

# Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists

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## Provenance XVI

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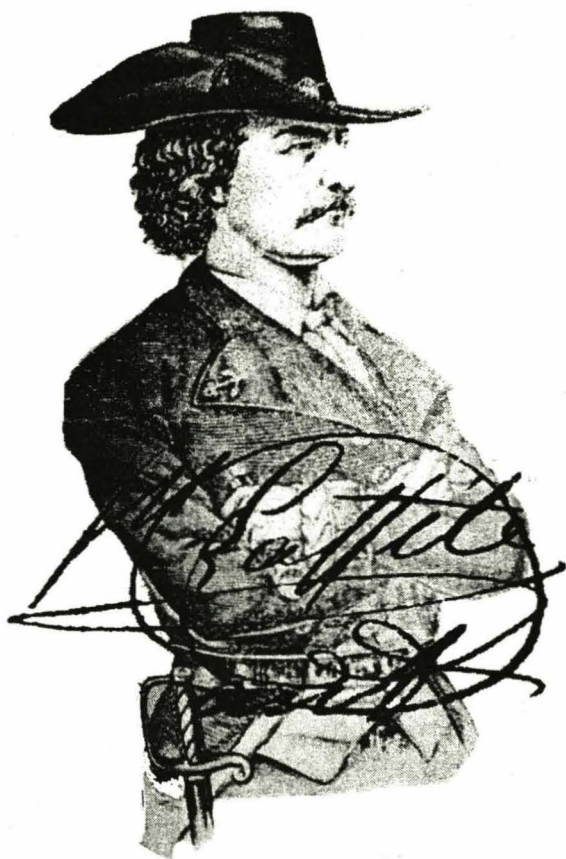
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# PROVENANCE

volume XVI, 1998



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## **Cruising Contractual Waters: Searching for Laffite in the Records of the New Orleans Notarial Archives**

**Sally K. Reeves**

The pirate Jean Laffite is a well known but elusive figure about whom much has been written and much is still unresolved.<sup>1</sup> Laffite studies are especially dynamic today because of the appearance in 1948 of an internally credible but controversial French-language manuscript that purports to be the pirate's own journal.<sup>2</sup> Written largely in Missouri from 1845 to 1850 and recently issued in reprint, the journal

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<sup>1</sup> Nearly sixty years ago Louisiana writer Lyle Saxon penned a biography of the subject that he considered definitive. Since then, however, at least eleven other book-length Laffite biographies or histories and numerous articles have appeared in print, all claiming the last word on the subject. Lyle Saxon, *Laffite The Pirate* (New York: The Century Company, 1930); see also Jane Lucas de Grummond, *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, LA.: LSU Press, 1961). Jack C. Ramsay's *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1996) contains a fairly up-to-date bibliography of sources on Laffite and other pirates and privateers in books, articles, and manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup> For a history of the journal, see page 23 for the following article, "The Journal of Jean Laffite: Its History and Controversy" by Robert L. Schaadt in this issue of *Provenance*.

contradicts previously accepted evidence that both Jean Laffite and his brother Pierre died in action and were buried in the Yucatan during the 1820s. It paints them instead as living until the 1840s and dying as prosperous middle-class citizens with traceable posterity. Today the chief historiographical question about Laffite and his followers is whether the Journal of Jean Laffite is authentic.<sup>3</sup>

While studies of America's nineteenth-century buccaneering era and of Laffite in particular have used a variety of sources<sup>4</sup> only one has drawn on the resources of the notarial system in New Orleans to widen the scope of information about the man.<sup>5</sup> Laffite-related records of the Notarial Archives in New Orleans, Louisiana, should be useful in shedding new light on the privateering era as well as on the Laffite journal. The frequency of documents in the collection purportedly signed by either Jean Laffite or his brother Pierre allows for an evaluation of the documents' authenticity and

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<sup>3</sup> Since 1980 the journal has been in the collection of the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas. In 1958 the manuscript's owner had it translated and published as *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story* (New York: Vantage Press, 1958). That translation has recently been reprinted by Dogwood Press, (Woodville, TX, 1994), contributing to ever-widening interest in "the true story" of the famous pirate. The availability of the journal text has also helped to spawn the formation of at least two Laffite research societies, The Laffite Study Group and The Laffite Society, both of which have published periodicals.

<sup>4</sup> Noteworthy among them are Louisiana's early U.S. District Court cases, which reside in the Ft. Worth (Texas) Regional Office of the National Archives, and published eye-witness accounts such as Vincent Nolte's *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres* or Arsène Lacarrière Latour's *Historical Memoir of the War of 1812*.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Clisby Arthur, *Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover* (New Orleans: Harmanson, 1962). Even Arthur's use of the Notarial Archives was rather cursory.



of the journal's legitimacy by diplomatics, the science of "critically examining written acts for the purpose of testing their authenticity or sincerity."<sup>6</sup>

This article will serve to report the existence of the collection's many Laffite-related documents and will attempt through the methodology of diplomatics to test their relevance to Laffite and their presumption of accuracy. It will serve also to evaluate the Laffite journal to a small extent in light of their contents. As a preliminary, it will characterize civil law notarial records for archivists unfamiliar with them, ultimately using questions about the Laffite journal to illustrate a way to analyze their types, genesis, and form.

#### *Civil Law Notarial Records*

The Notarial Archives in New Orleans, Louisiana, where both Jean Laffite and his brother Pierre lived at various times in their lives, holds some forty million pages of private-sector legal acts compiled by local notaries over three centuries.<sup>7</sup> The Louisiana notarial system, unique to America, relates closely to those of European and Latin American countries that share the state's heritage of civil law. Until 1970 the notarial system placed the notary at the heart of property and family law, and then required that he [or she] function as an archivist, preserving the original manuscripts that he drew up. Because of this background, New Orleans notaries have either created or preserved nearly every property transaction and a large part of the family transactions that have occurred in the city since its founding in 1718.

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<sup>6</sup> Olivier Guyotjannin, "The Expansion of Diplomatics as a Discipline," *American Archivist* 59 (winter 1996): 415.

<sup>7</sup> A notary in Louisiana is a semi-public official commissioned by the governor of the state to receive authentic acts.

Most notarial acts deal with sales or mortgages of immovables in Orleans and surrounding parishes.<sup>8</sup> Notaries also receive wills, marriage contracts, building contracts, powers of attorney, and private declarations. They conduct estate inventories, family meetings, and meetings of creditors. They record acts of partnership, corporate charters, maritime bonds, and marine or ship captains' protests; and before the Civil War, they documented slave sales and emancipations.

Civil law notarial records carry a presumption of authenticity owing to the notary's place in society as the draftsman, guarantor, and finally archivist of private-sector legal acts. Complete civil law notarial acts are always located, dated, witnessed, and signed with the original signatures of the contracting parties, witnesses, and notary. Those signatures furnish proof that the agreement or declaration described in the document actually occurred, to the extent of what the notary actually witnessed. Louisiana law and jurisprudence have repeatedly confirmed the principle that a properly completed, witnessed, and signed notarial act is presumed to be "authentic," that is, proof or legal evidence [in court, if need be] of its own contents.<sup>9</sup>

A subtle feature of the warrant of authenticity is the act's continuous maintenance in bound, indexed form and its uninterrupted public availability. Until 1970 notaries in New Orleans retained the original documents they had executed and had them bound in chronological order in an indexed volume. Louisiana law required that their archives should be available to the public in a secure office during regular

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<sup>8</sup> Louisiana's civil parishes are equivalent to the counties of other states. Orleans Parish is coterminous with the City of New Orleans.

<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the law exacts that an act may fail for seemingly small omissions. For example in *Succ. Volmer*, 40 *Louisiana Annual Reports* 593, the Louisiana Supreme Court declared a will void for having omitted an express statement of the residency of the witnesses, although they signed it.



business hours.<sup>10</sup> During the state's colonial and antebellum periods,<sup>11</sup> the notary bequeathed these records to a chosen successor in office when he died or retired, and that successor preserved the archives of his predecessors in addition to his own acts. After 1867 state law required that the finished works of Orleans Parish notaries be surrendered to the Notarial Archives, created by the state legislature that year to gather and make available the records of colonial and antebellum notaries. In 1970 the archives also assumed the function of collating and binding individual, newly passed acts rather than receiving the completed works of a lifetime after a notary died or retired. Notarial acts in New Orleans have thus been subject to uninterrupted public scrutiny during regular hours from the moment of their creation until this day.

If the system carries certain assurances of authenticity, individual acts may still deviate from the norm. Evaluating Laffite evidence in the notarial collection, therefore, requires an analysis of individual documents for convincing relevance to the Laffites, and their subsequent examination for the possibility of fraud or inconsistency. To address the questions of the journal's authenticity, one must compare those acts found relevant to some of the information represented in the journal, noting always that a complete comparison would require a book-length work and is beyond the scope of this article.

### *Laffite-related Documents*

No comprehensive index to the Notarial Archives exists. At the time the Laffites were most active in the New Orleans

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<sup>10</sup> See *State ex rel. Henry L. Garland Jr., Custodian v. Chas. J. Theard*, 45 *Louisiana Annual Reports* 680.

<sup>11</sup> That is, from 1700 to 1803 and from 1803 to 1861.

area (1803–1816), however, only six major notarial *études* or offices were functioning there, thus limiting the number of volumes to be searched. Like all notarial volumes prior to 1970, each of these early volumes has an index identifying party names, act types, and the position of each act in the book. About seventy acts involving Pierre or Jean Laffite can be located using these indices, as can a number of documents involving other important privateers such as Renato Beluche. Their appearances occur most regularly in two main act types: the slave sale, and the sea captain's protest.

The *slave sale* in its time was for legal purposes an alienation or change of ownership of an immovable property. Like all notarial acts, it includes the notary's authority, gives the place and date of the transaction, identifies buyers, sellers and the consideration, and ends with a reading and the original signatures of the contracting parties, the witnesses, and the notary. Slave sales also generally supply the individual's name, age, and color or ethnicity, and may provide the place of origin or skills. Notarized sales also customarily identified the seller's acquisition of the item sold. The *acquisition*, a discreet part of a sale or mortgage, is usually a citation to an earlier act and notary.<sup>12</sup> The Notarial Archives is replete with slave-related records, some fifty thousand or so transactions up to the 1860s, a challenging if dubious distinction.

If the Laffites' notarized slave sales were an outgrowth of their salient plundering and slave smuggling activities, many *sea captains' protests* of the period arose from similar activities. The marine protest, discussed at greater length later, is a first-person declaration before a notary by the

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<sup>12</sup> The acquisition could be by act under private signature, which the French called the *sous seing privée*. Louisiana Civil Code Article 2442 also required that actual delivery be made in a sale of an immovable to have effect against third parties, yielding a clause in most slave sales that the individual was already in the possession of the buyer at the time of the act.



master of a vessel in the port he reached following trouble on the waters. Orleans protests of the early nineteenth century were usually weather-related, but some resulted from privateering activities in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, or from the federal government's attempts on behalf of maritime commerce to suppress privateering. Both sides of the exchange ultimately yielded documentation that found its way to the notary's office in New Orleans.

Most of the Laffite slave sales are signed by Pierre Laffite, Jean's younger brother. Pierre evidently conducted business in New Orleans while Jean remained in partial seclusion south of the city. In addition to selling slaves in a predictable pattern, the Laffites took part in a small variety of other acts such as obligations, procurations or powers of attorney, and an occasional declaration.<sup>13</sup> They rarely needed to borrow money (a common activity in the society at large), but did so once in 1803, and another time in November 1812, right after a well-known incident in which the brothers were arrested, confined in the Cabildo, and released on bail only to skip New Orleans. In two other cases, Pierre appointed powers of attorney to represent him in making various claims out of the city.<sup>14</sup>

The archives also holds a curious document dated 21 April 1806 and signed "Pierre Laffite." In this act the notary stated that Laffite, whom he described as a native of Pouillac in France and a resident of New Orleans, had appeared before him to make a statement at the request of another man, Pierre Galletin. According to the appearer, someone named Mr. Gabauriau, who was a native of Gornac Sur Garone en Revange in France, had been massacred in the revolt that

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<sup>13</sup> P. Pedesclaux, N.P., 20 July 1803; N. Broutin, N.P., 30 November 1812, New Orleans Notarial Archives (hereafter cited as NONA).

<sup>14</sup> P. Pedesclaux, N.P., 21 May 1806; J. Lynd, N.P., 18 July 1815, NONA.

took place at Cap Français, Isle St. Domingue, on Place St. Pierre. This occurred in his presence, he said, and in the presence of Mr. Bernard Narieu, who in 1806 was in France. The statement was made "for what it was worth and to whom it may concern."<sup>15</sup>

This odd document is puzzling and contradicts the Laffite journal claim that the Laffites were born on the island of St. Domingue. On the other hand, Pierre's declaration may have been part of a scheme to establish French citizenship. If so, it would be consistent with a Laffite journal entry of the same period in which Jean Laffite claims that he had once given "Bordeaux, 1780" as his birthplace and date to the French consul in New Orleans in order to get three vessels authorized [for trade].<sup>16</sup> Still, the strange declaration imputed to Pierre in 1806 remained unsigned, leaving inconclusive evidence and a suspect piece of paper that future research may explain.

In contrast, the slave sales by Pierre Laffite all contain signatures and follow a consistent pattern. The signatures are quite legible and are themselves consistent, although they evolve in format. Pierre signed his acts "Pierre Laffite" (see figures 1-3, pages 9-10) from the earliest in 1803, until 21 March 1811, when he began to sign "Per Laffite" (see figure 4, page 10), the form that persisted until the last noted appearance by this figure before a New Orleans notary on 14 December 1816 (see figure 5, page 11). His appearances were irregular but repeated—about ten per year in 1810 and 1811, when he was actively negotiating. He disappears from the records for up to two years at a time, only to resurface later.

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<sup>15</sup> P. Pedesclaux, N.P., 1 April 1806, NONA.

<sup>16</sup> *Journal of Jean Laffite*, (1994 printing), 39.

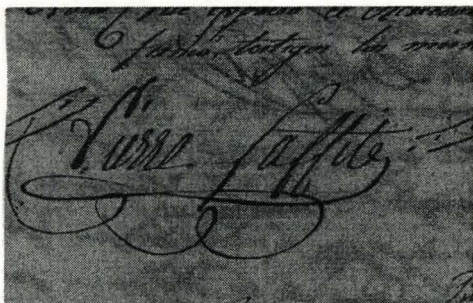


Figure 1

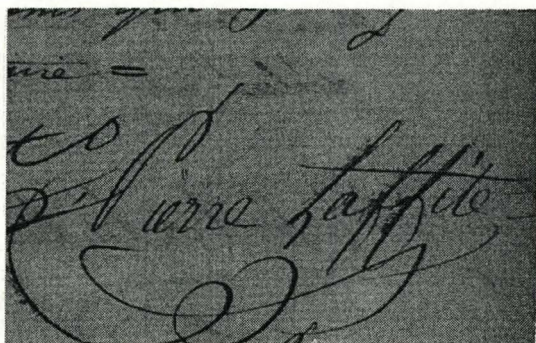


Figure 2



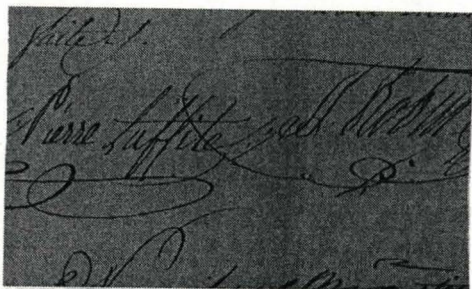


Figure 3

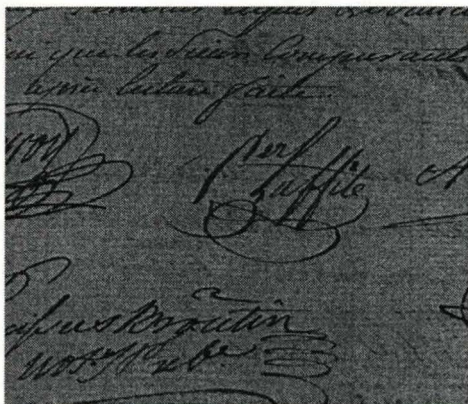


Figure 4

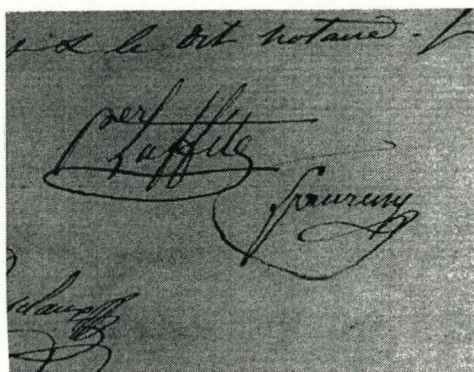


Figure 5

If Pierre Laffite's appearances before notaries were irregular but recurring, Jean Laffite's were extremely rare. He appeared once before notary Narcisse Broutin on 5 February 1813 to sell a slave named Louise, described as a *negresse* (black) and twenty-five years old. The buyer was a free woman of color named Jeanne Valoir Capucin. A Mr. Constant—perhaps the John Constant mentioned in the journal<sup>17</sup>—represented him in the act, but Jean Laffite appeared at the office anyway to sign the sale. The signature on this act is distorted by an ink smear—a rare occurrence on notarial documents—but still legible.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> N. Broutin, N.P., 5 February 1813, NONA.

Jean Laffite appeared again before a notary in the spring of 1815, after the Battle of New Orleans and not long after President James Madison pardoned all the Baratarians because of their part in helping the United States put an end to the War of 1812. Madison's pardon on 6 February enabled Jean Laffite to walk the streets of New Orleans a free man, perhaps the first time in decades that he considered living honestly. On 24 April 1815 he walked into the office of notary John Lynd to settle a dispute with one Edward Grant over the purchase of the ship *Adventurer*. The notary, an Anglo, identified him as "John Lafitte, mariner," but he signed "Jn Laffite" (see figure 6, page 13), in a style that appears identical to the signatures in the manuscript of the journal.

Jean Laffite is not known to have appeared before a New Orleans notary again, although Pierre did, along with Dominique You, Francois Dupuis, Renato Beluche, and many others known to the privateering trade in the Gulf. One of Pierre's late acts was the purchase of the two-masted felucca *The Flying Fish* in December 1816, after which he signed a procuration to Jean Deveze to handle his affairs in New Orleans and disappeared for a time from the notarial records.<sup>19</sup> This pattern is consistent with published histories of the Laffites, which report that they began to plan a new base at Galveston in 1816 and left New Orleans "for good" in 1817.<sup>20</sup> Recent research, however, has moved Pierre Laffite's last known appearance in New Orleans back to 28 December 1819, when he signed and dated a private act of sale of two slaves beginning with the words "*N.lle Orleans le*

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<sup>19</sup> P. Pedesclaux, N.P., 2 December 1816; 14 December 1816, NONA.

<sup>20</sup> Ramsay, *Jean Laffite*, 89-95.



28 decembre 1819."<sup>21</sup> The sale was to Baptiste Lafitte [sic], who the following year sold the slaves to Antoine Abat, a New Orleans merchant and recognized Laffite associate. Baptiste Lafitte had notary Philippe Pedesclaux attach the privately signed act to the 1820 sale.

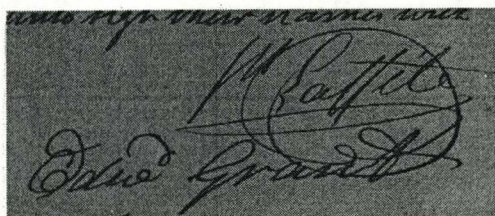


Figure 6

### *Applying Diplomatics*

Do the transactions described above represent authentic acts of the real Laffites and of other privateers? To answer this question, diplomatics requires an examination of a document's genesis, form, chain of custody, and dating system.<sup>22</sup> *Genesis* refers to the process by which original documents are created, including the use of formularies. *Form* refers to such things as medium, layout, writing, language, and style. The *chain of custody* leads from the

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<sup>21</sup> The writer is grateful to William C. Davis, author of an upcoming biography of the Laffites, for uncovering many additional acts in the Notarial Archives collection.

<sup>22</sup> Guyotjannin, "The Expansion of Diplomatics as a Discipline," 415.



original to the state of the document now used.<sup>23</sup> The *dating system* is more important in the study of medieval acts, but may be applied here too. While these are by no means all of the tools of diplomatics they are essential to its application.

Notarial acts generated in a civil law system pass easily under the scrutiny of these tools. The original documents in the New Orleans notarial system came into being through the rigorous formation of the notarial profession there and contain known formularies and known changeable parts. Each document is the original product of the notary's notes, drawn up and drafted by himself or his clerk, who also signs as a witness. Each act also has a well-known chain of custody, descending from the original notary to his successor in office to the Notarial Archives from 1867 to today. The form of the notary's signature at the end of the act is also well known—its distinctive nature indeed forms part of his original application for a notarial commission from the governor of the state. The presence of the dated act in paginated, bound form in its correct chronological position among thousands of other acts by a given notary, all formatted in the same way and using the same languages, clauses, ink, and paper stock, along with the volume's index, which cites the act by party name, act type, and page number, provides classic proof of the authenticity of the acts.

Are the acts those of the real Laffites? Could there not have been another merchant in the city named Laffite, selling slaves at that period? What about the change in Pierre Laffite's signature? What about the discrepancy between the conventional spelling "Lafitte"—one F and two Ts, used in New Orleans tourist literature and even by the southern Louisiana town Jean Lafitte—and the spelling "Laffite" as shown in these signatures and the journal, with *two* Fs and *one* T?

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 416-17.

To answer these questions, diplomatics requires working backward from an act believed to be authentic, comparing its accidents to those of the others. There *were* other Lafittes—Stephen Lafitte, a merchant; Marc Lafitte, a notary; Emile Jean Lafitte, a court official—but these are not the subjects sought. They were known figures, engaged in known legitimate activities, having their own distinctive signatures, with the name spelled in the conventional way.<sup>24</sup> Jean Laffite's signature, with the two Fs and the one T, can be found on six to eight letters in the Parsons Collection at the University of Texas.<sup>25</sup> A credible Pierre Laffite signature also appears on a procuration (power of attorney) dated 18 July 1815 in the acts of John Lynd. In the procuration, a Pierre Laffite of New Orleans appointed a Jean Laffite, also of New Orleans, to be his true and lawful attorney to transact his affairs in the City of Washington, to draw up and sign his name to petitions and memorials to the president, Congress, ministers, and departments and to appear, contract, and demand for him before government officials there. This document is particularly relevant because it purportedly involves both Pierre and Jean in a credible activity at a credible time when veterans of the Battle of New Orleans and owners of plantations which became the battlefield were demanding reparations for losses sustained during the War of 1812. External evidence shows that the Laffites at this time were also seeking reimbursement for ships confiscated by Navy agents before the pardon and the [largely stolen]

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<sup>24</sup> Acts of Marc Lafitte, notary, (1810–1826); acts of Michel de Armas, N.P., vols. 5A, 6 (1811), NONA.

<sup>25</sup> Edward A. Parsons Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. The Laffite documents in this formerly private collection appear to have been removed from federal district court records, the major part of which are now housed at the National Archives, Ft. Worth Records Center, Texas.



gunpowder they had supplied to the American forces for the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>26</sup> The signature is identical to that of Per Laffite (see figure 7, page 16) found on the slave sales described above.<sup>27</sup>

Examining the slave sales with the same signature reveals some interesting patterns in the name, in the act types, and in the slave profiles. Throughout this period, the notaries spelled the last name in the older way, with one F and two Ts, but in observing the signatures, one notes that the signer spelled his name with *two* Fs and *one* T. This is significant because it demonstrates that the signer deliberately chose a different spelling from the one the notary assumed was correct. The pirates—and the author of the journal—are the only ones in this area at this time known to have chosen this spelling.

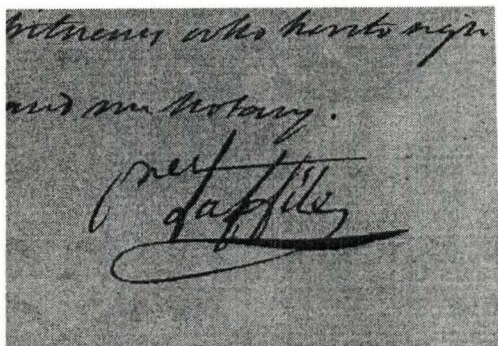


Figure 7

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<sup>26</sup> Ramsay, *Jean Laffite*, 88.

<sup>27</sup> It was "Pedro" in 1803, just after the close of Louisiana's Spanish Colonial period, but soon changed to Pierre, a common occurrence with persons of this name at that time. In the early years—generally 1803 to early 1806—the appearer was simply "Pierre Laffite." In 1806 the signature changed to "Per Laffite." There is no other "Per Laffite" in the Archives in 1815, and no other Jean.

Second, the acts involving sales were always slave sales. Among fifty or more documents spread over thirteen years, there is not a single sale of real property, highly unusual for the collection and atypical to the normal pattern of resident activity reflected in notarial acts. Still, the notaries, by February 1806, were consistently describing the signer as a "resident of this city," who presumably had real property. By March 1810, this someone has a partner, André Robin, whom the notary identified as a "merchant of this city," and whom the journal mentioned.<sup>28</sup>

Third, the slaves sold were always young—the majority twenty-two to twenty-four years of age—and sold for 400 to 600 *piastres* [dollars], always for cash, also atypical to the system. Most of them were *negre* (black), several from the Congo, a few Senagalese. They could not have come legally from those places in this period, suggesting some smuggling was involved in the sale.

Fourth, the notary had almost never seen the cash change hands—the pact was already confected, the money paid, and the slave in the hands of the buyer before the document was executed. One of the usual contractual safeguards of the notarial act was that the notary observed the money changing hands. This normally protected the buyer from future claims. Spanish procedure considered this so important that if the money did not change hands in front of the notary, the parties had to waive their rights to sue on this point later.<sup>29</sup>

Finally—and this is the convincing, consistent anomaly—not one *bona fide* acquisition by the seller appears in the lot. Indeed, the parties found creative ways to cite

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<sup>28</sup> Pierre Laffite's sales with André Robin may be found in the acts of Narcisse Broutin, March to June 1810, and January through March, 1811, NONA.

<sup>29</sup> This pleading was called the *non numerata pecunia*. See Sally K. Reeves, "Spanish Colonial Records of the New Orleans Notarial Archives," *Louisiana Library Association Bulletin* 55 (summer 1992): 8.



them. Most of the time, the seller had acquired the slave "by private signature." Frequently, Laffite simply affirmed that the slave was his. Sometimes he stated that he had acquired from a certain party "about 6 weeks ago"—still without citation. Only when he sold in partnership with André Robin was there as much as one citable title, and even when Robin participated in the sales, the parties simply affirmed ownership most of the time.

Observations about the timing of Laffite appearances before notaries may also be relevant. This Pierre Laffite first appeared in 1803, but then not again until 1806. He appeared six times in the winter-spring of 1806, and then disappeared again until 31 July 1809. Where was he? The journal has Pierre sick in the summers of 1805 and 1806 and has the Baratarians busy constructing storehouses in 1807 and 1808.<sup>30</sup> A flurry of sales occurred in the acts of Broutin and Pedesclaux in February 1810 and thereafter—coinciding with an entry in the Laffite journal stating that the Baratarians had constructed a storehouse for stock at Little Temple in February 1810, one of a series of storehouses mentioned about that time.<sup>31</sup>

Pierre reappeared before notary Broutin most reliably in 1810 and 1811, selling slaves with André Robin, and then selling by himself in 1812. Neither the person who signed the full "Pierre" nor he who signed "Per" made any appearance at all from 30 November 1812—two weeks after a well-reported incident when Pierre and Jean Laffite skipped bail after being arrested in New Orleans—until almost two years later, after the Battle of New Orleans. After Madison's pardon, they reappeared.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39. The journal also claims that Jean was in New Orleans on Governor Claiborne's birthday in 1805—thus, 13 August. This should be a good time to look for acts in more notaries, perhaps.

<sup>31</sup> *Journal of Jean Laffite*, 39.

To track the Laffites and other privateers throughout the period, one can also use the ship captain's protest. This is an abundant record type in the acts of certain notaries, for example John Lynd, whose volumes from 1808 to 1812 contain over two hundred such documents. The chief party to a sea protest was usually the master of a vessel, who brought along an officer and other crew members to confirm his story. Among other features, the protest identifies the vessel's name, type or "rig," port of departure, and cargo.

The heart of the act begins with a formulary: when the vessel departed from such-and-such a place, bound for this port, she was "tight and staunch, well manned and provisioned." The recital that follows is generally a harrowing tale of watery woes, of gales and groundings, lost equipment, cargo damage, even loss of vessels and lives. Toward the end of the act the notary, on behalf of the appearers, pens a solemn protest in their names against the winds and the waves, the obstructions and shoals of the oceans or river, or against another vessel for doing damage to the vessel or cargo. These "ought not to be imputed to any fault of himself or his company," the captain is said to declare. In this way he makes his case while his memory is clear, his witnesses are near, and the notary is available.

Sometimes the protest was leveled not against the winds and the waves but against pirates or privateers. One finds this type of protest most commonly in the Notarial Archives between 1810 and 1815, the heyday of Gulf privateering. In this period purportedly innocent mariners accused of illicit trading also lodged regular protests against U.S. Revenue agents for rough treatment and the confiscation of money, vessels, and goods. This type of act began to appear prominently after the Navy assigned Commodore David D. Porter sufficient strike forces to begin enforcing American customs laws in 1809.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For a brief discussion of Porter's initial operations, see Ramsay, *Jean Laffite*, 26.



It is not always easy to distinguish the innocent from the guilty in these acts. Porter's revenue officer Frazar of the cutter *Louisiana* seems to have truly mistreated the crew of the pilot boat *Two Brothers* near the Balize in 1812,<sup>33</sup> but the schooner *Milita's* protest is less credible. The master alleged that he had been getting his vessel repaired at Grande Terre in September 1814 when Commodore Daniel Patterson's squadron made a sweep there. He could not understand why U.S. agents stripped and searched him and took his money when he was just an innocent bystander who happened to have stored his sails and rigging in Mr. Lafitte's warehouse while he was repairing his rudder.<sup>34</sup> As disingenuous as this charge seems to be, it provides primary evidence from Grande Terre's point of view about Patterson's sweep—which has been known heretofore only from Patterson's reports.

Some protesters were admitted privateers who were brazen enough to complain before notaries that foreign governments had imprisoned their personnel when they stopped for provisions. Other mariners leveled complaints against foreign governments over the impressment of seamen. This happened frequently in the years preceding the War of 1812 and was one of Congress's motives for declaring war, although impressments obviously went both ways.

After the U.S. declared war on Britain in June 1812, Congress authorized its own letters of marque to private armed schooners so they would prey on British shipping. This led to the capture of the British ship *Jane* by the armed schooner *Spy of New Orleans* in 1813. After Laffite ally Renato Beluche impressed the *Jane's* seamen, the British captain made his protest in the acts of Lynd on 6 January 1813. In the journal, Laffite identifies Beluche as his uncle. This document thus places some of Laffite's closest allies

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<sup>33</sup> J. Lynd, N.P., 2 May 1812, NONA.

<sup>34</sup> J. Lynd, N.P., 29 September 1814, NONA.



two months after Pierre Laffite's last known appearance in local notarial acts before the January 1815 Battle of New Orleans.

In summary, the New Orleans Notarial Archives holds a significant number of early nineteenth-century acts that both notarial authority and internal evidence relate to Jean Laffite and his associates. Ironically, the flaws in the acts—their deviation from norms—associate them even more strongly with the subjects. More research among period slave sales, procurations, and protests should uncover even more evidence about these figures. It should also provide new information about Gulf privateering and the War of 1812, about Laffite's role in the slave trade, and about his career after the War of 1812 when he was planning his new base in Galveston. Other acts could provide evidence about what happened to the individual slaves smuggled into this country, and about what the population's attitude toward smuggling says about its character.

For many students of Laffite, however, the most important insight to be gained from this body of evidence is how well the primary evidence in notarial acts dovetails with details in the controversial journal of Jean Laffite. Another major test should be researching the activities of the intriguing list of 250 or more Laffite associates and vessels named in the journal. Considering the vast, universal coverage of the Notarial Archives, this would be a feasible if time-consuming assignment. The preliminary answer is that no act found to date, with a single, easily explained exception, contradicts the journal representations. On the contrary, notarial acts dovetail with journal facts rather nicely.

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## **The Journal of Jean Laffite: Its History and Controversy**

**Robert L. Schaadt**

Whether defined as original order or the history of ownership, provenance is one of the guiding lights of the archival profession, the key that guarantees the validity of documents in the archives. Archival material is rarely questioned, and authorship is seldom a topic of intense discussion. One assumes that the signer of the letter penned it except when secretaries were known to have been employed. Perhaps as a profession, however, archivists are too trusting and rely too often on provenance as a guiding light.

What does an archivist do when a document is questioned, and the provenance is arguable? What is the obligation of the institution when the document not only is challenged but also changes history? During twenty-four years in the archival profession, this author has had close encounters with obvious facsimiles, clever forgeries, documents claimed to be one thing and turned out to be something entirely different resulting in a total loss of market value, and even a few homemade fakes.



The Journal of Jean Laffite,<sup>1</sup> however, is the only document encountered that falls into that category of true controversy, for it changes the death date of the privateer, and thus history.

### *The Death of Jean Laffite*

For over a hundred and twenty years, Texas and Gulf of Mexico historians commonly referenced the fact that Jean Laffite died in 1824 (or 1825 or 1826) off the coast of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula during a hurricane. His journal places his death on 5 May 1854 in Alton, Illinois, under an assumed name. If Laffite's death in the mid-1820s were proven or even fairly well established, the journal would become another mystery; and historians, writers, and Laffite enthusiasts could ignore it as a primary source. The proof has yet to surface. The following 1886 version is but one of many tales recorded about Jean Laffite's death:

The tragic fate of this pirate king is told and retold by those who recollect the event. Just at a time when some of Lafitte's ships were away from the place of rendezvous, a strong force was set against him. He encountered it near Contoy and fought bravely but his ship struck a rock and sunk. He took to the boats with eight or ten men, and succeeded in landing on a sandbank called Blanquilla, but was pursued and surrounded. One by one all his men fell; still he

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling of the surname Laffite is a controversy in itself. According to the *Handbook of Texas* it was spelled Laffite with an acceptable variant spelling of Lafitte. There are many documented variations and even common misspellings. The Laffite Society of Galveston chose the spelling of Laffite since that was how Jean Laffite normally signed his name. This is the version used here, except that alternative spellings in original documents have been preserved.

refused to surrender, and was killed there, defending himself as long as there was breath in his body.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest notation in the historical record, however, dates from 1836. Mirabeau B. Lamar recorded the entry in 1855 as information received from James Campbell, who thought the year to be either 1821 or 1822. Campbell, a colleague of Laffite's, swore that in 1836 William Cochran, Laffite's first lieutenant, had told him:

Lafitt sailed to the Southard and made the Cape Cartouch, dividing the Honduras and Mexico, met a large ship and made up to her for action. She had 14 guns and made a sever fight; LaFitte was badly wounded in the action and lost several men. He captured her; and after holding her twenty-four hours the supercargo ransomed her for one hundred thousand dollars, her cargo being estimated by the invoices at three times that sum. Cochran being first Lt., Lafitt put him in command of the capture vessel as prize-master. Lafitt and Cochran now ran to Vera Cruz [*sic*] and ran off on waiting for the ransom, which was to be paid in twenty-four hours . . . and a sever wound inflicted on LaFitt himself . . . Lafitt beat up to Venezuela, where he died of his wounds.<sup>3</sup>

According to William Bollaert, writing in February–March 1842 in Galveston, Texas, Laffite “cruised about for a short time in the Gulf, went to the island of Margaritta near the

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<sup>2</sup> Alice D. Le Plongeon, *Here and There in Yucatan* (New York: Book Composition & Electrotyping Co., 1886), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Adams Gulick, Jr. and Winnie Allen, eds., *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar* (Austin: Von Boeckmann–Jones Co. for Texas State Library, 1925), 4, pt. 2: 22.

Orinoco and reported to have died in the Uycatan peninsula in 1826."<sup>4</sup> In 1843 Bollaert added, "General LaMar tells me that after Lafitte left Galveston there are no authentic records concerning him, but it is probable he is dead."<sup>5</sup>

In his 1857 "Recollection of Early Texans," J. H. Kuykendall included the reminiscence of Judge Thomas M. Duke about Laffite's death, which the judge believed had occurred in 1825 or 1826:

In the year 1841 while I was collector of customs at Pas Cavallo, an old Portuguese sailor lived with me for some time. He said Lafitte went from Merida to the Indian village of Celan(?) where he died. His old follower attended him in his last illness and after seeing the remains of his beloved commander interred in the Campo Santo of Merida, went to Honduras. The old sailor did not remember the year of our Lord in which Lafitte's death happened . . . .<sup>6</sup>

These are the primary records that document Jean Laffite's death from the early to mid-1820s. Other authors, especially popular and newspaper writers, have stated over the years that there is a marked grave and record of Laffite's burial in Yucatan, but none of the reports has been

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<sup>4</sup> W. Eugene Hollon and Ruth Papham Butler, eds., *William Bollaert's Texas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 160. William Bollaert also wrote "Life of Jean Lafitte, The Pirate of the Mexican Gulf," *Littrell's Living Age* 32 (March 1852): 433-46.

<sup>6</sup> "Reminiscences of Early Texans," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 4 (January 1903): 252. This article is from "Recollection of Early Texans" collected by J. H. Kuykendall in 1857 which was included in the Stephen F. Austin Papers.



substantiated.<sup>7</sup> Popular histories published in 1855 and 1893 accepted the date of 1826.<sup>8</sup> In his 1939 Texas textbook, Joseph L. Clark more cautiously wrote, "They [Laffite brothers] remained there [Galveston Island] until 1821, when they aroused the displeasure of the United States, whose navy set them wandering, never to be heard of again."<sup>9</sup> No one seriously challenged this until the 1950s when the Jean Laffite Collection became available to several writers and an English translation of the Journal of Jean Laffite was published.

### *John Andrechyne Lafitte*

The first hint of the journal's existence came in the 1940s when a man by the name of John Andrechyne Lafitte (John A.) began making inquiries about his great-grandfather Jean Laffite. After retiring from the Missouri Pacific Railroad,

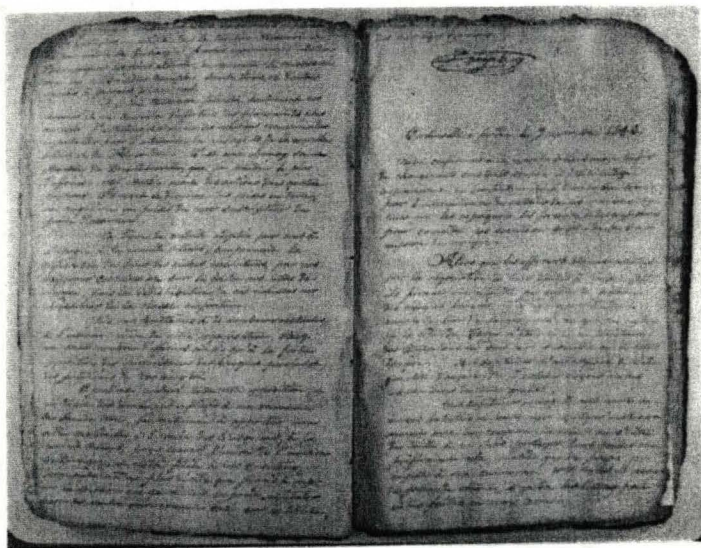
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<sup>7</sup> Newspaper articles, including photographs, have been published of the grave marker for Jean Laffite but none has been verified, and serious researchers dismiss all. The earliest appeared in the *Galveston Civilian & City Gazette* in 1855. *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar*, 4, pt. 2: 30. There is documented information about the burial in Yucatan of Jean Laffite's brother Pierre with whom he was often confused, but even this record is not 100 percent reliable. Michel Antochiw, Merida, Yucatan, to Dorothy McDonald Karilanovic, Galveston, 22 August 1995, and "Year of 1821 Summary Investigation Against the Englishman Don Jorge Schumpph Relative to the Pirate Don Pedro Lafitte, His Death and Burial in the Port of Dzilam," *Centro de Apoyo a las Investigacion Historica de Yucatan, Documentos Historicos Peninsulares* (Merida, Yucatan, Mexico: Instituto de Cultura de Yucatan, January 1995), Laffite Society Research Collection, Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center, Liberty, Texas (hereafter cited as LSRC, SHRLRC).

<sup>8</sup> H. Yoakum, *History of Texas* (New York: Redfield, 1855; reprint, Austin: Steck Co., 1935), 1: 204. John Henry Brown, *History of Texas, 1685-1892* (St. Louis: L.E. Daniell, Publisher, 1893), 1: 71.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph L. Clark, *A History of Texas, Land of Promise* (Dallas: D.C. Heath and Company, 1939), 77. Clark used the spelling Lafitte.





The Journal of Jean Laffite, Jean Laffite Collection. Courtesy of Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

John A. opened several trunks left to him in 1924 by his grandfather Jules. The bulk of the documents and books were in French, and John A. was not certain what he had inherited from his family since they seldom spoke of its history. He did know that they descended from the Gulf pirate and that the “trunk archives” including the journal documented this fact. According to Sue Thompson, who met him in New Orleans when he contacted her and her husband Ray about the documents in 1942 or 1943, John A. dreamed of fame and fortune based upon this heritage.<sup>10</sup>

He told them then that he was a retired railroader, could travel anywhere on railroad passes, and had all the time in the world to pursue his search. At that time John A. knew little

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<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Ray Thompson, Gulfport, MS, to Pamela Grunewald, 15 October 1975 and 12 December 1975, LSRC, SHRLRC.

about Jean Laffite and seemed mainly interested in finding Laffite treasures. The Thompsons noted his eccentric personality, but when John A. promised to share his treasure of documents they rolled out the red carpet for him. They also introduced him to Tulane University and Louisiana State University history professors.<sup>11</sup>

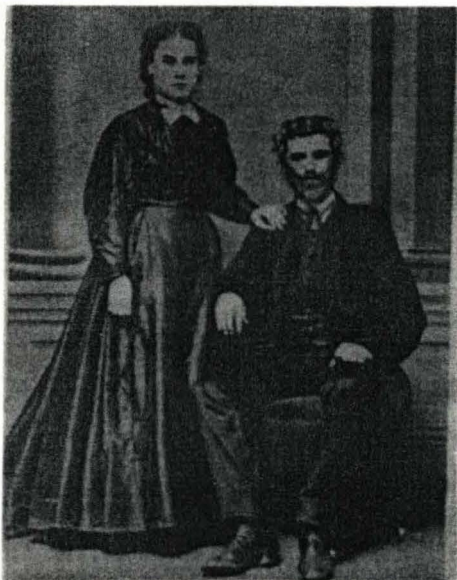
On 13 May 1947 in Atchison, Kansas, notary public Ethel MacAdow certified a birth information sheet for John Andrechyne Lafitte, the only official record that has surfaced to document his heritage.<sup>12</sup> This certificate, based upon family Bible records, gives his birth date as 4 June 1893 at Omaha, Nebraska, the son of Leon Jean Lafitte, born in the State of Louisiana on 10 March 1865, died on 16 April 1898. Leon was son of Jules Jean Lafitte, born in Baltimore, Maryland on 4 April 1834, died 10 October 1924, in St. Louis, Missouri. Jules Jean was the son of Jean Laffite and Emma Hortense Mortimore, and he (Jean Laffite) was born on 22 April 1782 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, died on 5 May 1854 in Alton, Illinois.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The majority of states did not require the recording of birth and death certificates until after 1900, and individuals born earlier commonly had a birth information sheet notarized to provide a delayed birth record for social security or other retirement purposes.

<sup>13</sup> John Andrechyne Lafitte, Certification of Birth Facts, 13 May 1947, Jean Laffite Collection, Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center, Liberty, Texas (hereafter cited as JLC, SHRLRC). Several scholars and genealogists have searched local government records of Kansas or Nebraska for documentation of John Andrechyne or Leon Jean Lafitte without finding census or other records.



Jean Laffite and his second wife, Emma Hortense Mortimore, ca. 1854, Jean Laffite Collection. Courtesy of Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center.

On 6 March 1948 city of St. Louis officials suggested to John A. that he contact Charles van Ravenswaay, the director of the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, to follow up on his historical inquiries about the city.<sup>14</sup> He wrote to Dr. Ravenswaay on 19 June of that year, remarking that he had “many letters on file from investigators and newspaper writers since I gave photostats to the Galveston Texas Public Library.” He stated that he wanted to verify information

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<sup>14</sup> St. Louis City Hall to John A. Lafitte, Kansas City, 6 March 1948, LSRC, SHRLRC.



about his grandfather and the location of St. Louis streets and cemeteries.<sup>15</sup>

The contacts and correspondence between Ravenswaay and John A. continued for several years until Ravenswaay received a letter from Clyde H. Porter in 1951, and by 1953 Ravenswaay had come to question the journal's authenticity.<sup>16</sup> Porter's letter contained the following story related to him from a friend, Frank Glenn:

Four years ago a railroad employee named John Lafeytte came to the Cuban representative here in Kansas City asking if there is any way of checking Cuban port records to find the coming and going of certain ships about a hundred and forty years ago. After several months of this sort of thing he proposed that Mrs. Espinoza [*sic*], the Cuban's wife, translate a manuscript for him and get it published, they to divide any profits. This has been done and Glenn has

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<sup>15</sup> John Lafeytte, Kansas City, to Charles van Ravenswey [*sic*], St. Louis, 19 June 1948, LSRC, SHRLRC. He also explained that ". . . My ancestor never used name Sylestor Lafflin. He used name: John Lafflin." This is the only time that John A. Lafeytte used the name Lafflin in a letter, and he is referring to the fact that only Jean Laffite used it as a alias. John A. never stated that he, his father, or grandfather used the surname Lafflin, but many writers continue to use that name in referring to him. When or whether he changed his name from Lafflin to Lafeytte is unknown, and genealogical research on the question has so far been unproductive. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the assumption is that John A. Lafeytte never used the surname Lafflin. Recently, Texas historian Jean Epperson determined from the files of the Employees Prior Service Records at the United States of America Railroad Retirement Board that John A. Lafeytte used the surname Nafsinger from 1913 to 1947. Nafsinger is thought to be his stepfather's surname.

<sup>16</sup> Charles van Ravenswaay, St. Louis, to Mr. Lewis, Alton, IL, 18 November 1953, LSRC, SHRLRC.

the book to publish . . . . The book purports to be the autobiography of Jean Lafette, the pirate, written when he was an old, old man living at Alton, Ill., under the name of Lafflin. It fits together perfectly. Glenn feels if it is a true autobiography, it is a find of the century . . . . On the other hand Glenn feels it cannot possibly be anything but a fake and don't know what to do about it . . . .

Now for the bad parts—The owner is a freak who will not allow anyone to know where he lives and moves every three months—he still fears the wrath of the British. He is known to be a collector of old paper. He visits old bookstores trying to buy end papers from hundred year old books they are tearing up for one reason or another. He has hidden the original book and will not again produce it. . . . I forgot to say that Glenn tried to find Lafette letters to compare with this manuscript and so far has not been able to find anything that was not presented to this museum or that library by this man John who owns the book.<sup>17</sup>

Stanley Clisby Arthur wrote *Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover* published by the New Orleans Harmanson Press in 1952. It was followed in 1955 by Doubleday & Company's *The Corsair, A Biographical Novel of Jean Lafitte, Hero of the Battle of New Orleans* by Madeleine Kent, who may have been the woman mentioned in Porter's account.<sup>18</sup> These two works,

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<sup>17</sup> Clyde H. Porter, Kansas City, to Charles van Ravenswaay, St. Louis, 21 November 1951, LSRC, SHRLRC. Frank Glenn told this story to Clyde H. Porter who passed it on to Ravenswaay, not a rare occurrence in this saga.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Clisby Arthur, *Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover* (New Orleans: Harmanson, 1952); Madeleine Fabiola Kent, *The Corsair, A Biographical Novel of Jean Lafitte, Hero of the Battle of New Orleans* (Garden City, New



both based upon the "trunk archives," ignited the public debate about the death of Jean Laffite and his life after leaving Galveston.

John A. continued to work with his family papers and apparently tried to authenticate the materials. On 4 May 1955, he sent samples to the Harris Laboratories in Lincoln, Nebraska, for testing of the paper and ink. Lewis E. Harris replied on 2 June that they were more than seventy-five years old.<sup>19</sup> On 11 August 1956 John A. also contacted the Library of Congress. On 5 September David C. Mearne, chief of the Manuscripts Division, replied that the paper John A. had submitted for testing compared favorably with other specimens of the early nineteenth century and concluded that the record could have been made in or about 1830. Mearne added that the small scrap that contained writing in French appeared to be on paper of somewhat earlier manufacture.<sup>20</sup>

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York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955). Madeleine Kent was the pen name for Mrs. Espinosa. Presently, this author has not documented that this is the same Espinosa as the wife of the Cuban Kansas City representative, but it appears that Madeleine Kent is the same person referred to in Frank Glenn's story. It is unknown how much of the "trunk archives" was shared with either author. See Memorandum of Agreement, 3 September 1952, between Doubleday & Co., Inc., Madeleine Kent de Espinosa, William Espinosa, John A. Laffite [*sic*], JLC, SHRLRC.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis E. Harris, director of Harris Laboratories, Lincoln, NE, to Mrs. Lula Surratt, Kansas City, 2 June 1955, Jean Laffite Collection File, Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center, Liberty, Texas (hereafter cited as JLCF, SHRLRC). John A. confused things by having the return letter addressed to one of his in-laws, his wife being Lacie Surratt Lafitte.

<sup>20</sup> David C. Mearne, Washington, D.C., to John A. Lafitte, Kansas City, 5 September 1956, JLCF, SHRLRC. This letter begins "Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_." Again, another mystery is why John A. obliterated his name on this letter, but the envelope is addressed John \_\_\_\_\_ (again whited out), Kansas City. It is unclear which book was examined. Some researchers have attempted



In 1958 *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer–Patriot's Own Story*, copyrighted by John A. Laffite [sic], appeared under the imprint of Vantage Press, a well-known subsidized publisher. The introduction to the volume declared: "Writing, in French at home, or as he traveled about the country, he worked at the task from 1845 to 1850. This volume is a translation of that journal." This translation was supposedly done for John A. by nuns in New Orleans, but unfortunately phrases and even paragraphs were left out. The first edition of the book sold quite well, but most of the stock was lost in a fire. Copies are now quite rare, commanding a price as high as \$500.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, John A. traveled to Florida, New Orleans, and Galveston, making public appearances and visiting people as the great-grandson of Jean Laffite. Two fires—one at his house in December 1959, and one at a Spartanburg television station in May 1960—damaged or destroyed part of his collection.<sup>22</sup> In 1966 he arrived in Galveston for the pirate celebration and attempted to sell his

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to locate his correspondence with the Library of Congress without success. Apparently, John A. was establishing credentials for his book since the Mearne letter was included in the publication by Vantage Press, which may account for removing his name.

<sup>21</sup> *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer–Patriot's Own Story* (New York: Vantage Press, 1958). This was copyrighted and published by John A. Laffite [sic]. No credit was given for translation. Mrs. Ray Thompson to Pamela Grunewald, 15 October 1975. Dr. Gene Marshall, associate professor of Languages for McNeese State University, began work on a new translation in the fall of 1998.

<sup>22</sup> *The Spartanburg (SC) Herald*, 17 May 1960, JLC, SHRLRC, and JLCF, SHRLRC. The fire singed the journal and several of the other documents at the station, but none were lost. These events took a rather bizarre turn when John A. claimed that he had lost gold doubloons in the house fire and sued the television station for negligence. His suit was not very successful.

papers to the Rosenberg Library there.<sup>23</sup> By the summer of 1969 the seventy-six-year-old John A. who had relocated to San Antonio and then Midland, Texas, started contacting Texas dealers and others in order to sell his family collection since he desperately needed the money.<sup>24</sup>

That same year Richard Santos, from the Bexar Archives in San Antonio, informed William Simpson and Johnny Jenkins of Houston about an old man who had come to him with some papers. Santos had reviewed them and claimed, "It is the most astonishing thing I have ever seen, because some of the things in these papers could only be proven by things in my archives, and I can assure you nothing has been salted here." Santos also warned them that the old man was somewhat strange.<sup>25</sup> Simpson and Jenkins then met John A. in Austin and, after negotiations, agreed to buy the collection for \$15,000 with each paying half.<sup>26</sup> About a year later,

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<sup>23</sup> John D. Hyatt, Galveston, to John A. Lafitte, Pacolet, SC, 2 January 1967, JLCF, SHRLRC. John D. Hyatt declined, stating that the purchase price of \$10,000 was too high, but expressed a future interest in the collection.

<sup>24</sup> Offering a sale price of \$1000, Charles Hamilton of New York requested two slave order documents for his 9 July auction and wished to take the entire collection on consignment. Charles Hamilton, New York, to John Laffite [sic], San Antonio, 9 July 1969, LSRC, SHRLRC. By 1969 and probably earlier, John A. started occasionally signing his name Laffite rather than Lafitte; and when he felt like it, his signature began to mimic Jean's, demonstrating another one of John's peculiarities. When correspondents wrote to John A. Laffite, he never corrected this misspelling of his surname.

<sup>25</sup> Don C. Marler, ed., "The Acquisition of the Laffite Journal," *The Laffite Society Chronicles* 4 (February 1998): 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–22. Simpson recalled, "He [John A.] did not want to show us the original collection, but he had numerous photocopies of it which he was willing to display to us. I refused, saying I could not sell from a photocopy and would not buy from one."

when Jenkins needed cash, he sold his half to Simpson and delivered the entire collection to him.<sup>27</sup>

On 20 February 1970 John Andrechyne Lafitte died in Columbia, South Carolina. According to his death certificate, he was a retired engineer from the Missouri Pacific Railroad and had been born on 4 June 1893 in Nebraska.<sup>28</sup> Thought by many to be very peculiar in personality, John A. was well liked by some and scoffed at by others. His personality had alienated many people who therefore discounted his claims and the family papers. Sue Thompson described him as "illiterate but very shrewd and wily—eccentric, bombastic, paranoid [*sic*] and easily alienated if you did not agree with him."<sup>29</sup> William Simpson characterized John A. as "very curious and highly paranoid, who thought that many people including the Thompsons and Charles Hamilton wanted to steal his collection."<sup>30</sup> He added, however, that John A. "was not, by any stretch of the imagination, what we would call a 'literate' man," and Simpson believed that he would have been incapable of faking the collection.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* When John A. refused Simpson's check, saying "Mr. Santos sent me to this man, but I don't know you," Jenkins paid him in full. Simpson then paid Jenkins for his half.

<sup>28</sup> Death Certificate, South Carolina, JLC, SHRLRC. On the death certificate, his surname is spelled LaFitte.

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Ray Thompson to Pamela Grunewald, 12 December 1975, LSRC, SHRLRC.

<sup>30</sup> Marler, "The Acquisition of the Laffite Journal," 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.





John A. Laffite and Audrey Lloyd of Midland, Texas, November 1967, Jean Laffite Collection. Courtesy of Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center.

### *The Jean Laffite Collection*

In 1970 William Simpson took the collection he had purchased from John A. to New Orleans, Louisiana State University, and the Rosenberg Library. "They were highly skeptical of my collection and critical of John," remembered Simpson, who was shown a *Time* article that included a photograph about Mr. Laffite being a mail fraud. "So I put my collection away thinking I might not have an authentic collection. For more than a year I never looked at the

collection.”<sup>32</sup> Simpson's interest revived in 1973 when he loaned the collection to John Howells, a Houston Internal Revenue Service employee and pirate buff, who was married to a Laffite descendant. Howells then began the process of comparing the journal's signatures to known Laffite documents and having the collection analyzed. By 1974 he was completely convinced that the majority of the papers were original and genuine.<sup>33</sup>

In 1975 Howells showed the journal to Joyce Calhoon, the first director of the Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center, and Miriam Partlow, a Liberty County historical author, at a meeting of the Harris County Historical Society. They in turn mentioned the collection to Partlow's nephew, former Texas Governor Price Daniel, and Howells subsequently sent Daniel copies of some of the documents. In June, Daniel, who was then serving as an associate justice of the Texas Supreme Court, expressed to Joyce Calhoon his desire to follow up their contacts. She spoke on his behalf with William Simpson, who arranged for her to inspect the collection at his Houston galleries.<sup>34</sup> On 16 July 1975 Simpson's agent William J. Burch sold Daniel “the entire

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Simpson added, “Later, I learned that *Time* had mixed up the pictures. They showed this Mr. Laffite's picture and the article was about another Laffite who was a criminal in New Orleans—a waiter in New Orleans.”

<sup>33</sup> Marler, “The Acquisition of the Laffite Journal,” 21; Ralph O. Queen Report, 27 September 1974, JLCF, SHRLRC.

<sup>34</sup> Joyce Calhoon, Liberty, TX, to Judge and Mrs. Price Daniel, Austin, 8 May 1975; John L. Howells, Houston, to Miss Miriam Partlow, Liberty, TX, 9 May 1975; and Joyce Calhoon, Liberty, TX, to Wm. Simpson, Houston, 16 May 1975, JLCF, SHRLRC. From 1973 to 1977 the Atascosito Historical Society sponsored the fund raising for the construction of the Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center. It also purchased several collections and manuscripts for the center with designated contributions.



Jean LaFitte Collection, purchased by me from William Simpson." The price was \$12,500.<sup>35</sup>

Why did Price Daniel purchase this collection? Jean Laffite interested Daniel due to Laffite's activities in Southeast Texas including his assistance to the Napoleon Refuges who established Champ d'Asile on the Trinity River in 1818. Daniel saw the collection as a centerpiece that tied in nicely with the history of Southeast Texas that additionally conjoined with his personal interests.<sup>36</sup>

In a press release 9 June 1976, the Texas State Library and Historical Commission announced that "Former Governor Price Daniel has purchased the hand-written 257 page Journal of Jean Laffite along with a rare collection of the buccaneer's family Bibles, albums, daguerreotypes, and a contract with his ship captains." The release continued that the first public display of the collection, which was to be donated to the Sam Houston Center, would be at the Regional Bicentennial Dinner at Beaumont on 16 June 1976. Daniel also loaned the journal and other items for display at the grand opening of the Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center on 15 May 1977.<sup>37</sup> The collection, which Price Daniel donated to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission on 1 August 1978, included:

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<sup>35</sup> Receipt of Sale, 16 July 1975, JLCF, SHRLRC.

<sup>36</sup> Price Daniel, conversation with the author, March 1983.

<sup>37</sup> Press Release, Texas State Library and Historical Commission, [now the Texas State Library and Archives Commission] 9 June 1976. Joyce Calhoun, Liberty, TX, to David B. Gracy, II, Austin, 10 December 1980, JLCF, SHRLRC. The Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center is a part of the Archives and Information Services Division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.



1. the original Journal of Jean Laffite, a 13" x 8" x 3" slightly burned leather-bound volume, written in French, 257 pages;
2. a leather-bound ledger book, 13" x 3" x 1.5";
3. two family Bibles (1839, French, 1608–1912 family information; and 1820, French, 1742–1932 family information);
4. a small leather-bound copybook, dating from 1840, property of Julius Laffite containing information on David Crockett, Andrew Jackson and others;
5. a small leather-bound book, printed in 1850, containing newspaper clippings and other entries;
6. twenty-one loose photographs of family and friends dating from 1850–1900 and a photo album;
7. a 6" x 8" portrait of Jean Laffite;
8. an 1806 Laffite ship document; and
9. a large portfolio containing photographs used in Stanley Clisby Arthur's book, *Jean Lafitte, Gentleman Rover*.

On 27 November 1989 Mrs. Price Daniel donated an additional 2.5 cubic feet of materials that included original documents related to the purchase of the collection and research materials that her husband had collected on Jean Laffite. This gift included five folk art paintings, circa 1840, of Laffite family members including Jean, Emma Hortense, and their sons Glen and Jules; correspondence between John A. Lafitte, his wife, and Audrey Lloyd; and Lloyd's manuscript.<sup>38</sup>

Today the Jean Laffite Collection housed at the center consists of four cubic feet of correspondence, documents, graphics, manuscripts, maps, photographs, publications, and artifacts. Two types of material are represented in the

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<sup>38</sup> JLCF, SHRLRC

collection: (1) original documents, manuscripts, photographs, and artifacts, 1806–1955, belonging to Jean Laffite or Laffite family members; and (2) collateral correspondence, publications, and other items dating from 1938 to 1985 pertaining primarily to members of the family and the original materials noted above.<sup>39</sup> Complementary to it are four other center collections as well as books and publications pertaining to Jean Laffite. The quarterly *The Life and Times of Jean Laffite* and *The Laffite Study Group Newsletter*, published by the society first organized in 1976, supplement the collection.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Donor Form, Price Daniel to Texas State Library and Archives Commission, 1 August 1978; and Donor Form, Mrs. Price Daniel to Texas State Library and Archives Commission, 27 November 1989, JLCF, SHRLRC. This collection may contain some items that were added to the collection purchased from William J. Burch via William Simpson. It is thought that Price Daniel received additional correspondence especially dating after 1950, a few documents, photos, and art from Audrey Lloyd of Midland and John's wife/ex-wife Lacie. Daniel added these items and his own correspondence pertaining to the journal. The collection does completely pertain to the "trunk archives" of John A. Lafitte, which explains its arrangement. A finding aid is available.

<sup>40</sup> Other Laffite Collections at the center are (1) the Foch Laffite Sr. Collection, .25 cu. ft., consisting of manuscripts, photographs, Laffite family charts, legal documents, land claims, Bible entries, maps, and field notes pertaining to Pierre Lafitte, Bouet Lafitte, Jean Lafitte and other Lafitte Family members, 1784–1844, photo copies; (2) the Laffite Society Collection, .25 cu. ft., donated by Randy Pace, Dr. Reginald Wilson, Jim Nonus, Dorothy McDonald Karilanovic, and Jean Epperson, documenting the activities of the Galveston-based organization and their semiannual publication *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, 1994–present; (3) the Laffite Society Research Collection, 2.8 cu. ft., donated by Dr. Reginald Wilson, Jean Epperson, Don Marler, and Dorothy McDonald Karilanovic, consisting of photocopies of original documents, letters, published articles and other historical research materials pertaining to Jean Laffite, Laffite descendants or claimed descendants, the Gulf pirates, and related subjects including inquiries into the Jean Laffite journal, dating from 1969 to 1981 with





Seated: Governor and Mrs. Price Daniel; Standing, L-R: Texas State Archivist John Kinney, Nina (Mrs. John) Kinney, and Frank Horlock (?) of the Texas State Library and Historical Commission; 16 June 1976, Beaumont, Texas; Jean Laffite Collection. Courtesy of Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center.

### *Authenticity of the Journal*

When Price Daniel purchased the collection in 1975, he knew that it was controversial since he told John Howells, "I have kept up with the *Journal* in a general way ever since Stanley Clisby Arthur wrote his book *Gentleman Rover* in

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information dating earlier; and (4) Jean and Pierre Laffite Collection, .2 cu. ft., an artificial collection of documents, publications, and information on the Laffites.



1952."<sup>41</sup> Although he realized that historians continued to debate the significance of the journal, Daniel never dreamed of what would transpire once it became accessible to researchers. Later Judge Daniel stated in several ways that he wished that he had never bought the collection, for he did not have time to respond to the critics and it was never his intention to be in the center of the accusations.<sup>42</sup>

The controversy over the journal's provenance has a long history. In the course of the controversy, speculation easily became fact, hearsay often was not confirmed, and facts were often twisted. There were winners and losers in the debate, and the majority of the figures involved had some personal stake in the outcome. The man claiming to be John A. Lafitte alienated many scholars and writers by his personality and by refusing to share the entire collection at one time, a practice he continued until his death. No doubt he sometimes used people to his own advantage, not an endearing trait. On the other hand, these same people were themselves attempting to profit from the journal by publishing or soliciting a donation for an institution.

Lafitte gave Stanley Clisby Arthur access to the entire collection, and Arthur apparently thought it was authentic when he wrote his book, published in 1952.<sup>43</sup> He made no

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<sup>41</sup> Price Daniel, Austin, to John L. Howells, Houston, 18 June 1975, JLCF, SHRLRC.

<sup>42</sup> Price Daniel, conversation with author, March 1983; Mrs. Price Daniel, conversation with author, November 1989.

<sup>43</sup> Some Lafitte scholars have disputed this and contend that Arthur may have seen only portions of the collection. In his personal acknowledgments, he states that he relied on former biographies, periodicals, published contemporaneous correspondence, Latour's works, court records, "as well as correspondence, journals, diaries, Bible entries, and other records belonging to the Lafitte family never before published. All placed at my disposal unconditionally and without reservation to their use." He thanked

attempt to distinguish written copies of documents from originals, however, and ignored the fact that part of the collection clearly was not written by Jean Laffite. He referred to it all as Jean Laffite's papers, which caused many of the questionable documents to be referred to as forgeries in future years.<sup>44</sup>

Prior to the Vantage Press publication of the journal, John A. Lafitte had two tests done—one by the Harris Laboratory, and one by the Library of Congress—and they both supported the journal's authenticity. These tests, done in the mid-1950s, do not meet today's scientific standards, and it is not clear what pages of the journal were analyzed or what tests were performed. One cannot dismiss these tests; yet the results are not conclusive.<sup>45</sup>

Few of the dealers attempting to secure John A. Lafitte's potentially lucrative business in 1969 seemed to consider the documents to be forgeries. On 23 September, for example, Charles Hamilton wrote to John A. Lafitte thanking him "very much for your letter of September 20, explaining the circumstances of your sale of Laffite documents to Mr. Jenkins" and added "You already know my high opinion of the value of Laffite's documents and my belief that they would bring a large sum at my sales."<sup>46</sup> Jenkins himself,

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John Andrechyne Laffite [sic] of Kansas City, Missouri, for his generosity in sharing the materials. *Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover*, 286.

<sup>44</sup> Many of the questioned originals are not originals, but are entries written by family members in a copybook and on various-sized papers. Producing such mementos was a fairly common leisure activity around the turn of the century.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis E. Harris to Mrs. Lula Surratt, 2 June 1955; David C. Mearne to John A. Lafitte, 5 September 1956, JLCF, SHRLRC.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Hamilton to John A. Laffite [sic], 23 September 1969, JLCF, SHRLRC.



along with William Simpson, ended up purchasing the collection from Lafitte in spite of his view that Lafitte was "a very nutty fellow, to say the least."<sup>47</sup>

In 1971 John Howells decided to take on the project of authenticating the Jean Laffite journal in response to doubts expressed by Simpson about its authenticity. Howells first located the Le Brave document in the Federal Regional Archives in Fort Worth and the Laffite documents in the Texas State Archives' Lamar Papers. Simpson and Howells then hired Ralph O. Queen, "Examiner of Questioned Documents," a nationally recognized handwriting expert with forty years experience in criminal investigation and a member of the International Association for Identification. Queen thus became the first and only forgery expert to compare the journal with known Laffite documents.

Between June and September 1974 Queen examined the entire journal and removed two pages of handwriting, dated 7 October 1846 and 24 September 1849, for comparison and testing. He found that one was written in iron oxide ink, its ferrous content permeating the paper, and the other in gallnut ink, and that the journal's paper, a linen-based type used before 1850, contained several water marks. Queen further reported that the ink "cannot be readily removed by washing the paper"<sup>48</sup> and concluded:

A detailed study has been made of these documents and comparisons have been made of the handwritings appearing on them with handwritings contained on other documents bearing handwritings that have been accepted as being known writings of

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<sup>47</sup> John H. Jenkins to Charles Hamilton, 2 October 1969, JLC and JLCF, SHRLRC.

<sup>48</sup> Ralph O. Queen Report, 27 September 1974, JLCF, SHRLRC.



Jean Laffite, commonly spelled Lafitte. Some of the documents used for comparative purposes were the Le Brave document, Federal Court case #1440, used to convict Capt. John Desfarges, two Jn Laffite Letters to Gen. James Long in the M. B. Lamar Collection in the Texas State Archives, known as documents #19 and #24. Also various other writings.

These examinations and comparison revealed that there are many individual personal characteristics appearing in the handwriting on the pages from the journal that are identical with characteristics appearing in the known writings.

Due to these findings, it is my opinion that the author of the known writings was also the author of the writings appearing on the two pages from the journal.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, some scholars cast doubt on the journal's legitimacy as early as 1962. Frances H. Stadler, manuscripts librarian of the Missouri Historical Society, addressing his archival and historical colleagues, issued a warning about the passing of fraudulent Laffite documents. In his speech, Stadler referred to the contents of letters that Charles van Ravenswaay had written between 1948 and 1951 concerning John A. Lafitte. He did not include the fact that his predecessor had attempted unsuccessfully to secure the collection for the Missouri Historical Society or that his own information was eleven years old.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Frances H. Stadler, "Laffite Documents—Challenge of Validity," *American Archivist* 25 (July 1962): 395-96.

In 1974 Robert C. Vogel, then a graduate student and later the editor of the Laffite Society quarterly,<sup>51</sup> began a correspondence about the journal's authenticity with van Ravenswaay, Sue Thompson, and Hamilton. Even Charles Hamilton had changed his view by then, declaring that all of the documents were forgeries. Hamilton added, "I corresponded with John A. Laffite [*sic*] about five or six years ago, and he finally sent me several documents . . . which took only a glance to identify as a forgery. Later I read an article in *Time* or *Newsweek*—I forget which—about Laffite being involved in several crooked schemes."<sup>52</sup> This is far different from the Hamilton writing to John A. Lafitte and John Jenkins five years earlier.

Van Ravenswaay, Thompson, and Vogel agreed with Hamilton's conclusions, and all became leading critics of the journal's authenticity, sometimes in public forums such as newspaper articles as well as personal correspondence. Unfortunately, much of this discussion was based on opinion rather than fact, and they utilized each other as their expert source on the "forgeries," although none was knowledgeable about the complete story of the journal. In this debate Vogel brought several important points to light including the fact that Pierre Laffite was often confused with Pierre Boit Laffite and other relations on Bayou Pierre, DeSoto Parish, Louisiana.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For his latest Laffite publication, see Robert C. Vogel and Kathleen F. Taylor, comps., *Jean Laffite in American History, A Bibliographic Guide* (Saint Paul: White Pine Press, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> Charles Hamilton to Robert C. Vogel, 26 February 1974, LSRC, SHRLRC.

<sup>53</sup> Robert C. Vogel to Pamela Grunewald, 13 February 1978, LSRC, SHRLRC. Vogel stated that he visited the center in November 1977 and examined the collection.



In October 1979 John Howells wrote Price Daniel about the questions of authenticity raised by Vogel and other critics. Aware of Daniel's desire to have another forgery expert examine the Laffite journal, Howells suggested asking a professor at the University of New Orleans who "teaches courses in hand writing identification" to analyze the diary, a project Daniel endorsed.<sup>54</sup> Marian (Mimi) Bethancourt had studied graphology in 1959 as part of her Loyola University course on art therapy, and from 1970 to 1979 she had entertained at New Orleans conventions by analyzing handwriting.<sup>55</sup>

On 16 January 1980 Price Daniel received Bethancourt's final report along with a copy of her letter to Howells in which she proposed doing two books on the journal: one aimed at the New Orleans tourist trade, another on her analysis itself. Bethancourt declared under oath that she had compared the 1806 Laffite document, the "250 page Journal," and two family Bibles with the 1819 Le Brave document, by submitting the documents to various graphological tests. She found that the 1806 document was original, true and authentic, but the "The Journal and Family Bibles were found to have many discrepancies and are therefore not authentic." Howells added in his cover letter, "She says she was as convinced as Ralph O. Queen, until she examined the personal letters by John A. Lafitte, which Ralph O. Queen did not have an opportunity to do."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Howells to Price Daniel, 16 October 1979, JLCF, SHRLRC.

<sup>55</sup> Mimi Bethancourt Resume, 1978, JLCF, SHRLRC.

<sup>56</sup> Marian Bethancourt Report, 11 December 1979; John Howells to Price Daniel, 16 January 1980; and Bethancourt to John Howells, 12 January 1980, JLCF, SHRLRC. Bethancourt never communicated directly with Price Daniel. It was always done through John Howells even though she was working for Daniel. Howell's delay in transmitting the final report to



Price Daniel, needless to say, was not very happy with these results. At that point, he learned that graphology, according to the dictionary, is the study of handwriting for the purpose of character analysis rather than authentication of documents and that Howells was incorrect in stating Bethancourt's credentials, especially her status at the University of New Orleans where she in fact taught a graphology course in the continuing education department. Price Daniel never resumed his quest to resolve the question of authenticity, but others continued the debate.<sup>57</sup>

On 8 June 1980 the front-page headline "Lafitte: Pirate's Costly Journal May Be Only a Famous Fake" appeared in the New Orleans *Sunday Times-Picayune*. In his feature article, Clancy DuBos detailed the purchase of the "258-page" journal attributed to "legendary privateer Jean Lafitte" by Price Daniel, then declared it was "a forgery, according to a New Orleans handwriting analyst and other authorities." Quoting Bethancourt, DuBos informed his readers that the journal was "One of the biggest freehand forgeries in American history" and that she "estimated it took between 10 and 15 years to complete." He added, "Coincidentally, Mrs. Bethancourt's conclusions of forgery also are those of Charles Hamilton, a New York handwriting expert . . ."<sup>58</sup>

Publication of Hamilton's book, *Great Forgers and Famous Fakes, The Manuscript Forgers of America and How They Duped the Experts*, in late 1980 fueled the critic's fire but did nothing to resolve any of the conflicts. Chapter 8 opened: "There were a pen and a bottle of Waterman's brown ink, plus a stack of inherited forgeries of Jean Laffite's

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Daniel was never explained.

<sup>57</sup> Price Daniel, conversation with the author, March 1983.

<sup>58</sup> Clancy DuBos, "Lafitte: Pirate's Costly Journal May Be Only a Famous Fake," *New Orleans Sunday Times-Picayune*, 8 June 1980.

and other historical figure's handwriting that created more havoc in the world than the pirate and his crew of cutthroats." Hamilton attacked John A. Lafitte as a forger and peddler of phony documents,<sup>59</sup> without examining the Sam Houston Center's collection. Instead, he based his prose primarily on statements given by Ray Thompson, Charles van Ravenswaay, and Robert C. Vogel, whom he characterized as "probably the world's greatest expert on Jean Laffite" and the primary source of his information.<sup>60</sup> Hamilton's own account contains many discrepancies, especially regarding his role in attempting to acquire the papers from John A. Lafitte, and misquotes Vogel.<sup>61</sup>

After 1980 Laffite researchers and enthusiasts continued to debate the collection's authenticity, and in recent years the journal has continued to have many supporters. Laffite Society member Dr. Reginald Wilson has spent several years pouring over the entire collection and authored a 1996 paper

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<sup>59</sup> Charles Hamilton, *Great Forgers and Famous Fakes, The Manuscript Forgers of America and How They Duped the Experts* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1980), 121, 129. Hamilton developed a tendency to glorify John A. Lafitte referring to him as the "greatest forger in America" especially when he contended that John A. had forged the Diary of Jose Enrique de la Pena. For this forgery certification, see Bill Groneman's book, *Defense of A Legend, Crockett and the de la Pena Diary* (Plano, TX: Wordware Publishers, Inc., 1994), 147. Again, Hamilton had never viewed the original diary. He repeated this same charge in Dale Walker's book, *Legends and Lies: Great Mysteries of the American West* (1997). Hamilton continued to refer to John A. as Lafflin when there is no proof that he used this surname.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-23.

<sup>61</sup> In Vogel's defense, it should be noted that he did not appreciate Hamilton's characterization. Vogel was the first person to attempt to understand the provenance of the journal and had collected many letters from people who knew John A. Lafitte. Robert C. Vogel to Price Daniel, 12 June 1980, JLCF, SHRLRC.



in which he examined the handwriting and found it to be authentic. Long-term Laffite researcher Pam Keyes wrote as recently as 1996, "I fully believe 90% of your Jean Laffite materials are authentic, and the proofs of their authenticity are readily at hand. Yes, even proofs that Robert Vogel would have to accept."<sup>62</sup>

Vogel's own 1998 summary of his position contained a note of uncertainty about the journal's authenticity, but without reservation he denounced its credibility as a historical record:

Of course, much of the evidence supporting the charge of fraud against John Andrechyne Lafflin and his Journals of Jean Laffite is quite circumstantial in nature. I cannot prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the journals were written by anyone other than the real Jean Laffite—but I believe that I have proved conclusively that the Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story is filled with inaccuracies, inconsistencies and several glaring and out-right distortions of the truth. I cannot show that Jean Laffite died in Yucatan in 1825 or '26—but I can question the reliability of the journal's account in the light of certain known facts regarding the character of Jean Laffite. Even if Jean Laffite did write his memoirs in Saint Louis in the 1840s—and I do not believe that he did—are his observations

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<sup>62</sup> Dr. Reginald Wilson Paper, LSRC, SHRLRC; and Pam Keyes, Miami, OK, to author, Liberty, TX, 11 November 1996, JLFC, SHRLRC. During their studies in 1996 and 1997, Pam Keyes and Wilson noticed a seal in the original journal at the end of Laffite's life story, a seal that only a privateer commissioned by Cartagena would have had. It physically marked the change in the journal's subject; after it, Laffite began his discourse on Karl Marx, governments, and philosophy. Pam Keyes and Dr. Reginald Wilson, "The Saga of the Seal," *Laffite Society Chronicles* 4 (August 1998): 2-5.



accurate and reasonably objective? To this the answer must be no—The Journal of Jean Laffite is at best a highly unreliable source of information on Laffite's role in American history during the turbulent years 1803–1830.<sup>63</sup>

### *An Archivist's Perspective*

The Jean Laffite Collection is typical of most family papers, a hodgepodge of documents including photographs that are identified only by the writing on their backs, newspaper clippings, and other rather mundane items.<sup>64</sup> The journal appears to be as authentic as the rest of the collection and contains a wealth of information that cannot be readily found in primary sources. There are no credible studies to prove that the journal is a forgery, and Ralph O. Queen, the only forgery expert who has examined the journal to date, concluded that it was authentic.

These materials are heavily used and quite popular with a wide range of patrons, from seventh grade Texas history students to authors of Laffite biographies. More requests are probably received for copies of the Journal of Jean Laffite than any other individual manuscript held by the center. The Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center also has an obligation to continue to collect all information on the journal and its controversy and to inform researchers that

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<sup>63</sup> Statement of Robert C. Vogel, 1998, JLFC, SHRLRC.

<sup>64</sup> There is no doubt some documents are copies made by a family member or perhaps even written by John A. Lafitte, in spite of his claims to the contrary. The entries in the copybooks, for example, are not in the same writing as the journal, which was obvious at first glance, and yet people claimed that the copybook was written by Jean Laffite and signed by David Crockett and Andrew Jackson. This particular book looks very similar to many of the scrapbooks maintained by people at the turn of the century and that probably was how family members used it.

there is body of literature that is highly critical of the document.

Historians do have the right to be skeptical of the Journal of Jean Laffite as they should be of any source that has a questionable provenance, but they should not totally dismiss the Jean Laffite Collection. No doubt the paper and the ink of the journal should be tested by a totally independent party using the most modern methods.<sup>65</sup> However, even if such tests proved beyond any doubt that the volume came from the correct time period, it would not end the controversy.

When Robert Vogel visited the center in March 1999, we speculated on the many possibilities of the journal's origin. After agreeing that it seemed highly unlikely that John A. Lafitte could have forged the French journal, we concluded the following possible scenarios: (1) the journal is indeed the work of Jean Laffite; (2) the journal is a forgery and a fraud; (3) the journal was an eighteenth-century novel written by Jean Laffite based upon his memory; (4) a family member or a friend or former associate familiar with the life of Jean Laffite wrote the journal based upon the family papers, which were in turn found or inherited by John A. Lafitte; or (5) the journal could even have been composed in the eighteenth century as part of that era's tide of romantic pirate literature and later discovered by John A. Lafitte. The discussion could have continued for hours.

In his 1940 article, "Why Jean Lafitte Became a Pirate," Charles Ramsdell, Jr., wrote that "Jean Lafitte belongs to

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<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, testing would require substantial funds, estimated at \$15,000 several years ago. Such tests would not be a prudent investment of limited resources given the other needs of the Sam Houston Center and are therefore not a priority for the center. There are plans to digitize the original French journal for web site access.

folklore rather than to History . . . ."<sup>66</sup> Perhaps Ramsdell was correct.

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Ramsdell, Jr., "Why Jean Lafitte Became a Pirate," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 43 (April 1940): 465.



## **Documenting Industry and Labor in Alabama: Can a Documentation Strategy Model Help?**

**Martin T. Olliff**

As early as 1997 the Society of Alabama Archivists (SALA) identified a number of topics in Alabama history and culture that were not well documented in the archives in the state.<sup>1</sup> Some of these topics, for example North Alabama's aerospace industry, were just beginning to appear in archival collections. Alabama archivists took note of such fields early enough that the volume of accumulated records did not become a problem. On the other hand, archivists in the state faced enormous problems in coping with the mass of records they already knew existed in other underdocumented fields like labor and industry.

Why try to document industry and labor?<sup>2</sup> They are two

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<sup>1</sup> Forum at the annual meeting of the Society of Alabama Archivists, 7 November 1997, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama.

<sup>2</sup> These terms are broad and difficult to define. Manufacturing and transportation are basic industries, but the further one goes back in time, and the closer one gets to the margins of industrialism, the vaguer and more difficult the division between industrial and non-industrial activities becomes. The title of Wayne Flynt and Michael Thomason's 1987 work, *Mine, Mill, and Microchip* (Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications), suggests a focused geographical and chronological expanse that would enable Alabama

of the oldest but most poorly recorded aspects of life in Alabama. This is especially unfortunate in view of new academic and popular interests in reevaluating the role both played in Alabama. Scholars of antebellum Alabama have discovered that manufacturing, transportation, and support businesses played an exceptionally vital role in shaping the state's history. Historians have shown a keen interest in postbellum industrial development as well. The literature on this topic for the past decade provides tantalizing hints that the New South owes its character to industry much more than previously thought.

In these significant, and significantly underdocumented, areas of life in Alabama records, creators and users, independent of each other and with no archival involvement, were already considering ways to improve access to existing research resources. The Southern Industrialization Project (SIP) focused on identifying relevant archival collections and on assembling a central set of metadata on industrialism throughout the South. The Alabama Organized Labor Awards Foundation (AOLAF) was working towards collecting the records of labor unions and working people in the state. Neither organization had incorporated the expertise of archivists in their plans, but both had opened the door to such participation.

These projects offered enormous opportunities for building strategic alliances within the archival community and with records producers and users as they dealt with these problems. Archivists first had to determine, however, what their role vis-à-vis these projects should be. How could archivists in Alabama and, by extension, archivists in similar circumstances, work with these groups to achieve a common goal? Did archivists have compelling theoretical and practical models to follow in these situations? Documentation strategy

offered one blueprint that Alabama's archival community could use to define and enhance its service role in both the SIP and AOLAF.

When the advocates for documentation strategy first appeared in archival literature during the 1980s, they considered it to be one of the most innovative concepts in archival theory, and they explored it with gusto. In its short life, however, documentation strategy encountered many practical problems in moving beyond its exciting theoretical formulations. If Alabama archivists could differentiate between the workable characteristics of documentation strategy and its problems, they might find a powerful tool for coping cooperatively with large quantities of documents, for working with nonarchivists, and for recording underrepresented histories.

### *SIP and AOLAF*

The Southern Industrialization Project began as the brainchild of Emory University graduate student Michael Gagnon and University of Genoa (Italy) professor Susanna Delfino, who had been disappointed by the seemingly haphazard way that scholars of industrialization presented their work at the 1996 Southern Historical Association meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas. There were no panel presentations on southern industrialism; rather, individual papers were joined to other panels as afterthoughts, or so it seemed to Gagnon and Delfino. To give their area of interest more thrust and import at future meetings, they decided to organize a meeting of like-minded scholars at Emory on 5 December 1996.

The agenda was simple—to establish a permanent but informal discussion group of scholars interested in southern industrialization. Gagnon's particular interest lay with the nineteenth century and Delfino's with comparative analysis between the southeastern United States and southern Italy. The specialties of meeting attendees, however, spanned the



chronological length and topical breadth of the subject. There would come a time, all agreed, when natural divisions would appear and the original group grow too large, but until then the Southern Industrialization Project would remain as eclectic as possible.

Besides deciding on a name and an inclusive membership policy, this first meeting set three goals for the group. The first was to create an electronic discussion group to coordinate activities and to debate scholarly issues. Under the leadership of Michael Gagnon the listserv virtually exploded its first year, with debates ranging from analysis of the course of events in history to the very construct of the terms used to address southern industrialism. SIP's second goal was to coordinate panels at various historical conferences. This, too, has been successful. The group arranged for panels on various aspects of southern industrialization at the Business and Economic History Society meeting in 1997, the Economic History Association meeting in 1998, and the Southern Historical Association in 1999.

Most important from an archival perspective was SIP's third goal: creation of an annotated union list of archival collections that document southern industrialization broadly defined, which would be maintained as a website. Project co-chairs Suzanne L. Summers of the University of Texas at Kingston and Steven Reich of the University of Alabama at Huntsville adopted a four-step strategy to create the list. First, they asked SIP members to forward information about collections they themselves have used for research.<sup>3</sup> Next, Summers and Reich asked the few archival members of SIP to inventory their collections and provide similar information.

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<sup>3</sup> Summers and Reich did not specify what type of information they sought, but metadata such as that used in USMARC records would be most beneficial. The co-chairs did request annotations concerning the scholars' impressions about the content and usefulness of the collections.

Once they establish the list, they intend to solicit nonmembers chosen by the membership to direct SIP to other potential collections. Finally, Summers and Reich will ask the archival community itself for information about extant collections in southern industrialism.<sup>4</sup>

The size and scope of this project and the professional demands placed on the co-chairs by their respective institutions have prevented much forward progress on this goal, and the union list has floundered. It is precisely this vacuum that gives archivists in Alabama and other southern states an opportunity to provide expert advice and service to a project begun by researchers who are knowledgeable about the subject and who anticipate using the results of the project. Archivists who choose to work with SIP can adopt parts of the documentation strategy model to make this project and its heirs successful.

Labor in Alabama, which has no collecting institution comparable to Georgia State University's Southern Labor Archives, is also woefully underdocumented. Creators of labor records have recently begun to champion this cause, working through the Alabama Organized Labor Awards Foundation (AOLAF), a committee of the Alabama AFL-CIO. The primary mission of AOLAF is to provide information to the public about the activities of AFL-CIO unions in the state and to honor organized labor's friends, but it is charged also with preserving Alabama labor's heritage, thus making it the perfect body to build the labor archives.

The structure of the AFL-CIO, a giant federation of 178 different-sized bodies in locations ranging from major metropolitan areas to small towns, makes it difficult to coordinate this kind of "top-down" project. The question of who could provide the archival expertise necessary for such a

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<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Summers, conversation with the author, 19 November 1997.



tremendous job has been critical for AOLAF, which has few contacts within the archival community, and the answer to the question has eluded the foundation since its establishment. Several recent events changed the contours of the task and made it possible for AOLAF to resume serious consideration of establishing a labor archives. First, records creators—in this case, local union headquarters—lacked storage space. Documents poured out of file cabinets, and boxed records were stored in halls and closets, under stairs, in basements and attics, and at the homes of former officers and current members. Local officers pressured the state organization to help them find a way out from under the mass of accumulated paper.

The state organization itself had designated part of its new headquarters building in Montgomery as a museum where local unions could display their memorabilia. The opportunity to make the public as well as their fellow unionists aware of their existence and accomplishments further motivated members concerned with the history of their unions to think about the records they possessed. They are interested particularly in how to find the right materials, from unarranged records, to display in the new museum.

A third impetus was a happy coincidence. Under the leadership of Dr. Frank Borgers, an AOLAF board member, the Center for Labor Education and Research (CLEAR) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, also took a renewed interest in pushing the archival charge of AOLAF. Dr. Glenn Feldman, a recent Auburn University graduate, suggested to Borgers that he contact the archives at his alma mater for help. Within two months the archivists at Auburn constructed a mail-in records survey for local organizations, which AOLAF planned to test through a pilot project at a



local union office.<sup>5</sup> When the state AFL-CIO granted AOLAF \$50,000 towards financing a repository, the focus of the board shifted from surveying and gaining control over the records to housing them, and AOLAF contacted the Birmingham Municipal Archives about working together to preserve labor records.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, AOLAF like SIP opened the door for archivists to help in achieving the goal of preserving its documentary heritage. Taking up that challenge gave Alabama archivists an opportunity to articulate an intellectual infrastructure that they had practiced informally but had never stated clearly. The greatest leap they faced, then, was to convince resource allocators that cooperating with and assisting groups such as SIP and AOLAF promoted their own institutional mission.

### *The Documentation Strategy Experiment*

No single archives in Alabama could collect the records of the 178 unions in the state, nor did the state have a specialized repository for industrial records. In fact, records

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<sup>5</sup> Meeting of AOLAF, Birmingham, Alabama, 18 May 1997. AOLAF consultants arranged to conduct their onsite, pilot examination through the United Auto Workers' district office in Birmingham. A misunderstanding led AOLAF to publish the records survey questionnaire before the local officials could be informed of the project, and no local returned its questionnaire. At about the same time, Dr. Borgers left CLEAR, severing the tentative connection between the Auburn archivists and the committee.

<sup>6</sup> Those who have worked with AOLAF have recognized the Birmingham Municipal Archives (a division of the public library) to be one of two "natural" repositories for the Alabama AFL-CIO unions' records. The other is the archives of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Until recently, Birmingham Municipal Archives did not have enough space to consider housing these records, but through deaccessioning some collections and transferring others, it has acquired 700 linear feet of space. Jim Baggett, interview with the author, Alabaster, Alabama, 6 September 1999.

documenting both these topics were already distributed throughout the state. While a cooperative project offered the best hope of documenting industry and labor in the state adequately, no cooperative model could integrate records creators, records users, and archivists as thoroughly as documentation strategy. Questions persisted, however. What aspects of documentation strategy worked and what did not? How could costs be shared and resources equitably allocated? Would computer technology, particularly the World Wide Web, make collaborations easier or more difficult? Clearly, the state's archival community needed to undertake an examination of documentation strategy to delineate its usable components.

Beginning in the 1970s some archivists called on the profession to develop unified appraisal theories and proactive collecting policies and to abandon its traditional, passive, haphazard collecting methods. In 1974 Gerald Ham challenged archivists to abandon the traditional selection process, which he described as "so random, so fragmented, so uncoordinated, and even so often accidental,"<sup>7</sup> and to adopt instead "imaginative acquisition guidelines" to document the human experience.<sup>8</sup> The next year David Gracy assailed what he called the "spilt milk" philosophy of collecting, based on the idea that archivists simply had only to wait for residual records to reach them.<sup>9</sup>

Archivists initially responded to this challenge by devising better appraisal techniques and improving the ways they shared collection metadata and appraisal decisions through

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<sup>7</sup> F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> David B. Gracy, "Peanut Butter and Spilt Milk: A New Look at Collecting," *Georgia Archive* 3 (winter 1975): 20.



national databases. Then, in 1986 Helen W. Samuels, spurred by the concern of social historians for the voice of the powerless, brought together different strands of thinking about cooperation, appraisal, and service that had existed in archival thought since Schellenberg published *Modern Archives*<sup>10</sup> and defined the concept of documentation strategy. In her seminal article "Who Controls the Past?" Samuels answered the question posed by her title unambiguously: archivists control the past when they select records for permanent retention. If, as she argued, the decisions archivists made were important, then she proposed in documentation strategy a powerful tool to improve those decisions. She urged archivists to go beyond cooperating with one another to include records creators and users and to seek actively those records that delineated the lives of the great mass of humanity. Samuels also suggested steps for creating a documentation strategy. Archivists were to choose and define the topic, select advisors, structure the inquiry, examine the available documentation, then collect and place the newly discovered records.<sup>11</sup>

Within a year Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett built on Samuels's original design in a pair of articles emphasizing meticulous planning and recruitment of participants in a documentation strategy. Hackman's model began with a core group of archivists who defined the topical area to be documented, drafted its strategy, then selected a

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen Garrison, "The Very Model of a Modern Major General: Documentation Strategy and the Center for Popular Music," *Provenance* 3 (fall 1989): 22-24; Margaret Hedstrom, "New Appraisal Techniques: The Effect of Theory on Practice," *Provenance* 7 (fall 1989): 12, 15; Terry Abraham, "Collecting Policy or Documentation Strategy: Theory and Practice," *American Archivist* 54 (winter 1991): 47-48.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?" *American Archivist* 49 (spring 1986): 109-24.



group of advisors to study and refine the strategy. Each step in this process had its own bevy of procedures, so that only after an extensive period of planning and committee work did participants finally seek the documentation their strategy targeted. Warnow-Blewett's account of the long-running American Institute of Physics (AIP) project to document its profession through the papers of its high-visibility members offered a model of this strategy.<sup>12</sup>

Even before these articles were printed, the New England Archivists constructed a project to collect the documentation needed to write a complete social history of New England. Members organized themselves into teams, defined the specific subject areas each team was to treat, and sought the available universe of documentation to complete the task. Of all the projects planned, the consortium finished five: the built environment, religious life, rural life, recreation and tourism, and the emergence of a high-tech research area in Massachusetts. *Finished* was a relative term; the end product was not a written social history but a model for massive, comprehensive documentation gathering.<sup>13</sup>

Following Hackman's adage that documentation strategies "may be developed at levels ranging from worldwide

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist*, 50 (winter 1987): 18-29.

<sup>13</sup> Hackman and Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process," 30-47; Eva S. Moseley, "Introduction," *American Archivist* 50 (fall 1987): 468-72; Nancy Carlson Schrock, "Images of New England: Documenting the Built Environment," *ibid.*, 474-98; James M. O'Toole, "Things of the Spirit: Documenting Religion in New England," *ibid.*, 500-17; Philip N. Alexander and Helen W. Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *ibid.*, 518-31; Samuel A. M. Reynolds, "Rural Life in New England," *ibid.*, 532-48; T. D. Seymour Basett, "Documenting Recreation and Tourism in New England," *ibid.*, 550-69.

and nationwide to statewide and community wide,"<sup>14</sup> Richard Cox chose a regional rather than topical approach in attempting to document the history of western New York state. Though funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), Cox could not produce a "full documentation plan," and his project like that in New England became a model rather than an precedent.<sup>15</sup> Cox's results, along with the high rate of dropouts encountered by the New England Archivists, illustrates one of the problems with many initial documentation strategy projects—they were simply too large. The planners tried to accomplish more than their available resources allowed. Implementing a documentation strategy requires funds to support a number of archivists, records managers, records creators, and other interested parties. Money is not the most important resource required, however, time is, including the time of records creators and scholars who are needed to carry out the project.

Institutional interests also restrained archivists who wanted to construct documentation strategies. They had a difficult time justifying to resource providers and allocators the exceptional expense of money and time required to succeed, and even among archivists who welcomed documentation strategy, collaboration foundered on competing institutional priorities. Frank Boles strongly argued that "documentation strategy must function within the limits imposed by institutional goals and priorities," and so accurate was his assessment that by 1996 Stephen Sturgeon could

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<sup>14</sup> Hackman and Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process," 14.

<sup>15</sup> See Richard J. Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *American Archivist* 52 (spring 1989): 192–200; Abraham, "Collecting Policy or Documentation Strategy," 49–50.



characterize documentation strategy as "little more than archival non-aggression pacts."<sup>16</sup>

Above all, for documentation strategy to succeed, participants themselves—archivists and nonarchivists—must believe that the documentation team can actually accomplish its goals and that those goals are worth the expense and time required to carry out the project. This requirement, which Terry Abraham attributed to the theory itself rather than to its implementation, made documentation strategy a "Holy Grail"—an ideal to be pursued rather than a real-world solution to appraisal problems for many archivists.<sup>17</sup>

Critics suggested scaled down documentation projects as a more viable alternative to complex documentation strategies. Abraham, for example, advised archivists to strike a compromise between their reality and the documentation strategy theory through "carefully written collection development plan[s], an appraisal policy, knowledge of—if not full cooperation with—other repositories in the region." Gould P. Coleman illustrated this point in his report of the Cornell Farm Family Decision Making Project, which worked primarily because it was exceptionally relevant to Cornell's stated mission.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes," *American Archivist* 50 (summer 1987): 359, 366–67; Stephen C. Sturgeon, "A Different Shade of Green," *Archival Issues* 21,1 (1996): 40. On opposition to archival activism and documentation strategy, see Gregory A. Stiverson, "The Activist Archivist: A Conservative View," *Georgia Archive* 5 (winter 1977): 4–14.

<sup>17</sup> Sturgeon, "A Different Shade of Green," 40–41; Abraham, "Collecting Policy or Documentation Strategy," 52.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information," 366; Abraham, "Collecting Policy or Documentation Strategy," 52. Gould P. Coleman, "Documenting Agriculture and Rural Life," *Midwestern Archivist*



The message was clear. Archivists were not in position to champion an entire documentation strategy and could not afford to lead those components of projects that fell outside their institutional priorities. The AIP model publicized by Joan Warnow-Blewett succeeded precisely because it had been tightly focused, relatively small, and intimately connected with the parent institution's mission. Special subject archives and discipline history centers ranging from the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center to the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University reported similar success by tying their participation in a documentation project to their repository's own priorities.<sup>19</sup>

Documentation strategy did encourage archivists to develop better appraisal and collecting theories and to reconsider their relationships with both scholarly and general users.<sup>20</sup> The AIP program, for example, was championed by

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12, 1 (1987): 21-27.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas H. Kreneck, "Documenting a Mexican-American Community: The Houston Example," *American Archivist* 48 (summer 1985): 272-88; Susan Grigg, "A World of Repositories, A World of Records: Redefining the Scope of a National Subject Collection," *ibid.*, 286-95; Jacqueline Goggin, "Carter G. Woodson and the Collecting of Source Materials for African American History," *ibid.*, 261-71; Garrison, "The Very Model of a Modern Major General," 22-32. Avra Michaelson and Jeff Rothenberg reported the use of similar strategies in the emerging electronic environment in "Scholarly Communication and Information Technology: Exploring the Impact of Changes in the Research Process on Archives," *American Archivist*, 55 (spring 1992): 286-315.

<sup>20</sup> Abraham, "Collecting Policy or Documentation Strategy," 52; Boles, "Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done," 361, 363-64; Mark A. Greene, "Store Wars: Some Thoughts on the Strategy and Tactics of Documenting Small Businesses," *Midwestern Archivist* 16, 2 (1991): 101; Michael Nash, "Small Business, Manufacturing, and Flexible Specialization: Implications for the Archivist," *American*

records users and creators who, concerned about their own professional knowledge, created a demand for archival expertise and service. Archivists in turn provided leadership in those areas where their expertise was greatest. It is these aspects of documentation strategy—impetus from records creators and users, involvement by archivists closely tied to their institutional mission—that proved to be its viable essence.<sup>21</sup> Programs that follow this model are likely to succeed.

#### *A Proposal for Documenting Alabama Industry and Labor*

Where does this leave Alabama archivists and the documentation of industry and labor in the state? What facets of documentation strategy can be applied to either the SIP union list or the AOLAF records collection project? How can archivists combine the intellectual infrastructure provided by documentation strategy theory with the needs of these groups of records users and producers?

The larger archives within the state of Alabama have already established a web of informal connections, though none have engaged in cooperative collecting ventures. These are personal connections among members of this relatively small community that provide a starting place to build more formal agreements. There is substantial agreement in the state archival community that both the SIP and AOLAF projects are worthwhile, and many larger archives in Alabama hunger for opportunities to perform community service. In fact, a number of archivists desire to work on joint projects like these.

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*Archivist* 58 (summer 1995): 292–93.

<sup>21</sup> Hackman and Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process," 18–29.



Interinstitutional cooperation may be easier now than it was in the past. Universities in the state, the archives of which make up a substantial bloc within SALA, have access to the Internet as well as the personnel expertise to use it for communications, data storage, and information display. Six of every ten SALA members subscribe to the organization's electronic listserv and an additional 15 percent use e-mail. The myriad of archival websites in the state further attest to archivists' abilities to use this new medium.<sup>22</sup> This communications revolution qualitatively changes cooperative projects and gives archivists the ability to bring together information about distributed collections on a particular topic and to make such information available to the public from a single location.

The development of this infrastructure in the last decade increases the ability of archivists to help the SIP and AOLAF projects succeed. So far archivists' relations with the SIP and AOLAF projects have been slow to develop, however. Neither project has good networks within the archival community, though both are striving to develop such links. For their part, archivists in Alabama are as yet unsure how to fit themselves, their repositories, and their institutional interests into these undertakings.

In the existing model of documentation strategy, archivists direct the entire project. They choose the topics and participants and, because they are familiar with the universe of documentation, lead the project through design and execution. This scenario has not worked well in the past and will not work here. Both the SIP and AOLAF documentation projects are already directed by individuals for whom the

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<sup>22</sup> Special Collections and Archives, University of Idaho Library, "Repositories of Primary Sources: Eastern United States and Canada." Updated November 1999. <<http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/east1.html>>; accessed 6 November 1999.



projects directly fulfill an institutional interest. The place of archivists in these projects is still one of leadership, but only within areas of their professional expertise that match their own institutional priorities.

The SIP union list of collections in Alabama and the South has very different parameters from the AOLAF goal of collecting and providing access to the records of labor unions. Both offer Alabama archivists an opportunity to employ parts of documentation strategy theory to good advantage, but they must pick and choose the components of documentation strategy that fit the individual needs of these projects

For example, helping build the SIP database requires archivists to agree to cooperate across institutional lines. They must survey the universe of documents currently held in the state's repositories and seek collections held by small repositories that might not even consider themselves part of the archival community. This group includes county historical societies, genealogical societies, businesses that keep their own records, and a variety of other organizations. Another area within the SIP project where archivists can provide leadership is in planning ways to collect and display the accumulated collection data. SIP members, for the most part historians without information management training, do not realize what options they have available, particularly in the electronic environment.

AOLAF has different needs. No one on its board is sure of the quantity of documents and other materials held by Alabama's labor unions. Implementing basic systems of physical and intellectual management—appraisal, arrangement and description, providing access—falls within archivists' expertise. Gaining such control over these records is an obvious task suitable for a cooperative project in which archivists lead within their areas of knowledge.

Suggesting ways archivists can work with SIP and AOLAF still begs the question of how such projects fit within the archivists' institutional interests. Answering that question

begins with the collecting policies of individual repositories. While most repositories in the state do not address industry and labor in Alabama in their collecting policies, many do approach those topics obliquely. For example, the repositories in and around Birmingham, where union concentration is highest, have a commitment to documenting their geographical area. So archivists there can justify bringing in regional labor union records under their geographic rubric. Other repositories in other regions have a history of formal or informal cooperation; the Mobile County Archives, the City of Mobile Archives, and the University of South Alabama Archives are a good example. If one of these repositories cannot participate in a collecting project, another can accept records for the sake of "professional courtesy," especially in small to moderate quantities.

Sometimes institutional interests that justify participation in documentation projects fall outside the repository's collecting policy altogether. Neither the Auburn University Archives and Manuscripts Department nor the University of Alabama W. S. Hoole Special Collections Department mention labor records in their collecting policies. The institutional missions of both universities, and of many other colleges in the state, do include outreach along with instruction and research, however. Demonstrating to resource allocators that doing their part in collecting the records of labor or industry in Alabama meets the needs of their constituents might not be particularly difficult, especially if union officials or SIP leaders addressed letters of thanks and support to university administrators and state legislators.

Information technology also supplies a concept that both SIP and AOLAF project leaders and their archival partners can use: *chunkable*. This neologism comes from the language of the World Wide Web, where webmasters and designers speak of chunks of information—succinct pieces that fit well onto the visible part of a single screen. The key to chunking



a cooperative project is to make sure that each segment is complete in and of itself rather than designing a linear progression of steps that depend on earlier steps. By accomplishing stand-alone parts, chunked projects do not fail completely when resources dry up. There still stands a completed body of work, available for use as is, ready to be the starting point for continuing the project at a later time. Building in stopping points also enables participants to point and say, We have successfully completed this part.

Chunking the SIP and AOLAF projects would provide the same psychological satisfaction to resource providers who demand a start and a finish to information gathering. The SIP union list, for example, has ready-made breaks. Project managers could ask Alabama archives to provide information about their collections that document the iron industry in the state. As each repository finished, it could take satisfaction in accomplishing an outreach project. When all known archives complete that portion of the survey, the SIP managers could canvas each repository again, this time on another industry. And so on, and so on, until SIP had covered all industries.

The greatest advantage of this chunking approach to project management is that it enables archives to participate at the level allowed by their institutional imperatives at any given time and allows greater success to coexist with lesser success. The project itself will not fail if every component does not fully succeed, just as the New England Archivists' documentation strategy succeeded in producing a set of articles that were discrete units of production even though the participants' original vision of documenting the social history of Massachusetts foundered.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Moseley, "Introduction," 468-72; Schrock, "Images of New England," 474-98; O'Toole, "Things of the Spirit," 500-17; Alexander and Samuels, "The Roots of 128," 518-31; Reynolds, "Rural Life in New England," 532-48; Basett, "Documenting Recreation," 550-69.



### *Conclusion*

There is no doubt that industry and labor in Alabama are not well documented in the archival record, and no Alabama archives has the institutional mandate to lead either of these projects. The archival record of completing such large projects anywhere in the United States also does not bode well for such an effort. Fortunately, in the Alabama situation, records producers and users have stepped in to design, and are beginning to execute, such documentation projects. Both the Southern Industrialization Project and the Alabama Organized Labor Awards Federation recognize the need for archival expertise and have invited archivists to engage the issues with them.

Alabama archivists are preparing themselves to handle their roles in these projects and have reached out to the leaders of both groups. Documentation strategy offers a well-articulated model that archivists can adapt in responding to these invitations and defines ways in which archivists can contribute to these efforts. Documentation strategy also demonstrates the importance of planning in such projects. If Alabama archivists are to play leadership roles in these projects, they must stay within their areas of expertise—specifically, information management and the universe of documentation—and must fit their efforts within the repositories' institutional imperatives. This is the lesson of a decade of implementing documentation strategy.

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## **Look Before You Leap: Weaving Preservation into Appraisal, Acquisition, Accessioning, and Processing Practices**

**Pam Hackbart-Dean and Theresa J. Montgomery**

Often the thrill of adventure and discovery propels archivists to pursue collections. While out in the field, few would pass up the opportunity to acquire an interesting collection that would enhance a repository's holdings or disregard an exciting find such as a love letter from a United States president or a personal diary. Sometimes, however, the excitement of discovery overshadows the daunting task of caring for these collections after they have been acquired. Regardless of the manner in which archival materials are acquired by a repository—whether by law, institutional mandate, purchase, or gift—it is important to evaluate the condition and preservation requirements of potential acquisitions, in addition to archival appraisal factors such as historical significance, legal and evidential values, informational content, and scarcity of other documentation.<sup>1</sup>

Before an institution accepts any collection, it should consider not only its value and significance but also the

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1993), 102.



potential costs associated with its accessioning, processing, long-term maintenance, and providing future access to the materials. Acquisition costs include packing, transportation, insurance, field survey, cleaning, and stabilization. Processing outlays include staff and supplies to provide the arrangement, description, and holdings maintenance of a collection. Adequate supplies include proper storage containers, such as lignin-free or low lignin boxes and folders, chemically stable plastic or paper enclosures, microspatulas, brushes, and bond paper for preservation photocopying.

Long-term maintenance considerations encompass ongoing monitoring of environmental controls, consistent physical inspection, reformatting, backing up and migrating electronic formats, and/or providing conservation treatment. At the same time, the safety of existing collections and the repository staff must remain a perpetual concern because of the potential of infestation from newly acquired collections.

### *The Acquisition Challenges*

The physical conditions under which collections have been stored will provide many clues to prospective problems that will require attention once the collections are accessioned by the repository. For example, if paper records have been stored for years in an attic, and the seasons are alternately hot and cold with associated shifts in relative humidity, papers may be or may become weak and embrittled. If a collection has been stored in a damp or leak-prone warehouse or basement, the records may be moldy or mildewed as well as somewhat pulpous, and thus again very fragile.<sup>2</sup> A careful assessment of the environmental conditions to which the materials have been subjected will suggest reasonable conclusions regarding their present physical state.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, archivists should also investigate the storage area and containers for evidence of insect, rodent, or fungal infestation. Collections presenting severe problems that will require substantial resources for conservation treatment or duplication should be evaluated against the institution's ability to preserve adequately such materials. Granted, most collections acquired by a repository are in fairly good condition. Some may have strong mold and mildew smells or are just plain dusty. Others are in good physical condition but have little to no order to them when they are received. A variety of materials in different formats and conditions may be stored in boxes that are sent to an institution. This could range from three-dimensional objects to photographs, paper, magnetic media, or oversized documents. Ultimately, the final questions are Can staff members adequately take care of these materials? and Will this donation make a contribution to current holdings while not endangering those materials already housed in the repository? To answer these consequential questions, an institution must review the Society of American Archivists' (SAA) *Code of Ethics for Archivists* and its own mission statement and acquisition policy.

### *Ethics*

The SAA *Code of Ethics for Archivists* includes a section on collecting policies, which reads, "Archivists arrange transfers of records and acquire documentary materials of long-term value in accordance with their institution's purposes, stated policies, and resources.... They cooperate to ensure the preservation of materials in repositories where they will be adequately processed and effectively utilized."<sup>3</sup> It is critical to concentrate on the resources aspect of this statement. David Hooper, State Archivist of Arizona, succinctly states the case, when he says, "A repository

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<sup>3</sup> "Code of Ethics for Archivists," Society of American Archivists, 1992.

ethically cannot acquire materials it cannot care for and make available."<sup>4</sup> The focus for repositories should be on their ability to "care for properly" the collections they plan to acquire.

### *Mission Statement*

A mission statement is the definition of what a repository is and does—its *raison d'être*. Most mission statements include the goals of collecting, preserving, and making available material that documents a specifically defined subject area or the history of an institution or organization. During the accession process, repositories tend to focus on the "collecting" aspect of the mission. Archives collect these materials to preserve them for future generations. Understanding the reasons that make a particular collection significant will assist in rationalizing the preservation decision-making. The mission statement gives an institution purpose, and then it is through the creation and implementation of specific policies that the mission is realized.

### *Policies*

In order to implement its mission, every repository needs a written acquisition policy. It defines more specifically what the archives collects, what the limits of the collection will be, and what types of materials are of particular interest. Basically, the purpose of the acquisition policy is to set down initial guidelines for assessing records offered to a repository.<sup>5</sup> It is used both as an internal document to inform the

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<sup>4</sup> David H. Hooper, "Manuscript Collections: Initial Procedures and Policies," *American Association for State and Local History Technical Leaflet* (Nashville, TN: AASLH, 1980), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ann Pederson, *Keeping Archives* (Sydney: Australian Society of Archivists, Inc., 1988), 74.



institution's planning and often as an external document to facilitate work with donors.

The acquisition policy should include a general statement, such as: "The condition and format of accessions, and the ability of the institution to provide adequate storage and access to the accessions, will be considered before acceptance." It might also include: "The (research/collection/monetary) value of the materials will be weighed against the amount of resources needed to preserve them (and make them accessible)."<sup>6</sup>

The policy should also include language concerning space and security of the space. It could state, "The institution shall refuse any materials for which it cannot provide adequate and secure storage facilities." This might include materials such as those requiring special housing (e.g., cold storage for nitrate films and/or colored photographs, cabinets for maps). Artwork and artifacts, such as furniture and machinery, may be more appropriate for a historical home or museum, rather than an archives, if proper storage and care cannot be guaranteed.

There could also be a clause in the policy alerting prospective donors to limit possible exhibition. Exhibitions of archival materials show what a repository collects, preserves, and makes available to patrons, but they also have the potential to educate, communicate, and encourage individuals to study the past.<sup>7</sup> However, "no guarantee of exhibition or other special treatment of materials will be made without assessing the risk of damage to the materials by a conservator or preservation professional." Simply, a repository would not

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<sup>6</sup> Sharla Richards and Tom Clareson, "Preservation and Access" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Southwest Archivists, Lafayette, Louisiana, 29 May 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Gail Farr, *Archives & Manuscripts: Exhibits* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1980), 8.

guarantee an exhibit until it can be confirmed that the materials would not be harmed through exhibition.

Finally, the policy should anticipate future collections and should attempt to provide contingencies for the accession of computer media/electronic records. "The institution shall not acquire materials requiring the use of equipment it does not own unless materials can be transferred to another format.... The institution shall limit the variety of storage formats accepted. There will be a standard format for the archival master files of all converted records."<sup>8</sup>

Such policy statements may be premature, and an institution might be better served by creating specific data acceptance/maintenance guidelines. As part of a project funded in part by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the Delaware Public Archives has developed "Model Guidelines for Electronic Records." These guidelines are intended to guide agencies toward developing electronic records systems that create records that meet the accepted standards for a variety of criteria, including legally acceptable, audible, and evidential. The purpose of these guidelines is to give agencies some guidance in the development of systems that create electronic records.<sup>9</sup> This type of policy would better serve such a specific area of collecting.

Preservation, therefore, must be seen as integral to every activity in an archival repository, beginning with the mission

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Hedstrom and Sheon Montgomery, *Digital Preservation Needs and Requirements in RLG Member Institutions* (Mountain View, CA: Research Libraries Group, December 1998), 36.

<sup>9</sup> "Model Guidelines for Electronic Records," Delaware Public Archives, Hall of Records, Dover, DE, 1998; <<http://www.lib.de.us/archives/recman/g-lines.htm>>. A similar project was conducted at the University of Pittsburgh and can be found at <<http://www.sis.pitt.edu/~nhprc/progl.html>>.



statement and policies, to acquiring the collection, and finally, to making the collection available for research.

### *Field Survey*

Ideally, when a repository is offered a collection, the archives staff should have the opportunity to survey the collection prior to bringing it into the building. A repository does not always have the opportunity to see the entire collection before it arrives on the doorstep. It may only have the opportunity to review a fraction of the collection and sometimes nothing at all. Accepting a collection sight unseen is risky business. Before any collection is accepted, the repository should always conduct a field survey. A field survey is the investigation of the collection and its condition. It is important to conduct at least a cursory condition survey at the same time that other appraisal functions are taking place. A careful assessment of the environmental conditions to which the materials have been subjected will suggest reasonable conclusions regarding their present physical state. The format of potential accessions also should be considered during the field survey. Unusual or especially fragile formats, such as glass plate negatives, paintings, or three-dimensional objects, may pose special transportation and storage problems.<sup>10</sup>

Collections presenting severe problems which will require substantial resources for conservation treatment or duplication should be evaluated against the institution's ability to preserve adequately such materials. The format of the records and their physical condition must be evaluated in terms of costs and prospects for long-term preservation. The administrative demands in processing and servicing the

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<sup>10</sup> Ritzenthaler, *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*, 102.



collection must also be estimated.<sup>11</sup> Further, condition should be weighed against value. Collections of limited or unknown value which are in extremely poor condition should not be accepted if the repository has a choice in the matter. Condition will be largely irrelevant, however, when the collection or item in question has significant historical, artifactual, or associational value. For example, a barely legible state constitution or a newly discovered Ernest Hemingway manuscript will be desirable regardless of condition.

Elizabeth Yakel, author of *Starting an Archives*, concludes, "Materials requiring extensive conservation treatments should not be discarded automatically. Although tempting at times, getting rid of one's sticky, expensive, and time-consuming access and preservation problems during appraisal distorts factual evidence for future generations and does future researchers a great injustice."<sup>12</sup> Because a collection has some preservation problems does not necessarily mean that an institution should not accept it. It is important to survey and appraise the collection before the institution makes a commitment. The repository should consider the ramifications prior to signing the donor agreement or facilitating the transfer of custody.

There are two primary benefits of the field survey, as outlined by NAGARA GRASP (National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators *Guide & Resources for Archival Strategic Preservation Planning*). These are (1) to assure that information is gathered by the most

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<sup>11</sup> Virginia R. Stewart, "A Primer on Manuscript Field Work," in Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, DC: NARA, 1984): 129.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Yakel, *Starting An Archives* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1994), 33.

efficient and economical methods, and (2) to establish clear and consistent information that ensures sound decisions by archivist(s) who appraise, arrange and describe, and address other functional concerns.<sup>13</sup>

It is helpful to use a survey form to gather the information needed to create an inventory (see page 85). It will generally include information on the scope and content of the collection and its estimated size. The surveying archivist should record additional information to aid in packing and moving material and thus decrease the likelihood of damage or loss. Highly valuable or fragile items that may require special handling or security precautions should be noted. It is particularly important to note any evidence of mold or insect infestations, past or present, if known. The archivist should also consider the storage environment: storage fixtures and furniture, environment and risk controls (such as, records on the floor). Format and physical condition of records would include the types, physical condition, container format, physical condition of containers, and relation between the container and the records (such as, 80 percent of boxes underfilled). Finally, another consideration would be the format and physical condition of machine-readable records. This includes type, physical condition (such as, dust), container format (such as, aluminum can used for film storage), physical condition of container (such as, microfilm box made of paper that tested positive for acid content) and relation between container and records (such as, audiotapes loose in box).<sup>14</sup>

Another benefit of a field survey is to determine a collection's preservation and security requirements. It also helps establish project priorities and costs for physical

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<sup>13</sup> NAGARA GRASP: *Guide and Resources for Archival Strategic Preservation Planning* (Albany, NY: NAGARA, 1993), 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.



transfer, conservation treatment of existing problems, arrangement and description, and long-term maintenance (such as, through environmental control).<sup>15</sup> Finally, it allows the repository the opportunity to assess the collection and to determine whether it fits the guidelines of its acquisition and collecting policies.

"If the outcome of the survey of a collection is that it presents too many problems, it is best to decline the materials, even if it has research potential and fits within the institution's collecting policy."<sup>16</sup> Another repository should be contacted to determine if they are interested in the materials. In the *SAA Code of Ethics*, archivists must "cooperate to ensure the preservation of materials in repositories where they will be adequately processed and effectively utilized."<sup>17</sup>

### *Receiving the Records/Isolation*

Once a repository has decided to acquire a collection, it must implement provisions for carefully packing and safely transporting the records. Inspection for biological infestation of incoming acquisitions must be complete before the new accessions are placed in the stacks or records storage areas. The accessioning archivist generally inspects the materials during the 'acquisition' period. Doug Sanders, Book and Paper Conservator at Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), recommends an acclimation period of approximately two days—depending upon atmospheric conditions—before a collection is accessioned and moved into

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Floyd, "An Archivist Looks at Preservation," in *Managing Preservation: A Guidebook* (Ohio: State Library of Ohio and the Ohio Preservation Council, 1995): 15.

<sup>17</sup> *The Code of Ethics*, SAA.



## Field Survey Preservation Notes

**Collection:****Donor:****Location:**

Telephone Number:

Nature of collection:

Estimated quantity:

Boxed materials:

Loose papers:

Filing cabinets:

Bound volumes:

Oversize materials:

Framed items:

Artifacts:

Other:

Special formats/condition problems:

DescriptionQuantityLocationSpecial Handling

Water damage:

Evidence of mold:

Evidence of insect infestation:

Packing supplies required:

Equipment required:

Approx. # of packing days:

Personnel required:

Transportation required:

Additional comments:

Archivist \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Form developed by Pam Hackbart-Dean for the Richard B. Russell  
Library, University of Georgia Libraries

the stacks.<sup>18</sup> This will provide time to inspect the collection to ascertain a pest or mold infestation problem.

Ideally, there should be a specially designed space adjacent to the loading dock and new acquisitions/accession area for the acclimation. It should be a secure place available to store incoming collections while they are awaiting integration into the archival accessioning/processing procedures. During the initial field survey and packing, the archivist should note any evidence of mold or insect infestation. All incoming collections in which there is evidence of infestation must be kept isolated in a secure area while fumigation options are explored, in order to avoid contaminating the entire holdings.<sup>19</sup> The archivist should also check the transfer to ensure that all materials are accounted for per transfer documentation.

### *Accessioning and Processing*

Accessioning is the formal acceptance into custody of an acquisition and the recording of that acceptance. Once accessioning procedures have been carried out, the staff should discard potentially damaging packing materials. Then, once processing has begun, archivists use holdings maintenance procedures to transfer newly acquired collections into chemically stable, good preservation quality archival enclosures.

The primary goal of archival preservation is to provide a basic level of preservation for all holdings. Whatever decisions are made, the repository should consider the limitations on institutional resources, including funding,

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<sup>18</sup> Doug Sanders, telephone conversation with Theresa Montgomery, 21 August 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Fumigation issues and procedures are outlined in Ritzenthaler, *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*, chapter 10.

staffing, and competing programs. At the same time, archives are experiencing increasing demands for access. This translates into a situation where a decision to preserve one collection means that another collection may not receive adequate preservation attention.<sup>20</sup> With finite resources and increased use, collections may also receive limited preservation attention before being made available for research.

Processing archivists also need to know, especially in the absence of a conservator, about the physical nature of archival materials in all formats, the causes of deterioration, the methods of preventing deterioration, and the methods of reversing existing deterioration. To accomplish the last two objectives, archivists should also have some familiarity with basic conservation treatments and techniques or preservation practices. Storage and housing can be improved at various stages during the life cycle of records but are often incorporated into accessioning or arrangement projects.<sup>21</sup>

If preservation were the only concern, fasteners would be eliminated entirely from the archival repertoire of supplies. But in this as in other areas, sound preservation practice must be meshed with other valid archival concerns regarding security, handling, and the need to maintain records in their original order.<sup>22</sup> Archivists may be the best persons to handle the removal or separation of foreign objects from collections, including damaging metal fasteners of various

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<sup>20</sup> Tyler O. Walters, "Contemporary Archival Appraisal Methods and Preservation Decision-Making," *American Archivist* 59 (1996): 323.

<sup>21</sup> Norvell M. Jones and Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, "Implementing an Archival Preservation Program," in James Gregory Bradsher, ed., *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988): 200.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.



types, rubber bands, artifacts such as court evidence (locks of hairs, bullets, and so on), or three-dimensional objects. The archivist can cross-reference and rehouse these materials with advice or assistance from a trained conservator. Institutional policies may vary regarding the best way to handle these extraneous but associated materials.

### *Environmental Examination*

Maintaining a stable environment once the material is in the repository is critical to the longevity of archival materials. Sometimes a problem may develop after custody of the collection has been transferred. Oftentimes, however, there is an existing problem into which new materials are transferred. This must be taken into consideration when determining whether to accept a collection. In this case, an ongoing environmental monitoring program would prove invaluable. The monitoring efforts would provide support documentation to solicit funding, if needed, to correct the deficiencies. The staff should continually monitor records in the processing and storage areas for evidence of pests, leaks, air quality, and fluctuations in the temperature and relative humidity. Staff education and consistent communication is imperative for the success of all preservation efforts.

### *Preventive Measures*

Among some of the issues the archivist needs to address when attempting to prevent future damage to the collections are pest control, cleaning practices, and dampness. The use of glueboards or sticky traps in records storage areas and exhibition areas can help make inspection and identification of inhouse problems easier. It is simpler to inspect the traps than to inspect each object, for example, and sticky traps provide an inventory of species present. Good sources for

insect identification are *A Guide to Museum Pest Control*,<sup>23</sup> an entomologist, an exterminator, or the state cooperative extension service. Good housekeeping for pest control includes more than inspection of collections, vacuuming (not sweeping), and damp mopping of all interior spaces, including attics and basements. All entry points such as doors, air intakes, air conditioning units, and openings for utilities should be sealed as well as possible, periodically inspected, and cleaned as necessary. Food policies should be carefully monitored. Food should not be allowed in or near records storage/processing areas.<sup>24</sup>

An Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program relies on the early detection of insect pests, preferably before they become established and cause damage. The emphasis is on preventive methods, and the use of chemicals as a last resort. One staff member, usually the conservator or head of preservation, serves as coordinator and liaison with the exterminator, other experts, and the repository staff. This person can also be responsible for expressing concerns about pest control when formulating collection policies and when planning for a new building, renovations, or exhibitions. The IPM coordinator is charged with keeping up with new information, health hazards, and legal restrictions related to pesticides. Limited use of chemicals is the safest way to monitor collections and prevent possible harm to collections, personnel, and the environment.

Dust is everywhere, so good housekeeping is vital to good preservation practice. Dampness can cause water damage, and unnoticed leaks can produce infestations like mold or

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<sup>23</sup> Lynda Zycherman, ed., *A Guide to Museum Pest Control* (Washington, DC: Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation and Historic and Artistic Works, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Of some concern at many repositories are new services, such as facility rental, which introduce new problems.



pests in rotting wood or plaster. A good source for mold infestation identification would be a university mycologist. It may be more difficult to determine the type of mold, especially if it is dormant.

### *Contacts*

An institution may not have the onsite resources to investigate various solutions when confronted with accepting a problem collection. There are sources, organizations, and individuals available to help. They can answer questions, send information, or put an individual or repositories in touch with appropriate resources. Such contacts might include the preservation field office of the Regional Alliance for Preservation (members include Southeastern Library Network, AMIGOS, Northeast Document Conservation Center, Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, and the Upper Midwest Conservation Association), the state archives, or a preservation department at a university or college. If they do not know the answer, they will lead to someone who might. It will take time to investigate possible solutions, but it is worth the effort.

### *Summary*

Preservation is an institution-wide responsibility. Because of the nature and size of many archives, there may be only one professional staff member administering the overall archival operation as well as management of preservation activities. This person must be able to make informed decisions about the program based on an understanding of the mission and collecting policies, the conditions of the collections as a whole and records scheduled to come in, the facilities in which they are housed, the needs of the archives' users, the resources required to support the program, and the options available for preserving both original records and reformatted records.



A repository should know that it is providing the best possible care for a collection when acquired. It is part of the mission and duty of an archives to collect, preserve, and make materials available for research. Preservation should be integrated in all archival functions such as appraisal, accessioning, arrangement and description, storage and housing, reference use, and exhibition. This must be seen as an inherent part of all archival work rather than a series of specialized activities limited to one day per week. Ultimately, repositories want to be assured that their staff members are doing all they can to preserve a collection that they accept into their holdings—that they have looked before they leaped!

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## Fresh Focus

Too often the pressure of the present-day work environment lures archivists into ignoring their professional past or advancing shortsightedly into the future. To encourage such reflection on the archival enterprise, *Provenance* includes this section, Fresh Focus. We invite contributors to explore neglected chapters in archival history or to share an original, especially historical, perspective on the current world of archival affairs. *Provenance* particularly encourages submissions for Fresh Focus from new or student archivists who are, after all, the future of the profession. Following is the second in a series of occasional essays or papers meeting these criteria.

The Editors

### **Before Archives: Margaret Cross Norton's Childhood, Education, and Early Career**

**Donnelly Lancaster**

The most fundamental influence on Margaret Cross Norton's career choice came not from a progressive history professor or experienced archivist but instead from a decidedly unique childhood. Looking back on her childhood after more than fifty years, Norton believed that the home



environment created by her parents made the most significant contribution to the direction of her archival career. Norton claimed "the major influence on my archival philosophy was absorbed unconsciously, but most emphatically, from my family background."<sup>1</sup>

Norton grew up in a family of government employees who imparted to her a knowledge of and respect for archives. Her early understanding of the value and definition of archives did not mean, however, that from youth she consciously prepared herself for a career in archives. Uncertain of what career she wanted to pursue, and influenced by the era, she selected a traditionally feminized career and entered the library profession. As she matured, she became interested in history and eventually completed the courses for a Ph.D. in history. Disheartened by her chosen profession, in 1915 Norton discovered a career that would utilize the appreciation of records she had developed in her childhood. Her appreciation of records came to fruition in the 1920s when she began to expand the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library and as she presented her ideas to colleagues in national organizations.

Born in 1891 Margaret Cross Norton was the only child of Samuel and Jennie Adams Norton. Her parents lived in Rockford, Illinois, until her father's death in 1926, and they had both lived in Rockford for some years before their marriage.<sup>2</sup> Both her parents and an uncle held positions in county offices. When they married, Jennie Adams was the deputy county treasurer and Samuel Norton was deputy

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret C. Norton to William Birdsall, 18 June 1973, *Margaret Cross Norton Working Papers, 1924-1958* (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Archives, 1991) (hereafter cited as *MCNWP*), microfilm, reel 3, frame 1234 (hereafter cited in the form 3:1234).

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. John Irvine to Margaret C. Norton, 13 March 1953, *MCNWP*, 3:1153; Margaret C. Norton to Mrs. John Irvine, 16 March 1953, 3:1154.

county clerk. After the birth of their daughter, Jennie Norton resigned from her position. Margaret Norton's uncle, Marcus Norton, was county clerk. Elected in 1889 Marcus Norton retained the position until his death in 1917; her father then served as interim county clerk for the remainder of the term. At that time in Illinois, the county clerk was the chief executive officer in the county and was responsible for a variety of records.<sup>3</sup> In this environment Margaret Norton "saw how and why records were being created, and how they were being used."<sup>4</sup>

Norton vividly remembered the times when her mother, rather than hiring a sitter, left her in her father's care at his office. Instead of leaving the child in his office where she might interfere with his routine, Samuel Norton encouraged young Margaret to play in the records vault.<sup>5</sup> Although this was an unusual location of play for a child, these times gave Norton early impressions of the importance of records creation and keeping. Norton remembered a cartoon in the stacks that depicted a harried records clerk among an enormous stack of record books with the caption, "Put that book back where it belongs!"<sup>6</sup> Norton learned early in life that a record's value to government depended on its authenticity and order.

Margaret Norton's introduction to these truisms came not only from time spent in her father's office; she also absorbed this knowledge of the importance of records in government administration in her home "for unlike most men, my father

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<sup>3</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 18 June 1973, *MCNWP*, 3:1234.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1235.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1234.

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

talked shop at home.”<sup>7</sup> Margaret Norton was privy to many discussions of county business during her childhood. Norton’s father also continued to use his wife’s mathematical skills for the benefit of the county when for many years she kept the assessment books for the county collector. Thus, the entire Norton family acquired knowledge of the daily proceedings of county offices.

Although Norton’s childhood experiences provided her a basic knowledge of government records, her decision to pursue an archival career came later in life. After she graduated from Rockford High School in 1909, Norton attended Rockford College for three years. In 1912 she entered the University of Chicago, and by 1913 she had completed an undergraduate degree in history. She continued her education at Chicago, and by 1914 she had completed a Master of Arts in history.<sup>8</sup>

Norton entered college during the Progressive period, which began in the late nineteenth century and lasted until the early twentieth century, from perhaps 1880 until 1920. During this period, the United States experienced significant growth, both in its population and industrial sector. This growth brought intolerable living and working conditions for the nation’s poor, especially in the crowded cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Americans from varied social, political, and economic backgrounds concentrated their efforts to improve living and working conditions and check the power of industrial magnates. Attempts at reform during this period focused on improving the country’s social, economic, and legal systems.

Many young women in the Progressive era found their time at college exciting and challenging as they enrolled in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Register of Illinois Librarians,” 24 March 1944, *MCNWP*, 3:1138.



demanding courses, joined social organizations, and developed often intense relationships with other women. This was particularly true for daughters of urban, middle- and upper-class, white, Protestant families such as Margaret Norton.<sup>9</sup> Women of this privileged group at the University of Chicago lived in the more expensive campus residence halls, belonged to social organizations, and enjoyed sundry gatherings with other female and male students.<sup>10</sup>

Historians have characterized the group of women who entered college after 1890 as "frivolous and socially preoccupied, contrasting them unfavorably with the serious and dedicated pioneer generation of 1865 through 1890."<sup>11</sup> These women were more interested in heterosexual relationships, marriage, and children than the earlier generation of college women.<sup>12</sup> Around 1900, marriage rates for graduates of "select women's colleges" were as low as 50 percent.<sup>13</sup> Although marriage rates increased for female college graduates in the Progressive era, for various reasons many remained single. Between 1877 and 1924, only 25 percent of women who earned the Ph.D. ever married.

No evidence explains Norton's single status or indicates that she was ever involved romantically. Norton did doctoral

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara M. Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women. A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 107-09.

<sup>10</sup> Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), 95, 104-05.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-6.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1987), 148-49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

work at the University of Chicago, but she did not complete her dissertation.<sup>14</sup> Her marital status conforms with the prevailing trend: as a woman's education level increased, the probability that she would marry decreased. In her later years, she jokingly described a former employee who left her position to get married as not "fully emancipated."<sup>15</sup> This comment implies she gave credence to feminist views on marriage, suggesting that she chose to remain single to pursue a career. Many educated women of this period had decided at an early age to forgo marriage and romantic relationships with men. As a general rule, professional success and avoidance of marriage went hand in hand for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> Ida Tarbell, "Muckraker" journalist, felt a complete aversion to marriage from an early age, for marriage "would interfere with my plans; it would fetter my freedom. . . . When I was fourteen I was praying God on my knees to keep me from marriage."<sup>17</sup>

Women of both generations—the nineteenth-century pioneers in college education and the "new women" of the Progressive era—shared one common concern: all had to

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret C. Norton, "Archives in Illinois: The Pioneer Period," *Illinois Libraries* 63 (1981): 231.

<sup>15</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 31 May 1973, *MCNWP*, 3:1216.

<sup>16</sup> Penina Migdal Glazer and Miriam Slater, *Unequal Colleagues: The Entrance of Women into the Professions, 1890-1940* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 4-8.

<sup>17</sup> LeeAnne G. Kryder, "Self Assertion and Social Commitment: The Significance of Work to the Progressive Era's New Woman," in *History of the Women in the United States: Historical Articles on Women's Lives and Activities*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (New York: K. G. Saur, 1992-1994), 8,1: 326.



answer the question, "After college, what?"<sup>18</sup> This question not only related to marriage, for even those who chose to remain single often had to choose between entering the paid work force or making the "family choice" by fulfilling family obligations.<sup>19</sup> During her time at the University of Chicago, Norton faced the problem of answering for herself "After college, what?" Norton's family made no impositions on her following her graduation. She planned to pursue a career immediately after the completion of her education, but she first had to choose that career.

In an age of professionalization dominated by men, women like Norton understood the obstacles in their quests for professional careers. Although she held a graduate degree from a prestigious university, Norton realized the barriers she would face as a woman, and she believed that she had only three options: teacher, nurse, or librarian.<sup>20</sup> She considered three of the four "female-intensive" professions of this period, omitting social work from her list of possibilities. By excluding social work, she dismissed an obvious option for a woman student in the Progressive period at the University of Chicago, which was a pioneering center for social work training.<sup>21</sup> Norton, nevertheless, considered only traditional, feminized careers even though some women of the early

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<sup>18</sup> This popular question comes from the title of an 1898 pamphlet by Helen Starrett, *After College, What?*, that encouraged parents to allow their willing daughters to enter the professions.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce Antler, *The Educated Woman and Professionalization: The Struggle for a New Feminine Identity, 1890-1920* (New York: Garland Press, 1987), 136-37; Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 30-1; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 115-40.

<sup>20</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 24 May 1973, *MCNWP*, 3:1204.

<sup>21</sup> Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 66-92.



twentieth century were pursuing nontraditional careers. For example, by 1920 women in the United States constituted 5.9 percent of all medical students and 5.6 percent of all law students.<sup>22</sup> Women scientists were abundant in the Progressive period, but these women seldom found employment in their field beyond women's academic institutions.<sup>23</sup> Apparently when Norton searched for a career, she chose the path of least resistance which at the same time seemed reasonably interesting to her. Nevertheless, she subsequently found that this feminized career offered her little satisfaction.

Norton was not alone in her desire for a feminized profession. In 1920 in the United States there were 640,000 women teachers, 145,000 women nurses, 27,000 women social workers, and 14,000 women librarians. The percentages of women in these professions ranged from 60 percent of the total in social work to 97 percent of the total in nursing.<sup>24</sup> Despite their differences, these professions shared one common characteristic: they offered women of the Progressive period few opportunities for advancement and little prestige. Teaching had attracted large numbers of women since the early nineteenth century when the "cult of true womanhood" had marked female teachers as inherently

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<sup>22</sup> Patricia M. Hummer, *The Decade of Elusive Promise: Professional Women in the United States, 1920-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1979), 57.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret W. Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 160-61.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara E. Brand, "Librarianship and Other Female-Intensive Professions," *Journal of Library History* 18 (1983): 391.

equipped to shape the lives and educations of children.<sup>25</sup> The Civil War stimulated the extensive development of the American nursing profession. As members of the medical community, nurses, natural care givers according to Victorian thought, always took positions subordinate to physicians; they were merely assistants to the physicians, worthy of little respect.<sup>26</sup> During the Progressive period, women continued to enter the nursing profession, but "as alternative occupations opened to women, fewer middle- and upper-class women chose nursing."<sup>27</sup> Social work developed as a paid occupation in the late nineteenth century with social reformers such as Jane Addams and Grace Abbot leading the way. For many educated, Progressive era women, settlements represented both an "opportunity to continue the collective female life they had enjoyed in college" and "the chance to feel that they were applying their knowledge in a socially useful way."<sup>28</sup>

The idea of a career in social work, teaching, or nursing failed to entice Norton. She apparently had little interest in aiding children, the sick, and the less fortunate in society. Despite her graduate education in history, Norton also expressed no interest in pursuing a career as a professional historian. Instead, she chose to enter the fourth feminized profession, librarianship, in what seems a rather simple decision-making process: "On no better authority than a

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<sup>25</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966).

<sup>26</sup> Susan M. Reverby, *Ordered to Care: The Dilemma of American Nursing, 1850-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 131.

<sup>27</sup> Brand, "Librarianship and Other Female-Intensive Professions," 396.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.



teacher's suggestion that 'Because Margaret likes to read, she should become a librarian,' I therefore took the two year graduate course in Library Science at the old New York State Library School at Albany, taking the B.L.S. in 1915."<sup>29</sup>

Like teaching in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, librarianship evolved as a feminized profession in the late nineteenth century as industrialization, immigration, and urbanization increased, and national and community leaders sought to preserve social order. Some of these leaders believed education and universal literacy were means of maintaining that order and that public librarians would reinforce these positive social values.<sup>30</sup> Melvil Dewey, founder of the Columbia College of Library Economy and its successor, the New York State Library School, was an outspoken proponent of women librarians' inherent abilities to provide this missionary service: "Is it not true that the ideal librarian fills a pulpit where there is service every day during all the waking hours, with a large proportion of the community frequently in the congregation? . . . [The library is] a school in which the classes graduate only at death?"<sup>31</sup> Contemporary literature supported these ideals of librarianship.<sup>32</sup> Educated women of irreproachable character seemed the ideologically sound choice to work in these libraries and benefit larger society. Furthermore, administrators could pay women librarians lower salaries than

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<sup>29</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 24 May 1973, 3:1204.

<sup>30</sup> Wayne A. Weigand, "The Development of Librarianship in the United States," *Libraries and Culture* 24 (1989): 101-2.

<sup>31</sup> Dee Garrison, "The Tender Technicians: The Feminization of Public Librarianship, 1876-1905," *Journal of Social History* 6 (1972-73): 135-6.

<sup>32</sup> Joanne E. Passet, "Men in a Feminized Profession: The Male Librarian, 1887-1921," *Libraries and Culture* 28 (1993): 388.



men.<sup>33</sup> As women entered the library as professionals they filled some of the reference and most of the technical positions, but men invariably held the administrative positions. This pattern "quickly stratified the large library institutional bureaucracy by gender. At most large libraries, directors were male, cataloguers female, and reference librarians about an even split between the sexes."<sup>34</sup>

Even though Norton chose a library career through a simple process of elimination, she evidently sought for herself excellent training for the position. With male enrollment at 19.5 percent between 1887 and 1921, the New York State Library School boasted the highest figures for male enrollment in library schools in the United States.<sup>35</sup> The New York State Library School was one of the few library schools in the country that required a bachelor's degree for admission.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the educational program that Dewey designed with its "attention to mechanics and apprenticeship within the training school, to the neglect of theory or general learning" prepared its majority female enrollment for their future in technical positions in libraries.<sup>37</sup> Norton obviously believed the school at Albany offered a superior education since she did not stay in her own state and enter, for example, the library school at the University of Illinois.

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<sup>33</sup> Weigand, "The Development of Librarianship," 103.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Passet, "Men in a Feminized Profession," 393.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>37</sup> Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 168.

After she graduated in 1915, Norton held a series of library posts. Her first position was at the Vassar College Library in Poughkeepsie, New York, as an assistant cataloguer. Norton remained at the Vassar Library for almost three years, but she grew increasingly disenchanted with librarianship. As a cataloguer, Norton performed perhaps the duller task in library work. In fact, the consensus among librarians at the time was that "because women had greater ability than men to bear pain with fortitude, women had stored great reserves of patience and thus could perform the most monotonous tasks without boredom."<sup>38</sup> When in 1973 a researcher asked why she left library work, Norton responded:

I do not care to discuss my disillusionment with the library profession. Among other things, I felt it too "cut and dried," inflexible, too much infused with the missionary spirit—people ought to be made to read, whether they want to or not; the work monotonous with little opportunity for originality, etc. I do not care to go into personalities as I would have to do to explain why I left Vassar after three years, the ostensible being to accept a fellowship at Chicago.<sup>39</sup>

Dissatisfied with her profession, Norton described herself as a "misfit" in the Vassar College Library.<sup>40</sup>

During her time at Vassar, Norton maintained an interest in academic endeavors. Although Norton's decision to become a librarian might suggest that perhaps her interest in

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<sup>38</sup> Garrison, "Tender Technicians," 137.

<sup>39</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 18 June 1973, 3:1231.

<sup>40</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 24 May 1973, 3:1204.

history had waned, she nevertheless continued her work in the field. Her position at Vassar left her summers free, and Norton used the time to begin doctoral work in history at the University of Chicago. Her continued interest in history during her time at Vassar perhaps changed the future course of her life and professional career.

In December 1915 Norton attended the national meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA) in Washington, D.C. Years later Norton called her attendance at this meeting "the turning point in my career."<sup>41</sup> Because the AHA leadership believed, incorrectly, that Congress would soon pass an act establishing a national archives, they planned programs around the subject. Waldo G. Leland and Leo F. Stock of the Carnegie Institute offered a presentation on European archives and the dismal condition of American federal archives.<sup>42</sup>

This presentation stimulated Norton's interest in the care of American records. While a student at Albany she had seen the disastrous consequences of improper storage of government records: a fire in the New York State Library in 1911 had destroyed enormous amounts of Dutch colonial records.<sup>43</sup> More importantly, this presentation grabbed her attention because as a child her parents taught her to respect records. Having grown up in a family whose livelihood depended on the creation, use, and care for government records, Norton knew what the loss and neglect of records could mean to a business or government agency. Consequently, the field of archival work seemed worthwhile and essential to Norton. Certainly, archival work captivated

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<sup>41</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 24 May 1973, 3:1205.

<sup>42</sup> Norton, "Pioneer Period," 231.

<sup>43</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 24 May 1973, 3:1204.



her interest more so than library work. She had only entered the library profession as a last resort, and she became bored with the work in the first year. An archival position would allow her to use the understanding and respect for records she had developed since childhood. She determined then in Washington, D.C., to become an archivist.

On the return trip to Poughkeepsie, Norton discussed her dream with Vassar faculty member Lucy Maynard Salmon. Salmon, head of the Vassar history department, was a distinguished and respected professor.<sup>44</sup> Known for her views on educated and professional women, Salmon believed women should receive recognition for their works only if their work had merit; gender alone did not warrant praise. In correspondence with a friend, Salmon confided, "I am intensely interested in all good work, but not specially because it is done by women."<sup>45</sup> Lucy Salmon was, however, realistic. When the young librarian Margaret Norton expressed her interest in an archival career, Salmon advised her, "Get ready for it. Read everything you can on the subject, and if the opportunity comes you will be ready."<sup>46</sup> After this advice, Norton "read everything about archives [she] could get [her] hands on."<sup>47</sup> During the next few years, however, no opportunities in the archival field arose for her, and Norton

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<sup>44</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 187-89.

<sup>45</sup> Louise Fargo Brown, *Apostle of Democracy: Lucy Maynard Salmon* (New York: Harper and Row, 1943), 256.

<sup>46</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 24 May 1973, 3:1205.

<sup>47</sup> Norton, "Pioneer Period," 231.

continued to work at Vassar, even though she believed she might find more fulfillment at a historical library.<sup>48</sup>

She left Vassar in 1918 when the University of Chicago awarded her a two-year fellowship for doctoral studies in history. During those two summers, she calendared manuscript collections at the Indiana State Library.<sup>49</sup> By 1920 Norton's fellowship ended, and she had completed the residency requirements for a Ph.D. in history. She found a position as a cataloguer for the State Historical Society of Missouri, located at the University of Missouri at Columbia. When she accepted the position she delayed the completion of her doctoral thesis. Nevertheless, she enjoyed her first full-time position in an historical setting. Her starting annual salary of \$1500 was an improvement over her ending salary of \$1000 at Vassar. These were normal salaries for a woman in a female-intensive profession. For example, in 1913 female librarians earned an average salary of \$1081 per year. Nurses that year earned comparable salaries, while public school teachers earned almost \$500 less.<sup>50</sup> Although some librarians felt this salary was too low, Norton never expressed displeasure concerning the nature of the work rather than the salary.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 24 May 1973, 3:1204.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Joanne E. Passet, "You Don't Have to Pay Librarians!: Women, Salaries, and Status in the Early 20th Century," in Suzanne Hilderbrand, ed., *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Company, 1996), 211.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 209-10.

Norton continued her work, "happily located" in Columbia, Missouri.<sup>52</sup> She enjoyed the work, and apparently she had a good working relationship with her supervisor, Floyd Shoemaker. Late in 1921, Shoemaker had "with great difficulty" arranged for her a salary increase and promotion to Head Cataloguer.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, Norton applied, with only slight interest, for a position as superintendent of the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library. Content at the State Historical Society of Missouri, Norton claimed "the only reason I would consider leaving was the fact that [Shoemaker] was only two years older than I and I realized there was a limit to how far I could go there."<sup>54</sup> With ambition and curiosity, Norton agreed to meet with Illinois Secretary of State Edward Emmerson. After several mishaps, Norton arrived in Springfield, Illinois, hungry, excited, tired, and suffering from a severe headache. On 10 January 1922 Emmerson faced a bewildered Norton when he said, "Miss Norton, I have decided to appoint you the first archivist of the state to organize the new department."<sup>55</sup> Until then she had assumed the position involved supervising a small, established department; she was "appalled" to think she would have to create a division herself.<sup>56</sup> In fact, she "felt like crawling under something." At that moment, however, she "braved up" and told herself, "You cannot do anything worse than fail.

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<sup>52</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 18 June 1973, 3:1232.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1233.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Norton, "Pioneer Period," 231.



Take the job."<sup>57</sup> After her acceptance, Norton wanted more time to prepare for the position. She decided to visit older archival repositories in the eastern states and seek advice from archivists there.

Perhaps Norton did not realize at the time that experiences before 1922 had laid a strong foundation for her successful career as an archivist. As the years progressed, however, her actions, successes, and dedication to her archival career compare favorably to successful men who were "efficient, objective, and devoted to service" in their careers.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Norton to Birdsall, 18 June 1973, 3:1233.

<sup>58</sup> Glazer and Slater, *Unequal Colleagues*, 13.



## Reviews

*The Records of American Business*. Edited by James M. O'Toole. Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1997. Index. 411 pp. Hardcover, \$28.00.

In reading this book, one does well to remember that it was published in 1997 and its preparatory work done even earlier. This is said as both a caution and a celebration; a caution because the technological discussions cannot, of necessity, be the latest, yet a celebration because the insights and analyses in the book are timely indeed. *The Records of American Business (RAB)* is a compilation of fourteen essays by practitioners and academic specialists in the archival field, most of whom come from academic and museum settings. Only four seem to be currently employed as corporate archivists.

In a penetrating foreword, editor James O'Toole offers an intelligent discussion of the burgeoning parameters of corporate archives and the often contested and paradoxical territory within which they exist. The book culminates the work of the Records of American Business Project, which, in turn, rests heavily upon the holdings, policies, outlooks, and procedures of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Hagley Museum and Library, the two institutions in North America with the largest holdings of business archives. The



book explores a wide range of topics from the relationship of corporate archives to business history, the role of oral history in corporate archives, the challenges of technology in particular and the Information Age in general, and the prospects for the future. Designed to be of service to any archive that seeks to collect business records, the *RAB* volume may be most effective in educating the members of the profession at-large.

*The Records of American Business* contains lively discussions and sometimes opposition theories and professional sentiments. On the one hand, many of the contributors describe the antipathy between the history/archival professions and business which has hamstrung much archival progress. In this view, the rule of the bottom line exercises disinterest at best in something as non-operational (non-income producing) as archives and history tend to be. Most agree that historical research, as a rationale for corporate archives, has been not a hard sell and a functional failure in corporate settings. On the other hand, many contributors vigorously agree that the future of corporate archives rests more on the understanding of the archivist of his/her company than any other single feature. That understanding seems to lie along all the "traditional" archival functions (litigation support, marketing protections, communication history and reference) and in the direction of corporate essence itself—its logos, images, culture, trademarks, brand equity, and identity. Those with this view see a bright future for corporate archives.

The analyses in the *RAB* book take on the challenges of technology and of the Information Age itself that seem to offer both consternating difficulties and unexplored opportunities for archivists. In the opinion of some of the contributors, archivists should become techno-nerds in the extreme, while others recommend manipulating the utilization of the evidence of the corporate memory, regardless of its media, and to accept the fact that electronic records keeping

is here to stay. On the one hand, several of the contributors say that the pure size of modern records defeats a profession that is so attached to paper records, while yet again, there are expressions of optimism that new forms and new appraisals techniques will serve to ameliorate the problems though not eliminate them. Several of the contributors tout the importance of the archivist becoming a more proactive agent in information management and in communication management, inside and outside the corporation.

The wisdom of this book lies in its balance—between research-based archival practices and corporate-based needs, between corporate archives as a marginal operation and corporate archives as an essential vehicle to create corporate enlightenment, between the views that the future is dim and those where it is unlimited. There could be more understanding of latest corporate theory and business philosophy (there is a tendency to cite archival literature primarily, not business literature). There could be much more information coming directly from corporate archives. The archivist from Coca-Cola is almost a lone voice for corporate realism and archival success. There could be more understanding of the importance of three-dimensional objects within the corporate archives setting, where the distance between material culture and documents is no further than that between documents and photographs in most historical societies. There are, it should be remembered, stagecoaches at Wells Fargo, coke bottles at Coca-Cola, cereal boxes at Kellogg's, and airplanes at Delta Air Lines.

The discussions here are so vital, in the sense that they lie at the center of the profession's growth and development, that this book is a recommended volume in any library where corporate or business history is remotely of interest. As the profession allows itself to be led by its users, not just its perpetrators, the more it will succeed in environments like the corporation. As to the variety of viewpoint, it stands as perhaps the most promising thing about the volume, for it is



true that any archivist who sees incomprehensible challenge ahead will find plenty of that in the book as will the archivist who sees unending opportunities to be of service. What this indicates is clearly the message of this book: the future of business history lies very much in the hands of the people who maintain the corporate archives.

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*Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science.* By Luciana Duranti. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1998. Index. 186 pp. Hardcover, \$45.00.

Luciana Duranti's *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* is timely and appropriate reading for both archivists and records/information managers as they encounter old and new forms of documentary evidence in the workplace. Originally published in six consecutive journal articles of *Archivaria* (numbers 28–33), the journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Duranti has added new life to a discipline originally developed in seventeenth-century France as a science for the purpose of proving authenticity of archival documents. In the twentieth century, diplomatics is being used for proving authority of research sources of medieval and early modern documents, comprised of concepts and procedures for studying the nature, formation, analyzation of their creation and transmission, and their relationships to facts and their creators.

While heavy in definition, Duranti uses an unusually large introductory segment to present successfully her education and application of the discipline in European settings, and eventual teaching of the concept to enthusiastic students, who,



along with collegial support, encouraged her modern day effort to make the discipline attractive to other eager learners, and applicable to them as young professionals. This narrative portion of the text is refreshing as these young, inquisitive, and enthusiastic archivists will soon begin filling the ranks of an aging professional body.

After an exhaustive journey through the history of diplomatics and its evolution to the modern day form, Duranti invites the reader into her writing to understand how the records in question are both dissected and analyzed, step-by-step, to investigate the origin, development, and eventual application of the diplomatic concepts and their effectiveness on both archival records and systems of any century. Her ability to transgress time, when appropriate, to introduce applications that are pertinent to modern day archival thinking and their concrete applications is impressive.

A later chapter of the text thoroughly discusses the relationship between originality and authenticity in records and the importance of knowing both. This portion proved inspirational as I began to see the applications to modern day records that have been effected by the multiple copies created by mimeograph machines, proliferation of facsimile use, and electronic documents that are constantly changing with the touch of a button.

Duranti finishes strong with two concise discussions on the importance of the physical and intellectual forms of records and clear explanations for the use diplomatic criticism in an archival setting. While this may have been the most inspiring of all six segments, Duranti's writing style will hold one's attention throughout the text so that the reader may enjoy the fruits of her laborious efforts with this final, thought-provoking discussion.

While critics will cite that a diplomatics revival had already started in the twentieth century, Duranti has gone much further by making the study of diplomatics readable (while sometimes very technical reading) and worthwhile to

multiple generations of archivists and records/information managers.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds  
Collections Archivist  
Joint Archives of Holland  
Hope College, Michigan

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*Hurricane! Surviving the Big One: A Primer for Libraries, Museums, and Archives.* By Michael Trinkley. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. A copublication of SOLINET and Chicora Foundation, 1998. 102 pp., accompanied by a free packet of information on recovery from water damage, provided by Heritage Preservation. \$15 postpaid; prepayment required. Order from SOLINET Preservation Services (800/999-8558 or 404/892-0943).

In recent memory, Hurricanes Hugo, Andrew, Alberto, and Mitch brought devastating destruction to individuals, businesses, and institutions, including libraries, museums, and archives. There are practical procedures that can be taken before a hurricane hits that can increase an institution's probability of survival and minimize immoderate damage. This guide focuses on general issues in developing a disaster plan, the nature and effects of hurricanes, making buildings more storm-proof, disaster preparation, what to expect after a storm, recovery procedures for various materials, rebuilding, and available assistance.

Much space in the guide is spent on how an institution can prepare for a hurricane disaster. The author consistently brings the point that there must be discussion with staff, building architects, local authorities, consultants, and disaster recovery firms long before their services are needed. There



will always be confusion and emotion during any crisis, but by planning early some issues will be already resolved. Transition from preparation to recovery will flow more smoothly.

Planning for disaster takes time and effort, but the end results are worth it. In addition to developing a telephone tree, an institution needs to investigate services in the area that will be beneficial in the face of a major disaster. This would include disaster recovery services, freezer trucks, grocery stores, and other institutions outside the area that may be of assistance during a crisis. Opening lines of communication with the fire marshal, police department, and local authorities can only benefit an institution. When disaster strikes, there is little time to try to locate services and individuals that could be of assistance to an institution. By developing these relationships in less stressful times, an institution should have a quicker response and not lose time trying to explain who it is and what its needs are. Also, it is important to talk with conservators ahead of time who can assist in recovery and answer questions about special problems. By inviting a consultant or conservator to visit, they can get to know the collection and be prepared to assist if or when a need arises.

Trinkley also focuses on storm-proofing buildings long before hurricane watches are ever issued. By securing the structure of the building, an institution is helping ensure the survival of the collections held inside. Trinkley provides many tips on how to strengthen the structure against strong winds.

Information in this primer is provided in a nontechnical language. This guide would be enhanced if an index were included since this an essential feature for the nonspecialist. Also, more information and clarification on the health risks of mold would be beneficial. A glossary of undefined terms would also be helpful. This is a good, basic manual for



disaster planning and recovery. Those who live in hurricane-prone areas will benefit from the information provided in this primer.

Pam Hackbart-Dean

Assistant Director

Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies  
The University of Georgia Libraries

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*Cost Analysis Concepts and Methods for Records Management Projects.* By William Saffady. Prairie Village, KS: ARMA International, 1998. 128pp. Softcover, \$59.00.

Every administrative-level records manager or archivist has at one time been confronted with and partially overwhelmed by budgeting, cost justifying programs, or preparing and evaluating bids for a new project. Their dilemma can cause the most competent archivist or records manager to be at a loss as to where to start. Bill Saffady's *Cost Analysis Concepts and Methods for Records Management Projects* is unquestionably where to begin. Whether the project is preservation microfilming, digitizing documents, records center operations, or processing and describing archival collections, Saffady's excellent book provides both the theoretical basis for cost analysis and projection and gives useful and easily applied examples of how such complex operations can be analyzed, evaluated, and presented. The book is at once a detailed and a selective treatment of the most widely discussed and useful cost analysis approaches likely to be encountered by or useful to records managers and archivists. Saffady's short and practical monograph allows the records professional both to comprehend and speak the language of the cost accountant and budget analyst with

confidence and to make a more compelling case for resource allocation.

The purpose of the book is to make the planning, budgeting, proposal evaluation, and decision making in records and information management projects understandable and useful to archivists and records managers. The volume accomplishes this goal in two major chapters or parts. Part One of the book, entitled "Categorizing Records Management Costs," is a more theoretical discussion of how cost accounting principles are used and the types of analysis that are possible in records-related projects. Cost accounting concepts and relationships—such as, direct vs. indirect costs, variable vs. fixed costs, controllable vs. uncontrollable costs, total vs. unit costs, standard vs. actual costs, and start-up vs. ongoing costs—are clearly defined, articulately explained, and elucidated through records-related examples. The first part of the work also shows how both capital and operating budgets are constructed using the classification and sorting of costs. Excellent and clearly detailed examples, using records reformatting, are developed for both fixed and flexible (multiple contingency) budgeting.

Part Two of the Saffady book, entitled "Justifying Records Management Costs," deals with cost justification concepts and methods that most records specialists and archivists are likely to encounter and find useful in acquiring sufficient resources. The work only briefly discusses Cost-Benefit Analysis. Saffady explains that the decision to treat the analytical framework most familiar to records managers and archivists in a superficial way was due to Cost-Benefit Analysis's focus upon intangible benefits and goals that may be primary-based on the mission of the organization. Cost-Benefit Analysis may be financial or nonfinancial, quantitative or nonquantitative, objective or subjective and, thus, too broad in methods and considerations to be treated fully in this small work.

This section of the book invests much space and attention to describing and demonstrating the use of Cost-Effective



Analysis and Return on Investment Analysis (ROI). Cost-Effective Analysis, the author explains, always involves an economic comparison of possible alternatives. For most government and not-for-profit organizations, Cost-Effective Analysis, a comparison between competing alternatives to accomplish the same or similar results, is more relevant and useful than ROI analysis. Through the Cost-Effective Analysis techniques of Differential Analysis, decisions can be screened for the most efficient and cost justifiable alternative. Break-Even Analysis, a type of Cost-Effective Analysis, determines the cost-effectiveness of replacement alternatives. It allows the records manager, archivist, or resource allocator to ascertain how much time or how much activity will be needed to justify the change from an existing system or process to a new one.

Return on Investment Analysis involves an evaluation of how good an investment a particular records program or project is. ROI compares the expense and returns of records project or program to other investment alternatives available to a for-profit organization. As the author notes, ROI methods of analysis are likely to have little impact on records and archival programs outside of the corporate world, and hopefully little use within commercial organizations. There are few records and archival activities that can provide the same type of monetary return on expenditures that stock buy-backs, equity purchases, and debt pay-downs can provide, yet properly managed and retained records can provide a great many benefits to an organization.

*Cost Analysis Concepts and Methods for Records Management Projects* is a very useful book, and belying its title, it is not only for a few practitioners at the highest organizational levels. Although its \$59 price tag may seem expensive, it is worth every dollar to the archivist facing budget preparation, bid selection, and cost justification. The work rescues the archivist and records manager from having to acquire an extensive accounting proficiency in order to



make the argument for project and program funding in the language of the resource allocators. There are more detailed works on cost accounting, but there are none specific to records and archives. I highly recommend this book to every records manager and management-level archivist.

Michael E. Holland, C.A.  
Director of University Archives  
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## INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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A one-hundred dollar prize will be presented annually to the author of the best article in *Provenance*. Named after David B. Gracy II, founder and first editor of *Georgia Archive* (the precursor of *Provenance*), the award began in 1990 with volume VIII. It is judged by members of *Provenance's* editorial board.

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Members of the Society of Georgia Archivists, and others with professional interest in the aims of the society, are invited to submit manuscripts for consideration and to suggest areas of concern or subjects which they feel should be included in forthcoming issues of *Provenance*.

Manuscripts and related correspondence should be addressed to Sheryl B. Vogt, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, Main Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602-1641. Telephone: 706-542-0619. Fax: 706-542-4144. E-mail: sbvogt@arches.uga.edu.

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Manuscripts (four printed copies) should be submitted in double-spaced typescripts throughout—including footnotes at the end of the text—on white bond paper 8 1/2-x-11 inches in size. Margins should be about 1 1/2 inches all around. All pages should be numbered, including the title page. The author's name and address should appear only on the title page, which should be separate from the main text of the manuscript.

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