

Lester J. Cappon and the Creation of Records: The Diary and the Diarist



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RÉSUMÉ Cet article est un examen de Lester J. Cappon comme expert en preuves historiques, en édition de documents et en théorie et pratique archivistiques, puis comme créateur de sources archivistiques, conscient de laisser des traces documentaires pour les chercheurs futurs. L'article se penche sur les façons dont Cappon s'est servi de son journal intime comme déclencheur de la mémoire dans le but de documenter sa vie, sa carrière et sa famille, puis comme moyen de se motiver à poursuivre ses propres projets de recherche (surtout les préoccupations avec la gestion de son temps). L'article expose les caractéristiques mécaniques et physiques du journal intime. On pourrait s'attendre à ce qu'une personne comme Cappon, avec ses intérêts et ses habiletés professionnelles soit plus porté à l'autoréflexion – et on n'est pas déçu. Cappon écrivait à la fois pour être lu et pour qu'on se rappelle de lui, choisissant d'inclure dans ses textes des commentaires très personnels à son égard et au sujet de sa carrière, ainsi qu'au sujet de sa famille et de ses collègues. Cappon se servait souvent de son journal intime comme moyen de réfléchir à sa propre carrière et aux possibilités quelle offrait, surtout quand il approchait de l'âge de la retraite. Il est clair aussi qu'il tenait son journal intime pour un lectorat futur, puisque plusieurs entrées sont très formelles, tant au niveau de l'expression que des explications.

ABSTRACT This article is an exploration of Lester J. Cappon as an expert in historical evidence, documentary editing, and archival theory and practice, and of his own creation of archival sources and sense of leaving behind documentary traces for future researchers. It considers how Cappon used his diary as a memory device to document his life, career, and family, as well as a means to prod himself about his own scholarly projects (especially his concern about how to manage his time). It reviews the mechanics and physical characteristics of the diary. One would expect an individual with his interests and professional abilities to be more self-reflective about the diary process – and we are not disappointed. He wrote both to be read and remembered, including in his entries highly personal comments about himself and his career, as well as his family and colleagues. Cappon often used the diary as a means to reflect on his own career and its possibilities, especially as he reached his retirement years. It is also clear that he wrote the diary with a future audience in mind, many of the entries having a formality in expression and explanation.

Introduction

Using diaries as historical evidence presents particular challenges. Jennifer Jensen Wallach acknowledges that uncovering the past is a difficult and often subjective process, as is using memoirs as evidence of the past: “When historians analyze the testimony of historical witnesses (regardless of the form these testaments take, whether published memoirs, private diaries, or oral history interviews),” she muses, “they must try to ascertain the truthfulness of their informants and also must evaluate the reliability of their informants’ memory. Memoir is at the crossroads of memory and history, and it contains elements of both.”¹ Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett note this about life stories and personal narratives, including diaries, suggesting that they are

... by nature subjective and highly personal. We have argued that every life story is unique but also that life stories, whatever their form, can only be understood in light of their social, cultural, and historical context. Moreover, although it is invaluable for many analytic purposes, personal narrative evidence is always to some extent incomplete, open-ended, and contingent, which presents a challenge in the face of the expectations of many readers in audiences schooled in the social sciences.²

How, then, do we approach a diary (or memoir) written by someone who is a master in understanding the nature and vagaries of historical evidence and its survival? When writing his diaries, Lester J. Cappon must have relished the prospects of their potential use, he himself being an expert on the nature of historical evidence.³

Lester J. Cappon (1900–1981) was a historian, archivist, scholarly publisher, and documentary editor who played a leading role in the formation of the archival and documentary editing professions in mid-twentieth-century America. Cappon served as president of the Southern Historical Association (1949), the Society of American Archivists (1957), and the Association for Documentary Editing (1979), a rare achievement in professional leadership, and his archival writings are still cited (although less often than they used to be). Cappon was

- 1 Jennifer Jensen Wallach, “*Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact*”: *Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow* (Athens, GA, 2008), 30. She also suggests that comprehending the value of memoirs depends on comparing them with other documentary sources: “The way the past is remembered is often at odds with what really happened. It is the job of the historian, or the scholar of the historical study of memoirs, to compare memoirs and other historical documents in order to compose as complete and as verifiable a depiction of a historical moment as possible” (pp. 33–34).
- 2 Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca, NY, 2008), 127.
- 3 For additional information about his background and importance, see Richard J. Cox, ed., *Lester J. Cappon and the Relationship of History, Archives, and Scholarship in the Golden Age of Archival Theory* (Chicago, 2004).

involved in nearly every major archival activity in those years, and the signs of his influence are many and varied. Coming into the field long before the creation of formal graduate archival education programs and even before the stabilization of both archival and documentary editing practices and principles, Cappon was an advocate for strengthening these professions for most of his career. He was also an advocate for the contribution of archivists to the scholarship of their profession, especially scholarship that required the tools and perspective of the historian who not only used documentary sources but also understood how those sources were formed and preserved.⁴ Even as Cappon ranged over various professional associations, he deplored the fragmentation of the archival community into many specialized groups (such as oral historians, records managers, and manuscript curators), especially as this seemed to dilute the role of history within the toolkit of archivists.

Cappon was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the son of a prosperous businessman, and earned degrees at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music (1920), and in history at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (1922, 1923) and Harvard University (PhD, 1928, working with Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr.). He worked with Dumas Malone at the University of Virginia Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, compiling bibliographies on historical publications and newspapers before settling in as the University of Virginia archivist, a post he held from 1930 until 1945. In 1945, Cappon was named the editor of publications at the Institute of Early American History and Culture in Williamsburg, Virginia, and he remained in that position until 1955, when he became the institute's director. Cappon also functioned as the director of Colonial Williamsburg's newly established Archives and Records Department from 1945 until 1952, adding records management experience to his archival work. In 1969, he went to the Newberry Library in Chicago as a senior fellow, and he stayed to edit the *Atlas of Early American History*.⁵ He then held posts as a distinguished research fellow and emeritus research fellow at the Newberry until his death.

A quarter of a century ago, in one of those furious professional debates about the relationship of history to archives and vice versa, I wrote a brief essay using Cappon as an example of how the two disciplines relate to each other. I termed Cappon a "model historian-archivist," and I noted then that his wide-ranging essays deserved publication as a volume. I drew on Cappon to argue that the acrimonious and intriguing debate of the early 1980s represented little that was

4 His SAA presidential address, "Tardy Scholars among the Archivists," *American Archivist* 21 (January 1958): 3–16, exemplified his conviction about this, and his entire body of scholarship – including archival history, documentary forms, education, the archival mission, archival knowledge, collecting, and appraising – reflects the seriousness with which he approached the notion of archival scholarship.

5 Lester J. Cappon, ed. *Atlas of Early American History: The Revolutionary Era, 1760-1790*, ed. (Princeton, NJ, 1976).

new since Cappon (and some others) had been wrestling with such matters for a full half-century. In this earlier essay, I contended that Cappon, unlike some then debating the essence of the archival discipline, was not afraid of change and held firm to the idea of a “dynamic archival profession while upholding the concept of the archivist as historian and scholar.”⁶ This debate was evidence of the then-fluid nature of what constituted archival work and the role of history in the field’s basic knowledge and practice. Just as we are concerned today about the implications of digital records and information systems for archival work, we were concerned then about what the drifting apart of historians and documentary editors from archivists spelled for the archival mission in society.⁷

We need to read Cappon’s writings and his personal archives, including his lengthy diary analyzed in this essay, in light of the era in which he worked. Individuals entered into the archival profession not through formal graduate programs but via institutes, an occasional course in a history department or library school, or the equivalent of apprenticeships. Individuals interested in this field had little to read (besides a few books by T.R. Schellenberg and Hilary Jenkinson, and journals like the *American Archivist*), prompting Cappon to work on a book to fill such gaps. Tentatively titled *Historical Manuscripts: Their Acquisition, Arrangement, and Accessibility for Research*, the volume was never finished (although a few of the essays Cappon originally drafted for this book were published). We must also remember that Cappon was involved in the Society of American Archivists when its conference attendance was small and its membership limited, a scale that enabled it to be run by volunteers. He laboured in a transition period when archival practice was being standardized, marked at either end by the books of Schellenberg and the commencement of the first set of SAA Basic Manuals, which started to appear in 1977. This set the framework for what went into Cappon’s diary, at least from the professional perspective. From the personal vantage, the diary was the means by which to sort out his own professional identity as well as to create a record of family life, recreational and leisure activities, and a plan for future work. As a result, his diary is both a commentary on a very important period in the history of the American archival community and a reflection by a key player on the events, issues, and controversies forming the new profession and his own identity.

6 Richard J. Cox, “Archivists and Historians: A View from the United States,” *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–85): 185–90.

7 For a good view of this era, see Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and Archives* (New York, 2011). For my own perspective about how Cappon fits into this framework, see the essay co-written with Charles Dollar, Rebecca Hirsch, and Peter J. Wosh, “Founding Brothers: Leland, Buck, and Cappon and the Formation of the Archives Profession,” *American Archivist* 74, supplement (2011): 1–26.

And So It Begins

On 23 April 1954, Cappon – historian, archivist, and documentary editor – wrote his first entry in a diary that he was to maintain with dedicated regularity for the remainder of his life (another twenty-seven years). This initial entry concerned his travelling twenty-five miles from Madison, Wisconsin, where he was attending the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, to visit LeRoy Gore, editor of a local Wisconsin newspaper. Gore was working on gaining signatures to petition for a recall election to remove Senator Joseph P. McCarthy; as it turned out, Gore was not there but in Milwaukee.⁸ This was an inauspicious start, perhaps, for what would eventually run to hundreds of thousands of words of reflection by Cappon about his life, family, career, and various interests. Anyone who has kept a diary, or tried to keep one, for any length of time will appreciate the achievement of maintaining one that extends over this length of time and in such exquisite detail.

While Cappon's rich personal and professional papers were opened shortly after being acquired by the College of William & Mary, his diaries remained closed until twenty-five years after his death (he originally wanted them closed for fifty years, but for some reason he changed his mind between 1978 and his death in 1981). Not long after they opened in August 2006, I made my first of eight visits to read them. I had anticipated one visit and a short article about Cappon as a diarist, but I was surprised by the richness of detail the diaries contained about both his personal and professional life. Not only did I find answers to some lingering questions and fill in some gaps about his seminal writings on archival topics (which were featured in a book published by the Society of American Archivists), but I also discovered a rich cache of additional information about his work as an editor, scholarly publisher, nascent public historian, collector, and teacher.

The Closed Diary

While I mined the Cappon papers, I wondered about what might lurk in the then-closed diaries and why Cappon, an open and outspoken scholar and administrator, would choose to keep them closed. The answer came quickly when I started reading the first volume. Cappon minces no words about how he views some of the leading archival and historical figures he worked with, as an entry in the initial 1954 volume suggests. He records how he interrupted a research project to write a letter of appreciation for Solon J. Buck, who was to retire from

8 College of William & Mary, Swem Library, Lester J. Cappon Papers, MS 90 C17, Diaries of Lester J. Cappon, 1954–1981 [hereafter cited as Cappon Diaries], 23 April 1954. LeRoy Gore was the author of *Joe Must Go* (New York, 1954).

the Library of Congress a month later. He notes that he knew Buck when he was head of the Milwaukee Historical Society, the archivist of the US, and SAA president. He then writes:

He was a difficult man to work with, given to dicta with an air of finality, and a stickler for minute and often inconsequential detail. He irritated many of his staff at the National Archives and caused great discontent as head of the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, and ends his service there as an assistant librarian. But he is a distinguished scholar and as historian and archivist is widely known in this country and abroad. It was a pleasure to write to him and to express my confidence that he will continue his historical activities after formal retirement.⁹

A few weeks later, while doing research at the Historical Society of Wisconsin on the documentary editor and collector Hubert Howe Bancroft, Cappon jots down his observations about what he has learned concerning the administration of that venerable organization:

It is an excellent place to work – undoubtedly one of the best in the United States – both from the standpoint of printed and manuscript materials available and with respect to the environment facilitating research through the good will of the staff.

But then after lunch with some of the staff, he adds:

I gather from their remarks that the Society is highly organized under Cliff Lord and that many projects are elaborately planned out and written out as to method, some of them far-fetched from reality in terms of personnel available and the relative importance of old and new undertakings. In the shuffle, *bona fide* research is likely to suffer. This condition reminds me of a similar situation in Colonial Williamsburg. Sound, basic research is too easily shoved aside by inconsequential “busy work,” noisy and barren of constructive results.¹⁰

And later that same year, after a farewell party for Lyman Butterfield, who was leaving to become the head of the Adams family editorial project, Cappon summarizes a conversation about the last volume of Douglas Freeman’s biography of George Washington:

Some comments were made on Freeman’s “factory methods” of research and how content he was for his researchers to see the original mss and provide him with copies. The thrill provided by the original didn’t seem to excite him or arouse his enthusiasm

9 Cappon Diaries, 29 July 1954.

10 Ibid., 10 August 1954. For another sense of how Cappon viewed this institution and Lord’s directorship, see his review of the 1967 history of the Society by Clifford Lord and Carl Ubbelodhe in the *William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1968): 501–2. While Cappon had great respect for the institution, one senses his own reservations about Lord.

beyond the content of the document. I suggested that a summary review of the entire *Washington* might be entitled “Freeman, Inc.”¹¹

Throughout the diary, Cappon records his personal frustrations and opinions about colleagues, friends, and family members in a manner that would compel him to keep the diary closed.¹² With such entries – and the ones above are only a few early examples – it is no surprise that Cappon wanted the diaries kept closed for a substantial time past his death.

Cappon never describes why he decided to keep a diary, but he certainly provides many clues about its purpose. In the first volume, on 18 September 1954, he carefully places himself in his own era:

My birthday – age 54. When I read historical surveys of the first half of the 20th century, my age is forcibly impressed upon me! “Recent history” is my era and what contrasts! – the Progressive Era and last phase of 19th century peace that could not be kept; World War I, “to make the world safe for democracy”; inflated prosperity and depression and New Deal; World War II and the post war struggle against world-wide communism. Genuine peace in this century is a dim hope, but the United Nations provides the forum for discussion which may forestall and even prevent war.¹³

Here we see some of the perspective we would expect from a historian. As he begins his twentieth year as a diarist, he pauses briefly for a moment of self-reflection about the creation and maintenance of his diary, which suggests he had more questions than answers: “As I begin Vol. 20 of this Diary I wonder what moves me to continue, year after year. Is it inertia or egotism or relief thru self-expression?”¹⁴ As it turns out, these are not unusual questions for any diarist to contemplate. And Cappon, the indefatigable user of archival sources and reader of history, certainly knew this.

Interpreting the Diary

Scholars studying diaries have often wrestled with how to interpret them. This struggle has emerged with the large scholarship on women and diaries espe-

11 Cappon Diaries, 28 September 1954.

12 Here are more examples: While at the SAA annual meeting in Atlanta, he writes, “Much politicking going on” with efforts to “defeat the Denver-Dover Axis (Renze-de Valinger)” (Cappon Diaries, 6 October 1966). Even when asked to write an obituary, he used his diary to record the differences between his public and private opinions. In his obituary of T.R. Schellenberg for the *American Archivist*, Cappon candidly notes, “He was something of a controversial figure, with perhaps more opponents than supporters in the National Archives; and what I wrote could not honestly be completely commendatory” and that he “pulled my punches” with the final version (Ibid., 22, 23, and 26 January 1970).

13 Cappon Diaries, 18 September 1954.

14 Ibid., 1 January 1973.

cially.¹⁵ Gayle Davis, for example, argues that women's diaries are puzzles since they were sometimes written in cryptic ways because of their authors' often uncertain positions in society. Davis argues for using various textual and artifactual methods to read the diaries.¹⁶ With Cappon, we may see the opposite. Given the richness of his other personal and professional papers, Cappon's diaries seem straightforward and clear. In fact, it may be that some of his other papers, deposited in the archives with no access restrictions, need to be read more closely. One has the strong sense that Cappon, using his diary to order his thoughts about his life and career, was also compiling it to secure a place for himself in the future. This is a common use of diaries. One study of Jewish Holocaust diaries suggests that the diarists were recording their thoughts not only to make sense of their world, but also because they were "writing themselves into the future."¹⁷ Given Cappon's sensitivities about the nature of the archival document, this may have been part of his agenda. His knowledge of archival history also may have made him realize that even archivists could be quickly forgotten by other archivists. What would be his place in posterity?

There is no mistaking Cappon's work as that of a classic diarist. While some scholars have suggested that ordinary individuals often created diaries strong on patterns and weak on reflection,¹⁸ Cappon's diary reveals both patterns and considerable reflection. The self-reflection is quite obvious, as in this entry from 1976, written while vacationing with friends in New Hampshire: "I am taking more vacation, now that the *Atlas* is published, than I have in many a year, extending well into September. Perhaps my 75th year marks the end of productive work, but I hope not."¹⁹ Throughout the diary, Cappon comments on projects planned, finished, and unfinished, and his own personal and professional limitations (as suggested by examples throughout this article). Moreover, Cappon was generally consistent in his use of the diary for personal governance. In his twenty-eight-year maintenance of the diary, there were only two years (1959 and 1980) when he went more than one hundred days without writing an entry (125 and 156, respectively); for half of the years he missed thirty days or fewer. Why did he miss recording entries in his diary? Sometimes it was because he was recovering from health problems (such as ear or hernia surgery), travelling, or attending professional conferences. It became a pattern for him to make only

15 Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst, MA, 1996) includes a range of essays on why such records are created.

16 Gayle R. Davis, "The Diary as Historical Puzzle: Seeking the Author Behind the Words," *Kansas History* 16 (Summer 1993): 166–79.

17 Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 5.

18 See, for example, Elizabeth Hampsten, "Tell Me All You Know: Reading Letters and Diaries of Rural Women," in *Teaching Women's Literature from a Regional Perspective*, ed. Leonore Hoffman and Deborah Rosenfelt (New York, 1982), 55–63.

19 Cappon Diaries, 12 August 1976.

light entries, if any, at the end of the calendar year, while spending the Christmas holidays at home with his family and friends. At the end of summer 1957, while engaged in cleaning up his mother's estate, Cappon offers one reason for occasional gaps in the diary:

During the past two weeks the diary has been neglected, as Dorothy and I concentrated increasingly on taking inventory of all my late mother's possessions and making innumerable decisions for retaining or disposing of them. It was an emotional experience too, recalling the past as old letters, keepsakes, and personal belongings came to light. In many instances, the last tie with years gone by was severed, the last memory which I derived from my mother of her own generation of 50-75 years ago.²⁰

When starting a new year in 1959, Cappon provides this insight into the nature of his compositions: "To record daily events at the end of the day makes for the most authentic diary. I have resolved to do so more regularly during the present year."²¹ Ironically, this turned out to be one of the two worst years for the regularity of his diary.

The Diary as Personal Archive

Cappon's diary, like most others, is filled with personal and family news (although as I have stated, these topics seem secondary in Cappon's case, mostly markers of time passed and a testament to his interests in personal pastimes such as music). As he gets older, he begins to write more observations about his own health. In early 1962, he complains of fatigue and an irregular heartbeat.²² But such entries about his own health are far less frequent than what he writes about others. In October 1978, after suffering a heart attack,²³ he mulls over the uniqueness of such an event in his life. He was in intensive care for close to six days, missing two weeks of writing – "What follows concerning the next several weeks are not daily entries of events (or more accurately, non-events), but rather incidents and observations written later in a reminiscent mood" – only catching up on his entries while recuperating at his son's home in Somerset, Kentucky. Having never been seriously ill before, he comments that the "prolonged hospitalization" was new to him. In his time of reflection, Cappon provides a few observations that are essential to understanding him and his lifestyle:

I smoked less than a pack of cigarettes per day, drank a bourbon-on-the-rocks or two before dinner and wine occasionally with the meal. . . , traveled many thousands of miles in America and Europe, most of them by car, along with some incidental hiking,

20 Ibid., 30 August 1957.

21 Ibid., 1 January 1959.

22 Ibid., 5 February 1962.

23 Ibid., 22 and 24 October 1978.

and after age 65 went on numerous tours on horseback in the western wilderness rivers in the Far West & British Columbia and Alaska.²⁴

After this event, Cappon became more conscious of his age. Over the years, he documented his health problems, as well as issues with various members of his family. His hearing continued to deteriorate. In 1957, it was determined that surgery would not improve it.²⁵ He occasionally recorded the ongoing financial and emotional challenges of his son and grandchildren, but always with an indication of his familial devotion.²⁶ There was no doubt that Cappon was becoming frailer. In early 1981, he records, with some amusement, that when he was working on the Jared Sparks project (editing Sparks's journals – a project not completed) he walked into a door on a bookcase, fell down, bruised his right hip, and damaged his glasses.²⁷ In his last months, Cappon confides to his diary that when the weather is colder he suffers from shortness of breath.²⁸ Around the same time, hearing from one of his old travel partners, Cappon also laments that his whitewater-rafting trips are now far behind him.²⁹ In early 1980, after having a tumour on the inside of his right cheek removed, he jots in his diary, "Old age is bringing quite a procession of doctors into my life. So far so good!"³⁰ Such fluctuations in his health prompted him to apply for admission to the Westminster-Canterbury retirement home in Richmond, Virginia, with the aim of starting a life there in September 1982.³¹ When visiting the home, he discovered there was a waiting period of three to four years, remarking that he was in "no hurry; I prefer to continue my present life of research at the Newberry Library in Chicago."³² And he did this, but with far less time ahead than what he anticipated.

24 Ibid., 25 October 1978.

25 Ibid., 6 August 1957.

26 Ibid., 6 March 1974.

27 Ibid., 28 January 1981.

28 Ibid., 11 March 1981.

29 Ibid., 19 March 1981.

30 Ibid., 31 January 1980. On 12 February, he notes that the stitches were removed and the biopsy was fine. The next day he writes that he had two small growths near his right eye removed.

31 Ibid., 7 July 1980. A week later, on 14 July 1980, he writes about a checkup with his doctor, noting the occurrence of brief dizzy spells, leg cramps, and weight loss (down to 118 pounds). Prior to this, at least within the time frame of the diary, his only health concern had been a week-long stay in a hospital to recover from a hernia operation (see entries for 9 and 15 March 1964).

32 Ibid., 1 December 1980. This reflects a change from his mid-sixties, when he thought he would retire in Williamsburg near the College of William & Mary. Cappon records (6 February 1965) that while out walking with his wife the question came up about where he wanted to be when he retired. He indicates that he wants to be "within walking distance of the College Library."

What connects Cappon to other diarists is his use of his diary to write about his family and their well-being, even if this was not the primary purpose of his diurnal activity. On 5 January 1965, he records that his wife, Dorothy, has suffered a “small stroke,” which doctors believed to be caused by a tumour.³³ A month later, it was discovered that she did indeed have a brain tumour.³⁴ A few weeks later, Cappon talked with his wife’s doctor, learning that surgery would be of little use, and that “We must be prepared as best we can to face the worst.”³⁵ In early March, his wife had surgery, and a sizable tumour was removed and discovered to be malignant.³⁶ By the following month, it had grown and doctors estimated that she had two months to live; on 11 August 1965, Dorothy Cappon died.³⁷ As is customary for diarists, Cappon used his journal as a way of reflecting on anniversaries, and the date of his wife’s death became a significant one for him. A few years after her death, Cappon writes, “Three years ago today in mid-morning Dorothy died. I have got quite used to living alone, but, all factors considered, it would not be my choice. Friends have been very thoughtful of me and Catherine Brown [his housekeeper] takes good of me. When I travel, I am glad to return home, but I do miss the sharing of many pleasures at home.”³⁸ Cappon also makes entries reflecting how Dorothy’s death transformed his long-term plans for life in Virginia.³⁹

Indeed, the mid-1960s was a difficult time for Cappon, as he dealt not only with the death of his beloved wife but also with his daughter’s mental illness and her stays in and out of hospitals.⁴⁰ In late June 1966, Cappon wonders, after talking with his daughter’s doctor, “Was there something in her past, in her relations with her mother, that would help explain her periods of mutual depression, her conviction that she is worthless, can do nothing well, excel in nothing?” He concludes that this was not the case.⁴¹ In a very short time, Cappon records in his diary the deterioration of his daughter’s mental capacities and the dissolution of her marriage.⁴² Although Cappon always seems hopeful that Mary Beth will improve and that she and her husband, Jack, will reconcile, by November 1966

33 Ibid., 5 and 11 January 1965. Two days later, on 13 January, Cappon writes that his wife may not have a tumour and that she has been sent home to rest.

34 Ibid., 11 February 1965.

35 Ibid., 28 February 1965.

36 Ibid., 8 and 10 March 1965.

37 Ibid., 22 and 25 April 1965; 11 August 1965.

38 Ibid., 11 August 1968.

39 Cappon notes how he drove out to his 17.9 acres of land 10 miles northwest of the University of Virginia, where he and Dorothy had planned to build a cabin but never did (Cappon Diaries, 4 June 1966). A year and a half later, Cappon bought 11 acres of land “contiguous” to his 17.9 acres in Albemarle County for \$5,250, noting that this is a “good investment” (ibid., 2 February 1968).

40 Cappon Diaries, 25 March, 24 April, and 12 June 1966.

41 Ibid., 23 June 1966.

42 Ibid., 24 and 28 June 1966; 3 July 1966; 1 August 1966; 22 and 29 October 1966.

he notes, "It is a sorry mess," when he finds out that Jack has officially filed for divorce.⁴³ After meeting with Mary Beth the next day and learning about her lack of money and poor job prospects, Cappon adds, "We must put the past behind us, I guess, & she must face a difficult future."⁴⁴ A few years later, Mary Beth quickly divorced her husband and remarried, causing Cappon to be skeptical about whether she was well and whether this would bring her happiness.⁴⁵

A year and a half after these entries, Mary Beth was dead.⁴⁶ On 31 May 1971, Cappon writes a brief note about receiving from a lawyer in Georgia Mary Beth's personal papers: "They are mostly unpaid bills, which do not surprise me. They are tokens of an erratic life that had a tragic ending."⁴⁷ A few weeks later, Cappon visited Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, to inspect the new marker on Mary Beth's grave (near his mother's). He notes that Mary Beth had been named after his beloved mother. "Her death was a tragedy to forget, but it cannot be forgotten," Cappon writes, suggesting at least one purpose for the diary.⁴⁸ Much has been made of women keeping diaries, especially in harsh conditions such as on the frontier, as a means of "coping" and as a way of adjusting: "By understanding the diaries as mediating devices as well as repositories of factual information, one can know the private people who kept these records in new ways."⁴⁹ Reading Cappon's diaries, especially when he is confronting personal tragedy, makes one realize that the notion of coping is a common characteristic of this genre of personal recordkeeping, one transcending gender. It also provides insights into Cappon as a person: out of this intensely traumatic period in the mid-1960s emerges someone who seems more focused on his scholarly and professional goals, perhaps as a means of forgetting personal pain.

The Diary as Record

As time passes, Cappon's reliance on, and valuing of, the diary grows. In 1962, on his return from a trip to Europe, he writes about discovering that he has left his diary in the car he rented to drive from New York to Williamsburg, Virginia. Cappon tells the tale: "This present volume of my Diary has been 'lost' for several days. It was brought back from New York, after disembarkation, in the blue zipper hand-bag containing guide-books, maps, etc." It is when he settles back into his work routine that he discovers it is missing:

43 Ibid., 19 November 1966.

44 Ibid., 20 November 1966.

45 Ibid., 4 January 1969.

46 There are no entries between 21 July and 4 August 1970, but there is a short newspaper clipping about the death of Mary Elizabeth Yarborough, Cappon's daughter, on 24 July.

47 Ibid., 31 May 1971.

48 Ibid., 12 June 1971.

49 Gayle R. Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14 (1987): 6.

Two days ago I began to miss this hand-bag, but in the midst of resuming work at the office and getting settled at home I had no time to reorganize our accumulated material on Europe or even to write in my Diary. When I began to search for the bag, I could not find it; yet I was sure I had brought it from the car into the house Tuesday night, along with all the other bags.⁵⁰

Cappon describes the diary as “personal,” as well as containing “my record of our European sojourn, among other matters.”⁵¹

At times, Cappon self-consciously scribbles about the diary’s function as a record. It is no secret that diarists often write about mundane matters, such as the weather. In noting “another insufferable day of heat and humidity” and an escape to his air-conditioned office, Cappon adds, “It was a good day to gripe, but let it be – off the record!”⁵² With some regularity, he made annotations about past entries relating to events and activities he was currently involved in. In a late 1954 entry about a book by the newspaperman LeRoy Gore on Joe McCarthy, Cappon writes, “See entry under April 23.”⁵³ He used this technique in a way that suggests he viewed his diary as a practical tool for managing his own vocational responsibilities. In early 1960, he made a note about writing a response to a scholar who had completed a revision of a study of Dutch bankers and the financing of the early American nation, adding “(See above Nov. 15, 20–22, 1958.)”⁵⁴

The diary was the centrepiece of his system of personal recordkeeping. He used the notes in it to help him label photographs taken on various trips. While at sea, returning home from a European trip, he notes that he has completed his eighteenth roll of film (thirty-six shots on each), has had some processed while on board the ship, and has “labeled each frame & dated each with the help of this Diary.”⁵⁵ Cappon also used the diary to plan new trips, as he explains in this entry in the spring of 1977:

In anticipation of my sojourn in Europe during late August to early October, I read portions of my Diary covering the summer of 1964, especially to get the names of certain hotels where Dorothy & I stayed, & where I might stay again. I read many entertaining passages of incidents I had forgotten, in town & country (we were traveling by car, the most enjoyable means, but I shall probably [be] going by train on a Eurail pass.⁵⁶

50 Cappon Diaries, 18 August 1962.

51 Ibid., 19 August 1962.

52 Ibid., 7 September 1954.

53 Ibid., 8 November 1954.

54 Ibid., 4 February 1960.

55 Ibid., 9 August 1962.

56 Ibid., 27 April 1977.

Such uses of a diary have long been considered both practical and traditional in nature, and for a scholar such as Cappon, who read others' diaries as part of his own research, the knowledge of such uses was paramount in his mind when adding new entries.

The diary served as a record of Cappon's efforts to manage his personal records, and these entries in turn reveal something about his own attitudes to the archiving of his papers. In early 1963, he writes:

At my office this morning the congestion in my file cabinet got me involved accidentally in house-cleaning and what amounted to "disposal of records." I am inclined to keep everything in true pack-rat spirit. When in doubt, I *don't* throw papers away. Then occasionally indulge in weeding out some of my files. Today old teaching notes, reading-lists, exams, etc. filled the waste basket; and in the course of the operation I turned up some choice bits that I shall still retain – until they come to light again, or maybe longer!⁵⁷

In the late 1960s, as he is preparing to retire, Cappon dutifully records his efforts to sort through his files and to reorganize them for his personal use.⁵⁸ Finally, in late June, he notes:

I think I am "over the hump" in taking inventory of books & papers in my office preparatory to vacating it next week – segregating books & pamphlets to be given to either the College Library or the Institute and a smaller number to be retained. I reviewed the confidential budget & payroll files in my desk drawer which I shall transfer to Steve Kurtz. The complete files of Annual Reports of the Director, 1954-69 I have taken home for permanent preservation, for this covers my period as director and I regard it as my personal file. No doubt I shall have occasion to consult it from time to time. Pat [Blatt, his secretary] put into better shape the reprints or offprints of numerous articles of mine, boxed & labeled them. I shall have a place for them on Level One of my house.⁵⁹

In one sense, Cappon, as an archivist and historian, reveals that he harboured many of the same attitudes about the management of personal papers as others, albeit with a greater, more informed sense of the challenges posed by this task.

The diary was intimately connected to Cappon's other recordkeeping. For example, he kept careful notes on his travels, diligently documenting daily mileage covered in his car, individuals he saw, atlases he used, books he read, and

57 Ibid., 23 February 1963.

58 Ibid., 30 May 1969; 5, 12, 13, and 17 June 1969.

59 Ibid., 20 June 1969. Cappon notes, on 25 June, the difficulties he had been having with this task: "The last round in my office in order to vacate it by the end of the afternoon. It seems to me that I have been going 'round and 'round in a vicious circle the past week, distributing many years' accumulation of books & pamphlets & papers among the Institute, the College Library, and the waste basket, not to mention what I am retaining."

other such detail.⁶⁰ Almost from the beginning of his diurnal habits, he used the diary as a way of capturing his thinking about his future. In early 1955, for example, he writes to his lawyer in Milwaukee “about some problems of the Cappon Estate and provisions for a trust fund in relation to inheritance taxes. Planning for the future is more complex in many respects than writing about the past.”⁶¹ This sentiment is prevalent in many entries.

One of the things that impressed me about Cappon in my earlier work on his personal papers was his ability to keep up with his correspondence no matter where he was and what his other activities might be – and the diary provides some insights about how he did this. In August 1955, while on vacation, Cappon records, after noting that a batch of mail had been forwarded to him from the Institute of Early American History and Culture, “Most of it will not require replies and I certainly intend to write as few letters as possible.”⁶² A few weeks later, Cappon notes, “Letter-writing (long-hand) has taken a good deal of my time this past week after our relative isolation in Wyoming. Institute business cannot be entirely postponed, even at the distance of Wisconsin from Virginia.”⁶³ And then, two days later, “I wrote a considerable number of letters in reply to matters forwarded by Sue Thomas, but they did not interfere seriously with relaxation and with real separation from the job.”⁶⁴ We can imagine how productive Cappon might have been in the present networked digital era, as he could have kept current with his correspondence and projects no matter where he was; as it was, Cappon was truly amazing in his ability to keep up with his network of colleagues and friends.

The Diary as Mnemonic Device

While Cappon made observations about such routine matters as his correspondence, he was, of course, focusing on the matter of time and its passing, as well as its management. His diary contains many references to issues regarding his use of time and his ability to focus on long-term projects. Arriving back at the office in Williamsburg after a vacation, Cappon writes, “What a pile of mail on my desk – first-class, second, third, and fourth-class in other piles! ‘First things first,’ so I caught up on letters received and noted book manuscripts, old- and newcomers which await my examination.”⁶⁵ This reflects Cappon’s use of his diary as a reminder of the work he needed to accomplish, as well as its central-

60 Ibid., 24 June 1954, and subsequent entries.

61 Ibid., 5 March 1955.

62 Ibid., 3 August 1955.

63 Ibid., 27 August 1955.

64 Ibid., 29 August 1955.

65 Ibid., 19 August 1954.

ity to his personal recordkeeping regime.⁶⁶ Cappon uses his diary to remind himself constantly, almost relentlessly, about his true interests. When he learns in late 1954 that he will be the acting director of the Institute of Early American History and Culture, he notes:

I received congratulations from friends and acquaintances I met today, but I am not deceiving myself as to the extra work the job will entail and its temporary duration as a stopgap. In a sense, it is a thankless chore, but on the other hand administrative responsibilities do not especially appeal to me. Yet the best recognition of accomplishment comes to those at the top and less locally than in the broader company of scholars throughout the state and nation. What I would like is more time for research and writing rather than administrative authority and responsibility.⁶⁷

Again in 1955, he writes,

My personal problem is to try to schedule my time so that a portion of it can be given regularly to research and the hours of routine in the office reduced.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, with misgivings, he did accept the directorship in May 1955.⁶⁹ In 1956, he spent a day at the University of Virginia reading the correspondence of Philip Alexander Bruce and newspaper clippings concerning his book *Plantation Negro as a Freeman*. “The comments provoked by his book on the Negro problem indicate that many southerners have modified their basic attitude little, if any, during the past 65 years.” He records that he was thinking of writing an article for the *Virginia Quarterly Review* or the *Yale Review* about this, but “To

66 Just as often (and perhaps more so), Cappon used the diary to capture his own inability to say no and the resulting time management problems he created for himself. When Oliver Holmes of the National Historical Publications Commission called and asked him to prepare a paper for the American Historical Association on historical editing for letterpress editions, he noted (24 September 1964), “In a moment of weakness I consented – and may begrudge the time.”

67 Cappon Diaries, 19 November 1954. Cappon had other opportunities for administrative advancement. A year and a half after wrestling with the institute directorship, Cappon received a letter from Arthur Schlesinger, informing Cappon that Schlesinger had nominated him for the head curator position at the American History Museum in Washington, DC. The salary was good, “but the job obviously involves considerable administrative work – more than I’d care to be burdened with – and cost of living would doubtless eat up the additional salary above what I am getting as director of the Institute & archival consultant. Furthermore, I have no real desires to live in Washington” (*ibid.*, 23 February 1956).

68 *Ibid.*, 5 November 1955.

69 *Ibid.*, 6 and 7 May 1955. He worried initially about the support of Colonial Williamsburg and the College of William & Mary presidents, as well as what the salary might be; see entries for 23 and 29 April 1955. Not long before, Cappon had been hopeful of leaving with Lyman Butterfield to work on the Adams Papers project. At that point, he was worried about the uncertainty of who might be the next institute director (*ibid.*, 20 August 1954).

find time enough to organize and write it soon will be difficult.”⁷⁰ Of course, Cappon was not unique in his concerns and struggles as an academic administrator to find time for scholarly work, but he was certainly rare in having so thoroughly documented his problems.

Not surprisingly, as he got older, Cappon became more protective of his time. At age 65, he diligently records turning down an offer to teach in a summer institute, noting that “any time I have available should be devoted to research & writing.”⁷¹ This occurred just as he was contemplating retirement.⁷² At age 77, Cappon was still working, albeit at a slower and more deliberate pace:

During the two years since the Atlas Project [the *Atlas of Early American History*] terminated on 31 Oct. 1975 I have not worked so steadily as hitherto. I suppose I need not justify that condition at age 77, but I know I would not be happy without work and on a regular schedule; nevertheless I enjoy the freedom of self-employment, to be or not to be on the job, as I choose. As Distinguished Research Fellow Emeritus (too formidable a title) I enjoy continuing associations in the Newberry Library and the use of secretarial services. Jared Sparks will keep me occupied for I know not how long; it is a fruitful subject.⁷³

It was a project he was never to finish, despite his best intentions, but, then again, many scholars have pet projects that they enjoy working on, whether or not they finish them.

The use of diaries and, later, blogs to resist time and to secure a future is a common feature of these documents and their interpretation. As Andreas Kitzman notes, “By writing about oneself in detail, death – or at least the anxiety produced by the recognition of its inevitability – is somewhat stayed. Equally important is the notion of deciphering the self, of regulating one’s inner life so that progress and improvement become easier.”⁷⁴ It is easy to slip Cappon’s diary into such an interpretative structure, seeing Cappon using it to resist the

70 Ibid., 4 June 1956. In working on such projects, Cappon also noted the challenge of positioning himself so as to avoid interruptions, such as in this entry on 12 December 1956, concerning his heading north to the University of Virginia library to do work on his history of historical editing: “Most of the materials I need are in the William & Mary Library, but there are too many interruptions in Williamsburg and working conditions in the College library are very poor.”

71 Ibid., 23 February 1965.

72 Ibid., 30 April, 4 May, and 13 September, 1965. He ultimately opted to put off retirement until 1969, with a one-year “terminal leave” until July 1970 (ibid., 5 May 1967; 10 April and 3 May 1968).

73 Ibid., 31 December 1977.

74 Andreas Kitzmann, “That Different Place: Documenting the Self Within Online Environments,” *Biography* 26, no. 1 (2003): 53. Kitzmann also argues that the diary functions as a memorial or avatar “that literally stands in place of the individual who wrote it” (p. 54).

inevitable. Each of his long-term projects might represent stalling tactics, ways of keeping him engaged and intellectually fit.

There is no doubt that Cappon utilized the diary as a mnemonic device. In a fall 1964 entry, he writes, "Yesterday I chanced to refer to my Diary for Oct. 1958 and so discovered that we had dinner at the Towners to celebrate Rachel T's birthday on 4 Oct." He called them to wish happy birthday.⁷⁵ Fifteen years later, Cappon drew on his diary in order to entertain. While in Williamsburg, after attending a dinner party with old friends at the Colonial Williamsburg Conference Center, Cappon recounts, "After the dessert I read some passages from my diary of 1961 – local events and incidents that sparked a succession of reminiscences by my guests and much laughter. Now the past of 18 years ago was partially relived. Thus the party turned out to be quite a merry occasion."⁷⁶ Scattered throughout the diary volumes are Cappon's forays into his own past and that of his family. In spring 1968 he visited Milwaukee, driving the entire length of 27th Street and onto Walnut Street to look at the house built by his father in 1900 and where Cappon lived until 1922: "A big frame house with a bay window, it has deteriorated along with the neighborhood for many years." He then visited the buildings of the West Side Manufacturing Company, his father's business, "now used for storage & suffering from vandalism. It was an expanding & profitable business, 1900-1929." He visited his old church, Kingsley Methodist, and then went to see the house his parents had bought in 1922, a brick house with tile roof, newly constructed: "It is well preserved & the shrubbing well cared for. So much for the past."⁷⁷ Four years later, he writes about a return visit to his old neighbourhood, Wauwatosa, in Milwaukee:

Some of the landmarks are still to be seen, including the house which my father built on the n.w. corner of Walnut & 29th Sts. in 1900, where I lived until I went to the University of Wisconsin. The old structure, very well built, is probably a rooming house now, down at the heel, in a shabby neighborhood. In this house my only sister died in 1909 at the age of 16. Shades of the past!⁷⁸

Sometimes, minor events triggered poignant memories for Cappon, and he used his diary to reflect on their significance to him. In an entry in late 1970, he remembers his old dog:

Walking through Washington Square to the branch post office this morning, I saw an Irish terrier, the very image of Jo-Jo, our devoted pet who died in the summer of 1965. It gave me quite a pang to see this dog – he must have run away from his master. Without

75 Cappon Diaries, 4 October 1964.

76 *Ibid.*, 4 November 1979.

77 *Ibid.*, 7 April 1968.

78 *Ibid.*, 27 May 1972.

thinking, I whistled for Jo-Jo, but this dog would not come to me. Jo lived to the age of 14 – an important and beloved member of the family. I would like very much to have another Irish terrier.⁷⁹

These kinds of entries abound in his diaries, providing a human portrait of Cappon that is less visible in his other personal papers and underscoring the importance of the diary for him.

Deeply embedded in his use of the diary as a mnemonic tool was his use of it as a means of thinking through difficult decisions. The instances when Cappon faced significant decisions, especially those opening up opportunities for more time for research and writing, provide insights into how he used writing as a way to air out the factors and determine how he should proceed. Upon receipt of a letter from Lawrence Towner, who offered him the senior fellowship at the Newberry library for 1969–70 for his own research and writing, Cappon records, “It is a tempting offer, as a change of location for work might be a good tonic. It raises questions, however, of my home & the two houses I rent next door; and even more so, Catherine’s [his housekeeper] employment during my absence and assurance of her return to me.”⁸⁰ A month later, noting that he must soon make a decision about the offer, Cappon writes, “It appeals to me very much and I suppose I should not let ‘domestic’ ties – my house & Catherine’s services – hold me back. I don’t think I would want to rent my house.”⁸¹ Ultimately, Cappon decided to offer his house rent-free to the institute fellows.⁸² Just a few years before, he had requested a year’s leave, figuring it would be his last opportunity to have such a year for research before he retired.⁸³ While we can

79 Ibid., 14 December 1970.

80 Ibid., 22 January 1969. Just a few years before, Cappon had noted in his diary his belief that his salary as institute director was too low (26 April 1966).

81 Ibid., 22 February 1969. This led him to direct the *Atlas of Early American History* until its completion in the mid-1970s. As this project wound down, Cappon accepted Towner’s offer of the Newberry’s Distinguished Scholar Fellowship, to extend from November 1975 to August 1976 (ibid., 28 October 1974). See Richard J. Cox, “Lester J. Cappon, Scholarly Publishing, and the *Atlas of Early American History, 1957–1976*,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 43, no. 3 (2012): 294–321.

82 He offered his two houses, 412 and 412A Griffin Ave., rent-free for institute fellows and up to \$3,000 to cover the rental fees of a fellow elsewhere if either of the two houses turned out to be too small. “My main purpose is to increase the value of the fellowships. The free housing would be in the nature of a fringe benefit of the fellowship” (Cappon Diaries, 14 December 1970). Cappon had bought his first house on Griffin Avenue in 1965 after the death of his wife (26 July 1965) and the second house the next year (ibid., 17 and 19 March; 22 April 1966). He also contributed to scholarships for institute fellows, noting in 1968 that he had met with his lawyer, Vernon Gedy: “I have decided to set aside a large amount for an endowment fund to finance a post-doctoral fellowship in the Institute” (ibid., 31 May 1968; see also 15 June 1971).

83 Cappon Diaries, 1 and 22 March 1967. He was then planning to use the time to complete his books on the history of historical editing and the administration of historical manuscripts.

view these entries as Cappon's efforts to write for a future readership, interpreting himself for a later generation and controlling his legacy, it is perhaps more important to see these entries as a tool that was useful to Cappon himself.

The Diary as Artifact

We can also consider the physical nature of his diary, a feature of such documents becoming more important as we observe the shift to virtual forms of diaries. The volumes themselves are remarkably consistent over the twenty-eight years, as is his handwriting. For as long as possible, Cappon used diary volumes provided though the Recordak company, with his name embossed in gold leaf on the front cover. Each page had a standardized template for a single day's entry (although Cappon regularly used the notes pages in the rear to extend these daily descriptions). José van Dijck indicates that "handwritten diaries are material artifacts that are themselves memorials – traces of a past self. Memory, in other words, is always implicated in the act and technology of writing."⁸⁴ This is certainly borne out in Cappon's diaries, consisting of multiple volumes remarkably uniform in their physical nature and reflecting the kind of consistency or deliberateness we can see in Cappon's life and career.

Almost from the beginning, Cappon used his diaries as a form of scrapbook, inserting photographs, newspaper clippings, and printed ephemera (such as menus and railway tickets). On the page for 22 May 1954, he inserted a newspaper clipping about his daughter, Mary Beth, then fourteen years old, who had driven a car into a local gas station pump owing to its defective brakes; she made the local news because of her age and the fact that she did not possess a driver's licence.⁸⁵ This mixing of documentary form is an important clue to Cappon's intentions for his diaries. Historians and other scholars have viewed scrapbooks as a form of autobiography and, with their inclusion of artifacts and keepsakes, as a means of establishing a personal identity and a rhetorical form for grounding self.⁸⁶ Most of the volumes include clippings, pasted photographs, and various ephemera, adding weight and texture to them. For most of the years, Cappon employed a fountain pen, and it is obvious to the reader that he enjoyed the materiality of these volumes as much as their contents. His concern for evidence in his historical research, scholarly book design, and book and manuscript collecting can be extended to the creation of these documents.

84 Sonja Neef, José van Dijck, and Eric Ketelaar, *Sign Here! Handwriting in the Age of New Media* (Amsterdam, 2006), 119.

85 Cappon Diaries, 22 May 1954.

86 Patricia P. Buckler and C. Kay Leeper, "An Antebellum Woman's Scrapbook as Autobiographical Composition," *Journal of American Culture* 14 (Spring 1991): 1–8.

Cappon as Mimic

Interspersed throughout the diary are either lengthy sections of descriptions of Cappon's Western travels or separate small volumes concerning these trips.⁸⁷ Cappon was well aware of the writings of Western explorers, naturalists, and scientists, and he seems to have been working in this tradition when he wrote sections of his diary.⁸⁸ There has been some investigation into the travel diary form, suggesting that such diaries were a means to fill downtime with an activity to create meaningful narratives that could border on spiritual reflection shaping a sense of self.⁸⁹ One of Cappon's own research and personal collecting interests concerned the Lewis and Clark expedition. One historian tells us that it is the "most heavily documented exploration in all of recorded history up to the twentieth century," although Lewis and Clark's journals are "partial, skewed, self-serving, and incomplete."⁹⁰ Cappon devotes a considerable part of his scholarly and personal collecting energies on this and other Western expeditions.⁹¹ His interest in the expedition and its various records and publications was because of its engaging story, as he notes in this review of Bernard DeVoto's edition of the journals: "To every American, however slight his knowledge of American history, the partnership of Lewis and Clark is a geographical expression sig-

87 Cappon also created detailed accounts of other travels, such as his 6 August to 9 October 1970 trip to Europe, which took him to England and Scotland, primarily to attend the Edinburgh Music Festival.

88 See, for example, Beatrice Scheer Smith, "The 1872 Diary and Plant Collections of Ellen Powell Thompson," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 62 (Spring 1994): 104–31.

89 Andrew Hassam, "'As I Write': Narrative Occasions and the Quest for Self-Presence in the Travel Diary," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 21 (October 1990): 33–47.

90 Thomas P. Slaughter's *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness* (New York, 2003), xiv, 33. The notion of what is true in the journals is not a simple matter: "The journals contain lies, deceptions, errors, inconsistencies, internal contradictions, differences among the six journal writers, and contestable perspectives. They embody suppressions, exclusions, ignorance, bias, and partial knowledge. In other words, the journals are reflections of human fallibility and are the product of explorers' ambitions" (p. 48). If the journals are not accounts of basic facts, then what are they? "If they are less reliable guides to external events than we have long believed, they are better guides to the interior wilderness – the minds and hearts of the explorers – than we have appreciated.... We should accept that reading the journals is a creative act, just as writing them was" (p. 64).

91 See, for example, Paul Allen, Lester Jesse Cappon, Alfred C. Berol, and Columbia University Libraries, *History of the Expeditions Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, Philadelphia, Published by Bradford and Inskeep, 1814: A Census of Extant Copies in Original Boards* (New York, 1970). Cappon regularly reviewed new scholarship, especially documentary editions, on the Lewis and Clark expedition; see his reviews in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 20 (July 1963): 460–62; 35 (January 1978): 176–78; and 38 (October 1981): 751–53. He also occasionally offered detailed notes on the original publications relating to this expedition, such as "Who Is the Author of the History of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark (1814)?" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 19 (April 1962): 257–68.

nifying western exploration. The story of their expedition, rewritten in every text-book, never fails to strike fire in the mind of the most apathetic student."⁹² History for Cappon was narrative and story, features of this scholarship once lost and now being found again.

Cappon often created separate journal accounts of his Western trips. In 1968, he notes that he has completed a thirty-six-page typescript of his journey down the Colorado River, with plans for photocopying it so he can send copies to some of his companions on the trip. "I plan to file a copy of this journal with my Diary of 1968, which is blank for the period of the voyage, 29 June to 9 July. I had taken along a note pad to record the rough journal, in writing which I was sometimes a day late because darkness came before I had an opportunity to write."⁹³ He prepared another notebook for a summer 1969 trip to Canada, Alaska, and San Francisco.⁹⁴ At the end of his 1971 diary volume is a set of separate pages of diary entries from 19 to 28 July 1971 for his Gros Ventre Mountains horseback ride, and there is also a typed cover page, "Diary of Raft Trip of Middle Fork of Salmon River, Idaho 31 July–6 August 1971," followed by loose pages as before. The following summer, Cappon compiled a separate volume describing his British Columbia raft trip, making an entry depicting how and why he prepared these journals. While visiting a friend and fellow historian, Max Savelle, in Seattle he notes that, in the afternoon, "I completed my diary of the river expedition. I am tempted to transcribe & enlarge it somewhat, if I can find time while the details are fresh in my mind. Whether it would be interesting enough to make multiple copies I am not yet sure, although several members of our company requested that I do so and send them copies."⁹⁵ In his 1973 diary, there are inserts of loose notebook pages concerning his rafting trip on the Green River in Utah and rafting trips on the Stanislaus and Tuolumne rivers.⁹⁶ In 1975, he prepared a separate journal chronicling his rafting trip on the Stikine River in British Columbia.⁹⁷ Another Western trip is documented in a separate journal in the summer of 1976.⁹⁸ And in 1980, just a year before his death, Cappon compiled a separate journal about his Caribbean cruise aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*.⁹⁹

92 *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 11 (July 1954): 486–88 (quotation, p. 488).

93 Cappon Diaries, 20 August 1968.

94 *Ibid.*, 9–19 August 1969.

95 *Ibid.*, 10 August 1972; the separate volume covered his raft trip from 27 July to 8 August 1972.

96 *Ibid.*, 12–17 August 1973 and 27–30 August 1973.

97 *Ibid.*, 5 August 1975, where he notes, "For 5–15 August see my Journal of the Stikens [Stikine] River raft trip in British Columbia."

98 *Ibid.*, 15 August–12 September 1976; no entries but there is a separate volume of his trip to the West.

99 *Ibid.*, insert for 15–23 August 1980.

From time to time, Cappon found himself revisiting the journals that describe his horseback riding and rafting, such as in 1976:

Among my papers at the Library [Newberry], I turned up the Diary I wrote during my horseback trip on the Gros Ventre Mts., Wyoming in July 1971, followed by the raft trip on the Middle Fork of the Salmon in Idaho with the Towners & the Nebenzahls. I enjoyed re-reading it, with many a chuckle; and I intend to make Xerox copies of the river trip for them. This record heightens my anticipation of the Colorado River trip next month with the Towner twins.¹⁰⁰

In 1978, Cappon reviewed his diary to assist him in identifying photographs of a rafting trip: “With the aid of my Diary to jog my memory, I have located and dated on the topographic maps the successive camps of the raft trip on the Tateshine & Black rivers in the Yukon Territory and Alaska. These records will help to identify the pictures I took.”¹⁰¹ In this sense, Cappon’s diaries function almost like a memoir. As June Cross writes:

Personal memories spring from the imagined and real connection among places, people, and things. This is where history and memoir diverge. Textbook history is arrived at by consensus, dulled at the edges. It is drawn from careful inspection of documents and limited by the records one can find. The grand sweep of history feels linear, even though it is messy and fraught with competing ideas and conflicting circles of influence. But for the memoirist, history and memory conflate to form a story we want to tell about ourselves, and that narrative arc changes as we grow older, as the world turns.¹⁰²

Cappon was definitely telling a story about himself.

The Big Questions

Cappon seems to have intended his diary to be read by others, with clear indicators of an audience other than himself. In one 1955 entry, Cappon makes reference to an interview with an individual for a position with the *William and Mary Quarterly*, introducing the topic in this way: “Bill Towner, with whom we already feel well acquainted . . .”¹⁰³ In another entry describing a paper by Ernst Posner about the National Archives, Cappon describes Posner, an individual he had known for a long time, for the benefit of others: “Ernst, an excellent scholar and delightful person, came to the U.S. as a German refugee in 1939. His rapid mastery of English, both oral and written, was a remarkable achievement, in-

100 Ibid., 21 June 1976.

101 Ibid., 17 September 1978.

102 June Cross, “All in the Family,” in Patricia Hampl and Elaine Tyler May, eds., *Tell Me True: Memoir, History, and Writing a Life* (St. Paul, MN, 2008), 63.

103 Cappon Diaries, 14 June 1955.

cluding American slang which he can toss off like a native.”¹⁰⁴ These are definite signs that Cappon was writing the diary for his future readers, even though this does not lessen the importance of his use of it as a goad for his projects and mnemonic device for his career and personal life. Writing the diary was as much a part of his legacy as were his published writings.

With diaries, we generally think we will find poignant entries about aging, the meaning of life, and other reflections on personal crises. Cappon does not disappoint us. As Cappon entered his seventies, a time when most are considering retirement or have already retired, he began to get offers for many other opportunities. In late 1970, Cappon was offered a National Archives Fellowship, “a new position affiliated with NA’s Bicentennial of the Amer. Revolution program of historical documentary editing & publication.” He turned down the offer because of his commitment to the *Atlas* project.¹⁰⁵ A year later, he was asked to head a study about the financial needs of independent research libraries, remarking that he was “flattered & flabbergasted” to be asked,¹⁰⁶ but he declined the assignment because of commitments to the *Atlas* work and, as he puts it, “Discretion, I believe, is the ‘better part of ambition,’ and, at 71 I do not have unlimited time to spend it on what I want most to do.”¹⁰⁷ In 1974, Cappon was asked to be a regent professor at the University of California at Riverside for the winter 1976 term. In this instance, he writes that the “timing is quite ideal in relation to publication of the *Atlas*” and, as he records, “I would enjoy living in California.”¹⁰⁸ While at the California school, he taught a course on the American Revolution, called “1776,”¹⁰⁹ and gave two public lectures, one of which concerned presidential libraries.¹¹⁰ Although he had agreed to run for SAA Council in 1977 (unsuccessfully), just two years later he expresses how he felt out of touch with the society:

The final sessions of the SAA were held this morning, but two days of it were sufficient for me. The membership now totals about 4,000 and attendance at the convention this year, about 1,000, set a new high record. The programs have become so elaborate that there is something for everyone and perhaps more than enough. I looked for the surviving old-timers of 40 years ago and found only Oliver W. Holmes. He doesn’t seem to be

104 Ibid., 14 September 1954.

105 Ibid., 23 November 1970.

106 Ibid., 30 August 1971.

107 Ibid., 3 September 1971.

108 Ibid., 16 October 1974.

109 Ibid., 21 and 25 October, and 4 November 1974; 8 March 1975.

110 Cappon thought that a talk on presidential libraries would be a “timely topic” because of President Ford’s signing of a bill giving public custody to the presidential papers. “The Nixon Library organization having been recently dissolved by its trustees, I wonder whether no more presidential libraries will be established” (Cappon Diaries, 2 February 1975). Ultimately he gave a talk on these libraries, one on Benjamin Franklin, and a history department colloquium on the *Atlas* project (ibid., 3 October 1975).

very alert and responsive. I asked him about Ernst Posner, now living in Germany, with whom Oliver corresponds but his reply was not informative. Most of the historical editors, whose projects are supported by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, are historians rather than archivists, or seldom both, and do not attend meetings of archivists.¹¹¹

Around this time, Cappon was considering what to do with his personal papers; in other words, he was beginning to close up shop.¹¹² In 1975, when asked to be interviewed by Colonial Williamsburg's archivist, not all that long after having been interviewed by the National Archives, Cappon notes, with wry humour, "I can only conclude that I have become 'historical' in an unexpected way!"¹¹³ Yet when interviewed in May 1976, he poignantly records that his memory was slipping in ways he had not imagined.¹¹⁴

When we discover such self-conscious ruminations in Cappon's diary, it is natural to think of other great journals, such as those of James Boswell. Adam Sisman describes the writing process behind it: "Reading Boswell's journal would be like reading his mind; reviewing his journal at a later date would enable Boswell to relive the events he had recorded. The effect was spontaneous and natural, even artless; but it resulted from conscious effort."¹¹⁵ The combination of Boswell's diligence and his memory led to the journal playing a critical role in his writing the biography of Samuel Johnson; that is, the "practice of keeping a journal over many years had trained him to formulate in advance what he might write."¹¹⁶ The descriptions of Boswell creating his journal are quite interesting. He viewed his journal as a "vast hoard of memory," compulsively taking down as much as he could and demonstrating absolutely no regard for privacy or secrecy.¹¹⁷ Boswell made self-conscious references to his journal

111 Cappon Diaries, 28 September 1979. The 1979 SAA meeting was the only time I met Cappon.

112 He was nonetheless always mulling over another potential publication project. While at home in Williamsburg, Cappon was examining some of his "old research files" and looking for the 1890 strike edition of the *Alabama Sentinel*, which he had intended to use as a follow-up to his Harvard dissertation on the southern iron industry. He gave this to the archives at the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs under Philip P. Mason. "I also came upon my unpublished essay, & historical sketch of Washington County, Va., during the 1850s, based upon a variety of valuable primary sources & some secondary works. With some more work & updating of background literature, I think it would be publishable & might appeal to the editor of the *Va. Magazine of History & Biography*" (Cappon Diaries, 13 November 1976).

113 Cappon Diaries, 4 September 1975.

114 *Ibid.*, 12 May 1976. He finished the interview on 11 October 1976.

115 Adam Sisman, *Boswell's Presumptuous Task: The Making of the Life of Dr. Johnson* (New York, 2000), 28.

116 *Ibid.*, 138.

117 *Ibid.*, 33.

and other notes as his “archive”¹¹⁸ in an era when there was no real public sense of archives. Sisman speculates that Boswell was driven by a terror of oblivion, noting that he daydreamed about his papers being discovered some 2,000 years in the future (it took only a little less than a century for the discovery to be made). Boswell, in his sense of the archival record as a memory device, was ahead of his time. It is a concept that scholars and others trying to understand evidence and collective memory would draw on in the late twentieth century. While no one would argue that Cappon’s diary rivals Boswell’s journal, it is still easy to see the same motivations at play with both, even separated by two centuries.

What does emerge from a close reading of Cappon’s diary is his use of it to order his self, to discover meaning for his life and career. In this sense, Cappon seems to be following the advice offered in the common guides to the writing of diaries. The personal writing sections in good bookstores are overflowing with advice manuals about the construction of journals, diaries, letters, and other document forms. Some provide interesting insights into how and why such personal records are created. Stephanie Dowrick discusses the values of journaling, privacy issues, choosing the physical journal forms, the motivations for these documents, and how to observe and describe events in one’s life. She also provides exercises for learning how to journal.¹¹⁹ Samara O’Shea, who is an avid diarist (although she prefers the notion of a journal, seeing the diary as a daily log and the journal more as an emotional log), also attempts to provide practical advice, from the premise that there is no right or wrong way to approach this task. There is no topic off limits when compiling journals; the grand intention is that a journal mostly assists you in “finding your sense of self.”¹²⁰ These self-help books provide insight into the nature of modern personal records creation and maintenance. Dowrick advises, for example, “Perhaps you feel that you must write your journal on the computer so that you can get your thoughts down fast enough, but I would suggest that you at least experiment with handwriting. For many journal writers this increases the sense of intimacy and makes a clear differentiation between the writing they do for work or for more public consumption and their creative journaling.”¹²¹ Sometimes the commentary suggests the value of personal records systems, such as when Dowrick states, “As a creative journal writer, you are always free to go beyond the mere recording of facts.”¹²² Archivists may recognize that this is true of all personal record

118 Ibid., 34.

119 Stephanie Dowrick, *Creative Journal Writing: The Art and Heart of Reflection* (New York, 2009).

120 Samara O’Shea, *Note to Self: On Keeping a Journal and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (New York, 2008), 61.

121 Dowrick, *Creative Journal Writing*, 56.

122 Ibid., 131.

forms, but it is interesting to see this stated so candidly. O'Shea also makes similar assessments with additional insights, such as "It's not in the rereading where one finds solace but in the writing itself"¹²³ and "A journal, rather, is the path of pebbles you leave behind you, so you have the security of knowing you can always return to where you've been."¹²⁴ Some of the descriptions in these volumes come very close to capturing real examples of diaries and letters sitting in archives. O'Shea, for example, suggests:

I think we all know or know someone who knows that person – the person who keeps a daily, very meticulous diary. They end each day with a cup of tea or perhaps a scotch on the rocks. They sit in a large velvet armchair and pull out a black leather hardcover journal with their name imprinted on it – very *Masterpiece Theatre*. Then with a majestic black fountain pen poised over a blank page, they relax and write. They record the day's events in the order that they happened, and they do this devotedly each night before bed.¹²⁵

It is as if O'Shea had read Cappon's diaries before writing this assessment, down to the use of a fountain pen and the degree of devotion Cappon exercised in the task of creating this record.

Conclusion

Reflecting on a diary ending in 1981, before the era of the Web and the advent of blogging (and other digital forms competing with the diary as record), naturally raises the question of Cappon's audience and how he might have viewed the blogging phenomenon of today. José van Dijck compares the two forms. He views the traditional diary in this way:

Diary writing, as a quotidian cultural practice, involves reflection and expression; yet it is also a peculiarly hybrid act of communication, supposedly intended for private use, but often betraying an awareness of its potential to be read by others. Inviting the translation from thoughts into words via the technologies of pen and paper, the old-fashioned diary symbolizes a safe haven for a person's most private thoughts – even if they are published in print later on. Personal notebooks are often treasured as stilled moments of a forlorn past, and kept in safe places to be retrieved many years later – much like photographs – as precious objects of memory.

Van Dijck also states this about the diary: "Over the past centuries, the diary as a cultural form has been anything but homogeneous. The genre has been defined as therapy or self-help, as a means of confession, as a chronicle of ad-

123 O'Shea, *Note to Self*, xv.

124 *Ibid.*, xviii.

125 *Ibid.*, 1.

venturous journeys (both spiritual and physical), or as a scrapbook for creative endeavors.” He dismisses the idea that diaries are intended to remain private, and he also pushes the notion that diaries have more features in common with later blogging, such as the former’s communal purpose:

Writing a diary, of course, never happened in a social vacuum; the ritual occupied its own niche alongside other acts of communication, such as talking, listening, reading, etc. As a quotidian habit, diary keeping gives meaning and structure to someone’s life.

Moreover,

Like the writing of paper diaries, blogging is a process that helps express and order thoughts through rituals, thus defining a sense of self in relation to others; diaries and lifelogs are both acts and artifacts, in which materiality and technology are interdependent on their changing cultural form, their use and users.¹²⁶

Looking at Cappon’s diary leads me to believe that had he been born a couple of generations later he might have been a blogger, if he had had the opportunity to see the potential of the blog as a means of influence. The primary purpose of his diary was to prod himself to accomplish more and to finish long, lingering incomplete projects. As for the content of his diary that was purely personal, such as his ruminations about his family, he probably never intended it to be public, and it is possible that the level of reflection in this area was much less candid than in his jottings about professional and scholarly activities. Cappon mostly relied on his diary as a personal reminder. Also, the diary captures something of Cappon’s intense personal network of scholars, colleagues, and friends. Serfaty suggests that “where traditional diaries were written for an implied, ideal reader, online diaries explicitly search for an audience and in so doing, turn themselves into a collaborative project.”¹²⁷ Cappon would have liked this aspect of blogging. He might have written publicly about his concerns about education, the status of scholarly writing, history in the public square, and his own scholarly research projects.

On the other hand, there are reasons why Cappon might have eschewed blogging. The rise of diary writing is connected to the growth in literacy, religious motivations about personal salvation, and growing secular interests in sometimes elaborate, almost compulsive observations about daily events. This notion of personal salvation and the diary form is a telling one, as individuals often have written diaries when under great stress, or, just as telling, when fearful of oblivion or, at least, the loss of their own perspective. L. McNeill concludes,

126 José van Dijck, “Composing the Self: Of Diaries and Lifelogs,” *Fibreculture* 3, http://www.journal.fibreculture.org/issue3/issue3_vandijck.html.

127 Viviane Serfaty, “Online Diaries: Towards a Structural Approach,” *Journal of American Studies* 3 (2004): 465.

for example, “In its functions as a spiritual journal and a private space to tell secrets, the diary has a long association with the confessional mode in both its private and public forum.”¹²⁸ Blogs, however, may not allow such reflection, and may not lead to anything so deep, revealing, or exceptional. As McNeill suggests, “The online diary, in which the writing and the written subject seem to occupy the same moment as each other and as the reader, already creates a sense of congruency between the lived and the written.”¹²⁹ Even more important, Cappon might have passed on the blog because of concerns about how it can be preserved over time, since blogging is a technology reliant partly on its creator but also on Internet service providers and digital technologies.¹³⁰ Still, Cappon might have overcome such technical concerns, drawing on the advice of archivists and other experts, as he often did on other issues.

It is important to make one final observation about this diary. In considering the purposes of Cappon’s subjects, the topics he covers, and the means by which he records information about his activities and ideas, how reliable should we consider his diary as evidence of his life and professional and scholarly career? In other words, how can we judge the veracity of this diary as an archival source, the challenge every historian faces when relying on such a document (especially when it is as long and complicated as this one)? Scholars, writers, and average citizens struggle with the notion of the veracity of the past, memory, and sources, as Hilary Masters observes: “Every history is shaped by the order of its telling. Even in memory we make selections that configure the past, so the narratives of a single life can be contradictory and truthful all at once, reshuffled like cards and picked up and played out as different hands.”¹³¹ It is why historians, especially those studying archives and archivists, began to consider why and how archival sources are created, maintained, and used. Kathryn Burns, examining the role of notaries in Colonial Peru, notes:

To get the most from our sources, then, we need to go into the archive – not just literally, but figuratively, getting into the rules and gambits that contoured the ways people made documents. Happily, the rules aren’t hard to find. They are hidden in plain sight, in the modern editions of legal codes and classics. Both rules and gambits are also treated extensively in the literature of diplomatics, the study of the forms and techniques through which documents were produced.¹³²

128 L. McNeill, “Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks: The Diary on the Internet,” *Biography* 26 (2003): 27.

129 *Ibid.*, 40.

130 See, for example, Catherine O’Sullivan, “Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them,” *American Archivist* 68 (Spring/Summer 2005): 53–73.

131 Hilary Masters, *In Rooms of Memory: Essays* (Lincoln, NE, 2010), 39.

132 Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham, NC, 2010), 124.

Admittedly, these are two far-reaching observations about deciphering historical sources, but the point is obvious when reading something like Cappon's diary. My general sense is that Cappon makes careful choices to portray himself as an important player in the formative years of modern archives, historical editing, and scholarly publishing. Through his choices and eyes we can discern important facts about the historical and archival enterprise in the mid-twentieth century. We do not have to believe everything Cappon says, but we can learn much about his life and world if we read carefully.

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