Meaning-Making and Memory-Making in the Archives: Oral History Interviews with Archives Donors

CARMEN RUSCHIENSKY

RÉSUMÉ Cet article explore les processus, les pratiques et les liens qui contribuent aux façons dont les significations et les souvenirs sont générés par les archives. Dans le contexte d'un projet-pilote pour développer une méthodologie afin d'intégrer les entrevues avec les donateurs dans la pratique archivistique, je me suis mise à la recherche d'initiatives existantes ou potentielles en me servant de la théorie archivistique, de l'histoire orale, des échanges avec des archivistes et de deux entrevues sous forme d'enregistrement sonore. La première entrevue – avec Shirley Gyles, qui a fait don des archives du Negro Community Centre à l'université Concordia à Montréal – est importante pour ses liens avec la communauté noire de Montréal, ainsi qu'avec les collections spéciales de Concordia, où la méthodologie citée ci-haut est présentement mise en application. La deuxième entrevue – avec Susan Hart, une archiviste qui a fait don des archives de l'historien Peter Hart à l'université Memorial de Terre-Neuve – est intéressante pour les différentes perspectives du sujet de l'entrevue en tant que membre de la famille, archiviste et donatrice. En déplaçant le centre d'attention des documents statiques aux rapports entre archiviste et donateur (et éventuellement avec l'utilisateur), cette étude met en évidence le rôle médiateur des archivistes, aussi bien que certaines tensions – entre la preuve et la mémoire, et entre la théorie et la pratique. J'affirme que les entrevues d'histoire orale avec les donateurs des archives joueraient un double rôle : fournir de l'information contextuelle de grande valeur d'une façon qui respecte et enrichit le concept de provenance et de description archivistique, tout en éclairant la relation entre le donateur et l'institution ou la pratique archivistique elle-même, permettant ainsi le soutien et le dialogue entre les grands centres d'archives et les communautés, et encourageant des pratiques introspectives, innovantes et participatives.

ABSTRACT This article explores the processes, practices, and relationships that contribute to how meanings and memories are generated through archives. In the context of a pilot project to develop a methodology for integrating donor interviews into archival practice, I set out to identify existing or potential initiatives by drawing on archival theory, oral history, exchanges with archivists, and two audio-recorded interviews. The first interview – with Shirley Gyles, who donated the Negro Community Centre's archives to Concordia University in Montreal – is important for its connection to Montreal's Black community and Concordia's Special Collections, where the above methodology is now being implemented. The second interview – with Susan Hart, an archivist who donated historian Peter Hart's archives to the

ARCHIVARIA 84 (Fall 2017): 103–125

Memorial University of Newfoundland – is of interest for the interviewee's different perspectives as a family member, archivist, and archives donor. Shifting the focus from static records to archivist-donor (and, eventually, end-user) relations, this study highlights archivists' mediating roles as well as certain tensions – between evidence versus memory and between theory versus practice. It is argued that oral history interviews with archives donors can serve dual purposes: to provide valuable contextual information in a way that respects and enriches the concept of provenance and archival description while, at the same time, shedding light on the relationship between the donor and the institution and on archival practice itself, thus fostering support and dialogue between mainstream archives and communities, and encouraging self-reflexive, innovative, and participatory practices.

Introduction: Evidence and Memory, Archivists and Donors

> And so, at last, records and archives find their place in the process of memory: as evidence, as memory triggers, as touchstones – acquired, preserved, articulated, and mediated by society in order to contribute to the construction of collective knowledge, identity, and, perhaps, wisdom.[1]
>
> But beyond evidence, archives also preserve memory. And they create memory.[2]

Records and archives are not memories in themselves, but they are vehicles of memory. They are "touchstones" that are partly found, partly created, singled out and imbued with meaning. From among all the information or communicated knowledge that comes to be inscribed in material form (textual, visual, aural, or digital), a tiny portion is retained and preserved for its evidential or informational value, and an even smaller portion of this is borne across the archival threshold to acquire the status of archives – those records deemed by experts, authorities, officials, institutions, societies, or communities to have permanent, historical, and enduring value.[3] While public records are usually systematically organized and thus can be processed and transferred to archives with relative ease, private records, especially those of personal creator-donors, family members, and community organizations, often lack any clear or consistent order. In these cases,

1 Laura Millar, "Touchstones: Considering the Relationship between Memory and Archives," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 125.

2 Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13, no. 2–3 (June 2013): 101.

3 It is estimated that only three to five percent of an organization's records have archival value; see Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 29.

an archivist can find herself caught between ideal and reality: the ideal of preserving an untainted and evidential order that distinguishes the *fonds d'archives* from a catalogued sequence of unrelated historical documents and the reality of an idiosyncratic and fluid order of use. The quixotic ideal of original order gives way to more imaginative, flexible conceptions and acceptances of order, such as "last order of use," "custodial order," or "received order."[4]

Archivists play a key role in determining the archival value of records. The archival profession is, however, often misunderstood by non-practitioners. Archivists are imagined as neutral technicians operating behind the scenes. "Some people picture dusty, dry storage rooms where stuffy, brown-bow-tie curators look askance at anyone who speaks above a whisper," while others imagine "old parchments, scrolls and leather-bound volumes of medieval treatises."[5] Meanwhile, as Cook observes, myths surrounding the archival profession also persist within the discipline, as evidenced in what he describes as its central competing dichotomy – evidence versus memory, the tension between the archivist's "guardianship role ... of the archival product, the evidence, on the one hand, versus [his or her] interpretive or mediating role, on the other, as manifested in all of the many archival processes, the memory-making."[6] While archival practice has traditionally focused on acquiring, describing, and preserving documents as evidence, and protecting their impartiality through a stance of neutrality and objectivity, with the avalanche of over-documentation in all media over the past century, archivists have gone from being passive keepers of the "documentary residue left by creators" to "active shapers of the archival heritage."[7] Archivists, along with their colleagues in museums, galleries, libraries, and other historic sites, are thus faced with the double challenge of "building society's enduring memory materials, all the while attempting to preserve records as untainted evidence."[8] Archivists are increasingly regarded as mediators – between past, present, and future and between creators, records, and researchers.

The donors of archives also play a central role in generating meaning and value around the materials they are donating, especially when they are the creators of the records or the creators' close friends, colleagues, or family members, or if they have personal ties to the donating organization. While "absent donors" are known to drop off boxes, transfer custody to the archival repositories, and then disappear until the next accrual,[9] more often than not

4 Carolyn Harris, "Paper Memories, Presented Selves: Original Order and the Arrangement of the Donald G. Simpson Fonds at York University," *Archivaria* 74 (Fall 2012): 197.
5 Millar, "Touchstones," 1.
6 Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community," 99–100.
7 Ibid., 110.
8 Ibid., 102.
9 Harris, "Paper Memories," 202.

donors are directly and personally implicated in the appraisal and transfer process, and the meanings generated around the donation often begin with the conversation between the donor and the archivist. Archivists, in a sense, are interviewing donors from the very first meeting. Over the course of the acquisition process – the initial contact with the donor and the appointment to evaluate the material on-site, the post-visit write-up and overview, meetings with acquisition committees, the preparation and negotiation of the donation agreement, and the final signing and transfer – there are many opportunities to learn more about the donor and the donation. Some conversations between donors and archivists evolve over time, resulting in substantial donations or even developing into life-long friendships.[10] Each donor and donation is unique, and archivists working with private archives often approach their work on a case-by-case basis.

The present article seeks to explore these meaning-making and memory-making processes, practices, and relationships. It represents the outcome of a pilot project – Reconnecting Records to Living Voices: Oral History Interviews with Archives Donors – to develop and test a methodology for integrating donor interviews into archival practice at the Concordia University Library Special Collections in Montreal. Drawing on archival theory, oral history, exchanges with archivists, and two audio-recorded interviews, I set out to learn more about the people and stories behind archives donations, imagining that oral history interviews could "bring the stories to life," so to speak, in order to make them more accessible to users in a productive and engaging way. However, over the course of my research, I came to understand that the implications of doing interviews with archives donors go far beyond the cliché of "bringing stories to life," though the embodied presence of living voices *is* important. Shifting the focus from static, fixed records to living donors and, more specifically, to archivist-donor (and, eventually, end-user) relations, cuts to the heart of some of the most hotly debated issues in archival theory and practice – questions about accountability and impartiality, power and agency, participation and community, and memory and representation. Whose memory is being preserved? By whom and for whom? Who are the decision-makers? When, where, and how are these decisions being made? How is archival value determined? How are meanings generated around archives at different stages and by different actors, and how are they reinterpreted and reconnected to the past, present, and future in different

10 Caroline Forcier Holloway, "Rewinding Back to the Beginning: In Praise of the Donor Interview," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 35 (2015): 8; Aaron D. Purcell, *Donors and Archives: A Guidebook for Successful Programs* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), xxi.

ways? As Wendy Duff and Verne Harris have observed, "There always have been and always will be many provenances, multiple voices, hundreds of relationships, multiple layers of context, all needing to be documented."[11]

This article approaches these issues through an overview of past and current archival practices and analysis of the two interviews I conducted: one with Shirley Gyles, former president of the Negro Community Centre, who donated the centre's archives to Concordia's Special Collections in 2013, and another with Susan Hart, an archivist with over 28 years of experience, whom I "met" on the ARCAN-L listserv (which is hosted by Archives Canada), and who donated the archival records of her brother, historian Peter Hart, to the Archives and Special Collections at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Libraries. The first interview is important for the ways it connects to Montreal's Black community and to Concordia's Special Collections, where the methodology resulting from my pilot project is now being implemented. The second is of interest for the interviewee's different perspectives as a family member, archivist, and archives donor. Though not connected to Concordia, this interview presented an opportunity to delve more deeply into the roles of different actors (in this case, one and the same person) in preserving and creating meanings and memories around archives.

Oral History and the Archives

In 1948, history professor Allan Nevins of Columbia University in New York established the Oral History Research Office, the first archives to conduct and preserve interviews.[12] In the 1950s, oral history archives were developed at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of California, Berkeley, and over time more universities followed, along with presidential libraries, government agencies, corporations, labour unions, and religious orders, all of which sponsored their own oral archives.[13] According to Ellen Swain, oral history's earliest use was as an archival documentation strategy to supplement records of prominent historical figures.[14] Though oral history was to become a widespread means to recover "history from the bottom up" in the context of the social history movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, the

11 Wendy Duff and Verne Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (September 2002): 236–85.

12 Donald Ritchie, "Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

13 Ibid., 4.

14 Ellen Swain, "Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the Twenty-first Century," *American Archivist* 66, no. 1 (2003): 140.

archival emphasis – the practical use of oral history to supplement or explain information in existing archival collections – continued to dominate the oral history field in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[15] By 1973, archivists were beginning to view oral history more favourably.[16] A survey conducted by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) found that "73% of responding SAA members believed that oral history should be viewed as a regular archival activity (i.e., those who engaged in oral history should consider themselves professional archivists)."[17] Over 300 oral history centres or projects were identified by the Oral History Association (OHA) in 1973, and that number swelled to over 1,000 by the end of the decade.[18]

The publication in 1978 of Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past* marks a turning point in how oral history would come to be perceived and used.[19] Thompson defended oral history against criticisms of its reliability as a historical source,[20] but more importantly, as a socialist Thompson was committed to a history that focused on the experiences of working-class people.[21] He argued that oral history was transforming both the content of history and the process of writing history "by shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the assumptions and accepted judgments of historians, by bringing recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored" and by "breaking through the boundaries between the educational institution and the world, between the professional and the ordinary public."[22] More historians began turning to oral history to uncover the forgotten or unacknowledged history of women, minorities, and "ordinary" life:

> As oral history began to take root within the history profession, the Oral History Association began to emphasize historical analysis of the ways in which the field provided new means to study memory and history. Archivists who used oral history to supplement existing documentation were joined by historians who capitalized on oral sources to understand those members of society with little or no documentary record.[23]

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Society of American Archivists (SAA) Committee, cited in Swain, "Oral History in the Archives," 141.
18 Swain, "Oral History in the Archives," 141.
19 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
20 Alistair Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History," *Oral History Review* 34, no. 1 (2007): 50.
21 Ibid.
22 Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 8–12.
23 Swain, "Oral History in the Archives," 141.

Oral history went on to develop its own practices and to embrace and explore "what makes oral history different."[24] Alessandro Portelli argued that orality, narrative form, subjectivity, the "different credibility" of memory, and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee should be considered strengths rather than weaknesses.[25] Subsequent debate around ethical issues related to authority and representation gave rise to concepts such as "shared authority"[26] and the co-construction of the interview.[27] New approaches also highlighted marginalized histories and histories of trauma, whose telling depends on and fosters relationships of trust and reciprocity between interviewers and interviewees.[28] Beyond contributing to the historical record, oral history tells us about people's perceptions of events, what people did and also "what they intended to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."[29] Oral history projects provide a forum for stories to be told and heard by the research community and the broader public but also within communities, thus contributing to memory work and the creation and strengthening of community bonds. Oral history has also evolved to encompass a diverse range of participatory, academic-community, and research-creation collaborative projects.[30]

The early archival emphasis on using oral history to supplement or explain information in existing archival collections has not greatly benefited from these later developments, though the 1980s did see the emergence of the "activist archivist."[31] Writing in 1983, James Fogerty observed that most, if not all, archives collections contain gaps – periods of time or events, for example, that affected or were affected by the donor's activities, but about which the collection contains little information:

24 Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

25 Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations," 55.

26 See Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

27 Henry Greenspan argues that "a good interview is a process in which two people work hard to understand the views and experiences of one person: the interviewee." Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), xvii.

28 See Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), and Steven High, ed., *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).

29 Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 50.

30 See High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*, and Elizabeth Miller, Edward Little, and Steven High, *Going Public: The Art of Participatory Practice* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

31 Donald Ritchie, "The Technological Impact," in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 322.

> Even those periods of a donor's life that appear best documented will usually be found wanting; the documents seldom adequately reflect the considerations that contributed to key decisions and very rarely betray the donor's candid opinion of events and people with whom he interacted. Collections of personal papers are especially weak in the information they provide on the formative years of their donors – years that often hold the keys to perceptions that influenced their subsequent actions. Even correspondence does not always betray the author's inner thoughts, and it may, depending upon the intent behind it, be quite misleading to the researcher.[32]

But Fogerty's call to "fill the gaps" also extends to individuals and groups not represented in the archival record, and he challenges archivists to go beyond their collections to find ways of including them.[33] He sees oral history as the most feasible and potentially useful tool for the task.[34] He goes on to consider the logistics of such an undertaking:

> Who should undertake these oral histories?... Should it be the archivist, familiar with the records from involvement in their collection and processing? Should it be an oral historian hired specifically for that purpose? Or should it be a researcher, that scholar whose use of the collection uncovers gaps and whose research demands that an attempt be made to fill them?[35]

The most likely answer, he writes, is the latter – regrettably so because a scholar's interview is likely to be limited to his or her own narrow research interests and overlook the wider potential.[36] The best solution, according to Fogerty, would be to hire a full-time oral historian to work within the context of a specially designed oral history project or, better yet, for the archives to fund a permanent oral history office as an adjunct to its operations. Wishful thinking, perhaps. More than 30 years later, while oral history is thriving as a practice in its own right, Fogerty's call to integrate donor oral history interviews into archival practice has not resulted in any consistently implemented programs or protocols.[37] The broader and deeper significance of the meaning-making and memory-making processes taking place at different

32 James E. Fogerty, "Filling the Gap: Oral History in the Archives," *American Archivist* 46, no. 2 (1983): 150.

33 Ibid., 155.

34 Ibid., 151.

35 Ibid., 156.

36 Ibid.

37 Among the many thousands of archives and oral history projects around the world, there are surely several donor interviews – either as part of the acquisition process (recorded or not) or, in cases where individuals also happen to be donors, in the context of thematic oral history projects. Yet there are few published articles on the subject (see Caroline Forcier Holloway, "Making a Case for the Donor Interview: Giving a Voice to the Doug Betts Silent Home Movie Collection," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 26 (2006); and Forcier Holloway, "Rewinding Back to the Beginning") and no published protocols.

stages in the acquisition process and afterward remain to be explored, as does what oral history, specifically, can tell us about these processes, practices, and relationships.

In Praise of the Donor Interview: Past and Present Initiatives

In a recent series of exchanges on the ARCAN-L and SAA listserv forums, which were prompted by a message I had posted regarding my project, a number of archivists expressed interest in the idea of doing oral history interviews with archives donors.[38] Some described having conducted interviews with donors, though not always in a systematic way:

> I know I'm not the only archivist ... frequently frustrated by the lack of information about an acquisition conducted in the past, and I have actually started to record (with the donor's permission) my discussions with the donor and then put a copy of the transcript in the accession file.[39]

> This topic greatly interests me. Before my retirement from full time work a decade ago, I did at least half a dozen interviews with donors of personal papers. There were many more collections acquisitions that would have been enhanced by oral histories.[40]

> I have not been systematic about it but have interviewed as I had questions for the donors. In some cases, I have gotten written explanations instead.[41]

Others wrote to share the outcomes of ongoing or completed oral history projects that have been showcased in online and print publications or have become the basis for online exhibits.[42] Archivists working with community

38 My message read as follows: "Dear Colleagues, I am a PhD student working on a pilot project based on oral history interviews with archives donors. I hope to develop a methodology for integrating donor interviews into archival practice. If anyone has any interest or experience in this area, I would sincerely appreciate any feedback or information that you have to offer."

39 Email exchange with Gina Rappaport, head archivist at the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution, 6 February 2017. All personal exchanges are quoted with the permission of their authors.

40 Email exchange with John Fleckner, retired senior archivist at the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution, 4 February 2017.

41 Email exchange with Shelley Sweeney, head of the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections, 13 April 2017.

42 Them Days Archives and Publications in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, for example, has published for more than 40 years a quarterly magazine that contains interviews conducted with elders and people of Labrador, though not specifically focused on archives donors (email exchange with Janice Goudie, acting editor at *Them Days*, 2 February 2017). The King County Archives in the state of Washington completed a project in 2016 that involved oral history interviews with the creators of records in a government archives collection (the "donor" was thus the agency) (email exchange with Carol Shenk, archivist at the

archives also responded. Désirée Rochat, a community educator, and Kristen Young, former archives coordinator at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University, described their work with a community organization in Montreal's Saint-Michel neighbourhood, the Maison d'Haïti. They are using oral histories not just as archival objects but also to aid description of the archives and "find a way to incorporate collaboration, inclusion, and education in the creation and maintenance of community based archives."[43]

The most detailed and informative response I received came from archivist Kelly Revak, who described donor interviews (recorded and otherwise) that she conducted in the context of her work at Lambda Archives of San Diego between 2007 and 2014:

> We did not have a formal policy, it was case by case. Usually, I thought it useful to do an interview primarily when a donor brought in a large, mixed, unprocessed collection, with context that would not be obvious to future processors. In these cases, I would sit them down, start recording (with their permission!), and talk through the collection, box by box, or item by item, as appropriate. I would sometimes take notes as well, if there were points where I thought it might be unclear what specifically was being discussed in the audio, and key that to the items/boxes as necessary. I would store the audio files, in the digital file for that accession, and make a note in the accession folder. Any notes would be copied and go in the accession folder, and with the collection itself in an admin file. In the collection's admin file, I would also make a note that the intake recording had taken place, and where it was stored, what it was called, etc. There were some other occasions when we did intake interviews, such as when a particularly notable donor came in, or if the donor had a lot they wanted to share about the collection either descriptively or just reminiscing, that I didn't feel I could capture in notes. Sometimes the stories they shared about things in the collection were more fascinating (and more used!) than the collection itself![44]

Some institutions conduct oral history interviews within the context of larger community outreach programs that also encourage archive donations. The Brooklyn Public Library's "Our Streets, Our Stories" project, for example, includes oral history interviews with Brooklyn residents as well as

King County Archives, 13 March 2017). The oral history project can be found here: http://respondingtoaidsexhibit.org.

43 Email exchange with Kristen Young, 4 February 2017. At the time of the exchange, the centre had not yet started interviews but was working on the inventory of a fonds that will include both oral histories and transcriptions of the interviews. The team has also been looking into ways to include excerpts of interviews in the descriptions (email exchange with Désirée Rochat, 1 March 2017).

44 Email exchange with Kelly Revak, archivist at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, 14 April, 2017. As Revak noted in her email, this work was done when she was archivist at Lambda and does not reflect the policies at the Library of Congress.

"community scanning events," which involve bringing scanners to library branches around Brooklyn and asking patrons to bring in "photographs, fliers and documents ... and anything else that tells the story of Brooklyn" to be digitized.[45] Diantha Schull's 2015 publication *Archives Alive: Expanding Engagement with Public Library Archives and Special Collections* documents more than 100 similar community outreach projects that include the use of oral history, social archives, citizen cartography, and photovoice projects, among many other initiatives.[46] Lauren Kata, archivist and co-chair of the OHA's "Metadata Task Force," also recently highlighted archivists' expanding roles, which include "doing oral history" – facilitating oral history, conducting interviews, processing, cataloguing, and preserving oral history, and creating online collections, exhibits, publications, and community events.[47]

If any institution has come close to fully implementing an archives-donor oral history interview program, it is Library and Archives Canada (formerly the National Archives of Canada). Drawing on her own experiences and those of her colleagues at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Caroline Forcier Holloway[48] provides a thorough overview of the institution's long-standing but recently interrupted (as of 2004) incursions into oral history in her article "Rewinding Back to the Beginning: In Praise of the Donor Interview." She outlines some of the benefits of such an undertaking – filling in historical gaps, obtaining context to build on descriptions, creating finding aids, and developing biographical sketches, for example.[49] Starting in the early 1970s, the National Archives donor interview concept elicited the participation of "curious archivists" across a variety of media and manuscript holdings who took part in the interviewing process.[50] More than 100 interviews (ca.

45 Brooklyn Public Library, "Our Streets, Our Stories," Brooklyn Public Library's Department of Outreach Services, accessed 20 March 2017, https://ourstreetsourstories.tumblr.com.

46 Diantha Dow Schull, *Archives Alive: Expanding Engagement with Public Library Archives and Special Collections* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2015).

47 Lauren Kata, "Oral History and Archives in Practice" (PowerPoint presentation, San Jose State University SAA Student Chapter, 2 February 2017), accessed 28 March 2017, http://sjsusaasc.weebly.com/uploads/1/1/9/7/11972646/kata_guest_speaker_sjsu_saa_02-02-2017.pdf.

48 Caroline Forcier Holloway, "Making a Case for the Donor Interview" and "Rewinding Back to the Beginning."

49 Forcier Holloway, "Rewinding Back to the Beginning," 2.

50 "In an effort to ensure that archivists followed consistent standards in recording techniques, the Sound Archives staff and other concerned archivists in the Visual and Sound Archives recruited members of the newly formed Canadian Oral History Association to draft oral history recording standards in both official languages.... They were written and recorded in English by Richard Lochead, and in French by Jean-Paul Moreau" (Forcier Holloway, "Rewinding Back to the Beginning," 3).

120 hours) were conducted between the 1970s and 1990s by archivists who wanted to bring a broader context to potential or existing acquisitions.[51]

Regarding the ongoing debate about archivists conducting interviews, there were two divided camps. Many viewed it as creating a record, "and as such were opposed to the process since it went against the principle of the fundamental role of an archive: to acquire and not to create."[52] But, according to Forcier Holloway, those who did partake in the process "knew that there was much more to an archive than just acquisition, description, and preservation."[53] The retired colleagues she interviewed "unanimously" and "unequivocally" stated that

> the most important reason for conducting donor interviews was to ensure that the context provided by a donor supported the "content" of the acquisition. In acquiring a fonds or a collection of documents, the donor interview was never part of the official process, but grew out of necessity as a means of culling more information from the creator and/or the donor of the material. In many cases, the oral history interviews conducted by archivists complemented and enriched the textual records.[54]

But Forcier Holloway also sees the donor interview as a form of material culture that can "speak volumes" to a visitor when displayed or digitized.[55] The time invested in interviewing a donor also builds rapport, provides a sense of belonging for the donor, solidifies pre-existing links, and establishes a reciprocal and beneficial relationship.[56] Under Forcier Holloway's direction, LAC has established the Oral History Initiative, an oral history program with one stream that focuses on donor interviews. According to Forcier Holloway, though the initiative is still in its pilot year, the researchers have made some headway, with a few donor interviews and one knowledge-transfer interview completed to date.[57]

51 Forcier Holloway, "Rewinding Back to the Beginning," 5.

52 Ibid., 8. As Swain has observed, the larger debate about the role of archivists as curators of materials versus creators of documentation has taken on new meaning for postmodern theorists in recent years: "Over the last decades, one of strongest deterrents to oral history's acceptance among archivists and special collection librarians has been the idea that they, as neutral, impartial curators of collections, can or should not 'create' records. Of course, this neutrality or objectivity is a noble but unattainable goal. The origins of this aversion to 'creating' records are grounded in traditional, twentieth-century archival theory" (Swain, "Oral History in the Archives," 144).

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 9. "Transcriptions were not included in the donor interview process as this would have been an additional expense to be incurred by the archives. In retrospect, with transcriptions being in high demand by the research community, the added expense may have benefited wider access to the interviews in the long run" (Ibid.).

55 Forcier Holloway, "Making a Case for the Donor Interview," 44.

56 Ibid., 48.

57 Email exchange with Caroline Forcier Holloway, 2 February 2017.

Reconnecting Records to Living Voices: Oral History Interviews with Archives Donors

My own pilot project sought to trace the stories and journeys of archival donations through conversations with creators, family members, or community/organization representatives who had donated archives to Concordia University Library's Special Collections. After meeting with Concordia University Librarian Pat Riva and Special Collections Archivist Alexandra Mills, I wrote a brief description of my project, which Mills forwarded to archives donors who might be interested in participating in interviews.[58] Within a week's time, two archives donors had enthusiastically agreed to participate – an organization donor, Shirley Gyles, who had donated on behalf of the Negro Community Centre (NCC) in Montreal, and a creator donor, Norman Marshall Villeneuve, a well-known Montreal-based jazz musician (also affiliated with the NCC), who had recently donated his personal archives to Concordia but who, eventually, was unable to participate. I decided to approach Susan Hart, an archivist-donor I had met on the ARCAN-L listserv, and she also responded enthusiastically. Though she had not donated archives to Concordia, I felt that her simultaneous role as archivist, family member, and archives donor would contribute an interesting perspective to the pilot project.

The study was conducted within the context of an oral history seminar at Concordia University. I was thus working within a limited time frame and approaching the interview process from a particular perspective. I am a translator and translation scholar whose research focuses on translating cultural memory and includes studies on oral history and archives.[59] Acting as a kind of liaison, I set out to explore the donor–archivist relationship in order to develop a methodology for integrating oral history interviews into archival practice. My project was not primarily research driven but directed toward pragmatic outcomes. Oral history was well suited to the task. More than just an interview technique, oral history draws on the unique relationships

58 My interview invitation stated the following: "These interviews will provide an opportunity for donors to share their knowledge and personal perspectives on these important contributions and enrich our understanding of the life stories behind them – what they mean and have meant for particular people and communities over time – "bringing them to life," so to speak, and making them accessible as living records."

59 There are some striking parallels between archival practice and translation, notably the central dichotomy described by Cook regarding archivists' fidelity to the evidence versus their interpretive roles as mediators who make evidence accessible to end-users, which echoes the central "millennia-old" dichotomy in translation between "faithful vs. free" or "source-oriented vs. target-oriented" translation. Hans Vermeer, "Starting to Unask What Translatology Is About," *Target* 10, no. 1 (1998), 49.

forged between interviewers and interviewees. My approach was thus not based on empirical or comparative methods (e.g., quantitative and qualitative studies, semi-structured interviews, and so on) but, rather, on the relational dynamic already implicit in the archivist-donor relationship. The protocol that I submitted is now in the hands of Concordia's Special Collections staff and will be developed and improved upon by them in collaboration with researchers affiliated with Concordia's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS).

My methodology was largely informed by the approach established and developed over many years by COHDS. Working with COHDS, interviewers (myself and those continuing the project) have access to ethical guidelines, templates for interview guides and consent forms, practical and methodological training, webinars, digital tools, software, and audio- and video-recording equipment.[60] I conducted two audio-recorded interviews, one in person and another by telephone. A Summary Protocol Form was submitted to Concordia's Human Research Ethics Committee and approved prior to my undertaking the interviews. This application included a brief project outline, interview guide, and consent form. The interview guide established different parameters for creator donors, family member donors, and organization donors. This broader format was later adapted to the specific situations of the interviewees. Before conducting interviews, interviewees were asked to sign consent forms. These outlined the purpose of the study and specified that it was non-confidential and that participants could withdraw their consent to participate at any time.

Shirley Gyles and the Negro Community Centre Fonds

The first interview I conducted was with Shirley Gyles, regarding her donation of the NCC archives to Concordia University Library Special Collections. We agreed to meet at her home in Saint-Lambert, Quebec, on 14 September 2016. Gyles was on her cellphone when she answered the door, but we smiled and laughed without words as I took off my boots, and I felt welcome immediately. Before I had time to present my consent forms or start my recording devices, Gyles launched right into talking about the difficult period she went through after the NCC was demolished in 2014:

I took it quite badly there for a few months. Actually, tears would come to my eyes sometimes, you know, I had put so much … I guess it was not so much the effort,

60 Concordia University, Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, accessed 14 August 2017, http://storytelling.concordia.ca.

but I was so sure that it was going to happen, and I was disappointed. You know, my particular history with the centre.... Everyone said, oh, you know, you did everything you could and it would take time to get over it, and I'm slowly getting over it, but it was *not* one of the, let's say, shining or the best moments in my life. But I say to myself, well, I guess that's the way that it should be, that it was meant to be and I did all that I could *that I know*, and so I'm comfortable with that but still disappointed.

Gyles is referring here to the history of the NCC (founded in 1927), an organization that she had been involved in since her childhood. She grew up in the east-end Montreal borough of Pointe-aux-Trembles, and as her family was one of only two Black families in the neighbourhood, they maintained a connection with the predominantly Black neighbourhood of Little Burgundy in the southwest. Shirley and her sisters spent a lot of their summers there, travelling two-and-a-half hours by bus to attend dance and music lessons at the NCC. Later, after joining the NCC board of directors in 1995, including 10 years as president (2004 to 2014), Gyles spent 20 years organizing events, fundraising, and working to reopen the centre, which had been closed since 1989 and was in need of extensive repairs. The centre never managed to raise enough money, and the building was demolished in 2014.

Over the course of our hour-and-a-half interview, Gyles did not have much to say about the content of the archives donation itself. But an important theme that emerged was her sense of responsibility in preserving not only the materials in the archive donation itself (which has a long, complex history, with contributions by various parties over time, which were stored at Concordia prior to her official donation), but also other materials circulating within the community that she hopes will be preserved. She specifically mentioned instances of "historians" taking materials and children of deceased parents not recognizing the value of certain things and just throwing them away:

Shirley Gyles: I know I have a lot of archival things, not a lot, but I know that before I pass away I'm going to make sure that I give them to Concordia, because what has happened in our community is there's lots of, or there has been lots of information out there, but people kept in their basement or whatever, and when they passed family looked at it ...
Carmen Ruschiensky: And didn't know ...
SG: I mean Reverend Este, I mean there's hoards of stuff that have gone the wayside, plus people who felt that they were historians and entitled have taken it and, you know, they've passed on. I know this for a fact, it's in their home and there's nothing, you know, I won't name names at this point, but I do know that there's archival [stuff] ...
CR: Um-hum.
SG: ... from our community that's in other people's homes.

She also relates how the community's and the centre's history is unimportant to the younger generation and to newer immigrants who had no personal connection to the NCC:

SG: But a lot of these people in these organizations, they came here, and the centre means nothing for them, so when it's time to knock it down or there's a paper – Look! Look! There's the signing of the deed!
CR: Yeah.
SG: Knock it down! It doesn't mean anything. Their parents weren't married there. They weren't christened there. Their cousin didn't drown as part of an outing there. It means nothing! So it's easy. So if I say okay, give that paper to XYZ community organization, then they see the paper [gestures as if throwing away].
CR: Yeah.
SG: And I know that as sure as I'm sitting here, that's what will happen.

Though she said she has been criticized for donating to Concordia (by community members expressing concerns about access), she feels that the materials will be best preserved there, and this is very important:

CR: So do some people in the community feel it's less accessible being at Concordia than being ... ?
SG: Yes they do, they do, and when, like in this last thing, when I did give the papers they told me I had no right to do that, and so what are you keeping, let's say if we do eventually get a community centre, some miracle? You know, you've given everything to Concordia. I take that responsibility because I know what happens. Yeah, yeah, I'm gonna do this and I'm gonna do that. It ends up in file 13, so I'm going to take that responsibility. At least I know if it's at Concordia it's safe.

We discussed different ways of addressing community members' concerns about access.

SG: I would like to go see just what we just talked about, that, you know, they do make some formal type of announcement and, say, have it on display. I imagine it would have to be under glass, but I mean there's places in Concordia. Then they could have something – maybe during Black History Month would be a perfect opportunity to say, you know, these are the documents we received from the NCC and perhaps you'd like to see some of the pictures. I'm sure that people would like to see it, because those that do hear about the centre, I think it would be nice actually.

Gyles asked if I was in touch with Professor Steven High at Concordia University. I said yes and that he was, in fact, in the process of organizing an event with a group of Concordia students to showcase the NCC archives donation.[61] Though I was not able to attend the event, I learned later that Gyles

61 See Steven High, "Montreal Black History: 'Hidden Stories' Find a New Home at

and many other community members had attended, and that it was a huge success, attracting more than 200 people and drawing media attention.[62]

Though the interview with Gyles does not reveal a lot about the materials in the donation, it does provide a lot of contextual information about the centre, Little Burgundy's Black community, different attitudes, concerns and debates within the community, her own long-standing commitment to the community, as well as information about related groups and activities; for example, she is also currently president of the Coloured Women's Club (founded in 1902), which also has a long, rich history in the neighbourhood. Though the long-term impact of oral history interviews with archives donors (perhaps in tandem with outreach events such as the event cited above) cannot be deduced from a single interview at this early stage, it is interesting to note that Gyles' primary concerns – preserving the centre's (and community's) memory and history, while also making it accessible to community members (past, present, and future) – echo, from a donor's perspective, some of the very same issues currently being explored and debated in archival practice, in particular issues pertaining to participation and community, memory, and representation.

Susan Hart and Peter Hart's Archival Legacy

While the foundational concepts of provenance, original order, and respect des fonds remain the cornerstones of archival practice, they are not always easy to apply. As Millar has observed, tracing custodial history can sometimes become a matter of guesswork, especially in the case of personal or family archives involving records that are "created by one member of the family, vetted and reviewed by another, added to by another and rearranged by another."[63] Identifying provenance might imply "choosing among many possible creators," and determining original order may necessitate "declaring a particular point in history as the authoritative time to which the archives should be fixed, never mind the additions or changes made over time."[64]

Concordia," Concordia University: News, accessed 15 March, 2017, http://www.concordia.ca/cunews//main/stories/2017/03/13/35-concordia-undergrads-showcase-local-black-history-research-projects.html?c=news/stories.

62 See Bill Brownstein, "Spirit of Negro Community Centre Lives on in Concordia Student Project," *Montreal Gazette*, accessed 20 April 2017, http://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/spirit-of-negro-community-centre-lives-on-in-concordia-student-project; and Ainslie MacLellan, "Historic Negro Community Centre Given New Life at Concordia University," CBC News: Montreal, accessed 20 April 2017, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/negro-community-centre-concordia-archives-1.4065615.

63 Millar, *Archives*, 98.

64 Ibid.

The second interview that I conducted, with Susan Hart, highlights these interpretive challenges. When my initial planned interview fell through, Hart was the first person who came to mind as a possible replacement. When I wrote to ask if she would be interested in doing an audio- or video-recorded interview over Skype or the phone, she responded right away. Susan Hart grew up in St. John's and studied at Memorial University of Newfoundland in that city, completing a BA and an MA in Folklore. She moved across the country to attend the University of British Columbia, where she completed her Master of Archival Studies degree in 1989. She has worked for 28 years for the Government Records Service of British Columbia and currently holds the position of Archivist and Digital Information Strategist. She became involved in the donor experience after her brother, a specialist in Irish history, died suddenly. She and other family members decided to donate his archives to the Memorial University of Newfoundland Queen Elizabeth II Library, and she played a central role in the donation process.

Our audio-recorded phone interview lasted a little over one hour. I began by asking about her background and then about the archive itself, and ended with a discussion of the donation process. Hart had presented a paper on the donation of her brother's archives at the Canadian Association for Irish Studies Conference in Banff, Alberta, in 2016. She sent me a copy, which provided a very informative point of departure for my interview guide; a few of my questions included quotations from her paper. Some of these highlight the interpretive challenges archivists face when attempting to determine original order:

> Over everything is a beautiful creative layer of documents awaiting judgment: Do they belong in existing files? Should a new file be opened? Or perhaps they are just copies needed for a meeting or a class, which can be discarded afterwards. Look at your own office; you probably have a similar sedimentary layer, whether it's spread about in a decorative fashion or centralized in one or a few "to do" piles.[65]

During the interview, I learned that Hart was not present when the records were first boxed up. She later commented that she thinks doing oral history interviews with archives donors is a good idea and that, in this case, conducting an interview with her brother's partner might also have been useful, given that his partner had other knowledge about the materials and had boxed up the records.

65 Susan Hart, "Peter Hart's Legacy" (presentation, Canadian Association for Irish Studies conference, Summits: New Perspectives and New Vistas in Irish Studies, Banff Centre, Banff, Alta., 25–28 May 2016).

One of the most interesting aspects of the interview was Hart's multiple perspectives. It highlighted her various relationships to the materials donated – as a professional archivist, as a donor, and as the creator's sister. Her interview therefore raised questions about subjectivity/objectivity, archival practice as an interpretive process, privacy and protection of sensitive information, and the issue of the many layers of material that have to be sorted and arranged (physically, emotionally, intellectually, digitally); touched on debates surrounding respect des fonds, original order, and "last" order of records (e.g., the order of records in the university office versus the home office, the experience of walking into a room full of papers that seem to have no order); and considered Hart's personal journey of "communing" with her brother in a new way. In addition, questions surfaced about how Hart's role as a professional archivist helped her move through her grief and move forward in the project, and, finally, how the whole experience changed, in some ways, her perspective on archival practice.

I asked her what it was like, from a donor's point of view, to work with other archivists. She found it very interesting because she had to keep reminding herself that she was the donor and not the archivist. Even though all archivists follow the same basic principles, there are differences between public and private archives. As the donor, Hart suggested an arrangement to the archivists, who changed some of the order based on those suggestions, but she said it was up to the archivists in the end. She elaborated on this interpretive aspect, noting that, especially with loose records, sometimes you have to "create" an order, but one that "flows from" or "echoes" a (hypothetical) original order. When I asked her if her experience as a donor had changed in any way her perception of archives and archival practice, she explained that the process gave her more insight from both sides. It helped her realize that there is a great deal we can learn from donors. There would have been a lot of gaps without her help (as a donor) – information about contacts, letters, first names, and so on. But she feels that the impact of the donor's role also depends on the kind of knowledge the donor has. The archivists, she said, had many questions for her, and if she had not been there, they would not have been able to fill in many gaps without conducting significant research. She realized, therefore, how important the connection with a donor can be.

Since she was working with her late brother's archives, Hart also had a very personal connection to the materials and the process, which was at times "emotionally intense." I mentioned a section in her paper in which she describes having "communed" with her brother in a new way. She said that it was ironic that their work was related – hers as an archivist and his as a historian – but that they had rarely spoken about it. She had not followed his career closely. "It was a revelation to me," she said. She came to find his work much more interesting by examining it closely; she saw a new side of him. "It was wonderful that way, because there are so many regrets when a

close relative dies." She said it felt like getting to know him all over again: "These days I am much more interested in Peter's life as a historian, and as an archivist and donor, I've had the special privilege to explore this."[66]

I concluded by asking what Hart considered to be the value and benefit in making archival donations. She replied that archives in general are valuable because they are the history of our society. There is so much that is not well represented, such as records of Canada's First Peoples. Creating archives is not, however, the only way that history is recorded or remembered. As an academic, her brother wanted his work to be built upon by others. Researchers are always going to be questioning and building on one another's work, Hart pointed out. This process is not possible if the work is not archived. Part of what made her brother's files interesting was knowing that they were repeatedly revisited (before and after becoming archives).

Overall, Hart's interview highlights the interpretive dimension of archival practice, the ongoing tension between memory-preserving and memory-making, and issues around (sought-after) impartiality and accountability. Her multiple roles as family member, archivist, and donor also foreground the different actors implicated in assigning value to records and interpreting (and generating) meaning around archives, as well as the power dynamics at play ("It was up to the archivists in the end") and the influence the donor has on the process. Finally, her reference to providing a legacy of records for researchers to revisit and reinterpret attests to the ongoing processes of meaning-making and memory-making that archives can generate.

Discussion

The interviews I conducted with Shirley Gyles and Susan Hart recall, in different ways, the competing dichotomy between evidence and memory, as identified by Cook at the outset of this article – that is, the tension between the archivist's guardianship role on the one hand versus his or her interpretive or mediating role on the other.[67] Gyles, as a donor and community representative, feels a personal responsibility to preserve her community's history *and* ensure that it remains accessible to and serves the community. Though she has faced criticism within the community for donating to Concordia University, her personal experience reveals that these two positions – at least from a donor's point of view – are not incompatible but, rather, complementary. Meanwhile, Susan Hart's interview reminds us that neither the donor nor the archivist is working in isolation, that meanings and memories are generated around archives through relationships and the different perspectives and power

66 Ibid., 2.

67 Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community," 99–100.

dynamics these bring into play. If advocates of the archives-as-evidence paradigm, taking their inspiration from Jenkinson, have focused more on description, descriptive standards, and metadata models, and if advocates of the archives-as-memory paradigm, drawing inspiration from Schellenberg, have focused more on appraisal and archivists' interpretive and research-based decisions,[68] then reconciling these strands calls for a more relational perspective or, as Cook puts it, "more active engagement by the profession in the society and communities it serves, an external reorientation towards hospitality rather than an inward isolating gaze."[69] As archival paradigms have shifted from evidence to memory to identity to community, the archivist, Cook maintains, has been transformed from "passive curator to active appraiser to societal mediator to community facilitator."[70] There is no "truth" to be found or protected in archives, "but many truths, many voices, many perspectives, many stories."[71] Oral history interviews with archives donors, as the present study has shown, can provide valuable contextual information while, at the same time, foregrounding these different truths, voices, and perspectives. They can enrich archival description while also considering whose memories are being preserved, by whom and for whom, and who has access to them and what/whose purposes they serve.[72]

Conclusion

In her recent article "Toward More Honest Description," Jennifer Douglas maintains that one of the first steps toward creating more honest descriptions of archives involves admitting a more active role for the primary creators of archives:

Opening up information gathered from the donors of archives and related to their decisions regarding the contents and shape of the archives, as well as information

68 Ibid., 111–12.
69 Ibid., 112.
70 Ibid., 95.
71 Ibid. "Yet ironically, as archivists were more confidently finding their own voice as societal agents, as social activists for memory-making, adopting a flexible, fluid, and pluralistic mentalité mirroring the values of postmodern society and the possibilities of digital technology, they were also developing more sophisticated means by which archives were managed, and evidence protected" (Ibid., p. 111).
72 The methodology guide that I submitted to Concordia concluded by outlining a number of ways that oral history interviews with archives donors could be showcased; for example, through online exhibits, on-site or travelling exhibits, or as part of community events or creative projects initiated by researchers, community members, and artists. An excellent sampling of creative projects based on oral history interviews can be found on the COHDS website: http://storytelling.concordia.ca.

related to their acquisition and processing, would help call attention to the roles of the archiving I, of subsequent custodians, and of archivists in the formation of the archives researchers eventually encounter.[73]

Jeannette Bastian argues that archivists, as "documenters of society," have "significant roles to play" in representing, transmitting, and providing access to knowledge of events, places, and persons to be remembered.[74] Elizabeth Yakel prompts archivists to think about how moving "from a model of mediation and controlled description to one of collaboration and shared authority" might strengthen the archivist's role as documenter.[75] Meanwhile, end-users – donors and donor community members, researchers, and other individuals and communities – also have a role to play; they also contribute to the meanings and memories generated around archives.

This article represents one of the outcomes of a pilot project to develop and test a methodology for integrating oral history interviews into archival practice. As such, it set out to reflect on some of the complex issues emerging at the intersection of archival theory and practice in a way that complements the more pragmatic methodology guide itself. The overall project thus highlights another dichotomy beyond evidence and memory – that of theory versus practice. Given that archival practice is indebted to a long and rigorous tradition based on the principles of provenance, original order, and respect des fonds, one wonders how the newly emerging archival paradigms identified by Cook, which revolve around identity and community, can actually be reconciled with core archival principles and put into practice. It sounds good, in theory, to say that the archivist "has been transformed ... from passive curator to active appraiser to societal mediator to community facilitator,"[76] but how is this transformation manifested? How can archivists embrace new roles and develop more self-reflexive, innovative, and participatory perspectives and practices without relinquishing the basic principles of their trade – those principles that make it possible to do their work and still aspire to a *certain degree* of impartiality as "keepers" of untainted evidence? This role is one of authority but also one of responsibility.

In the model of the participatory archives described by [Isto Huvila and Elizabeth Yakel] the critical element is the sharing of authority and control/curation between

73 Jennifer Douglas, "Toward More Honest Description," *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 46.

74 Jeannette A. Bastian, "Flowers for Homestead: A Case Study in Archives and Collective Memory," *American Archivist* 72, no. 1 (2009): 120–21.

75 Elizabeth Yakel, "Who Represents the Past? Archives, Records, and the Social Web," in *Controlling the Past: Documenting Society and Institutions*, ed. Terry Cook (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011), 259.

76 Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community," 95.

the *archivist* and a body of users who self-identify as stakeholders in the archives' content. In such a model it would also be possible for there to be no involvement from anyone with formal archival training or affiliation – in other words there would be no "archivist."[77]

Less radical alternatives to eliminating the archivist can be found in Douglas's call for a "more honest description"[78] based on transparency and inclusion or Fisher's investigations into donor agency, for example.[79] In oral history, the concept of "shared authority" does not imply the elimination of the interviewer or historian but, rather, the building of relationships based on trust, respect, and reciprocity. Multiple voices contribute to meaning-making and memory-making in the archives, including those of donors.[80] Listening to their stories is a good place to start.

Carmen Ruschiensky *holds an MA in Translation Studies and is pursuing a PhD in Humanities at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture at Concordia University in Montreal. Her research explores the relationships between language, translation, identity, and memory in Quebec, and includes studies on migrant literature, oral history, and archival theory and practice. As a translator, she specializes in the French-to-English translation of scholarly texts in the visual arts, social sciences, and humanities.*

77 Kate Theimer, "Participatory Archives," in *Encyclopedia of Archival Science*, ed. Luciana Duranti and Patricia C. Franks (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). Theimer cites Isto Huvila, "Participatory Archive: Towards Decentralized Curation, Radical User Orientation and Broader Contextualisation of Records Management," *Archival Science* 8, no. 1 (March 2008): 15–36, and Yakel, "Who Represents the Past?"

78 Douglas, "Toward More Honest Description," 26.

79 "Donors of archival fonds are largely neglected in our professional literature, and yet for many archives, donors are essential to building a rich and vibrant collection. Though archivists have a wealth of practical experience with donors, there is a paucity of research and reflection about them. The role of donors deserves greater inquiry. Donors introduce a dynamic element to the archival process, bringing their own values, ideas and interests. Examining donors through the concept of *agency* ... reveals that they exercise significant influence on key archival functions, which in our theoretical models are generally treated as the sole purview of archival professionals." Rob Fisher, "Donors and Donor Agency: Implications for Private Archives Theory and Practice," *Archivaria* 79 (Spring 2015): 92.

80 See Eric Ketelaar, "Cultivating Archives: Meanings and Identities," *Archival Science* 12, no. 1 (March 2012): 19. "By cultivating archives through successive activations, people and communities define their identities. In these activations, the meanings of archives are constructed and reconstructed. Archives are not a static artefact imbued with the record creator's voice alone, but a dynamic process involving an infinite number of stakeholders over time and space. Thus, archives are never closed, but open into the future."

P.O. Box 2596, Station D, Ottawa, ON K1P 5W6 phone 613 234-6977 fax 613 234-8500
email aca@archivists.ca www.archivists.ca

Association of
Canadian Archivists
Association canadienne
des archivistes

Truths, Trust and Technology

June 6th – 9th, 2018
Edmonton, AB

The Association of Canadian Archivists invites you to attend the 43rd Annual Conference "Truths, Trust and Technology," June 6th to 9th, 2018 in Edmonton, Alberta. Archivists from far and wide will engage with the theme truths, trust and technology. The truth ? whatever that is ? is messy these days. In the "post?truth" era, lies can seem more convincing than facts, and in an era of discourse on decolonization, Canadians are reflecting on new truths about historical facts.

"Truths" become "lies" depending on context and interpretative lens. The very existence of facts may even be open to question. Contributing to the messy truth is technology. Amidst this technological and social backdrop, we can be certain that archivists must sustain their role as trusted custodians of the historical record. How might archives and archivists need to adapt? What new approaches, competencies and skills will be needed? How can archivists help people to realize the enriched insights into historical truths that knowledge of context and provenance offers?

Where does "truth" lie for archives and for humanity?

Conference sessions and activities are based in and around the Chateau Lacombe Hotel, centrally located in Edmonton, walking distance from Art Gallery of Alberta and overlooking the North Saskatchewan River. The Archivists Society of Alberta will be working closely with the ACA – our website and social media platforms will have further announcements and workshop details.

While in Edmonton participants will be able to:

Take a ride on the Edmonton Street Car

Tour BioWare – Electronic Arts

Be part of the East – West softball game

Edmonton extends a warm welcome to all archivists, national and international.

Conference information and registration is available at the ACA's 2018 website, https://archivists.ca/content/annual?conference.