

**COLLECTING OUR THOUGHTS AND RE-COLLECTING OUR STORIES:
THE COLLECTION OF PERSONAL RECORDS
IN ARCHIVAL INSTITUTIONS**

BY LEAH SANDER

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Of

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ABSTRACT

The appraisal of personal records is a challenging task for archivists, who must decide what records of a society are suitable for preserving in archival institutions. Much of the literature on archival appraisal has focused on records flowing from governments or institutions. What literature exists on the appraisal of personal records has often criticized the lack of any systematic approach to the task by personal records archivists. Some archivists have attacked what is understood as a “collecting mentality” in the appraisal of records, where records are acquired according to the eccentric tastes of archivists, who regard documents more as object-artifacts than as contextualized archival records. The practice of “collecting” records is perceived, in archival literature since the mid-twentieth century, as antithetical to the science of archival acquisition, where it implies a kind of impassioned, erratic, irrational pursuit of records as objects of desire.

This study demonstrates that the motives behind a collecting mentality are necessary for archivists to understand, however, since the forces driving some individuals to collect objects mirror those that inspire others to create and keep personal records. As such, the desire to control time, explore personal identity, create memory, develop life narratives and come to terms with human existence are all reasons why individuals both collect objects and create some types of personal records. If archivists understand these impulses, they will be better able to understand the values and functions of personal record keeping, which will in turn assist them in making better appraisal decisions.

Chapter One will examine the psychology of collecting to establish what human needs are fulfilled in the collection of objects. The themes discussed will then be extended to the creation of personal records, where it will be illustrated that the same human needs are fulfilled through the collection of thoughts and stories as through the collection of objects. Chapter Two will review existing literature on the subject of archival appraisal, in particular highlighting how archivists have understood “collecting” to be related to the acquisition of records. Chapter Three focuses on the results of a case study of women’s records at the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections and the Archives of Manitoba, which demonstrate how the themes at work in collecting objects have driven the creation of these personal records. It will be concluded, therefore, that the collecting mentality is one that archivists should understand, rather than dismiss, for it reveals some of the value and deeper functions of personal record keeping.

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And I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandpa, Carl Wilfred Johnson, who was a collector of so many stories, which I carry with me always.

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a story. What happens to that story is, well, another story. The drive to record it, collect it, preserve it, publish it, is determined by the needs of individuals to express their identity, their ability to do so in the form of a record, and their inclination to do so.

There are as many reasons for, and ways of, recording and keeping stories as there are stories themselves. The human being is a complex creature, a creative mixture of social and personal experiences. Each person reflects her/his culture, historical era, geographical location(s), political climate, economic means and position in a class system, ethnic or racial affiliation, religious convictions, gender, sexual orientation, individual psychological make-up, position in the family, childhood experiences, and so on and so on. It is no stretch to see that just as each individual's story is unique, each individual's means of keeping a story is bound to be unique as well. Personal records, understood as those that are created by individuals in their daily lives, are just that: *personal*.

Keeping a record of one's story may, in fact, have nothing to do with creating a conventional narrative of one's life (I was born on this date, grew, loved, worked, became old): the story may reside in the fifty years' worth of pay stubs that a pensioner has bundled up in an upstairs cupboard. Herein lies his story, which must yet be constructed and interpreted by the historian; but this material of his life gives evidence of his personal past and his identity. It is something real he can touch, or ignore, or throw out, or show

someone, as he sees fit. He talks of getting someone to write his biography, his “official” story, but perhaps he is satisfied with the knowledge that the bags of papers and scraps in his closet which represent his life are simply there: they exist, he knows where they are, and that is enough.

So personal record keeping, whether it is through the act of creation or through the act of keeping, through conscious efforts or by accident, through an attempt to express something or an attempt to hide everything, can be done in an almost infinite number of ways. For archivists who acquire and appraise personal records for retention in their archival institutions, this wide variance in the form and content of personal records can make decisions about what to keep difficult and confusing. There are no hard and fast rules about what is worthy of being kept, or what ought to be shredded. Where records are created within an institution or organization, such as a government, a university, or a bank, appraisal decisions can still be difficult; yet record-keeping systems in these institutions lend some order to the records, perhaps even with retention and disposition schedules that determine early on in the life-cycle of the record what its archival destiny should be. Moreover, a great deal of thought has been put into the appraisal of institutional records by archivists; indeed, much of the existing archival literature on appraisal addresses these kinds of records.

There is a clear need for further thought on developing concepts and strategies for the appraisal of personal records. However, the nature of these records, as precisely being part of no system at all, makes developing a systematic approach to their appraisal difficult indeed. Historically, the acquisition and appraisal of this kind of record has been accorded the term “collecting.” This word has a negative connotation for many

archivists, where the practice of collecting as a strategy for archival appraisal and acquisition is perceived as antithetical to the “science” of archiving, in that it is ad hoc, dependent on the whims of the archivist, and narrowly focused on the record as artifact-object.

This thesis inverts the idea that collecting is a practice that should at all costs be avoided by archivists, and suggests instead that, as collectors of society’s memory and identity, archivists must understand the collecting mentality, for it relates very much to the creation of personal records where individuals collect their thoughts, stories and experiences in record form. These records are demonstrative of the fundamental human needs to create identity, memory and narrative, understand the past and the world, and come to terms with human existence, marked as it often is by loneliness, death and fear. Only by understanding the value the records had for their creators, as tools that meet these human needs, will archivists be able to understand the value of these records for preservation in archival institutions.

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on the psychology of collecting, and the way in which collecting objects is mirrored in the creation of records, which can be understood as a collecting of thoughts and a recollecting of stories. The line between tangible objects and intangible experiences is erased, where it becomes clear that the collection of baseball cards and the collection of a life’s narratives are driven by the same forces, such as the need to create identity and memory, tell stories, understand the past, and impose order on a chaotic world. As all humans are subject to these forces, everyone, on some level, becomes a collector.

The second chapter discusses archival approaches to appraisal and archival collecting, noting the gaps and silences that have resulted from existing strategies. Much of the literature on archival appraisal has focused on institutional or public records; what literature exists on the appraisal of personal records has not, to any great degree, examined the functions and processes at work in the creation of such records, which would assist in determining their value for archival institutions. Also, as mentioned, many archivists contributing to the field of the appraisal of personal records have been critical of the practice of “collecting” as a strategy for archival acquisition and appraisal.

As a case study to test these ideas, the third chapter examines the creation and collection of personal records by women, through the holdings at the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections and the Archives of Manitoba, to show that records were indeed created and valued for many of the same reasons that individuals collect objects. These reasons shed light on what is being documented in personal records; it is not just the information they contain that is significant, but the processes that fulfil human needs of which they give evidence that reveal the depth of their importance for archival institutions.

It is the contention of this thesis that collecting can be understood as a universal activity, in which people attempt to create identity and assume control over a portion of the material world; and that a crucial aspect of this collecting entails the collection of mental, emotional and spiritual processes through the creation of personal records. In the same way that collecting material objects defines our relation to the exterior world, the collecting of ideas, thoughts, stories and experiences may well be a means of

understanding and defining our interior world, and relating it (and ourselves) to the exterior world.

CHAPTER ONE

COLLECTING OBJECTS AND CREATING PERSONAL RECORDS

What is collecting?

“Collecting is in the air,” wrote Dr. George C. Williamson from Hampstead, England, in the preface to his 1924 work *Everybody’s Book on Collecting*.¹ Williamson’s volume, consisting of forty-three chapters individually dedicated to specific collectibles such as “Old English ironwork,” “curious old wine,” “lace bobbins,” and “Battersea enamels,” provided useful facts and advice for contemporary practitioners of this popular activity. His work is clearly situated in a very specific time and space, that of Britain between two world wars. However, his assertion that “There are few persons who do not collect something”² has currency for a far wider range of human experience than early twentieth-century middle- to upper-class British society.

The term “collecting” generally refers to the gathering together of a series of items that relate to each other in some way. Understood in this sense, the word (in Western society) conjures up images of antique shops, comic-book dens, shelves stuffed with Beanie Babies, or albums full of exotic stamps. By far the largest number of people who collect do so not as a profession, as art dealers or antique traders, but as a personal pastime or hobby. Most people know someone (if it is not themselves) who has a basement full of model trains, a house littered with ceramic dogs, a room dedicated to

¹ George C. Williamson, *Everybody’s Book on Collecting*. London: Jenkins, 1924, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*

Elvis memorabilia, or a shelf lined with unique teapots. These activities can consume much of a collector's leisure time and money.

The status of collecting as a hobby, however, has not prevented academics from taking it seriously and studying it as a sociological phenomenon. Indeed, extensive studies have been done of the activity's practitioners from a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, archaeology, museum studies, history, and economics. The general conclusion is that collecting is a subject of much depth, with the capacity to explain a great deal about human behaviour.

In fact, for the purposes of archival discussion, a study of the forces at work in collecting is highly relevant, where it becomes clear that collectors gather together objects for many of the same reasons that individuals create and keep personal records. Thus, the need to create identity, memory and narrative, bring order to the world, have an understanding of the past, and cope with death, time, loneliness and fear are all factors driving individuals to both create personal records and collect physical objects. If archivists are to appreciate the value of personal records, they must surely understand the value that these records possessed for their owners, and what functions they served for those individuals, what deeper human needs the records fulfilled. Observing the similarities between collecting and creating personal records, then, can reveal such values and functions.

Collecting through time

An historical perspective illustrates clearly that the collection of material entities for reasons other than those that assist physical survival has been a long-standing practice for humans. Werner Muensterberger, looking at the phenomenon of collecting from a

psychological perspective, links collecting to the basic human instinct to grasp and hold.³ Krzysztof Pomian, in an examination of European collecting, notes that the first collectors (for which there is evidence) were Upper Paleolithic peoples, who existed forty to sixty thousand years ago and whose gatherings of natural curiosities were found in the Grotte de l'Hyene at Arcy-sur-Cure in France.⁴ Objects, as evidenced in the burial of human remains, have long held sacred meaning; the way in which they have been gathered and accumulated reveals, as the discipline of archaeology is devoted to discovering, the inner workings of each human civilization. It is apparent, moreover, that collecting objects has been, for many societies, a key means of imposing order on the external environment, and so of gaining control over it.

Evidence of formal collecting in early civilizations indicates that such an activity was enjoyed primarily by those with power, particularly political or religious power. Indeed, collecting has often been explicitly used as a means of displaying or exerting power. King Alexander of Macedon and King Eumenes in Pergamum established libraries circa 300 B.C.E., each in competition with the other to establish a monopoly on the world's knowledge by collecting it, and so indicate their supremacy over their dominions.⁵ Early collecting in China and Japan, Russell Belk recounts, also began with royalty, with the Mong and Edo dynasties in these regions.⁶ Wealth and knowledge, therefore, have long been manifested through collections of object and text as symbols of

³ Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting, An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 57.

⁴ Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*. Elizabeth Wiles, tr., Cambridge, Eng.: Portier Polity Press, 1987, pp. 28-29.

⁵ Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1995, p. 62.

⁶ Russell Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 22.

power and privilege.⁷

During the medieval era in Europe, collecting was as yet still largely confined to the church and the state. Churches in this period were particularly interested in the collection of relics, to add to the glory and sacredness of their establishments.⁸ With the development of national governments, the collection of records as part of a concerted effort to retain power and have control over the populace emerged, the first major example of this being the Domesday Book. James O'Toole argues that the principal use of this record was not, in fact, as a reference tool for the new rulers of England, but was instead meant to be a symbol of a new power, the Norman conquerors, over the Anglo-Saxon people.⁹ Collecting data on governed subjects, then, was a means of imposing control over them, by virtue of the process alone.

Collecting was infused with a new spirit with trends that emerged during the Renaissance. A number of factors came together during this period to make collecting more possible and more widespread: a renewed interest in antiquity contributed to the desire to preserve the past; the flowering of cultural, artistic and intellectual enterprise fostered a climate of objects having value beyond their immediate use; a substantial growth in trade not only increased the number of objects available for consumption, but also gave rise to a growing merchant class that could afford such items; and humanist ideas emphasized the idea of the individual and a better understanding of the self and the world through empirical knowledge rather than the absolutist knowledge of church and

⁷ For a discussion on the relationship between the collection of records and power, see Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." *Archival Science* 2 (2002), pp. 1-19.

⁸ Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, p. 27.

⁹ James M. O'Toole, "Cortes's Notary: The Symbolic Power of Records." *Archival Science* 2 (2002), p. 51.

states.¹⁰ Collecting, therefore, was no longer the exclusive privilege of the political and religious elite, and became an activity in which many more individuals could engage.

The early modern growth of rationalism encouraged individuals to further understand the world through intellectual control, from the rational, humanist tradition of the Renaissance to the major intellectual accomplishments of the encyclopaedia and the dictionary in the "Enlightenment". During this time there was a further move away from absolute acceptance of theological explanations of the world, with leading thinkers looking to science and nature itself for their understanding. As such, collecting became a field of scientific inquiry, where, as Werner Muensterberger explains, "knowledge correlated with method and an intellectual delight in classification and order."¹¹ Thus it is during this period that, with the discovery of the New World, new cultures and new species, the popularity of curio cabinets emerged, as a means of bringing into the established order these exotic and foreign worlds.¹² Perhaps most noteworthy of these trends during this era was the development by Linneaus of his taxonomic system, giving scientific control over the natural world through classification and categorization.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the development of museums and libraries as, for the first time, public institutions, a time during which, as David Lowenthal has shown, the past began to emerge as a foreign country.¹³ Tony Bennett, in a thoughtful study of the birth of the modern museum, notes how this was related to changing political views, where governments were interested in educating (and

¹⁰ Muensterberger, *Collecting, An Unruly Passion*, pp. 171-173; Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, pp. 37-38.

¹¹ Muensterberger, *Collecting, An Unruly Passion*, p. 189.

¹² Christian F. Feest, "The Collecting of American Indian Artifacts in Europe, 1493-1750," in Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed. *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, p. 344.

¹³ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

controlling) a new democratic populace. He observes that the development of nineteenth-century liberal governments coincided with "the view of high culture as a resource that might be used to regulate the field of social behaviour in endowing individuals with new capacities for self-monitoring and self-regulation."¹⁴ Significantly, this was a tool to be used for the population as a whole, not only for the upper classes which had traditionally had exclusive access to high culture and its institutions, but primarily for the middle, educated class to control the working classes as well. Through the ordering of the exhibits and organization of the museum's space, artifacts and information gave more than voice to past civilizations; they sent messages about contemporary civilization as well, and the expected place of every kind of social category in it.

It was also during this period that archival institutions were established for the first time as publicly accessible institutions, mirroring museums in the separation of past from present where archival records were carefully preserved and locked away in centralized buildings.¹⁵ This reflected the power invested in them as signifiers of society's memory and history, as well as fostering the idea that the past was not something to be lived, but instead collected and set aside.

A further force at working during the nineteenth century that broadened the popularity of collecting, both institutional and personal, was the product of the Industrial Revolution. Russell Belk observes how "The dramatic increase/growth of mass production, mass distribution, and mass communication is found to parallel the similarly

¹⁴ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 20.

¹⁵ Terry Cook, "The Archive is a Foreign Country." *The First International Conference on the History of Records and Archives, October 2-4, 2003: Conference Programme and Participants' Papers*. Toronto: Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, 2003, p. 7.

dramatic increase of mass consumption, mass individual collecting and massive museum collecting."¹⁶ Thus, the greater number of objects available, the greater amount of income available for purchasing such objects, and the greater the knowledge of the existence of such objects, meant that individuals and society could, and did, collect to a greater extent.

By the twentieth century, then, collecting stopped being mainly the purview of an elite and privileged class, and could be practised by anyone. Even individuals with little personal wealth, who live in a wealthy society, have access to the material "waste" of that society. Plastic shopping bags, bottle caps, Popsicle sticks: items that cost nothing or very little are objects that anyone can collect. In the post-modernism of the twenty-first century, collecting may have even more currency as individuals cease to identify with former social institutions such as religion or the state and instead use the immediacy of their own corner of the world to forge a personal identity and understanding of the world. Paul Martin argues that "The burgeoning of post-modern collecting is indicative of a fin de siècle sensibility in the late twentieth century, in which the material centred society is superseded by the non-material society." As a result, the diversity of veritable junk that people collect "is symptomatic of a society which is looking for reassurance and stability in an unstable environment."¹⁷

It is clear, then, from even this cursory overview, that collecting has a long and rich heritage. All of these historical eras demonstrate that collecting has flourished where individuals have needed to situate themselves in an ever-expanding material world over which they often had little control, but desired to gain such control. Collecting, therefore,

¹⁶ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Paul Martin, "Tomorrow's History Today? Post-modern Collecting." *History Today* 46:2 (February

permeates human society, as individuals classify, order and keep together the various parts of their existence.

Defining collecting

Those academics studying contemporary collecting have naturally given considerable thought to a definition of the activity, to establish parameters for the scope of their studies. Werner Muensterberger, for instance, defines collecting as "the selecting, gathering, and keeping together of objects of subjective value."¹⁸ In a similar vein, Susan Pearce identifies it as "the gathering together of and setting aside of selected objects."¹⁹ Russell Belk provides a more explicit description, understanding collecting to be "the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences."²⁰ Krzysztof Pomian perceives a collection as "a set of natural or artificial objects, kept temporarily or permanently out of the economic circuit...."²¹ Emphasis in these definitions is on the selection process, as well the idea that items collected are no longer in "use."

These definitions are carefully crafted so as to distinguish collecting from other object-related activities that humans practise. In particular, many studying the field stipulate that true collecting is a different activity than hoarding or accumulating, excluding the latter terms from their studies. The French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, for instance, maintains that "the concept of collecting is distinct from that of accumulating...Collecting proper emerges at first with an orientation to the cultural."

1996), pp. 6-7.

¹⁸ Muensterberger, *Collecting, An Unruly Passion*, p. 4.

¹⁹ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 3.

Thus, the “piling of old papers, the stockpiling of items of food,” are activities that do not correspond to his definition of collecting.²² Belk and Pomian impose similar limitations on their definitions.²³ These exclusions from the phenomenon of collecting serve to narrow the number of people who practise it, relegating the activity more to the fringes of society.

While setting parameters for collecting has been useful for these academics, there is much to be gained by opening up the notion of collecting. To begin with, although there are valid distinctions between accumulating and collecting, the lines between them are easily blurred, for both activities are part of a human obsession with objects. Pearce, in fact, allows for different shades of collecting, arguing that the impulses that drive hoarders and collectors are not so different; moreover, she observes that many accumulations later turn into collections.²⁴

Furthermore, there is always difficulty when attempting to determine whether or not objects are “in use,” a nebulous phrase at best. Some collections are, in fact, composed of items that are enjoyed most when in use, such as vintage cars, even if these are not used frequently. And there are, of course, innumerable psychological, spiritual and emotional “uses” for collecting objects. Are the creation of identity, the establishment of order in one’s life, the need to escape into something pleasurable, the enjoyment of “walking down memory lane”—all common reasons for collecting—not valid human needs, where the collection of objects thereby has a real *use*? Therefore,

²⁰ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, p. 67.

²¹ Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, p. 9.

²² Jean Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds. *The Cultures of Collecting*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 22.

²³ Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, p. 9; Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, p. 67.

²⁴ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 21.

defining collected objects as those no longer “in use” is a misleading and misinformed view of the nature of collecting itself.

Thomas Tanselle suggests that only in connecting *all* kinds of collecting can we truly understand the phenomenon. Tanselle defines collecting more inclusively, describing it to be “the accumulation of tangible things.”²⁵ The crux of collecting, he argues, is in the drive to find order in the world: “the human need to find order should be thought about as a fundamental—and perhaps the most fundamental—explanation of collecting.”²⁶ As a result, he comes to the conclusion that in some way, everyone is a collector, for we all deal with the material world by ordering it and organizing it in some fashion. Some individuals may find order, stability and a sense of control in a collection of Victorian dolls; others might find these characteristics in pile of old tin cans in their basement that they think just might come in handy one day. For these kinds of pack rats, throwing “stuff” out can cause great anxiety.²⁷ Their accumulations, then, act in a similar way to “proper” collections: they are a means of exerting control over the material world. Even if their collections are the antithesis of control to outside observers, these piles of stuff in fact bring a sense of comfort to such individuals.

John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, editing a work on the nature of collecting, establish a very inclusive definition of a collection as well. They suggest that the collection is ubiquitous in society, and move beyond Tanselle’s definition of collections being of tangible items, indicating that society itself is a collection. This idea is predicated on the observations that “classification precedes collection” (classification is the first step in control) and that society is nothing more than a multitude of

²⁵ G. Thomas Tanselle, “A Rationale of Collecting.” *Raritan* 10:1 (Summer 1999), p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

classifications and taxonomies.²⁸ Ingrid Schaffner, art historian and curator, concurs that everyone is a collector, defining collecting in a similar way to Elsner and Cardinal. She contends that “collecting is naming...it is a kind of pointing to the object.”²⁹ In this vein of thought, then, collecting is understood not simply as a material activity, but more expansively as an intellectual one, as a defining of the relationship between humans and entities exterior to them. Collecting, therefore, is a notion that can be applied to all human ways of life.

The collecting of nature

The intellectual concept of collecting can further be understood if we consider one of the longest-standing relationships on earth: that between humans and other animals. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, one of the first tasks given to the original human, Adam, was to name all of the beings in the newly-created animal world. This event underlined the separation between humans and other animals: Adam, representative of the human race, now had dominion over these other beings. Classification and categorization was thus symbolic of the (supposed) control and power that humans had over the "wild" kingdom. Naming, then, as suggested above, can operate on the same level as collecting: it is a means of setting apart the "other" and establishing intellectual control over that other.

The naming of animals and their grouping as an entity below humans, therefore, can be seen as the archetypal collection. This does not mean, however, that it was an inevitable one. Some human cultures across time and space have understood themselves

²⁷ Anne H. Rosenfeld, “Confessions of a Packrat.” *Psychology Today*. February 1988, p. 62.

²⁸ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting*, pp. 1-3

²⁹ Ingrid Schaffner, “On collecting,” in *Pictures, patents, monkeys and more...on collecting*. New York: Independent Curators International, 2001, p. 36.

not to be above other living organisms, but as an integral part of an environment that depends on a balanced natural world. That said, many cultures (notably Western society) have indeed perceived themselves as superior to and separate from nature, masters of the land and of all animals.

The way in which humans have defined and redefined their relationship to the animal world, then, reveals much about the structure, values and concerns of their societies. A further Biblical story, that of Noah and the Ark, emphasizes the power humans were thought to have over animals through the ability—in fact, the God-given responsibility—to collect them and keep them all in one place to ensure their survival. Beyond Noah, there is a multitude of ways in which humans have attempted to organize the animal kingdom, whether through physical containment or intellectual classification, throughout recorded human existence. Despite historical differences in approaches, there is a common theme throughout. In studying the history of zoos, Vicki Croke contends that, despite professed motives to the contrary, the gathering together and enclosure of animals, dating back to as early as 3000 B.C., is principally about control.³⁰ Thus, the exotic beasts that Cleopatra had on display in Alexandria are connected to the carefully displayed and classified specimens in an eighteenth-century butterfly cabinet; or a public zoo open to amaze all at the height of the Victorian Empire; or the most current of zoos which attempts to render the artificial environment as close as possible to natural habitats, concerned with conservation, education, and understanding of the balance of the world as an ecological system.³¹ Through the exertion of control over the natural world through its

³⁰ Vicki Croke, *The Modern Ark, The Story of Zoos: Past, Present and Future*. New York: Scribner, 1997, p. 96.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

collection, then, it can be seen that collecting is one of the most fundamental ways in which humans have come to an understanding of the world exterior to them.

The nature of collecting

With the broader historical context in mind, the specific characteristics of collecting that allow for an understanding of human existence and bring a sense of order to human life can be examined. Those who have studied this phenomenon note the relationship between collecting objects and the need to define time and space, the drive to create identity and express the self, the human condition of loneliness and a keen desire to belong, the preoccupation with understanding the "other," the need to cope with mortality and death; and how all of these impulses attract people across time and place to collecting.

A principal quality of objects which meets, through their collection, a human need to understand and control the environment is the ability to transcend time. Objects, by their material (and, at least in most cases, relatively stable) nature, are necessarily vehicles of transmitting pastness, in that they exist past the moment of their creation, and often past their life of original use.³² Collecting past objects, therefore, affords humans an opportunity to understand former worlds. This puts human life in context, and so gives some sense of meaning and order to the present. It is the materiality of this process that makes it so potent, with the object becoming, in Tanselle's words, "a tangible survivor from an earlier moment, putting one in touch, literally, with a vanished time."³³ This desire to relive (or at least connect with) the past is often the starting point for a collection: Dick Hunt's collection of vintage radios began with the console radio left to

³² Edward Shils, *Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 63.

³³ Tanselle, "A Rationale of Collecting," p. 33.

him by his grandmother, a piece and a person of which he has many childhood memories.³⁴ Here, then, the past collected is a connection to a personal past, nostalgia and sentiment re-discovered (and re-inforced) in each new acquisition.

In like manner, those who collect traces of the past come to understand themselves not just as preservers of the past, but as an integral part of that past, even if it is not their own. Miles Harvey, in an examination of the intense world of map collectors, illustrates this power of historical connection at work as he held in his own hands an historical map:

Looking down at those uneven lines of ink, it was almost as if I could see the hand that drew them moving carefully across the page. Then I began to imagine all the other hands that might have held this fragile document during its long life: the hardened palms of sailors and explorers, the sinewy fingers of cartographers, the pampered mitts of royals, the loving clutches of collectors. Suddenly, I felt a powerful connection to the past--not so much that I was reliving history but that I was part of it, a continent taking shape right before my eyes.³⁵

Such a connection to the past, then, can transform the most ordinary of individuals into active adventurers in the grand historical schema. This sensation not only situates the collector in time, but also enhances his or her sense of self-importance, as a vital part of the unfolding human story, in league with the great historical actors of the past.

Because of their link to the past, otherwise ordinary items can be transformed into extraordinary objects in the eyes (and hearts) of their collectors. Since they once existed in a time that is no longer, material survivors are imbued with meaning and acquire an elevated status, providing what no mental memory can: touch. North Carolina author and book collector, Reynolds Price, makes the significance of this tactile dimension abundantly clear in recounting the history behind a treasured classic he had managed to acquire:

³⁴ Brian Coleman, "Radio Daze," *Country Collectibles*, Summer 2003, p. 51.

My copy of *Paradise Lost* once belonged to Deborah Milton Clarke, the daughter who took Milton's dictation after he went blind. For me, it was like the apostolic succession. I was touching the hand that touched the hand that touched the Hand.³⁶

In this way, having tangible access to an object of desire not only ensures the status of the object itself as sacred, a veritable relic, but also transforms the individual into something sacred, making him, in this case, almost a holy figure himself.

Moreover, individual collections not only tell the history of the objects collected, but also give evidence of the personal history of their collector. Susan Pearce's assertion that collections are "both the product of a person's life...and a means of structuring that life span, of giving tangible form and content to the experience of time passing"³⁷ is substantiated by the observation of writer Kenneth Breecher, whose postcard collection consisted of "postcards from every period of my life...they had become my private museum, a cabinet of curiosities, a personal history reflecting large and minute concerns."³⁸ Identifying closely with one's objects makes them markers of various moments in the collector's own life, as much as they are markers of former times and cultures too. Collecting, therefore, consists of several pasts layered on top of each other to tell an entirely new story in the present. Thus it can be seen that the pasts of creators, users, owners, and past collectors merge together in the collection, which becomes the testimony for all of these stories.

But objects, and the collecting of them, have a subtler message in their timeliness than simply their ability to explain what went before. Because objects hold evidence of

³⁵ Miles Harvey, *The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime*. New York: Random House, 2000, p. 248.

³⁶ Quoted in Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness*, p. 57.

³⁷ Pearce, *On Collecting*, pp. 235-236.

³⁸ Quoted in Schaffner, "On collecting," p. 35.

their past, possessing them becomes a means of possessing elapsed time, which has a potent attraction for humans. As Bruce Ferguson explains, "in collecting we can find the utopian desire to capture and possess, to fix, forever, a moment or an experience in time."³⁹ Possessing time in this sense gives individuals the illusion, therefore, that they have mastery over time, the force that will inevitably destroy them in the end.

Moreover, there is a very human element to possessing parts of the past. The wonder of gathering together material evidence of pre-colonial Maori society, or tomb decorations belonging to Egyptian royalty, or war ration booklets, is not only that such objects give evidence of the human story by their difference from what their collectors experience daily, but also that they in fact hold so much of the same story: concern about death, love, food, strife, family, joy, grief. That humanity has existed for so long is a comforting thought, even as individuals are aware of their own personal end. Therefore, the collecting of objects not only gives people a sense of control over their identity through some sort of conceived idea of their "past;" it also reminds them that even as they have a sometimes lonely and always finite existence individually, collectively, humans are never alone and will never die.

These ideas, of objects collected giving the individual collecting them the ability to mitigate fears of death and loneliness, are expressed in the work of Jean Baudrillard, who explains the phenomena of collecting through the framework of what he terms the "object-system." This framework considers that putting objects into a collection enables collectors to "help us master the world" and "establish dominion over time."⁴⁰ Humans can therefore come to terms with the natural cycle of birth and death, as putting collected

³⁹ Bruce Ferguson, "Collecting Edmonton: A Passion Show," in *Hoarders, Packrats, Connoisseurs: Collecting Edmonton, A Passion Show*. Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1995, p. 40.

objects into fixed sets allows them to “*symbolically transcend the realities of an existence before whose irreversibility and contingency [they remain] powerless.*” (original emphasis)⁴¹ In this way, collecting becomes an aid to one of the greatest challenges of being human: coping with the exigencies of time, and its finish, in death.

Werner Muensterberger, in a similar vein, links such a conquering of death through objects to a human fear of loneliness. He writes that “The [collected] objects are regarded as testimony that death is not final and the end of all existence; that one does not have to face abandonment, the dread of being left alone and, ultimately, demise and nothingness.”⁴² This brings up the corollary that objects are often perceived by their collectors as true friends, in that they bring joy, comfort and solace to the collector, and are very much alive for that collector. And perhaps they provide safer and more reliable relationships than those with other humans, for, as one collector expressed: “while love for another person may be spurned, no one was ever jilted by a book mark or a cheese label.”⁴³ Thus it can be seen that objects are a significant means for humans to come to terms with their existential humanity, which is defined in part by fear, loneliness and death.

If objects give a sense of understanding and control of life through signifying a common humanity, they also give individuals their memory. That is to say, they are not only memory aids; they have become concrete memory icons themselves. The avid twentieth-century book collector, Walter Benjamin, believed collecting to be, in fact, “a

⁴⁰ Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” p. 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 17.

⁴² Muensterberger, *Collecting, An Unruly Passion*, p. 56.

⁴³ Schaffner, “On collecting,” p. 35.

form of practical memory."⁴⁴ French historical theorist Pierre Nora argues that the perception of memory as object, as described here by Benjamin, has only emerged with the dissolution of truly lived memory. When memory was an integral part of people's every day lives in village cultures, Nora contends, there was no need for commemorative institutions such as museums and archives, institutions that "mark the rituals of a society without ritual." He describes "the eradication of memory" by history, taking memory to be the dynamic force of the past in a lived present, and history to be the analytical and, if not static, fixed-in-time intellectual understanding of the past. Thus, "even as traditional memory disappears, we feel obliged assiduously to collect remains, testimonies, documents, images, speeches, any visible sight of what has been, as if this burgeoning dossier were to be called upon to furnish some proof to who knows what tribunal of history."⁴⁵ Memory, in the contemporary scenario Nora describes here, has been supplanted by the object; the collector, therefore, becomes a crucial agent in the preservation of memory.

Bringing this idea to the home, John Gillis, in describing the loss of lived memory in nations, communities and families, observes that "every attic is an archive, every living room a museum...as collective forms of memory decline an increasing burden is placed on the individual."⁴⁶ Shared pasts, through storytelling, are no longer as viable as they once were, as the borders of nations blur, religions splinter, communities grow so large they dissolve, and extended families fragment and cease to communicate across

⁴⁴ Quoted in Michael P. Steinberg, "The Collector as Allegorist: Goods, Gods, and the Objects of History," in Michael P. Steinberg, ed., *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." Marc Roudebush, tr. *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 13-14.

generations. Individuals must take responsibility for their own personal past; and thus so many turn to collecting it themselves.

More tellingly, as David Lowenthal has suggested, any past will do.⁴⁷ This is evident in the work of Canadian artist Rosalie Favell, born in Winnipeg of Métis and English ancestry. Her 2003 exhibition entitled *Belonging* consisted of digital replications, without alteration, of her family's photograph albums from the 1950s. Favell thus turned a private space into a public one, by sharing her family history in public venues. More than that, she has also turned a public space into a private one, in that her family's photographic past becomes part of the personal past of all of us, as individuals who view her work. Her attic was an archive, and now it is ours, too, even those of us with a past very different from Favell's, those of us who are not Métis, not female, not Manitoban, not lesbian, not artists.

Finally, collecting and objects provide understanding of the world and the place of individuals in it through their capacity to be identity-makers. Collections are indisputably expressions of personal identity. French book-collector Maurice Robert reminded other collectors in 1936: "Friend and fellow bibliophile, remember your library is the mirror of your personality."⁴⁸ Robert was by no means unique in identifying closely with his collection. Rosalie Favell's work also effectively combines collecting and identity-making:

Favell's art practice is conceptually based on the act of collecting. For her, the act of acquiring images is about seeking out, accumulating and systematically assembling the images that constitute her personal collection. Commenting on

⁴⁶ John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in John R. Gillis, ed. *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁷ Lowenthal, *Foreign Country*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness*, p. 275.

her unconventional approach to photography, Favell states: 'I have been mining my family's snapshots, images of my own making and images from popular culture, in search of visual evidence and the possibilities of new visual equations.' The collected images act as an aide-memoire, igniting personal and collective memory....⁴⁹

The visual evidence and visual equations she speaks of are evidence of her self, equations of her personal life with the societal environment in which she is situated. Favell's identity is very much entwined not only in her collection (as represented by her art), but also by the collecting process, as she "mines" the images available to her, both inside and outside the home.

Susan Stewart, in an examination of human relationships with objects, takes this idea that collections are expressions of identity one step further, arguing that the collector is not merely reflected in the collection, the collector *is* the collection, since "the material body is simply one more position within the seriality and diversity of objects."⁵⁰ As result, the collector is as much a part of the collection as the collection is a part of the collector. Jean Baudrillard concurs, observing that in the collection of objects, "it is invariably *oneself* that one collects."⁵¹ The common-place expression of "collecting oneself"—bringing oneself to an acceptable emotional and mental state—acquires, therefore, a special double meaning in terms of the functions performed by the collecting process.

Extending this thought, if collections are used for self-expression and are representative of that self's life, they are then used to tell stories, in particular stories of the self. Collections are replete with narrative. Darrell Varga, presenting his ideas to a

⁴⁹ Barry Ace, "Collecting Many Worlds," in Rosalie Favell, *I Searched Many Worlds*. Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2003, p. 21.

⁵⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984, p. 159.

conference of collectors at the Edmonton Art Gallery in 1995, expresses it thus: “The objects people surround themselves with form an alphabet with which they may give meaning to their world.”⁵² Pearce concurs with this, writing that “the collecting process is a form of fiction through which imaginative constructions can be expressed...according to the view and capacity of the collecting individual, who is using objects, like language, to create and project the image of himself and how he sees the world.”⁵³ Collecting, then, serves to give meaning to individual lives through the narrative of identity that the meaning-filled relationship between the collector and the selected objects provide.

The use of objects as a means of communication, in fact, well preceded the use of records for that purpose. M.T. Clanchy describes the process of England changing from a non-literate to a literate society in the centuries after the Norman Conquest. He demonstrates how lengthy and complex the process of convincing a society used to the legality of oral testimony that written documents could perform the same function, arguing that this process was by no means straightforward and linear. Clanchy illustrates this through the example of the Earl of Warenne, who, when questioned about the ownership of his land, produced an object—the rusty sword that had been used in combat by his predecessors to win claim to the land—rather than a record, such as a title deed, as proof that the land was indeed his.⁵⁴ In fact, the development of European culture and philosophy in the centuries following the adoption of written records by the state for purposes of administration show that both word and object continued to be used as means

⁵¹ Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” p. 12.

⁵² Darrell Varga, “Introductory Comments for the Screening of the Film ‘Hunters and Gatherers,’” in *Hoarders, Packrats, Connoisseurs*, p. 38.

⁵³ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 32.

⁵⁴ M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England, 1066-1307*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 36.

of explaining the world. Susan Pearce connects the textual and the tangible record by highlighting their similar cultural and intellectual purposes:

Collections are essentially a narrative of experience, as objects are a kind of material language, so the narratives into which they can be selected and organised are a kind of fiction, and it is no accident that both fiction and collection are a characteristically modernist European way of telling experience, with their formal and imaginative roots deep in cultural traditions of the long term.⁵⁵

It becomes clear here, that despite obvious differences, written word and material object can serve similar functions.

Non-collectors and objects

For individuals who are quite certain that they are not conscious “collectors” (according to Russell Belk roughly two-thirds of the population in wealthy nations⁵⁶), does the above discussion have any relevance? Certainly it does, for the line between collectors and non-collectors becomes blurred where we all, collectors and non-collectors alike, forge relationships with the material world to bring order and understanding, to come to terms with our individual and collective past, and to construct identity and establish memories.

While the material link with history may seem especially relevant for collectors, collecting is a force in all of our lives, because traces of the past surrounds us at all times, even if we are not conscious collectors of it. Indeed, connection with the past is provided just as much by the souvenir coffee mug used daily as it is by a series of rare Byzantium tapestries, even though the latter may be more striking in their distance and difference from the present moment. Both the prize piece in the collection of tapestries and the mug used carelessly and frequently, however, are evidence of past experience, the

⁵⁵ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 412.

⁵⁶ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, p. 83.

experience of their creators, owners and their users. If it is only the impassioned collector who actively seeks out related objects to set aside, and can sense the stories of items (in Walter Benjamin's words, being able to discern "the period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former owner"⁵⁷) to which most would not give a second thought, it does not follow that the ability of objects to transmit the past to humans is entirely absent for the indifferent majority; it still exists, if only working at a different level of consciousness. Therefore, humans are always surrounded by the past, and are given an historical understanding of the world and their place in it through objects, even without formal collecting.

In like manner to collectors, non-collectors also rely heavily on objects to serve as their "memory," from the string tied around a finger, to photographs taken during a family holiday, to collections at the local museum. This equation of memory with object is captured in the example of the souvenir. Susan Stewart, in her study of objects, nostalgia and desire, writes that the phenomenon of the souvenir epitomizes the "capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience...we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us."⁵⁸ The primary function of the souvenir, then, is to serve as a material reminder of a former material experience. As explained above, this is an active force in the collectors' relationship with their treasured objects as well. Furthermore, the souvenir not only reminds us of that experience, it becomes our memory. The photograph that is taken of one moment in a childhood, which subsequently becomes the defining memory of that period in life: the moment keeps coming back to the individual through the image frozen in time, whereas

⁵⁷ Quoted in Muensterberger, *Collecting, An Unruly Passion*, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 135.

moments not captured, if not sufficiently extraordinary, fade away into the indistinguishable blur of the past.

On a less self-conscious level than the souvenir, however, we are continually absorbing information on the history of our environment through objects. Edward Shils, in a study concerning the maintenance of tradition, contends that memory is not so much an act of remembering, as an absorption of the world around us: "Memory is more than the act of recollection by recollecting persons. Memory leaves an objective deposit in tradition. The past does not have to be remembered by all who re-enact it; the deposit is carried forward by a continuing chain of transmissions and receptions."⁵⁹ Shils defines tradition as "that which is handed down [and] includes material objects, beliefs about all sorts of things, images and events, practices and institutions. It includes buildings, monuments, landscapes, sculptures, paintings, books, tools, machines."⁶⁰ This is what ensures the survival of human culture, as ideas and practices are transmitted from one generation to another. Shils' argument here supports Nora's view that memory has been lost to the trace, the artifact, the object. Memory as the object, then, is not only relevant to collectors, but to non-collectors as well.

Alan Radley furthers the idea that the material past, with which we are constantly surrounded, creates individual and collective memory, where he maintains that "artefacts and the fabricated environment are...there as a tangible expression of the basis from which one remembers, the material aspect of the setting which justifies the memories so constructed."⁶¹ Therefore, the material world not only gives a window on the past, it

⁵⁹ Shils, *Tradition*, p. 167.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶¹ Alan Radley, "Artefacts, Memory, and a Sense of the Past," in David Middleton and Derek Edwards, eds. *Collective Remembering*. London: Sage, 1994, p. 49.

becomes the basis for social and individual "memory", an essential tool for the development of cultures and civilizations.

Furthermore, if collections can be synonymous with identity, identity too is collected through objects outside what may be considered formal "collections." Elsner and Cardinal, in their introduction to essays on collecting, note that "as one becomes conscious of one's self, one becomes a conscious collector of identity, projecting one's being onto the objects one chooses to live with."⁶² Because all individuals select pieces for their homes, bodies, cars, work places, items that may be seen as "functional" or not--a shiny cappuccino maker, a cartoon-figure tie, a pewter photo frame, decorative tea towels; in short, personal style--they are continually "collecting" their selves, defining themselves, building their identities.

Of course, these ideas are predicated on societies where the focus has long been on materialism. However, it is still true for societies, past or present, that are considered to be oral cultures. While the memory of such societies may be transmitted less through buildings, monuments or books than through yarns, parables and beliefs, oral culture is an objectification of sorts, in that the story, especially that which is owned, so to speak, by the entire community, exists outside the self, as do relationships, rituals and other forms of social interaction. Susan M. Pearce argues for the similarity between material and non-material "objects," when she writes that

not merely language, but all social communication systems like the disposition of time and space, and the human relationship of kinship, have symbolic value in broadly the same way [as collected objects]. All of these aspects of life may be described as objects in the sense that they have an existence which is independent of that of any individual human and in this sense are external or objective in relation to him.⁶³

⁶² Elsner and Cardinal, *Cultures of Collecting*, p. 3.

⁶³ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 163.

From this perspective, collective memory is not only partially dependent on objects, it is wholly so, whether those objects are tangible or intangible. Furthering this line of thought, David Middleton and Derek Edwards explain how collective memory is formed by a combination of such forces, and is completely integral to our lives:

the objectification of [social practices] in the social environment, both material and communicative, such that the world we live in embodies in its very design a relation to the past...the very integrity of a person's mentality depends upon participation in an environment which owes its very shape to socio-cultural practices.⁶⁴

Collective memory, then, is rooted in the objects around us; moreover, it is critical for the functioning of society, and the functioning of individuals within that society.

Collecting our thoughts: from object to record

How do these observations on collecting and objects relate to personal records in archival institutions? Principally in the same (or parallel) way that collecting our thoughts and recollecting our stories serve many of the same functions as the collecting of objects: in shaping memory and identity, aiding in the struggle against death and loneliness, helping to conquer time, providing understanding of oneself and the world, and bringing order and meaning to our lives. And, as mentioned, language, socially constructed ideas, and relationships have a similar "collectability" to objects, since they exist outside the individual and are similarly infused with meaning when acquired/used by the individual. Furthermore, ideas, emotions, and thoughts that may be considered to reside within individuals and are not necessarily external to them, are still items that can be collected as "objects" with meaning, and then reflected through the creation of personal records. Finally, collecting records, even our own, is, in the most obvious sense,

⁶⁴ David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering*, p. 10.

the collecting of objects, as Thomas Tanselle points out.⁶⁵ Drawing parallels between objects and records highlights the way in which they serve the same functions, and are created and collected for the same reasons.

To begin with, if individuals collect objects to serve as evidence of the past, so too do they create and collect records for this reason. Indeed, records are often perceived as having a greater ability than objects to transport the past into the present. Edward Shils writes that archival documents are "valuable in that they disclose the intrinsically cognitive interesting past...They embody some quality which is inherent in their pastness—both in their own physical identity with what they were in the past and because they carry a record of a past event."⁶⁶ As such, records possess more explicitly a cognitive element than other objects, in that they purport to represent exactly what the people who created the records were thinking or feeling.

Such a claim, Tanselle observes, is not only dubious at best, but erroneously differentiates records from objects.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, records certainly give evidence of the past in a powerful way, both through their materiality and through the ideas they hold. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, an historian of nineteenth-century American women, was overcome by her first encounter with women's own writings, diaries and letters, through which she "rediscovered women's voices." These voices were so strong, so powerful, that she "felt she was engaged in a dialogue with hundreds of American women," a dialogue that completely transformed her line of scholarship.⁶⁸ Like the object, then, the

⁶⁵ Tanselle, "A Rationale of Collecting," p. 47.

⁶⁶ Shils, *Tradition*, p. 77.

⁶⁷ Tanselle, "A Rationale of Collecting," p. 47.

⁶⁸ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985, pp. 26-28.

capacity of the record to serve as evidence of the past is without a doubt one of the most compelling reasons why it is treasured, sought out, and, indeed, collected.

Furthermore, like past objects, records have an intimate relationship with memory, and are often created and retained for that reason. In the same way as objects, they not only aid memory, they become memory itself. Referring back to the ideas of Pierre Nora, the proliferation of records in recent times (and the dependence of memory on these records) has ensured that "modern memory is above all archival."⁶⁹ Plato, in *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh and Eighth Letters*, recounted the scornful reaction of Thamus, king of Egypt, to the god Theuth's invention of writing: "Those who acquire it will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely upon writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of on their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a recipe for recollection, not for memory."⁷⁰ Thus King Thamus saw records as a replacement for the act of (oral) remembering; although he dismisses such "recollection" as not being true memory, his musings underline the notion in which records have become our memory through literacy and technology.

Even if Thamus' position is overstated, we can see how memory is reliant on the record. "To have some account of my thoughts, manners, acquaintances and actions, when the hour arrives in which time is more nimble than memory, is the reason which induces me to keep a Journal,"⁷¹ wrote the English novelist Fanny Burney in 1768.

Events that would otherwise be lost can be captured and rediscovered through a record. Just as some depend on souvenirs to remind them of a trip, so too do others depend on a

⁶⁹ Nora, "Between Memory and History," p. 13.

⁷⁰ Quoted in John Shotter, "The Social Construction of Remembering and Forgetting," in David Middleton and Derek Edwards, eds. *Collective Remembering*, p. 136.

travel journal or photographs to refresh their memory in later years; notes are written to remind oneself of tasks that need doing later; daybooks are kept so that important appointments and events can be remembered.

But the relationship between memory and record manifests itself in an even more fundamental way. Records are communications, and as such, they form a critical part of the very process of remembering. In a discussion on family memory-making, William Hirst and David Manier maintain that "one cannot divorce the act of remembering from the act of communicating."⁷² Their point is that without a communication, whether to others or to oneself, there is no memory. The two are so intrinsically bound that the record *becomes* the memory. Therefore, it is not the memory that is prior to the record; it is the record that is prior to the memory, later recalled. The function of the record, then, is not only to preserve the memory, but to bring it into existence.

Furthermore, it is abundantly clear that, just as the collecting of objects is a means of creating identity for one individual, the creation of personal records is a means of identity-building for another. This is one of the most beneficial functions provided by creating records, as the process becomes a means of understanding the self. To begin with, the very act of writing, Susan Stewart maintains, "is linked to the personal... To sign your name, your mark, is to leave a track like any other track of the body...."⁷³ As such, a person becomes instantly identified with the mark he/she leaves. From this starting

⁷¹ Quoted in Irene and Alan Taylor, eds. *The Assassin's Cloak: An Anthology of the World's Greatest Diarists*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2000, p. 162.

⁷² William Hirst and David Manier, "Remembering as Communication: A Family Recounts its Past," in David C. Rubin, ed. *Remembering our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 287.

⁷³ Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 14.

point, then, humans (with the ability to do so) use their mark with language and technology to express themselves, explore themselves, and leave a trace behind.

Not just the authorship of a record makes it personal, however, but so too do its shape and form. The diary, scrapbook, and memoir are obvious examples of creating self as record: not only do individuals making such records identify closely with their end product, they are also an active means of learning about the self through the creation process. Trudelle H. Thomas, in interviewing contemporary female diarists, perceived the diary to be a “creative midwife,” as the women she talked to “spoke of the diary as an aid to ‘giving birth to the self,’ to ‘coming into my own,’ to ‘becoming a whole person.’”⁷⁴ The autobiography and memoir, in a similar way, not only represent the life of an individual in written form, but the writing itself is a process of reflecting on one's entire life experience, and attempting to make sense of it.

If collecting objects is a means of fighting mortality against loss through time and eventual death, there is ample evidence that records are created for this purpose too. In fact, it is the rendering of personal experience as object that allows humans to come to terms with the transience of the flesh. Continuing on the theme of writing as an extension of the self, Susan Stewart explains the potency of the written record in this way: “writing leaves its trace, a trace beyond the life of the body...writing promises immortality, or at least the immortality of the material world in contrast to the mortality of the body. Our terror of the unmarked grave is a terror of the insignificance of a world without writing.”⁷⁵ Supporting this idea, Alex Aronson contends that “Diaries...are metaphors of

⁷⁴ Trudelle H. Thomas, “The Diary as Creative Midwife: Interviews with Three Writers,” in Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds. *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996, p. 170.

⁷⁵ Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 30.

the flux of time, evocations of the writer's often capricious and fragmentary recall of the past, and his daily attempts at transforming memory into images that, once they are written down, are apprehended as if they existed outside or beyond time." This "produces an illusion of stability and permanence."⁷⁶ Thomas Mallon, studying some of Western society's more renowned diarists, notes how Anaïs Nin considered her diary writing to be "an effort against loss, a way of saving things that would otherwise disappear."⁷⁷ It is clear, then, that written records provide some individuals with a sense of mastery over time, just as collecting objects do so for others.

Furthermore, when discussing records, whether textual or visual, there is no denying their materiality. Even digital records have, in their hardware, a physical aspect to them; even oral testimony, if it is to become a record, must be captured by physical means, if only through the bodies of subsequent tellers of the community stories or family narratives, let alone those taped or transcribed. Records, therefore, are objects. And are collected as such. Kathryn Carter, in an introduction to a work she edited on female diarists in Canada, "asked contributors to remark on the physical appearance of the diary manuscript because it matters what kind of container a diarist chooses for her words." Carter goes on to outline the effect of the material chosen on the record itself, as well as the ways in which diarists creatively expand the flat format of the diary by adding extra tidbits such as flowers, photographs, ticket stubs, postcards, and recipes.⁷⁸

The integrity of such objects to the completeness of the record is evident in a journal entry from Etty Hillesum's war diary in 1942. Hillesum, a Jewish Dutch woman

⁷⁶ Alex Aronson, *Studies in Twentieth Century Diaries: The Concealed Self. Studies in Comparative Literature*, vol.12. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, pp. vii, ix.

⁷⁷ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984, p. 86.

who had studied law and psychology, wrote the following from her home in Holland at the age of 28, as she added a little flower to her diary:

Just a small red, faded anemone. But I like the idea that in years to come, I shall chance upon it again between these pages. By then I shall be a matron, and I shall hold this dried flower in my hands and say with a touch of sadness: 'Look, this is the anemone I wore in my hair on the fifty-fifth birthday of the man who was the greatest and most unforgettable friend of my youth. It was during the third year of World War II, we ate under-the-counter macaroni and drank real coffee, on which Liesl got 'drunk', we were all in such high spirits, wondering if the war would be over soon, and I wore the red anemone in my hair and somebody said, 'You look a mixture of Russian and Spanish,' and somebody else, the blond Swiss with the heavy eyebrows, said 'A Russian Carmen,' and I asked him to recite a poem about William Tell for us in his funny Swiss burr.'⁷⁹

Here we are lucky that Hillesum has told us the significance of this flower pressed between the pages of her diary; it is clearly an integral part of her record, a reminder of her experience for years to come, an object-memory trace, just as much as the words, written on the same page. Lucky that we know indeed, since she was killed at Auschwitz a year later, never to be the matron she imagined. The anemone is a part of her lived experience, and as such had great meaning to her, in capturing the essence of small joys that were felt in otherwise oppressive circumstances. To perceive a diary or journal solely as recorded information, then, and not as an object, is to lose out on the breadth of what is documented in such records.

In fact, the record as object is what gives the personal archive meaning, perhaps as much as the content of the records themselves. In a human interest column in *Maclean's*, community learning program coordinator Connie Gibbs describes the treasure trove of family letters kept by her parents, which were stored in a "Gladstone bag." Through Gibbs' description of the letters and their container, it becomes obvious that the

⁷⁸ Kathryn Carter, *The Small Details of Life: Twenty Diaries by Women in Canada, 1830-1996*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, pp. 22-23.

aura of magic, sentiment and family identity surrounding the letters is wrapped up in the materiality of the bag itself, symbol of all these qualities. She describes the bag in detail:

In a dark cranny of the closet, I spied its homely shape. The black leather was cracked, the brass fittings tarnished, and my father's initials, R.C.G., had deteriorated to an illegible red smear. A beige tag dangled from the double handles, a note from my father with my name scrawled at the top: "This Gladstone bag was given to me by my mum and dad when I went to Hawaii in 1937."⁸⁰

Here, the tangible character of the "object" is part of its potency: its shape, texture, colour, markings, and story all contribute to the bag's allure, as keeper of the family letters. These are not simply communicatives with interesting information on them; they are Letters Kept in the Gladstone Bag. Thus, the object, in this case, becomes the bag and the letters combined, both of which form the personal archive.

Moreover, memories, thoughts and experiences, intangible as they are, can certainly be understood as objects. The correlation between physical items and mental images are described further in the musings of Etty Hillesum, where she perceives the experiences captured in her (physical) journal as akin to the (intangible) residue of those experiences in her mind. As she waits to discover if she will be taken by Nazis and sent to a place where she will no longer have her diary, she writes in its pages:

...nevertheless these last two years will shine at the edge of my memory like a glorious landscape in which I was once at home and which will always remain part of me. I feel that I am still tied by a thousand threads to everything I treasure here. I will have to tear myself away bit by bit and store everything inside me, so that when I have to leave I shall not abandon anything but carry it all with me.⁸¹

Here, the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual "threads" of Hillesum's life are described as objects to be collected and later re-collected through remembering.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Irene and Alan Taylor, *The Assassin's Cloak*, pp. 210-211.

⁸⁰ Connie Gibbs, "The Gladstone Bag." *Maclean's*, June 24, 2002, p. 12.

⁸¹ Quoted in Irene and Alan Taylor, *The Assassin's Cloak*, p. 373.

Optimally, for Hillesum, this process occurs through the material existence of her experience as text on pages, but if that cannot be, the experiences can be retained as items stored in her mind. She sees no difference in kind between the collecting of these thoughts physically, and their collection by intellectual means.

Finally, it is overwhelmingly apparent that creating records, just like collecting objects, has to do with maintaining a sense of narrative in our lives. The subject of narrative is one of much depth, and is closely related to our sense of self. Kim Worthington takes the idea that the self is text and expands it, arguing that self is in fact narrative, the stringing together of text. She suggests that "the construction of a subject's sense of selfhood should be understood as a creative narrative process achieved within a plurality of intersubjective communicative protocols. In the act of conceptualizing one's selfhood, one writes a narrative of personal continuity through time."⁸² Worthington refutes the idea that this narrative is a fiction, in the sense that the self has no relation to reality, but argues instead that "a narrative of sense provides the human subject with a sense of self-continuity and coherence that enables the projection of desire and intention towards an imagined future. In short, it allows the subject to function as a purposive, morally responsible agent."⁸³ Narrative is an essential tool, then, for humans to exist as social beings.

Although Worthington approaches these ideas from a literary perspective, through analysing personalities in fictional works such as Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, they are supported by psychological theory as well. Narrative is critical to our early psychological development, as it shapes the way we understand our selves and maintain

⁸² Kim Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 13.

social relationships. Those studying early childhood development observe how parents teach their children to tell stories about themselves at a very early age, and tell their children stories about the world so that it might be rendered comprehensible. From the earliest possible moment, children are exposed to the tangible format of the storybook, and the intellectual concept of the narrative. It is so fundamental to the growth of children, Katherine Nelson argues, that the greater part of their psychological development in the late preschool and early school years occurs “in the telling, retelling, transforming, and reconstructing of stories for oneself and for others.”⁸⁴

As children develop into adults and their autobiographical memory expands, narratives continue to be imperative for them to understand their selves and relate to others. Susan Engel, in studying the characteristics of human memory, emphasizes the importance of coherence in a functioning adult's life, of having a sense of being consistent over time. She indicates the way in which this function is also a creative one: “engaging children in descriptions of the past reflect the parents’ possibly unconscious motivation to involve their children in what is an essential form of making meaning and creating a self.”⁸⁵ As such, narratives are a way for each individual to bring the threads of his/her life together, and ensure that his/her personal past makes sense and has meaning. Just as importantly, narratives enable individuals to share their experiences with others in a meaningful way, thus strengthening interpersonal bonds and creating

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁴ Katherine Nelson, *Language in Cognitive Development: Emergence of the Mediated Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 219.

⁸⁵ Susan Engel, *Context is Everything: The Nature of Memory*. New York: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1999, p. 33.

further understanding among families and communities. It is also a means of “sustaining intimacy” in our closest and most treasured relationships.⁸⁶

In fact, Craig Barclay argues that narrative is so key to the maintenance of mental health that individuals unable to frame their experiences in narrative forms experience a sense of “self-fragmentation” and can become alienated from society. He observes that traumatized victims often lack the requisite vocabulary to put their experiences into a familiar narrative, an absence that has a debilitating effect on their psyche. Holocaust victims, for instance, cannot explain what happened to them in a linear way, following a narrative pattern, as there was no logic to their experience, nor are the narratives that society provides adequate for what they endured. From his study of such victims, Barclay contends that “people who are traumatized often lose a sense of the order and location of the traumatic experiences and the evaluative narrative function, or information, to explain what the traumatic events mean.”⁸⁷ Autobiographical remembering, therefore, is interpreted as an “activity that forms emergent selves which give us a sense of needed comfort and a culturally valued sense of personal coherence over time.”⁸⁸ Like Engel, then, Barclay argues that the purposes of autobiographical memory are twofold: for a personal sense of coherence through time, and for a social sense of being to create and maintain meaningful and intimate relationships.

Of course, autobiographical remembering and narrative do not always translate into physical records. Much reminiscing and story-telling is done verbally, mentally, or in means other than through preservable records. Nevertheless, narrative must be seen

⁸⁶ Robyn Fivush, Catherine Haden and Elaine Reese, “Remembering, Recounting, and Reminiscing: The Development of Autobiographical Memory in Social Context,” in David C. Rubin, ed. *Remembering our Past*, p. 358.

as central to the creation and preservation of personal records. There is not one kind of record or assemblage of records, which, in its own way, does *not* tell a story.

Formal autobiographies, of course, may fit best into the category of narratives as life-creating, structured, as they are, with a semblance of a beginning, middle and end, of a (usually) linear plot describing the progression of one's life. While autobiographies often result in published works, and are therefore not considered a "personal record" in the archival sense, there are many life-stories that remain unpublished, as manuscripts or as works intended only for family and friends, that are personal records of a life in narrative form. Moreover, the notion of the formal autobiography is so central to Western society that its concept alone helps members of that society to make meaning and sense out of their lives. Susan Engel maintains that "even though so few of us actually write our own [life stories] in a full-fledged form, we all use autobiographies, our own and those we read, to find order in our lives and to gain understanding about ourselves and social world around us."⁸⁷ It is not just the writing of the autobiography, then, but the idea of it and the presence of it around us in innumerable forms, that helps us to manage the chaos of our environment.

This need to understand human existence through knowledge of others' life stories is further evident in the immense popularity of biography in popular culture. The plethora of biographical books, magazines, television and radio programs, documentary films, movies based-on-true-life-stories and web-sites that are churned out for public consumption (many as part of the feverish cult of celebrity worship), are indicative of an

⁸⁷ Craig Barclay, "Autobiographical Remembering: Narrative Constraints on Objectified Selves," in David C. Rubin, ed. *Remembering our Past*, p. 113.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁸⁹ Engel, *Context is Everything*, p. 113.

insatiable human need to understand life as a narrative that, despite its trials and routines, does in fact have an overarching plot with significance and purpose. It is not simply because the media, in all its various forms and permutations, promotes biography that people find themselves interested in the genre; these media are responding to the strong need in humans to understand their world and the cycle of life and death.

Such themes are also explored by individuals in the creation of diaries and journals, which represent narratives of a different sort from biography. Elizabeth Podnieks, in studying the creation of daily texts by individuals, in fact explores how diaries are similar to both autobiographies and fictional novels, both examples of formal narratives.⁹⁰ Certainly there is no overall sense of plot and resolution in a diary as might appear in a novel or autobiography. Nevertheless, while records that consist of brief and regular entries may not resemble a single structured narrative, they are narratives of daily stories told through thousands of entries; and these entries, collectively understood, give breath to an overall life story. Thus, although distinct from the more structured autobiography, diaries and journals do represent life narratives in a similar fashion, and cannot be dismissed as disconnected jottings.

Story-telling is also driven by the human need to relate to and communicate with others. When relationships occur across space, stories are told through a variety of personal records. Thus letter writing, sending greeting cards, and e-mailing are ways of conveying our narrative to others in an effort to maintain relationships, or even create new ones with new technology, as relationships thrive in Internet chat rooms or in the phenomenon known as “blogging.” Blogs are personal websites that are updated daily,

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Podnieks, *Daily Modernism: The Literary Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart and Anaïs Nin*. Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000, pp. 13-44.

often taking the form of a journal. Rebecca Blood, a blogger herself, notes that, in the creation of these on-line journals, which expose the daily activities and thoughts of individuals to the world, the bloggers increase their self-understanding.⁹¹ Thus, through the narratives of her or his world, the blogger is both creating the self and creating new relationships, where individuals from around the globe read the blog, and comment on it.

A further obvious means of creating a narrative of the self through personal records is in the form of photographs and photograph albums. In capturing lived experience in images, then selecting certain ones and placing them in a story-telling format, individuals, and families, put their lives in order, both for themselves and for others. Martha Langford emphasizes how this helps people to make sense of their lives, where she writes, "The album as a private collection...domesticates a vast and unpredictable universe, setting its pleasures and terrors into a pattern of knowledge and experience inextricably linked with the self."⁹² Each picture in the album tells a story, and the album as a whole tells a story, becoming, as Deborah Chambers argues, "a narration of family values and meanings."⁹³

More than that, it is narrative that induces people not only to create records, but to keep them; records that were created in the course of individual lives, through childhood, adolescence, education, careers, families, community involvement, and so on, are all evidence of people's developing stories. In this way the collecting mentality and the need to have a record of one's life come even closer together. "All my life I have been a

⁹¹ Rebecca Blood, "Weblogs: A History and Perspective." Available at: http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html. Accessed: 5 May 2004.

⁹² Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photograph Albums*. Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, p. 63.

⁹³ Deborah Chambers, "Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Domestication of Public and Private Space," in Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds. *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, p. 96.

collector," wrote Randie L. McDuffie of Florida to the *Country Collectibles* magazine. "I have menus from every restaurant I've been to and programs from every concert. I even have movie ticket stubs and matchbooks." To organize this collection, McDuffie "took large manila envelopes, collaged the front of each with pictures from that year of my life and wrote a brief summary of the year's events. I also kept a record of all the additions to the family, such as births of children, grandchildren and pets...How wonderful it will be for my great-great-grandchildren to have this detailed story of my life."⁹⁴ This individual's life story is in part the record of major family events, but in greater part it is the paper waste of life: slips of paper and bits of material originally intended for very temporary uses have become a de facto autobiography. This is collecting and the personal archive brought together, where the two activities have completely converged.

Another example demonstrates how records become objects for collection, telling a story as they are collected. Miles Harvey, on the hunt for information about the map thief Gilbert Bland, came to the realization that in his obsessive pursuit of Bland's life through records, Harvey had become a collector just like Bland:

...without really noticing it, I had devoted years of my life to building a collection, and a very extensive one at that...Gilbert Bland's birth, marriage, and divorce records. Gilbert Bland's military documents. Gilbert Bland's criminal records. Transcripts from his trials. Gilbert Bland's prison correspondence. Documents related to his business and real estate dealings. Forms from his wife's bankruptcy case. A copy of the notebook Gilbert Bland left at the Peabody Library. Photographs of the maps he stole. Hundreds of pages of testimony from those who came in contact with him. I had never spent so much time, effort, or money acquiring any group of objects in my life.⁹⁵

The records that Harvey collected, then, told the story of Bland's life, and their collection became the "collection" of Bland himself.

⁹⁴ Randie L. McDuffie, Letter to the Editor, *Country Collectibles*. Summer 2003, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Harvey, *The Island of Lost Maps*, pp. 267-268.

It is evident, then, that narrative is key in the creation and preservation of personal records. In whatever form humans choose to create them, whether through photographs, letters, e-mails, scrapbooks, diaries, poetry, memoirs, autobiographies, family histories, web-sites or even as products or souvenirs of our professional and personal lives, these are the stuff of the stories of their lives.

Conclusion

Collecting, it can be seen, has a long and rich history. Stretching back to prehistoric humans, collecting objects has been one of the fundamental ways in which humans have learned about and organized their environment. More than that, collecting has also been a significant intellectual framework for many cultures, as a means of identifying and categorizing material, as a way, too, of exercising power and social control.

Considering this framework also brings to light the way in which collecting objects is strongly connected to collecting our personal thoughts and recollecting our own stories. Whether through objects or records, individuals preserve their stories in order to have a sense of self, an identity, an understanding of their past, and an ordered memory. Collecting their thoughts, recollecting past events, or collecting fancy salt and pepper shakers, are therefore connected on the level of identity-making, of putting order into their world, past and present. It is the creation of order and meaning out of thoughts and experiences, whether by collectors through objects and pieces, or by others through various types of personal documents and records, that renders a life into a personal story. Therefore, personal records, like collections of objects, are a significant means of

organizing one's life, creating identity, celebrating memory, and fighting against the progression of time and inevitable death.

CHAPTER TWO

THE APPRAISAL OF PERSONAL RECORDS IN ARCHIVAL INSTITUTIONS

The relationship between collecting and archival appraisal

Collecting is a word that has been long associated with archival institutions, and is one that has many connotations for archivists. This association manifests itself, for one, in the terminology surrounding archives and the records found therein. Many institutions, for instance, use the term “Special Collections” in their titles; indeed, researchers and archivists alike refer to the holdings of archival institutions as “collections.” Archivists also develop “collecting policies,” which are those policies designed to guide them in determining what broad categories of records should be acquired and kept in their archives. As such, the act of acquiring itself is often understood as “collecting.” These are terms that form a part of standard archival lexicons.

There is another, more troublesome connection between collecting and archives, however, one with which leading archivists have taken issue. This is where archivists have acted *as collectors* in their acquisition strategy; that is to say, have focused on treasured pieces for their institution, spending great resources in pursuit of such objects of desire, competing with private collectors, with little reasoning behind the acquisition of items beyond perceiving them as prize possessions. Instead of having planned approaches to acquiring records that are part of full *fonds* or series, and that document the functions or records creators which the institution seeks to document and then preserve

through archival records, archivists who “collect” in this way are narrowly focused on the individual record as an historical curiosity or intrinsic artifact. In these cases, archivists do not have the interest of well-contextualized archival records at heart, but rather, some have suggested, their own personal glory and the glory of their institution in acquiring notable objects, often according to their own whims and eccentric tastes. This kind of collecting, then, used as a strategy for archival acquisition and appraisal, is perceived by many professional archivists as a detriment to the documentary heritage of society, and a throwback to antiquarian approaches common before archival work became professionalized.

However, there are, in fact, some archivists who must act like these early collectors, because of the nature of the records they preserve. Therefore, archivists in various special media, such as map archivists and documentary art archivists, as well as those who deal with material from early periods, including early photographs and diaries from eras that are not well documented, must de facto operate in the world of collectors whether they like to or not. For these archivists, the prized object *is* archival, since often no full *fonds* or series survives or perhaps ever existed. Moreover, it is the aesthetic or rare nature of the records that makes them of interest to private collectors. Such archivists, then, must compete with these collectors, thus becoming engaged in the market and auction trade of old manuscripts, rare maps, watercolours, sketches, daguerreotypes, lantern slides, and so on. Therefore, by virtue of the fact that the documentary universe for these areas is limited, and has a widespread appeal to non-archivists, specialist archivists are forced to enter the world of “collecting.” This does

not mean, however, that their approaches are unplanned, unsystematic or unprofessional, but it does mean that they have a close relationship with the realm of collecting.

A further connection between collecting and archives is where archivists, at a very broad level, are collectors of society's memory and identity, and must understand the forces at work in collecting. At an individual level, collecting in this sense merges the line between collectors of objects and collectors of thoughts, stories and experiences; this means, as discussed in Chapter One, that everyone is a collector. Everyone needs structures and systems to order their lives, to understand their environment (past and present), and to come to terms with their human existence. Such goals can be accomplished through the collection of physical objects, or through the creation of personal records, to name only the two examples pertinent to this thesis. When applied to the appraisal of personal records, then, such collecting can inform the appraising archivist, as a means of understanding the value that the records had for their creators.

Early archivists as collectors

The roots of the archival profession in terms of acquiring personal records in fact lie in the sphere of true collectors. In the United States, the history of archiving was long divided between two traditions, that of public records on one hand, and that of private (or historical) manuscripts on the other. The former was the purview of national, state or local government archives; the latter was the exclusive sphere of collecting libraries and historical societies, often with private collectors donating their collections to such libraries. Private or personal records archiving was, therefore, very closely linked with

antiquarian collectors of manuscripts.¹ The practice of manuscript curators competing with private collectors and acting in a similar manner was so prevalent during the early stages of the profession that Gerald Ham described such collecting as “the primary means of saving the nation’s archival treasures.”²

In fact, the historical manuscripts tradition, which originated with American historical societies and state and university libraries, was closely associated with collectors since not only did such societies collect records, but they also collected, as James O’Toole describes, “objects, artefacts, and scientific specimens,” in an effort to capture the history of the American people.³ Part of the approach to the collection of early records, moreover, was to save all the documents possible.⁴ Thus, the preservation of personal papers was very much linked to the realm of collecting where these papers were collected alongside artifacts and organic material, and where there was an atmosphere of having to save all historical matter possible, very much part of the “completist” collecting mentality.

The historical manuscripts tradition in the United States, moreover, was shaped by a handful of collecting individuals. Justin Winsor (1831-1897), first president of the American Library Association, illustrated this point when discussing the history of collecting libraries in America, writing that “we may trace the beginning of a general interest in the preservation of our national muniments to the labors and influence of three

¹ Luke Gilliland-Swetland, “The Provenance of a Profession: The Permanence of the Public Archives and Historical Manuscripts Tradition in American Archival History. *American Archivist* vol. 54 (Spring 1991), p. 161.

² F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993, p. 37.

³ James M. O’Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990, p. 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*

men—Jared Sparks, Peter Force, and George Bancroft.”⁵ All of these men were collectors of books, newspapers, historical manuscripts and transcripts, that, when donated to libraries, fostered the development of these libraries as collecting institutions. Collecting individuals, therefore, played a large role in the development of early manuscript repositories.

This pattern, of strong collecting personalities being among the first in a budding archival scene, was also evident in the birth of many Canadian archives. With no archival tradition in Canada, civil servants in the Confederation years, and for a long time after, were left to their own devices in putting together record repositories, with little in the way of qualifications or guidance. As such, those who found themselves in these positions were informed by their own interests and systems (or lack thereof), and by American “collector” precedents.

Such a pattern, of collecting items based on personal interest, was evident in the early archival activity in Nova Scotia as one example. When Dr. Daniel C. Harvey, a professional historian, became the provincial archivist in 1931, he found a daunting task in preventing the archives, which had developed under various predecessors, from “becoming a miscellaneous museum, warehouse, or junk-heap, to the ultimate exclusion of legitimate archival material.”⁶ These predecessors, T.B Akins and Harry Piers, possessed a variety of interests that were reflected in the antiquarian-type collections they produced. Such collecting personalities were thus important in paving the way for early archival institutions, but the personal stamp they left on these institutions was not always

⁵ Quoted in T.R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965, pp. 25-26.

in the best archival interests. Harry Piers, for instance, was, in addition to being the Keeper of the Public Records of Nova Scotia, the curator of the Provincial Museum; based on what Harvey found in 1931, it would seem that Piers' double role meant that some of what he acquired for the archives was, in fact, more artifact-like than archival.⁷ A similar approach to collecting "quaint specimens of the early days" animated the Provincial Archives of Ontario after its founding in 1903 as well.⁸

Provincial repositories aside, nowhere was the impact of a personality felt on the development of archival acquisition policies than at the federal level. Ian Wilson writes of Douglas Brymner, appointed to be in charge of an "Archives Branch" in the Dominion government in 1872, that he began his archival career "with a minimum of theory but considerable enthusiasm,"⁹ for his "noble dream" of building a great storehouse collection of Canadiana.¹⁰

After Brymner, the Canadian national archival scene met with the colourful character of Arthur Doughty, who became the first official Dominion Archivist in 1904. Doughty brought a personal flair to his position that made him both famous and infamous as an archival collector. Known sometimes as "the great thief" for his aggressive tactics in collecting material,¹¹ Doughty's personal charm and finesse enabled him to acquire records that may not have been best placed in the centralized Ottawa repository. He

⁶ Carman V. Carroll, "Developing 'an Historical Laboratory': The Genesis of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia," in Barbara Craig, ed. *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*. Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992, p. 178.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁸ Donald Macleod, "'Quaint Specimens of the Early Days': Priorities in Collecting the Ontario Archival Record, 1872-1935," *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986), p. 33

⁹ Ian Wilson, "'A Noble Dream': The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-1983), p. 18.

¹⁰ Danielle Lacasse and Antonio Lechasseur, *The National Archives of Canada, 1872-1997*. Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet no. 58, 1997, pp. 4-5.

¹¹ Carroll, "Developing 'an Historical Laboratory,'" p. 185.

travelled to Europe and Britain to hold company with Europe's political and social elite, capturing what he considered to be archival gems for the Canadian federal repository.¹² His exploits revealed both his charismatic nature and his passion for archives, but not, unfortunately, a reasoned approach to the appraisal and acquisition of records. His field agents, who collected in regions on his behalf, often were at loggerheads with provincial and local archivists.¹³ Moreover, the records Doughty and his agents did acquire were not always full series. James Mitchell, for instance, the first agent of the new Dominion's Public Archives in Ontario, collected bits and pieces from other series that resulted in an eclectic mixture of curiosities.¹⁴ Doughty's zeal in collecting, along with that of his agents, allowed him to increase the Dominion's holdings considerably, but without any clear strategy or mandate other than to collect, collect, collect.

Both Brymner's and Doughty's grab-bag assortment of records, then, paid little attention to the fundamental archival concepts of provenance and *respect de fonds*. It was not until 1916 that Doughty proposed the system of provenance-based classification, instead of the subject-based system being used in the Dominion archives.¹⁵ Therefore, while these pioneers are to be commended for their dedication, their tactics and the results they produced did not necessarily leave the best archival legacy.

Development of archival theory

While individuals in North America were making preliminary attempts at collecting records for their archival institutions, archivists in nations with older archival traditions were attempting to develop more systematic approaches to the work of

¹² Wilson, "A Noble Dream," p. 29.

¹³ Carroll, "Developing 'an Historical Laboratory,'" p. 185.

¹⁴ Macleod, "Quaint Specimens," p. 17.

¹⁵ Lacasse and Lechasseur, *The National Archives of Canada*, pp. 14-15.

archiving. It is, not surprisingly, in the field of institutional or government records that initial attempts at archival theory first emerged. In 1898, Dutch archivists Muller, Feith and Fruin published one of the first efforts to codify such theory. Their *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* is clear, from the first sentence of the first chapter, as to what kind of records they were addressing:

An archival collection is the whole of the written documents and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body or one of its officials, in so far as these documents were intended to remain in the custody of that body or of that official.¹⁶

While this seminal work was a welcome manual for an archival profession beginning to separate itself from the historical profession, it was clearly never intended for non-governmental records, which were still largely left, in Europe as in the United States, to the manuscript collectors, antiquarians and librarians.

Further development of archival theory and appraisal continued to be in the area of institutional records, particularly as twentieth-century bureaucratic governments blossomed. Hilary Jenkinson, an eminent British archivist, published *A Manual of Archive Administration* in 1922, in part as a response to the quantity and complexity of records created in Britain while administering the First World War. In his manual, the first such (and enormously influential) work in English, he provided the following definition for archival documents:

A document which may be said to belong to the class of Archives is one which *was drawn up or used in the course of an administrative or executive transaction (whether public or private) of which itself formed a part; and subsequently preserved in their own custody for their own information by the person or persons responsible for that transaction and their legitimate successors.* (original emphasis)¹⁷

¹⁶ Samuel Muller, Johan Feith and Robert Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*. Arthur H. Leavitt, tr. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1968, p. 13.

¹⁷ Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*. 2nd ed., London: Percy Lund, 1937, p. 11.

While he included public and private transactions in this definition, Jenkinson was quite specific about the kind of activity that produced a proper archival document: it was from an administrative or business transaction. Moreover, the archives that were created from such records he defined as “*documents which formed part of an official transaction and were preserved for official reference.*”¹⁸ While some personal records could be forced into this definition, it is very clear that the overall emphasis of Jenkinson’s manual was intended for government or institutional records, with personal records again left on the fringes of archiving.

By the end of the next world war, Jenkinson was even clearer in defining what constituted archival records, and how they were to be appraised and acquired. In a lecture in 1947 entitled “The English Archivist: A New Profession,” he defined archives as records that grew naturally from the institution that created them, and were *not* records that were consciously collected, in the sense of consciously made for archival and historical purposes: “Archives are not collected: I wish the word ‘Collection’ could be banished from the Archivist’s vocabulary, if only to establish that fact.”¹⁹ Throughout his career, then, and in the many, widely influential writings on archival theory that he produced, Jenkinson concentrated heavily on institutional records, and distanced archivists from the world of collecting, indeed, disavowed that world, and word.

Jenkinson’s attitude has been adopted by many later archivists. Although “collection” is a term used colloquially by many to refer to a group of records created by an individual or group of individuals, archival theory dictates that the word *fonds* should

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁹ Hilary Jenkinson, “The English Archivist: A New Profession,” in Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne, eds. *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*. London: Alan Sutton, 1980, p. 238.

be used instead of collection. Archival descriptive standards make this clear. The Canadian guidelines for archival description, *Rules for Archival Description*, provide the following definition for a *fonds*: "The whole of the documents, regardless of form or medium, automatically and organically created and/or accumulated and used by a particular individual, family, or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities or functions."²⁰ A collection, on the other hand, is defined as follows:

An artificial accumulation of documents of any provenance brought together on the basis of some common characteristic, e.g., way of acquisition, subject, language, medium, type of document, name of collector, which may be treated for descriptive purposes as a unit under a common title.²¹

A key distinction, then, between the collection and the *fonds* is that while the latter is "automatically or organically" created, the former is "an artificial accumulation." These definitions echo Jenkinsonian ideas very strongly, and demonstrate the extent to which his thoughts have been firmly entrenched in archival theory.

The Second World War brought about an even greater focus on the ever-increasing volumes of government records being produced. The renowned American archivist, T.R. Schellenberg, writing in a bulletin of the American National Archives in 1956, described the problems facing archivists as a result of "an expansion of governmental activity" resulting in "a tremendous increase in record production."²² To this end, he put forth guidelines for the appraisal of modern public records, which he elucidated more fully in his publication of the same year, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*. Schellenberg's ideas were expressly for application to public (that is,

²⁰ *Rules for Archival Description*, 2003, Appendix D. Available at: http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/RAD_Glossary_revised_Aug2003.pdf. Accessed: 10 May 2004.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² T.R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records." *Bulletin of the National Archives*, no.8. Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1956, p. 237.

governmental) records, and it therefore follows that his definition of archives should emphasize the institutional nature of the records:

All books, papers, maps, photographs, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by any public or private institution in pursuance of its legal obligations or in connection with the transaction of its proper business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that institution or its legitimate successor as evidence of its functions, policies, decision, procedures, operations, or other activities or because of the informational value of the data contained therein.²³

He outlined the differences between archival institutions and collecting libraries, and understood their approaches to records to be fundamentally different.²⁴ His work, then, was to provide techniques and methodology for public archival institutions alone.

Schellenberg's concepts were not only a critical influence in the development of American archival programs, but were also acclaimed by an international audience as well. W. Kaye Lamb, Dominion Archivist from 1948 to 1968, adopted for the Public Archives of Canada a Schellenbergian approach to government records appraisal and arrangement.²⁵ In fact, it was under Lamb's leadership that the Public Archives began to accept more responsibility for the systematic management of government records, moving away from Doughty's eclectic legacy.²⁶ The leading archival theory of post-war North America, then, was concentrated on public records, leaving issues concerning private records still on the sidelines.

Another contributor to the field of archival appraisal was Maynard Brichford, who wrote *the* manual on the subject for the Society of American Archivists in 1977.

Brichford emphasized the weighty significance of this archival task, writing that

²³ T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 20-23.

“Appraisal is the greatest professional challenge to the archivist. In an existential context, the archivist bears responsibility for deciding which aspects of society and which specific activities shall be documented in the records retained for future use.”²⁷ In writing his manual, Brichford attempted to bring practical guidelines to archivists undertaking this important task. In order to properly appraise records, Brichford argued that a great deal of knowledge and a great many skills were necessary:

Records appraisal is best considered as a *process* that requires extensive staff preparation, a thorough analysis of the origin and characteristics of record series, a knowledge of techniques for the segregation and selection of records, an awareness of the development of research methodologies and needs, and a sequential consideration of administrative, research, and archival values.²⁸

Brichford’s manual was indicative of an attempt to address the intellectual complexities of appraisal, and provide practical solutions to its challenges.

As the documentary world continued to grow exponentially, and the form of that world spiralled into myriads of different media and record-keeping capabilities of “the information age,” further theoretical frameworks were needed to rise to the challenges facing archivists. Terry Cook, at the then National Archives of Canada, developed the world-renowned “macro-appraisal” system, studying the functions of record-creators and those with whom they interact, rather than the subject content of the records they created, to determine archival value. In getting to the heart of the appraisal process, Cook suggested that

the key appraisal question is, Who—in articulating and implementing the key functions of the institution (as assigned it by the broader society)—would have had cause to create a record, what type of record would it be, and with

²⁵ Jay Atherton, “The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897-1956.” *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979), p. 57.

²⁶ Lacasse and Lechasseur, *The National Archives of Canada*, p. 17.

²⁷ Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977, p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

whom would that corporate person cooperate in either its creation or its later use?²⁹ (original bold type)

It was the context of the record's creation, Cook argued, rather than its content, that became the critical element in determining its archival worth. His model deepened the intellectual scope of archival appraisal, providing a strong theoretical foundation for this fundamental archival task, and has now been adopted by many public institutions around the globe.

Richard Brown, also at the National Archives of Canada, continued Cook's line of thought, arguing that appraisal should be done with a contextual understanding of the records-creators, but in addition, broadening the scope of that context to include what he called *discourse formations*. These he defined as:

The institutional networks and properties of organizational structure and function revealed in texts (records) when they are viewed as media of information integration and communication for the purpose of situating, transmitting, and recording messages about institutional activities, systems, processes, etc.³⁰

It is through an understanding of these discourse formations, Brown contended, along with an understanding of the metatexts (which consist of documentation about record creation) that better appraisal of archival records could be conducted.³¹ Brown's rich discussion provided further intellectual depth to the new macro-appraisal theory.

Victoria Lemieux added to the macro-appraisal literature as well by using the organizational theories of Henry Mintzberg to develop "a more sophisticated theoretical

²⁹ Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed. *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh Taylor*. Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992, p. 47.

³⁰ Richard Brown, "Macro-Appraisal and the Context of the Public Records Creator," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), p. 122.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

framework for understanding the context of creation.”³² As a starting point, she perceived macro-appraisal methodology to be a “viable means of handling archival selection from within the virtual mountains of multi-form records found in increasingly complex administrative settings,” and then sought to refine this methodology through application of Mintzberg’s ideas on organizational configuration, which included seven basic configurations, as well as several “basic organizational building blocks.”³³ In using this framework, Lemieux argued that archivists would be better able to understand the structures and functions of the institutions whose records they are appraising and therefore be better able to identify archivally valuable records.

These works, including Cook’s, Brown’s, and Lemieux’s ideas, constituted significant contributions to the field of archival appraisal. It can be seen, however, that they were designed exclusively to deal with institutional records, rather than the realm of personal records. Indeed, Riva Pollard, through an analysis of existing appraisal literature, concludes that “The realm of personal papers has been notably neglected in the course of the development of archival theory.”³⁴

Literature for the appraisal of personal records

While literature on the appraisal of institutional records flourished, then, reaching a sophisticated, multi-disciplinary, theoretical and strategic focus, there were fewer and more limited attempts to produce similar thinking and practical guidelines for the appraisal of personal records. In large part, this is because the old “collecting” mentality lingers still in many places. Some of the earliest articles addressing this area were more

³² Victoria Lemieux, "Applying Mintzberg's Theories on Organizational Configuration to Archival Appraisal," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998), p. 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

technical in approach than theoretical. For example, Virginia Stewart, writing in 1976, provided practical tips for archivists on how to deal with donors, as well as a suggestions for transporting the records to archival institutions, with little discussion of what records would be considered of value for such institutions. In her article, Stewart attempted to bring more of a scientific approach to the “art” of collecting, for she maintained that “Even an art form demands rigour, attention to detail, and some rationale for the technique.”³⁵ Beyond indicating that a repository must have a collecting policy based on “some concept of desirable subject areas, time periods, and formats,” however, Stewart gave little attention to the heart of appraisal work; that is, how to determine which records have value and which do not. Instead, her article primarily addressed the details of acquiring, not appraising, records.

Mary Lynn McCree, in “Good Sense and Good Judgment: Defining Collections and Collecting,” first published in 1975, gave greater space to how archivists must establish their collecting policies. Like Stewart, McCree attempted to give a more systematic approach for archivists to follow in the appraisal and acquisition of private-sector records. To do so, she in fact juxtaposed the private collector with the collecting archivist, underlining their differences in valuing records, and highlighting how the collecting archivist must develop a more measured, logical approach in his/her collecting patterns than the private collector. She outlined the different values of private collectors and institutional collectors, arguing that the former are interested in “individual items for their uniqueness or autograph more than for their informational value,” while archivists

³⁴ Riva Pollard, “The Appraisal of Personal Papers: A Critical Literature Review.” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), p. 137.

are interested in the historical information content contained in records.³⁶ While McCree cautioned against “attempting to tailor a collection to the interests of one group of faculty or students, or one small pressure group,” she considered the primary criteria for determining record value as what would be most useful to researchers.³⁷ Here she was attempting to take the Schellenbergian approach to government records’ appraisal, based mainly on the informational value of the records’ content for researchers, and transfer this thinking to private-sector manuscript acquisition. The remainder of her article addressed the more technical aspects of acquisition, in a fashion similar to Virginia Stewart.

Writing around the same time, Maynard Brichford’s manual for the Society of American Archivists on appraisal included a short section on the appraisal of personal records. He also provided suggestions for developing a clear collecting policy, which, he felt, was critical to the appraisal of manuscript records. Like McCree, most of Brichford’s criteria related to the projected use of the records to be collected. He argued that institutions should collect so as to “extend research strengths, interests, and needs in a logical manner,” as well as “anticipate future research needs” and “show a high ratio of use to volume and processing costs.”³⁸ His other suggestions focused on having appropriate resources for collecting such records and serving researchers

Gerald Ham, writing in 1975, provided another voice in the debate, criticizing archivists who were passive custodians of records, or those who bent to the needs of academic researchers, rendering the resulting collections as “nothing more than a

³⁵ Virginia 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, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1984, p. 125.

³⁶ Mary Lynn McCree, "Good Sense and Good Judgment: Defining Collections and Collecting," in Daniels and Walch, eds. *A Modern Archives Reader*, p. 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

³⁸ Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts*, p. 18.

weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography.”³⁹ His discussion was geared toward institutions collecting historical manuscripts, or private records, where he clearly perceived a need to improve on the collecting practices of these institutions. Ham called for a much more active and theoretical approach to collecting private records, arguing that “Conceptualization must precede collection,” and suggesting that “By his training and by his continuing intellectual growth, [the archivist] must become the research community’s Renaissance man.”⁴⁰

Later, Ham produced a manual for the Society of American Archivists on appraisal. In describing early manuscript curators and their collecting practises, he was clear that collecting ought not to be undertaken by archivists; where field collecting was characterized admittedly by the “enterprise, interest, instinct, inspiration” of individuals, it also resulted in a “disorderly process” that “fostered competition and conflict among collecting institutions, and happenstance and fragmentation in collection building.”⁴¹ Therefore, Ham’s view of archival appraisal was that it ought to be done in a systematic and rational way, unlike the approach taken by early archivist-collectors, and more like the appraisal strategies that had been articulated for institutional or government public records

Helen Samuels, writing in 1986, responded to Ham’s challenges by developing an approach that she called a “documentation strategy.” Although based on defining “value” in appraisal still by Schellenberg’s approach of judging real or anticipated use, the documentation strategy used teams of archivists—and creators and users—from

³⁹ F. Gerald Ham, “The Archival Edge.” *American Archivist* (January 1975), pp. 7-8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

⁴¹ F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993, p. 37.

various repositories to plan the appraisal and acquisition of private records in a systematic way, thus eliminating the ad hoc competition and idiosyncrasies of the collector archivists. As a result of this coordination, Samuels writes (in an American context) that “each collection and each repository becomes a part of a larger collection—our nation’s collection.”⁴²

Mark Greene, of the Minnesota Historical Society, in his 1998 article “‘The Surest Proof’: A Utilitarian Approach to Appraisal,” was another proponent of using the use of records by researchers as the primary criteria for determining their value. He tried to marry the macro-appraisal functional-structural insights of Cook and Brown with his native Schellenbergian focus of research use, real or anticipated. He supported this idea by suggesting that “If we acknowledge that archives do not have validity aside from the value that an institution or society places on them, then use is the only empirical measurement we have of that value, and significantly, of the overall success of an archives’ various programs.”⁴³ He dismissed the idea that records become archival because they are evidence of business transactions, arguing instead that “archives are social creations valued for social purposes.”⁴⁴ Moreover, collecting policies, he maintained, are often too broad to be of any help to archivists; and in any case, are only secondary to discovering what kind of records are useful.⁴⁵

Timothy Ericson tackled the issue of acquisition policies for private records being poorly defined, without specific targets, in his 1991 article “At the ‘Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction’: Archivists and Acquisition Development.” He called for more rigorous

⁴² Helen W. Samuels, “Who Controls the Past,” *American Archivist* 49:2 (Spring 1986), p. 124.

⁴³ Mark Greene, “‘The Surest Proof’: A Utilitarian Approach to Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998), p. 150.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

thought behind developing acquisition strategies that are realistic, well-defined and able to capture “whatever phenomena we are hoping to document.”⁴⁶ In his discussion, Ericson quite strongly maintained that archivists ought not to act like collectors in their acquisition strategies. He was dismayed by the public view of archives “as society’s ‘attic’ or ‘dusty shelves,’” and criticized repositories that compete for archival treasures and attempt to collect all material relating to a subject area for their repositories, much like private collectors would do.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the connection between private collecting and ill-advised archival collecting was made clear when Ericson wrote that “we have been collecting records as *physical objects* when we ought to have been collecting records for the *information* they contain.”⁴⁸ In this way, he attempted to distance private-sector archivists from their collecting origins, and encouraged more focused, reasonable acquisition for archival repositories, as public-sector archivists had adopted, along with records management, decades earlier.

More recently, Richard J. Cox, of the University of Pittsburgh, has made several exhortations to archivists against assuming the role of collectors. In a review essay on archivists and collecting in 1996, Cox baldly stated that “Collecting is not appraisal, it can destroy the value of archival records and it is sometimes irresponsibly carried out.”⁴⁹ He maintained that collecting runs against archival interests in a variety of ways. First, where items collected are perceived as objects rather than records: “we continue to be absorbed with the physical possession of records, documentary remnants, and a wide

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁶ Timothy L. Ericson, "At the 'Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-1992), p. 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 70.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Cox, "The Archivist and Collecting: A Review Essay," *American Archivist* vol. 59 (Fall 1996), p. 498.

spectrum of other objects we could term artifacts....”⁵⁰ Secondly, collecting is unarchival where archivists become immersed in the market trade of records, competing with other institutions and private collectors for items. Thirdly, collecting is detrimental to archives where the public image of archivists as collectors obscures the proper work of archivists (in Cox’s view) of providing a record of evidence and accountability for society’s institutions and individuals: “Thinking of archives as archaeological sites and collections can cause one to miss the larger issues of the value of archives for evidence, accountability, and even corporate memory.”⁵¹ Cox also perceives collecting as a reactive strategy, and, in a further article examining the relationship between archives and collecting, alleges it is an irrational and unsystematic approach, lamenting that “many archivists sometimes have allowed collecting to take the place of careful consideration” of how society values records.⁵² It could not be clearer, in Cox’s mind, that collecting is completely antithetical to proper archival appraisal. He even takes some of Werner Muensterberger’s psychological viewpoints to suggest that archivists who cling to the role of collectors may, in their own personalities, exhibit identity disorders, anxiety, inadequacies and loneliness. Perhaps this is why, Cox conjectures, archivists need to call themselves heads of *special* collections, to reassure themselves that they are doing important work.⁵³

What many archivists see as negative in the collecting mentality, then, is a focus on the record as an artifact, and the desire to possess all the artifact/records of one kind possible, without considering what is repetition in the archives, what would be better

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 497.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 499.

⁵² Richard J. Cox, “The End of Collecting: Towards a New Purpose for Archival Appraisal.” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), p. 299.

placed in other repositories, and what is really being documented in the retention of that record. Collecting as a form of acquisition strategy is perceived as a reactive, emotionally-charged, misguided and amateur activity.

New approaches to the appraisal of personal records

Recent approaches to personal-records appraisal have moved beyond condemning the old collector and collecting methods, and beyond arguing for better articulated acquisition policies (ironically still called “collecting policies”) based on Schellenberg’s notions of anticipated research uses for records. Where archivists thinking about the appraisal of institutional records, as mentioned above, have used the quality of the functions of records creators that led to the creation of records as a theoretical basis to determine appraisal value, archivists in the field of personal records have now begun, similarly, to look at the functions of personal record keeping as well. Sue McKemmish, in a ground-breaking article published in the Australian journal, *Archives and Manuscripts*, in 1996, argued that:

Just as they [archivists] can identify significant business functions and activities and specify what records are captured as evidence of those activities, so they can analyse socially assigned roles and related activities and draw conclusions about what records individuals in their personal capacity capture as evidence of these roles and activities—‘evidence of me.’⁵⁴

She continued by calling for more study of these personal record-keeping “functions.”

Her article opened the arena for an imaginative rethinking of the possibilities and impossibilities of personal record keeping. What would a list of the “functions” of personal record keeping look like? Certainly record keeping fulfils human needs, or humans would not practise it. There is obvious evidence that it serves many so-called

⁵³ Cox, “The Archivist and Collecting,” p. 500.

⁵⁴ Sue McKemmish, “Evidence of Me.” *Archives and Manuscripts* 24:1 (May 1996), p. 30.

"practical" needs: people keep their financial and tax records, their personal legal documents, their academic or professional credentials, and their correspondence that helps them go about the "business" of their lives. In contrast, less obvious and certainly less articulated by archivists, there are many "impractical" (by default or implication) reasons for personal record keeping, such as maintaining relationships, working through troublesome issues by keeping a journal or diary, expressing the self through creative writing or web-site construction, preserving memories by keeping photograph albums, or memorializing special events in a scrapbook. But how to measure these "impractical" or psychological reasons for making and keeping personal records, which are subtle and difficult to name, but are essential to the human psyche and soul? These factors are just as necessary to human life as documenting household budgets or taxes paid, in fact, arguably a good deal moreso. Yet these needs to create and then preserve such intensely personal records are rarely articulated by the record creator, unlike for institutional settings, where reasons for record-keeping practices are often formally stated in detail in law, regulation or policy; nor have archivists considered these "values" when appraising personal records for possible acquisition by an archival institution.

When archivists began to grapple with these questions, it became clear that a complete and absolute list of "functions" for personal record keeping would be impossible to achieve. Verne Harris, in a critical analysis of McKemmish's article, in fact spoke of the "dys-functionality" manifested in personal record keeping. He deconstructed the notion of evidence in personal record keeping as outlined by McKemmish, using Derrida to find "fissures" and "silences" in the supposed logical

functionality of personal record keeping.⁵⁵ There is a messy chaos that does not lend itself to rational planning and neat archival organizational boxes, a building of personal narratives that are as important for their story-telling as their informational content. Harris' attack was in turn responded to by McKemmish and Frank Upward, who argued that McKemmish's 1996 article was using the records continuum, the basis of record-keeping theory in Australia, "to structure its exploration of issues relating to personal recordkeeping, identity, and memory...."⁵⁶ They missed Harris' key point that the records continuum with its intellectual focus on (and assumptions about) organizational "evidence" and institutional accountability through record keeping was the very problem—personal record keeping is more about memory than evidence, more about building narratives than enshrining systems. This debate highlighted the complexity of the role record keeping has in the lives of individuals, making the application of appraisal methodologies to personal records more difficult (in some ways, at least) than to institutional records.

Catherine Hobbs speaks to this issue in discussing how the personality of record keepers affects the shape and style of their records. She notes that this human factor is what renders personal records so distinct from corporate ones, making the functionality of personal record keeping more unpredictable and unique.⁵⁷ Riva Pollard, in her review of the literature on personal records appraisal, acknowledges the difficulty in developing appraisal methodologies for personal records, but suggests that appraising archivists should be informed by "the social context in which the records were created and used,

⁵⁵ Verne Harris, "On the Back of a Tiger: Deconstructive Possibilities in 'Evidence of Me.'" *Archives and Manuscripts* 29:1 (May 2001), pp. 12-13.

⁵⁶ Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish, "In Search of the Lost Tiger, by Way of Saint-Beuve: Reconstructing the Possibilities in 'Evidence of Me.'" *Archives and Manuscripts* 29:1 (May 2001), p. 25.

and the underlying personal functions, roles, and processes driving records creation.”⁵⁸

She cites case studies that have been done of the personal papers of families, promoting these studies as a means of better understanding the variety of functions and roles found in personal record keeping.

When the forms and functions of personal record keeping are seen as almost infinite, then, “collecting” can be understood as one more way for individuals to keep a record; and, conversely, the creation of records can be understood as another way of “collecting” in the way that individuals seek to gain control of their world, explore and maintain and create their identity, and express themselves and their needs. From this perspective, “collecting” is about collecting one’s thoughts and feelings, in various documentary formats, to build, maintain, defend, enhance, embellish personal narratives justifying or explaining or making sense of lives lived. Thus, records or objects so “collected” that are often dismissed as having no archival value (what Hobbs calls “flotsam” and Jim Burant may deem “ephemera”),⁵⁹ could in fact be as much a testament to someone’s life as carefully organised correspondence, journals or day-planners, let alone the formalized structured records management registry systems in institutions, public or private. The essence of an individual’s character can be found not so much in well-written and neatly organized records, but in the messy way they choose to “collect” evidence of their life.

Collecting and personal records

In conclusion, while all archivists are collectors in the sense that they acquire (or

⁵⁷ Catherine Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives: Reflections on the Value of Records of Individuals.” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), p. 128.

⁵⁸ Pollard, “The Appraisal of Personal Papers,” p. 149.

“collect”) things, they should not, with some exceptions,⁶⁰ be collectors in the traditional, antiquarian sense of competitive, ad hoc, and non-strategic acquisition of archives. That said, “collecting” as a human activity, indeed, a human need, may well be an activity that appraising archivists should understand, if they wish to come to terms with the functions and dysfunctions of which personal record keeping is evidence. A look at the early history of the archival profession reveals a close connection between archival appraisal and archival collecting that did not always make for good appraisal decisions, especially with larger institutional record holdings. As the literature and practice on archival appraisal grew during the twentieth century, it tended to focus on the problems and necessary strategies for such institutional records, leaving personal records to the traditional collecting fringes. When more thoughtful literature on the appraisal of personal records recently began to emerge, it often defined appraisal in sharp distinction to collecting, and mirrored theories and strategies from institutional government records appraisal. And now, almost turning full circle, where archivists working with personal records have begun to think about what deeper human needs are filled through the collection of personal records, the activity of collecting seems to be once again relevant to understanding archival work, and to articulating “values” in such records that appraisal archivists should consider when deciding whether to acquire a set of personal records.

⁵⁹ Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives,” p. 131; Jim Burant, “Ephemera, Archives, and Another View of History.” *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 189-198.

⁶⁰ As discussed, archivists in special media areas, such as maps, photographs or documentary art, as well as archivists documenting early periods for which material is scarce, do legitimately deal in the world of collecting, as the only means of obtaining archival records in their field.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COLLECTION AND CREATION OF WOMEN'S RECORDS

If archivists are to understand the value of personal records, they must consider what value these records held for the creators themselves who “collected” them. What needs do the creation of personal records fill? This chapter is an examination of records created by women at the Archives of Manitoba (AM) and the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections (UMASC), in an effort to understand what kinds of record-keepers are documented at these institutions, and what value these record keepers placed on their records.¹ It is an attempt to verify through primary research the arguments of this thesis. In light of the discussion thus far, are the themes of collecting, theorized by the various writers so far cited, actually present in the personal records found at these archival institutions? The women whose papers are at the UMASC and AM can certainly be understood to be collectors, where their records function as signifiers of identity, creators of memory, means of ordering the internal and external environment, and tools to cope with loneliness, death and time.

Gendered Records

Why study only women's records? While each human being is a unique creation, there are factors that individuals hold in common with others which provide grounds for

¹ The methodology for this thesis was to study all of the women's records found in the finding aids at the Archives of Manitoba and the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections, to have a view as to what kind of women were being documented in these institutions, and then to select specific fonds for detailed examination. The fonds chosen were those that seemed to have the potential to be rich in insights

common experiences. One such factor--a fundamental category that influences the way in which people think, feel and act--is gender. Female identity has historically been expressed (or not expressed) in a much different way from male identity. This is not to say that all female experience (or male, for that matter) is part of one homogenous entity. Indeed, categories such as class, race, religion, age, past history and geography, not to mention personality, produce significant distinctions between the experiences of all women and all men. Nevertheless, gender can still be a useful framework for studying the impulses to create and preserve personal records, since gender conventions have shaped how, what and when both genders have written in the form of personal records.

Many scholars have pondered the implications of gender on record keeping. Clearly, from the beginning of literacy in the western world, the power of the pen, and other forms of creating long-lasting records, has been just that: power, to be accessed by the privileged. In medieval Europe, the power to record in long-lasting ways was restricted to the highest ranks of religious and political spheres, which were predominantly male. As education became an increasingly important tool for both the noble classes and the emerging middle class, it remained largely within the reach of boys. As Gerder Lerner notes, this led to a severely skewed historical record for 3800 out of roughly 4000 years of recorded history, which favours an elite, white, heterosexual, male perspective.² Therefore, the relative absence of the female record made it difficult to include women's history in a comprehensive historical picture. Carrie MacMillan, in studying nineteenth-century Canadian women writers, found that, due to contemporary

that revealed the reasons why the records were created and collected by their creators. A wide assortment of fonds were examined, some of which are described in this chapter.

² Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of a Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy*. New York: Oxford, 1993, p. 268.

attitudes which ascribed importance only to achievers of political and economic fame, predominantly male during her era of study, it was difficult to locate rich archival sources for women.³

Certainly access to inscribing technologies, knowledge of writing and literacy, and socio-economic opportunity for creating durable records all feed into the individual's need and ability to create records, and women have historically had less access to these tools than men. The fragile line between needs and abilities is evident in the diary of Catherine Eliza Pritchard, a Manitoban pioneer who wrote, on the day of her son Hugh's death, in 1879, "O this day O this month What is it to me I am not learned enough to discribe it with my pen but I am umain [human] enough to feal it in my Heart."⁴ This woman had barely the words, barely the tools, to record what she felt. Yet she was just able to do so, in order to have some small outlet through which to express her overwhelming grief. Her tale, however, holds the ghosts of thousands of other tales that have never survived in documentary form.

Because a historical voice was connected to a political one, Lerner contends that women fighting for political equality in the nineteenth century became record-conscious: searching to find the female voice in the historical record, preserve it, and ensure also that they themselves created records for the benefit of the generation to follow. She writes that a shift in attitude occurred at this time: "Self consciousness of women as a group,

³ Carrie MacMillan, "Research in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers: An Exercise in Literary Detection," in Lorraine McMullen, ed. *Re(dis)covering our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990, p. 49.

⁴ University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections (hereafter UMASC) MSS 100 – Sophia Irvine and Emily Pritchard fonds, Account Book, 5 July 1879.

their awareness of the value of their work in communities and organizations, found expression in a new and different attitude toward documentation.”⁵

In later periods of feminist activity, the history of women as found in their records has also been the focus of activists. In the 1930s, American historian and archivist Mary Ritter Beard worked toward the establishment of a world centre for the preservation of women's records, for she maintained, "Without knowledge of women in history as actual history, dead women are sheer ghosts to living women—and to men."⁶ Later, Eva Moseley, writing in 1973, also linked the lack of women represented in history books and the lack of women's papers in archival institutions.⁷ Indeed, she argued that the absence of female-created records lay deeper than such records not being preserved by society, but that women themselves have not recognized the importance of their own creations and collections. Thus, not only was she interested in seeking out the female voice of the past, but also in urging members of the current women's movements to save their papers.⁸ The act of collecting female writings and records, therefore, has been used as a means of shaping identity and creating a political voice, of taking back some power from patriarchal control.

It can be seen, then, that the motivation to record and collect has, for women as members of groups and as individuals, been rooted in the desire and need to make their voices heard, to bring meaning to their existence and gain an understanding of their world. Having control of the past has been a tangible way of having control of both the present and the future. In reasserting their selves, women have understood that collecting

⁵ Lerner, *The Creation of a Feminist Consciousness*, p. 268.

⁶ Quoted in Anke Voss-Hubbard, "'No Documents—No History': Mary Ritter Beard and the Early History of Women's Archives." *American Archivist* vol.58 (Winter 1995), p. 17.

and preserving their thoughts, in the form of records, is a viable way to regain control of their identity. All of these themes, then, make women, collectively, collectors in the sense described in early chapters.

How else has being a woman shaped the act of creating a record? In a Victorian world, notions of public and private spheres determined to some degree the nature of records created by women and by men. Dale Spender, in examining the patriarchy prevalent in the English language, which structures the English-speaking world, argues that conventional gender roles have restricted the writings of women, and have ensured that most of the writing they have done is private:

The dichotomy of male/female, public/private is maintained by permitting women to write for private audiences (which can be extended to encompass other women) but discouraging them from writing for a public audience, that is, men. In the 'private' sphere, women have been permitted to write for themselves (for example, diaries) and for each other....⁹

According to this theory, we are more likely to find a female voice in letters written between friends and family members, in household accounts kept by a housewife, or in diaries and journals kept in the home, or in photograph albums and family scrapbooks, all not meant for the public eye.

In fact, Margo Culley, in studying diary-keeping practices in the United States, argues that it was the evolution of the diary from a public to a private record that allowed for the transition of diary keeping as a masculine activity to a feminine activity. Before the twentieth century, the diary was not necessarily a private record, full of personal

⁷ Eva Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America." *American Archivist* (April 1973), p. 215.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁹ Dale Spender, *Man-Made Language*. 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 1980, p. 192.

revelations and insights. She notes that men kept diaries more often than women did until the later part of the nineteenth century, when this trend began to shift:

As the modern idea of the secular diary as a 'secret' record of an inner life evolved, that inner life--the life of personal reflection and emotion--became an important aspect of the 'private sphere' and women continued to turn to the diary as one place where they were permitted, indeed encouraged, to indulge full 'self-centredness.'¹⁰

Valerie Raoul confirms these ideas, noting that it is the genre of the French *journal intime* that is considered a female activity, and not other traditions, such as that of the Puritan or Quaker diarist, who created records that were part of the community, and therefore more public.¹¹

Records of women in archival institutions

What kinds of women's records are held at the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections and the Archives of Manitoba? First, it must be said that in attempting to categorize and analyse the personal records of women at these institutions through a study of the finding aids, it soon became apparent that determining which *fonds* were strictly "female" would be less than straightforward. Certainly there were obvious fits: diaries, correspondence, financial records, and personal documents created by women, for example. However, for every simple example there were as many, if not more, complex ones. Australian archivist Graeme Powell performed an analysis of Australia's *Guide to Collections of Manuscripts* in order to determine what kind of individuals were being documented in Australian archival institutions. He also encountered the difficulty of drawing distinct gender lines between each *fonds*, categorizing them as either "men's" or "women's"; for not only did he find that "family"

¹⁰ Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the present*. New York: Feminist Press, 1985, pp. 3-4.

fonds hold large bodies of records created by women, but many "men's" *fonds* do as well.¹² This was indeed the case at AM and UMASC. A *fonds* consisting of the private papers of a prominent man often included personal correspondence from his mother, his wife, or his daughter, or perhaps even diaries of these female family members; and there were countless family *fonds* that could obviously not be described as either "male" or "female." Certainly, men and women do not exist in entirely separate spheres; they interact in a fluid way that defies any attempt to put their creative output into sharply demarcated categories.

Furthermore, there were numerous collections of records that were not created by women, but were collected by them, thus having the name of a woman as the title of their *fonds*. Powell states that he omitted "artificial collections" from his study.¹³ However, if collecting records is an activity comparable to creating records, artificial collections assembled by individuals can indeed be revealing about the individual who collected them. What did an individual value or treasure, what activities and events mattered to her? Therefore, this study did include what Powell considered "artificial collections," understanding these to be revealing about the women who collected them.

Also presenting a challenge was attempting to determine what kind of women and women's activities were documented in these archival institutions, in the way Powell did with Australian records, where he categorized individuals according to occupation. In his report, Powell includes a cautionary note as to the difficulties inherent in slotting individuals into such categories, indicating that the occupations of some individuals were

¹¹ Valerie Raoul, "Women and Diaries: Gender and Genre." *Mosaic* 22:3 (Summer 1989), p.57.

¹² Graeme Powell, "The Collecting of Personal and Private Papers in Australia." *Archives and Manuscripts* 24:1 (May 1996), p. 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

not apparent from the *Guide* he examined, especially when concerning family records, and where some individuals had several occupations in their lives.¹⁴ This was no less true at the UMASC and AM and, indeed, was particularly true for attempting to classify the professions of women. Most women with collections in these archival repositories filled a variety of roles, and most of them were not paid professions, but instead were defined in terms of relationships: wife, mother, daughter. Thus, a typical character could be, in a lifetime, sometimes in succession and sometimes simultaneously, a teacher, an author, a housewife and mother, and a leading member of several charity groups. As well, many collections that were collected and donated by women were items that did not reveal the details of their life story, as much as it may have been a clue to their personality or character. Their "profession" was not mentioned in the finding aid, and remains unknown to the researcher. In fact, the number of women whose background was not identified in finding aids at AM was larger than any one identifiable profession of women found therein.

It is for this reason that, while this study considers the "statistics" gathered from research in archives, it does not translate them into chartable numbers. They were far too nebulous for that. What was found through an analysis of women's records in archives, however, were some general trends. It would seem that the sample of women's collections found in these archival institutions has a higher percentage of professional women than would be represented in larger society, for the time period examined, predominantly the twentieth century, and to a lesser extent, the second half of the nineteenth century. This is not surprising, for it is often women who have professions who are targeted by archivists as leaders worthy of being memorialized in an institution,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68

something that appraising archivists must consider when attempting to document the breadth of human society.

What I also found, in the collections of both private and public women, and which will be discussed at length below, were the themes of the collecting mentality: the need to create (or articulate) identity, memory, and narrative, to bring order and sense to the world, and to have a means of coping with humanity.

In a discussion of personal records that touches on the private and public nature of records, a further note must be made regarding the “public” and “private” nature of women’s records. In the world of archives, “personal” or “private” records refer to those records that are not created in the business of the archives’ supporting or sponsoring institution, whether that is a government, in the case of the Archives of Manitoba, or a university or other institution, such as in the case of the University of Manitoba Archives. But the terms “personal” and “private” have a further connotation: that they reveal something of the inner, private and secret lives of their creators, which sometimes is the case, but not always. Therefore, a personal record may easily encompass written speeches given by a local MLA, newspaper clippings of a lifestyles columnist, or minutes kept by the secretary of a community’s Women’s Institute, records which are all, in a sense, very public. Essentially, then, the line between what is private and what is public is often not clean.

Moreover, there is a gender bias to private and public as well, with women’s records being more closely associated with the terms “private” or “personal.” Dale Spender illustrates this where she points out that “The diaries and letters of men-- particularly influential men--are not necessarily classified as private, and those of male

politicians, for example, have frequently been published, treated with serious consideration, and even revered as the 'real' facts."¹⁵ William Lyon Mackenzie King's diaries in Canada, first published in print, then microfilm, and now digitized on the Internet, are only among the most famous of numerous such cases.

The records of Lillian Allen, a professor at the University of Manitoba in the mid-twentieth century, make the difficulty of separating public from private abundantly clear. In a journal entry regarding the transfer of her papers to the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections, she wrote:

Anne Cribbs said, 'You will destroy all your references about men and love affairs.' Of course it's alright for a married woman to talk about love and such. It's legal. Well, this is a part of my life, too. I don't want to embarrass anyone after I'm gone, or families, but my private life is an important part of my total life. I don't want to be known as a virgin professor. So help me God.¹⁶

Thus Allen felt a wholeness to her self that rejected a "partitioning" of her life, at least in its archival legacy, into private and public spheres. Her complete identity entailed all aspects of her life, and at the risk of embarrassment, she ensured that this completeness was preserved at the archives. And so it is with letters between professionals who are also friends, with philanthropic women whose life work is also their personal and social life, with professional poets who write personal poems. Therefore, perhaps what can be said most of all about the public/private nature of women's records, is that there is a high degree of integration between the various facets of women's lives, which is ideally reflected in their collections in public institutions.

Finally, one further generalization must be addressed. The records studied in this chapter are all women's records, but they are not the records of all women. As

¹⁵ Spender, *Man-Made Language*, p. 193.

¹⁶ UMASC MSS 45 – Lillian Allen fonds, Diary, 1978, p. 18.

mentioned, there are factors other than gender that affect the likelihood of women writing down their stories. Kathleen Mullen Sands, for example, indicates how Aboriginal women in North America might find it even more difficult to create a written life story, since "tribal societies do not value individualism or self-assertion in the Euro-American sense highly, so to relate one's life story is to put oneself forward in a way that may elicit criticism from one's own community."¹⁷ In addition to race and ethnicity, Estelle Jelinek notes that class has much to do with opportunity to create personal records, since it is women with the economic means to have an education, as well as the luxury of free time, who will be able to write. Thus, she found, for example, that all the diaries written by American women, and still existing, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were written by teenagers or upper-class women.¹⁸

Certainly, the women documented at UMASC and AM were predominantly white, and many, although not all, were middle to upper class. All were women who had access to education, and so possessed the ability to create records. Because there are innumerable factors affecting the ability and inclination for individuals to create records, there are many silent voices in archival institutions, a subject worthy of further study. Lillian Allen, at the age of 89, wrote in her journal, "I am now ashamed of my handwriting--so little control of my fingers and my thoughts as well as the words I use and abuse,"¹⁹ indicating one deterrent from keeping records: old age. Yet it was in part because of her age that she was compelled to keep such a journal, to deal with the loneliness of those years. Allen managed to keep her journal despite her perceived

¹⁷ Kathleen Mullen Sands, "Indian Women's Personal Narrative: Voices Past and Present," in Margo Culley, ed. *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*. Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, p. 270.

impediment: imagine what records are not created because of other impediments. This is a fact that not only archivists, but society in general—educators, politicians, parents, the media—should not forget, as well as historians and other researchers approaching the surviving archive.

Collecting women

With these cautions in mind, the records of women as collectors of their selves can be examined. The first place we find a connection between the collecting mentality and the creation of women's records is in the collecting types who donate their records, as well as the records of others, to archival institutions. These are women who collect records as others may collect, for instance, depression-era dinnerware. A prime example of this kind of collector is Barbara Johnstone, who donated many items to the Archives of Manitoba during her lifetime.²⁰ She was, in essence, a collector of documents on fur-trading and Manitoba history, reflective of both her personal and professional interests. Johnstone worked for the Hudson's Bay Company Historical Exhibit in the downtown Winnipeg Bay Store in the 1950s, and then became superintendent at Lower Fort Garry National Historic Site in 1961. She was the first female director of a national historic site, and was a leader in various historical and museums associations in Canada. She was also, on her mother's side, descended from prominent Hudson's Bay Company fur traders, making her the seventh generation of her family to work for the HBC. Along with her own personal records, Johnstone, being so historically-minded, donated several other groups of family and individuals' papers to the Archives of Manitoba. Her many

¹⁸ Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986, p. 61.

¹⁹ UMASC MSS 45 – Lillian Allen fonds, Diary, 1990, p. 101.

²⁰ Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AM) P3386-P3395 and HBCA E.97 – Barbara Johnstone fonds.

donations, along with her own papers, give evidence of a kind of pack-rat collector, collecting as she did many items relating to the fur trade and the history of Manitoba. One series in her personal records in fact consists of a “postcard collection,” with 272 postcards, primarily of historic sites and communities in Manitoba . Records she donated “on behalf” of others include the records of the Captain William Kennedy family, another prominent Hudson’s Bay Company family.²¹ It is clear that collecting these records provided her with a strong link to her personal past and a powerful affirmation of her own identity. Significant numbers of collections in the Archives of Manitoba, therefore, are not just about the history of Manitoba or the individuals whose lives they document: they are about Barbara Johnstone. Such collectors, then, can have a huge influence on the documentary heritage preserved at archival institutions.

Johnstone is not the only example of a record collector. Marie Barton, a woman who raised her family of four on a farm in Manitoba until her husband died in 1939, then taught as a means of supporting her family, became a writer of fiction and human interest stories in her latter years, and was also a very active record creator and collector. The records her family donated to the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections consisted of forty boxes of records, ranging from multiple drafts of her stories and articles, to correspondence with her family, to scraps of paper with almost unintelligible writing, to pamphlets and fliers that largely seem to be worthy only of the dustbin.²² Barton was very much a pack-rat, and in this, her records present a challenge to the appraising archivist. Although most of her papers would generally be considered non-archival, and thus discarded, it is not just the interesting manuscripts and letters that

²¹ AM P2343-P2348 – Kennedy family fonds.

²² UMASC Unprocessed collection – Marie Barton fonds.

make up Marie's story; it is the seemingly useless pieces of paper she collected and the torn envelopes she scribbled notes on, in increasingly shaky handwriting as she aged, that reveal how she ordered/did not order her life, what she viewed as integral to her life, and how she coped with becoming a lonely, old woman.

This does not mean that the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections should preserve all her scraps of paper. But what it does mean, as Catherine Hobbs suggests, is that the character of an individual must be factored in to an appraisal of her papers. Perhaps the University of Manitoba does not deem Marie Barton's character of sufficient interest to document, but in the clutter of her scraps is revealed who she was and what she was about. To preserve only one kind of record, that which fits easily into acid-free folders and Hollinger boxes and which contains logical, often linear, content, a classic definition of archival document types, is to miss out on the breadth of the human personality. A life-work can consist of an infinite number of shapes and forms of "collections," and it is that individuality which gives them their life and true meaning. Indeed, Judy Nolte Lensink, in studying women and gender with a transdisciplinary approach, tackles literary images through women's private writings. Her definition of a "text," she writes, "is still expanding because I am moving toward the borderland of what is currently considered an acceptable historical or literary document."²³ She describes the papers of Elizabeth Tabor (a "major western historical figure"), a disarray of notes scribbled on bits of paper in no apparent order, that may be discarded by the less determined scholar, but for Lensink, reveal psychological themes

²³ Judy Nolte Lensink, "Beyond the Intellectual Meridian: Transdisciplinary Studies of Women." *Pacific Historical Review* 59:4 (November 1992), p. 470.

crucial in understanding Tabor. In expanding their definitions of texts, then, archivists too can broaden the kind of documentation preserved in their archives.

This can be seen in the collection of Lucia Zatylny at AM, which is described in the finding aid as "Newspaper clippings and scrapbooks, mostly recipes."²⁴ The collection is stored in a large, flat box that is crammed full of loose clippings in no apparent order, that doubtless some archivists would consider non-archival ephemera. However, it was reminiscent of the words of the famous diarist, Virginia Woolf, on her use of diary writing:

I should like [my diary] to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through. I should like to come back, after a year or two, & find that the collection had sorted itself & refined itself & coalesced, as such deposits mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light our of life, & yet steady, tranquil composed with the aloofness of a work of art.²⁵

She wished for her diary to “resemble” such a motley collection tossed into a desk, becoming a work of art in the passage of time. What if such scraps of paper thrown loosely into the desk, however, not even in the form of a bound diary, was a work of art in itself, gave breath to the life that created it and constituted the record worthy of preserving? That box of undated, unordered scraps of paper collected by Lucia Zatylny was her record; even if it told us very little of the facts of her life, it documented vital aspects of her values and her personality. In appraising, therefore, archivists should focus not only on the record form or content in its ability to reflect the exterior world of the individual who created/collected it, but also on its ability to reflect the interior world of that person. This is a crucial consideration in determining how best to document an individual's life.

²⁴ AM MG16 B20 – Lucia Zatylny collection.

In light of this, Sue McKemmish speaks of researching "the personality traits of people who are good record keepers, who are moved to make and keep records in such a way that they come to form a personal archive."²⁶ This is a useful suggestion, in that those personalities inclined to create and keep records are those who are, by default, subsequently able to be memorialised in archival repositories. However, we must be careful in our judgement of "good" record keepers. What constitutes a "good" record keeper? And are only good record keepers to be allowed into archival repositories? Are the standards of institutions' professional records management, as McKemmish implies, really a "good" standard by which to judge the record-keeping activities of private individuals in their personal lives? We are all record keepers on some level; certainly the records of those individuals with no great sense of order, provenance, system or completeness deserve to be, in fact need to be, preserved in archival institutions. Therefore, although they present many challenges, individuals who are true collectors of records raise many important issues for the appraising archivist.

Other collecting themes

Aside from women who are collectors of actual records, where else can the themes of collecting be found in the personal records of women in archival institutions? If the fundamental force inspiring individuals to collect is understood to be the need to create order and so make sense of their world, then the link between collecting objects and collecting one's thoughts is clear, since order and sense are exactly what many women seek to gain through the creation of their personal records. Moreover, historically, being a woman has informed the shape of these personal records. Estelle

²⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. London: Hogarth Press, 1977, p. 266.

²⁶ McKemmish, "Evidence of Me," p. 42.

Jelinek, in studying the male-dominated form of autobiography, argues that it is the structure of women's lives that renders diaries and letters a more convenient form of self-expression than an autobiography. She writes: "From earliest times, these discontinuous forms have been important to women because they are analogous to the fragmented, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives."²⁷ It is, furthermore, the disjointed nature of some women's days that increases the need for them to create order by collecting their thoughts. In a similar line of thought, Joanne E. Cooper postulates that "The diary or journal...is used by women to sort out their own lives. It is a way of ordering the overwhelming number of details women encounter in their often fractured lives, a way of bringing meaning to disorder."²⁸

Thus, the journal can become a tool to give form to an otherwise shapeless life, to impose order on it. Alice Cameron Brown, a twentieth-century housewife in Winnipeg who wrote novels, kept a journal describing her daily activities. The entries give a sort of rhythm to her life, marking the day where no other routine does. They also give evidence of the challenges of having no routine. In February 1966, she wrote, "MSS returned from MacLeans--letter from A. etc. Worked on preparations for dinner, set table, etc. Heavy rain in P.M.--most of snow gone. Feeling rather tired unaccountably."²⁹ A few weeks later, her journal continues in much the same vein:

Unaccomplishing day--raining in AM. Made cookies--only useful thing. Extreme fatigue may be due to having permanent, shopping, doing without lunch yesterday. Phoned Mabel to report on the headstone matter. Didn't get letters posted. Reports of air crash (Tokyo), tornados, etc. make me glad to be at home very comfortable but wish I felt like work on novel.³⁰

²⁷ Estelle C. Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, p. 19.

²⁸ Joanne E. Cooper, "Shaping Meaning: Women's Diaries, Journals – The Old and the New." *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10:1 (1987), p. 95.

²⁹ UMASC MSS 105 – Alice Cameron Brown fonds, Diary, 10 February 1966.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Diary, 4 March 1966.

Although Brown felt that she did not do much of use, she chose to record the day in her journal nonetheless. Throughout Brown's journal, it is clear as to what gives a pattern to her life: domestic duties, personal relationships, creative writing when she can, journal-writing and weather. She berates herself for not having the motivation to do more on her novels, but it is evident that the need to constantly push herself in a day without form is challenging. Her journal serves as an outlet for her self-dissatisfaction, then, as well as a means of giving a tangible structure to her life through the recording of it: the document thus gives her the real form to her perceived formlessness.

The writer May Sarton expressed similar sentiments in her journal, published as *The House by the Sea*. Sarton wrote: "I find it wonderful to have a receptacle into which to pour vivid momentary insights, and a way of ordering day-to-day experience."³¹

Moreover, Sarton understood the lack of structure throughout her life as an advantage to dealing with old age. She explained how the journal was an aid to her in her advancing years:

Growing old is certainly far easier for people like me who have no job from which to retire at a given age. I can't stop doing what I have always done, trying to sort out and shape experience. The journal is a good way to do this at a less intense level than by creating a work of art as highly organized as a poem, for instance, or the sustained effort a novel requires.³²

From these musings, it is apparent that journal writing is a habit that developed from Sarton's personal experience of not having a "job" (although she was an acclaimed novelist and poet!) which has long been more of a female experience than a male one, and furthermore, that it is useful to deal with the unstructured days that are the reality facing many elderly people.

³¹ May Sarton, *The House by the Sea: A Journal*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977, pp. 28.

A look at the diaries of Lillian Allen (1900-1995) supports such ideas. Allen was a lecturer in the Faculty of Agriculture and Home Economics at the University of Manitoba from 1934 to 1971, when she retired as a professor. She did not marry or have any children. She kept years of diaries and travel journals, correspondence, news clippings, manuscripts, and slides from her travels as well as artistic shots. Allen retired from her university career at the age of 65. As she made the transition from working woman to retired woman, she reflected, "Suddenly about June first I felt almost ill with fatigue. I suppose a lot of it was emotional...that my 'work' life was considered to be over, and that's scary. Of course I shall miss the youth of it all, and the drama and excitement of lectures and labs, but I shall not miss routine, meetings...."³³ Although Allen indicated that she would not miss the routine, she effectively replaced the routine of being a university professor with the semblance of a routine provided by recording the events and feelings of each day, which she did very faithfully throughout the years of her retirement.

Beyond creating order in a person's life, personal record keeping acts in a similar way to collecting objects in the way it creates identity. This can be especially useful for women whose identity runs against the conventional gender roles assigned to her. Beatrice Brigden (1888-1977), a social activist and political reformer who grew up on a farm in rural Manitoba, was certainly one such woman, exceptional for her time. In 1913, in her mid-twenties, she began working with the Social and Evangelistic Department of the Methodist Church, travelling across Canada to teach subjects relevant to women and children, such as sex education. In the 1920s, she became heavily

³² *Ibid.*, p.27.

³³ UMASC MSS 45 – Lillian Allen fonds, Diary, 1971, p.5.

involved in labour and political movements in the Canadian west, co-founding the CCF party with J.S. Woodsworth. In an autobiographical sketch preserved at the Archives of Manitoba entitled "One Woman's Campaign for Social Purity and Social Reform," which she wrote around 1970, she acknowledges that her upbringing and situation were unique, giving her opportunities to pursue avenues other women did not. She speaks of her parents being prohibitionists, of them being involved in farmers' organizations, of her mother being raised a Quaker and her father prone to discussing political matters around the dinner table:

Growing up in such an environment I readily developed an interest in moral and social issues, and have difficulty in conceiving a time when I was not of a social gospel orientation. A young woman in many a family could not hope to give much expression to such interests. It was still a time in Canadian social development when laws respecting women were described by Cora Hind as even a disgrace to heathenism.³⁴

The unique path she chose for her life had also been expressed in her diary, sixty-five years earlier, when she wrote the following entry as a young woman:

I got a letter from Anne Cocklan saying she and Chris are going to attend business college in Brandon. I thot [sic] of trying to go but mother is opposed so I will try to go to school this winter + try for the entrance in July. I must be something. I feel if I should stay here on the farm I would be a narrow, cross old maid at thirty...no one ever will know cooking over the hot stove for a lot of ungrateful men is know [sic] fun. I saw [____?] Wish I had taken his proposal and married him he would have been a kind and loving husband + would have used me like a queen but I cant help but think he was beneath me still if I had married him I should probably have been happy with him in the home he would have made for me at _____. I suppose instead of being the school girl I am now I should have been _____s dignified little wife for of course we would have been married long ago—poor boy. I wonder if he has forgotten me all ready...None of the family know of this I never could bear to tell even Mother yet. I see I have never written of this affair before. I must stop this or I will be getting sentamental + I hate sentimentality [sic].³⁵

³⁴ AM MG14 C19 – Beatrice Brigden fonds, "Biographical folder," p. 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Diary, 17 September 1905.

Brigden was thus expressing her struggles in choosing not to follow traditional female roles, as a wife and house-keeper, but rather following her personal ambition. Even though her family appears to have been relatively liberal for the time, she used her diary to form the words and ideas she felt she could not speak; she was even reluctant to put such ideas to paper in a private document. Through this document, then, she was able to give voice to an identity that faced many challenges, and reaffirm the path she had chosen, despite its inherent difficulties.

Of course, identities created through written reflection are not necessarily in opposition to assigned gender roles. Laura Elizabeth Bradshaw (1875-1956) was a woman who, through personal records, molded her identity to be in keeping with what would have been expected of her as a woman. Bradshaw, who never married, kept house for her parents for most of her life, in Morden, Manitoba. In 1906, she returned to the farm of her childhood which she and her parents had left five years earlier, and where her brother, Fred, still farmed, with the aim of keeping house for Fred. She wrote a record of this time, called "Prairie Dreams & Realities," now preserved at AM, where she set out (as she explains in her preparatory note) to record this new experience of life on the prairie from a female point of view.³⁶ In fact, the record became a reminiscence of her childhood days, intertwined with her present experiences: the nostalgic meanderings of a romantic dreamer, concerned with her family, her childhood sentiments and a memory obscured by her present situation. It is heavily lined with what Helen M. Buss calls "encoding;" a way of expressing one's true feelings that do not concur with accepted

³⁶ AM MG9 A120 – Laura Elizabeth Bradshaw fonds, "Prairie Dreams & Realities," introduction.

social conventions.³⁷ It is clear that when Laura began to keep house for her brother, she was not impressed with the state of the house, making slight jibes at his "house-keeping efforts." Yet she crafted her writing to place the fault in her lap, not his: "it is with a certain guiltiness of conscience that I express, even in the solitude of my own room and to my secret self, any adverse criticism of his thoughtful and praiseworthy labours."³⁸ The words she wrote were not at all meant only for her "secret self," however; she indicated later in the memoir how she was writing it chiefly for her brothers and sisters.³⁹ In writing of the situation in this manner, she was able to express what she was feeling without openly appearing a nagging old maid, as an older sister. Through this reminiscence, then, Bradshaw is able to shape her identity to conform to gender norms of her day, while still finding self-expression.

Bradshaw and Brigden's writings also give evidence of another function performed in the creation of such records that also can be met through the process of collecting, that is, the creation of narrative. The most obvious kind of narrative is the formal autobiography, which sometimes can be found in archives as unpublished manuscripts. Estelle Jelinek maintains that historically, women, rather than writing formal, published autobiographies, as men do, projecting their life experiences into a public arena, have written diaries, letters and journals, in order to create their life stories.⁴⁰ Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson refuse to accept this analysis as true for all women, however, bringing into view the autobiographies of women of varied race,

³⁷ Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English*. Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991, p. 45

³⁸ Bradshaw, "Prairie Dreams," pp. 16-17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁰ Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography*, p. 19.

ethnicity and class, suggesting that their particular experiences informed a different approach to the creation of life stories from white women.⁴¹

Nevertheless, female narratives have been observed by many as less assertive, less public and less heroic than their male counterparts. Helen M. Buss, studying life writings of Canadian women, finds that women are more apt to write a memoir than an autobiography, suggesting that the ambiguity of the memoir, somewhere between the traditional autobiography and history, renders it more "suitable" for women.⁴² Jil Ker Conway, in a similar vein, notes the difficulty women have in putting themselves at the centre of a published work.⁴³ In contrast to the male autobiography, then, what one finds in women's collections, especially for women of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, are softened, feminized versions of the same, in the form of memoirs or reminiscences. Such a term takes away the emphasis on the "life of the self" that is implicit in the word autobiography. With a reminiscence there is a suggestion of others as part of a story. It also implies less structure, less of a linear plot and progress than is found in the autobiography, more fluidity and meandering. Reminiscences suggest a collection of stories, clouded in a soft light of nostalgic emotion. As a result, they are understood to be more of a feminine genre rather than a masculine one.

There are many such reminiscences in women's pioneering experiences in Manitoba as documented in AM and UMASC, which, despite their non-linear nature, provide a narrative structure into which the writers could fit their lives. Annie McEwen

⁴¹ Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, pp. 24-25. For a discussion on the differences between rural and urban writings, see Royden Loewen, *From the Inside Out: the Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863 to 1929*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999.

⁴² Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, p. 61.

⁴³ Jil Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Exploring the Art of Autobiography*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998, p. 88.

(née Lusted), whose father was first a businessman in Winnipeg, then a farmer in Stonewall, Manitoba, wrote a reminiscence of the late nineteenth century that showed more concern for relationships and family than historical accuracy. In her chapter entitled "Stonewall Days," she recounts her time as a teenager, describing various friendships from school:

Last year, in April, when as Pioneer of the City, my picture and a write up was in the paper, another of my earliest school mates, Violet Patterson Ballantyne, saw it and wrote to me. She lives in Emerson, is the widow of a newspaper man, and when he died 27 years ago, she ran the paper and a printing shop for over 25 years.

Friday, she came along for a visit. We enjoyed hearing of all the various mutual acquaintances. There were not many girls of Lenora's and my age when we were young. Lizzie and Hettie seemed to have more to chum with, perhaps it was as Ruth Sutton told Nora Hadskis 'those Lusted girls except Hettie are so self-satisfied they want [no other] company.'⁴⁴

Her writing, then, flows easily from the distant past to the recent past, to the present and back again. She is concerned not about a linear narrative, but about relationships she cherished, both past and present. Although Annie's story includes historical facts as well (her family was in Manitoba during the Red River Rebellion of 1869 and 1870, in which her father opposed Riel and was temporarily held captive by him), she is clear in her first chapter that these are not the focus of her story:

We left the city [Winnipeg] when I was nine years old, so mine are very childish recollections and had I tried to write these childhood happenings, even a few years earlier, the result would have been better, then too, I have not checked my dates or locations with official history and some may not be just correct, though I believe nearly so.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ AM MG8 B52 – Annie E. McEwen fonds, "Stonewall Days," pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, "Those Days of Long Ago," p. 11.

In concentrating more on relationships and humorous or poignant anecdotes rather than historical accuracy and linearity, Annie created a typically female life story, which rings "true" at a personal, psychological, if not at a factual, level.

Julia Anna Asher (b.1873), whose family farmed in Ontario, Manitoba and southern Alberta as she grew up, also wrote a typically female reminiscence, a copy of which is at AM. She dedicated the manuscript to her grandchildren, and her writing illustrates the manner in which gender expectations and norms affected her record creating. She is, as many academics studying female life-writing conclude, uncomfortable with making herself the subject of her story. In her introductory note, she apologizes for having done so: "Forgive the excessive use of the pronoun 'I,' for, remember that this is principally the story of Grandma's life."⁴⁶ In fact, telling stories came naturally to her, and had she the opportunity to make it a priority, she would have done so more frequently. Her family spent two years in Selkirk, Manitoba, of which she writes: "At school in Selkirk, when nine years old, my chief leisure pastime became the writing of stories which at recess I would read to my seatmate...Indeed, had I received proper education during that period, I still think your grandmother might have become a writer, but fate willed otherwise."⁴⁷ Instead of writing, Asher became a teacher. At the end of her script, she remarks: "These reminiscences, written for you, grandchildren, are the only realization of that early ambition to become a writer."⁴⁸ Thus, despite the natural talent and inclination to write, she was able to find her creative voice only through an acceptable "female" document, an unpublished memoir for her grandchildren.

⁴⁶ AM MG8 B10 – Julia Anna Asher fonds, "Reminiscences," preface.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Creating narrative could also coincide with the creation of memory, another facet of the collecting mentality, which was clearly active in the records examined. Margaret Fetherstonhaugh (1918-1974) was a home-maker, active club member, amateur pianist, and the wife of a prominent engineering professor at the University of Manitoba. Her collection is a rich mixture of correspondence with family and friends, journals, music programs, records relating to her involvement in the Women's Musical Club in Winnipeg, and notebooks of other community activities. In 1936, she travelled to England, and kept a travel journal of her trip through letters to her husband: "My dearest Ted: I will start my account of our visit in London, to be continued in snatches, and posted twice a week...."⁴⁹ In creating a narrative account of her trip, Fetherstonhaugh was also creating a memory or memory-triggers of that trip. While her motivations at the time for writing her journal-letters may have been many, and remain unknown, the fact that she preserved them indicates the memory-value of the record to her, in first collecting, then remembering through preserving, her thoughts.

Finally, where "collecting" has been used to cope with the transience of human life, and, through the continuing existence of the collection, to conquer death, creating and preserving records has been used for the very same purposes. The records of Manitoba writer Mary Lile Benham (1925-1990) are at UMASC, and include unpublished manuscripts, research notes, correspondence, scrapbooks and "memorabilia," as outlined in the finding aid. The manuscripts include some memoirs, one of which was her reaction to being diagnosed with lung cancer in 1989.⁵⁰ Benham wrote of her determination and faith that she would defeat the cancer, and indeed her tumours

⁴⁹ AM MG14 C78 – Margaret Fetherstonhaugh fonds, Correspondence, 21 July 1936.

⁵⁰ UMASC MSS 115 – Mary Lile Benham fonds, Memoir, 1990.

miraculously shrunk. She died, however, seven months later. But the writing of the memoir was clearly an integral part of her fight with the illness, giving her a sense that she had some control over her life, and her death.

For similar reasons, Lillian Allen was quite pleased about the fact that her records were going to be placed in an archival institution. In the summer of 1978, she recorded her positive response to Richard Bennett, archivist at the University of Manitoba, in her journal:

...Mr Richard Bennet [sic] has written me to ask if I will put things about Dad or by Dad in [the university archives], and what about me? Have I anything. The poor man. My middle name is Archives...so he came, and saw my scrap books, travel books, diaries, and slides, and said he'd take it all...I'm very happy about this, as I wondered what would happen when I would fly off the planet, someone would have to decide what to do with all of my scribbling. And who could possibly care about me and what I've done. Now that has all been arranged for. And will go out of here box by box as I look over it.⁵¹

Such an admission is rich with meaning. Clearly, Lillian Allen was a natural record creator and keeper, a natural personal archivist. As part of her ageing process, she was concerned with what will happen with her life's work, and how her spirit will carry on after death. She was relieved that somebody will care about her and what she has done; and even though she seems to have doubted that someone could care, she seems quite satisfied that the long-term preservation of her life in documentary form at an archival repository is possible. Moreover, she will have control over the life that keeps on living without her, since she has the power to give to the archives whatever she chooses, ensuring that a certain image of herself, one she is happy with, is maintained. In August of that year, she indicates how closely she associates herself with her records: "Mr.

⁵¹ Lillian Allen fonds, Diary, 1978, p. 18.

Bennet [sic] called and two took boxes of my life to the archives."⁵² Her life, then, will carry on far beyond her death.

Moreover, this is a help to her as she faces the loneliness of old age. She wrote in her journal in December 1978, "Dr. Patton 'phoned to say the stool sample showed trouble so I was to see a dr. [sic] Duffy at the clinic. So I'm scared. Tonight I'm scared and lonely. Wish I had someone to talk to. What a sad time of life this is."⁵³

Suggestively, this was written in a journal that Allen knew by then was going to be kept at UMASC. Essentially, then, she is not alone: she is speaking to researchers of the future who come across her records, and at some level, she is aware of this fact. Not only is the act of writing useful to her, then, but so is the act of keeping the record, destined for a public institution.

In a similar situation was Lorene Francis Milliken (1907-1990), who taught school in rural Manitoba, married and raised two sons, wrote novels and poetry and kept a diary as she aged. In her diary, she addressed the physical, emotional and spiritual challenges of growing old. In March 1978, at the age of seventy-one, she wrote: "Stomach is really troublesome. What to eat and do about it is my great problem right now. It is hard to forget about it...When one resorts to the Lord's Prayer one is indeed in dire straights + this I have had to resort to today." She then claims she is "off to bed," but in fact, after a break, comes back to her diary: "I've thought of giving up my pen—but have decided every blessed word is going down."⁵⁴ The entry then continues on for several more paragraphs, touching on a wide range of subjects, from her internal struggles, to Margaret Trudeau on Peter Gzowski's evening program, to the Manitoba

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Women's Curling Championship, to her relationship with her son, to her physical ailments. Thus she gives evidence of the intense urge to write, to materialize with a pen whatever thoughts came to her mind and tumbled out on to paper. Margo Culley, in her examination of the diary literature of American women, discusses relevant themes:

...the writing act itself implies an audience and this audience will be the vehicle of preserving the life records (in the act of reading) despite the passage of time and inevitable change. Even the phrase 'keeping a diary' suggests this resistance to time, change, and ultimately, death...the essence of the impulse to keep a diary is captured in 'I write, therefore I am.' And will be.⁵⁵

"Keeping" is, of course, "collecting." The impulses described by Culley are certainly alive in the diary of Milliken, who could not resist putting down "every blessed word." Moreover, they bear striking resemblances to the needs filled by the collecting of objects such as pieces of art or military medals: resistance to time, change, and death. In this way, creating a record of one's life fulfills needs very similar to those filled by collecting objects.

Loneliness is another issue addressed by both the collection of objects and the creation of records, and has been a theme perhaps especially prevalent in the lives of women. Elouise M. Bell ponders whether women keep diaries "primarily if and when we are lonely, estranged, cut off?"⁵⁶ Harriet Blodgett also notes the benefits of diary writing for women, where she writes: "The very nature of the diary as a personal record counters the limiting and devaluating nature of the female self entailed by accommodation to a male-dominated culture. Keeping a diary is not a peculiarly female habit. But it has been

⁵⁴ UMASC MSS 62 – Lorene Francis Milliken, Diary, 6 March 1978.

⁵⁵ Culley, "A Day at a Time," p. 8.

⁵⁶ Elouise M. Bell, "Telling One's Story: Women's Journals, Then and Now," in Leonore Hoffmann and Margo Culley, eds. *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1985, p. 174.

especially useful to female being."⁵⁷ Therefore, the creation of personal records has been a tool with which women have learned to cope with the isolation present in their lives.

Loneliness is certainly a theme in many personal records of pioneer women found at AM and UMASC. For the immigrant to Canada, far from family, friends and familiar society, loneliness could dominate the lives of women. Isabella Cooper Coates, an immigrant from York, England, to Manitoba in the nineteenth century, described, after her journey, what struck a chord in her heart: "Went to church this morning. The sermon was a very suitable one, the subject being 'Alone.' It did me good for I felt very low spirited when we went, feeling so lonely in a strange land and not a body I knew."⁵⁸ Long distances separating family meant a loneliness that created another kind of record: separation was a reason to write and keep letters to and from loved ones. Margaret Fisher, living in Nesbitt, Manitoba, was a mother of ten, whose son, Jack, served in the First World War, to whom she faithfully wrote letters. At the end of one letter she told him: "And now I must close. Father + Will have gone to bed. We get lonely [sic] sometimes only 3 of us now."⁵⁹ Maintaining relationships over large distances necessitated the creation of such records.

The lack of population in the vastness of rural Canada also create various social and spiritual holes otherwise filled in communities with denser populations. Ann McCarthy, an Irish immigrant to Ontario whose records are preserved at AM, converted to Methodism after moving to Canada, and kept a lengthy journal of her spiritual trials and prayers. The need to discuss her faith and her spiritual struggles in the form of a

⁵⁷ Harriet Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988, p. 97.

⁵⁸ UMASC MSS SC123 – Isabella Cooper Coates, Diary, p. 14.

⁵⁹ AM P4216 – Blanch Miller collection, Letters to John T. (Jack) Fisher, 21 November 1915.

journal is accentuated by an absence of a nearby Methodist church. In 1871, by which point she had been keeping her journal for at least two years (the surviving portion starts part way through 1869; the location of any previous years is not known), she wrote, "Every hour I live I feel more and more the loss of living so far from a place where I might enjoy the means of grace to a greater extent than I do here. I feel the loss of Christian fellowship; I am getting old, and I want someone to sympathize with me in many a trial; but O my God, not my will, but thine be done...."⁶⁰ Thus her frequent and lengthy epistles of her spiritual struggles, to herself through her journal, compensate somewhat for the inability to communicate them to other believers.

Beyond the creation of personal records, the act of collecting and keeping records speak to loneliness as well. If collecting ceramic unicorns or baseballs cards helps individuals express their identities and gives them some sort of companionship that is otherwise lacking in their lives, then how much more could collecting one's personal records, or one's family records, fill a similar psychological need. Margaret Fisher, of Nesbitt, Manitoba, kept a diary in 1932. Her first entry on January 1, 1932, expressed her intent for the diary: "This book was given to me yesterday by a very dear friend and I am going to use it as directed—praying that each line written may be helpful to someone in the future when I am no more."⁶¹ The book itself, called *Happy Days for Shut Ins*, prepared by Harriet Lummis Smith, was comprised of daily inspirational quotations and poems, with a space under each entry for the owner's own thoughts, labelled "My Daily Record." In the pages of the book, there was a loose note from Margaret's daughter, Etta, to another daughter, Maud:

⁶⁰ AM P4217 – Blanche Miller collection, Diary of Ann McCarthy, p. 541.

⁶¹ AM P4216 – Blanche Miller collection, Diary of Margaret Fisher, *Happy Days for Shut Ins*, p. 11.

Dear Maud

This has been a wonderful help to me when I am lonely and discouraged. Trust it will do likewise to you when you feel downcast.

Love Etta

P.S. This was Mothers [sic] book which I have read over + over so pass it on to you to keep. Hoping [sic] it will give you some bright moments too. Etta⁶²

Blanche Miller, a grand-daughter of Margaret Fisher, and donor of her family's records to the Archives of Manitoba, noted that "This book was among the many treasures of the late Maud Cory (Mrs. R.F.), nee Fisher, and her daughters Misses Beulah and Frieda Cory have allowed me to transcribe it."⁶³ Margaret's diary, then, fulfilled her wishes as its original owner and creator: to her, it was a spiritual guide, a means of self-actualization, and chance for a kind of immortality consciously reaching into the future. To her daughters and grand-daughters, it was a source of comfort, a connection for future generations to an older and loved family member, and a way to keep her alive after she was gone. Death, life, identity, memory, family, and loneliness are all brought together in the personal record and the acts of collecting and keeping.

The records of women at AM and UMASC illustrate that records are created and preserved for a multitude of reasons, including to underpin identity, memory and narrative, the establishment of order in one's life, and the need to cope with fear, loneliness, the progression of time, and death, which all mark the human condition. These themes, moreover, are all at work in the phenomenon of collecting as well. The line between the collection of objects and the collection of life stories, memories, thoughts and experiences, then, vanishes when these activities are viewed together, as means for humans to come to terms with their material, emotional, intellectual and spiritual existences.

⁶² *Ibid.*, loose note in diary of Margaret Fisher.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Transcription of Margaret Fisher's diary.

CONCLUSION

How archivists should undertake the task of appraising personal records is not an easy matter to determine. It is clear that the ways in which humans create personal records are varied and complex, rendering the appraisal of such records difficult. Archivists writing about the appraisal of personal records have usually addressed only issues of technique, procedure, and strategy. When they have transcended these “how to” questions, examining the harder “why” questions concerning which personal records collections belong in archives and which do not, they have overwhelmingly focused on the research values of the information content in the records: the factual data about persons, places, things and ideas present in the documents. But the psychological value of the “collection” as a whole, as collected by its creator, has rarely been articulated in archival literature, and certainly not codified as appraisal criteria for archivists to follow.

By an examination of the forces at work in the collection of objects, this thesis has sought to better understand the forces at work in the creation of personal records, and thus their overall “value.” The collecting of material objects has enjoyed a long tradition in the history of human existence, during which the activity has been used as a means of imposing order on the external environment. It has also, whether at the individual or societal level, been used to support identity and memory, cope with time, death and loneliness, and make stories out of experiences in order to make sense of the world.

These factors that inspire some individuals to collect objects inspire others to create personal records. Thus it can be seen that the creation of memoirs, diaries,

personal web-sites, scrapbooks, letters, photograph albums, daybooks, and any manner of record that people choose to either create or keep, may be understood as the collection of thoughts, stories, and experiences: the collection of lives. Such a collecting process is evident, as described above, in the records of women whose “collections” are deposited at the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections and the Archives of Manitoba.

Collecting has had a long, and sometimes uneasy, relationship with archival institutions and archival theory. Although part of the everyday terminology in use in archival institutions, some leading archival theorists have condemned the use of “collecting” as a strategy for the acquisition of archival records. However, the collecting mentality does have relevance for archives, where it reveals the functions for which personal records are very often created and kept. It is in studying not only the form of records, nor their informational content, but the reasons for which they were created and then maintained by their creators, that archivists will have a deeper sense of the worth of the records, and of what is being documented in their preservation. In this way, they will, in their appraisal criteria for personal records, value not only records that capture famous careers or noteworthy achievements in the public sphere, but also records that give evidence of basic human experiences, including celebrations or grief, giving birth or growing old. Furthermore, understanding records comprehensively, that is to say, including ephemeral items or objects as potential archival records, allows for a fuller picture of the life/lives being documented. Items that are artifactual in nature are often severed from textual records, perhaps returned to the donor, forwarded on to a museum, or possibly even destroyed. Recognizing the object as part of the records could mean that

more of this material stays in an individual's fonds, if it seems appropriate. At the very least, mention of objects taken out of the fonds should be made in the description as to what their disposal was.

While these conclusions have been demonstrated by the research for this thesis, additional research would be valuable to confirm or modify these findings. Most of the women in this study were Anglo-Saxon in background. What kinds of records do women of different ethnicities, races and classes create? Investigations of women's records outside Manitoba and the chosen time period should also be undertaken, to explore whether these collecting mentalities are present in other times and places, in different rural and urban relationships. Broadening the scope of study to include the personal records of men is a further area of necessary research. Also of relevance for this discussion is that the impact of more immediate computer-based technologies for making and communicating records may fundamentally alter the character of what is collected, and, alas, the very complex and costly (and still unsolved) issues of preserving private digital records across decades and centuries will undoubtedly affect the nature of what can be collected and preserved for the long term.

Despite the need for more research into the value and motivations behind personal record making and keeping, this thesis suggests that "collecting" and "collection" and "collector" should not be banished from the archival lexicon, as thinkers from Jenkinson to Cox have stated. Rather, these terms, and the deeper psychological meanings they signify, should be embraced by archivists, not to return to an antiquarian past, but to advance to a more sophisticated appreciation of the value of personal record collections.

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