

Hybrid Histories: Blended Archives and Mediated Memory

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As many archives seek to grow their audience and make their collections more accessible, the politics of archival digitization is a growing area of interest both for curators and archival researchers. In this chapter, we suggest a tension between the desire to preserve primary materials and a need to alter them to suit new contexts, audiences, and purposes, and we reflect on the ways this tension has shaped four distinct archival collections. The first two sections address the materiality and accessibility of the Lucille M. Schultz Archive of 19th Century Composition at the University of Cincinnati. The third section turns to the Martha McMillan Journal Collection at Cedarville University to consider the technical and political risks of archival transcription. Finally, the last section compares the Lesbian Herstory Archive and the Museum of Transology to explore how these two queer historical collections enact their missions despite facing unique curatorial challenges. Drawing on our work with these four distinct collections, we ultimately argue for a more courageous and access-focused approach to historical and archival work in the field of rhetoric.

Digitizing primary materials is a key means of preserving and composing community memory. This multimodal enterprise attests to the materiality of historical research while emphasizing the constructive, even intrusive dimensions of building a repository. Mark Garrett Longaker and a team of scholars (2022) have recently undertaken such hybrid work with UT-Austin's Rhetoric and Composition archive, arguing that the discipline "cannot explain itself" to stakeholders "without taking proper control of our past" (p. 77). We reaffirm the desire to preserve that past while noting that "taking control" involves inescapable forms of mediation. Whether the focus is on disciplinary archives or archives where rhetoric is a salient concern, we posit an ironic slippage between safeguarding things and altering them.

With that slippage in mind, we adopt a self-conscious curatorial politics that acknowledges its shaping power while insisting on archival accessibility and inviting participation of marginalized voices. To adopt the language of

Maria Novotny and Ames Hawkins (2019), we accentuate how archives and archival curation situate bodies “in relationship with a wide range of artifacts, materials, and texts in order to design, frame, and position engagements and experiences for viewers of an exhibition” (para. 7). Alex Evans and Chris Carter begin this investigation by discussing the Lucille M. Schultz Archive of 19th Century Composition at the University of Cincinnati in the two opening sections, reflecting on the archive’s material form, its conditions of fragmentation and decay, and its accessibility challenges. Bethany Hellwig then details her work transcribing the writings of Ohio farmer Martha McMillan, highlighting the tensions between feminist fidelity to McMillan’s original text and the need to make informed, if risky, editorial decisions when faced with ambiguous script. Finally, Katie Monthie examines the Lesbian Herstory and Museum of Transology archives, lauding how they record a diversity of queer experiences while also exploring the challenges of cataloging forms of eclectic, vernacular materiality.

Curatorial Presence and Material Disembodiment in the Hybrid 19th Century Composition Archive

When I (Alex Evans) was first introduced to the Schultz Archive of 19th Century Composition, I was a new graduate student at the University of Cincinnati; now-Emeritus Professor Russel Durst came to speak to my class about the department’s composition program. He brought with him a weathered volume of grammar instruction that he passed around the room. As he described the archive, made up of texts collected by Lucille Schultz over her 26 years researching the history of writing instruction as a faculty member at UC, I imagined a dimly lit room full of leatherbound volumes and dark wood hidden away somewhere in the building. When I later began volunteering for the archive, I realized that my first impressions could not be further from the truth, though they perhaps reveal something about the way archives live in the contemporary imagination. In reality, the Schultz collection contains no antiquarian books at all and is stored inside a set of unassuming filing cabinets in the English department offices. The archive is made up primarily of facsimiles—xeroxed copies of original texts found in libraries and archives across the country and used by Schultz throughout her career. The facsimile archive has both affordances and limitations for the archival researcher, drawing attention to the materiality of the artifacts (and the original texts they reproduce) as well as the figure of Schultz as the curator and creator of the archive.

In the introduction to *Meetings with Manuscripts*, academic librarian Christopher De Hamel (2016) wrote that “facsimiles are rootless and untied

to any place. No one can properly know or write about a manuscript without having seen it and held it in the hands. No photographic reproduction yet invented has the weight, texture, uneven surface, indented ruling, thickness, smell, the tactile quality and patina of time” (pp. 2-3). Schultz herself was able to have this kind of embodied, tactile experience of the original 19th-century texts during her research trips, but contemporary scholars utilizing her archive can only see this experience reflected through her photocopied reproductions or, more recently, the digitized version of those reproductions. Schultz (2021) noted this evolution in research methods in the Foreword to *Composing Legacies*, writing that for researchers in the archive, there are “no more dusty jeans. No more jumping up to turn on the light that had gone off at the end of a stack” (p. xii). While Schultz was right to point out that both the facsimile collection and the digitized version of the archive make these texts accessible to researchers in a way that they never previously were, De Hamel’s critiques still stand: the Schultz archive presents challenges not only for researchers invested in the material, embodied experience of reading 19th-century texts but also more broadly for researchers who wish to venture beyond Schultz’s work to “properly know and write about” the original texts.

As a figure, Schultz looms large over the archive. In both the physical and digital collections, Schultz’s choices as a researcher and, ultimately, as the creator of a collection, assert a distinct curatorial presence. Many of the photocopied texts in the archive are incomplete as Schultz chose only to copy certain sections, and the facsimiles often include Schultz’s annotations, underlines, and other markings. In some of the copied pages, fingers—presumably Schultz’s—are visible holding down the corners of documents. While De Hamel’s (2016) description of facsimiles presents reproductions as impersonal, alienated versions of a particular text, Schultz’s reproductions feel extremely personal, as if her presence as curator has occupied the space between the reproduction and the original text. Though Schultz’s curatorial presence lends a kind of coherence to the whole collection, uniting disparate texts under a single body of research, her reproductions themselves cause problems, particularly as we work to make the archive more accessible. Generating accurate alt text via optical character recognition is already challenging with historic texts, but Schultz’s photocopies add another layer of confusion for software readers. To address these accessibility concerns, the current custodians of the archive are faced with a quandary: maintain the integrity of Schultz’s facsimile collection as-is and accept its inaccessibility or expand the collection to address its current limitations.

To my mind, the choice is clear: the archive cannot stand still. I believe Schultz would agree with me as she wrote that archives are “far from static,” described the collection in its current form as “limited,” and celebrated

researchers who have “pored over this archive...in their different ways of seeing, making it new” (2021, p. xii). If, as Stephanie Taylor declared in 2017, “the future is hybrid,” it is essential that the Schultz archive continue to evolve and expand to meet the needs of a diversity of researchers. To do this, we must increase the accessibility of the digital archive, a task that may also require an expansion of the physical collection. By acquiring original copies of the texts that Schultz reproduced, the archive could not only invite the kind of tactile engagement with texts championed by De Hamel, but it could also have far better source material for creating an accessible digital collection. In this way, one researcher’s personal archive could live on to support further generations of scholars.

The Long History of Normativity: Accessing Nineteenth-Century Counter-Literacies

The archive that Alex mentions above, and that he has recently helped to catalog and enrich, speaks powerfully of Lucille Schultz’s dedication to her field and her contributions to its self-understanding. Her painstaking assembly of nineteenth-century writing and rhetoric materials from libraries across the country have culminated in an onsite and electronic repository of nearly 350 items. That hybrid trove is, to use the language of Charles E. Morris III (2006), an “inventional” resource for “rhetorical pasts,” affording researchers an abundance of overlooked records from which to construct historical narratives (p. 113). Digitization makes the records widely available, though it also clarifies the uncertainties of the storytelling process. Heeding the recommendation of Jennifer Ansley (2020), I (Chris Carter) aim here to “dwell in the uncertainties” of archival investigation, locating instructive contradictions in the artifacts and their mediation (p. 19). The artifacts support histories that associate nineteenth-century pedagogy with grammar drills and social sorting, but they also anticipate multimodal process and critical consciousness. Yet even as those surprising tendencies might appeal to activist researchers, the interface excludes people who are well-positioned to invent novel pasts from the archive’s holdings.

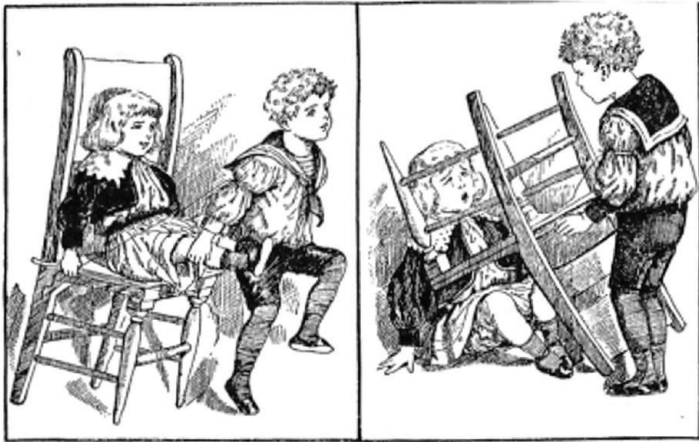
Interpreting those holdings requires a tolerance for inconsistency, a patient openness common to what Jessica Enoch and Pamela VanHaitsma (2015) termed “archival literacy.” The works often filtered writing lessons through the lenses of White Christianity, with notable instances from Hosea Hildreth in the 1820s, Spencer Smith in the 1850s, and Sarah Annie Frost in the 1870s. Some books mixed racial and religious conditioning with an emphasis on taste, fostering what Thomas Miller (2010) saw as the belletristic pursuit of social distinction (p. 95). Exclusive as those tutorials could be, the

inequity long preceded the classroom experience: Schultz (1999) noted poor people's limited access to schooling while lamenting laws against teaching Black people to read (p. 16-19). But the artifacts also proffered innovations that would influence college writing instruction deep into the next century. Elizabeth Mayo fused pictorial, material, and environmental literacies with a respect for democratic dialogue in the 1830s. Thirty years later, Warren Burton reaffirmed that materialist ethos, arguing for building on students' existing knowledge and having them weigh in on civic deliberations. By the 1890s, William Maxwell incorporated storyboarding into invention exercises while Gertrude Buck and Elisabeth Woodbridge encouraged investigation of audience assumptions when composing. Such contemporary-sounding concerns clarify the contradictory character of the Schultz holdings: the era against which modern composition studies defines its identity also prefigures some of the field's groundbreaking discourses.

The archive thereby gives scholars ways to extend Jason Palmeri's work in *Remixing Composition*: whereas he tracked multimodal rhetoric from its recent expressions to key moments in Composition's twentieth-century history, the Schultz holdings reveal the prevalence of the visual, aural, and tactile in the pedagogy of the 1800s. A number of the texts also veer from the writing practices Eric Darnell Pritchard (2016) associated with "literacy normativity" (p. 53), encouraging students' resistance to orthodox viewpoints and standardized forms of argument. But even as it permits us to remix composition's history, its inventional resources emerge from conditions of decay. Books contain badly blurred lines; paragraphs and sentences get cut off; engravings lose clarity during reproduction. Some texts come only in segments. Visitors cannot experience the tactile specificity of the entries, as the holdings appear mainly as photocopies and digital facsimiles. UC Libraries rendered the documents internally searchable, but the works still need to be formatted for screen readers in ways that negotiate page damage and make it available for analysis. Without appropriate document modification, screen readers have trouble with headers and page transitions, and they skip the texts' images and instances of cursive handwriting. They also bypass highlighted text while missing Schultz's marginal notations, some of which fueled her arguments in *The Young Composers: Composition's Beginning in Nineteenth-Century Schools*.

Despite curatorial efforts to open composition history to neglected perspectives, the archive also reifies normative reading practices, reproducing what Chloe Anna Milligan (2019) called "a transcendental version of what 'the body' apparently should (want to) be" (p. 75). That body is, among other things, one that sees the finer details of the textbooks' image-based lessons. To make those lessons accessible, the pictures require written supplements, some of which may expose tensions between imperatives for brevity and

accuracy in alt-text. Sometimes the images come in sequences that suggest unfolding action, for example, inviting students not just to decipher the visuals but imagine moments between (see Figure 5-1). Archivists' efforts to describe those sequences with accuracy coexist with the necessity to interpret them; the goal of preserving their uncertainty conflicts with an ethic of clear translation. When we engage in such translation, alt-text guidelines call for careful distinctions between decorative and informational visuals. But such clarity proves elusive as abstract dimensions of otherwise figurative engravings confuse ornament and substance. At these moments, archives of rhetoric demand risky rhetorical choices, some of which extend the long history of normativity while aiming to counter that very thing.



Oral Exercise.

Let us call the boy in the chair Henry, and the boy who is pulling him John.

- What are they playing?
- Which is the horse, and which the driver?
- How are the reins fixed?
- What do they call the chair?
- What are they using for shafts?
- How do you think John feels about it?
- How do you think Henry feels about it?
- Is there any danger, and of what?
- What makes the chair fall?
- Where is Henry when the chair falls?
- Do you think John feels sorry about it?

Figure 5-1. From Maxwell's First Book in English, 1894.

A Conversation with the Past: The Interpretive Transcription of a Nineteenth-Century Woman's Journal

Making interpretive choices when preserving texts also poses a risk when analyzing more intimate archives, ones that focus on individual writers while holding wide-ranging lessons in the history of literacy. One such writer is Martha McMillan, a rural Ohio farm woman who kept a daily journal for 46 years, from the day she was married in 1867 until slightly before her death in 1913, resulting in over 12,000 pages of writing. As part of a 2015 undergraduate American Women Writers class, I (Bethany Hellwig) transcribed five months' worth of McMillan's 1898 Journal for a digital archive (Brock et al., 1898). Other undergraduate students have, in the years since, transcribed much of McMillan's writing, and the journals have been scanned for digital access ("Martha McMillan Journal Collection"). Creating transcripts of the journals is an ongoing project under the direction of Dr. Michelle Wood at Cedarville University in Cedarville, Ohio, close to where Martha McMillan lived and wrote. The collection showcases the voice of a woman whose writings would, without this project, likely be lost to time. It is a feminist research project initiated to preserve the words of a writer who was unremarkable according to many traditional standards.

Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Royster (2010) wrote that excellence in feminist rhetorical inquiry "involves an effort to render meaningfully, respectfully, honorably, the words and works of those whom we study" (p. 664). By creating a digital transcript of faded, hard-to-read cursive text, the McMillan journal project shows tension within this standard of excellence. The project's goal is to preserve McMillan's work in a readable format, yet in the transcription process transcribers must, out of necessity, alter McMillan's original writing. Take, as an example, the April 1, 1898 journal entry shown in Figure 5-2.

This is the transcription I wrote in 2015 for this entry:

1 April. Friday. Rather a pleasant day, but by no means warm. Stanley(?) here and finished up his work after dinner. Alex cleaning the yard. Clayton & Jason at Selma School. Paul at our school. Casey busy. Uncle Joe around. I went on a hasty trip to C- on an errand this morning. The men _____ the fence along the ditch in the lower meadow. Mr. Mc at C- on an errand too. Luella and I busy. A traveling man here to supper and with us to night. His name _____ he was in the rebel army. [editor's note: she leaves a long space for traveling man's name in the journal, but never filled it in.]

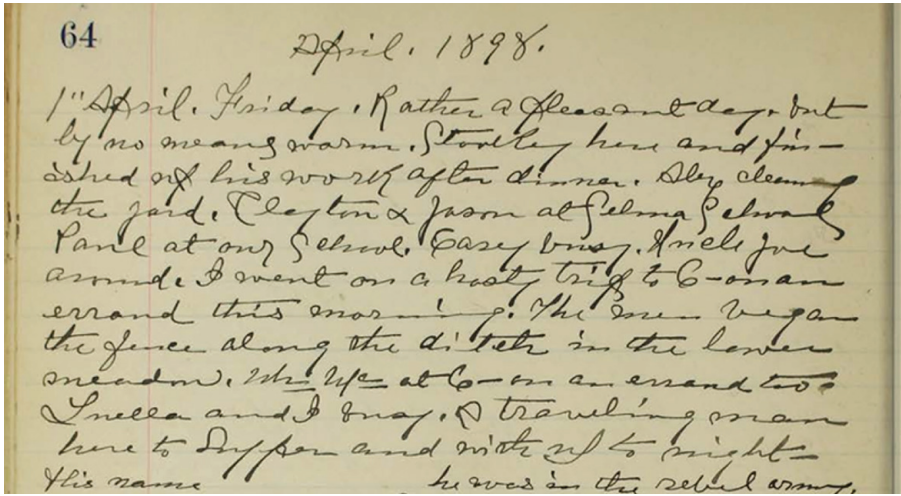


Figure 5-2. Photo of Martha McMillan's journal entry from April 1, 1898

As an undergraduate researcher, my instinct was to avoid authority, decision-making, or anything that could be considered a rhetorical act while transcribing McMillan's work. I privileged McMillan's writing above all, and in a desire to perfectly represent her words, I left question marks, blanks, and a worried-sounding editor's note about a blank space in the text. My lack of decision-making was meant to honor authenticity, but in refusing to make decisions, I ironically obscured the meaning of the text. In the current complete transcript of the journal (edited by an unknown person, but who may have been Dr. Wood), there were some significant changes from my 2015 transcription. "Stanley (?)" has become "Stookey," the blank space where I couldn't decipher the handwriting of a word has been deemed "began," as in, "the men began the fence," and my editor's note has been condensed to a bracket: "His name [Blank space] he was in the rebel army." These edits are decisive and, in their decisiveness, hold potential to be incorrect. However, they ironically insert less of the archivist's presence into the text, allowing McMillan's voice to remain the focus of the transcription.

This evolving entry's journey from handwritten journal to tentative transcription to final transcription shows the inevitable mediation of archivist work. Historicizing written pasts is messy and imprecise, and in the act of preserving it, we inevitably alter it. Sean Zdenek (2015) explored a similar idea about closed captioning as a rhetorical act, showing captioners' influence over perceptions of sound through their word choices. Similarly, transcribers of the McMillan journals make inevitable rhetorical choices, even if, like me, they try to avoid them. Avoiding them is in itself a rhetorical choice. As a burgeoning academic and archivist, transcribing McMillan's journals showed

me that Kirch and Royster's standard for meaningful and respectful interaction with original texts can coexist with decisive interpretation. Archivists and transcribers must approach these tasks consciously, with a self-reflective stance toward their own positionality and how it may affect their choices. However, they cannot and should not avoid interpretative moves entirely. Instead, emphasizing rhetorical consciousness in these representative acts provides a way to honor the voices of feminist history even as we mediate them.

Complications with Queer-Countering in the Archives

Honoring critical literacies, such as feminist and queer literacies, through reflective transcription is one of the many crucial, delicate purposes of archival study. Such work underscores the inescapably political nature of history and the necessarily rhetorical character of storytelling. Who has access to those stories, as well as what stories are told, are at the heart of the discipline and can reflect the political interests of the communities archives are made to reflect. Michelle Caswell (2014) noted this explicitly when discussing her work with the South Asian American Digital Archive, asserting throughout the piece that the choice to represent certain narratives by community archivists can operate as a form of social justice. It is therefore no surprise that there are a great many queer and LGBTQ+ archives, like the Lesbian Herstory Archive and the Museum of Transology (MoT), that have developed to convey queer history. Considering the types of stories that are told within these archives, particularly those that are online and most accessible to the public, allows both researchers like myself and public audiences to reckon with a wide variety of queer experiences.

Given that the Lesbian Herstory Archive was established in the 1970s, it has had both a larger amount of time to collect materials and more capability to represent specific moments in queer history. Conversely, the MoT was created to fill a gap in trans representation during 2016 and address transphobia in the UK. Both of these archives work to improve visibility and documentation of differing experiences of queerness, but the Museum of Transology, from its inception, has a more overt political message. Whereas the Lesbian Herstory Archive arose out of a lack of historical visibility, the Museum of Transology has arisen out of a need for positive, everyday representation of trans lives. Thus, it is important to consider that these differing archival missions may shape the distinct approaches to documenting objects and their narratives.

For instance, the Lesbian Herstory Archive's attention to culture and history reflects their focus on documentation and visibility. In contrast, the representation of emotion, body, and style within the MoT is more in line with

the political activism associated with work like the AIDS memorial quilt, as the fiber objects aim to increase empathy for trans people through reminding viewers of these individuals' humanity. Given the common thematic categories of "body" and "style" within the archive, it is well set up to converse with queer composition's understandings of embodiment and queerness. It is a premier example of how the queer archive can, as Alexander and Rhodes (2012) explained, offer "us a nearly unprecedented opportunity to think the body in rhetorical practice—and in this case, the queer body in queer rhetorical practice."

Despite how valuable these archives are to exploring queer rhetorical practice, they may not be known or fully accessible to LGBTQ+ communities or other areas of the wider public. While Ann Cvetkovich (2011) made a compelling argument that these kinds of public archival spaces aid in the accessibility of archival material, these stories may not fully reach larger audiences as intended given constraints in building and disseminating collections online. People within the LGBTQ+ community, similar to the South Asian American families in Caswell (2014), may not feel comfortable separating from possessions that reflect their identity, such as flags and clothing. They also may wish to pass objects such as binders to another member of the community to give the object more utility while spreading support.

An additional complication that emerges when working with such data is the difficulty in making and using the metadata, which impacts the searchability of the archives for both researchers and a larger public. Both archives' metadata is incomplete in some areas, which can influence both the nature of a collection's stories and its accessibility. This may be because clothing is harder to date—do we use the year it was made, the years it was worn, or something else? How do we even find such information? Perhaps for this reason, many shirts in the Herstory archives do not have any years attached to them, or they have decades-long ranges. Alternatively, the MoT simply does not collect such data, as using tags to tell stories does not always support the inclusion of baseline information such as "dates." The metadata in these archives, as well as the themes or search terms attributed to them, are informed by both the person who donated and the archivist. The choices of both individuals may mean that information like dates, use, and meaning of a piece can be murky, unclear, or non-existent through no intended fault of the donator or the archivist. This ultimately impacts how researchers and the public interact with and understand a collection, changing the educational value and political impacts of archives. Thus, considering alternative documentation practices that register the unique benefits and challenges of online archiving (Caswell, 2014) is paramount to such archival practice, serving as a successful counter to the traditional political narratives and assumptions made about LGBTQ+ communities and individuals.

Conclusion

Determining appropriate documentation techniques for blended archives is one of many tasks that clarify the rhetorical character of historical stewardship. Not only do archives support the invention of disciplinary and political identities, they are themselves inventions in various stages of evolution and disrepair. In reflecting simultaneously on their production and use, we have underscored the imprecision of the work rather than warding it off. But at the same time, we have encouraged courageous forms of cataloging and interpretation, keeping historically marginalized groups in view even as we contest the marginalization of historical study.

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