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Cover Page Footnote

The author would like to give special thanks to Nicholas Meriwether for his support and guidance during the project.

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Scott Carlson

In the early morning hours of August 9, 1995, Jerry Garcia – the bearded, bespectacled singer-guitarist whose thirty-year tenure with the band the Grateful Dead made him a worldwide icon – quietly passed away at Serenity Knolls, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in Forest Knolls, California. In his biography of the guitarist, Blair Jackson notes that Garcia was released earlier that month from the Betty Ford Center to spend his birthday in the San Francisco Bay area. He confided to a friend that he felt his willpower to be shaky, so he checked into the local facility, determined to shake his chemical dependence. Sadly, Garcia's efforts were cut short by what was later determined to be a massive heart attack around 4:00 a.m.¹

A private funeral service was held on August 11 for Garcia's family, friends, and bandmates. Amongst fans, anticipation was high for some kind of public memorial. It was unthinkable to not have one – after 30 years of near-constant touring and recording, the Grateful Dead were American cultural icons of the 1960s counterculture movement. Furthermore, any memorial would most likely occur somewhere in the Bay Area; not only was it their longtime base of operations, but the band's residence from 1966-1968 in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district inextricably linked the Dead to the neighborhood.

The following day, the band, their long-time promoter Bill Graham Presents, and the City of San Francisco jointly announced a municipally-sanctioned memorial for Garcia in Golden Gate Park, not far from where the band played in the formative stages of their career. "There will be no specific ceremony," read the press release for the August 13 event. "Instead, a large altar will be erected at the Polo Field, and fans will be invited to leave a poem, light a candle, or say a prayer to his memory."²

¹ Blair Jackson, *Garcia: an American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 451-455.

² City of San Francisco, Bill Graham Presents, and the Grateful Dead, *Memorial Gathering in the Memory of Jerry Garcia*, August 12, 1995, archived from dead-heads@nemesiis.berkeley.edu, <http://www.hake.com/gordon/latest.html>.

However, Deadheads – the fanbase famous for their fanatical devotion to the Grateful Dead – had already started gathering in the Park on August 9, the day Garcia's death was made public. Congregating fans and a small shrine of photographs, flowers, postcards and candles appeared and grew before the August 12 announcement; by August 13, a prescient Deadhead had painted "Jerry Garcia Memorial Field" on the concrete section of the field's bleachers.³

An estimated 25,000 fans turned out for the memorial. Despite the press release insisting that the memorial would feature "no live music and no appearances or performance by the Grateful Dead or any other musicians," fans found a stage, with music blaring from a public address system. After a Mardi Gras-style funeral parade, members of Garcia's immediate family, as well as his other family of bandmates – guitarist Bob Weir, bassist Phil Lesh, drummers Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann, and keyboardist Vince Welnick – addressed the crowd, sharing memories and consolations. The memorial's soundtrack, selected by the band's longtime tape archivist Dick Latvala and host of the syndicated radio show *The Grateful Dead Hour* David Gans, spanned the musical career of the band as well as cuts from Garcia's solo recordings.

But it was the altar, mentioned in the press release, which captured much of the attention of the fans. Erected amidst flowers and crowned by an enormous portrait of Garcia, fans deposited a vast array of offerings. The outpouring was spontaneous; devotees left poetry, as the press release suggested, but they also came with letters, artwork, mementos, and photographs. The mementos were shuttled by Bill Graham employees to the bleachers under the altar. The vast majority of items were adorned with personal inscriptions, short messages, quoted lyrics (the chorus of Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away," a staple of the live Dead, appeared frequently), or simple sentiments such as "Bye, Jerry."

Late in the afternoon, Bill Graham employees and a handful of volunteers carefully packed the materials on the altar into boxes, which were transferred and stored in one of the company's

³ Nicholas Meriwether, "A Requiem for Jerry: Six Days of the Dead," in *The Deadhead's Taping Compendium, Volume III: An In-depth Guide to the Music of the Grateful Dead On Tape, 1986-1995*, ed. Michael M. Getz and John R. Dwork (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 668-671.

warehouses. After Bill Graham Presents' sale to Clear Channel Entertainment in 2000, representatives from the company determined that the ownership of the altar materials rightfully belonged to Garcia's estate. Accordingly, they contacted his heirs – daughters Heather Katz, Theresa "Trixie" Garcia, Annabelle Garcia, and Sunshine Kesey – about the future of the collection. With family support, Trixie Garcia accepted responsibility for the altar materials and stored them in a climate-controlled room in her house for another eight years.

In April of 2008, bandmembers Weir and Hart with University of California Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal announced that the band's archives would be handed to the Special Collections and Archives (SCA) of the university's McHenry Library.⁴ Dating (mostly) from around the band's 1970 incorporation to its 1995 dissolution, an Ithaka S+R Case Study on the archive noted that the entire collection spanned approximately 600 linear feet of documents, photographs, audiovisual recordings, textiles, and other artifacts.⁵ The announcement necessitated a unique and highly specific position within SCA; the resulting job notice for a Grateful Dead Archivist made headlines across the world.

A few months prior to this announcement, a meeting was arranged between Nicholas Meriwether – later named Grateful Dead Archivist at UCSC – and Carolyn Adams Garcia and Trixie Garcia about the altar materials. They concluded that because the band's archive was soon to be transferred to UCSC, the altar collection should as well. In January 2008, Meriwether completed a box-level inventory of the materials at Trixie's home; an item-level appraisal followed the following month. At the time of transfer to UCSC, staff removed materials damaged, destroyed, ravaged by mold, or found to be perishable, leaving about 20 boxes plus oversize items. With the acquisition and the subsequent hiring of Meriwether as archivist, processing began on the band's archive; meanwhile, the altar

⁴ Regan McMahon, "Grateful Dead Archives Going to UC Santa Cruz," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 24, 2008, <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Grateful-Dead-archives-going-to-UC-Santa-Cruz-3286888.php>.

⁵ "Ithaka S+R Case Study: Grateful Dead Archive Online," *Association of Research Libraries*, 2013, <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/searching-for-sustainability-gdao-case-nov2013.pdf>.

materials awaited processing until 2013.

Near the end of 2012, I contacted Meriwether about a possible volunteer internship with the Grateful Dead Archive. As a Cataloging and Metadata Librarian for less than a year, my position was transforming in unanticipated ways. For example, there was a steady increase in working on the institution's DSpace repository. To successfully adapt to the challenges of digital archive work, I needed to be versed in metadata, traditional archival procedures, and digital curation.

Meriwether responded enthusiastically to my offer for an internship, and under his supervision I was to process the Jerry Garcia Memorial Collection. In our discussions before the project began, Meriwether promised the project would be difficult – the most difficult collection I would ever work on, he described it. The processing of the collection required special care and consideration, for both the items contained as well as the overall plan for arrangement and description.

Prior to formal processing, we created a detailed box-level inventory of the collection. Through this, we removed and deaccessioned items in either an advanced state of decay or a danger to the rest of the collection. These included perishables, foodstuffs, organic materials (such as rotting animal feathers, flower arrangements, dried plants) and combustibles, and clipped dreadlocks and other remnants of human hair. This preliminary itemization led to a fuller comprehension of the collection's scope and underscored the uncommon nature of the altar materials. Instead of the works of a single entity, gathered over many years, the altar collection represented personal gifts delivered over the course of a single day, from a crowd close to 25,000. With no original order to follow, its arrangement would undoubtedly be different from that of a traditional collection.

The simplifying solution was to group as many like items together, generating the collection's most basic components. This approach was not without its problems; any descriptive conventions applied were tested by the sometimes discordant nature of the materials. Correspondence, for example, necessitated clear delineation between what constituted "letters," "public letters," and "notes" for their respective subseries. Similarly, some fan art contained personal messages, some letters included elaborate

artwork, and some poetry was intricate enough to be considered visual artwork. We tried to maintain as much consistency as possible among these descriptive conventions, knowing that some items would always challenge our categories. This discordant nature also ensured that the eventual series would be unique, though a few (Realia, Correspondence, and Photographs) are consistent with series in the Grateful Dead collection.

Additionally, more items necessitated deaccessioning. Duplication permitted the removal of several candles from the altar, which were largely store-bought and indistinct. While a few were kept for posterity, preference was given to handmade candles, some of which featured the band's distinctive logos and iconography. Most deaccessioning involved items that included sensitive, personal information of fans: identification cards of underage fans, prescriptions, medical documents, court documents, and fragments of a social security card.

By mid-August, the inventory had approximately 3,100 items, grouped into seven series: Correspondence, Fan Art, Photographs, Printed Materials, Textiles, Realia, and Oversized Realia. In addition to the letters, artwork, and photographs, there were t-shirts, hats, animal bones, crystals, two acoustic guitars scrawled with messages for Garcia, plush animals, tapestries, handicrafts, necklaces, candles, religious artifacts, and more that Deadheads left on the altar. The materials ranged from the very personal – artifacts adorned with messages, song lyrics, and dates of attended shows – to contents likely emptied from someone's pants pocket, such as map shards, candy wrappers and matchbooks. The collection was the result of a distinct, communal, and powerful impulse for fans to leave pieces of themselves upon the altar in the memory of a cultural icon. If the only contribution a fan had was a sticker or an old deck of playing cards, so be it; it was now an offering to Jerry and the band.

This range of materials is the fundamental component of the collection's uniqueness, but its unorthodox nature had already raised questions about its perceived usefulness. After my internship in the fall of 2013, the Grateful Dead Archive (the Archive) and the UCSC launched a crowdfunding project to raise money for rehousing and proper preservation. In raising awareness of the project, the Archive posted photos of the collection during processing on its Facebook

page, specifically the inventorying of handmade bead and pendant necklaces.⁶ The photos prompted one commenter to question the value of "a tangle of beads sent by Deadheads" in an archive – even one devoted entirely to the Grateful Dead.⁷ Amanda Diederich-Hirsh, an active Grateful Dead researcher, responded with a defense of artifactual analysis: "Found objects are highly relevant in ethnographic research. In grad school, I studied a box of objects that belonged to Sol Tax. Cruise ship placemats and scrawled out recipes for homemade tortillas are a couple that come to mind. In the end, it gave my research a depth of understanding and texture that was essential to understanding his journey."⁸

In the context of traditional, paper-based archives, such questions on the value of artifactual collections are expected. One could argue that the collection's letters, artwork, and photographs have an intrinsic research value that makes them the core of the collection, overshadowing the toys, pinwheels, pogs, crystals, rocks, bones, and geodes in the realia series. In fact, it is not inconceivable that another archive would choose to remove this realia material, reducing this collection by more than half. But this is not a traditional collection; this is an artifact collection and such a decision would have seriously compromised its usefulness and its historicity.

In her 1951 book *What is Documentation?*, Suzanne Briet argued that the scope of a document extends beyond the textual realm, broadly defining a "document" as any material evidence, preserved or recorded, of a physical or conceptual phenomena. Briet's philosophy justifies that the objects left at the Garcia

⁶ Grateful Dead Archive, "Our fund-raising campaign for the Garcia Memorial Collection is in its last days...", *Facebook*, October 2, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/97374802938/photos/a.384944897938.165429.97374802938/10151698530692939/>.

⁷ Eric Lewis, October 1, 2013, comment on Grateful Dead Archive, "Our fund-raising campaign for the Garcia Memorial Collection is in its last days...", *Facebook*, October 2, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/97374802938/photos/a.384944897938.165429.97374802938/10151698530692939/>.

⁸ Amanda Diederich-Hirsh, October 1, 2013, comment on Grateful Dead Archive, "Our fund-raising campaign for the Garcia Memorial Collection is in its last days...", *Facebook*, October 2, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/97374802938/photos/a.384944897938.165429.97374802938/10151698530692939/>.

memorial service are worthy of being historical documents; in fact, they allow researchers the unique opportunity to interpret the meaning behind their inclusion. While Briet's philosophy can be applied to include the documentary value of artifacts as historical documents, several recent researchers – such as Hugh A. Taylor, Gloria Meraz, and Jill Robin Severn – have more explicitly discussed the connections between artifacts and archives. Meraz wrote that as archives separate artifacts from collections, they lose the opportunity to enhance the "voice" of those collections.⁹ Similarly, Taylor wrote about a potential future where archives are viewed "not just as legal and social evidence, but as material instruments fashioned by a culture bent on the survival of the whole creative process," ultimately making that future more intimately knowledgeable of the people who created those materials.¹⁰ Finally, Severn, who eloquently described the value of artifacts in an archival context, noted that their inherent value is often overlooked:

Clearly, there are challenges associated with making artifacts more accessible to researchers. However, artifacts, like other non-paper materials that often get short shrift in an archival setting, have tremendous potential to illuminate the individual or organization that collected them as well as the broader culture that created, used, and derived meaning from them. Some archivists wrongly assume that artifacts are somehow not fully records because they were collected, rather than made, as they would be if written, spoken, or typed. But the individual who amasses a collection of items creates meaning for an artifact by imbuing it with context and juxtaposing it with other artifacts and records that form the framework of his or her material life.¹¹

⁹ Gloria Meraz, "Cultural Evidence: On the Common Ground Between Archivists and Museologists," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 15 (1997): 11.

¹⁰ Hugh A. Taylor, "'Heritage' Revisited: Documents as Artifacts in the Context of Museums and Material Culture," *Archivaria* 40 (1995): 18.

¹¹ Jill Robin Severn, "Adventures in the Third Dimension: Reenvisioning the Place of Artifacts in Archives," in *An American Political Archives Reader*, eds. Karen

While Severn refers to a collection of objects from a single person's lifetime, the Garcia Memorial Collection is an example of a mass of objects with meaning and context beyond their everyday form. This collection of 3,100 items and written notes offers researchers insight beyond the surface-level documentation through photographs, newspaper clippings, and the press release. The items were given with love and their own stories, allowing researchers the opportunity to analyze and interpret those artifacts to enrich our understanding of why more than 25,000 people felt compelled to visit the memorial that day.

However, the contents of the collection represent much more than the record of a one-day memorial of a popular musician; they document the bond between Deadheads and the band that eventually formed the core of the Grateful Dead's cultural phenomenon. In 1947, British archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson wrote that archives exist "by a natural process [...] almost you might say, as much an organism as a tree or an animal."¹² Some texts on archival theory – notably a number by Hugh Taylor¹³ as well as others, such as Nicholas Cox¹⁴ – seem to have adapted Jenkinson's quote to describe the practice of archiving as "the secretions of an organism," implying that archives were the regular, unplanned byproducts of organizations and people. In effect, this thousands-of-pieces love letter to Jerry Garcia was the secretion of a very specific organism: the Deadhead community. The altar collection was a spontaneous, material outpouring of celebration and grief. Fans were invited to "leave a poem, light a candle, or say a prayer," and instead showed

Dawley Paul, Glenn R. Gray, L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 224.

¹² Hilary Jenkinson, "The English Archivist: a New Profession" (1947), in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, ed. Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1980), 238.

¹³ Taylor attributed the "secretions" quote to Jenkinson at least twice: in "Canadian Archives: Patterns From a Federal Perspective," *Archivaria* 1 no 2 (1976): 13; and in "Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984): 36. In both cases, Taylor asserted these to be Jenkinson's words without a reference source.

¹⁴ Nicholas Cox, "National British Archives: Public Records," in *The Contemporary History Handbook*, ed. Brian Brivati (Manchester University Press, 1996), 254.

up with offerings that were not intended for anything more than a momentary expression of appreciation. The collection presents a rare opportunity to visualize the connection between Deadheads and the Grateful Dead; the value of this collection lies in how such a relationship can be expressed artifactually. Meriwether commented:

The core of the Grateful Dead phenomenon was the relationship between band and fan. Outsiders marveled at it, fans and band members pondered it, but everyone recognized the transformative bond of trust, encouragement, and support that, at its best, was the essence of the participatory ritual of shared music-making and community. The Garcia Memorial Collection is an expression of that unique relationship, a profound and powerful expression of Deadhead mourning that reveals how fans showed their love and respect for the fallen musician and their grief at his passing.¹⁵

While the documentation of the relationship between Deadheads and the band makes the Garcia collection unique, it ultimately joins a small but growing fraternity of community-driven memorial and disaster archives. Indeed, what these few collections have in common, beyond being collections of tragedy – is that no two are exactly alike, in collection scope or processing methodology. The September 11 Digital Archive – organized by the American Social History Project at the City University of New York Graduate Center and the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University – includes electronic communications, digital photographs and firsthand accounts immediately relating to that day’s events.¹⁶ Syracuse University’s Pan Am Flight 103/Lockerbie Air Disaster Archives, besides publication clippings, photographs, media and exhibit materials, includes items specific to

¹⁵ Nicholas Meriwether, “Documenting the Dead: the Jerry Garcia Memorial Collection,” *Dead.net*, May, 2015, <http://www.dead.net/features/blog/documenting-dead-jerry-garcia-memorial-collection>.

¹⁶ “About,” *The September 11 Digital Archive*, 2014, <http://911digitalarchive.org/about>.

individual victims, "to personalize our students whose lives were lost."¹⁷ Closest in form to the Garcia collection is Virginia Tech's memorial collection of the April 16, 2007 campus shooting. In the weeks following the shooting, the university received thousands of "condolence material" in the form of cards, letters, banners, and other ephemera, which were given to the special collections department of the University Libraries. Writing about "collections of tragedy" that "suddenly form and are deposited on your doorstep," Purcell notes, "[A]s archivists we have the responsibility for documenting and collecting evidence about unfortunate events, whether natural or human-made. As a result of our sometimes difficult efforts, researchers, alumni, family members, and those directly affected can use that original material to answer their larger questions about the event."¹⁸ By the same token, archivists also have the opportunity to share their own experiences in arranging and describing such atypical artifactual collections, as more collections join this impromptu brotherhood.

The month-long internship project provided an overall plan for arrangement and description, but the preservation planning, rehousing, and creation of the finding aid were still in the planning stages. The UC Santa Cruz Crowdfund campaign to raise money to complete the processing of the altar collection closed in early October of 2013 with a final amount of \$10,911, more than double its initial \$5,000 goal.¹⁹ To date, the funds paid for standard materials for processing and housing, such as boxes, file folders, and artifact tags; the funds will be depleted by the time reboxing and rehousing is complete. Meriwether anticipated completion in early 2015, the 50th anniversary of the Grateful Dead. However, in between the end of my internship and the collection's final processing, Meriwether actively sought opportunities to loan parts of the collection in external, Dead-related exhibits. To date, six exhibitions featured

¹⁷ "Scope," *Syracuse University Pan Am Flight 103/Lockerbie Air Disaster Archives*, 2010, <http://archives.syr.edu/panam/scope.html>.

¹⁸ Aaron D. Purcell, "More Than Flowers Left Behind: Building an Archival Collection and Remembering April 16, 2007 at Virginia Tech," *Journal of Archival Organization* 10 (2012): 232.

¹⁹ "UCSC Grateful Dead Archive -- Jerry Garcia Memorial Project," *UC Santa Cruz Crowdfund*, October 4, 2013, <https://crowdfund.ucsc.edu/project/521b8e6f0920652673f9fa55>.

artifacts from the collection, including at the New-York Historical Society and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, giving audiences from around the world the opportunity to connect with the personal and social impact left by the Dead, documented by the items left at the memorial. "Completing the processing of this remarkable collection seems like an especially appropriate way to mark this milestone," Meriwether said. "It is the most palpable expression of the band-fan bond that formed the core of the Grateful Dead phenomenon."²⁰

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²⁰ Nicholas Meriwether, email conversation with author, July 29, 2015.