AASLH

TECHNICAL LEAFLET BUNDLE

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Collections Management III

BNDL016

The leaflets in this bundle address collections issues associated with objects commonly found in historical collections: manuscripts, account books, farm equipment, and costumes. It also helps you address the appraisal of objects for internal purposes. This bundle is another valuable reference for collections managers trying to establish effective practices with limited resources.

This bundle may help institutions achieve the standards as set forth under the Interpretation and the Stewardship of Collections sections of the AASLH StEPS Program.

technical leaflet

APPRAISALS:

of objects in historical collections

A panel of certified appraisers examines seven basic questions of importance to history museums and societies.

Responses reviewed and edited by
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Executive Vice President
American Society of Appraisers

When staffs of historical societies and museums talk about questions of "value," they generally mean something more aesthetic and abstract than "how much is it worth?" Quite likely they are referring to their own challenging task of identifying and preserving the values of the past, rather than to the price tag on an artifact.

Sometimes, however, they do have to ask the question of "how much is it worth?" And when they do, where they go for the answers is important.

A historical society or museum will need the services of an appraiser when value is to be determined for such purposes as: a) acquisition, disposition, exchange; b) insurance (for permanent or loan collections); c) damage assessment (accident, vandalism, fire, water, etc.); d) establishment of attribution or market conditions in fields not within the usual purview of the museum or society; e) documentation (recording movement of objects for exhibition, loan, or restoration).

Appraisals often can best be handled as an external function of the historical society or museum rather than as a function of the staff. This is true for at least two reasons. Frequently no one on the staff is properly qualified to make appraisals. Registrars, archivists, and curators, for instance, are concerned primarily with recording and preserving the properties entrusted to their care, not evaluating them. Secondly, an "outside" (non-staff) appraiser should be used in determining the value of bequests or donations in order to avoid the possibility of advocacy or adverse interest.

I. Where do you find an appraiser?

Because nearly all appraisals required by historical societies and museums will be for valuations of some form of personal property (sculpture, antiques, books, manuscripts, coins, stamps, paintings, graphics, gems, jewelry, rugs, tapestries, residential contents, etc.), try to locate an appraiser who has been tested and certified in his or her field. This may be as easy as going to the Yellow Pages or as convenient as calling upon well-known practitioners in the area.

Those appraisers who are tested and certified will belong to the American Society of Appraisers. There is no state testing and licensing of personal property appraisers in the United States, and there is no other professional appraisal society in the country which tests, nation-wide, personal property valuators.

If you do not find a listing for the American Society of Appraisers in the local telephone directory, write the International Headquarters, American Society of Appraisers, Dulles International Airport, P.O. Box 17265, Washington, D. C. 20041, or call (703) 620-3838. That office will refer you to a certified appraiser specially skilled in the specific area of your interest in one of the eighty chapters of the society nearest you.

There are many competent appraisers who do not belong to ASA or to any appraisal society; they should be judged by their individual merits and statements.

There are approximately thirty appraisal groups in the United States, almost all of which are concerned only with real estate. In addition to ASA, there are three other major personal property-oriented appraisal groups, though ASA is the only one which tests its members for certification. The others are: The Appraisers Association of America, 541 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10022; The Art Dealers Association of America, 575 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022, and The National Antique and Art Dealers Association of America, 122 East Fifty-seventh Street, New York, New York 10022.

II. How can you judge an appraiser's qualifications?

An appraiser's qualifications can be judged by studying and evaluating information from several sources:

A. Documented accomplishment such as a "qualifications statement" or curriculum vitae sheet.

B. Professional certification by ASA, which designates appraisers in two categories, *member* and *senior member*. The distinguishing differences are: only two years of full-time appraisals experience is required before a practitioner may apply to be tested as a *member;* five years of full-time appraisal experience is required for the *senior* designation. Membership in either category requires intensive written examinations in the field of specialization, and members of both categories must adhere to a strict code of ethics, a copy of which the ASA will provide upon request.

C. Reputation, including acceptance by such institutions as insurance companies, the Internal Revenue Service, other museums and societies for which the appraiser has performed valuation services, and recognition received from professional activities such as lectures, treatises, editorial or academic assignments related to valuation of historical properties.

D. Personal interview to determine relevance of valuation experience and expertise to the assignment you are proposing. A close look at value reports previously completed by the appraiser (identity of clients involved in the reports should remain anonymous unless special consent is given) will prove helpful.

Some questions which would be helpful in interviewing an appraiser are: What is your general valuation and educational background? What specific experience do you have with the kind of property to be appraised? Are you a member of a professional appraisal society? Do you hold a special designation issued by an appraising society? Is that designation based on successfully completing written examinations? How long ago did you take the examination? If the examination was taken more than four years ago, what continuing education has been undertaken to keep current in the field?

In summary, then, a history museum or historical society must complete the following four steps before hiring an appraiser: 1) recognize, test, and evaluate the education, experience, and expertise of the appraiser; 2) determine the relevance of such qualifications to the proposed valuation assignment; 3) consider the appraiser's recognition and acceptance of the specific purpose of the appraisal; and 4) determine the appraiser's ability to cooperate with the curatorial staff in order to assure optimum effectiveness in completing the assignment.

III. How can you assist an appraiser?

The better assistance you offer an appraiser in his or her work, the better the work is going to be. Time, money, and effort will be saved in direct proportion to the assistance and information the historical agency provides the appraiser. Optimum assistance will produce optimum results, especially in such areas as providing background information about the object or objects to be appraised and establishing a suitable environment in which the appraisal is to take place.

Background information which appraisers usually find helpful includes item identification, provenance, history of prior restorations, previous appraisals, authenticity documentation, and published references regarding prior exhibitions.

A suitable environment for making an appraisal might require special lighting, the additional assistance of staff members, and arranging adequate space.

IV. What ethical considerations are involved in an appraisal?

All the principles of appraisal ethics stem from a basic concept: the primary objective of a monetary appraisal is the determination of a numerical result; the numerical result is objective, unrelated to the desires or wishes of the client; the numerical result is as independent of what someone desires it to be as a physicist's measurement of the melting point of lead or an accountant's statement of the net profits of a corporation.

There are a number of factors which support professional, ethical appraisal practices. Some of these are:

A certified appraiser is obligated to attain competency and to practice ethically.

Appraisers have a fiduciary relationship with their clients, with third parties, and with the public.

Generally, it is unethical and unprofessional for an appraiser to accept an assignment to appraise a property in which he or she has an interest or contemplated future interest. If, after full disclosure by the appraiser of present or contemplated interest in the property, a client still desires to have the appraiser do the work, the appraiser may properly accept the assignment *provided* full disclosure of the nature and extent of his or her interest is contained in the report.

Establishment and maintenance of trust and confidence in the results of an appraisal work is a primary objective of the professional appraiser. Therefore, contracting for or acceptance of contingent fees in the areas listed below is considered unethical and unprofessional by the American Society of Appraisers:

A. Acceptance of an assignment in which the compensation is contingent upon the appraiser reaching any finding or conclusion specified by the client;

B. Agreement to a fee contingent upon the consummation of a sale or financing of a property in connection with which the appraiser's services are utilized;

C. Agreement to a fee contingent upon the amount of a tax deduction obtained by a client where his services are used;

D. Acceptance of an engagement in which the compensation is contingent upon the amount of an award in a property settlement or court action where the appraiser's services are employed.

Further, it is also considered unethical for an appraiser to contract for or accept compensation for appraisal services in the form of a commission, rebate, division of brokerage commission or similar forms, or to receive or pay finder's or referral fees.

In summary, the essence of the appraisal function has to do with objectivity. The experience and expertise of the valuation counselor must be blended with personal integrity and professional orientation. The appraiser you select should possess experience, skill, *and* integrity. In reviewing an appraiser's credentials, remember that a "certification in appraising" issued by a valuation society is a strong indicator of ability and adherence to a strict code of ethics.

V. How is the intangible factor of "historical significance" treated by an appraiser?

No doubt, historical value exists in regard to specific objects. A pair of nineteenth–century eyeglasses may not be highly valued. On the other hand, a pair of nineteenth–century eyeglasses which belonged to Andrew Jackson would have a particular value and would have to be considered in a different light from other eyeglasses of that type and period. Such factors as origin, prior ownership, significance of location (state, regional, national, international), and time (inter-relationship of date of creation, period, and type of use, etc., with social, economic, political, and artistic events) must be analyzed, documented, and carefully interpreted in light of current market data (interest, demand, and supply) and condition of the property being valuated.

Consequently, to some degree, an appraiser often functions as a historian. Each valuation demands individual considerations, and, when historical significance is involved, a valuation will require special research and documentation.

VI. How do you know when an appraisal is "acceptable"?

Experienced curatorial personnel of a history museum or society are generally best qualified to decide if an appraisal is "acceptable." Most likely, they defined the property valuation needs in the beginning and so would be familiar with the appraisal project from the outset and why it was requested.

There are three areas of consideration in determining if an appraisal "gets the job done":

1. There must be a direct, affirmative correlation between the needs, requirements, and guidelines expressed by the historical agency in its contract with the appraiser and in the final report submitted by the appraiser. In other words, the appraiser's report must speak to the questions specified by the history museum or society in the original contract. Additional information or opinions offered by the appraiser may be helpful, but the job has not been completed and cannot be considered "acceptable" until all questions specified in the contract have been addressed and given adequate responses.

2. The curator should compare data findings by the appraiser with the information and opinions of experts within the museum or society. In appraisals of very valuable items, corroboration may be essential, and additional valuation services may be required for the sake of comparison or substantiation.

3. Appraisal reports which indicate in-depth research, explicit item-by-item description, and sound bibliographic references will generally be worth more to a museum or society than less detailed reports in that they provide reliable value conclusions and property identification and documentation.

VII. How long is an appraisal considered "up-to-date"?

Because of fluctuating market conditions which affect different properties differently, no precise answer can be given to the question, "How long is an appraisal considered up-to-date?" Current market value is patently dependent upon such factors as time, type of property, and market environment.

Generally, up-dating an appraisal requires a change only in the value conclusion of a report; no change need be made in the descriptive portions of the report. Whether an appraisal needs to be up-dated, then, depends on whether the value as reported at the time of the appraisal is still pertinent.

Many appraisers recommend an "up-date" at least every four years, preferably every three. Several decades ago, appraisals were considered "current" for at least ten years. Shifting market conditions have drastically reduced this estimate. A professional appraiser can provide an informed and probably helpful recommendation as to the necessity and frequency of appraisal "up-dates." Advisability of up-dating depends in part upon such organizational elements as availability of funds, the size of collections, board and staff attitudes, and upon such extrinsic forces as insurance and legal requirements. A historical agency should weigh its own organizational needs, responsibilities, and finances and then require appraisals to be up-dated with sufficient frequency to provide the protection and documentation required. An overall concept of up-dating every three years is not an unreasonable objective.

This brief commentary was prepared as a cooperative project between the American Association for State and Local History and the American Society of Appraisers. The material presented is based upon the personal experiences of seven nationally-recognized, certified appraisers who contributed to a discussion of the issue, and it does not constitute an officially adopted policy statement by the two organizations.

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technical leaflet

ANTIQUE FARM EQUIPMENT:

researching and identifying

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Introduction

In preserving the material culture of the past, museums routinely acquire agricultural artifacts. Because donations are drawn from the reservoir of artifacts within the community, they by nature reflect the legacy of that community, and in most areas that legacy is agrarian. Until 1880, farming supported more families than all other occupations combined, and not until 1920 did urban Americans outnumber rural residents. The process of urbanization has moved so rapidly since the Great Depression that agricultural implements may mystify museum personnel as well as visitors. Obviously, before a meaningful interpretive program can be developed, the staff must understand the role of each artifact.

What Is It?

Curators or research personnel who are totally unfamilar with farming practices should probably begin by consulting a general history of agriculture. For some, it may be advantageous to familiarize themselves with current local crop production and work backwards, though in many places such a procedure is impossible. Researchers with a modicum of knowledge of farming techniques can usually fit implements used with cultivated crops into five functional categories.

1. *Soil preparation* equipment prepares the field for crops. Tools would include spades, turning plows, harrows, and some disks and listers.

2. *Planting devices* actually place the seed or small plants in the earth. These

Harvesting grain by hand. Until 1880 farming supported more people than all other livelihoods combined. Not until 1920 did more Americans live in cities than in the country.

would include pouches used to broadcast seed by hand, mechanical broadcasters, drills, seeders, planters, and transplanters.

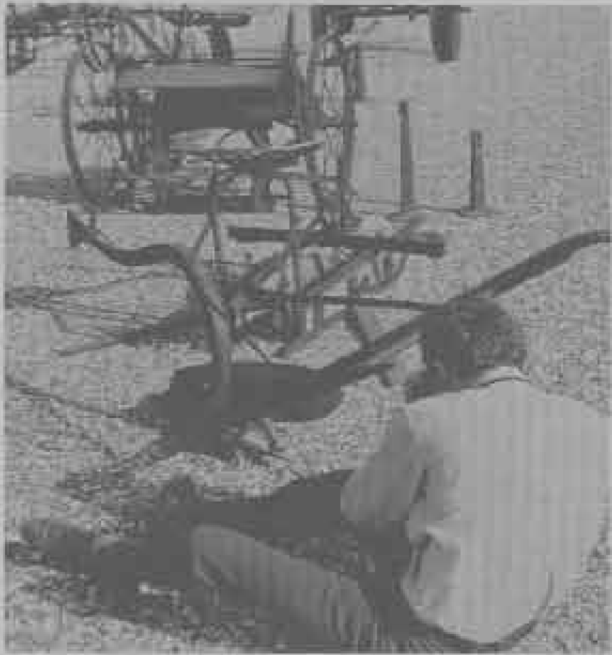
3. *Cultivation* tools kill weeds in a growing crop to lessen competition and sometimes to stir and loosen the soil for better aeration, water penetration, or control of wind erosion. Examples of this category include hoes, cultivators (some of which are known by exotic names such as "double-shovel," "go-devil," or "gee-whiz"), sandfighters, and in more recent times herbicide sprayers.

4. *Harvesting* equipment is often specialized to the particular crop to be gathered. It may be as simple as a sickle or cotton sack or as complex as a corn binder or row-binder, combine, or cotton picker. Threshing machines, balers, and mowers also fit this category.

5. *Miscellaneous* implements were necessary on every farmstead. Axes, wagons, fertilizer spreaders, insect control apparatus, and dual-purpose machines fit this group, as do the baffling, apparently unidentifiable objects that occasionally appear in any sizable collection.

General Research

After the general function of an object has been determined, reading in old agricultural textbooks and antique farm journals will often shed light on the role that that particular object played in the farm's economy. Good research techniques are a must. Photocopying avoids many errors that can intrude into annual transcription and is usually available at a very reasonable cost. The researcher should also record complete bibliographic data on each source. Although library call numbers are not normally included in a citation, their inclusion can be an invaluable time saver, particularly where dealing with government documents or archival materials. Yet, often it is the implement itself that reveals further avenues of investigation.



All numbers, designs, names, and other markings should be copied down and photographed.

Studying the Object

In all museum work, there is no substitute for careful scrutiny of the artifact itself. Obviously, all names, model numbers, patent dates, trademarks, instructions, and similar markings should be copied down and, if at all possible, photographed. One should also note other features that may give eloquent testimony to past usage. Worn handles or oft-repaired weak spots tell a story of long, hard work. Even an unused item may suggest a hidden narrative or anecdote. For instance, in the Lubbock County Museum there is a walking plow of 1880 vintage that appears to be brand new. Even a cursory glance prompts the question, "Why was this plow never even setup, much less used?" Local investigation revealed a curious answer. The plow was purchased in the East Texas blacklands by a family moving to the South Plains. Upon their arrival, they were informed by their new neighbors that a *Vulcan* "New Ground" plow might work well in clay gumbo but that it would not work well in the sandy loam of the Llano Estacado. The plow remained in storage for almost a century until it was finally donated to the museum (see engraving on title page).

Donor/User Related Research

After carefully inspecting and recording all the markings on the artifact, the investigator is ready to begin the major research effort. Obviously, the donor or relatives of the original owner, if traceable, are potentially excellent sources. The researcher should use the best professional oral history techniques for interviews and must maintain a respectful skepticism. Memories are sometimes colored by either nostalgia or bitterness. Wherever possible, data should be confirmed by other primary sources.

In communicating with people associated with an artifact, a tactful inquiry about receipts, owner's manuals, and similar materials may occasionally result in a windfall. Nor should a researcher overlook potentially relevant personal papers in local or regional archives. These may contain letters contemporary with an old planter or cultivator, and such letters may describe the purchase or use of the implement, particularly if it was innovative, expensive, or remarkably convenient.

Manufacturer-Related Research

Donor/user related sources are frequently unavailable or incomplete so that the bulk of information must be found from other sources. If the maker of the implement is known, the next few procedures are simplified. The investigator's tools here are the reference library and the post office.

The addresses of firms currently manufacturing farm implements are listed in

Names, trademarks, parts numbers, and patent information help identify implements.

the annual *Supplement and Tractor Product File* (for full citations of references, see the bibliography). Some corporations maintain archives; others do not. Many early firms and brand names have since been absorbed by modern "long-line" companies. Such acquisitions and mergers can usually be traced out through the *Report of the Federal Trade Commission on Manufacture and Distribution of Farm Implements.* The report is out of print but may be found at regional U.S. Government Document Depositories located at most major universities. Relevant pages can be photocopied for less than one dollar.

If the manufacturer appears to be defunct, some information can still be found in extant issues of old tradebooks such as *Chilton's Farm Implement News Buyers' Guide* or *Millard's Equipment Directory.* In rare cases the company may be contacted at the old address. (The writer recently had a letter of inquiry forwarded by the post office from a forty-year-old address to a successor company with a different name in a different town.) Even if the letter to the old address is returned, the only loss is the cost of the stamp.

The old company's address is important for other reasons, however, for it gives a clue as to what local history sources might be consulted. The local historical society in the area of the artifact's origin can be found in the *Directory of Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada.* The history faculty and librarians of the nearest college are usually cooperative and may be located by using an atlas and the College Bluebook. Investigators should not neglect writing the editor of the local newspaper, the public library, and chamber of commerce. Inquiries should be accompanied by a courteous offer to pay photocopy and postage costs.

If the artifact has a patent number or patent date, a photocopy of the patent may be secured for a very modest fee from the U.S. Government Patent Office, Washington, D.C. 20231. The Patent Office also records trademarks but does not offer a search service. Although private firms will search out trademarks for a fee, it may be preferable to create a separate file of trademarks that need research and periodically visit the Trade Mark Search Room.

Parts Numbers and Parts Lists

Parts numbers may be invaluable if matching-parts catalogues can be located. For example, part number JR329 was only used on Avery's "Joy Rider" Cultivator No. 185A. A machine with that part number on it would normally be a Joy Rider Cultivator. Many items were made by suppliers for several manufacturers (especially handles, wheels, and similar fittings), so not all numbers are equally significant. Also, such numbers must be used judiciously because a farmer may have used a John Deere jockey arch to repair a McCormick-Deering cultivator or used listers made by Oliver Chilled Plow Company on a planter made by J. I. Case Plow Works. When numerous parts numbers concur, however, the identity and perhaps even the date of the artifact may be established. Unfortunately, parts lists fall into a category that archivists discouragingly label as "fugitive items" and are sometimes difficult to locate. Perhaps someday a clearing house will be organized under the auspices of a major library or museum to assist in locating various catalogues and manuals, not only for agricultural research but for other museum collections and industrial archaeology as well. Until that time, curators of collections containing a large number of agricultural artifacts will have to collect various documents to assist them in identifying items in their collection.

Owner's Manuals and Other Materials

Owner's manuals and other printed records can frequently be located for artifacts made in the late nineteenth century and after. These give invaluable information to interpreter, conservator, and curator alike. For an ideally documented artifact, the museum would have on file an advertisement, sales catalogue description, owner's manual, shop manual, parts list, historic photographs, and oral history transcript, as well as other miscellaneous items.

Technical Information

While the museum's entire audience may not be intrigued by technical details of the machinery on exhibit, there will be a sufficient number of "buffs" in many areas to justify the inclusion of a small technical label near each major artifact. Such labels, even if relatively inconspicuous, will spare the staff endless questions, but they do require some "homework" by the research staff. The Lubbock County Museum attempts to record the following data on each major implement: manufacturer, date and place of manufacture, years in production, related equipment (what was used with it), capacity (number of rows, width of cut, etc.), size (weight, height, width, length in U.S. and metric), origi-

Donor or users of equipment often can supply invaluable information if professionally interviewed, left. Advertisements from old publications, such as this page from the 1861 Texas Almanac, *offer insight into the role of the artifact.*

nal color(s), material (oak, cast iron, etc.), area of use and specific location, how obtained, and whether rare or common.

Documenting Tractors

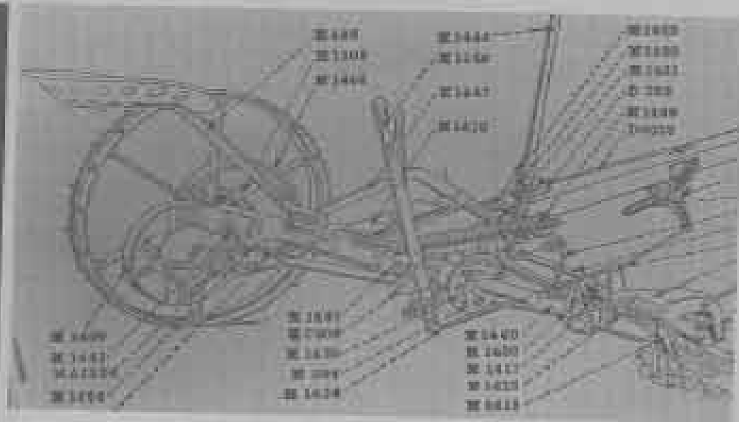
Few items in an agricultural collection are as dramatic as tractors. Their size and power are obvious even when resting quietly in the corner of the gallery. Because they generate special attention and have special sources, they must be researched especially carefully. Nearly all of the documentation mentioned above should apply to tractors, but there are other materials as well.

Every model tractor sold in Nebraska since 1920 has, by law, been submitted to official tests. These *Nebraska Test Reports* are still available from the Department of Agricultural Engineering, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508. For older tractors, a researcher might consult *The Iron Men Album* or *Gas Engine* magazine. These sister publications devote their attention to the restoration of steam and internal combustion engines respectively, and a major number of those engines are tractors.

A museum that uses technical labels such as those described above should add the following information for tractors: horsepower (at ______ rpm), fuel, number of cylinders, displacement (bore and stroke), carburation, ignition, lubrication, cooling, clutch, and transmission. More important, aficionado and casual visitor alike appreciate a good description of what operating a given implement "was really like" (rough, loud, tiring, heavy, dusty, dangerous, etc.).

The Researcher's Goal

Research that is done well prepares a marvelous resource for exhibit, sometimes including striking graphics. It gives the curator an invaluable basis for evaluating artifacts as to intrinsic and representative merit. Sometimes it assists in preservation and is always the *sine quo non* of restoration. And, ultimately, the museum's audience—the general public—is the greatest beneficiary of all.



Owner's manuals are especially valuable in conserving complex or intricate equipment, left. Parts lists are sometimes beautifully illustrated, above. They supply a wealth of information if used carefully.

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Red Tractor Book [title varies], Ca. 1885 to present.

Directory of Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada. Biannual publication of the American Association for State and Local History. Best source for historical societies, gene-

alogical societies, and museums in any given locality.
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TECHNICAL LEAFLET 101

Technical Leaflets are published by the American Association for State and Local History for the purpose of bringing useful information to persons working in the state and local history movement. The series does not follow the same categories month after month, since the selection of subject matter is based upon varied inquiries received by the Association's home office. The leaflets, which are detachable from the magazine, are copyrighted © and should be catalogued as part of HISTORY NEWS.

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technical leaflet

DATING COSTUMES:
a check list method

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The dating of costumes in museum or historical society collections is important for several reasons. By determining the range of a collection and the deficits that need to be filled for certain periods, accession guidelines can be established. Dating may also facilitate expanded use of a collection, as well as lead to increased appreciation and understanding of the historical development of various modes of dress.

If a collection is used for study or research, dating individual articles of clothing in the collection is a necessity. If costumes from the collection are exhibited, dating will add to the enjoyment and comprehension of those who view it.

The Dating Procedure

Generally, the first step in dating is to obtain what information is available from the donor or lender. If the donor personally used the artifact, the date given for its use is probably correct. However, if the donor did not use the artifact, the date that he supplies for its period of use is less likely to be accurate. In either case, this information should not be assumed to be correct without other verification. The date suggested by the donor, however, provides a base from which to work.

Generally, the second step for determining the date of an object is to compare it with a similar object with an established date or with other primary sources such as paintings, sculptures, photographs, periodicals, and newspapers. Secondary sources such as reputable reference books may also be used in dating an artifact. The process is to compare first the design, then the details of construction, the materials, and any evidence of alteration.

In determining the date of an historical dress, one should consider the silhouette, neckline, bodice, sleeve, waistline placement, and skirt as features of the design. In comparing details of construction, one should note closures (such as zippers, hooks and eyes, buttons, and snaps) and their placement. Other construction details such as cut, machine stitching, linings, padding, and stays should also be noted.

The materials from which any object is made change in some way as frequently as do styles. A dress made from rayon could not possibly be dated earlier than 1910 as rayon was first produced at this time. A dress with needle marks would indicate that some type of alteration has been made. Further investigation might reveal that the dress may have been remade from a style and fabric many years older or it may simply have been let out.

A New Technique

Although using donor information and comparing the costume with primary and secondary sources are effective means for determining the date of an object, this process is often sporadic and time-consuming. An alternate method has been developed by the authors for dating women's day dresses from 1850 to 1949. By following the same procedures, a tool for dating costume collections of other periods can also be produced. This method involves developing a check sheet which lists the costumes' features by times or regions. (See pages 4 and 5.)

Development of Check Sheet

The first step in developing a check sheet for dating is study of references on the history of the particular type of costume. These references may be books, periodicals, newspapers, and archival materials. It is helpful to have an idea of breakdowns (time or region) in mind when beginning; however, it is not absolutely necessary as these breakdowns become obvious when looking through the references.

It is advisable to take notes as accurately as possible and to footnote all references as it may be necessary to refer to them at another time. From this study, design and construction features should be noted. The changes in these features and the time period in which they occur will be most important in determining the date.

For example, almost all historical costume references mention the invention of the sewing machine in 1846. Any garment with machine stitching could not be of an earlier date. Thus partial or total machine stitching is an important construction feature beginning in the 1850's.

After a study of references, a list of features of the costume during each period of its development should be compiled. The next step is to compare the features noted for each period with costumes already accurately dated. If dated examples are not available, then slides, paintings, photographs, prints, or other sources may be used. If the features of each period do not compare with a dated example of the period, a rechecking of references may be necessary. Some discrepancies, however, may be inherent.

Regional differences in costumes are common. Homemade fabrics worn in rural areas will probably be unlike the fabrics mentioned in books and magazines as fashionable at the time. If information is available on regional differences of dress, they should be noted and included with the other features.

Now that the features of the garment, through its development, have been determined, preparation of the check sheet may begin. Since several persons may use the check sheet, it is advisable to prepare a brief glossary that defines terms and insures consistency.

In devising a check sheet, the major changes that have occurred in the historical development of dress must be noted. The notes taken during the study of references should make clear these changes and the time or region of their occurrence.

The check sheet developed by the authors for dating the costume is divided into decades. The decision to use decades for the breakdowns was based on the changes that occurred in dress at about ten-year periods. This decision was also based on the need of the collection studied.* Thus, depending on the type of garment and its intended use, the date needed may be more or less exact than that chosen by the authors.

Once the breakdowns for the check sheet are determined, the features under each period should be listed. These features should be categorized. For the check sheet developed by the authors, there were nine categories which were appropriate to dress. (See check sheet.) These were: silhouette, bodice, neckline and collar, sleeve, waistline, bodice construction, skirt, skirt construction, and popular fabrics and trims. The earlier study of references had indicated that features within these categories would most likely determine the date of the dress. Organization of the check sheet into categories simply facilitates study of the garments during the dating process.

Those who use the check sheet should first look it and the glossary over in order to familiarize themselves with them. Then the costume should be examined, and the daters should check on the check sheet each feature which they observe it to have.

It is important when observing the costume that its form not be distorted in any way. For example, until the date of a garment is decided upon, the proper supports (hoops or bustle) cannot be accurately determined. Thus it is better to place the garment on a hanger rather than risk distorting its silhouette and causing misinterpretation of the date. (See photographs on page 6.)

After the features have been checked, the number of checks in each period should be tallied. The period with a majority of checks should reveal the time or region of the garment.

When the date of a garment is particularly difficult to establish, resources are available to lend assistance. Both the Smithsonian Institution and Metropolitan Museum of Art will date garments. Color slides of garment front, back, and inside construction should be sent to the curator of costumes along with closeups of details. (See photographs.) A period of four to six weeks is required to complete the dating and return the slides.

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*The collection used in the development of the check sheet is the Betty D. Eastin Historical Costume Collection at the University of Kentucky. The Eastin Collection, which was begun in 1973 and now contains over a thousand articles, is used primarily by students in historic costume classes. For this reason, the date of garment within a ten-year period is needed.

Check Sheet for dating day dresses, 1850-1949

Examine check sheet and glossary to establish familiarity with the tools. Inspect garment, determine silhouette, and check the appropriate silhouette in each decade it occurs. Then check additional features but only in those decades for which the silhouette has been checked. The period with the most checks will indicate the date of the dress. Asterisks indicate phrases defined in the glossary.

1850 - 1859

A. SILHOUETTE
__1. Dome skirt*
__2. Fitted bodice*
__3. Small waist
__4. Wide shoulder line

B. BODICE
__1. Jacket style* with peplum*

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
__1. Jewel neck
__2. V-neck with collar and lapels

D. SLEEVE
__1. Pagoda sleeve*

E. WAISTLINE
__1. Pointed at front

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
__1. Front hook and eye closure
__2. Lined with white or brown fabric
__3. Set-in* dropped shoulder sleeve
__4. Vertical waist darts
__5. Boned*

G. SKIRT
__1. Dome*
__2. Train
__3. Flounced* and tiered*
__4. Not ornamented

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
__1. Front or side hook and eye closure
__2. Lined with glazed cotton or muslin
__3. Pleated to waistband
__4. Inner waistband*
__5. Pockets in seams

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
__1. Tartan*, plaid and check patterns
__2. Fringe and tassels

1860 - 1869

A. SILHOUETTE
__1. Dome skirt* with some back fullnes
__2. Fitted bodice*
__3. Small waist
__4. Wide shoulder line

B. BODICE
__1. Bodice ends at waist, no peplum*

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
__1. High collar
__2. V-neck
__3. Square neck

D. SLEEVE
__1. Plain straight sleeve
__2. Sleeve with cuff

E. WAISTLINE
__1. Slightly raised

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
__1. Front button or hook and eye closure
__2. Lined with white fabric
__3. Set-in* dropped shoulder sleeve
__4. Vertical waist darts
__5. Boned*

G. SKIRT
__1. Dome* with some back fullness
__2. Slight train
__3. Flounces* at hem
__4. Not ornamented

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
__1. Front or side hook and eye closure
__2. Unlined, or lined with glazed cotton
__3. Pleated to waistband at sides, gathered to back
__4. Inner waistband*
__5. Pockets in seams
__6. Cut in gores*

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
__1. Tartan*, check, plaid, striped and spotted patterns
__2. Ball fringe
__3. Fringe
__4. Braids

1870 - 1879

A. SILHOUETTE
__1. Bustle skirt*
__2. Fitted bodice*
__3. Small waist

B. BODICE
__1. Jacket style* with long or short peplum*
__2. Cuirasse bodice*

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
__1. High collar
__2. V-neck
__3. Square neck

D. SLEEVE
__1. Straight sleeve with deep cuffs

E. WAISTLINE
__1. Natural waistline*

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
__1. Front button closure
__2. Lined with cotton or silk
__3. Set-in* sleeve
__4. Vertical waist darts
__5. Boned*

G. SKIRT
__1. Bustle*, at top of skirt or lower
__2. Tubular*
__3. Trained
__4. Ornamented - flounces*, drapery*, etc.
__5. Overskirt and underskirt*

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
__1. Side hook and eye closure
__2. Unlined
__3. Pleated to back of waistband
__4. Inner waistband*
__5. Pockets in seams
__6. Cut in gores*
__7. Inner tapes to control shape of bustle*

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
__1. Woolen fabrics
__2. Velvet and silk trims
__3. Two or more contrasting colors in garment

1880 - 1889

A. SILHOUETTE
__1. Bustle skirt*
__2. Fitted bodice*
__3. Small waist

B. BODICE
__1. Jacket style* with peplum*
__2. Jacket style*, pointed front and back
__3. Polonaise style*

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
__1. High collar

D. SLEEVE
__1. Three-quarter to long length
__2. Straight sleeve
__3. Puffed-at-shoulder sleeve

E. WAISTLINE
__1. Pointed, front and back

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
__1. Back or front hook and eye closure
__2. Back or front button closure
__3. Lined
__4. Set-in sleeves*
__5. Vertical waist darts
__6. Boned*
__7. Inner waistband*

G. SKIRT
__1. Extreme bustle*
__2. Tubular*
__3. Slight train
__4. Front drapery*
__5. Intricate design - pleating, tucking, shirring, etc.

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
__1. Side hook and eye closure
__2. Unlined
__3. Pleated to waistband at sides, gathered at back
__4. Inner tapes to control shape of bustle*
__5. Pockets in seams
__6. Side and front pieces cut in gores*

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
__1. Eyelet embroidery*
__2. Flounces*
__3. Pleating

1890 - 1899

A. SILHOUETTE
__1. Tubular skirt*
__2. Fitted bodice*
__3. Small waist
__4. Sleeve fullness about elbow

B. BODICE
__1. Jacket style*

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
__1. High collar

D. SLEEVE
__1. Three-quarter to long length
__2. Straight sleeve
__3. Leg-of-mutton sleeve

E. WAISTLINE
__1. Pointed, or U- in front

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
__1. Front hook and eye closure
__2. Lined
__3. Set-in sleeves*
__4. Vertical waist darts
__5. Boned*
__6. Inner waistband*
__7. Wire or paper supports for leg-of-mutton sleeves

G. SKIRT
__1. Tubular*
__2. Slight train
__3. Ruffles or lace at hem

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
__1. Back hook and eye closure
__2. Lined with muslin
__3. Gathered at back of waistband
__4. Cut in gores*

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
__1. Chiffon for trims
__2. Lace

1900 - 1909

SILHOUETTE
1. Tubular skirt* with tulip shape*
2. Soft bodice effect*
3. Small waist

BODICE
1. Zouave style*
2. Pouter pegeon style*
3. Yoked

NECKLINE AND COLLAR
1. High collar with wire supports

SLEEVE
1. Long length
2. Straight sleeve
3. Fullness below elbow
4. Cuffed

W[illegible]LINE
1. [illegible]dip in front
2. S[illegible]

BODICE CONSTRUCTION
1. Front or side hook and eye closure
2. Separate lining
3. Set-in sleeve*
4. Kimono sleeve*
5. Vertical waist darts
6. Boned*
7. Inner waistband*
8. Front gathering

SKIRT
Tulip shape*
Slight train
Flounced*

SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
Back or side hook and eye closure
Separate lining
Cut in gores*
Large hooks to attach skirt to bodice back
Gathering at back

POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
Lightweight fabrics
Vel[illegible]t piping and c[illegible]
R[illegible]inge

1910 - 1919

A. SILHOUETTE
___1. Tubular skirt*
___2. Soft bodice effect*

B. BODICE
___1. Soft blouse style*
___2. Surplice bodice*
___3. Yoked

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
___1. High collar
___2. Peter Pan collar*
___3. Near stand-up collar
___4. V-neck, with or without fill-in
___5. V-neckline with collar and lapels
___6. Square neckline

D. SLEEVE
___1. Three-quarter to long length
___2. Straight sleeve
___3. Full to elbow
___4. Cuffed

E. WAISTLINE
___1. Sashed

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
___1. Front, back or side hook and eye closure
___2. Front, back or side snap closure
___3. Lined, fastens separately
___4. Vertical waist darts

G. SKIRT
___1. Tubular*, with straight hem, no train
___2. Draped*
___3. Flounced*

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
___1. Front or back hook and eye closure
___2. Lined
___3. Inner waistband*
___4. Cut in gores*
___5. Faced hem*

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
___1. Embroidery
___2. Lace
___3. Ball fringe
___4. Buttons

1920 - 1929

A. SILHOUETTE
___1. Tubular skirt*
___2. Straight bodice*

B. BODICE
___1. Straight style*

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
___1. Round neckline with Peter Pan collar*
___2. U- or V-neckline
___3. V-neckline with collar and lapels

D. SLEEVE
___1. Sleeveless to long length
___2. Straight sleeve
___3. Bell sleeve*

E. WAISTLINE
___1. Waistline at hips
___2. Sashed

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
___1. Slip-on style
___2. Side snap or hook and eye closure
___3. Unlined
___4. Set-in sleeve*
___5. Kimono sleeve*
___6. No bust darts

G. SKIRT
___1. Tubular*
___2. Godet pleats*
___3. Scalloped* or uneven hem

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
___1. Slip-on style
___2. Side snap or hook and eye closure
___3. Unlined
___4. Faced hem*

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
___1. Fringe
___2. Lace

1930 - 1939

A. SILHOUETTE
___1. Tubular skirt* with tulip shape*
___2. Semi-fitted bodice
___3. Square shoulder line

B. BODICE
___1. Plain style*
___2. Draped*, pleated or gathered bodice
___3. Padded shoulders

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
___1. Collar
___2. Round neckline
___3. V-neckline
___4. Cowl neckline*

D. SLEEVE
___1. Short to long length
___2. Straight sleeve
___3. Puffed short sleeve

E. WAISTLINE
___1. Natural waistline*

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
___1. Side zipper or snap closure
___2. Unlined
___3. Set-in sleeve*
___4. Raglan sleeve*
___5. Kimono sleeve*
___6. Bust darts or vertical waist darts
___7. Bias cut fabric

G. SKIRT
___1. Tulip shape*
___2. Godet pleats*

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
___1. Side snap or zipper closure
___2. Unlined
___3. Cut in gores*
___4. Bias cut fabric

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
___1. Buttons
___2. Rickrack

1940 - 1949

A. SILHOUETTE
___1. Tubular skirt*
___2. Dome skirt*
___3. Semi-fitted bodice*
___4. Fitted bodice*

B. BODICE
___1. Shirt style*
___2. Plain style*
___3. Fitted
___4. Padded shoulders
___5. Sloping shoulders

C. NECKLINE AND COLLAR
___1. Small collar
___2. V-neckline
___3. Round neckline
___4. Square neckline

D. SLEEVE
___1. Short to long length
___2. Straight sleeve
___3. Dolman sleeve*

E. WAISTLINE
___1. Natural waistline*

F. BODICE CONSTRUCTION
___1. Front button closure
___2. Front, side or back zipper closure
___3. Unlined
___4. Set-in sleeve*
___5. Horizontal bust darts
___6. Darts at elbow and shoulder

G. SKIRT
___1. Tubular*
___2. Dome*
___3. Plain style
___4. Pleated
___5. Pockets

H. SKIRT CONSTRUCTION
___1. Front, side or back zipper closure
___2. Unlined
___3. Hip darts
___4. Cut in gores*

I. POPULAR FABRICS/TRIMS
___1. Seersucker*
___2. Buttons
___3. Ribbons

Day Dress Dated 1900-1909

Front and back views, inside bodice, and garment modeled with proper foundations. In using the check sheet, check all features, beginning with the silhouette, as follows: tubular skirt with tulip-shaped silhouette, 1900-1909 and 1930-1939 (eliminate latter due to missing square shoulder line and incorrect skirt length and construction); pouter pigeon bodice, 1900-1909 and 1910-1919 (surplice bodice could be checked if silhouette did not indicate 1900-1909); high collar neckline, 1900-1909 and any date from 1860 to 1919 (only 1900-1909 is also supported by silhouette and bodice features); long sleeves with cuffs, 1900-1909 and 1910-1919 (1910-1919 is not supported by silhouette and bodice features); slight dip in front waistline and sashed, 1900-1909; and tulip-shaped skirt with slight train, 1900-1909.

Day Dress Dated 1850-1859

Front and back views and inside bodice. Dome skirt with fitted bodice and small waist silhouette, 1850-1859 and 1860-1869; jacket bodice with peplum, 1850-1859, 1870-1879, and 1880-1889 (the last two can be eliminated because they had bustle skirt silhouettes); jewel neckline, 1850-1859; pagoda sleeves, 1850-1859; and pointed front waistline, 1850-1959.

GLOSSARY for Day Dress Check Sheet

Silhouette

Bustle Skirt Silhouette—a skirt shape which when viewed in profile shows much back fullness.

Dome Skirt Silhouette—a skirt shape which when viewed in profile has a bell shape or fullness equally in front and back.

Tubular Skirt Silhouette—a skirt shape which when viewed in profile has a cylindrical shape.

Bodice

Boned—stays, usually made of whalebone, inserted in the bodice for shaping.

Cuirass Bodice—a hip-length bodice very tightly fitted to the body with no waistline seam, usually with a front button closure.

Fitted Bodice—a bodice shaped to closely fit the wearer. This tight fit is sometimes achieved by boning.

Jacket Bodice—a bodice which is separate from the skirt and which slips on, then fastens in front.

Peplum—skirt-like attachment to a bodice extending to about the hips.

Plain Bodice—a semi-fitted bodice without added ornamentation or special construction features.

Polonaise Bodice—bodice with side drapery creating puffs at the hips.

Pouter Pigeon Bodice—a bodice with extra front fullness creating a large-busted effect. The fullness is usually in the form of gathers at bottom of the bodice front.

Semi-fitted Bodice—a bodice which closely follows and reveals the body's contours but is not tight or boned.

Shirt Bodice—a bodice which has a collar and placket front, similar to a man's shirt.

Soft Blouse Bodice—a bodice which fits loosely without hiding the shape of the body.

Straight Bodice—a bodice with no contours, gathers, or darts which emphasizes a straight line from shoulder to hip.

Surplice Bodice—a bodice which forms a V-neck, crossing one side of the bodice over the other side.

Zouave Bodice—a waist-length loose jacket bodice with braid trim around bodice and sleeve edges.

Neckline and Collar

Cowl Neckline—a neckline with soft folds extending across the upper bodice near the neck.

Peter Pan Collar—a round collar attached to a round neckline.

Sleeve

Bell Sleeve—a sleeve which flares at its hem creating a bell shape.

Dolman Sleeve—a variation of the kimono sleeve in which the sleeve does not fit closely to the underarm but extends out wing-like from the bodice side.

Kimono Sleeve—a sleeve which is cut in one with the bodice instead of being attached to it.

Leg-of-Mutton Sleeve—a sleeve with great fullness at the top, tapering to a fitted sleeve on the lower arm.

Pagoda Sleeve—a sleeve in a bell or flared shape with a wide uncuffed hem.

Raglan Sleeve—a sleeve which is joined to the bodice by a slanting seam extending from the underarm to the neck.

Set-in Sleeve—a sleeve smoothly sewn into a round armhole without gathers or puckers.

Waistline

Inner Waistband—a separate waistband, usually a twill tape, attached at the inside back of a garment. It has a front hook and eye closure.

Natural Waistline—a waistline at the true waist. It may or may not be indicated by a seam.

Skirt

Draped—decorative folds in a garment created by incorporating extra fabric into the design.

Faced hem—a hem created by sewing on a piece of fabric, in the same shape as the hem, and turning it up.

Flounces—ruffles of gathered fabric or lace.

Godet Pleats—triangular shaped gores inserted into slits in the skirt for fullness.

Gores—skirt pieces, or sections, cut narrower at the top than at the hem so that the skirt when sewn together fits smoothly over the hips and to the waist.

Inner Tapes—to control shape of bustle. Cloth tapes sewn to the inside back of the skirt which tie to regulate height or width of bustle.

Overskirt and Underskirt—an upper skirt raised or split to reveal a second skirt of the same or contrasting fabric. The same effect may be achieved by trimming one skirt to look like two.

Scalloped Hem—a hem with half circles forming an uneven, rather than straight, edge.

Tiered—two or more layers of fabric or flounces, one above the other.

Tulip-Shaped Skirt—a tubular skirt silhouette with flare at the bottom giving the effect of an inverted tulip.

Popular Fabrics and Trims

Eyelet Embroidery—small holes around which a buttonhole stitch is usually worked.

Seersucker—a fabric with alternating puckered and unpuckered stripes.

Tartan—plaids associated with Scottish clans.

Conclusion

Dating of costumes in small museums and historical societies is necessary to give collections their utmost historical value. This process, however, usually requires much time on the part of the museum staff. Although it is time consuming to develop, implementation of a check sheet will reduce time spent in dating. Knowledge of the history of costumes and of dating procedures is less important when using the check sheet. Since volunteers will be able to date objects by using a check sheet, its development could aid in promoting community interest in the collection.

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Further Reading

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Editor's Note:
This checklist method has been validated twice with two groups of students. Accuracy within one decade was 96 per cent in one experiment and 80 per cent in the other.

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American Association for State and Local History

Technical

LEAFLET

Local History Manuscripts: Sources, Uses, and Preservation

By Nancy Sahli
National Historical Publications and Records Services

What is a manuscript? The Society of American Archivists' *Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*, published in 1974, which contains standard terminology for the profession, defines a manuscript as, "a handwritten or typed document, including a letterpress or carbon copy. A mechanically produced form completed in handwriting or typescript is also considered a manuscript." And yet, when most of us use the word "manuscript," as when we refer to a "manuscript curator," or a "manuscript collection," we often confer a broader meaning on the word than "handwritten or typed document." A couple of summers ago a student intern called a local historical society in the upper Midwest to solicit information on archives and manuscript holdings for the NHPRC's directory of repositories. The lady at the other end of the line said she wasn't sure of all the specific kinds of manuscript materials they were trying to acquire at the moment, but she did know that first on the list was a stuffed beaver!

We hope this same sort of confusion does not prevail among readers of this leaflet, but it would make sense to say at the outset that this leaflet is not going to confine itself to a discussion of manuscript materials in the narrowest, SAA glossary sense. Rather, it will cover historical documents, i.e., unique pieces of primary source material, regardless of medium. They include traditional manuscript items, such as correspondence, diaries, ledgers, and logbooks, as well as other materials—oral history tapes and transcripts, photographs, machine-readable computer tape files, and original non-commercial motion pictures, such as Uncle Joe's home movies of the big fire on Second Street.

The word document has its root in the Latin word "docere," to teach, and this is precisely what these materials do. They teach us and, like a good teacher, lead us further into ourselves and into an understanding of the small local worlds from which we all have come. It is from individuals living in local environments, be those environments 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue or a one-room schoolteacher's house over the second hill past the big clump of trees, that these clues to our present and our past have come.

In writing this paper, the problem was how to define the difference between a historical document, a material culture object, a printed work, and a work of art. Let us take a wall with five commercially reproduced copies of old photographs, one printed calendar, two reproductions of 18th-century manuscript rebuses, two posters, one of which is a reproduction of a hand-drawn map, one ERA vigil button, hand-lettered, but produced in bulk, one cardboard 78 rpm phonograph record cover with a photo of evangelist Jack Coe embossed on its surface, and one historical document that used to be a material culture object until Ernest Work's mother-in-law got hold of it. Around 1925 she bought a commercially produced birthday greeting bookmark, then pasted an original photograph of her son-in-law, Ernest, on the front, just underneath the parrot, and wrote on the back in her own handwriting to her daughter: "Edith, With best love and all good wishes for a happy birthday. Mother."

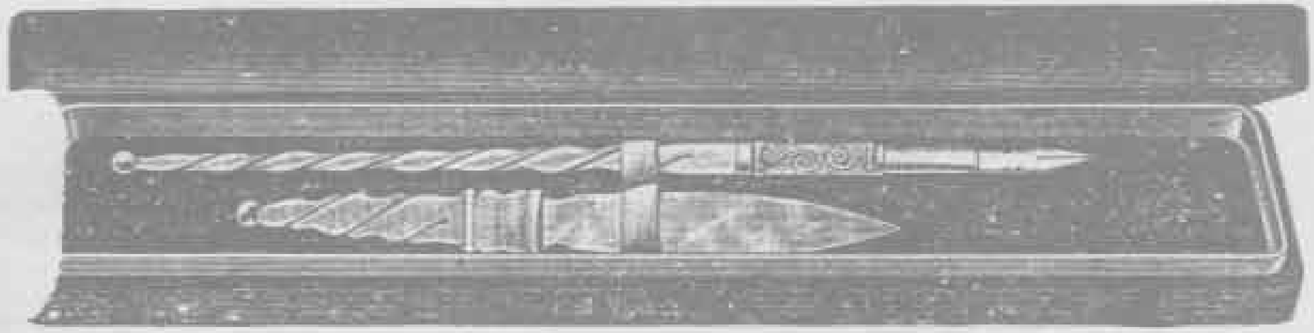
This object is not made a historical document because it relates to a famous or noteworthy person, although Work was well-known during the 1930s for his role in establishing the educational system in Ethiopia, nor because it is old, nor because it is "important." It is a piece of trivia, really, BUT, it is unique, it is original, it was not produced deliberately to be a "creative" product, as are paintings, and, secondarily, it was the result of individual human activity. It is this uniqueness and originality that distinguish it from all other objects on the wall. And while it is like them in being a material culture object, a printed work, and perhaps, if we stretch things a bit, even a work of art, the intervention at one time and in one place of Ernest Work's mother-in-law with her pen and pot of paste has transformed this humble little object into a genuine, stupendous, 100 per cent authentic historical document. In either collecting or using historical documents having a clear sense of what makes them different from other types of historical materials can enable us to more fully appreciate their value, as well as what they can and cannot tell us about the past.

How then have historical documents been created? By whom? When? What activities do they document? What don't they document? And whom don't they document? Every day, each of us is in the business of creating historical documents. Many of these are generated in the course of work. The records of organizations and institutions in which persons are employed are a potential archives. So are the records of professional organizations, such as the AASLH. Churches, political-action groups, and recreation organizations, all of these keep records, if only the minutes of meetings, and all of these records are potential historical documents. Individuals are also the creators of historical documents. The photographs that are taken at family gatherings, family letters, personal diaries, oral history tapes of local old-timers—all these are historical documents too. And so are some of the unlikelier sources: a silent documentary film of a botanical expedition to the mountainous uplands of the Irrawaddy River, a hospital's medical records on its patients, or the case files of a lawyer's office. In short, the potential supply of this material is endless!

Take a look at a typical local setting and see what the potential for the creation of historical records is. Let us take a typical small college town in western Pennsylvania. It has a local historical society and, in addition, is the seat of county government. The population is in the neighborhood of 15,000, and it has been swelled recently by the expansion of the college into a state university. But, nevertheless, the community is still representative of the sort of situation in which many local institutions collecting historical documents may find themselves.

What, then, are the potential sources of material in a community of this type? First, there are, of course, individuals. These range from the town's first families, who have lived there since the early 1800s, to the latest arrival, a doctor born and reared in Thailand and educated in Boston. There are people of diverse occupations, ethnic backgrounds, levels of education, and ability to generate historical documents. The first families, for example, may well have kept generations of family correspondence, photographs, financial records of former family businesses, and the like. The Thai physician may have kept a journal describing his experiences as an immigrant coming to the United States, as well as letters from his native country that could be used for studying the history of that area. But there are others who won't have this sort of documentation. And while oral histories, such as the programs developed by Eliot Wigginton of Foxfire fame, can be used to document the lives of some individuals, there are other types of documents that this small town is creating that will tell about the individuals who have left no personal record.

There are government records, both county and local. Wills, deeds, tax and voter lists, school district records, justice of the peace



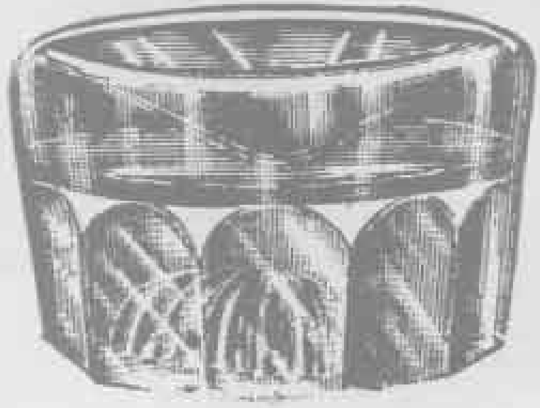
records, court records, local welfare records, ledgers of the 19th-century poor farm and the orphan asylum, all these are sources for the study of the locality. In many cases these materials are still being actively used by the creating agencies. In others, they may have been placed in cold storage, and in still others, they may be rotting somewhere because the appropriate local officials have little sense of their historical significance.

Then there are the local businesses. The coal company, for example, keeps personnel files on each employee, as well as health records, that can enable us to develop a composite picture of this segment of local society. Inventories of local merchants can help us determine what patterns of taste and consumption prevailed in communities at a particular period. Records of the local farm equipment dealer enable us to see how the agricultural sector in the county has been declining over the past twenty years. Business correspondence places the local business community in a broader perspective, as letters document dealings with agents, conglomerates, and suppliers over a broader geographical area. It is by the study of the microcosm of individual localities that the economic history of an entire region is written.

In addition to individual, government, and business records, towns generate records of organizations. There are churches—Presbyterian, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Unitarian, Pentecostal. There are organizations—men's service organizations like Rotary and the Lions, the YMCA, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, various Masonic orders, two country clubs, private social and literary clubs, ethnic groups like the Sons of Italy, and a Chamber of Commerce. All of them generate records of potential historical significance that can tell us things about social association patterns, lines of local authority, decision making patterns, elitism, and similar topics. Likewise, the records of the local political party organizations, when used in conjunction with government and voting records, can enable us to see just how and why particular candidates were elected and what their conception of government for the community was.

And, finally, there are institutions. The local university, because of its direct involvement both as an employer and educator of local citizens, has much impact on the history of the area. Its records range from the minutes of the faculty senate, which can be used in conjunction with political and organization records to determine the locus of local power, to student term papers on local historical topics. The physical impact of the university on the town can be studied by examining master plans and architectural drawings of campus buildings. The study of architectural materials in general, regardless of the source of their creation, can assist us in developing historic preservation programs and stimulate general community involvement in local history. Other institutions, such as hospitals, orphanages, and even animal shelters, create records, such as case files, health statistics, and placement records, that enable us to understand the role of these activities in the local community. Although individuals' rights to privacy may limit our access to certain types of materials, at least for a certain amount of time, it is, nevertheless, true that their ultimate utility for the study of history, and particularly of people not documented by more traditional individually created sources, merits their consideration for preservation.

Not all of these sources will exist for every community. Different types of organizations and sources of documentary materials will be found in different regions of the country. Just as important as an awareness of which individuals and institutions in local communities have created materials is an awareness of what organizations on a regional, state, and national level may also be generating historical records relating to our own local history. United States census manuscripts, for example, have been a favorite hunting ground of genealogists for years, but as contemporary studies of local history, beginning back in 1959 with Merle



Curti's analysis of 19th-century Trempealeau County, Wisconsin, have shown, they are gold mines of information on local history as well. Other United States government records, such as those of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Forest Service, and especially the U.S. Geological Survey's maps and aerial photographs, cover a wide range of local subjects.

Corporate records of national firms, such as IBM or the Insurance Company of North America, both of which incidentally have active archives programs, can be used to study the impact of these companies on the local areas in which their facilities are located. Other national organizations whose local components' records we have already discussed, often make a policy that filters down to the local level, affecting activities and individuals there. Just as local organizations' files may hold letters received from national officials, so may national organizations' files hold letters sent from the local agency.

Regional, state, and other local organizations and agencies often create or receive records relating to a wide variety of different localities. Public power district records in the Pacific Northwest, for example, which have been the focus of an NHPRC-funded study over the past two years, contain not only information on the operation of the districts themselves, usually at the county or regional level, but also such local history documents as aerial photographs of the districts, photographs of personnel, and biographical data on individual employees. Legislators' case files contain letters from constituents detailing particular issues of local concern to them. Chapters of organizations in neighboring communities or counties may hold materials relating to cooperative activities between them and their neighboring chapters. In short, the possible sources for the creation of historical documents is endless.

Bear in mind, however, that different periods of history have created different types of materials which often have very different uses. In studying colonial history, for example, it is more logical to turn to local church and government records than to records of organizations, simply because organizations, be they the Sons of Temperance or the Daughters of the American Revolution, are largely 19th- and 20th-century creations. On the other hand, prior to the widespread use of the telephone, it was far more common for individuals to communicate personally by writing than it is today. Photographs and their immediate predecessors—the tintypes, calotypes, and daguerreotypes—simply didn't exist before the 1840s, while it wasn't until the 1890s that photography made its way out of the studio and into the hands of amateurs throughout the country. Motion pictures, such as documentaries and home movies, are a 20th-century phenomenon. In asking why local historians have not been able to document a particular activity or why emphasis is placed on certain areas of research rather than others, we must always ask ourselves if the sources are indeed available that will give us the answers to our questions.

Obviously, there is no dearth of potential creators of historical documents relating to local history. The next question, then, must be who collects local history materials and how we, as researchers and administrators alike, can find out what documents exist where. When many people think of local history, they think of a local historical society. Often organized at the county level, local historical societies can also focus, as does the Chicago Historical Society, on the history of a particular urban area or on the history of a region, as does the Chilkat Valley Historical Society in Alaska. Usually they collect materials relating to a particular locality, although some, such as those in major metropolitan centers, will, because of the interaction of the area with the mainstream of national life, have materials of national importance and scope as well. Local historical societies vary in the services they offer to their users. In fact, in some areas they are open perhaps only one or two days a month. It is evident, however, judging from the responses to the NHPRC survey of repositories for its *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories*, that local historical societies are second only to university libraries as institutions that collect archives and manuscript materials.

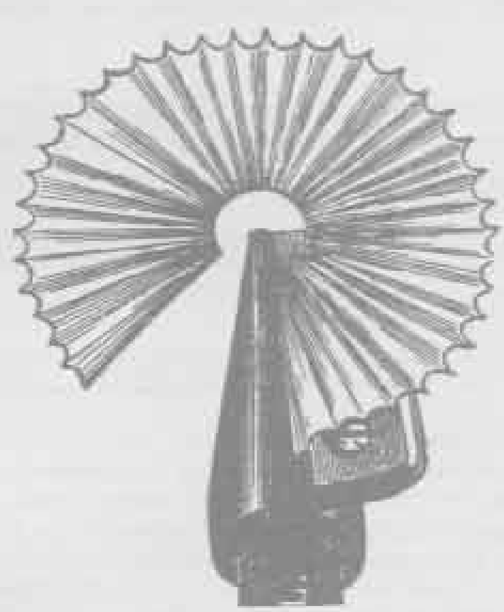
If local historical societies are the most logical place to find local history materials, they are not the only source. Corporate archives often contain business and personal records relating to the particular communities in which their operations were based. Although there are fewer than one hundred organized archives in this country sponsored by business firms, other business records have found their way into such libraries as the Baker Business Library at Harvard and the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library in Delaware. Local historical societies often hold records of particular local businesses.

Federal agencies are another likely source of local history information. The National Archives and its regional branches contain agency records, census records, and other materials dealing with specific localities. The regional offices and individual national forest offices of the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture often have active historical programs relating to the region in which the particular forest is located. Likewise, the National Park Service's parks, monuments, and historic sites have document collections relating to the particular regions they serve.

Local government units, such as county clerks' offices, are both creators and custodians of local history documents. Local government archives have been created in a few metropolitan areas, such as Philadelphia, and many state archives have active programs for microfilming and accessioning local government records. Other local government records, especially from the 19th century, have found their way into private institutions, such as historical societies and local college and university libraries. The vast majority of local government records, however, remain with the agency of their creation.

Medical institutions are an often unthought of source of local history materials. Ninteenth-century medical history in Philadelphia, for example, can be studied by a visit to the Pennsylvania Hospital Institute Medical Library, which has over 110 linear feet of hospital admission records, case histories, and materials relating to Thomas S. Kirkbride, founder of the institute. Hospitals often have collections relating to their history and that of the communities around them, and the astute researcher will fully exploit this source.

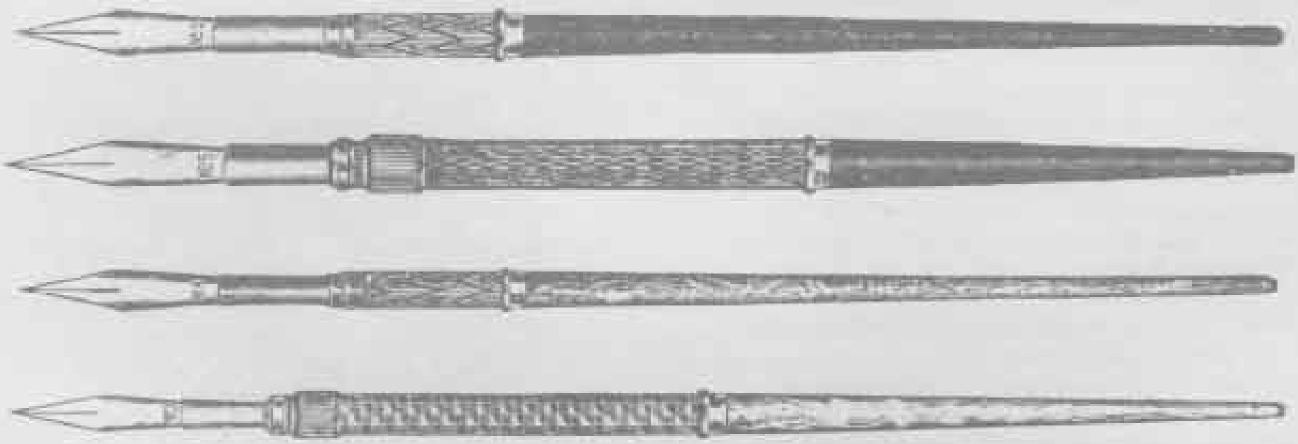
Many local historical societies operate museums, and these, as well as other museums, historic sites, restored houses, and other restorations, contain a variety of documents relating to the history of their localities. Public libraries, along with local museums and historical societies, often maintain either casual or active collecting programs relating to local history. The Martin Luther King Library in the



District of Columbia, for example, has a Washingtoniana collection, featuring a variety of documents relating to all aspects of the District's history. Smaller public libraries may hold only an isolated document or two, but they are still potential resources for the researcher.

Organizations and institutions are another research source. Many national organizations, such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the American Association of University Women, and the Grange, maintain archival programs, including documentation of local activities, in their national offices. Most major religious denominations have historical and archival programs. The Presbyterian Historical Society, for example, encourages local congregations to deposit their non-current records at the society's headquarters in Philadelphia. Local archival programs are also underway. With NHPRC support such a program was recently initiated by the Archdiocese of Boston and contains not only Archdiocesan administrative files, but also records of local parishes and congregations. Some local churches have historical programs of their own.

Special mention should be paid here to the active microfilming program sponsored by the Genealogical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Local records in the states have been microfilmed by special teams sent out by the church, and in addition to being deposited in the department's headquarters in Salt Lake City, they are often deposited in the archives of each state as well.



State archives often undertake microfilming programs of their own for local records, and, in some cases, records of local government agencies are actually accessioned into the archives. Other state departments, such as state libraries and museums, may collect manuscript materials pertaining to local regions. The Drake Well Museum in Titusville, Pennsylvania, for example, documents the history of the oil industry, including the communities it spawned, in northwestern Pennsylvania. State historical societies, since their collecting policies generally encompass all materials within a particular state, are unusually fertile sources for local history documents. Some states, such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ohio, have network systems of regional repositories coordinated by the central society that focus on collecting materials of a local nature.

College and university libraries and archives are an additional source of local historical documentary material. Memphis State University in Tennessee, for example, has a Mississippi Valley Collection of materials relating to the Memphis area, while the University of Pittsburgh's Archives of Industrial Society focuses on the history of the industrial region of western Pennsylvania. College archives contain materials documenting the impact of the institution on the community, as well as personal paper collections of faculty members, administrators, and alumni, many of whom may have been active in local affairs.

Since local history materials may be found in such a wide variety of repositories, it is necessary for the potential researcher, or the historical administrator trying to learn which agencies hold materials relating to his or her own, to have ready access to information about institutions and their holdings. For many years, researchers have relied on the National Historical Publications and Records Commission's *Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*, published in 1961, and the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, issued annually since 1959 by the Library of Congress, as their chief sources of information. Unfortunately, the listings of these two publications are far from complete. The *Guide*, for example, includes references to 1,287 archives and manuscript repositories, while *NUCMC* contains individual entries for about one thousand institutions. And yet, we know from looking at such excellent institutional directories as those published by the American Library Association, the American Association of Museums, and the AASLH that the potential number of repositories of historical documents is much higher.

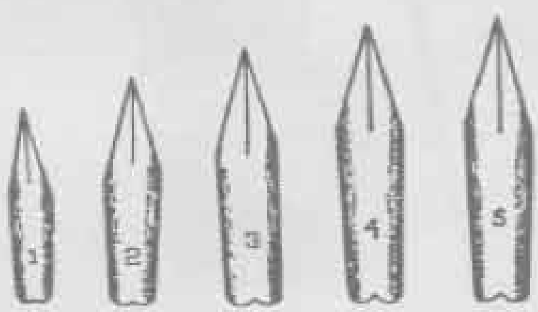
In order to solve this problem of user access, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission is working on a data base of information on all types of repositories of historical documents and their holdings. The first publication resulting from this data base, the *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories* has been published by the National Archives and lists summary information on approximately 3,250 repositories of historical documents, ranging from the National Archives itself to the Washington County Historical Society in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Information for the directory was compiled by a mail survey sent to over eleven thousand potential repositories of historical documents and from NHPRC's extensive bibliographic files, whose information was used to supplement that gathered on the survey forms. Individual entries are arranged by state, city, and the name of repository and contain such information as the institution's acquistions policy, its days and hours of service, and a narrative description of the general nature of its holdings. Extensive bibliographic references supplement the descriptions as do paragraphs preceding each state's entries describing its local records program. The volume is fully indexed and also includes special lists of repositories by type. Local historical societies compose the most frequently listed category with 571 of them being present. This figure alone should provide an idea of the potential of the directory as a resource for the study of local history.

The directory, however, is only the beginning of a much larger project to collect and disseminate information on historical source materials in the United States. The commission's plans call for the incorporation of data on individual collections and record groups, and at the present time several cooperative projects in such states as Washington, Kentucky, and New York are engaged in surveying and gathering this type of information. Because of the capabilities of the SPINDEX computer program package that NHPRC is using, the project is capable of generating not only one massive national guide publication, but also more specialized publications or even just simple printouts to individual states, repositories, subjects, or types of records. All aspects of the project utilize electronic data processing techniques, from initial entry of data using a magnetic tape-typewriter device to the final composition and printing of the volumes themselves by means of a sophisticated set of computer programs called interface programs, which correlate the computer data files with the visual composition requirements needed to produce a printed book. The significance that this project has for the study of local history is tremendous, for not only will researchers have greatly improved access to the raw materials of history, but local historical organizations themselves will be in a better position to know which other agencies in their region have similar collecting patterns and programs. This residual effect of improved inter-institutional cooperation is one of the results hoped for when, for the first time, diverse collecting agencies find that they do not exist in isolation in the local setting.

The stage, then, is set for the next question. Once we know who the creators of local history documents are, what types of records they have created, and where to go to do research in these materials, what kinds of research and other uses can be made of them? What can we learn about local history from studying historical documents?

Before about 1960, local history was seen as primarily the province of antiquarians, chroniclers, if you like, who were content, as in the numerous 19th-century county histories, to list an area's noteworthy events, and, along with biographies of local luminaries, call the resulting publication an example of local history. Aside from extolling the virtues of the founding fathers, however, these histories, contained little interpretation or analysis and tended to give the impression that the particular community involved had little or nothing in common with its neighbors, who were usually not discussed.

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough came with the WPA's Historical Records Survey during the 1930s. As a result of the efforts of survey teams dispatched throughout the various counties in most of the states and the publication of guides to a few states in which surveying was completed, not only did many historians become aware for the first time of the diversity of resources that existed at the local level, but local records were in effect legitimized by being made the focus of a federal government program.



Subsequent years have seen the proliferation of resources, such as microfilm copies of the United States census, for the study of local history, as well as a new interest on the part of a younger generation of scholars in examining the local government. Up to the early decades of the 20th century, the small town or semi-rural community was the basic form of social organization experienced by most Americans. Moreover, by studying the microcosm of the local community, scholars can test many of the theses on social and economic behavior postulated over the years by historical theorists. Testing of the Turner thesis on the frontier, for example, was the ostensible purpose of Merle Curti's *The Making of an American Community*, published in 1959, which was a forerunner of many contemporary studies into the nature of 19th-century community life. Other community studies on colonial localities such as those of Lockridge, Greven, and Zuckerman, try to relate pre-Revolutionary life

to social patterns extant in England during the same period and to explain 17th- and 18th-century social and political behavior in terms of the actual life of the times. An excellent summary of much of this new research, David J. Russo's *Families and Communities*, was published by the AASLH in 1974.

There are, however, other things that we can learn from local history materials and other uses for these materials besides scholarly historical research. Architectural records are one of the more neglected forms of historical documentation. Indeed, until the Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records received funding in 1976 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to begin a program of comprehensive surveying in this field, little systematic attention had been paid to these materials as a form of historical document. It is perhaps to the field of historic preservation that we owe most of the credit for developing this comparatively new field of historical documentation. Architectural records come in many forms, shapes, sizes, and media, and their uses are as diverse. Building plans, for example, provide the chief source of information for structural renovation of existing structures, and even if a plan of the exact building in question is not available, the study of similar structural plans can assist the restorationist in arriving at a conclusion on the style and construction of a particular era. Account books of contractors and architectural firms can be used to determine specifications, materials, paint colors, and other construction details. An evaluation of city building and zoning records gives us an idea of what alterations have occurred to a particular property and can also be useful in dating an otherwise chronologically indistinct structure. The study of city directories enables us to see what uses particular structures at certain addresses had and, used in conjunction with plats and other charts and maps such as those of census enumerators' districts, facilitates the reconstruction of neighborhood demographic patterns. In those cases where the records of individual architectural firms, especially those operating in a particular geographical area, are still extant, it is possible to trace the careers of individual architects, as well as the impact of a particular architectural style on a community.

A second important use for local history documents is simply to stimulate individual pride and consciousness of the local environment. The Georgia Department of Archives and History is currently conducting, with NEH funding, a "Vanishing Georgia" program for historic photographs. A mobile unit visits the county seat of each of Georgia's counties and, while there, solicits photographs still held by individual citizens. The photographs are copied, and the copies are placed in the state archives; the originals are returned to their owners. Such a program not only stimulates the interest of individuals in their community's past, but draws on the individual as a resource person to provide identification of the subject matter of the pictures. Such photographs are then used as part of a curriculum package for local schools, another potential user of local history documents.

Many educators are finding that a student's interest in history, particularly at the high school and beginning college levels, is stimulated by the use of primary source materials drawn from either the local community or from the student's own background. Some instructors, such as Eliot Wigginton who pioneered in the study of local Appalachian culture with his students at the Foxfire School in Rabun Gap, Georgia, are finding that students are eager to create their own local history materials and, armed with camera and portable tape recorder, are capable of creating documentation of individuals whose lives are without the more traditional literary records. Wigginton's program has been copied throughout the country, and such publications as *The Salt Book*, which deals with seacoast life in Maine, are evidence that this approach is successful from the perspective of the student, the teacher, the subject of the research, and the general public who reads the final product.

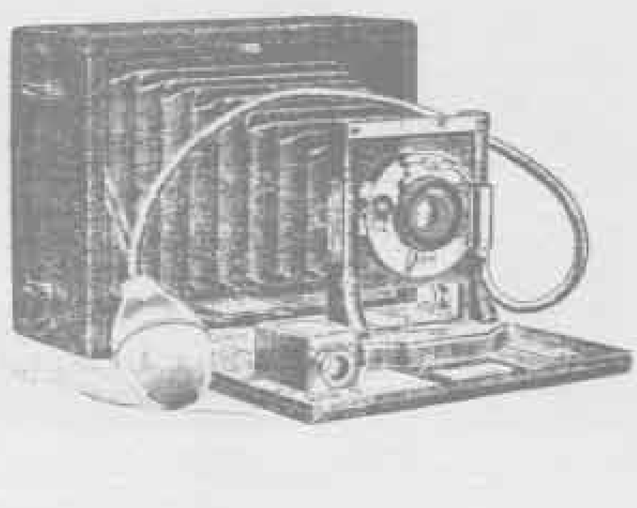
Although the *Roots* phenomenon has become somewhat of a cliche, it is certain that in a rapidly changing and at times alienating society, involvement with local history and one's own origins in the community can do much to stimulate a sense of self-worth and collective pride at the same time. Too often our judgments of the past are based on stereotypes and hearsay; the study of local history is one way of determining what truly was the lot of our ancestors and predecessors. Only by knowing from whence we have come can we have any real idea about where we are going.

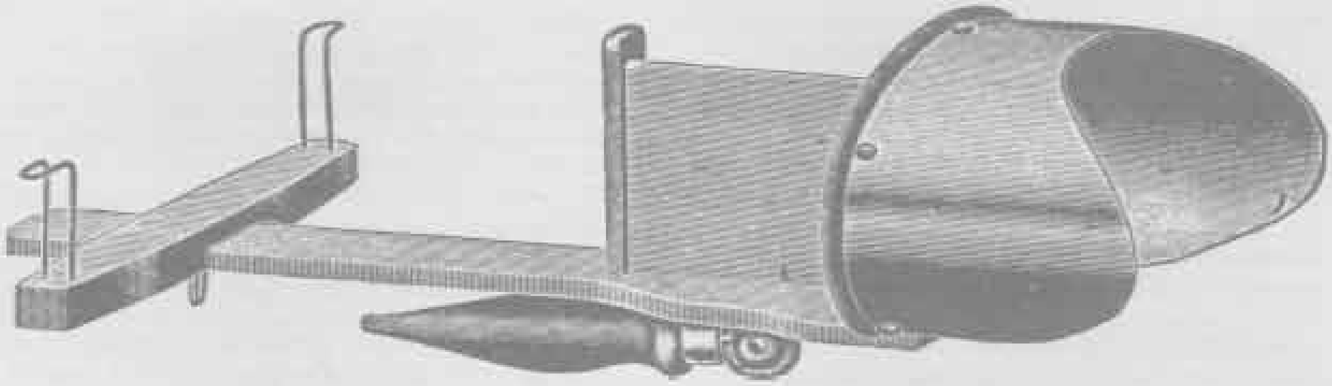
Despite the apparent simplicity of the situation, it is also clear that if we are to continue to develop programs in this country relating to local history and its documents, we need to address ourselves to some basic problems in the field. One of the most serious of these is preservation. At a federally sponsored conference on energy and cultural institutions held in Washington, representatives of various organizations, such as the American Association of Museums, as well as of funding agencies, met to discuss the implications of national and state energy policies, energy cutbacks, and similar matters, and what, if any, lobbying and other pressure activities could be used to make legislators aware of the needs of the cultural community. There was nothing wrong with such objectives, but it was striking that most people present assumed that institutions already had the energy-using equipment—air conditioning, humidity control, and the like—essential for preservation of their holdings. This, however, from the experience of NHPRC, is simply not the case, and the small local historical society is often in need of the most basic equipment essential for the preservation of its collections. There are some historical societies in northern parts of the country, for example, that simply close their doors during the winter. The reason—they have no heat. Needless to say, they have no humidity control, no air conditioning, no security systems, and perhaps, as was the case with one local historical society in Massachusetts, no water or electricity either. Given conditions such as these, it is surprising that many collections at the local level are in as good a condition as they are.

Even if the institution has some of the basic facilities, such as heat and air conditioning, it is less likely to have any trained staff member who can perform the elementary conservation and preservation steps necessary for resolution of even the most elementary problems. Commercial restoration shops, such as the New England Document Conservation Center, are few and far between and are simply unavailable in some parts of the country, although special arrangements can sometimes be made with an appropriate state historical society or archives. Moreover, preservation costs money, a commodity often in short supply in societies with fewer than five hundred members.

There is no quick and easy solution to the problem. Funding agencies such as the NHPRC and the NEH are simply unable to meet the needs of all; nor should they be expected to do so. Some special training programs, such as that conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society for local historical society personnel, are attempting to alleviate the situation, and we can hope the success of this and other training methods, such as basic workshops and reference books, will eventually lead to a resolution of the problem.

Physical preservation, however, is only one problem. Another, which is closely related, is that of administration and access. Many institutions holding materials relating to local history are staffed by non-professional volunteers, and even those, such as public libraries, that have professional staff, often do not have a person specifically trained in archives and manuscripts. Too often, as is clear from surveying done at the NHPRC, historical documents and other primary source materials are seen as being incidental to an institution's other holdings, administrative step-children, as





it were, and do not receive essential financial or staff support. Security arrangements in such repositories are sometimes woefully lacking as are proper storage facilities for the material.

Local history materials are, then, too often found in a "Catch-22" situation. If no institution decides to collect them and make them available to users, they are probably in danger of ultimate physical destruction and will never be able to tell reseachers anything about the past. And yet, even if they do find their way into an institution, there is still no guarantee that proper preservation procedures will be followed and that they will be there 150 years from now for our great-grandchildren's enlightenment. Moreover, will the same level of interest be maintained in local materials if they are removed from the immediate site of their creation to the fairly anonymous, but physically sound, setting of a large state historical society or university library?

There are probably no easy answers. Microfilming is expensive and time-consuming, although its success with local government records leads one to think that similar success could prevail with materials held in the private sector. There are many options open in the area of preservation and administration of these materials, and within the coming years we may see more and more institutions turning to various types of networking and cooperative arrangements in order to solve their historical records problems.

As administrators of historical collections, then, there are several basic things that we can do to ensure that local historical documents are available to users of all types for years to come. First, we must work to uncover new sources of materials not yet in repositories. Projects such as "Vanishing Georgia" and "Foxfire" are only scratching the surface of available materials, whether they already exist, as in the case of historic photographs, or are to be created, as in the case of oral history interviews. In the course of our work in uncovering these sources, we must also be aware of the diversity of individuals and groups that have gone into making our community's history. The days of an elitist approach to local history are over, and we can ill-afford to continue perpetuating stereotypes about our country's past and the citizens who have helped to make it.

Another of our goals, in addition to collecting local history documents, should be to stimulate awareness of the significance of these materials and their study. Education and outreach programs extending from elementary school children to senior citizens give individuals an awareness of their own past and stimulate interest in local history in general. School curriculum materials, for example, can be developed to effectively use local resources and institutions. Volunteer programs, whether they are for docents or historical administration interns, can provide relief from the ever-present people-power shortage, as well as providing potential continuing support for the programs of the local repository. Exhibits and special programs aimed at exploiting local history resources are another facet of this educational process.

As administrators and researchers, we also need to develop an awareness of federally and privately funded programs designed specifically with local history materials in mind. These programs can give our institutions a much needed shot in the arm, and, while they cannot substitute for effective day-to-day administration, they can provide individual repositories with the resources to develop special programs relating to historical source materials. The National Historic Publications and Records Commission's records program, for example, has, during its three-year existence, made many local history grants, such as one to the Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, Historical Society for preservation, arrangement, and description of 18th- through

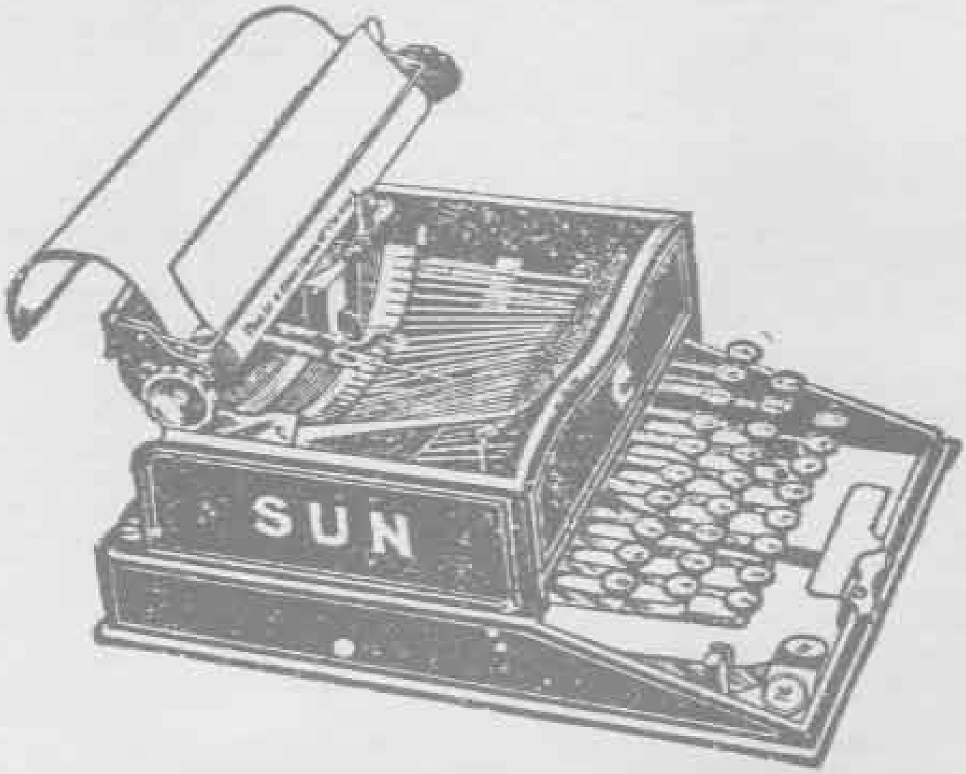
20th-century county records, another to the Social Law Library in Boston for preservation of early local court records, and another to the Mattatuck Historical Society of Waterbury, Connecticut, for the preservation and processing of local business records. It is up to historians to become aware of related local resources, such as private foundations, business firms, and organizations, that can be enlisted in the cause of preserving local history materials. New programs, such as HEW's Institute of Museum Services, are being developed, and the alert administrator will exploit the opportunities these agencies present.

Improved access for researchers is another continuing need. Although the NHPRC data base will fill a major gap in basic knowledge of local history source materials, there is still an acute need for basic internal finding aids or even simple physical arrangement of materials. Despite the educational efforts of such organizations as the Society of American Archivists, too many institutions are still clinging to antiquated, inefficient means of arrangement and description of their materials. With the great increase in volume of most 20th-century collections, we can no longer afford to engage in such procedures as item indexing, calendaring, cross-referencing of individual documents, and the like. We can no longer afford to practice restrictive and capricious access policies that deny researchers full knowledge of the past. And we can no longer afford to be so naive as to believe that we are immune from the hazards of theft, vandalism, and pollution.

We need to be aware and to utilize whatever educational opportunities are available to us that will improve our capacity to administer our holdings of local history documents. Many of the materials—photographs, films, high acid paper, audio tapes—that are housed in our repositories are chemically unstable, and we must be aware of what we can do, even with the minimum of facilities, to preserve them. We need to develop a knowledge of modern techniques of business administration and fund-raising and be receptive to the potential of such networking and inter-institutional cooperation. In short, we need to develop in ourselves the same skills as any professional manager in a large corporation.

All of this may seem a long distance away from the initial discussion of the nature of local history documents and their creators. It really isn't, however. The process of creating, collecting, preserving, and administering collections of local history materials is a spiral leading upward from the initial act of Aunt Nellie clicking the shutter on her Polaroid at the DAR picnic. If we think that the Aunt Nellies and the DARs and the Polaroid pictures of this world have any value at all, we should try our best to give them the same attention, care, and professional concern that we would give to a letter by Thomas Jefferson. In the best sense of the Declaration of Independence, the day of the common man and the common woman has come, and, given the opportunity, the documents of their local environment will provide both this and generations to come with the materials from which to document the real American history.

Nancy Sahli is coordinator of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission's guide/data base project and was supervisory editor of the *Directory of Archives and Manuscripts Repositories in the United States*. She holds an AB degree from Vassar College and master's and doctoral degrees in American history from the University of Pennsylvania. Sahli is the author of numerous articles on women's history and archives administration which have appeared in such journals as *Ohio History*, *Pennsylvania History*, and *The American Archivist*.



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TECHNICAL LEAFLET 115

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American Association for State and Local History

Technical

LEAFLET

Early American Account Books: Interpretation, Cataloguing, and Use

By Robert J. Wilson III

What does one do with old account books? These troublesome documents, unwieldy, dirty, and difficult to catalogue, are frequently the despair of a great many librarians and curators in local historical societies. The volumes often lurk in some dark corner of the library, like stubborn children who refuse to be assimilated into the archival family.

Librarians, however, are not the only people who are uncomfortable when confronted with account books. These old volumes have been largely ignored by the broader scholarly community which, mistakenly, has tended to regard bookkeeping as a mysterious art beyond the ken of non-professionals. Account books, therefore, have been chiefly exploited by economic historians, students of material culture, and the inevitable antiquarian interested in the price of a half-yard of shalloon in 1765.

The failure to rely readily on account books in historical research is all the more curious given recent scholarly interest in the lives of the historically inarticulate—those individuals commonly ignored by traditional history. Few sources depict with greater fidelity the day-to-day economic life

of farmers, laborers, and merchants. The purpose of this leaflet, then, is to suggest how early American account books (early eighteenth through early nineteenth century) may be organized and catalogued, as well as to indicate some of the possibilities they afford for scholarly research.

Ledgers and Day Books

Account books are difficult to classify since the purposes of the people who kept them varied so widely. A collection may include a journal listing the daily household expenses of a farmer's wife, as well as the sophisticated consignment ledgers and trial balances of a mid-nineteenth-century industrial firm. Most account books from the Colonial and Early National periods, however, may be divided into two general categories—ledgers and day books.

Ledgers consist of individual accounts that cover a time period varying from a year or less to five years or more. The keeper of the accounts can, for instance, find all the credits and debits of Jonathan Doe from 1800 to 1810 listed on two opposite pages.

Day books, sometimes called "waste books" or "blotters," were journals of original entry. On each page or two were recorded all the transactions conducted on any given day. Day books were used, in effect, as the data source for ledgers. (Surviving day books, incidentally, are proving to be far more numerous than earlier scholars had supposed.) One frequently finds the eighteenth-century ledger and day book format casually intertwined in the same book.

Pre-Industrial Bookkeeping

Modern librarians often find the informality of eighteenth-century American account books frustrating. This does not mean that colonial account keepers were hopeless amateurs. Indeed, from the 1730s on, most merchants were familiar with double-entry bookkeeping, thanks to popular instruction texts such as John Mair's *Bookkeeping Methodiz'd* (Edinburgh, 1736). Nevertheless, a store merchant might suddenly stop recording daily business and insert a personal diary, or an agricultural journal, or a list of wholesale purchases. To add to the interpretive confusion, more than one person frequently used the account books. For all these reasons, I warn cataloguers at local libraries and historical societies against forcing a volume to fit a strict definition. Indeed, in a small collection, it would be quite proper for a cataloguer to accession the volumes under the general category of "Account Book" and therefore avoid the problem of technical nomenclature posed by the more ambiguous account books.

The bookkeeping system in pre-industrial America was unquestionably more primitive and less tidy than in later periods. Owing to the scarcity of specie and the uncertainty of provincial currency, most transactions involved exchanges of goods and services. However, to prevent this system of barter from becoming too cumbersome to record, colonial bookkeepers assigned a monetary value in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence to these goods and services. For this reason, we must not expect to find neatly-balanced accounts or annual profit-and-loss statements in the earlier account books. Accounts at a general store often were not settled for years; in many cases the merchant had to wait for the death of a customer before collecting a debt. This system, called "bookkeeping barter" by historian W. T. Baxter, lubricated the intricate network of credit which sustained the pre-industrial economy.

The following excerpt is from the ledger of Samuel Davison, a cabinetmaker from Plainfield, Massachusetts. It illustrates most of the characteristic elements of bookkeeping barter in the early ledgers. Although the account covers the period 1802-1806, the reader will note that monetary value is still expressed in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence. The left side of the ledger is the debit (Dr) side and the right, or contra (Cr), side lists the credit of Mr. Davison's customer, George Vineing. For those who are completely unfamiliar with the art of bookkeeping, one little couplet from an early nineteenth-century accounting instruction book may be of some use:

Profit and Loss Accounts are plain
I debit Loss and credit gain.

Notice that, in exchange for his furniture, Vineing rendered payment in cash, labor, produce, and third-party credit.

	George Vineing Dr		
1802	to three chairs with board		
May	bottoms & one with		
	rockers 12/6		12-6
	to one whurl /3		0 -3
	to one chest for George 13/9	0	13-9
			13-9
1805			
Feb.	12 to six chairs 1-10-0	1	10-0
	to one table 12/	0	12-
Dec.	to mending a cutter 2/6		2-6
	to whetting & setting a saw 2/6		2-6
	to six screws /3		-3
	to one whurl /3		-3
		2	76
		2	76

	George Vineing Cr		
1804	by Mr. Beales 12/9	0	12-9
Mar.	by money 12/	0	12-0
	by money 1/9		1-9
1805			
	by a note given to		
	C. Bisbe	1	16-0
Dec.			
1805			
	by half a bushel of beans 3/		3-0
	by work one day 3/		3-0
1806			
Dec.	by work one day 3/		3-0
	by money 2/6	2	5-0
			26
		2	7-6
		2	7-6

Cataloguing

Identification of Owner

Having classified an account book according to type, a cataloguer must identify the person or firm to which the book belonged. This is not always an easy matter, particularly in the older books. The owner may have his name elegantly inscribed on the first page, or he may have scribbled it in an obscure corner of the fly-leaf where it competes with the names of his children, who used the discarded account book for penmanship practice. Often the only clue to the owner's identity may be found in a note inserted after balancing an account. The note might read:

"Then made all accounts even to our statisfaction *[sic]* as witness our hands

Samuel Davison
George Vineing"

In this instance, since George Vineing's previously mentioned account clearly proclaims him to be a customer, one may infer that Mr. Davison is the likely owner of the book. One should always remember that most account books existed solely for the convenience of their owners, and therefore tend to be highly idiosyncratic.

Catalogue Card

If an account book was kept by an individual merchant, craftsman, or such, the main entry on the catalogue card should include:

* The owner's name.
* The owner's vital dates.
* The type of account book (ledger, day book, agricultural journal).
* The profession of the owner or general subject matter of the account book (if this can be ascertained).
* The place where the accounts were kept and the inclusive dates of the book.

In the case of a company or firm whose accounts were kept by a professional accountant, the name of the firm would replace the first two categories. If any secondary sources, such as local town histories, provide information about the owner or his business, cite them in short-title form at the bottom of the card. Finally, if time and staff permit, add a series of entry cards based on the subject matter of the account books. Examples of subject titles might be: BLACKSMITHING, CLOTHING, COOPERAGE, DYEING, MEDICINE, SHOEMAKERS, TAVERNKEEPERS, TOOLS. Use Library of Congress subject classifications unless the titles are simply too contemporary to adequately describe early American institutions and professions.

Field, Moses, 1719-1787.

Account book; shoemaker, also grain, labor, potash, produce, salt. [Northfield, Mass., 1750-1795]

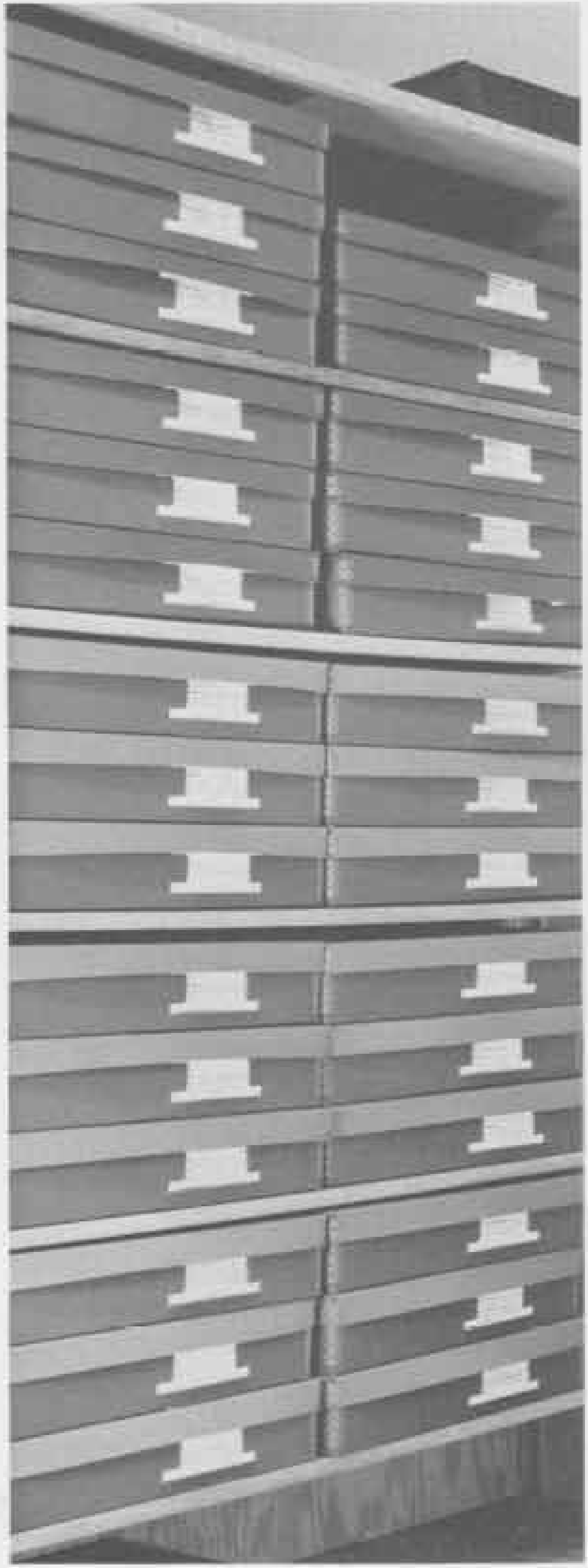
lv. manuscript. 30.5cm.

Also a brief account book of Ebenezer Field (1688-1723); blacksmith [1721-1723]

Final two pages list Indian atrocities, 1744-1748.

PVMA No. 5437.

Temple & Sheldon's Northfield, pp. 442,444.



Care and Storage

Account books, particularly the older ones, tend to be longer than they are wide, and often are enclosed in a decaying leather binding. To prevent further deterioration and to keep the books from becoming too dog-eared, store them horizontally. Use acid-free storage boxes and order them in the largest standard size. Although account books vary in height from 15 cm. to 53 cm., the average range is 30-35 cm. Because of the often delicate state of the binding, flagging for identification is preferable to labeling on the spine. If a particular book is of great value, professional restorative work and a more careful mode of preservation may be in order.

Frequently, you will find old account books pasted over with scrapbook clippings. You may steam the clippings off, but approach the restoration of such books cautiously. The steaming process is a tedious one, and—since pages were probably slit out for the scrapbook—the underlying account book may be so eviscerated that its value to researchers may be negligible.

Research Possibilities

What is the historical value of account books? Why is it important that they be preserved? For museum curators and their staffs the answer is clear. The authentic re-creation of an early nineteenth-century general store, or the reconstruction of the agricultural economy of colonial times, indeed, any attempt to explore the material fabric of our past, is heavily reliant upon account books. Social and cultural historians are also beginning to exploit these old volumes.

The research possibilities, depending upon the extent of a collection, are considerable. Account books have already provided much of the grist for large-scale research into the economic realities of the ante-bellum South, the tobacco economy of the colonial Chesapeake, and the mercantile world of eighteenth-century Boston, to name a few areas. They are also indispensable to historians studying the local community.

The objectivity of account books is a considerable factor in their usefulness. Unlike diaries, journals, or wills, they were not intended for the consumption of posterity. Account books, therefore, afford an unvarnished glimpse into the economy of life in a household, a farm, a village, or a factory. Furthermore, unlike probate inventories, they allow us to catch merchants and consumers in the prime of their economic life.

These seemingly dry, dusty ledgers often provide revealing insights into the character of their owners. Elijah Williams of Deerfield, Massachusetts, for instance, was a prosperous proprietor of a general store. We may infer one of the reasons for his success from a note enclosed in one of his account books, dated March 4, 1760, which advises a customer: "I have an account against you which is of a very long standing and which you must settle immediately or expect Trouble."

This no-nonsense approach can be contrasted with the gentle irony of Linus Yale, Jr., an industrial pioneer in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, who wrote in one account book that: "The manufacture of Locks under this Patent during the Years of 1858, 1859, and 1860 was small and so far as I can ascertain unattended with profit."

Even a modest collection of account books can begin to provide answers to scores of historical questions. How did consumption patterns vary among the different social strata in a small town? How did these patterns vary over time in an industrializing community? To what extent was the rural community in colonial America in fact economically self-contained?

The utility of account books is not confined to economic historians alone. Scholars interested in the history of the family, the professions, women, agriculture, medicine, and transportation are finding these sources essential to their research. The interest in account books is rapidly growing among members of the academic community, and the local historical society and museum should, accordingly, take a heightened interest in providing for the preservation and accessibility of these important and irreplaceable documents.

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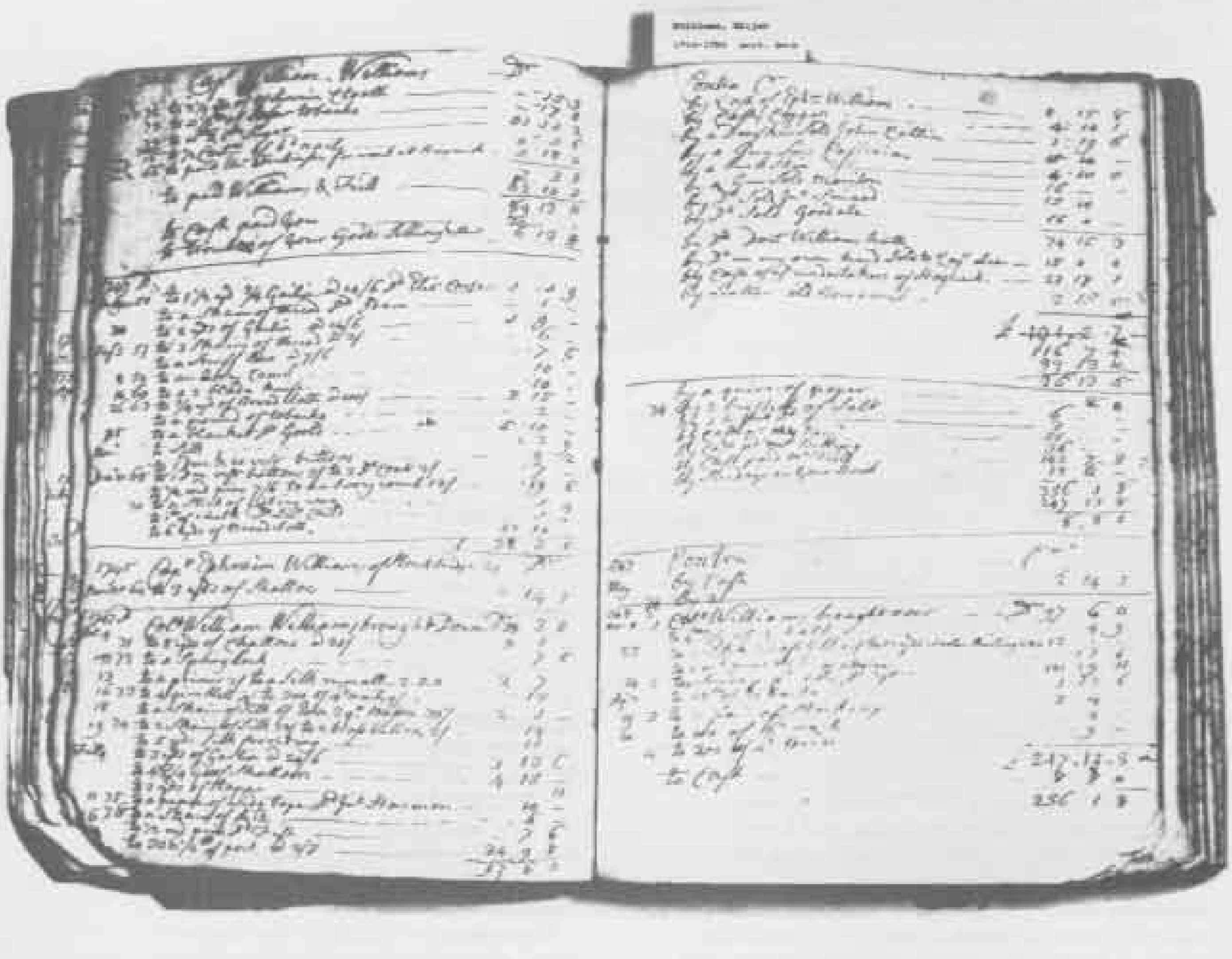

Robert J. Wilson III holds a master's degree from the University of Hawaii and a Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts in early American history.

With a grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities through Historic Deerfield, Inc., he organized and catalogued some 380 business account books held in the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association collection and jointly administered by Deerfield's Memorial Hall Museum and the Henry N. Flynt Library of Historic Deerfield, Inc. The result composes a research guide entitled, "Economic Life in Western Massachusetts: Materials for its History."

Wilson currently serves as assistant editor for *Guide to the Study of United States History Outside the United States, 1945-1980*, a project of the University of Massachusetts.

The photographs in this technical leaflet were taken by Ann W. du Mont and were made available through the courtesy of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association of Deerfield, Mass.

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