

Archival Theory and Practice
AMST 620/ENGL 696/HIST652
REC 309/West Lafayette Public Library
Spring 2012

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In an age of digitization, what is the status of the “real”? How do archival collections, brought together, arranged, and described by fallible human beings come to be seen as bottomless wells of information about what “really happened”? What happens to us when we hold the 100-year old letter in our hands, when in the course of our research we breathe in the dust of centuries? And what are our best practices as we seek to fold our experiences in the archives into our work, whatever our disciplines or genres?

This course will seek answers to these and other questions as it engages innovations in theories and methods of archival research while introducing students to the practice of archivists. Using several archival collections, we will discuss both the *how to* and the *how come* of archives: their invention, organization, cultural significance and pragmatic use for humanities and social science research. We will read discussions of archival theory, creation and use by leading scholars, we will read narratives, fictions, and poems written out of archives. We will interrogate the differences between “professional” and “lay” researchers and, as part of the service-learning component of this class, we will work to make local archival collections accessible to the public.

Texts:

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (at Von’s)
Cathy Day, *The Circus in Winter* (at Von’s)
Driving tour of West Lafayette (tickets through profs, price TBD)
Course packet (CP; at CopyMat)

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

January 11

REC 309

“What’s Worth Saving?”

Introduction to the course—its objectives, expectations, requirements, and readings

Readings: (To be completed by the first class)

Marilyn Johnson, “What’s Worth Saving?” from *This Book Is Overdue* (PDF)

Susan Scott Parrish, “Rummaging/In and Out of Holds” *American Literary History* (2010) 22 (2): 289-301.

Morrill Act of 1862: <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=33>

The first seminar is devoted primarily to diving into the themes and issues of the course. Themes to consider as you read: The fundamental work of an archivist is to decide what is worth saving, why it promises to have “enduring value,” and how to describe it. What are the implications for shared public knowledge as well as scholarship of these fundamental decisions? How are “hidden histories” uncovered? And by whom? How can they be uncovered in conventional archives?

During this session we would like to identify a small ad hoc grants writing committee—small grants are available to students interested in community service work, and the final public presentation of the semester would be a good use of such a grant. If you are interested in the role of the public intellectual and think that you might want to explore that role this semester, this committee would be a good jump off project for your final archival and/or traditional project.

January 18

Purdue University Archives and Special Collections in the HSSEE Library

Elizabeth Wilkinson of Purdue University Archives and Special Collections will conduct a workshop on the fundamentals of archival work. In addition to introducing students to institutional collection mission, determination of “enduring value,” preservation strategies, principles of arrangement and description, the essential elements of finding aids, and the like, students will actually do some hands-on work with a collection to begin to recognize the challenges associated with archiving. *Questions to consider as you read: How do these readings make you think differently about collections or about archives? If you have worked with archival collections in the past and you could go back to them, what new questions would you ask in response to the readings for today.*

Readings:

Greene, Mark A. and Dennis Meissner. “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing.” *American Archivist*, vol. 68, no. 2 (2005), p. 208-263. (CP)

Meehan, Jennifer. “Making the Leap from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description.” (CP)

January 25

Meet at the West Lafayette Public Library

“What’s Worth Saving II?”

Readings:

Caitlin De Silvey, “A Montana Homestead,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (October 2007): 878-900.

http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6WJN-4MRND1D-1&_user=29441&_coverDate=10%2F31%2F2007&_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_orig=search&_or_igin=search&_sort=d&_docanchor=&_view=c&_searchStrId=1577722479&_rerunOrigin=google&_acct=C000003858&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=29441&md5=92d632b3df1792745b6efb47bf85a644&searchtype=a

Chris Rose, “Magnet Man,” From *I Dead in Attic* (CP)

Richard Cox, *Personal Archives and a New Archival Calling*, Chapter 1 (CP)

The first week opened the discussion about archives by discussing “serious” or institutional collections. Today’s readings ask you to consider the ways that private materials connect to some kind of public, collective history.

Questions to consider as you read: What are the upper and lower limits of saving strategies? Is the Montana Homestead or the Magnet collection an “archive” in any sense? Do you find Cox’s argument for the necessity of private saving persuasive?

Exercise #1: Identify a collection of your own—any collection of texts or materials is fair game, including collections that until this moment you hadn’t even identified as collections. Imagine that you are volunteering at an archives that has just received your collection as a donation. You’ve been asked to take a first pass at processing the collection by drafting a description of it. In light of the growing use of digital and searchable finding aids, create a list of keywords you would enter into a database or other electronic finding aid to help users find your collection. The description and keywords list are due in class on **February 8**, along with your first set of journal entries.

Friday, January 27, Class-Community Cocktail Party, 6-8 pm at the New Chauncey Neighborhood, Incorporated building at 279 Littleton Street in West Lafayette.

February 1

West Lafayette Public Library

“Theorizing Archives and what can be said from them”

Readings:

Michel Foucault, “Introduction,” and “The History *a priori* and the Archive” from *Archaeology of Knowledge* (CP)

Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, excerpt (CP)

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

This is a demanding week of reading. The seminar will divide into groups to make an inventory of the key theoretical points made by these authors. Consider how these theoretical points help us see how each imagines what archives can do; what archives cannot do; and how each imagines a relationship between archival traces and what can be said about the past.

Questions to consider as you read: What do each of these authors say can be said from the archive? How much power does an archon have over what we can know about the past? Are there limits to this power? What are the implications of this power to what gets saved and whose stories are told?

Also, reflect on last week’s party. Compare your conversations about history with community members to that with faculty and fellow students in your field—what is similar/different? Do you and community members think about history or value history for the same reasons? If not, what are bases for some common ground? Why might West Lafayette citizens want to know their history? What are some of the local issues that impinge on West Lafayette residents’ relationship to their past?

Exercise #2: Identify an institution to which you belong that has (or should) have archival records. Arrange an interview with an “archon” of that institution—someone responsible in some way for those records. Find out all you can about what records are kept, how they are preserved, who has access to them and what their final disposition is. When were records first collected? Have the kinds of records retained or their use changed over time? Does your interviewee set collections policies? If not, who does? To what use are the archives put in your institution? If you can look at the archives or get a sense of what they include, speculate on the research potential of the records—academic or otherwise. How might Foucault, Derrida or Steedman understand this archive and its archon? Your report on your interview should include an appropriate record of your interview (verbatim or close paraphrase) and a 3-4 page analysis of it.

Week 5 February 8

West Lafayette Public Library

“From Archives to Scholarship”

Readings:

Postcard collection (distributed in class on February 1)

Fred Bassett, “Wish You Were Here! The Story of the Golden Age of Picture Postcards.” This is Appendix C of the Postcard Collection of the New York State Library. We’d like you to locate it on your own and think about the path you took to find it.

Kathleen Donegan, “Narrative Practice: Writing Between the Lines” (CP)

Bernadette A. Lear, “Wishing They Were There: Old Postcards and Library History.” *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 43 (2008): 77-101.

<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=107&sid=fd9c3de6-4bfa-428c-a5a9-c0b980faf414%40sessionmgr113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=31h&AN=29965482>

Today’s class meeting offers a practical experience of immersing yourself in an archival collection and then working toward a research path or set of questions. ***Questions to consider and research to pursue as you read: Spend some time considering the collection. What do you notice? What stands out? What questions do you have as a consequence of spending time with these objects/text? Go ahead and find out what you can about this collection before we meet to discuss it. Although these are facsimiles, they approximate the feeling of holding the real thing in your hand. Speculate on what difference access to the original object has on scholarship. How do scholars extrapolate or speculate from archival traces? Finally, what one question or method from your own field do you think would be useful in approaches these materials, and why?***

Week 6 February 15
West Lafayette Public Library
“What *Have* Writers Said from the Archives?”

Readings:

Cathy Day, *The Circus in Winter*

Janet Davis, excerpt from *The Circus Age* (CP)

The discussion of this week focuses on how histories are narrated.

Questions to consider as you read: What are the scholarly strategies for uncovering hidden histories embedded in archives? What can we learn by reading Day’s novel—what does it tell us about archival work? What are the historical parameters of the novel and what are some historical events during that period that you associate with it? How do we recover voices that have been silenced? Reading Davis, a historian, and Day, a novelist, we have a chance to think about the very blurry nature of “history” and “fiction.” How are the strategies for dealing with partial archives the same/different for history and fiction?

Assignment: At the end of today’s meeting, each student will receive a piece of paper on which is written the name and location of a memorial in the community. It will be the job of each student to dig as deeply as possible to find out about the person/event being memorialized. In two weeks, students will present the results of their work in a 15-minute presentation. Professors Bross and Curtis will model the exercise with research related to the Memorial Gymnasium next week.

Week 7 February 22
Meeting Place TBD
“How do we remember?”

Readings:

David Charles Sloane, “Shrines and Granite Sketches: Diversifying the Vernacular Landscape of Memory,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 12 (2005): 64-81. (CP)

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20062046>

Daniel Schacter, from *In Search of Memory* (CP)

This week we will present our findings on a significant site of memory for Purdue. As we lead you through our findings and discussion, please take note of research questions that our findings provoke for you, especially those questions we have not considered ourselves—how does our immersion in this place and its attendant archive prompt us to investigate and narrate the past?

Exercise #2 due with new journal entries

Week 8 February 29
REC 309

Research presentations

During this seminar meeting, each group will have time to present their findings and field questions (approximately 15 minutes of presentation time). Please note that in addition to the presentation we are also asking for short individual essays. We ask your group to prepare a powerpoint presentation for the class and to consider the following questions in relation to your particular memorial: *How does remembering the subject of your memorial matter? What form does your memorial take, and why do you think it took that design? Why do memorials eventually blend in with the scenery? Or are memorials “overwritten” with new signification? What is the impulse to memorialize—is it an immediate, urgent, open wound that we seek to heal by memorializing? A more sober desire to remember and honor? Some combination of the two? Something else entirely? How successful is your site of memory in reaching the public? How might you as research-scholars inspire the community to take note of these markers of memory? What new questions have arisen?*

Week 9 March 7
REC 309

Local History

Readings:

Angie Klink, excerpt from *Divided Paths, Common Ground* (CP)
Centennial History of West Lafayette (PDF will be emailed to you)
Guest speaker, Abby Stephens and tour of West Lafayette

This week will offer some context for the archives you have been investigating and should ground us in West Lafayette as we enter into the final, research-intensive stage of the seminar. Questions to consider as you read: Are there differences between the methods and findings of practitioners of “local history” and “academic history? How do you (or should you) distinguish between them? Does the subject position of the historian matter? That is, does a personal connection to one’s subject (Angie Klink is a Purdue alumni, for instance) make a qualitative difference in the history produced, and if so, how do you judge that difference?

Sites of Memory assignment due

Week 10 March 14 – NO CLASS, Spring Break

Week 11 March 21

West Lafayette Public Library

Students work on archival projects or on related research. Our assumption is that your work on the archival project will have begun some time ago, but that you will have focused and dedicated hours to complete the work through the end of the term.

Week 12 March 28

West Lafayette Public Library

Consultation with Professors McMullen, Bross, and Curtis about Block Party presentation/installation plans

Exercise #3: Proposal for Block Party presentation/installation (2-3 pages). After today's consultation, you and your group members should work together on a detailed proposal for the Block Party. Describe your plan (with illustrations, if necessary) and briefly discuss the "learning outcomes" you hope to achieve with it. Please also provide a budget for your presentation/installation if applicable.

Week 13 April 4

West Lafayette Public Library

Readings:

Dana Nelson and Russ Castronovo's book, *Materializing Democracy*, Chapter 1:

http://books.google.com/books?id=O_7qRCNxzQcC&pg=PA351&lpg=PA351&dq=public+intellectual+dana+nelson&source=bl&ots=-Svnm-RrOb&sig=oSOIZgpXipyGTcsbG1M6vDggZi4&hl=en&ei=RZXnTtuwEIrt0gHoqOHmCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&sqi=2&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false

We will meet briefly to discuss your Block Party proposals.

Exercise #3 with final journal entries due

Week 14 April 11

West Lafayette Public Library

Week 15 April 18

West Lafayette Public Library

Students work on archival projects or on related research.

Friday, April 20: Critical Archival Project Ceremony (critical reflection and deposit of archival work with Bross, Curtis)

Week 16 April 25

West Lafayette Public Library

Meet as a class to finalize Block Party plans

Saturday, April 28: West Lafayette History Block Party

Monday, May 2: Final Project is due. Place to submit TBA.

Assignments:

Academic Honesty

Every student in the seminar will be working with original materials for the archival project and research paper. As you interrogate and analyze the materials, you will undoubtedly consult the work of other scholars who have studied the same broad subject matter or similar original materials. Citing the work of other scholars shows that you have done your homework, so to speak. Even if you do provide a citation, remember to enclose in quotation marks all passages composed by another writer and provide information about your source that will lead your readers directly to that passage; some readers like to see the quoted material in its larger context.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course—it is considered a form of academic dishonesty. All scholars depend on the work of others before them, and it is a sign of academic honesty that you credit those on whom you have relied for information. Often plagiarism happens when a student inadvertently fails to enclose the words of others in quotation marks or paraphrases another author's ideas without giving him/her credit. When it happens purposefully, it means that you are taking someone else's work and passing it off as your own; such intellectual thievery is unacceptable. Penalties for intentional plagiarism may range from the failure of an assignment to failure of the class and notification of the dean.

If you have a question about how to use the work of others, when to quote, when to paraphrase, or how to cite previous scholarship, please consult one of the professors in the course.

Participation

We take your active participation in seminar meetings very seriously. We expect that graduate students will be present for each class session, having read and digested the assigned readings with questions and comments to offer to the group. A-level work in this class cannot be achieved without your prepared, active participation in all class activities.

Purdue "Sites of Memory" essay and power point presentation (15%)

The parameters for the in-class, group presentation for this assignment are in the schedule above. In addition, each student should write an individual, 3-4 page essay about your assigned site of memory for inclusion in the next edition. Differences between partners' papers are expected and instructive. Your essay should have the following elements: 1) A description of the memorial's location, how one approaches it and a description of its appearance; 2) an explanation of the research results that deepens what is immediately apparent; 3) a discussion of some enduring significance of the person/event being remembered; 4) questions that remain unanswered or that have arisen in the course of research. Keep in mind that your audience is an educated reader interested in Purdue and Purdue's history, but who may not be a humanities or social science scholar.

Research Journal (20%)

Each week for which we have assigned content, we have posed several questions sparked by the readings, and there are three exercises scattered through the first part of the semester, which should be included in the journal. **We will collect and comment on these journals after each exercise**; please keep copies of your journals electronically so that you can continue to add

to them even when we are evaluating parts. You may submit your journal as a hard copy or electronically. Our goal for these journals is twofold—to get a sense of your critical thinking about archival theory and practice and also, perhaps more importantly, to have a formal place in which we can have a conversation with you as you develop your two major projects for the semester.

To that end, we expect that you will spend 2-4 pages responding to the reading prompts, though you need not answer each and every question posed. In addition, please keep a record of your archival work and research in the form of regular discussions of what you are doing with the archives and (most importantly) how the readings and discussions have illuminated your work with our community archives and vice versa. Please use subtitles each week to delineate your response to each element of the journal (i.e. “Response to Readings”; “Exercise #n”; “Archival Research.” You may not have an entry each week for archival research in the early days of the semester, but we expect by the end of the term that you will have ramped up this element of the journal.

Critical Archival project (25%)

The form of these projects will vary depending on the work you undertake in service to the various archival collections made available to the class. You should have an articulated direction for this project (constructed in consultation with Susan and Kristina) by Monday, February 20 at 5:00 pm. Please submit a 1-page proposal for the project, including your goals, by email to both instructors.

Final “Traditional” Project (25%)

This project will be a traditional, research-based seminar paper of 20-25 pages including bibliography. The expectation here is that the subject of your paper will have emerged from work with the archival materials. As you work with the archival materials take note of emerging patterns, unusual locutions, references to institutions, people, events, or other phenomena with which you are not familiar. Perhaps a reference to a book or author will lead to a traditional work of literary criticism. Maybe yours will be a paper that seeks to answer the very basic question: What is that? Rest assured that what begins in your archival collection probably will not end there—you will find yourself going to other sources for answers to your research questions.

Block Party Presentation (15%)

This class hosts the West Lafayette History Block Party on Saturday, April 28 from 1-3 pm. We ask that you create and execute a presentation about your archive, your methods, or your findings that will exemplify public scholarship. You may work in groups for this assignment. Your presentation should be both enjoyable and intellectually rigorous. Last year we had over 200 members of the public attend the event, so this is an excellent way to extend your graduate work to the community in which it is based (and a good cv line as well). On the Wednesday before the Block Party, please turn in a 2-3 page description of your presentation that also outlines its goals. We would be delighted, following the party, to hear informally about your experiences.