have used them.” See Powell, 104. Jackson writes that Rapport’s argument for reappraisal “challenged the profession to make the use of records a tool by which plans for appraisal, reappraisal, and what many regard as the ‘mortal sin’ of deaccessioning are accomplished.” Jackson, 133. Greene writes that “critics have argued that reappraisal is a necessary evil, necessary only in emergencies when space has literally run out in a repository.” Despite the invocation of the “many” archivists who oppose reappraisal and the plural form “critics,” these writers cite only Benedict as a voice opposing reappraisal. See Greene, 9.

reasonable a proposition than anyone thought when Rapport broke the ice in 1981. Perhaps Rapport was the first person to put in writing what many were reluctant to admit believing. This discussion of the reappraisal literature should offer comfort to those who are reluctant to embrace reappraisal because of its supposed history of controversy. Archivists supporting well-designed reappraisal programs have the better arguments on their side. Reappraisal's neo-Jenkinsonian detractors adhere to a doctrinaire theory of archives that, however intellectually interesting, is too rigid to guide the practicing archivist through real-world dilemmas.

**Ashby Crowder** is an archivist in the Office of Research Services at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. He holds an MA in history from Ohio University and an MLS from the University of Maryland. He has published in the fields of information studies and European history.