

Labor Union Grievance Records: An Appraisal Strategy

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Among the many duties and responsibilities of the archivist, records appraisal stands out as among the most intellectually taxing. Appraisal has been defined as:

the process of determining the value and thus the disposition of records based upon their current administrative, legal and fiscal use; their evidential and informational or research value; their arrangement; and their relationship to other records.²

While the archival profession may, as a whole, accept this definition, archivists have failed to establish a similar consensus regarding the actual techniques and strategies that comprise the appraisal process.³ Some archivists prefer the application of specific guidelines and standardized formulas; others question the imposition of any restrictions whatsoever. The views of the majority no doubt reside somewhere between these two extremes.

- 1 The author would like to acknowledge the kind assistance provided by his former colleagues of the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at the Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, especially Philip P. Mason, Warner Pflug and George Tselos who reviewed an earlier draft of this paper. NHPRC financial assistance during 1977-78 is also gratefully acknowledged.
- 2 Frank B. Evans, et al., eds., "A Brief Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators and Records Managers," *American Archivist* 37, no. 4 (October, 1974): 417.
- 3 To date, the archival profession lacks a thorough bibliographic analysis of the writings concerned with records appraisal. But one may reconstruct the debate by first reviewing the G. Philip Bauer and Herman Kahn essays that comprise *National Archives Staff Circular* 13 (June, 1946) and T.R. Schellenberg's essay "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," *Bulletin of the National Archives* 8 (October, 1956): 1-46. The utilitarian arguments of Bauer find their way into aspects of the following: Sidney R. Hall, "Retention and Disposal of Correspondence Files," *American Archivist* 15, no. 1 (January, 1952): 3-14; J.J. Hammitt, "Government Archives and Records Management," *American Archivist* 28, no. 2 (April, 1965): 219-222; Paul Lewinson, "Towards Accessioning Standards—Research Records," *American Archivist* 23, no. 3 (July, 1960): 297-309; Vernon B. Santen, "Appraisal of Financial Records," *American Archivist* 32, no. 4 (October, 1969): 357-361; and Wilfred I. Smith, "Archival Selection: A Canadian View," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3, no. 6 (October, 1967): 275-280. While Hall, Hammitt and Lewinson do not take full account of the contents of the documentation in developing their appraisal strategies, Santen limits collection development to a strict regime of cost analysis and Smith argues that retention ought to be based on "probable use" without carefully defining his terms. Examples of a more broadly conceived notion of archival appraisal include: David L. Lewis, "Appraisal Criteria for Retention and Disposal of Business Records," *American Archivist* 32, no. 1 (January, 1969): 21-4; Larry Steck and Francis Blouin, "Hannah Lay and Company: Sampling the Records of a Century of Lumbering in Michigan," *American Archivist* 39, no. 1 (January, 1976): 15-20; and Meyer H. Fishbein, "Appraising Information in Machine Language Form," *American Archivist* 35, no. 1 (January, 1972): 35-43 and "Appraisal of Twentieth Century Records for Historical Use," *Illinois Libraries* 52, no. 2 (February, 1970): 154-62.

As the profession's methodological perceptions have developed through the years, there has been a noticeable trend away from the rigorous compartmentalization of the appraisal process and towards a more flexible approach. Thus, Maynard J. Brichford may write that:

research appraisal is best considered as a *process* that requires extensive staff preparation, a thorough analysis of the origin and characteristics of record series, a knowledge of techniques for the segregation and selection of records, an awareness of the development of research methodologies and needs, and a sequential consideration of administrative, research and archival values. Without a set of master guidelines or a magic formula, the archivist may gain a better idea of the continuing process that shapes our documentary patrimony.⁴

Though less organized and detailed than one would have hoped for, Brichford's work does attempt to identify the various components of an intellectual framework for archival appraisal. But even as a "process", appraisal does require more definition of its method and purpose than Brichford offers. For the most part, archivists have learned of appraisal techniques by example and first-hand experience. While such a case method approach has its merits, much of the professional literature on appraisal touches upon methodology in passing or couches it in terms that are only relevant to the particular collection under discussion. With the possible exception of Brichford's problematic conceptual study, a much more systematic approach as well as more discussion, research and thoughtful analysis will be required before archivists can turn with confidence to the writings of their colleagues when faced with an especially vexing appraisal problem.⁵

An appraisal project carried out at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, during 1977-78 deserves examination as a means of illustrating and focusing upon the appraisal process in general. Its usefulness will be found perhaps in its broader implications. Since appraisal is such an individualized process, varying according to the unique demands of the collection being considered, one must invariably begin with the particular. By laying bare the project's intellectual framework and the appraisal strategies that grew out of the experience, it ought to be possible to move beyond the "concrete" problems addressed in the original undertaking and to explore ways in which archivists might enhance their current appraisal efforts.

The Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs' appraisal study focused on the grievance case files of the United Auto Workers (hereafter cited as the UAW).⁶

4 Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning* (Chicago, 1977) p. 2.

5 The Evans' bibliography testifies to this fact by including only five pages on all aspects of appraisal but very little on the development of appraisal strategies and procedures. See Frank B. Evans, *Modern Archives and Manuscripts: A Select Bibliography* (Chicago, 1975) pp. 21-5.

6 Funding for this project came from both the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and Wayne State University. Dr. Philip P. Mason, Director of the Walter Reuther Library, served as project director and Warner Pflug, the Library's Assistant Director, served as project supervisor. The author, formerly of Stanford University, served as research associate and archivist for the project.

For many years, management of grievance documentation has posed a difficult problem for both labor unions as the generating organizations and labor archives charged with the responsibility for their storage, processing and preservation. Each union local, regional office and departmental headquarters maintains its own set of grievance case files at considerable cost. These records are copious, complex and dispersed. While there is much duplication, it appears that many of these documents remain unique to their specific offices of origin. As the costs of servicing these materials increase and as more pressure is placed upon archivists and the unions they represent to make them available for research, those concerned with grievance records have sought answers to this growing problem. Indeed, as far as labor union records are concerned, grievance case files constitute an archival problem of the first magnitude.

In an effort to at least identify problem areas and perhaps develop appraisal strategies, the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs with the financial assistance of the U.S. National Historical Publications and Records Commission assembled a project staff and chose the grievance records of the UAW as their test case. The project staff settled on the UAW because the Archives enjoyed a close working relationship with the Union and had in fact been named official depository for UAW records. More importantly, the UAW processes thousands of grievances annually and has millions of case files on hand or already deposited at the Archives. UAW problems in managing grievance records may be described as acute. The union is also a complex amalgam of semi-skilled, skilled, white collar and professional workers residing in both the United States and Canada. Its locals are organized by plant (though many are amalgamations of workers from various plants); its regional offices are organized by geographical region and its international departments are organized by industry (aerospace, auto parts, agricultural implements, etc.) or by company (Ford, American Motors, etc.). While the history and development of the UAW as a labor organization sets it apart from other labor unions, the project staff nevertheless agreed that it would serve as an excellent focus for our study because it shared the same grievance records problems faced to a greater or lesser extent by all American labor unions. In addition, its complexity and diversity presented any and all of the obstacles that an archivist might expect to face in devising a practicable appraisal strategy for grievance records.

The grievance process itself is common to most modern labor organizations. Though terms like "union activities" may conjure an image of collective bargaining and strike action, union officials actually spend much more of their work day in grievance handling than in contract negotiations. The grievance process serves to mitigate industrial conflict between contract agreements.⁷ Through a series of oral and written procedures, usually set down within the body of the union's contract with management, a worker may raise a grievance or complaint over his treatment at the hands of his employer. The worker may also object to the

7 See, for example, Canadian Union of Public Employees (C.L.C.), *Human Relations at Work* (Ottawa, 1968) 5 vols.; Bertram R. Crane and Roger M. Hoffman, *Successful Handling of Labor Grievances* (New York, 1956); Vad D. Kennedy, "Grievance Negotiation," *Industrial Conflict*, eds. Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross (New York, 1954) pp. 280-291; Florence Peterson, "Settlement of Grievances Under Union Agreements," *Monthly Labor Review* 50, no. 2 (February, 1940): 286-311; and A.W.J. Thomson, *The Grievance Procedure in the Private Sector*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1974).

manner in which his or her employer interprets or implements specific clauses of the contract. By resorting to grievance mechanisms, employees and management can settle day-to-day differences without the use of more disruptive forms of dispute, such as strikes. The written stages of the grievance process generate considerable documentation, including grievance forms (often provided by management), memoranda, correspondence, meeting minutes and transcripts, employee work records, briefs, and arbitration decisions and awards.⁸

For the purposes of the study, it was necessary to first identify past and current grievance procedures affecting industrial relations between the UAW and those corporations with which the union holds contracts. At the same time, we wanted to establish the extent to which scholars had already employed grievance records in their research. Our objective in carrying out the latter inquiry was to collect information concerning the possible research value of these materials while an analysis of grievance procedures would hopefully unveil the specific types of documentary evidence that we might find. To a certain extent, these first two components of our research program proved complementary. Union publications about grievance procedures often shed light on their potential research use while studies by industrial relations specialists and labor sociologists contributed substantially to the project staff's understanding of how the UAW's grievance procedures operated on a day-to-day basis. In addition, these latter studies occasionally discuss the types of records that one could expect to find among grievance case files.⁹

Our study of grievance records therefore began with a survey of the literature of grievance handling. Significantly, few scholars have actually resorted to the use of union grievance records in their own research. David A. Peach and E. Robert Livernash,¹⁰ two business administration specialists, have examined the grievance process as it operates in the steel industry, but in their quantitative approach to the data, they rely almost entirely upon surveys and interviews largely ignoring documentary evidence. Labor arbitrators, who have shown a professional and even a scholarly interest in the grievance process, not surprisingly tend to concentrate on the process's last stage—binding arbitration.¹¹ A

8 See Milton Derber, W. Ellison Chalmers and Ross Stagner, *Local Union-Management Relations* (Urbana, Ill., 1960); Milton Derber, W.E. Chalmers, Milton T. Edelman and Harry C. Triadis, *Plant Union-Management Relations: From Practice to Theory* (Urbana, Ill., 1965); and John T. Dunlop, *Industrial Relations Systems* (New York, 1958).

9 Works by labor unions on grievance handling that are particularly useful include: Terrence F. Connors, *Talks with Stewards* (Detroit, 1966) and Phillip L. Garman, *Handling Grievances* (Urbana, Ill., 1960). For views on the grievance process from the arbitrator's perspective, see: Robben Wright Fleming, *The Labor Arbitration Process* (Urbana, Ill., 1965) and Robert B. McKersie, "Avoiding Written Grievances: A Successful Program," *Journal of Business of the University of Chicago* 35, no. 2 (April, 1962): 135-152. Also see note 11.

10 David A. Peach and E. Robert Livernash, *Grievance Initiation and Resolution: A Study in Basic Steel* (Cambridge, 1974).

11 Gabriel N. Alexander, "Impartial Umpireship: The GM-UAW Experience," *Arbitration and the Law, Proceedings of the 12th Annual Meeting, National Academy of Arbitration*, ed. Jean T. McKelvey (Washington, D.C., 1959) pp. 108-151; Harold W. Davey, "The John Deere-UAW Permanent Arbitration System," *Critical Issue in Labor Arbitration, Proceedings of the 10th Annual Meeting, National Academy of Arbitration*, ed. Jean T. McKelvey (Washington, D.C., 1957) pp. 161-192; "Restructuring Grievance Arbitration Procedures: Some Modest Proposals," *Iowa Law Review* 54, no.4 (February, 1969): 560-78, and "The Uses and Misuses of Tripartite Boards in Grievance Arbitration," *Developments in American and Foreign Arbitration*,

few industrial relations specialists have employed an historical approach when studying grievances,¹² but no historian has yet published a study based upon grievance materials.¹³ One natural response to such conspicuous neglect would be to conclude that the documents themselves have little to offer researchers and may therefore be passed over by the archivist. However, as any archivist who has had sufficient contact with the scholarly community can testify, it is often up to the archivist to first make a new source for research known and available before academics will embrace it as their own. A number of those on the project staff were trained labor historians. Their own limited experience with grievance records within the confines of the Walter Reuther Library suggested that these records were a case in point. Though neglected, they had substantial research value.

To clarify the situation, we contacted other labor historians. They in turn admitted that they were either unaware of the research potential of grievance files (though quick to grasp their usefulness) or that due to the bulk and inaccessibility of these materials, they had always sought alternative sources of information when conducting their research. They reinforced our conclusion that scholarly avoidance of grievance records was due more to a lack of awareness than to a lack of interest. It must also be admitted that archivists have been unable to present these records in a form useful to researchers, hence discouraging use. In addition, since the main value of grievance records lies primarily in their use through aggregate statistical analysis and since this has been a little-used methodological approach by labor historians, even the actual availability of these materials has not always stimulated research use. If these scholars had at an earlier date pressed archivists to process grievance case files for their use, many of the problems addressed in this paper may have been resolved previously. In short, there is no simple explanation for the under-utilization of grievance records. The answer has many components. But, as a by-product of our appraisal project, we hoped to generate more awareness, both among potential users and archivists, regarding the research value of these materials, while making them more available. We therefore persevered in our efforts with the expectation of at least initiating a

Proceedings of the 21st Annual Meeting, National Academy of Arbitration, ed. Jean T. McKelvey (Washington, D.C., 1968) pp. 152-179; James Dunne, "The UAW Board of Review on Umpire Appeals at General Motors," *Arbitration Review* 17, no. 3 (1962): 162-174; Arthur M. Ross, "Distressed Grievance Procedures and Their Rehabilitation," *Labor Arbitration and Industrial Change, Proceedings of the 16th Annual Meeting, the National Academy of Arbitration*, ed. Jean T. McKelvey (Washington, D.C., 1963) pp. 104-132; and David A. Wolff, Louis A. Crane and Howard A. Cole, "The Chrysler-UAW Umpire System," *The Arbitrator and the Parties, Proceedings of the 11th Annual Meeting, National Academy of Arbitrators*, ed. Jean T. McKelvey (Washington, D.C., 1958) pp. 111-141.

- 12 Richard A. Beaumont, *Grievance Handling: A Case Study of a New Approach*, Industrial Relations Memo No. 139, (New York, 1961); Waldo E. Fisher, "Bituminous Coal," *How Collective Bargaining Works*, ed. H.A. Mills (New York, 1971) pp. 229-279; and Frederick Harbison and Robert Dubin, *Patterns of Union-Management Relations: The UAW (CIO), GM and Studebaker* (Chicago, 1947).
- 13 This state of affairs may soon come to an end as a new generation of labor historians turn their attention to grievance records. See, for example, Frank Boles, "The Boss Won't Listen When One Guy Squawks—Worker Grievances in the Automotive Industry, 1939-1942," unpublished seminar paper prepared for the History Department of the University of Michigan (1977). The author is currently expanding his research to include data gathering from the grievance records of many Detroit area UAW locals in preparation for the writing of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan.

fresh approach to a vexing archival problem and if possible, drawing colleagues from other institutions into our research endeavours.

As a first step in establishing the specific nature of grievance documentation, provenance and potential research use, we attempted to define the specific operation of the process. To begin, we turned to UAW contracts, each of which includes a section delineating the "official" grievance handling procedures.¹⁴ In selecting contracts for the study, we took care to draw upon a representative sampling by industry, company, local and year. With few exceptions, the staff found that the wording of the grievance handling clauses varied only slightly over time. While other sections of the contract, dealing with pensions, fringe benefits and classification, changed dramatically between the late-1930s and the mid-1970s, the sections on grievances remained the same. As arbitration cases began to back up the system in certain companies, notably General Motors Corporation and International Harvester, changes were made to deal with the problem.¹⁵ But for the most part, our analysis demonstrated a remarkable degree of stability over time.

If significant change in grievance procedures did not occur within the same UAW bargaining unit from contract to contract, the same was certainly not true when comparing the arrangements between two different industries or even between two companies within the same industry. Indeed, no two companies shared the same procedures and in the case of a company, such as Ford which has a Canadian subsidiary, grievance handling even varied within a single company. The initial or oral stage of the process often involved the grievant and his foreman but just as frequently included a union shop steward or grievance committeeman as well. The written stages of the process, preceding arbitration, ranged from two in the case of McDonnell-Douglas Corporation to five in the case of the Budd Company. Some contracts included a provision for binding arbitration as a final step in the process. Others made no provision should the grievance remain unresolved (presumably strike action would follow). Among those contracts employing arbitration in the final stage, a single umpire might be used while some agreements provided for an arbitration board of from three to seven members with an impartial chairman and both union and management representatives.

The differences uncovered in our study of the grievance process's operation as described in UAW contracts were so numerous that we found it necessary to schematize individual procedures so that we could easily differentiate between them. Later, we discovered that this approach also facilitated our appraisal efforts. Each diagram showed the different stages of the process, the timing of each stage, and the status of those who participated in the negotiations. These drawings allowed us to trace the generation of grievance documents within each respective set of procedures, and therefore contributed to our appreciation of the relative research value of documents produced during the process. While

¹⁴ Our sample of UAW contract agreements included those of the big four auto makers (GM, Ford, Chrysler and American), seven agricultural implement companies, five aerospace industry firms, five manufacturers of auto parts, and eleven agreements from both small and large amalgamated industrial operations. A total of well over sixty individual contracts were examined for our study. All of the contracts are UAW publications.

¹⁵ See James Dunne and Arthur M. Ross.

grievance handling may be unique to industrial relations, complex bureaucratic decision-making processes are common to many organizational frameworks. Business, government and even university archivists might benefit from a simple schematic approach to document generation within their own institutions. Though this technique served our immediate purposes well, the results of our inquiry raised more questions than they answered. For example, we were uncertain as to whether or not union and management negotiators actually followed the procedures set down in the contracts. Nor did we know if the use of common grievance forms and record keeping practices compensated for what at first glance appeared to be a welter of different grievance procedures. Finally, we had no way of telling from the contract agreements themselves if the grievance documents, so generated, accurately reflected shop floor conditions and therefore whether or not they possessed significant research value.

In the next major stage of the project, we planned to address these questions through a careful examination of the grievance records held at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs. As the official depository of the UAW, the Archives had on hand a representative sampling of union records.¹⁶ While the transfer of grievance records to the Archives had not kept pace with the arrival of other union records,¹⁷ the Archives nevertheless held forty-six major UAW collections containing grievance files. For those archivists faced with a similar task but lacking the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs' advantage of having the documents under study at hand, a records survey of these materials will undoubtedly prove necessary. Even in the case of our own UAW collections, we checked to ensure that our holdings of grievance records were proportionately distributed according to specific vital criteria, namely, geographic location of local, size of local, structure of local (i.e. single industry or amalgamated local), and the place of the agency within the UAW hierarchy (i.e. local, regional, or international departmental status).¹⁸ A similarly well-balanced sample would be essential, regardless of the source of documentation, if the archivist hopes to develop an accurate picture of the materials to be appraised.

Having identified the subject matter of our survey, we proceeded to analyze all grievance records held by the Archives. We examined them for both evidential value (i.e. information relating to the organization and function of the creating institution) and informational value (i.e. data pertaining to persons, places, subjects and events irrespective of the connection between this information and the creating institution). The single most prevalent document type was the

16 See Warner Pflug, *A Guide to the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs* (Detroit, 1974) pp. 10-14 and 98-116.

17 There are a number of reasons why some UAW grievance records have not found their way into the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in greater quantities. First of all, due to their enormous bulk, many distant local and regional UAW offices have foregone the costly process of shipping them to Detroit. Secondly, many union officials would rather keep their grievance files (including non-current ones) on hand for easy reference. Thirdly and finally, the Archives staff wanted to complete its grievance records project before actively soliciting grievance files from the UAW. However, at no time has the Archives staff ever turned down a collection of grievance files sent in by a participating union, except when they were duplicated elsewhere as in the instance of published appeal cases. The Archives has never advised unions that their grievance files have no value and should be destroyed.

18 Since there is a heavy concentration of UAW organizations in the Detroit area, many of the locals we sampled are located close to the Archives. We nevertheless succeeded in drawing an otherwise balanced sample of UAW records.

grievance case form. This record came in various sizes but always contained the same information: the grievant's name and badge number, the nature of his or her grievance, the date and time of occurrence, the shop steward or grievance committeeman's name, a statement by the grievant and a reply by his or her foreman. If the grievance went beyond the first written stage, this form also provided room for responses by other management officials indicating the disposition of the case at the end of that particular stage. The information found on these forms almost invariably limited itself to the details of the case, relating the grievance in question to a particular contract clause.

Depending upon the importance of the case, the nature of the grievance, and the number of stages in the process through which it passed, a case file might include many supporting documents. Discharge cases involving charges of tardiness or absenteeism often included employee work records as a part of the evidence. Cases alleging foreman abuse or poor working conditions usually contained transcripts of testimony by those present at the time. When the local union leaders asked a regional service representative to intervene, his or her notes often found their way into the case file, as did the legal briefs and arbitration awards for those cases that went to binding arbitration. We also found further information pertaining to grievance handling in the minutes of shop (grievance) committees and joint plant committees. Since grievance work constitutes such an important part in the responsibilities of most union officials, it did not surprise us to find references to grievance cases in their correspondence, memoranda and diaries as well.

The major benefit of this stage was to confirm in our minds the research value of grievance case files. In terms of their research potential, these records afford scholars both quantitative and qualitative avenues of inquiry. The standardized forms, for example, could provide data for an aggregated analysis of relations on the shop floor. Such a study could reveal patterns in working conditions, political factionalization within the union, and conflict between labor and management that may not surface in other documentary sources. Comparisons between plants within the same industry or a secular study within the same plant may also shed light on such topics as the seasonality of labor disputes, the impact of automation on worker attitudes, the role of women and minorities on the shop floor, or the effect of differing management practices on similar work forces.

A quantitative labor historian, for example, may wish to analyze the various political factions within the union organization. By examining grievance patterns over time and the manner in which these cases are treated by the union leadership, the scholar can begin to identify groups that enjoy or lack official support. When studied in conjunction with other union materials, such as the papers of union leaders, grievance committee minutes and arbitration hearing briefs, it is possible to reconstruct rank-and-file attitudes towards their union leaders and vice versa. In addition to mitigating industrial conflict, the grievance process was on occasion employed by union members on the shop floor to raise issues with their leaders and conversely, by union officials to deal with trouble makers. These patterns emerge, at least in part, from an aggregate analysis of grievance case files. Similarly, labor sociologists could examine grievance patterns to detect rank-and-file responses to changes in management policy or in the

shop-floor environment, as when new work rules or equipment are introduced. Scholars can also use grievance records to analyze particular leadership styles and their effectiveness in industrial situations. Patterns in grievance initiation would shed considerable light on this and similar problems currently under investigation by labor historians and industrial relations specialists.

Supplementary grievance documents also provide a plethora of qualitative information often unavailable elsewhere. For example, a grievance raised regarding speed-up, especially if it goes to arbitration, will entail research by union officials into general company practices and shop floor conditions. This information will eventually find its way into the case file through union briefs and supporting papers, and hence, if preserved, into the hands of researchers. One might, for instance, wish to trace worker attitudes toward certain management practices, such as piece work or incentive pay, and could do so by examining worker statements as found in case file transcripts and briefs. The research notes of union service representatives are also most illuminating, often examining the historical development of a particular shop floor practice or union tradition.

The importance of these findings cannot be sufficiently stressed. Effective processing of archival collections requires an appreciation of the potential uses of the collections to be processed. Without this, collection organization and subsequent intellectual access may suffer. Furthermore, the archivist may fail to alert potential users of the new resource's existence. Of equal importance, recognition by the archivist's supervisors or some external funding agency as to the research value of these materials will help justify the expenditure of staff time and institutional funds on the project. This was certainly true of our grievance records study.

Unfortunately, our survey of grievance case files also uncovered considerable diversity among the materials we examined. Though they might contain varying amounts of similar information, no two collections were identical. Some collections included transcripts and hearing minutes; others did not. Certain locals organized their files by type of grievance, others by the date the case was initiated, and still others by an arbitrary alpha-numeric code. Some locals processed numerous cases each year while others processed only a few. In short, we found that our survey raised as many questions as it answered. Did, for example, these variations in form and, at times, content reflect substantive differences between shop floor situations or should this divergence be explained in terms of inconsistent records management practices and an absence of forms control? Did the regional and departmental offices duplicate files produced at the local level and if so, could one or two of these files be eliminated without a loss of information? Did the union, at any level, keep comprehensive statistics on its grievance handling activities that the archivist could in turn use to scientifically sample grievance case files? Finally, did these records, regardless of their form, accurately reflect shop floor realities?

It was clear to us that the records themselves could not answer these questions. We therefore turned to those who had created them—UAW union officials—in the hope that they might resolve these quandaries. Since we found such diversity in the procedures set down in UAW contracts and in the documentary evidence, we decided that a comprehensive survey of union views on these issues was

required. Our approach was two-fold. We arranged interviews with union officials in the Detroit area, drawing upon people at all levels within the organization,¹⁹ and we sent out a questionnaire to local and regional UAW offices in the United States and Canada not represented in our Detroit area sample.²⁰ In both cases we asked the same questions: how do you keep grievance records, do other service representatives in your office employ similar procedures, do you keep statistics, do you ever refer back to old grievance cases, what duplication occurs within the process, are there guidelines and formats for grievance file documentation, do grievance records reflect shop floor realities, and do they have any research value? The results of these inquiries were remarkably uniform. They confirmed what we have already suspected; namely that union patterns of document generation were far from uniform and that the records so created varied widely in volume and form.

All the officials examined in our survey indicated that both union and management follow grievance handling as prescribed by the contract. This in turn meant that the diversity portrayed in the contract agreements reflected the actual heterogeneity of the process as executed on the shop floor. Each company provided its own forms, designed to meet the needs of that particular industrial setting and not the record keeping practices of the UAW as a whole. The forms, like the procedures they document, developed as by-products of industrial relations between specific companies and their respective work forces. While these findings did not point to any substantive differences between various sets of grievance case files, they did suggest that it would be almost impossible to scientifically sample such materials without some additional guide. If, for example, each local, regional, and departmental office kept accurate statistics of the number of grievances processed, the source of the grievance, its nature, the stages through which it had passed before final resolution, and its ultimate disposition, we might have had a statistical guide from which we could have derived a sampling strategy. Yet, with the exception of summary data on arbitration handling, at no level within the UAW did officials keep statistical records of their grievance handling. It is, of course, a truism that those who create records rarely organize, store and index them for the convenience of the archivist. In this case, the complexity of the source was not mitigated by the helpful assistance of careful record-keeping.

In an effort to at least establish why grievance records were so diverse, we asked our pool of union officials about their individual training and experience as grievance handlers. Each in turn indicated that grievance processing is highly individualized where every service representative develops his or her own personal style. Even basic guidelines are rare. The individual develops his or her own record keeping practices to meet the needs of the situation. As a result, some representatives prefer to do most of their work informally and in person, leaving few written records while others leave copious notes. This means that not only

19 Among those interviewed were local and regional service representatives from UAW Region 1B, representatives from the Chrysler and Agricultural Implements Department and members of the UAW Research Department staff.

20 Our mail survey questionnaire included multiple choice and fill-in type questions similar to those asked during our face-to-face interviews in the Detroit area. In this manner, we hoped to solicit the views of the widest range of UAW grievance handlers. Those who responded to our questionnaire all shared strikingly similar views to those of their Detroit colleagues.

will grievance case files between locals, regionals and departmental offices differ widely but so to will the files *within* the same office if produced by more than one service representative. Since there is almost no standardization within the files, even weeding becomes a highly skilled task that can only be assigned to an archivist knowledgeable in grievance documentation. Sampling is almost an impossibility; the records are too heterogeneous.

If we could not sample grievance records in an effort to limit their volume, we at least hoped to eliminate duplication. However, here too we found our expectations frustrated. A case that moves beyond a certain stage does go from the local to the regional and eventually to the departmental office. At each stage, some documents are duplicated but many are not. The initial interview notes and fact finding carried out at the local level may only appear at the regional level as a summary fact sheet. Arbitration briefs, prepared at the departmental level, rarely find their way back to the local level. In each of these examples, materials that may have substantial research value are not being duplicated by the process. Thus to throw out the local case file of a grievance that goes to arbitration may mean a loss of important information. What is more, few cases move beyond the local level and the cost of collating local, regional and departmental records in a search for duplication would prove too costly to consider. It now appears that the weeding of grievance records is as fraught with difficulty as sampling them.

All the union officials with whom we communicated did emphasize the importance of old grievance case files in their own work. Many searched old records for precedent. They generally agreed that contract procedures accurately reflected actual grievance handling practices and that the records do for the most part reflect shop floor realities. However, each interviewee also cited instances where the records disguise what happened. First of all, it ought to be kept in mind that written grievance records only represent about twenty percent of the total number of grievances raised each year. However when pressed on this point, most of the UAW officials, who we examined, admitted that the documented cases came fairly close to a representative sample of all cases raised in the oral stage. They also cited other situations where union and management representatives negotiated at great length to settle particularly difficult cases within the framework of broader union-management agreements. During negotiations much was left unsaid and unwritten; often special arrangements of this sort are secured orally, leaving no permanent record. As a result, the grievance documentation obscures what actually happened. One specific example of these practices demonstrates how such deviations might affect one's interpretation of the data conveyed by grievance records. A particular company purposely fired a number of workers because it expected a substantive grievance issue, affecting contract interpretation, to come to arbitration. Since dismissals took precedence over all other grievance issues, the union was obliged to suspend the substantive grievance case so that it could get the dismissal cases on the docket. The incautious observer might have concluded that the union withdrew this grievance because it felt that it would lose in arbitration, if he or she was unaware of this practice. Like all evidence, care and discretion are required when employing grievance records in research. A thorough knowledge of the union and company involved in the dispute as well as an understanding of industrial relations will greatly assist the researcher in this regard. At times, other documentary evidence, such as correspondence or negotiation meeting minutes may also assist the

scholar in his or her efforts to shift through grievance case files in search of an accurate picture of the situation. Generally speaking, those who have created the records and the archivists who subsequently service them ought to be able to testify to their integrity and to point out their pitfalls to potential users. Indeed, an essential component of the archival appraisal process ought to be a determination of validity of the story told by collection contents.

If we had hoped to find a single formula for the effective sampling of grievance case files, it was apparent by the end of our study that such a conclusion was no longer possible. Grievance records are too heterogeneous to sample or weed in any rational and economic manner. An approach to these documents which has yet to be explored would be to identify a limited number of representative UAW local, regional and departmental offices and then accession and process *all* of their grievance records. Such a strategy would be most difficult, entailing as it would the study of nearly two thousand UAW local, regional and departmental offices and the selection of those with the most important collections of grievance records. Most, if not all, regional and departmental records would undoubtedly be included in such a collecting scheme. Though there would be some duplication, weeding the records would prove more troublesome and costly than the benefits to be gained from the procedure. Finally, someone would have the unenviable task of selecting key locals since sampling—scientifically or otherwise—is not a productive alternative.

This study of union grievance record appraisal strategies should not be viewed as a failure. Through a systematic analysis of the problem, the dimensions of the task, what can and cannot be done, and chances for success when taking up a particular strategy were more fully appreciated. Furthermore, while this report may not have an immediate impact on the way archivists handle grievance case files, it may give those concerned with appraisal methodology something to ponder. The strategy followed at Detroit falls into three general categories of information gathering. If an archivist is to effectively appraise a body of records hitherto unknown, he or she must first establish a thorough understanding of (1) record contents and form, (2) record generation and integrity, and (3) record research value and potential use. These information categories are closely related and depending on the circumstances, may even be served by a single research strategy. The process of gathering information will be a function of the documentary source under examination. Record content and form, for example, may be derived from a study of those samples of the record type on hand. But the archivist can be assured of an accurate impression only if this record sample effectively represents the whole. A thorough record survey may therefore prove to be a prerequisite to obtaining a full understanding of the records in question.

The documentation itself is a product of a process that may have been examined previously. It is essential that the archivist become conversant with all the details of document generation and provenance. In addition, it will most likely prove necessary to learn about those who have created the records and for what purpose. As in the case of our grievance project, one can derive such information through interviews combined with evidence gleaned from the documents themselves. This data may also help the archivist determine the dimensions of the appraisal problem. In particular, the archivist will hopefully learn how specific procedures and documentation evolved, points of com-

monality and divergence within the process, and the degree to which the documents accurately reflect the creating agency's activities. If former or acting members of the creating agency are not available for questioning (this is likely to be true of older records of defunct businesses and governmental bodies), one ought to locate a local historian or scholar who might have worked with these records or knew former officers of that institution. At times, the archivist may have to play historian and pour through the records themselves in the hope of uncovering these facts. When employing interviews or drawing information from documents, it is important to balance the data by relying on sources that speak from different perspectives within the creating agency. Often agency executive officers have little first-hand knowledge of how their organization creates records. It is therefore essential to get the views of their subordinates as well.

Identifying the research value of a particular set of documents may prove to be the most elusive task faced by the archivist during the appraisal process. In most instances, the archivist will be faced with the need to evaluate the usefulness of a record type that has been ignored or under-utilized by scholars. When placed in such a situation, it might prove useful to call upon local scholars who may be interested in the records under consideration. Where researchers have already employed these records, it is a much simpler task to cite examples of research use. In addition, scholarly publications using these records will often provide useful information as to their form, content and origin. A wide sample of opinion is essential. What to one scholar may be a worthless set of papers, may prove invaluable to a researcher in another discipline. In the final analysis, the archivist must have faith in his or her own judgement and experience. Often we see research uses for materials once they are properly processed, that a scholar cannot envision from examining a heap of disorganized paper.

The appraisal process is quite obviously a collective effort. While it may all be the responsibility of a single archivist, that individual does not toil unaided. Expert opinion can and should be solicited through interviews and the written word. External surveys to collect supportive information on the documentation and its potential uses will supplement internal surveys of the documents themselves. It is important to be flexible, imaginative, and a first rate detective.

Résumé

L'évaluation des dossiers de documents est, sans conteste, le problème d'évaluation le plus difficile auquel doit faire face l'archiviste. L'auteur démontre comment un groupe de documents tels que les griefs du "United Auto Workers" étaient le sujet d'une enquête et d'une évaluation pour fin de préservation aux "Archives of Labour History and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University", lors d'un projet réalisé en 1977-78.