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The Coca-Cola Company Archives: Thriving Where Dilbert, Not Schellenberg, Matters

Gregory Markley

It's unlikely that many of the more than one million visitors who experience The NEW World of Coca-Cola in Atlanta every year know that a small team of archivists helped bring the museum to life. Selecting historical materials to display and verifying the accuracy of exhibits are just two of the tasks faced by Coke archivists. In a high-order challenge, the small archives team—just six people, including two from the communications/clerical staff—based at the company's corporate headquarters across from Georgia Institute of Technology is charged with guardianship of Robert W. Woodruff's image of the 123-year-old company. Woodruff, longtime chief executive of the soft drink company, insisted above all that no employee allow his company's good name to be sensationalized, trivialized, or appropriated for uses that would place Coke in a negative light. Working closely with advertising and marketing teams, Coke archivists seek to put a positive face on their company by using historical artifacts in ways that will bolster the company's profits. This article describes how Coke's archives department works and how it presents an image that would make Woodruff proud.

Woodruff's vision even today guides the Coke team. That has been true since soon after he joined the company in 1923 at age 33 and transformed the Georgia business into a global sensation.¹ Woodruff jettisoned any use of Coke that did not comport with the image he wanted for the company. In his manner, his writings, and his reluctance for personal publicity, Woodruff etched out a vision of his company as representative of the best of America, and eventually of the world. A fixture on his office desk was his personal creed: "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit."²

Woodruff's view is ingrained on Philip F. Mooney, who, although often seen on local and national television, manages to keep the focus on Coke and its history, rather than on himself. It's true that being an archivist is not normally seen as a high-profile position. But the nature of Mooney's job with a legendary corporation forces him to become one of its chief advocates. Still, he guards against his own persona superseding the product and heritage he is promoting. Even with a project as big and meaningful as *The NEW World of Coca-Cola*, Mooney did not mind who got the credit. He and his small archives team researched historical information that would describe the museum's exhibits. They also tracked down items to be displayed, whether artifacts of all shapes and sizes or valuable items from personal papers. Though Mooney had already been very involved with the creation of the original *World of Coca-Cola* at *Underground Atlanta*, which opened in 1990 and closed in 2007, he says the Coke archives department spent years, not months, laying the groundwork for the new museum. He is proud that he and his five employees played a key role in bringing the larger, more spectacular museum into existence.³

¹"Robert Woodruff (1989-1985)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp>> (accessed August 18, 2008).

²"The Personal Creed on Mr. Woodruff's Desk," Robert W. Woodruff Foundation, <http://www.woodruff.org/images/rww_quote_1.gif> (accessed August 18, 2008).

³Philip F. Mooney, interviewed by the author, September 21, 2006, The Coca-Cola Company Headquarters, One Coca-Cola Plaza, North Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia.

Visitors to The NEW World of Coca-Cola first view a film highlighting the company's many products and its global influence. The museum is adjacent to the Georgia Aquarium (opened in 2005 on land donated by The Coca-Cola Company) and within walking distance of Centennial Olympic Park (honoring the XXVI Summer Olympiad, in Atlanta). It cost \$97 million to build and doubles the size of the original facility. Business writer Leon Stafford of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* examined the plans for the upgrade and reported: "The NEW World of Coca-Cola will feature a contemporary glass-and-stainless steel architectural design on one side, dominated by a 27-foot 'frosted' replica of its famous contoured bottle encased in a 90-foot glass cylinder. A glass window will display a smaller version of the lighted, trademarked Coca-Cola swoosh featured in the current building near Underground Atlanta."⁴ There are more samples of Coke products, from water to juices to teas (the company has more than 400 brands worldwide), and more interactive displays to appeal to the computer generations. The old museum attracted on average 750,000 visitors a year; the new museum increased that by a third, to more than a million, in its first year. The space open to visitors has more than doubled, from 23,000 square feet to 60,000.⁵

Mooney has presided over the archives of The Coca-Cola Company since 1977. These archives are located in the sub-basement of the company's international headquarters. Mooney notes that this warehouse on North Avenue is home to more than 100,000 collectibles with an estimated cumulative worth in the tens of millions of dollars. The archives are not open to the public, and Mooney estimated in 2006 that as of 2001, just fifty people and two media outlets (*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Adweek*) had been granted access. Like his predecessor, Willard G. Kurtz, Jr., Mooney reviews the trove of historical documents and provides information to authors and researchers. Among the treasures at this 8,000-square-foot site are the original watercolor Coke ads by artists Norman Rockwell and N. C. Wyeth, commemorative bottles, and an extensive

⁴ Leon Stafford, "New Coke World Adds Pop," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 17, 2006.

⁵Ibid.

selection of ad catalogs.⁶ Mooney says the original advertising catalogs help company lawyers battle false claims by people who say they invented a certain advertising concept.

The Coke archives team is an example of fulfillment of two key concepts described in a 1978 book considered the “bible” in the field of business archives. Veteran business archivist Edie Hedlin’s *Business Archives: An Introduction* identifies two main reasons to establish archives: public services and services to one’s company. Private companies, she writes, should develop their own archives to store records that cannot be maintained in crowded public archives.⁷ Hedlin notes that archives can prove invaluable in marketing, writing a company history or commemorative booklet, and public relations. She does not address the issue of litigation, a reason frequently given by other business archivists for the rise of their archives. Mooney explained that the Coke archives were created in response to the need for records relating to a 1941 trademark case. Hedlin says at minimum, the archives must be staffed by a full-time archivist with a master’s degree or higher in history and archival experience and one or more additional staff members to handle routine tasks. Physical requirements include adequate space, equipment, and supplies; long-term environmental infrastructure; and facility security.⁸

Hedlin’s book still provides a firm grounding for corporate archivists, but Mooney has taken her analysis a step further in a book chapter published nineteen years after her trailblazing book. Mooney wrote that several myths and realities commonly characterize life for a business archivist. One myth is that executives and senior managers routinely use the archives to study past policies and programs so they can increase corporate productivity and achievement. He says the reality is that, “In all probability, the impetus for development of a historical collection was a single, seminal event that required historical documentation for an appropriate execution. However, when the

⁶Mooney interview.

⁷ Edie Hedlin, *Business Archives: An Introduction* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1978), 7.

⁸Ibid., 7-15.

immediate, quantifiable reason for archival support disappeared, so too did the archives.”⁹ A second myth is that companies rely on the archives to define the corporate culture and possible future directions for the company, based on past occurrences. The reality, according to Mooney, is that corporate culture is determined more by consumer trends and technological innovations than historical precedent. The archives must show themselves to be relevant to consumers’ tastes as well as a strong contributor to the company’s financial success. What happened before is only a tangential concern for management and shareholders.¹⁰

A third myth is that the number and depth of corporate archives have grown significantly since the late 1970s, when interest in the subject was so keen that Hedlin’s *Business Archives: An Introduction* was commissioned by the Society of American Archivists. Mooney argues that corporate downsizing and acquisition-driven dislocations have led to closings of many company archives. Even the widely respected collections of Sears, Roebuck and Company, United Technologies, Boeing, and International Harvester (now Navistar) have ceased to exist. Mooney asserts that “The archival community can also play an important role in helping practicing archivists better understand the realities of work life in an environment where Dilbert may be more relevant than Schellenberg.”¹¹

Yet what happened before in archival practice directs Coke archivists in their work. This repository does in many ways follow traditional archival procedures, but the principles are adapted to the unique demands and limitations of a business archives. “We arrange things in ways we can best use them,” Mooney said. “Item-level arrangement and description is inappropriate for us, we go down to the folder level. To classify each letter is just too time-consuming in light of all our other duties.”¹² Ted Ryan, Coke’s manager of collections development, is a former chair

⁹ Philip F. Mooney, “Archival Mythology and Corporate Reality: A Potential Powder Keg,” in *The Records of American Business*, James M. O’Toole, ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1997), 58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

¹² Mooney interview.

of the SAA business archives section and a Coke employee for fourteen years. Ryan divides his collections into three categories. These include internal company papers, with the archives only keeping and appraising a tiny fraction of all available Coke records; a “very strong” audiovisual component (heavy in advertising and marketing); and three-dimensional artifacts such as vending machines. “We look at how all these artifacts can be used to promote Coke,” Ryan related. “Our holdings are a hybrid. It is all mixed together: original oil paintings, archival collections, etc.” Ryan marvels at how their small archival staff can handle such a volume of materials. “But somehow we get the job done, and we never get tired of handling and assessing Coke records, advertisements, and memorabilia.”¹³

Hedlin writes that as a rule, only between 1 and 3 percent of business records have any enduring historical importance. Ryan told the author the Coke archives retains just 1 percent of the company’s global records. On arrangement and description, Hedlin prefers provenance, or keeping records in original order and allowing for the relationship of a record to others originating from the same source to be obvious by arrangement.¹⁴ Mooney and Ryan stated that The Coca-Cola Company archives are organized according to provenance, as recommended by Hedlin and most other contemporary archivists.¹⁵ Ryan reports that the Coke archives are generally closed to the public, but on rare occasions entry is granted to scholars and journalists. In 2006 Ryan denied a request from a Yale University student because the company archivists were too tied up with other projects to commit to a long-term visitor. “We were in the homestretch with *The NEW World of Coca Cola*, so we could not grant anyone access right then, because we were simply too busy preparing for the museum’s opening,” he said.¹⁶

¹³ Edward (Ted) Ryan, interviewed by the author, November 13, 2006, The Coca-Cola Company Headquarters, One Coca-Cola Plaza, North Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁴ Hedlin, *Business Archives*, 18-19.

¹⁵ Mooney interview and Ryan interview.

¹⁶ Ryan interview.

Mooney explains that as a museum for a private corporation, The NEW World of Coca-Cola does not relive the company's mistakes, real or imagined. "The new Coke museum will have a passing reference to New Coke, for example," he told the author in 2006, in reference to the company's marketing fiasco of the mid-1980s. "But we don't demonstrate every faux pas in the company's history in our displays. We take a definite point of view—people can interpret it as they want. My responsibility is to present a marketing and merchandizing success story."¹⁷ With those comments, Mooney identified a main difference between corporate archives and those in the public sector: The former seek to preserve a company's image and enhance the business's economic vitality, while the latter are public trusts and must put forward historically accurate depictions.

Mark Weiner of Yale University wrote a 1994 journal article criticizing the company's first museum. Weiner described the World of Coca-Cola as being as market-driven as Coke ads. Visitors often labeled it "the Coke museum," but Weiner called that a misnomer: "The World of Coca-Cola may contain museum-like elements, but, as company archivist Philip Mooney has noted, the institution more appropriately should be understood as an 'EPCOT experience,' a subtle combination of Disneyland and the Smithsonian. With a massive neon sign and housed in a 45,000 square foot, three-story structure—a building that reveals every bit of the fifteen million dollars it cost to construct—the World of Coca-Cola has a mission to sell as well as to educate."¹⁸

Weiner points out that controversies such as persistent claims linking The Coca-Cola Company to human-rights abuses in Guatemala, and the popular belief that Coke's name derived its early ingredient cocaine, were found nowhere on the premises of the first museum. Weiner explains that Mark Pendergrast in his 1993 book, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, determined that while Coke has not contained cocaine since the early 20th century,

¹⁷ Mooney interview.

¹⁸ Mark Weiner, "We Are What We Eat; or, Democracy, Community, and the Politics of Corporate Food Displays," *American Quarterly* 46 (June 1994): 241.

at one time it did.¹⁹ He cautions: “To deny this, to sweep this particular story under the rug of public relations—especially given that so many consumers are interested in the subject—is not only a violation of intellectual honesty but also undercuts company claims Coca-Cola is ‘owned’ by the public, for the public surely cannot own its present if it does not have full rights to its past.”²⁰ As Mooney’s statements indicate, the company makes no excuses for presenting a “happy face.” Any successful corporation would likely expect their archivists to duplicate Mooney’s approach and company museums would undoubtedly put the proverbial best foot forward to advance the company’s image and thus its financial health.

But dealing with a marketing disaster such as New Coke at a company museum requires finesse and a high degree of tact. In 1985 the company was under a fierce challenge from The Pepsi-Cola Company, which was gaining market share at what Coke executives viewed as an alarming rate. So on the eve of the company’s 100th birthday, Coke’s flavor was changed to make the soft drink taste more like its onrushing rival. The response to New Coke was overwhelmingly negative; most people hated the new sweeter, fizzier stuff. What they really seemed to detest was the audacity of the company changing a traditional drink that they thought epitomized life in America. An 80-year-old woman in a nursing home called Coke headquarters and spoke for twenty minutes with the secretary to Donald L. Keough, head of the domestic soft-drink branch. Keough secretly listened in on the other line, and got an earful. He realized from the woman’s complaints that the company had tampered not just with a type of soda, but with an American icon important to millions of people.²¹

The tens of thousands of letters the company received were mostly from angry customers. One wrote: “Dear Sir: Changing Coke is like God making the grass purple or putting toes on our

¹⁹ Ibid., 246. The book referred to is Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Definitive History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes It*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Thomas Oliver, *The Real Coke, The Real Story* (New York: Random House, 1986), 154-156.

ears or teeth on our knees”; another said, “I don’t think I would be more upset if you were to burn the flag in our front yard”; and a third wrote: “Monkeying with the recipe is akin to diddling with the U. S. Constitution.... Many of us aren’t interested in caffeine-free, NutraSweet, diet slop, fancy gimmicks or new formulas. After all these years, the original Coke practically runs through our veins.”²²

So how does the company address this marketing and public-relations tsunami in its museum and on its Web site? The answer is with surprising frankness and yet in a way that “spins” the story to make Coke’s decision-makers seem like they were not total fools. As for the first World of Coca-Cola museum, Mooney said there was “a passing reference” to the New Coke saga. The same holds true for the new museum which opened on May 24, 2007, at Pemberton Place, named in honor of druggist Dr. John S. Pemberton who invented Coca-Cola in 1886.²³ The “passing reference” to New Coke at the second museum amounts to a few panels along a long timeline in a large room detailing the company’s evolution since World War II.²⁴

On the company’s “Heritage” Web site, New Coke’s strange short life and unlamented death are given fairly accurate play. The site is maintained by a Web master who works in Mooney’s department. A section on the New Coke episode (“The Real Story of New Coke”) acknowledges that consumer desire for Coke and sodas in general was declining in 1985, that the company took a giant risk changing the formula popular since 1886, and that the risk ended up “spawning consumer angst the likes of which no business has ever seen.” But the section argues that the episode had a silver lining because it signaled to the public and especially the stockholders that Coke executives would be bold in attempting to increase economic value for them. The Web site notes that at a 1995 New Coke commemorative employee meeting CEO Roberto Goizueta said he wanted his employees to recognize that “taking intelligent risks” as he and his cohorts did with New

²² *Ibid.*, 156.

²³ The Coca-Cola Company, “The NEW World of Coca-Cola,” <http://www.the-coca-colacompany.com/presscenter/presskit_nwocc.html> (accessed August 18, 2008).

²⁴ Mooney interview.

Coke was essential for moving the company forward.²⁵ Whether reconfiguring a soda that was viewed by many as an American icon comparable to apple pie and baseball was an “intelligent risk” remains a debatable question.

The most encouraging aspect from a truth-seeking standpoint is that the “Heritage” Web site maintained by the archives department has a link where people can insert “New Coke Stories.”²⁶ This reminds us that the New Coke episode, whether one supported the new formula or not, was a common experience that all Americans shared in the mid-1980s. Allowing Web site visitors to defend New Coke (the minority view) or vent their anger (though after twenty years the anger has subsided) is brilliant marketing. Most contributors just sweetly recount how their life was affected by the soda’s change, and this may lead them to think better of The Coca-Cola Company. Taking a contrary view to Mooney, but echoing Weiner, Constance L. Hays in her 2004 book *The Real Thing: Truth and Power at the Coca-Cola Company* criticizes Coke for hiding its blemishes behind flashy interactive displays and glitzy bottle-filling machines. “The World of Coca-Cola makes no mention of the past or present ingredients in Coca-Cola. There is no mention of the clashes with bottlers, of the lawsuits filed by Coke’s most intimate partners when they felt the partnership being torn out of their hands. It transmits only the story that the company wanted the world to know.”²⁷

Hays has a right to be concerned about The Coca-Cola Company not being forthcoming of its purportedly ugly side, managerial arrogance, and possible negative health impacts. Still, a company museum is not designed to tell a story in the objective way a newspaper should. Instead, it is a mouthpiece of the corporation no less than a press release or company brochure. With regard to the limits of corporate museums like Coke’s: Mistakes and controversies surrounding companies are

²⁵ The Coca-Cola Company, “The Real Story of Coca-Cola,” <http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore_newcoke_include.html> (accessed November 23, 2006).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Constance L. Hays, *The Real Thing: Truth and Power at The Coca-Cola Company* (New York: Random House, 2004), 173.

finessed or go unmentioned as companies recoil from wounding themselves. Thus, Coke puts the best possible face on the New Coke disaster, offers no references to the idea that cocaine was once an ingredient in Coke, and promotes globalization without regard to human rights violations.

Companies like Coke with archives in 2008 can thank Firestone Tire and Rubber Company for leading the way. In 1943 Firestone became the first company in the United States to hire an archivist and establish an in-depth archives program. Firestone executives had decided important records needed to be protected and preserved. William D. Overman, state archivist at the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, was named the first corporate archivist. After Firestone founded its corporate archives, just six companies organized archives during the rest of the 1940s. David R. Smith, founder in 1970 of the Walt Disney Archives, said business archives reemerged in the 1970s because many corporations were celebrating major anniversaries and needed archival records, papers, and artifacts. "The nostalgia craze made instant antiques and 'collectibles' out of the relatively recent products of many of our companies," Smith stated. "Universities were turning out large numbers of history graduates who, finding jobs scarce in the field of education, helped convince some businesses that they could be useful in an archives program."²⁸

Elizabeth Adkins, in her 2003 booklet *A History of the Ford Motor Company Archives*, suggests that other companies may actually have beaten Firestone for the title of first business archives. She found that several insurance and financial-service companies had established archives departments a year or two before Firestone. The forerunner of CIGNA Corporation, INA, set up an archives section in 1942, though the company did not hire a professional archivist for twenty-three years. That archivist earned a place at the insurance/financial services firm after the corporate secretary saw the need for help in preparing for the

²⁸ David R. Smith, "An Historical Look at Business Archives," *American Archivist* 45 (Summer 1982): 130.

company's 150th anniversary.²⁹ Procter and Gamble launched its archives in 1957, but the first archivist with specialized training did not start at the consumer-goods company until 1980. In 1987 an archives program was implemented at Cargill Corporation, an agricultural and pharmaceutical company in Minnesota, but the first professional archivist did not come on board until 2000.³⁰

The 1970s were a good time for business archives to start. Reasons included the U. S. Bicentennial in 1976, which helped make history fashionable again; many companies faced upcoming major anniversaries and needed to produce corporate histories; and the onslaught of civil lawsuits demanded that company lawyers have easy access to historical files to bolster their cases. The 1970s saw sixteen major companies start archives. Among these were Smith's new employer, Walt Disney Productions (1970), Nationwide Insurance (1974), Wells Fargo Bank and Chase Manhattan Bank (both 1975), *The Los Angeles Times* (1978), and the New York Stock Exchange (1979). In all, thirty-four companies initiated archives between Firestone's establishment of its archives in 1943 and the end of the 1970s.³¹ The Coke archives were in existence only on an ad hoc basis until Mooney was installed as the first full-time professional archivist in 1977.

Another major company on par with Coke that established its archives based on an anniversary was the Ford Motor Company. The impetus was the celebration of fifty years of the Michigan automaker in 1953. Within ten years, the Ford archives were being hurt by a negative economic climate. At that point, most of the Ford Industrial Archives' holdings were donated to a nonprofit educational institution, the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village. Remaining holdings stayed at the company headquarters. For more than thirty years, the Ford archives kept a low profile both internally and externally; it had but one employee. As Adkins, Ford's director of Global Information Management, wrote in her company history: "Until 1995, no

²⁹ Elizabeth W. Adkins, *A History of the Ford Motor Company Archives, with Reflections on Archival Documentation of Ford of Europe's History* (Dearborn, Mich.: Ford Motor Company, 2003), 34-35.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹ Smith, "An Historical Look at Business Archives," 127-133.

one took much notice. But the upcoming Ford Centennial—yet another anniversary!—inspired both the executives and the Ford family to revive the archives and enable the historical record to be completed.”³²

In a book chapter, Nancy M. Merz offers a case study of how the archives at Texas Instruments (TI) were established in 1993. Merz, a former TI archivist, recalls that the company began as an oil-exploration company, Geophysical Services, Inc. (GSI). When it began to branch out into integrated circuits and developed innovations such as the first electronic handheld calculator, a need was recognized for an in-depth history. New employees could then better understand their business; institutional memory that was being lost as older employees retired, resigned or died could be captured.³³ Echoing aspects of Hedlin’s booklet from fifteen years before, Merz said an early concern for Texas Instruments was staffing (the average is two archivists and one clerk). Other concerns were placement within the larger company (TI archivists fall under the Corporate Communications and Marketing Group) and the need for a mission statement, which was generated and distributed to all departments so personnel knew the goals and services of the archives. Like the staff at Coke’s archives today, the TI archivists assist corporate staff in providing information for speeches, presentations, litigation support, and public-relations purposes, and for analyses of past events and programs.³⁴

Wilbur G. Kurtz, Jr., a Coke employee who spent a portion of his work day supervising the archives, was known for his encyclopedic knowledge of all things Coke and his steadfast promotion of the company’s image. He served as a bridge between collectors and the company and at The Cola Clan’s Third Annual Convention in Huntsville, Alabama in August 1977 he was given a special gift and honor. Kurtz was presented with a straight-sided bottle reproduction that was limited to only a thousand copies.

³² Adkins, *A History of the Ford Motor Company Archives*, 1.

³³ Nancy M. Merz, “Starting an Archives: Texas Instruments as a Case Study,” in *Corporate Archives and History: Making the Past Work*, Arnita A. Jones and Philip L. Cantelon, eds. (Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993), 21-25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

An inscription on the diamond-shaped label paid tribute to his thirty-six years of service. An enthusiastic collector from Coke's hometown, Margaret Almond, remarked that "Mr. Kurtz is so dear. We just think the world of him."³⁵

Mooney, who succeeded Kurtz in the archival role in 1977, notes that one individual or another has been tasked to study the corporation's history since the 1940s. This early unofficial archives was absorbed within the public-relations department in 1969, and from there Kurtz built the resources to establish the separate entity that exists today.³⁶ One instance where Kurtz's contributions are clearly seen is in a letter Hugh Waters of Orlando, Florida, wrote to Robert W. Woodruff in May 1974. Waters suggested that The Coca-Cola Company restore the original drugstore where the drink was invented. Kurtz responded for his boss, "According to historical record, Coca-Cola was originated in 1886, a few years before Mr. Woodruff was born, by Dr. John S. Pemberton in his residence at 107 Marietta Street...not in a drugstore. This was accomplished by the constant blending of certain ingredients in a brass or iron kettle stirred with a boat oar. The record further shows that it was at Jacobs' Pharmacy, at the corner of Peachtree and Marietta Streets in Atlanta, that Coca-Cola was first served as a soda fountain drink."³⁷

Thus Kurtz showed that he was actively engaged in historical research, among his many duties. His efforts earned praise: Waters told Kurtz he had just read *The Big Drink: The Story of Coca-Cola* by E. J. Kahn, Jr., "who said he couldn't have written it without your [Kurtz's] help."³⁸ Kurtz was a pioneer at reviewing the maze of documents in the archives and providing information to authors. Mooney, Ryan, and four other Coke staffers operate the same way today.

³⁵ Pat Watters, *Coca-Cola: An Illustrated History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978), 287.

³⁶ Mooney interview.

³⁷ Hugh Waters to Robert Winship Woodruff, May 10, 1974, Robert W. Woodruff Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

³⁸ *Ibid.* The book referred to is: E.J. Kahn, Jr., *The Big Drink: The Story of Coca-Cola* (New York: M. Reinhardt, 1959).

According to Bruce H. Bruemmer, an archivist with wide experience in both business and public sector archives, the main difference between these two kinds of institutions centers on the working environment. “Business archives are the only archival institutions that are in a competitive environment (the corporate desire to outsource), and an environment that is generally hostile (more so than government or academic archives),” Bruemmer wrote in a message to the author.³⁹ Bruemmer is the director of the Corporate Archives at Cargill, Inc., an international provider of food, agricultural and risk management products, and services based in Minneapolis.

Corporations have a small patron base and so interest in what the archives do is minimal, he reflected in a speech at SAA’s annual meeting in Washington, D.C., in 2006. “At Cargill, I got the feeling (to steal a line from the late comedian George Gobel) that the world was a tuxedo and I was a pair of brown shoes. As I became more familiar with the work of other archival kindred spirits in different companies, I realized this angst was not mine alone.”⁴⁰ He noted that Mooney of The Coca-Cola Company has written that success comes only to corporate archivists who are “aggressive self-promoters, seeking every opportunity to sell the use of the archival record for business enhancement.”⁴¹

Bruemmer argued that business archivists face a high risk because, “To paraphrase Calvin Coolidge, the chief business of American corporate archives is business. Ultimately, corporate archives are responsible to the shareholders, and the primary interest of shareholders is to increase their investment. A corporate archive can justify its existence from a number of perspectives, but its survivability is much more assured if it can contribute to the bottom line.”⁴²

³⁹ Bruce H. Bruemmer, email message to the author, November 19, 2006.

⁴⁰ Bruce H. Bruemmer, “Brown Shoes in a World of Tuxedos: Corporate Archives and the Archival Profession,” presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists held in Washington, District of Columbia, July 31-August 5, 2006.

⁴¹ Mooney, “Archival Mythology and Corporate Reality,” 62.

⁴² Bruemmer, “Brown Shoes in a World of Tuxedos,” 4.

Bruemmer said a key quality that successful business archives share relates to brand. Mooney once commented that the Coke archives are highly valued because they contribute to a multi-million-dollar legacy brand. Bruemmer elaborates: "Where the brand is king, you have companies that understand the reason to spend money to preserve that brand. I'm a bit jealous of my colleagues at Coke, Kraft, P&G, and McDonalds because they have a natural advantage over a company like Cargill which is not generally a consumer brand company."⁴³ Culture is yet another quality that helps determine whether a business archives prospers. Bruemmer touches upon one of Nancy Merz's themes in her chapter on Texas Instruments' archives: some companies attach more value to their heritage, and this is especially true of companies which still have family members heavily involved. The problem is that interest can disappear almost instantly, according to Bruemmer. "H. B. Fuller had a wonderful archive in the Twin Cities, but when a key family board member went off the board, the archives tanked."⁴⁴

An additional quality that successful business archives require is having an archivist with a winning personality. The more engaging and skilled in interpersonal relations the chief archivist, the more likely the archives will be respected, well-funded and staffed, and utilized. Bruemmer sees Mooney as the archetype. "At a workshop Phil distilled his success to one issue: everything you do is marketing," the Cargill archivist said. "Your participation in committees, your dress, your interaction with other company officials, etc. As long as he has been at the Coke job he still is looking for opportunities for the archives."⁴⁵ In 2000 Timothy L. Ericson, then archives program director at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, drafted an award citation for Mooney when he was named a fellow of the SAA.⁴⁶ Ericson identified a key ingredient of Mooney's success as his personality:

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁶ The Society of American Archivists, "SAA Names New Fellows," <<http://www.archivists.org/recognition/denver2000-fellows.asp>> (accessed September 5, 2006).

“I think that anyone who is affable and approachable is ahead of the game in acting as a spokesman for his or her organization and [will] be a successful PR representative. These traits are, I think, a part of being a skilled archivist because promoting one’s program and the value of archival records is necessary to the survival of the program.”⁴⁷

Bruemmer said Coke leads among corporate archives because four essential qualities (profit and loss as well as the just-mentioned relation to brand, culture, and the personality of the archivist) are aligned in such a way that they positively impact the archives department. He wonders: “Why does Pepsi, with the same legacy brand needs, not have a professional archivist? I’ll bet it has to do with culture, personality, and perhaps profit.”⁴⁸

One critical aspect of Mooney’s job is evaluating articles for historical accuracy in media coverage of the company. An example is his memo to Joseph W. Jones, Robert W. Woodruff’s executive secretary, dated July 17, 1984, regarding an article written by Hugh Best that was slated to be published in a special issue of *Debrett’s Peerage on the American Aristocracy*. Mooney caught several errors in the article, including the claim that Coca-Cola creator Dr. John S. Pemberton invented the Botanic Blood Balm (it was developed by Candler family members) and that Asa Candler’s purchase of Pemberton’s interests in Coke has been estimated at \$2,000 rather than the more accurate \$2,300 as stated in Best’s first draft.⁴⁹

Philip Mooney’s long career at The Coca-Cola Company began in 1977 after Willard Kurtz retired. He came south as a thirty-two year-old archivist from upstate New York and became the company’s first full-time archivist. Mooney has carved out a national reputation for himself while making Coke’s repository a model of how a corporate archive should operate. He bridges the gap between making the archives department relevant to Coke’s profitability and supporting external clients such as scholars and journalists. He has developed enduring relationships with

⁴⁷ Timothy L. Ericson, email message to the author, November 14, 2006.

⁴⁸ Bruemmer email.

⁴⁹ Phil Mooney to Joseph W. Jones, July 17, 1984, Woodruff Papers.

the public relations, marketing, and legal departments of the company.

Upon receiving his Master of Arts degree in history from Syracuse University in the mid-1970s, Mooney was undecided as to whether he wanted to continue on for a Ph.D. in history. He heard of a job opening at the university library's Rare Book and Manuscript Division, applied, and was hired. He quickly learned the fundamentals of archival management and found he enjoyed applying his historical-research background to archival operations. His next job was with the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies in Philadelphia and from there he moved to Atlanta.⁵⁰ Mooney has kept active in the archival fraternity, publishing frequently in books and academic journals, teaching workshops on business archives for the SAA, and participating since 1998 as one of the select members of the Corporate Archives Forum. He has been a member of The Academy of Certified Archivists since it was established in 1989 and served as a regent for outreach from 1998 to 2002. For Coke he has conducted scores of television and radio interviews, including three segments on *The Today Show*, and has appeared on The History Channel, the Food Network, and CNN.⁵¹

In an American Historical Association career guide, Mooney explained why his corporation developed its own archives. "At Coca-Cola, the need for documentation in a 1941 trademark case underscored the need for the formal maintenance of a historical collection," he said.⁵² Mooney oversees three professional archivists, a communications manager responsible for the company Web site's extensive heritage section, and an administrative assistant. (This employee strength is roughly equivalent to that of industry giant Ford Motor Company. That archives grew from four people in 1997 to seven in 2007. However,

⁵⁰ American Historical Association, "Careers for Students of History: Profile of Philip F. Mooney," <<http://www.historians.org/pubs/careers/mooney/htm>> (accessed August 27, 2006).

⁵¹ The Society of American Archivists, "Meet Your Instructor: Philip F. Mooney," <<http://www.archivists.org/prof-education/instructor-bios/mooney.asp>> (accessed September 9, 2006).

⁵² "Careers for Students of History."

at the height of a major research project of Ford's role in World War II in Germany, the archives had fifteen employees.⁵³)

Funding for his department varies by year, Mooney said. "One year can be good, another year tough; funding depends on how your business is going," he reflected. "You constantly have to justify and provide a reason for your existence."⁵⁴ Mooney reports directly to the senior vice president of global communications, who is a member of the executive committee of the company. Similarly, at Ford Motor Company the archives (and the rest of Global Information Management including Records Management) reports to Corporate Services. The latter group has adopted an enterprise-wide approach to provide a range of services while keeping an eye on resources so the company can best benefit. Also, the automaker's archives interact well with the Department of Public Affairs, its chief internal customer.⁵⁵ Similarly, the Coke archives are well respected among employees of all departments.

At Ford Motor Company Archives, Elizabeth Adkins, like Mooney at Coke, has turned the archives into a multi-use center of historical and statistical information. The Office of the General Counsel turns to the archives for assistance in developing Ford's responses to litigation and regulatory issues. The staff at the Ford Archives conducts research to help Product Development understand and insert elements of classic design into new vehicles with long historical legacies (such as luxury car Thunderbird and sportscar Mustang). Adkins, a past president of the SAA, has turned the Ford Archives into an example of how diversification of functions can dramatically increase an archives' worth inside and outside the company and thus its chances of survival. In the official history of the Ford Archives, she points out the importance of documenting and reporting on the services the unit provides to a wide spectrum of users. "The Archives has been able to show that the business value of its services continues well beyond the current celebratory year and is, in fact, timeless."⁵⁶ That durability can be said of the Coke archives, as well.

⁵³ Adkins, *A History of the Ford Motor Company Archives*, 33.

⁵⁴ Mooney interview.

⁵⁵ Adkins, *A History of the Ford Motor Company Archives*, 33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

According to Bruemmer, Cargill's chief archivist, many business archivists spend more time providing "historical services" than handling traditional archival functions like arrangement and description. At one corporation, "almost nobody" from the internal clientele does research at the archives. "It is more of a corporate library environment, where the key is to provide analysis, not just raw research," reported the minutes of the Ninth Annual Corporate Archives Forum (CAF), held in New York City in 2006. The archive referred to at the CAF meeting also conducts many tours, averaging 350-600 people each month. Archivists there have adopted a pro-active approach, promoting and publicizing their services. A second corporate archive was given one year to illustrate its value as an information source worthy of continued funding. According to CAF's 2006 meeting notes, "The archives has to educate new managers and push services to regional operations. They provide private tours and prepare client gifts with an historical theme. They also are developing a traveling exhibit for trade shows."⁵⁷

Assisting the company's lawyers is a significant part of Mooney's job. He also educates managers in the company's history, and about its many brands. Mooney told *AdWeek* that when many people learn about the nostalgia-buff's dream of a job he has, they are envious. "They say, 'What a fun job that would be.' And it is a fun job. But the part that people don't realize is that there's a discipline to it. There's a lot of work involved in doing quality research."⁵⁸ Mooney recognizes that such dedicated effort results in a happier client base and a greater likelihood his archives will not be placed on the chopping block when economic times are rough.

Mooney and the rest of the Coke archives department keep foremost in mind Robert W. Woodruff's instructions of long ago: The product is number one. Just as Woodruff once refused to allow a photo to be distributed of a horse drinking Coca-Cola, so he refused to allow an image of himself on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1950. His longstanding executive secretary Joseph

⁵⁷ Meeting notes, final, for the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Corporate Archives Forum, New York, N.Y., May, 10-12, 2006.

⁵⁸ Kathleen Sampey, "Seldom-Seen Archives Contain a Trove of Vintage Advertising," *Adweek Midwest Edition* 42, no. 26 (June 25, 2001): 18.

W. Jones recalled him saying, “The story’s about the company. It ain’t about me.” The resulting cover was the first in *Time’s* history to feature a product rather than a person.⁵⁹ Mooney and his team have strong corporate support because they are adept at tying in the archives to the company’s profitability. Mooney succeeds because he takes the advice he offered in *The Records of American Business*. There he argued that business archives must be “aggressive self-promoters, seeking every opportunity to sell the use of the archival record for business enhancement.”⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ Frederick Allen, “Mr. Coke, Robert Woodruff: His Power Is Subtle, His Power Is Coke,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, April 16, 1977, 1. The story of the Coke-drinking horse can be found in Samuel F. B. Morse to Robert W. Woodruff, June 3, 1963, Woodruff Papers.

⁶⁰ Mooney, “Archival Mythology and Corporate Reality” in *The Records of American Business*, James M. O’Toole ed., (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1997), 62.